

providing a future with hope

# Challenges

The Challenger  
is a publication  
of Life Challenge of  
Southeastern Michigan

enlightening empowering equipping

November 2005

## LIVING WITH EXPECTATION

By Jeff Bonzelaar, Executive Director

In a book entitled *The First World War*, author John Keegan writes of the war's most catastrophic battle: "The Somme (together with the battle of Ypres in July, 1917 where 70,000 British were killed and 170,000 wounded) marked the end of an age of vital optimism in British life that has never been recovered."

Here was a society that had, for nearly one hundred years, enjoyed a bountiful supply of vital optimism. Nineteenth-century Victorian England believed that her best days were yet to come. It was a period of time characterized by excitement, enthusiasm, incentive, and love. And then the world fell apart, and the exact opposite mood entered the landscape: melancholy, disinterest, and a general sense of resignation. Hope was lost.

What was true of a nation may be true of you. Perhaps a crisis has taken place in your life that has knocked the wind out of you. You've lost your job, your spouse wants to separate, your child has been diagnosed with a rare, incurable disease. Or maybe nothing of any real significance has taken place. Just the daily grind of life, and you're worn out.

Where you once dreamed of hitting home runs, now your hope is to simply avoid getting beamed

on the head with the ball. No, you wouldn't classify yourself as a skeptic or cynic, at least not yet.

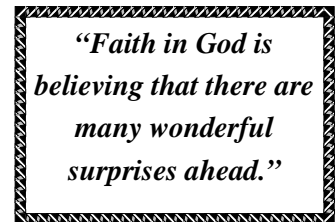
But you could properly be identified with the congregation of the "nonexpectant."

Yes, you love the Lord, but your faith isn't what it used to be.

Your expectations aren't as high anymore. You've toned down on your dreaming. You're older and wiser now, . . . more "realistic." You're not going to set yourself up for more disappointment.

True, living under such a cloud is less risky, but it's definitely not more enjoyable. Without vital optimism, life becomes long and hard.

A former professor of mine had a poster in his office which read: "*Faith in God is believing that there are many wonderful surprises ahead.*"



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I like that. And I think that's how God intends for you and me to live—in a growing state of unre-served, joyful expectation.

If there was ever a man who understood the difficulty of living in such a state—of believing for the best though all the evidence pointed to the worst—it was Abraham.

Author and speaker Gordon MacDonald notes in his book *Mid-Course Correction* that Abraham came from a world where life was thought to be in the vise grip of fate. People lived with a sense that nothing ever changed. Repetition was the ongoing theme. Reality was like a wheel, slowly turning, always coming back to where it started. In a world where nothing changes, there is no such thing as the hope or expectation that tomorrow might offer more than today.

Against this backdrop, God unexpectedly bursts on the scene and tells Abraham to leave everything he knows to experience everything he doesn't know, namely, a life of continual surprise and blessing. He and his barren wife were told that they would become possessors of a vast land and parents of a mighty nation (see Genesis 12).

Believing that was not always easy. There were days when all Abraham could do was get out of bed and wish for an early sunset. God seemed so far away; the promise so outrageous. But he persevered. Paul writes this in Romans: "Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations. . . . He did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised" (4:18, 20-21).

One of the great challenges in life is fighting what pastor and author John Ortberg calls "spiritual habituation." It's when the ceiling of our expectations drops ever so slowly, and we start accepting as normal things that used to stand out and bother us. It's a low voltage Christianity that's part of the spiritual maintenance mode.

For example, the headaches which once triggered

prayer, we now take aspirin for without giving it a second thought. The lustful looks that we once believed God to deliver us from, we now accept as standard operating procedure. "It's the way we'll always be, why put up the fight?" The vision and burden we once had for reaching our neighbors with the gospel has become drowned in a sea of bills, soccer games, and household repairs.

*"Have we forgotten that Jesus never said, 'I have come that you might do okay?' Okay is not okay."*

And so our life amounts to "getting by." At least, we rationalize, "I'm not involved in some major sin. I haven't done anything to jeopardize getting into heaven. I'm doing okay." Have we forgotten that Jesus never said, "I have come that you might do okay?" Okay is not okay. Jesus came that we might have life in abundance (Jn. 10:10). Jesus promised that *anyone* who has faith in him will do even greater things than what he did (Jn. 14:12).

There's a passage in Romans which speaks of the source and strength of the believer's "vital optimism:" "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (8:32) In other words, God's not sparing his own Son is the guarantee that "all things" will be given to us. A God who went to the extreme of giving his very best will not withhold anything that will benefit us.

Living with this knowledge keeps us on the edge of our seats—or as my old prof. would say, "believing that there are many wonderful surprises ahead!"

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*"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." (Eph. 3:20-21)*

—Testimony—

Randy Kelley

"I grew up the youngest of four kids in what would be considered a normal home. My dad worked construction and my mom stayed at home with us kids. Some of my earliest memories are of going to church with my mom and grandparents.

My parents divorced and I went to live with my mom who now had to work outside the home. I was left alone a lot and started hanging out with kids in my new neighborhood that were known troublemakers. They were bold and rebellious, and I was drawn to them like a magnet. I smoked my first joint and drank my first beer at age ten.

In my senior year my girlfriend became pregnant, and I put away any dreams I had of a football career for the reality of becoming a teenage dad. We got married and I got a job.

Three years into our marriage my wife began seeing other men. This went on for seven years until I divorced her and got custody of the kids. The pain was so great I started drinking heavily and using cocaine to help me cope.

I cleaned up for a while and devoted myself to being a good dad. I started lifting weights and taking steroids. The steroids brought out the anger and rage I had suppressed for so long. I would often go to the bars just to pick fights.

One day I ran into an old girlfriend. We started seeing each other and soon got married. We had a son in addition to her two and my two. I had a good job and a great family, but I still felt something missing.

I knew about God from my church background but only went to him when I was in trouble and needed something. I would ask for help but as soon as things were good I would turn away from him again.

In 1996 while at work, I fell off some scaffolding and was seriously injured. The doctors prescribed narcotic pain pills and tranquilizers, and I

quickly began abusing both.

Everything started falling apart. I lost my job, my home, and my family. I spent my days hanging out in drug houses with people I used to think I was better than. I was just like them—angry, depressed and lost.

I also tried secular rehab centers and 12 step programs. Nothing worked. I made several attempts to end my life by overdosing.

One night I was sitting alone in my truck. I was tired of my pain. I had become a slave to the things that had once felt like freedom. I cried out to God to save me and my family. I told him I had given up on life and I wanted to die.

At the urging of my family I checked into a hospital for detox. My brother and sister-in-law began to tell me about a group that had come to their church. They were from Life Challenge and shared how their lives had been changed through the power of Jesus Christ. My family convinced me that Life Challenge was what I needed to help me put my life together.

I entered Life Challenge in August of 2004. During the year the love of Jesus took hold of me. My hardened heart began to soften as I began to hear the Word of God and the price Jesus paid for my sins. I now have a freedom and a peace I had never known. In addition, God has started to heal the damage to relationships I thought were beyond repair. I have a desire to serve and honor God. I am so glad that Jesus has revealed himself to me."

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Thanks so much for all your prayers, notes of encouragement, and financial support.

Jeff

P.S. We rescheduled our October 21 fund-raising banquet for **Friday, November 11 @ 7:00 pm.** Seats are available! RSVP with Debbie @ 313.531.0111.