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# Challenges

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## Game Boy, Nickelodeon Network, and the Rocky Mountains

By Jeff Bonzelaar, Executive Director

One of my missions as a father is to help my sons appreciate beauty and develop a taste for the finer things in life. Consequently, Lori and I periodically take the boys on special trips to the museum or a play or the orchestra or a science fair. We expose our sons to the classics in literature and film and read to them biographies of great men and women of old.

It's not that we want them to become cultural snobs, little elitists who think themselves better than the average person. We simply believe that beauty transforms. Beauty revives and enlarges the soul. It releases creative energies and stirs noble themes of heart. Lori and I want to raise up young men who have the capacity to think and feel and behave in God-honoring, kingdom-becoming ways.

With that in mind, you might understand my recent frustration. Our family took a two week vacation to Colorado. Lori spent months charting our course and planning our weekly itinerary. We were determined at making a memorable family vacation and introducing our children to some of the country's most awe-inspiring, breathtaking sights.

Our journey began westward on Interstate 80 through the scenic plains of Iowa and Nebraska. I

was mesmerized by the miles and miles of neatly arranged corn and wheat fields surrounding us on either side of the highway. Quaint farm houses and barns dotted the landscape as cows and other livestock grazed. And at the end of the day the orange glow of the sun lit up the sky in brilliant fashion. This was, indeed, a Hallmark card picture if there ever was one.

I felt myself being lifted into the heavens only to discover my children oblivious to it all. I was aghast. They were wrapped up in Game

Boy, a hand-held video toy. They were missing out on the wonder of God's creation, more interested in beating past scores and getting to the next level in Super Mario. With my blood rising and sergeant-mode coming upon me (this is the part where I got

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a bit overzealous), I commanded them to put down their “stupid-little-contraptions” and stare out the window.

As only duty-bound children can do, they obeyed their Daddy-Corporal to the letter of the law. They looked, all right. Five minutes tops.

Well, I’m not one to stay down too long. I reasoned that this was just an isolated incident. Things would be different once we got to Colorado. Wrong.

Lori had marvelously secured a lovely condo tucked away in the Rocky Mountains at 9,200 feet elevation. Our living room window overlooked the Snake River and its colorful wild flowers gracing its banks. Pristine evergreens adorned the mountainsides. Snow was visible on the peaks. Exotic wildlife danced regularly before our eyes. It was, in a word, spectacular.

On one particular day I had gone biking. I drank in the mountains, the water, the birds, the air itself. I was reborn. Upon returning later that morning to our condo, I saw my three oldest glued before the TV watching the Nickelodeon Network.

I couldn’t believe it. They were completely enamored by that which is trivial and inane. Outside the door was greatness, magnificence, and beauty, and here they were finding pleasure in Sponge Bob.

I was ready to throw stones at them until the Holy Spirit convicted me that I’m no different. It might not be Game Boy or Nickelodeon Network, but there are plenty of silly things I choose over Christ. Sports. Home improvements. Surfing the web. Browsing through the Saturday ads. Watching news. Sure, none of these are sinful in and of themselves. But they become sin when I give them undue attention. When I allow them to distract me from my rightful focus.

Every time we exchange the glory of God for images, we sin. The prophet Jeremiah talks about this very pointedly: “Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols. Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror, declares the Lord. My people have commit-

ted two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water” (Jer. 2:11-13).

I think I now understand a little better some of the Father’s grief over my own vain preoccupations. When God has only in mind to bless me, to redeem me, to cheer me with a vision of Himself, what do I do? Like my kids, I so often fool around with other gods.

May God help each one of us acquire an appetite for the one thing alone that can satisfy our souls, namely, Himself.

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I remind you of a prayer Jesus prayed to the Father in John 17. After praying, “Glorify your Son” (i.e., “Bring to light my magnificence and splendor”), Jesus said, “This is eternal life: that they may *know* you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (vv. 1, 3, respectively). The word Jesus uses for “know” means “to notice, to become aware of, to recognize.” Jesus was asking the Father to give his disciples spiritual insight to see and savor His splendor and beauty because He knew that in their seeing, they would be saved!

O friend, look to Jesus and live! Remember: Beauty is transforming, and there is nothing or no one more beautiful than Christ. Make the following your prayer: “Father, grant that the same love and delight and admiration you have for your Son be in me.” (Jn. 17:26, adapted)

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*“Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;  
naught be all else to me, save that Thou art.  
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,  
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.”  
(Ancient Irish Hymn)*

### **For Further Thought:**

- “We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when

infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.” (C.S. Lewis)

- “Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.” (Psalm 34:5)

### —Testimony—

Tasha Griffin

“I grew up in central Illinois in a loving Christian home where church was a very important part of our lives. My mother and father also made sure that there was plenty of time for family events.

Troubles began to slowly creep into our home, however. The bottom dropped when I was 13 and my dad had an affair. He and my mom separated. I grew angry and bitter towards my mom, blaming her for the break-up of our family. I became physically and emotionally abusive towards her. When she started dating someone else I became even more angry and started stealing money from her.

I was out of control by the time I was 17 and had to leave my mom’s. I moved in with my dad, his girlfriend, and seven other children. Things started out okay, but I soon got lost in the mix with all the kids. I didn’t fit in with my dad’s new family and always felt like an outsider.

When I turned 18 my dad told me I had to go. He said the only reason he let me move in was so that he didn’t have to pay my mom child support. Now that I was 18 he was no longer responsible. I felt totally rejected and used.

My mother allowed me to move back in with her and she even bought me a car, but the anger and hurt were still there and the stealing and disrespect continued. One day while I was at school I stole some equipment from the journalism class. I was caught and the school pressed charges. I was arrested and put in jail.

Upon release, I transferred schools. I was now under court supervision and my family hoped that it would be a wake up call. Instead, I became more rebellious. I started sneaking around with friends who smoked and drank. My mom put her foot down and said I had a choice, either find a

place on my own or go to Life Challenge. I moved in with a friend.

My friend and I would drink every day and twice as much on the weekends. Some old church friends caught up with me and told me I needed to make some changes and start serving God. I knew they were right.

I thought that if I could just find the right people to be around I would be okay. But I soon discovered it wasn’t the people or the places, it was me who was the problem and who needed help. I called my mom and she encouraged me to come to Life Challenge. I was still kicking but finally made it into the program August of 2004.

Studying the Word of God daily in chapel and class, Jesus became real to me. I asked Him to come into my life and accepted Him as my Lord and Savior. Three months later I was baptized.

There were a lot of ups and downs my first nine months. Rebellion continued to surface in my life. Before I left on my 9-month pass I was asked by staff to seriously ask myself whether or not I truly wanted to follow Jesus and return to complete the program.

While on pass I went back to my church and attended a youth service. One of the leaders prayed for me and said he felt I was called to work with young people like myself. This confirmed what I thought God had been speaking to me. To do this, though, I knew I needed to commit myself wholly to Him. I called Life Challenge and told them I wanted to come back and finish my three months.

God has been good to me. There are still areas in my life that need to change, but I am confident that the Lord Jesus will complete the good work He has begun in me. Praise God for His amazing grace.”

*P.S. Tasha graduated in August. She has returned home where she plans to work with the youth group in her church and continue to seek the Lord for his direction*

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Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith,

*Jeff*