

providing a future with hope

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Blistered Feet & Free Hot Lunch Tickets

By Jeff Bonzelaar, Executive Director

“And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, ‘Surely this man was the Son of God!’” (Mk. 15:39).

Think about it. A high standing officer in the Roman army converted to Christ. He is a hardened, professional executioner, unmoved by the cries of the dying. His deepest loyalties lie with a government hostile to anything or anyone posing a threat to the *Pax Romano*. He has been indoctrinated in Caesar worship.

And at the risk of losing everything he had worked for—fortune, status, personal security—he publicly proclaims that Jesus is the Son of God.

What brought about such a radical change?

Mark indicates that there was something about the manner and way in which Jesus *died* that convinced this centurion of the truth of Jesus’ claims.

At the cross, Jesus never lashed out in anger. He had every right to. “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats” (1 Pet. 2:23). Where He could have exercised

judgment, Jesus extended love and acceptance: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk. 23:34). To the thief who had earlier ridiculed Him, Jesus welcomed him into His kingdom (Lk. 23:43).

There was never any hint of begrudgement on Jesus’ part. Hebrews points out that “for the joy set before Him (Jesus) endured the cross” (12:2). Seeing such a humble and willing display of suffering and dying, the centurion was converted.

There is something about sacrifice—when gladly received—that demonstrates the reality of God and His supremacy more than anything else in the world. The greatness of the gospel is shown by the amount of pain we are willing to cheerfully embrace for Christ.

Paul commended himself and his ministry to the Corinthians by showing his wounds. He recounts for them the various afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, and trials he had patiently and wholeheartedly endured for Christ's sake (see 2 Cor. 6:4-10). Paul knew that the best apologetic for the faith had to do with the number of scars and bruises on his body received because of his identification with Jesus.

J. Oswald Sanders tells the story of a missionary who walked barefoot from village to village preaching the gospel in India. After traveling many miles he came to a certain village and tried vainly to convince the people of the reality of the gospel. Rejected, he went to the edge of the village and lay down under a tree and slept from exhaustion.

When he awoke the whole town was gathered to hear him. The head man of the village explained that they

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came to look him over while he was sleeping. When they saw his blistered feet they concluded that he must be a holy man, and that they had been evil to reject him. They were sorry and wanted to hear the message that he was willing to suffer so much to bring them.

Blistered feet opened the door for evangelism.

When we joyfully embrace loss and difficulty and stress—without complaint or self-pity—and deny ourselves safety and comfort and convenience for the cause of Christ, others will ask, “Who is your God?!”

Moses showed that God was a treasure worth having when he refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. In choosing to be mistreated and disgraced for the sake of Christ, Moses made it plain as to what He

considered to be of greatest value (see Heb. 11:24-26).

I'm grateful for two parents who left a nice home and an upper-middle class income to minister at Muskegon Teen Challenge when I was eleven-years-old and my two sisters were five years of age and two months, respectively. My dad's starting pay was \$75 per week. In 1982, seven and one-half years later, he was making a whopping \$150 per week (with no health insurance or retirement package). Mom and Dad survived that period by living off the savings from the sale of both their house and second car.

I remember as a high-schooler going to the school cafeteria early on Monday mornings to collect my free government-issued hot lunch tickets for the week. As a family, we went out to eat once a week on Thursday evenings (I had a \$2.00 limit). Vacations were always memorable in that our family car always seemed to break down along the way.

I share this not out of any bitterness. On the contrary, I have wonderful memories of those years. Though we had little, we never lacked. And never did I hear my dad complain about the money he made or the long hours he put in. In fact, to this day, he considers it to have all been an honor.

What effect did this have on me? I desired the same kind of life as my parents and so, as a young man, committed myself to full-time ministry. The witness of my parents produced in me an unshakable confidence in the power and preciousness of the gospel. I will be forever thankful for such glad-hearted submission and sacrifice to His will.

So what might this mean for you and me?

- Consider becoming a foster parent or helping another couple adopt a less privileged child;
- Move into the city;
- Volunteer your time at a homeless shelter;
- Give one of your cars to a needy family; or

- For starters, give up your Starbucks for a month and send the money to a crisis pregnancy center.

Just remember, if you are going to make any kind of lasting difference for the kingdom of God, you will have to get blistered feet. And you must do so cheerfully. God's name is at stake (and so is that of your children!).



*“And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate
Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.”
(Heb. 13:12-14).*

Testimony

David Saunders

“I was born in Virginia in 1963, the youngest of four kids. My parents raised us to be people of good morals.

I rebelled against my parents and started drinking when I was 14. I was shy and self-conscious. I found that when I drank all my inhibitions and awkwardness disappeared. The drinking escalated, but I managed to stay out of serious trouble.

Shortly after graduating from high school I got arrested for drinking and driving. During the next couple of years I was arrested two more times for the same thing.

In August of 1982, I entered the Marine Corp. My parents thought the structure and discipline would be just what I needed. But my drinking only got worse. I twice received a reduction in rank, extra physical duty and fines because of my excessive use of alcohol.

I was discharged from the Marine Corps in 1985 and went back to Virginia in worse condition than before. I met a woman and we married in 1986. She had two

children from a previous marriage. I wanted so badly to be a good husband and father. I thought I had found a reason to stop drinking, but I just couldn't.

We managed to stay together for 6 years, but the constant battle over my drinking ended the marriage. My life got completely out of control. I lost numerous jobs, was arrested again for driving under the influence, and the bank foreclosed on my house.

Sitting in a motel room with no money, no alcohol and no job, I thought of killing myself. But by God's grace I called out to Him for help.

I had heard about Teen Challenge and called the center in Maryland. I was accepted two days later. That was in June of 1999. I received Jesus as my Savior and Lord. I graduated the following year and stayed on another year as staff.

I returned home and got a good job but within six months I was drinking again. I was miserable and re-entered Teen Challenge, this time in Detroit.

I immersed myself in God's Word. I was so empty, but Jesus filled me once again. Life Challenge is what God has used in my life to keep me. I am so grateful.

My life has been far from perfect since coming here to Michigan. I am a very stubborn man. But God has not given up on me. Whenever I fall He has been there to pick me up. His grace has brought me safe thus far, and His grace will lead me home.”

P.S. Dave currently serves on staff in the Education Department.



Your prayers and financial support make testimonies like David's possible. Thank you.

Together for souls,

Jeff