

providing a future with hope

Challenger

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Something Better Than Healing

By Jeff Bonzelaar, Executive Director

I don't know who I felt more sorry for—me or them.

I met with a young couple who had a child born to them with a severe handicap. Refusing defeat, they were believing God for a complete healing for their son. They talked about the days when they would testify of God's miraculous power in addition to the call they were sensing to a future healing ministry.

They seemed so confident, so expectant. They left my office beaming with smiles from ear to ear.

I thought to myself, "These dear folks aren't dealing with reality. They're setting themselves up for major disappointment. This is dangerous faith."

I didn't have the heart to tell them that their sincerest efforts at believing and standing on God's Word would possibly make no difference in their child's recovery. Their boy might very well be sick the rest of his life. I justified my silence with the thought that this was probably their best way of coping. Who was I to make their lives more difficult?

Then I reflected some more.

I began to feel sad—not only for them but for me. "Have I become a cynic in my old age? Am I the one out of touch with reality?"

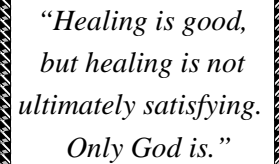
I'll admit that I've offered up many prayers for the sick that didn't seem to "avail" (i.e., profit, benefit). And I've heard countless stories of people supposedly

healed all to see them sick again. My mother was one of them. Now she's in heaven ("healed" as some would say).

So who's worse off? That young couple or me? I confess to having plenty of doubt mixed with my faith, and I'm not proud of that.

When my dad worked in the grocery business, he said that he preferred cashiers who bounced a check occasionally to those who never did. His reasoning was simple: he wanted employees who operated from a trusting platform rather than one of distrust. I'm sure that's true of God too. He wants believers, not doubters.

It's not that I don't believe in divine healing. I do (though I don't presume to know God's will). I did pray for that couple's baby. I still pray for my own



*"Healing is good,
but healing is not
ultimately satisfying.
Only God is."*

kids when they get sick. And trust me, I pray for myself when I suffer from some physical malady. I'm not a sadomasochist. I don't like pain any more than anyone else.

The Bible tells us to pray when we are sick: "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.

"I believe that 'signs and wonders' . . . occur sometimes often and sometimes seldom, sometimes dramatically and sometimes subtly."

And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up" (James 5:15).

Yes, I believe that God is alive and actively engaged in the affairs of our world. And I believe that "signs and wonders"—God's merciful suspension of natural laws as we know them—occur sometimes often and sometimes seldom, sometimes dramatically and sometimes subtly.

This for me, though, isn't the issue. It's not about whether God *can* heal or *does* heal. Healing—"signs and wonders"—is not the point.

God is.

While our heavenly Father doesn't enjoy seeing His children in misery, there's something more He wants for us. He wants us to know Him. He wants us to taste of His fullness in sweet fellowship with Him.

Please don't misunderstand me. I'm not against praying for the sick (and surely God isn't against His needy ones coming to Him for help). What disturbs me is when God is reduced (unwittingly) to some heavenly genie who supposedly exists to make my life easier and more comfortable.

God is so much greater and has so much more to offer than that!

God exists to show me that He is all-glorious, holy, infinite in beauty and majesty and, as such,

all that I need. He has many ways of going about this, but the primary means He uses is suffering. That is why the psalmist could say, "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees" (119:71). Or that is why Paul said, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Friend, don't run from God's disguised blessings. The heartache and sickness you bear may be the very means God intends to draw you closer to Him.

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*"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say?*

*'Father, save me from this hour'?*

*No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.*

*Father, glorify your name!"*

*(John 12:27-28)*

## Testimony

*Dan Martin*

"I was born in Garden City, Michigan in 1958. I was the middle child of three. Before my fifth birthday my mother and father divorced. My dad moved to California and disappeared from our lives forever.

Soon after the divorce my mother remarried. This was the beginning of a relationship that would end in divorce and remarriage three times over the next thirteen years.

My stepfather had a reputation as a troublemaker who drank and used drugs. I remember parties at my house that lasted into all hours of the night. These usually ended with with my stepfather and mother arguing and my mother getting hit.

It was always the same. When my stepfather was gone, my mom did good. She stopped drinking, went to church and took care of us kids. When he came back the drugs, drinking and fighting started all over again.

We moved into a low-income housing project

when I was in junior high. They called the area "Sin City". The drugs and alcohol were easy to get and all of us kids ended up using something to cope with life.

When I was sixteen I dropped out of school and left home. I worked odd jobs while I continued to drink daily. At twenty I met a woman and we began a seven year relationship. We had two children together. I was still drinking on and off, sometimes heavily. During this time my mother committed suicide and my stepfather died a year later from lung cancer. My drinking got worse.

One day I got a call from Social Services in Tennessee where my daughters were living with their mother and her boyfriend. There were allegations of sexual abuse by the boyfriend toward my daughters. Because of the circumstances I was given the opportunity to raise my kids. I sold everything I had, emptied my savings account and borrowed from friends to buy a house for us to live in. Three days after closing on the house I received a letter saying that full custody would be given to their mother because of my history of alcohol abuse.

I stopped going to the AA meetings I had started attending, and a year later began drinking again. I became very depressed and started to isolate. I would quit for a while, go back to church, go to outpatient counseling, but nothing gave me any pleasure or happiness.

In March of 2004 I was at the end of my rope. I cried out to God to save me from the endless battle I had been fighting for so long. I was tired and broken. I knew that if I didn't stop I was going to kill myself.

My pastor was new at our church and when I asked him for help he went on line and found the Life Challenge web site. Six months later I entered the program.

When I came to Life Challenge I knew how to stay sober, but I did not know how to be free from

bondage of sin. I discovered the only thing that could keep me free was a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Life Challenge has helped me see what is important. Through the ministering of God's Word in chapel and classes, the emptiness I had is being filled with the love of Christ. I am a new creation. It hasn't been easy, but it sure has been worth it."

*P.S. Dan graduated last month and is doing a six-month internship.*

## MINISTRY UPDATE

We recently had 12 students graduate from an 8-week course in evangelism called, "The Way of the Master" spearheaded by staff member Jim Bell, Men's Administrator. These students are currently involved in street ministry and our bicycle-tire repair outreach to children in the surrounding community. We have additional teams that go out to minister to local nursing homes under the leadership of Paul Hamlin.



Pray with us as we seek to convince men and women that there's something much better than healing and restoration of relationships and freedom from addictions (as wonderful as these things are). As Jesus said, it's about knowing Him. This is eternal life (John 17:3).

Together for souls,

*Jeff*