

providing a future with hope

Challenger

The Challenger
is a publication
of Life Challenge of
Southeastern Michigan

enlightening empowering equipping

April 2007

THE POWER OF BEAUTY

*“There are only two things that pierce the human heart.
One is beauty. The other is affliction.”
(Simone Weil)*

By Jeff Bonzelaar, Executive Director

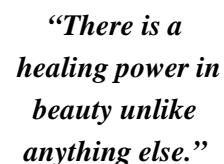
One of my favorite times of the year is Spring. I love hearing the morning chirp of the birds. I love smelling the fragrances of new-born tree blossoms. I love seeing the freshly released colors decorating the landscape. Everything bursts with life and beauty explodes.

Beauty is powerful.

Author John Eldredge reflects on a time when he lost his best friend in a climbing accident. As the grief began to set in, he shares how it was too difficult to read his Bible and that he didn't want to talk to anyone, not even God. He said the only thing that helped was his wife's flower garden. He writes, “Sitting outside this evening, the Shasta daisies swaying in the gentle breeze on their long stems, the aspens shimmering without light, the full moon rising over the pine-crested bluff . . . *only beauty speaks what I need to hear. Only beauty helps.*”

Beauty is redemptive. There is a healing power in beauty unlike anything else. Beauty comforts and soothes; it also stirs us and moves us. Beauty calls us out of ourselves. Beauty makes us alive.

At Life Challenge, we believe that beauty is the greatest power in the universe. Whether seen in a sunset or heard in the roar of ocean waves; whether tasted in a sweet, juice-filled orange or felt in the warm embrace of a child, beauty is all around us. But the beauty of the created world is, at best, the echo of a voice—



*“There is a
healing power in
beauty unlike
anything else.”*

not the Voice itself. It is a signpost pointing beyond itself to the One from whom it originates, Jesus Christ. He is the greatest beauty in the universe.

It is in beholding His beauty that we are saved. The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians, “We all, with unveiled faces, *beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed* into his likeness from one degree of glory to another” (3:18).

The beauty of God in His Son is life-transforming. His beauty frees us from the power of sin. We are changed from “glory to glory” as we apprehend his splendor and magnificence.

There are at least two specific ways how beholding the beauty of God conquers sin:

1. Seeing His beauty enlarges a person’s soul.

Nothing expands or broadens the human soul like contemplation of God’s glory. And as the soul is enlarged, sin and all its cheap little thrills remain small as they really are. One of the main reasons men and women are immersed in pornography and greed and gluttony and

***“Little souls cause little lusts
to have great power.”***

bitterness is because they are drowning in a sea of triviality. Their souls are disconnected from the infinite grandeur for which they were made. It is no wonder they reach for the best natural buzz life can give—illicit sex, shopping extravaganzas, cinematic productions, drugs and alcohol. As Pastor John Piper puts it, “Little souls cause little lusts to have great power.”

2. Seeing His beauty empowers a person to suffer.

We must understand that in order to be righteous, we will have to suffer. We will have to do hard things like

cut off certain body parts (see Mt. 5:30), sell our possessions (see Lk. 12:33), and hate our parents and children (see Lk. 14:26). What will enable us to take such radical measures? Sight of His beauty. Seeing that His loveliness is better than life itself (Ps. 63:3) empowers us to suffer for the sake of the joy set before us (see Heb. 12:2). The Beauty we have caught only a glimpse of (and will take an eternity for us to see) is too great, too spectacular, too glorious to forfeit for the cheap imitations Satan parades before us.

CONCLUSION

There is a joy found only in beholding the beauty of God in the face of Christ which lifts a person above earth itself, out of the reach of everything here below. This satisfaction is a sin-killing force creating in a man or woman a holy indifference to all the temporal treasures the world offers. God’s beauty will not only take your breath away; it will take away your interest in everything that stands in opposition to His beauty.

In his natural state, man cannot see His beauty. The Prophet Isaiah wrote, “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him” (53:2). God must in His grace by His Spirit open our eyes so that we can see true power where the world sees only weakness and true wisdom where the world sees only foolishness.

For those of us who have been mercifully illumined to His beauty, let us humbly thank Him. Let us also find ways to break free of those activities which divert our gaze from His beauty.

*“Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.”*

Testimony

Dan McGarry

“I was born in 1986. I grew up in a two-parent home in a rural community and went to Catholic school. I enjoyed sports and participated on several teams throughout my school years.

In my sophomore year I transferred to a public school. It was a total culture shock. I felt completely out of place. Wanting acceptance, I got involved with the wrong crowd and began drinking and smoking marijuana. Towards the end of my junior football season I was getting very sore after games. A friend at school introduced me to pain medication and I became increasingly addicted.

My senior year started out great. I received a full scholarship to Michigan State University. I thought I was set for life. I limited my drinking and partying to the week-ends but even that was too much. One day I got arrested for drinking and driving. The very next night I was arrested again for being at a party with underage drinking. None of this fazed me, though I was blind to my own bondage.

One night at a party a friend told me about Oxycotton, a very strong narcotic pain reliever. I tried it and this led to heroin within a month. When the time came to start training-camp for college, I was fully dependent on drugs.

A week into training camp I was asked to leave. I lied to my family about why I left college and quickly signed up for school at Youngstown State University. I rarely went to class, however I got high all day long, in addition to getting into trouble with the law again and again.

My mother heard about Teen Challenge from a friend at work. I was very apprehensive about going away for one whole year but knew I needed to get my

life together. I entered the Teen Challenge in Muskegon, Michigan but after two months was dismissed for violating the rules. I came home and spent five days in jail. God was trying to get my attention. I called Life Challenge in Detroit in November 2005, and they agreed to accept me.

I did well on the outside but inside I had not fully surrendered to Jesus Christ. Six months into the program I was involved in a fight and dismissed. I returned two weeks later.

Anger still consumed me and I got involved in yet another altercation. Thankfully, I was not dismissed but was put on restriction for one week. In my room with nothing to do except read the Bible, God began revealing Himself to me. He showed me how much He truly loves me. Through His Word Jesus became alive to me.

I finally began to really change on the inside. The calluses on my heart were slowly removed and I became free. I graduated the program November 2006.

My life is now submitted to the will of Jesus Christ and great things have been happening ever since. I met a football coach from Walsh University at the church I attend and he offered me a chance to go back to school. I am now attending college and playing football. I am a new man – someone I never thought I could be. I am so grateful to Jesus for giving me another chance.”

✍

I trust you recently received a letter from me alerting you to our desperate financial situation. I ask you once again to please consider helping us. Thanks.

Together for souls,

Jeff