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# Challenger

*enlightening empowering equipping*

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## Addiction, Self-Control, and **Marshmallows**

*By Jeff Bonzelaar, Executive Director*

*“Like a city whose walls are broken down  
is a man who lacks self-control”  
(Proverbs 25:28).*

Scientists can predict the future of four-year-olds by watching them interact with a marshmallow. Here’s how. A researcher calls the children, one by one, into a room and gives these instructions, “You may eat this marshmallow right now. But if you wait until I return from my errand, you may have two marshmallows when I get back.” The researcher then leaves.

Some children grab the treat the moment the researcher is gone. Some last a few minutes before they give in. But others wait. They cover their eyes; they put their heads down; they sing to themselves; they try to play games or even fall asleep. When the researcher returns, these children are given their hard-earned marshmallows.

By the time these children reach high school, something remarkable is observed. After a survey of the

children’s parents and teachers is conducted, it is found that those who as four-year-olds had the self-control to hold out for the second marshmallow gener-

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ally grew up to be better adjusted, more popular, adventurous, confident, and dependable. The children who gave in to temptation early on were more likely to be easily frustrated and stubborn. They tended to buckle more quickly under stress and shied away from challenges.

The point of the story is that the ability to delay gratification in small areas can translate into huge success in other areas. Self-control is essential for any long-term success. C.S. Lewis put it like this, “For any happiness . . . quite a lot of restraint is going to be necessary. Surrender to all our desires obviously leads to impotence, disease, jealousies, lies, concealment, and everything that is the reverse of health, good humour, and frankness.”

We all know people who have crashed in one moment of unguarded innocence. Marriages have been wrecked, jobs sacrificed, health compromised, and reputations ruined because of a single rash decision. Astounding gains have gone up in smoke because self-control was lost.

Remember Esau, the twin brother of Jacob and son of Isaac? For a single meal he threw away his future with

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the excuse: “I am about to die! What good is the birth-right to me?” (Genesis 25:32) Many more could be added to the list of those who fell because they failed to wait.

The question is: How is patience and self-control developed? What steps are necessary to build into the character of a human being the power to forgo immediate pleasures for the sake of future gains?

The answer is simple. The children who overcame their urge to eat the single marshmallow had faith—they could envision the moment when they would enjoy *two* marshmallows. They held off eating the one because they trusted.

Self-control—the ability to say “No!” to sin’s enticing appeals—rests on faith. We can resist an inferior joy when we are confident a far superior one awaits us. This is what John Piper identifies as “the present power of a future possession.” When you know that you have a better and lasting possession, you can wait. You do not have to succumb to immediate pressures. The writer of Hebrews, in encouraging his fellow brothers and sisters to persevere and not give up, charged, “We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through *faith and patience* inherit what has been promised” (6:12).

Moses refused to take advantage of his position as Pharaoh’s son. In fact, he willingly chose to be mistreated with the people of God rather than enjoy the treasures of Egypt. What empowered him to exercise such self-control? “He was looking ahead to his reward” (Heb. 11:26). Jesus himself endured the cross, scorning its shame, “for the joy set before him” (Heb. 12:2).

At the root of all addiction is impatience, a lack of self-control based on unbelief. The addict craves certain feelings and is unable to resist the temptation to use because of shortsightedness. He or she cannot see or taste the wonderful future God promises to those who wait. The result: self-sabotage.

The key, then, to self-control is faith—trusting God for a better future, a better reward.

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*“I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.”*

(Psalm 27:13-14)

## Testimony

Ed Hillyer

“I was born on February 17, 1959, into a large Catholic family. We attended church regularly, and I became an altar boy.

My father died when I was ten-years-old. My mother was left with the difficult task of raising ten children alone. I began associating with kids who were wild and rebellious. I found the lifestyle exciting, and it took my mind off my father’s death.

I began drinking, doing drugs, and stealing. I got into trouble with the law and the school, and by the ninth grade I was expelled. I was required to attend a semester of substance abuse awareness. Afterward, I was permitted to re-enter high school.

I met my wife in my senior year of school, and we were married the following year. A wife and three children, however, could not keep me away from drugs and criminal activity. I went to prison three different times.

I moved my family to North Carolina, California, and back to Michigan trying to escape the things I thought were the causes of my addiction. Nothing helped. I couldn’t quit using drugs, even though my greatest desire was to stop.

In October of 2006 my wife asked me to enter Life Challenge. I initially refused trying to convince myself that there was an easier way. Then I thought about the eight rehabilitation programs I had been to previously and how none of them had worked. I finally agreed to enter the program to save my marriage and my family.

In a very short time Jesus became real to me. I felt a strong desire to draw near to Him. My eyes were opened.

There were many obstacles that almost ran me out of Life Challenge at various times. I had health issues. My wife and I were faced with losing our home. A death occurred in the family. I struggled with the academics of the program, especially the Scripture memorization. But God was faithful. I learned to rely on Jesus and He saw me through.

During my seventh month in the program, on May 21, 2007, my wife and I renewed our wedding vows of twenty-eight years in the chapel at Life Challenge. Our marriage is far from perfect, but we are endeavoring to work things out as believers.

God has been so merciful in renewing my mind and restoring my life so I can be the man He has called me to be. I spent thirty-five years in an ever-losing battle with drug addiction but Jesus has set me free. All the glory goes to Him!”



The following letter (dated 6/11/08) was sent to me by a former student. Below are some excerpts:

*“I cannot express enough thanks to you and your staff. Even though I did not complete your program, I consider myself a Life Challenge success story...I learned more about the Bible in my 65-day stay than I did as a Sunday School teacher and one who went through confirmation twice...I have been sober now 8 and 1/2 months. God has lifted the obsession I never thought possible. I am working again as a pharmacist. As soon as I save enough money I am going back to court for joint custody of my kids.”*

Together for souls,

*Jeff*