

providing a future with hope

Challenger

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What Does It Mean To Be Fruitful?

By Jeff Bonzelaar, Executive Director

Last fall a fellow director invited me to a conference geared toward ministries such as ours. He told me that there were going to be seminars on topics such as fundraising, public relations, networking, and the like. As one of the speakers, he promised me that ideas were going to be shared that would enable us to more than double our budget and enrollment and expand in many other ways.

I appreciated his enthusiasm. I have no doubt that what he said was true. He's a good man. He runs an operation that's the envy of many. I thanked him for his call and told him I would think about it.

I didn't have to think long.

"Numbers and nickels" should not be at the forefront of our attention. I have yet to be persuaded that bigger in-and-of-itself is better.

"... growth ...
isn't always good
and it's not
always of God."

I'm not opposed to prosperity. I like addition better than subtraction. But growth—in the conventional sense—isn't always good, and it's not always of God.

Don't get me wrong. I believe we should be the best we can possibly be. We should always be striving to improve, excel, and reach our God-given potential. I'm surely not for sitting still until He comes.

God wants us to "be fruitful and multiply." This is

the first command given by God to man (Gen. 1:28). Jesus said that God is glorified when we bear "much fruit" (Jn. 15:8). He told His disciples that He appointed them to go and "bear fruit—fruit that will last" (Jn. 15:16).

But fruitfulness should not be confused with "materialism." The spirit of the age puts more stock in what can be felt and seen rather than matters of faith which are intangible. Comfort, pleasure, and wealth have become our highest values. This is not God's plan.

I believe the essence of fruitfulness is "faithfulness"—holding on to God through thick and thin, leaning on His everlasting arm. The book of Hebrews reminds us, "Without faith it is impossible to please God. . . . This (i.e., faith) is what the ancients were commended for" (11:6, 2).

It's interesting to note that in the Bible's Cooperstown (Hebrews 11), very few of the persons recorded ever did anything spectacular. Take Abraham for instance. More space is devoted to him than any other person (eight verses total). Yet what did he actually do? He wandered around "like a stranger in a foreign country" living in "tents" (v. 9). Eventually he had two children—one of them by a mistress. What got Abraham into the gallery of the greats was simply this: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:9, 22; Gal. 3:6).

And then take the list of those people mentioned—many remaining nameless—who are recorded in the grand finale of Hebrews 11: "Others were tortured and refused to be released, . . . Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. *These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised*" (vv. 35-39).

I suspect few of these would have made *Time Magazine's* "Person of the Year." In terms of "growth and prosperity," there wasn't much to show. They didn't have the largest churches, nor did they have the latest technology. What they did have was faith, and for that God was pleased.

What does this mean for you and me? Stay the course. Remain faithful to your spouse, your family, your church, your employer. Don't get caught up with the size of your house or the level of your education or the sum total of your earnings. With such things God isn't too much impressed. What does impress Him is your faith.



"The essence of fruitfulness is 'faithfulness'—holding on to God through thick and thin."

*"I have fought the good fight,
I have finished the race,
I have kept the faith.*

*Now there is in store for me the crown of
righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge,
will award to me on that day—
and not only to me, but also to all who have longed
for his appearing."
(2 Tim. 4:7-8)*

Testimony

Chuck Jordan

"I grew up in Detroit, the middle of five children. My dad was an alcoholic. He started drinking after an accident at work which took one of his legs. My mom had to work to make ends meet.

When I was fourteen my mom divorced my dad and took my brothers and me to Nevada. Being so far from my friends and family, I was anxious to fit in and started hanging out with some kids who gave me my first drink. I would do other drugs once in a while but nothing serious.

Two years later I left home and dropped out of school. School had always been a struggle for me. I got a job at a gas station. The money wasn't great but at the time it was enough.

I spent the next few years moving from job to job, never finding anything that satisfied me. I thought marriage was the answer so I met a girl and got married. The marriage ended within six months because of my infidelity.

At the age of twenty-six I tried cocaine for the first time. It wasn't long before my recreational use became a habit. The money I made working minimum wage jobs was not enough to support my growing need for cocaine, so I started stealing cars and robbing stores.

I got arrested in 1983 for robbery and spent the

next three years in prison. I didn't know that while I was in prison my mother had become a Christian and began praying for me.

After being released I went right back to my old ways. It was all I knew how to do. I wound up homeless and living at a rescue mission.

One day a group came and spoke about becoming a new creation in Christ. I prayed and confessed my sins. Jesus came into my life, but I had such a hard time letting go of my old ways.

My mother suggested I call Teen Challenge in Detroit. I spent the next ten years in and out of Teen Challenge programs, never willing to make that commitment to let Jesus become my Lord as well as my Savior.

In 1992, I met my second wife Karen. We were married in 1993 and had our son Charles in 1996. I continued to struggle in my walk with Christ.

The road that has led me to the place where I am today has been long and hard, but Jesus has been with me every step of the way. He has been so faithful and merciful. Time and again I would return to the sinful life of my past, but He never gave up on me.

When I entered Life Challenge in 2004, I was broken and tired. My second marriage was failing and I was in danger of losing my son, something I could not bear the thought of. I finally began to listen to what the chapel speakers and teachers were telling me. Through Bible classes and prayer groups I began to get closer and closer to Jesus. I am experiencing a relationship with Jesus that I never had.

I completed the program in 2004 and have been on staff ever since. I am growing daily with His guidance. He is showing me how to live a life of love. I am praying that I be a Godly example to my son and that my relationship with my wife will be restored."

P.S. Chuck works as a mechanic in our garage and takes classes at Central Bible College in the evening.

2005 Fiscal Report

The following information dates from January 1, 2005 through December 31, 2005.

Income:

• Individual Offerings	\$ 252,743	33.1%
• Church Offerings	\$ 104,858	13.7%
• Businesses/Organ.	\$ 80,053	10.5%
• Walk-a-thon / Golf	\$ 35,452	4.65%
• Entrance Fees (\$700)	\$ 72,342	9.5%
• Banquets	\$ 25,543	3.3%
• Yard/Tree / Misc. Sales	\$ 91,112	11.9%
• Vehicle Sales	\$ 7,490	.98%
• Work Crews	\$ 4,390	.57%
• Car Washes	\$ 48,707	6.4%
• Other	<u>\$ 41,974</u>	<u>5.4%</u>
TOTAL	\$ 764,664	100%

Disbursements:

• Gross Payroll (1)	\$ 444,294	60.33%
• Mortgage (2)	\$ 12,868	1.75%
• Employee Enrichment	\$ 9,961	1.35%
• Utilities (9 Properties)	\$ 84,226	11.44%
• Property Insurance	\$ 13,939	2.84%
• Property Taxes	\$ 16,589	2.25%
• Repairs/Maintenance	\$ 13,939	1.89%
• Equipment	\$ 11,241	1.52%
• Vehicle Expense (rep.,gas,ins.)	\$ 57,391	7.79%
• Office Exp/Postage	\$ 6,178	.84%
• Telephone	\$ 7,494	1.02%
• Food	\$ 3,879	.53%
• Missions	\$ 11,726	1.60%
• Miscellaneous	\$ 7,264	.99%
• Promotional	\$ 9,766	1.33%
• Contingency	<u>\$ 18,772</u>	<u>2.54%</u>
TOTAL	\$ 736,494	100%

Note:

(1) This includes weekly salaries, retirement, housing allowance, health insurance, workers' compensation, disability and FICA for 18 employees.

(2) As of December 31, 2005 our final mortgage (LadiesHome) was paid off and we are now debt free!

Fighting the good fight of faith,

Jeff