

August 2009

Monthly Musings

from Jeff Bonzelaar



Catching the Vision

*“The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”
(Mark 1:14-15)*

Translation: “Another world is possible. In fact, it is already here! It is time for you to change your thinking. Time to reconsider your direction. Time for a new way of life. Believe this good news and be part of the conspiracy.”

Think for a moment about the original setting in which Jesus spoke these words. The Roman Empire dominated the world. Brutality ruled. Immorality was rampant. Women were disparaged. The poor were neglected. Polytheism was in. The government was corrupt. (Sound familiar?)

And then this lone, obscure Galilean comes along and says, “There’s been an invasion. A new world order is in motion. Regimes of oppression, tyranny, and wickedness are being eclipsed by a kingdom of love, forgiveness, goodness, and justice.”

What a far cry from the typical altar invitation given in church these days: “Accept Christ into your heart so you won’t go to hell after you die. Invite Jesus into your life and become successful. Tired of being lonely? Let Jesus be your friend.”

Such appeals completely miss the point.

Christianity is NOT about getting saved so you won’t burn up after you die (yes, that is part of the deal). Christianity is NOT some self-help program so you can experience healthy self-esteem and manage your life better (yes, that happens). And the fact that God loves us, forgives us, and is at work sanctifying us—wonderful as it is—is only a small portion of Christianity.

Christianity is about a kingdom (now and not yet) and catching this vision, joining a movement, and changing the world. Jesus came to establish God’s kingdom—God’s rule and reign—right now, right here. He came to start a revolution. This is the good news!

The intent of the gospel is to form a new people, a holy community of lovers, that will join with God in extending the borders of His dominion—a government based on justice, mercy, fairness, compassion, and equality.

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Testimony

Brad Trumble

“I was born in 1970 in Warren, Ohio. Raised in a Christian home, I went to church on a regular basis. However, I did not know what it meant to have a personal relationship with Jesus.

I started drinking at the age of thirteen, sneaking it at family gatherings. I drank socially to loosen up and have fun with my friends. When I entered college, drinking became more frequent. There was always a party with plenty of alcohol. Before long I was drinking every day. Still, I was able to attend classes and complete school work.

I graduated in 1999 and was married that same year. I began a career in sales where it was common practice to drink during work hours. My drinking increased while my church life stopped completely.

Three years later my wife gave birth to our first child. Now I had a son to think about. I convinced myself that I could just cut back and still drink socially, but that did not work. Then I tried to stop drinking altogether but could never go beyond a few months.

My wife could not endure watching me destroy myself and my family. She took my two children and left. We were divorced shortly after. That was one of the lowest points in my life.

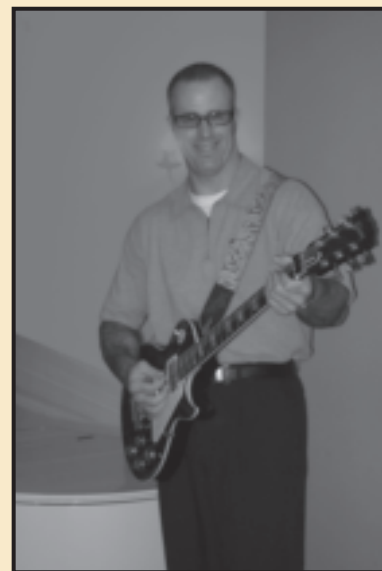
Depressed and ready to give up on life, I reached out to a friend. He invited me to church. I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior. That was October of 2005.

I began to have daily devotions, attend Bible classes, and go to church regularly. My thinking began to change. I had peace. I found satisfaction in helping others. Life was great.

In the spring of 2007, I received what I believed to be a blessing—a new and better paying job. Unfortunately, the new job kept me away from home and church. I was tempted again by alcohol and, without spiritual strength, gave in to the temptation.

A few months later I was arrested for driving under the influence. I was fired from my job. I hit rock bottom and could see no way out. I went into seclusion and began drinking myself to death.

By January of 2008 I found myself on my knees crying



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Catching the Vision (continued from page 1)

When God called Abraham in Genesis 12, He didn't just say, "Abraham, I'm going to be a real blessing for you! I have something wonderful in store for you. Something really good is going to happen to you." No, God said, "through you ALL the nations of the world are going to be blessed" (vv. 2-3).

Jesus held before people an alternative vision of the future and called others to come and unite with Him in creating this new world, this new society of righteousness. The story about Jesus in the Gospels arms us not so much with a new philosophy or doctrine but a new imagination, a fresh vision.

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If this vision is not upheld and people are left ignorant to the promise that God's salvation is about the restoration of *all creation* (Rom. 8:21; Eph. 1:10), the Christian faith collapses in on a narcissistic self. Christianity is thought of in only individualistic terms. And such faith is far from compelling.

