

providing a future with hope

Challenger

The Challenger
is a publication
of Life Challenge of
Southeastern Michigan

enlightening empowering equipping

May 2007

WHEN LAWS ARE NOT FIXED

By Jeff Bonzelaar, Executive Director

A little over a year ago I had an epiphany of sorts. God connected some dots in my life. The circumstances were nothing out of the ordinary. It was a typical weekday at the office.

I was mingling with some students when one of the men came up to me and asked me a question I've been asked a thousand times: "So, Brother Jeff, how are you doing?"

I stopped and thought about that for a moment, and then something clicked.

"I am being humbled," I replied. "I see less and less correlation between my behavior and God's blessings."

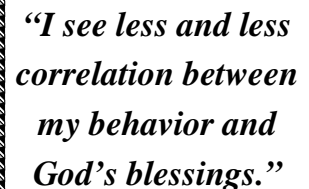
I can't recall exactly what was going on in my life at the time. I simply remember that I was off-center in my walk with Christ. I was falling short as a husband, dad, director, . . . you name it. I was losing my temper. Morning devotions were inconsistent. I was in a spiritual slump.

And I wasn't happy with myself.

I also remember that at the same time, God's bless-

ings were overflowing in my life. Here God was being so good to me, and I was living half-heartedly for Him. I wasn't getting what I deserved.

I was raised under the motto, "You reap what you sow." That was law where I came from. "You get what you put into it." "What goes around comes around."



*"I see less and less
correlation between
my behavior and
God's blessings."*

Now I have to ask myself, "Is that true?" I don't think so, exactly.

Yes, the Apostle Paul wrote, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:7). But that's only half the truth. (Note: I

didn't say, "But that's only 'a half-truth.'")

God's grace alters things.

Grace makes laws liquid, changeable. And that's good news. We don't get what we put into it (remember the workers who were hired the last hour but got a day's pay?). God doesn't treat us as our sins deserve (Psalm 103:10). In fact, God the Father causes his sun to rise on *both* "the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45).

***"Grace makes laws liquid
And that's good news."***

Remember Jacob, Isaac's son? Talk about a rascal. He capitalizes on his twin brother's weaknesses. He deceives his father. And yet he is blessed. Jacob doesn't reap what he sows. He winds up being the patriarch of the nation Israel. Scripture goes so far as to record God saying, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Romans 9:13).

Hardly fair. Go figure.

Love does that. Nothing is ever quite fixed. Laws get amended. They get suspended. The people you think should get one thing get another. Mercy triumphs.

I'm not saying our behavior doesn't matter. It just may not be as important as we'd like to think.

It's humbling to know that ultimately it's all grace. It takes away all self-boasting. All glory goes to God. But it's also comforting. It takes a lot of worry and stress off your chest when you know that a good and gracious God is in charge. After all, we can never be good enough.

Thus, God sent His Son, and every blessing we enjoy and every curse we are spared is due to His righteousness.

*"But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, And you will be sons of the Most High, Because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."
(Luke 6:35-36)*

Testimony

Larry Williams

"Drugs and violence were part of my life at an early age. My neighborhood was run by drug dealers and gang members.

I started smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol at the age of twelve. At a friend's fourteenth birthday party I was introduced to crack cocaine and was hooked immediately.

I became a thief and a burglar to support my habit. I was always looking for different ways to make money and get high. I couldn't get enough.

My teenage years were not spent preparing for prom, graduation, a summer job or sports. Instead, I was consumed by drugs and alcohol. On one occasion, I was caught bringing alcohol to school and spent 45 days in a treatment center.

My parents sent me away to live with my sister in Hawaii to get me away from the drugs. I temporarily left the drugs but my dependency on alcohol grew. I picked up a new addiction as well – making money.

Having money made me feel powerful. The more money I had, the more I wanted. The only way I knew how to make money fast was to sell drugs.

After a couple of years I moved back to Pontiac, Michigan and continued selling drugs. I had a child out of wedlock but even the birth of my daughter could not make me change my ways.

My first arrest occurred in 1990 when I was nineteen. I was arrested again a few months later. My third arrest sent me to Jackson Prison for four years. I was twenty one years old and felt that my life was over.

Upon my release from prison, I went right back to my old ways, selling drugs and getting high. I was bound and didn't care.

My lowest point came when I was living in a dingy motel room. After being up for two straight days I felt like I was losing my mind. I was alone and had nowhere to go. For the first time I felt hopeless and guilty.

During this time, unknown to me, the closest members of my family had given their life to Christ. They began praying for me.

I eventually decided to come clean with my family. I couldn't live like this anymore. I told them I was a drug addict. I felt so ashamed. I cried out to God and asked Him to help me. If there was any hope for me at all, it had to be in God. My family directed me to Life Challenge.

When I walked through the doors of Life Challenge in December of 2005 it felt as if a huge weight was lifted from me. I felt a peace that I had never known. Jesus was made real to me and I began to believe that through Him I could overcome my sinful addictions.

God put a hunger in my heart for righteousness. I wanted to learn all I could about God and His Son Jesus Christ. The morning Bible classes taught me what it meant to live a godly life and the daily chap-

els and prayer times drew me closer to the cross and the healing power of Christ's love.

My life has been transformed and my family restored. I have never known such peace and joy. Praise God!"

P.S. Larry graduated the program in December of 2006 and is doing a six – month internship in the Men's Division.

Thought you might like to know:

CURRENT STUDENT PROFILE (5/1/07)

- # of students in program: 60 men, 13 women
- # of students completing program since January, 2007: 9
- average age of students: 35 (youngest—19, oldest—66)
- # of students presently married: 18
- # of students who are parents: 43
- # of students who are grandparents: 9
- # of children/grandchildren represented by current student population: 128



Together for souls,

Jeff

P.S. So many of you expressed your love and generosity to us recently. THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH!!! We are not only caught up financially, but your support has put us ahead so that we can now address matters long overdue as well explore new opportunities for ministry as we seek to advance His kingdom. To God be the glory!