

providing a future with hope

Challenger

The Challenger
is a publication
of Life Challenge of
Southeastern Michigan

enlightening empowering equipping

OCTOBER 2006

Life with Frodo

By Jeff Bonzelaar, Executive Director

In one of my favorite series, J.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo, an unassuming little hobbit, finds himself uniquely thrust into a mission not of his own choosing. He and his faithful servant, Sam, along with a small band of companions, are to carry a ring to Mount Doom where it is to be destroyed. His success or failure will determine the future of Middle-earth.

The journey to Mount Doom is long and hard and filled with danger. Frodo never gets a completed set of instructions. He gets only enough direction to carry him one leg at a time. He searches for clues along the way, hoping to make the right turns at the right times. Everything works out in the end, but most of the time Frodo wanders around confused and helpless. Only occasionally, and in subtle ways, does the good wizard Gandalf actively give assistance and guidance.

I can relate. In calling me to Himself, God has graciously given me a role in the divine drama. The goal is clear enough—to advance His kingdom by bringing everything in all creation under the lordship of His Son Jesus Christ. The specifics of the assignment, however, often remain a mystery.

I told my class the other day that I have no idea where I'll be three months from now, let alone three years. (Hopefully, after more than 18 years of continuous ministry at Life Challenge, I can make those kinds

of statements without generating needless insecurity in our students.) I know that's not the kind of thing a leader is supposed to say, but it's hard to make long term plans when living by faith. I can plan (and do) but do so only in pencil. And I try to always have a big eraser ready on hand.

"Most of the time, Abraham was feeling his way forward in faith, hoping not to trip in the process."

Think back to the story of Abraham for a minute. If you read the Genesis account, there are only eight recorded occasions (depending on how you count them) where God speaks to him. These occurrences take place over a hundred-year period of time between ages 75 (the time of Abraham's initial call) and 175 (the age at which he dies). That computes to one divine encounter per every 12 ½ years. (How many parishners get

disappointed and leave a church if they don't experience some special revelation every Sunday!)

Most of the time, Abraham was feeling his way forward in faith, hoping not to trip in the process. I know that there could have been additional meetings between God and Abraham that we do not have on record. But my point still stands. Heb. 11:8 reads, "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, *even though he did not know where he was going.*"

"Life under the cloud afforded little opportunity for planning."

For the wilderness-wandering Israelites, things were no different. Life under the cloud afforded little opportunity for planning. The people had to be ready at a moment's notice for holy alignment (see Num. 9:15-23). Sometimes the cloud would stay put for a month, sometimes a week, and sometimes only a day. The people could never get too settled or drive their tent stakes too deeply.

I'll be the first to admit that in my flesh this is not my preferred modus operandi. I'm not known for my spontaneity (ask my poor wife!). I'm the kind of guy who likes to know what's ahead. I like predictability. God, however, seems to value other things, like freedom and openness and flexibility.

Author Phillip Yancey writes about an elderly lady named Louise who works among the poor in Atlanta. For the last several decades she has daily fed and loved hundreds of people. Louise admits, "I never planned a formal 'ministry.' . . . I don't have a board or committees, or anything like that. . . . I just work on my own." She gets a little testy when questioned about planning and organization. "How would anyone go about scheduling a Jericho Road ministry? You just walk down the road and look for victims." Yancey observes, "If you asked (Louise) about a five-year plan, or even a five-day plan, she would stare

at you blankly. She says she needs to stay free to listen to God's Spirit. She simply wakes up each day and asks God to use her."

CONCLUSION

A life of faith is a life of movement. You can't sit around waiting for absolute clarity each step of the way. Faith wouldn't be necessary then. You have to just venture out, using your best judgment and trusting God to guide as you go. It's not easy, but it is strangely satisfying. If you have yet to take the first step, call on Him now. You won't regret it.

I'm grateful that in spite of all my uncertainties, God will lead me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake (Ps. 23:3). His reputation is on the line. He will do whatever it takes and use whatever means is necessary (blessed rod or staff action!) to insure that I finally arrive at the right destination. And when necessary, He will override my decisions to bring about His plans. Prov. 16:9 declares, "In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps."

Testimony

Chris McCreary

"I was born and raised in Branson, Missouri. My mother attended church on a regular basis and made sure my sister and I did as well. I found church boring so at fourteen years of age, I told my mother I didn't want to go anymore and stopped going.

The first time I smoked marijuana was on a dare when I was sixteen. The effect was so powerful that I started using it on a regular basis. After awhile I was no longer satisfied with just marijuana. I moved on to prescription pain pills and whatever else I could find to get high on.

I became very rebellious and stopped listening to

everyone. My anger was uncontrollable. My parents were afraid of me. I would threaten them and then not remember. I became a different person when I used drugs.

My lowest point came when I started using methamphetamines, a strong synthetic stimulant. To support my habit, I started breaking into businesses and stealing whatever I thought I could sell. I was eventually arrested by the police, charged with three felonies, and put in the county jail.

When it came time for my sentencing, I could have been sent to prison for 21 years. The judge was a Christian, though, and believed in the ministry of Teen Challenge. He offered me the choice between prison or Life Challenge. I chose Life Challenge.

When I entered the program I was eighteen years old. I didn't want to be here at all. My heart was hard. I shut everything out. God, in His grace however, began to soften my heart. I started to see myself for who I really was—a lost sinner.

There was an altar call in chapel one morning and I went forward to give my life to Christ. I waited for something to happen. I thought I would feel different but nothing changed. I kept returning to the altar time after time, service after service, asking God to give me a sign that I was really saved.

During one of those times at the altar God reminded me of the verse in John where Jesus said, 'Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.' I also remembered 'Doubting Thomas' who would not believe unless he touched Christ's wounds. I was Thomas asking Jesus to prove Himself to me. I was living by sight and not by faith. I was convicted of my unbelief.

My time at Life Challenge has showed me how important it is to have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The daily chapels and Bible classes have given me the tools I need to live life for Christ. I now know that life is meant to be lived for the glory and honor of God. I am so thankful for this

chance I've had.

P.S. Chris graduated in August and is currently doing a six-month internship in the kitchen

MINISTRY NEWS & NOTES

Here is a letter I recently received from a grandmother of a recent graduate:

"Thanks to Life Challenge Jeff is a real Christian. I can't thank you all enough. God is so good—so real and makes new people out of those who have damaged their lives. I've prayed for Jeff so many years. I love him so. . . . Thank you all!"

VEHICLE DONATION POLICY

For those of you considering donating your car, mini van, or truck to Life Challenge, please note the following:

- For vehicles that have a Fair Market Value less than \$500, Life Challenge will issue a receipt and you may deduct the Fair Market Value of the vehicle.
- For vehicles with a Fair Market Value over \$500, Life Challenge will issue a Form 1098C that will state the amount for which the vehicle was sold. You deduct the amount of the sale and attach the Form 1098C to your tax return.

If Life Challenge elects to keep the vehicle, a Form 1098C will be issued stating that the vehicle was kept for use in the ministry. You determine and deduct the Fair Market Value, and attach the Form 1098C to your tax return.



Please consider giving a little extra this month as expenses rise and overall income is down. At present, we are discipling 71 students in our 1-year residential program. Our prayer is that they, like Abraham, learn to live by faith and not by sight.

Together for souls,

Jeff