

providing a future with hope

# Challenger

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## HOW PEOPLE CHANGE: Life Challenge's Bible Education Program

By Jeff Bonzelaar, Executive Director

### INTRODUCTION

At Life Challenge we work from a simple premise: Persons are transformed (lit., “metamorphosized”) as their minds are spiritually renewed (Romans 12:1). Our students are exposed to God’s Word in chapel and class every weekday morning. As the Holy Spirit illumines the Truth to them, they become liberated from the crippling, cotton-candy pleasures of sin.

The essence of the biblical instruction we provide can be summed up from Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 3:18: “We all, with unveiled faces, *beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed* into his likeness from one degree of glory to another.” What Paul is saying is that seeing the glory of God is transformative. As a person supernaturally apprehends God’s magnificence, he or she is changed from “glory to glory.” In other words, beholding is becoming!

Seeing His splendor saves us. Seeing His splendor sanctifies us. The ‘razzle and dazzle’ of sin weaken

in the light of His brightness and brilliance. We become freed—crucified to the world—as we taste of His goodness and greatness. Cars and cash and movies and music and drugs and illicit sex start to lose their hold over us.

Accordingly, Satan’s number one objective is to blind us to the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). He attempts to obscure and distort the beauty of Christ and make Christ look unappealing and undesirable so that he can keep us captive to the evil deeds of darkness.

### OUR EDUCATIONAL PROCESS UP CLOSE:

**1. Our goal in all things is to bring glory to God—that is, to show God’s weightiness and importance and value (see 1 Pet. 4:11).** To that end, we seek to stimulate minds and ravish affections with glimpses of God’s unlimited perfection’s (i.e., his power, wisdom, purity, love, and etc.). As we set

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before individuals irresistible displays of the supremacy of God we hope to raise holy affections (e.g., *hatred* for sin, *fear* of displeasing God, *hope* in the promises of God, *gratitude* for undeserved benefits, *zeal* for the purposes of God, *hunger* for righteousness, *desire* for the final revelation of the Son of God, *grief* and *contrition* for failures of love, and etc.) AND thereby change behaviors. (We believe that the spring of behavior is our affections. So, to change a person's behaviors, you must first change their affections.)

**2. The glory of God is most clearly and wonderfully seen in the grace of Jesus Christ.** Jesus is the face of God: "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Heb. 1:3). Showing men and women God's glory demands that we point them to Jesus Christ crucified and risen again. And in pointing people to Christ, the aspect of God's glory that shines most powerfully is His love and grace (John 1:14; 1 John 4:16). Mercy is the apex of God's glory the way the overflow of a fountain is the apex of the fountain's fullness.

**3. The glory of God's grace in Jesus Christ is encountered through the teaching and preaching of God's Word.** Not group therapy. Not individual counseling. Not accountability groups. Not personal meditation. Not healing seminars. While these things can be helpful, they are only supplemental. The principle means God has chosen to manifest His glory is through the simple, non-spectacular ministry of preaching and teaching (see 1 Cor. 1:18, 22-24). Protestant Reformer John Calvin comments, "God has ordained his Word as the instrument by which Jesus Christ, with all his graces, is dispensed to us."

**4. To focus on anything other than the glory of God in Christ Jesus is unloving.** Love is helping people toward the greatest beauty and highest value and the most lasting joy and the biggest reward and the most wonderful friendship—it is helping people toward God. It is pointing people to the only source of true and lasting satisfaction.

Hence, the theme of our teachings will focus on God's character and deeds—His truthfulness, righteousness, love, justice, sovereignty, faithfulness, and etc. This doesn't mean we avoid addressing matters like parenting and sexual purity and business ethics

and gossip and racism and the like. It does mean, however, that these issues are dealt with in the light of God's glory and presence.

The spirit of the age is "meism." It is a blend of narcissism and consumerism which pressures those of us who serve in helping professions to focus on self-esteem, self-fulfillment, and self-help. But this is NOT what people ultimately need. Author and pastor John Piper writes, "If God's glory is the only all-satisfying reality in the universe, then to try to do good for people, without aiming to show them the glory of God and ignite in them a delight in God, would be like treating fever with cold packs when you have penicillin."

