

providing a future with hope

Challenger

The Challenger
is a publication
of Life Challenge of
Southeastern Michigan

enlightening empowering equipping

September 2006

Renaissance Man

By Jeff Bonzelaar, Executive Director

I was at a youth rally and Renaissance Man showed up. In his early twenties and wearing a pair of shorts and sandals with some thick-framed glasses and a shaggy beard donning his face, he was seated in the front of a packed chapel-like hall.

When it came time for the singing, he got up from his chair. Presumably looking for more elbow room, he meandered to the back. He kicked off his foot wear and then, as the music played, began bouncing up and down.

I watched him closely. At first, I was simply amazed at (and envious of) his athletic ability. He sustained a constant bouncing motion (jumping nearly one foot off the floor) for several minutes. Then, half-way through one of the songs, he bolted forward and began bouncing/skipping around those assembled. I lost it.

I began laughing hysterically. I personally am not much of a bouncer (I come from a long

line of unbouncers), but I've been in several services where bouncers were present. So I'm not a stranger to such phenomenon. It's just that Renaissance Man's bouncing got to me.

*"That God would love
us . . . so much that He
would call us
"Friends!" should
have us all in stitches."*

God used Renaissance Man ("RM" for short) to help me connect some dots. RM helped me see the utter ridiculousness of God's grace. You see, RM was joyfully bouncing up and down to a song entitled, "Friend of God." I've heard this song before, but the truth of the lyrics never fully sank in until that night.

As I observed RM's bouncing, I thought of how appropriate his response was. We should all be bouncing (not off the walls, of course)!

This IS amazing!
This is almost too wonderful to believe! That God would love us—people who have scorned His name and abused His grace—so much that He would call us “*Friends!*” should have us all in stitches.

“*Stories of God’s kindness and Scriptures like John 3:16 can lose their shock value over time.*”

It’s easy to take God’s love for granted. And it’s easy to forget your roots—who you were and what you did B.C. (i.e., before Christ). Stories of God’s kindness and Scriptures like John 3:16 can lose their shock value over time. I know for me, I can smile and nod in appreciation and let out a hearty “Amen” when the preacher talks about the mercy of God, but my heart is too seldom “strangely warmed” by these gospel truths.

So God sent a bouncing Renaissance Man my way to help me get a better handle on His love. Thankfully, a God who wouldn’t spare His only Son to die for us while we were still enemies of His (Rom. 5:8) will go to any length to communicate this wild and scandalous love of His.

*“I no longer call you servants,
Instead, I have called you friends.”
(Jesus; John 15:15)*

Friend of God

(words by Israel Houghton and Michael Gungor)

*Who am I that You are mindful of me
That You hear when I call?
Is it true that You are thinking of me?
How You love me, It’s amazing!*

*I am a friend of God
I am a friend of God
I am a friend of God
He calls me friend!*



Testimony

Stephen Grenier

“As a young child I remember having a curiosity for things that were not good. By the time I was five I was looking at adult magazines and trying to smoke lit cigarette butts.

When I was seven, my parents got divorced. We moved to Michigan, and my mom started working a lot of hours. Left unsupervised, I would sneak out whenever I could. I started smoking cigarettes and hanging out with the wrong crowd. By the time I was thirteen I was smoking marijuana and sexually active.

My mother remarried. My stepfather and I did not get along. He became increasingly abusive towards me. I sank into a depression and tried to commit suicide. My drinking got so bad I ended up in a hospital and later in a youth home for fighting with my stepfather.

I entered into a relationship with someone who encouraged me to change. I stopped drinking and doing drugs and began to attend church with this girl and her family.

But I began to miss the things I had given up. Sin slowly crept back into my life. Soon I was smoking again and watching pornography on a daily basis. Suicidal thoughts came back in full force. After another suicide attempt, I found myself in a psychiatric hospital.

I moved in with my father, but my drinking and marijuana use persisted. I was filled with so much hate and anger that I couldn't get the victory. I cried out to God for deliverance.

Life Challenge came to my father's church, and I listened with interest to the testimonies of changed lives through the power of Jesus Christ. I knew this was an answer to my prayers but rejected the idea of a year program. I wasn't that bad, or so I thought.

My drug use increased and my father eventually kicked me out of the house. With nowhere else to turn, I got the number to Life Challenge and scheduled an interview.

I entered the program in August 2005. At first I hid the pain and anguish of the sin I had accumulated in my life. On the outside, I made it look like everything was fine. But when I finally surrendered to God, He peeled away the mask I had been hiding behind for so long. Hearing the good news of Jesus Christ daily, I was able to draw near to Him.

I learned that the sinful life I had been living was more than just using drugs and drinking alcohol. He showed me my pride and bitterness and unbelief. By His grace and mercy,

Jesus began transforming me into a new creation. I thank God for the work He has done in me. I have learned that, apart from God, I can do nothing. I now trust Jesus Christ to keep me safe and direct my path."

P.S. Stephen graduated last month. He is working and plans to start school in the spring to pursue a career in nursing.



I thought some of you might be interested in reading a few excerpts from a note I recently received from a current student:

"I was never educated about God. There was no church life in my family. I knew nothing about faith and wasn't interested in hearing about it. I was a sinner to the fullest but in my eyes wasn't doing anything wrong.

Alcohol and drug abuse were wreaking havoc in my life. I lost job after job. My friends faded away. I lost my home, my license, my car, and my inspiration for life. My family tried to save me again and again but they lost hope or got tired of trying."

Now, for the first time in his life, this man is getting a clear presentation of the good news that there is a God who loves him and desires relationship with him. To all of you who help make this possible, **THANKS!**

Together for souls,

Jeff