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Confessions of a Hypocrite

By Jeff Bonzelaar, Executive Director

I sometimes wonder if I am a Christian.

I believe in God the Father Almighty. I believe in Jesus Christ His Son. I believe in substitutionary atonement. I believe in the resurrection of the dead. I believe in the judgment to come.

I believe, but that's not the problem; it's how I live.

This past summer I spent a couple of weeks in Los Angeles. As I toured the area, I was taken back by the number of people living on the streets. It seemed like everywhere I went someone was begging for money.

It's not like I'm completely unfamiliar with this sight. I minister in the city of Detroit. I just didn't know what to do. My family was with me. I was concerned for their safety. I felt overwhelmed. I began reasoning: "If I give them any money, they'll just use it on drugs or alcohol." (You know, I did write the book, *101 Reasons Why NOT to Give to Panhandlers.*)

So I did nothing. Not one beggar received so much as a dime from me.

Now I ask myself, "Am I really a Christian?" Jesus' words haunt me: "Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me" (Mt. 25:45). The fate of such is described in the next verse: "Then they will go away to eternal punishment."

And then there's the race thing. I've always considered myself fairly unbiased in matters concerning racial relations. I grew up at a Teen Challenge where I literally shared a supper table with black and white alike.

But the other day an ugly side of me surfaced. I got a call from someone who told me that a projected influx of people of color is expected in my community over the next several years.

Instead of rejoicing that I will be living in a more integrated neighborhood (which is reflective of God's heart), my very first thought centered around money: What effect will this have on my property value?

Maybe I have more in common with the priest and Levite mentioned in the Parable of the Good Samaritan than I care to admit (see Lk. 10:25 ff.). Because of their prejudices, they refused to befriend someone different from themselves. If what Jesus stated in vv. 27-28 is true—that inheriting eternal life requires loving your neighbor (whatever his color, creed, or nationality) as yourself—these men were headed for hell. What about me?

While I'm at it, I might just as well confess how I felt the day America declared war on Iraq. After what we experienced as a nation on that terrible day none of us will ever forget—9/11—I was glad when our boys be-

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gan bombing Bagdad. “That will teach them,” I thought. Instead of mourning the loss of precious human lives that have each been made in the image of God—whether American or Iraqi, Christian or Muslim, terrorist or nonterrorist, I gloated over the fact that no one plays hard ball with the U.S.A. and wins.

So much for loving enemies. So much for caring for the lost. So much for grieving over the nations.

So much for being a Christian.

Oh, there's more I could say. Much more. I've said enough.

I resonate with what Frederick Buechner says in his book *The Alphabet of Grace*, “I am a part-time novelist who happens also to be a part-time Christian because part of the time seems to be the most I can manage to

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(Frederick Buechner)

live out my faith: . . . From time to time I find a kind of heroism momentarily possible—a seeing, doing, telling of Christly truth—but most of the time I am indistinguishable from the rest of the herd that jostles and snuffles at the great trough of life. Part-time novelist, Christian, pig.”

My only hope is God's mercy. My trust is that, “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love” and that in his kindness “He remembers that we are dust” (i.e., frail, weak, powerless) (Ps. 103:8, 14).

John Newton, the infamous slave-trader turned preacher and author of *Amazing Grace* sums it up well. At the end of his long life he was asked, “What was the most important thing you learned?” Newton replied, “I am a great sinner, and He is a great Savior!”

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*“By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.”*  
*(1 Jn. 3:19-20, ESV)*

## Testimony

**Mona Harris**

“I grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the youngest of five children. My father always let me have everything I wanted. I had no discipline or accountability so I became very spoiled and self-centered.

During my teenage years I was teased by other girls. I was African- American, but my skin color was very light. I felt like I didn’t belong.

At fifteen my father introduced me to alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana. Drugs and alcohol gave me the acceptance I was looking for.

I got pregnant when I was sixteen and had a daughter. As much as my baby meant to me, the drugs and alcohol had just as strong a hold on me. Eventually I began selling drugs to support my habit.

I later married a man with whom I had gone to high school. He was a drug dealer also. I became even more dependent on drugs.

Three months after I was married, my mother passed away with cancer. I lost it. I began smoking crack cocaine. Despair overwhelmed me.

After years of physical and emotional abuse, my marriage ended. I never felt so alone. I sought help at a treatment center, but as soon as I was released I went back to my old ways. My friends and family could not understand why I could not stay away from drugs. The guilt and shame was too much for me to bear, and I sank deeper and deeper into drugs.

I lost everything – my home, family, job, and dignity. With nowhere else to turn, I cried out to God for help. I started seeing a man who was heavy into crack. Strangely enough, he mentioned a place he had heard about called Teen Challenge. He said he thought we should go.

In March of 2005 we entered Western Michigan Teen Challenge together. While I was there I asked Jesus to be my Savior. I asked Him to forgive me and help me overcome the sin that had me bound. God began working in my life, but I was not ready to fully commit to Him. After two months my boyfriend left the program and, three months later I was dismissed.

We tried to help each other stay clean, but it never lasted. I knew in my heart I had to finish what I started. So on June 15, 2005, I left my fiancé and came to Detroit and entered Life Challenge. When I arrived I knew I was where I was supposed to be. I felt at peace and was ready to submit totally to God and allow Him to shape me.

I thank God for the teachers and the Bible classes. Through the daily preaching and teaching of God’s Word, the hole in my heart was filled with the truth. The Lord Jesus Christ poured His love into me and now lives through me. He has restored my sisters, brothers, and daughter to me. I am so thankful to Jesus.”

*Ps. Mona graduated in June of 2006 and is now serving a six-month intern ship in the Women’s Division. She is also attending Bible classes at Great Lakes Community College.*



Please help us. We endeavor to provide the best possible care in a gospel-rich setting. We currently have 57 men and 17 women in our one-year residential program. In addition, we have 21 full-time and 4 part-time staff along with 5 interns. It takes roughly \$2,300 per day to operate. (That translates into a little over \$11,000 per student per year or \$30 a day.) We receive no government funding. It all comes from people like you who care.

For the glory of God,

*Jeff*