## CONCLUSION

The goal of our ministry is that all of God's elect would see and savor the glory of God and enter into the fullness of white-hot enjoyment

of Him. Our hope is that the redeemed would be brought into never-ending, ever-increasing pleasure in God. *WORSHIP!*

Men and women are starving for God (but they might not know it). Piper notes, "We were made to know and treasure the glory of God above all things; and when we

trade that treasure for images, everything is disordered. The sun of God's glory was made to shine at the center of the solar system of our soul. When it does, all the planets of our life are held in their proper orbit. But when the sun is displaced, everything flies apart. The healing of the soul begins by restoring the glory of God to its flaming, all-attracting place at the center."

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*"How sweet all at once it was for me  
to be rid of those fruitless joys  
which I had once feared to lose! . . .  
You drove them from me,  
you who are the true, the sovereign joy.  
You drove them from me and took their place,  
you who are sweeter than all pleasure."  
(St. Augustine)*

"We become freed—crucified to the world—as we taste of His goodness and greatness."

A look up close at our weekly class schedule and accompanying instructors:

**Lower Growth (Students 0-3 months)**

- The Gospel of Mark (2 hrs.): Ken Keene
- The Book of Genesis (2 hrs.): Bill Lichty
- The Book of Proverbs (1 hr.): Bob Carey
- Christianity (2 hrs.): Steve Swaggerty
- Basic Life Principles (2 hours): Jeff Bonzelaar

**Middle Growth (Students 4-6 months)**

- The Gospel of Mark (2 hrs.): Ken Keene
- The Gospel of John (2 hrs.): Bill Lichty
- The Book of Ephesians (2 hrs.): Cody Pelham
- General Epistles (2 hrs.): Dave Pace
- Spiritual Disciplines (1 hr.): Norm Frechette

**Upper Growth (Students 7-12 months)**

- The Gospel of Mark (2 hrs.): Ken Keene
- Paul's Letters (2 hrs.): Ken Keene
- The Book of Romans (2 hrs.): Cal Bonzelaar
- Doctrines and Practices (1 hr.): Cody Pelham
- Guilt and Grace (2 hrs.): Jeff Bonzelaar

**—Testimony—  
Juan Barrow**

"I grew up in Romulus as an only child. My mother lived close by and supported me financially, but it was my grandmother who nurtured me, took me to church, and taught me the right way to live.

As a boy I had a picture in my mind of how life should be. This included a college education, a good job, and a loving wife and kids. There were a lot of positive role models in my family that let me know these things were possible. My goal was to become a professional athlete like my uncle.

When I was 13 years of age, I watched my grandmother die. Along with her death went my sense of well being. I felt lost and terribly alone.

I started looking for other things to fill the emptiness I was feeling. I had my first relationship with a girl at 14. When the girl's mother found out about it she quickly put an end to our relationship, and I was devastated. I tried to kill myself by overdosing on pills.

"I couldn't sell without using and I couldn't use without selling."

Seeking relief, I turned to sports. As a freshman in high school I was playing varsity basketball and was on my way to college on a full scholarship. My teammates became my friends, and I began hanging out with an older crowd. I got mixed up with some things that eventually led to me being expelled from school and losing my scholarship.

Gang life came next. I felt like I was part of a family. I was popular with the women and there were lots of parties, but I still felt empty.

I then tried college. At the age of 24, I enrolled and attended for two years. There I met a guy who introduced me to the world of drug dealing. It seemed he had it all and I wanted it. The next summer vacation I decided I would sell drugs to pay for the upcoming semester. However, I never went back to school.

I started making my living as a drug dealer. Some days I would wake up so scared that I wouldn't leave the house. It didn't take long to discover that a little cocaine gave me the courage I needed to go out and sell drugs. I couldn't sell without using and I couldn't use without selling. My life spiraled out of control.

During this time I straightened up for a little while. I got a job working in a plant, got married and had 3 children. It wasn't long, though, before I quit my job and started selling drugs again. When my wife found out that she and the kids were being provided for with drug money, she left.

I came to Life Challenge in 1998 after the police raided my home. I only stayed for three months. I wasn't ready to accept the things that God wanted to give me. I still desired the things of the world. But the seed had been planted. I couldn't escape the feeling that God was calling me to complete what I had started.

I re-entered the program in 2003. God began to show me that everything I had been searching for I could find in him through His Son Jesus Christ. He showed me a love that reached beyond the love of my grandmother that I missed so very much. He has now become my desire and my comfort. His love is everlasting and never failing."

*P.S. Juan graduated the program in August of 2003 and now serves on staff in the Men's Division. He also attends classes at Central Bible College.*



To the glory of God,

*Jeff*