God does not save us so we can simply be free of various life-inhibiting addictions. If all you get is a drug-free, alcohol-free, nasty habit-free life, you have not gotten much. God saves us and fills us with His Spirit so that we can participate in His dream and effect change on this earth beginning today.

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WEEKENDS AT LIFE CHALLENGE



Did you know that 3 out of 4 Friday afternoons per month and every Saturday—weather permitting—we are washing and detailing cars at our Grand River lot (just southeast of 6 Mile Road)? This fundraiser generates between \$50,000--\$60,000 annually.

Alumni Update



Melissa Brune

Melissa Brune (class of 2004) is completing her third year at the Joyce Meyers' Dream Center Ministry Academy in St. Louis. She also serves in the Pastoral Care Department of the school. She writes, "I thank God for the solid foundation in God's Word I received during my year at Life Challenge. What the enemy meant to destroy God has turned around for good. I am now ministering life and hope to those who are hurting and lost. Glory to His name!"

Testimony (continued from page 1)

out to God for help and forgiveness. I called two friends from my church. They told me about Life Challenge. I knew that was an answer to my prayers and was ready to do whatever was necessary to get back with Christ.

I entered Life Challenge in June 2008. The chapels and Bible classes allowed me to lay the foundation of faith that I needed in my life. I found incredible strength from the Word of God.

During my last month as a student at Life Challenge, I had an accident which resulted in the loss of my right eye. In this dark time I discovered that faith in Christ is enough. Jesus can carry you through anything. I didn't have to drink.

I graduated the program in March of this year. My relationships with my parents and children are being restored. But above all, the Lord Jesus Christ is the center of my life. I love Him with all my heart, soul, mind and strength."

PS. Brad is now serving as an intern in the Men's Division. He has rediscovered his love for music and is a member of our praise and worship team.

Catching the Vision (continued from page 2)

We have been commissioned by God to claim our families, neighborhoods, cities, schools, workplaces, bike clubs, softball teams, etc. for the rule of God. Together, we as believers, have been sent by God as little advance colonies to live out the life of the kingdom in our present context. Our mission is to build this kingdom, expand its limits, to push it into dark and evil places—whether in corporate America or the local corner store, whether in the high power world of politics and the media or on an elementary school soccer field, whether across the street or across the ocean.

God has a dream, and He calls you and me to join with Him in realizing this dream.

“Christianity is about a kingdom (now and not yet) and catching this vision, joining a movement, and changing the world.”

This IS our salvation. Personal change rests upon incorporating a greater vision into your life. Dreaming God’s dream for this world. Without this vision, we will die. Proverbs 29:18 puts it like this, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.”

Life is about righting wrongs and giving a fair shake to those denied equal opportunity. It is about eliminating poverty, providing housing for the homeless, caring for orphans, speaking up for the unborn, . . . championing justice for all to the glory of God!

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”
(Mt. 6:33)

MINISTRY UPDATE

Mark your calendars! Our annual Walk-a-Thon is scheduled for Saturday, September 26 @ Kennsington Metro Park in Milford (9:30 am start time).

ASK THE DIRECTOR

Q: Why do you ban all student use of psychotropic medications (e.g., Zoloft, Xanax, Paxil, Lexapro, etc.)?

A: From a purely pragmatic standpoint, we feel the risks to the student body outweigh the benefits received by the specific individuals under care. Anti-depressants and other mind-mood altering drugs on site would create unnecessary temptations and complications for the many of our students.

On a spiritual note, we believe that when a person is brought into right standing with God and experiences Christ’s forgiveness of sins, personal power over sin, and new found purpose and meaning to life, debilitating anxieties, depression, and the like lose their grip. This is not always the case. There are instances where the above medications may be necessary for certain persons (my own late grandmother). Our program, however, is not equipped to deal with such exceptions.

Post Script: Over the last 10-15 years, there has been a marked proliferation of psychotropic medication use. There are many reasons for this (not all bad), two of which I list: (1.) We are a culture addicted to feeling good, having a low tolerance for pain. We want easy fixes and instant relief; and (2.) Greed. St. Paul wrote, “The love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Tim. 6:10). Doctors, clinics, and pharmaceutical companies all benefit when people are prescribed these medications. I am not casting aspersions on the entire industry. There are many wonderful mental health care professionals out there. Notwithstanding, money is a driving factor in many situations.

Thank you for your partnership with us in providing the only hope this world has –
the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Life Challenge of Southeastern Michigan

Presents:

Our Second Annual

Women's Banquet

"Beauty for Ashes"

September 11, 2009

7:00 pm

@ The Pierson Center

Please RSVP

For more info. call 313.531.0111



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