

providing a future with hope

Challenger

The Challenger
is a publication
of Life Challenge of
Southeastern Michigan

enlightening empowering equipping

August 2008

A Love Affair Ended: (And a New One Begun)

By Jeff Bonzelaar, Executive Director

For many years I battled an addiction. I “had to have it.” It controlled much of my thinking throughout the day. I would often sneak behind my wife’s back to satisfy my cravings.

My addiction cost me my health, self-esteem, and pocketbook (not to mention good relations with Lori). I began to doubt whether or not deliverance was possible. Perhaps, I reasoned, this bondage was my fate.

But then a wise and loving friend came to my rescue. He introduced me to Dove ® dark chocolate! Now a Snickers ® candy bar can sit in my house for months and go uneaten.

I’ve conquered one addiction with another.

We all have addictions—some are just more serious than others. Whether it’s drugs and alcohol, gambling and porn, or food, work, ESPN, exercise, music, or playing video games. Maybe it’s shopping or listening to the news or being a busybody.

No matter what yours are, all addictions rob us of fully becoming what God intends for us to be.

So the question is, “How can we be free?”

Jesus gives us the answer in Matthew 13:44: “*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*”

**Happiness in God leads
to holiness of life.**

The treasure the man found caused such an overwhelming joy to arise within him that he sold everything he had to buy the field. His satisfaction led to sacrifice.

The joy I found in Silky Smooth Dark Chocolate Promises ® enabled me to turn my back on those milk

chocolate and caramel covered peanut candy bars that held me hostage for much of my life. An inferior pleasure was conquered with a superior one.

Our goal at Life Challenge is to lure men and women away from the cotton-candy pleasures of sin by exposing them to white-hot enjoyment of God.

Happiness in God leads to holiness of life.

Seeing God's glory gives rise to a gladness that severs the nerve of sin. Finding Jesus as our all-surpassing treasure fills us with an indomitable joy that empowers us to leave everything and follow Him.

That is why the fight to be happy in God is the most important fight of your life. If you are not happy in the Lord, you are a sitting duck for any sin. This is not hard to understand in the natural. When is the best time to go grocery shopping?

This is not to say that the Christian life is all happiness. Sometimes we must accept temporary pain

**The motivation behind addiction
isn't wrong (i.e., to be happy);
it's the means that is.**

and suffering and loss in order to maximize our joy in the future. This is where self-denial enters the equation. We deny ourselves lesser pleasures for the sake of greater pleasures.

This is why as Christians we practice abstinence as a single man or woman. This is why we stay in a difficult marriage. This is why we report all of our income when filing taxes. We choose lesser joys up front for the sake of greater joy in the end. This

was the example of Jesus: "...*For the joy set before Him* endured the cross, scorning its shame" (Hebrews 12:2).

CONCLUSION

Your passion for happiness is not wrong, but your passion for happiness may be misdirected. The *motivation* behind addiction isn't wrong (i.e., to be happy); it's the *means* that is.

So don't crucify your craving. Don't suppress it. Thank God for it, and let it lead you to the Rock that is higher than you and me. The enjoyment of God is the supreme pleasure for which we were made. Anything else is too short-lived, too insignificant, and inconsequential for our soul. "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8).

*"Restore to me the joy of thy salvation."
(Ps. 51:8)*

~~~~~

## Testimony

*Debbie Van Zweden*

"I grew up in a home that would be considered normal by most standards. I have one brother and a sister. My dad was a police officer and my mom worked part-time as a waitress.

I tried alcohol for the first time when I was 13. I was at a family function; my uncle served me a drink, and I got drunk. Everyone thought it was funny.

Growing up in the late 60s and early 70s, everything was sex, drugs and Rock 'n' Roll. I was drawn to that lifestyle. I used LSD and Mescaline almost every day in high school.

When I was 19, I married a man I met in a bar. Together we began to experiment with any kind of drug

we could get our hands on. After five years and many attempts to get clean together we split up.

I went from relationship to relationship trying to fill a space that I had no idea how to fill. I did not believe in God and thought that Jesus was just a crutch for people who were weak. I thought that life was a series of failures and disappointments, and then one day you died. This mind-set made me hard-hearted.

After 12 years my ex-husband and I got back together again. He introduced me to heroin. He was a heroin addict and I followed suit. I quit five years later and fell into a deep depression that lasted about a year. I would come home, close the drapes, and not answer my phone or the door. I stopped cleaning my apartment and cut myself off from everyone.

In October of 1998 everything came crashing down. I lost my job. I was being evicted from my apartment. My car was repossessed. I was at my lowest point. I took about 30 pills and washed them down with a bottle of vodka. I lay down and waited to die.

An hour later I was in the bathroom, so sick that I could not get off the floor. In my desperation I cried out to a God I didn't believe in and told Him if He was real I needed Him because there was nothing left in me.

Three hours later the police walked into my apartment with my dad and stepmother behind them. I had not seen my dad in a 1 ½ years. I did not know that they had accepted Jesus into their lives and that they and their church had been praying for me. I was so ashamed and humiliated that all I could do was sob. My dad took me in his arms and said, "Don't worry, we will help you."

He had talked with his pastor and they recommended Life Challenge. I applied to the program

and one week later I entered. I had no idea what was in store for me. I could not believe that I was not allowed to smoke, watch TV, or listen to rock music. The daily chapel and Bible classes were also strange to me.

For the first couple of months I held onto my stubbornness and refused to accept what I was hearing. I did the homework and did well in the classes because the projects and Scripture memorization were a challenge, but it was all head knowledge.

My third month in the program, I was reading the Gospel of John. When I got to the part where Jesus was telling Peter about his own death, I started to cry. Immediately my eyes were opened to the truth. I embraced Jesus as my Saviour and Lord.

Upon completion of the program in 1999, I was asked to stay and do an internship. After six months I came on staff where I have been ever since. I work in the office as the receptionist and in the evening I go back to the women's center where I live and oversee the women who are going through the program. I never thought I could be content and happy without using drugs or alcohol.

I enjoy the challenges God brings to me each day and by His grace, I have never looked back. God is truly a keeping God and a God of second chances!



#### **MINISTRY UPDATE:**

Don't forget our golf scramble coming up on Monday, August 18, 9:00 am @ Tanglewood Golf Course in South Lyon. Call the center for more details (313.531.0111).

Fighting to be happy!

*Jeff*