

November 2009

Monthly Musings

from Jeff Bonzelaar



CHILD ABUSERS, SUBSTANCE ABUSERS, & GOD ABUSERS

It might surprise you to learn that I would equate substance abuse with child abuse. Few would disagree that child abuse ranks as one of the most heinous of all crimes. Even inmates in our prison systems have little sympathy for those who violate the most vulnerable among us. But putting substance abuse in the same category?

At one level, there appears to be a hierarchy of sins in Scripture (and along with that, degrees of culpability). In denouncing an unrepentant city in which He had performed miracles, Jesus said it would “be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you (Capernaum)” (Mt. 11:24). In other words, one city’s sin was greater than another’s. But I am not about to publish my own “top ten” list of worst sins. I do not have that kind of discernment.

At another level, on Judgment Day, God is not going to be discriminating between “good” sinners and “bad” sinners. Gluttons, gossips, racists, Sabbath-breakers, the profane, liars, and homosexuals will all be lumped together and go to the same place. James wrote, “Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it” (2:10). Sin is sin, and sin is evil. It is an abomination. It is betrayal. Sin is God-abuse.

What do I mean by “God-abuse?”

Sin is mistreating God. It is a failure to give Him the honor and esteem due Him. In terms of human relations, there are many different forms of abuse, some more *direct* (e.g., verbal taunting, physical violence, sexual assault) and some more *indirect* (e.g., lack of encouragement, lack of physical warmth and affection). No child should go unpraised and unaffirmed, let alone be put down with ego-shattering words such as, “You’re stupid. You’ll never make it.” That is abuse.

In the same way, all sin is an abuse of God—an insulting of His character and a reviling of His name. Sin is drinking of the Fountain of Life, spitting it out and saying, “Yuck!” It is exchanging the infinitely valuable glory of God for cheap substitutes (sports, shopping extravaganzas, vacations, alcohol, pornography, etc.; see Rom. 3:23).

This offends God and damages His reputation. When we sin, we do not merely hurt others and ourselves, we hurt God. We make light of Him. In the words of the writer of

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Testimony

Melinda Darrow



“My grandfather offered me my first drink at the age of ten when he began molesting me. I discovered street drugs a few years into the abuse and took whatever I could to numb the pain and guilt I felt.

By the age of sixteen, I left home and moved in with my drug dealer. The relationship was extremely violent. **I feared everyday for my life.** Drugs became my obsession.

At eighteen, I got pregnant with my first daughter. I knew that the life I was living was wrong and vowed to not raise my daughter in such conditions. I worked out a plan of escape and was successful.

I met a guy, and we got married. I had two more daughters. My husband and I started going to church together. Life became more settled, but I never made a commitment to Christ. The drug use continued.

I eventually turned to cocaine. This led to a six year addiction. Before I knew what was happening, I was choosing crack cocaine over my children.

My husband found out about my secret life. We separated, and he took custody of my two youngest daughters. I felt like a failure and looked for relief in prescription medication. Between the psych meds and the street drugs, I became a walking zombie.

Some friends told me about Life Challenge and suggested that I enter the program. They offered to care for my daughter while I was away. I agreed and entered the program in October, 2008.

I initially came to Life Challenge to try and regain custody of my daughters. I had no interest in learning about God. I tried to ignore what I was hearing, but God’s truth started to penetrate the defenses I had set in place. Whether it was in a chapel service or doing a homework assignment, my eyes were slowly being opened to the glory of God.

I struggled with submitting to authority and following the rules. I did not trust anyone and found it hard to believe that anyone could have my best interest at heart.

By the grace of God, I finally surrendered to Him. He healed me from the pain I had hidden for so long. The freedom God has given me is amazing. No more guilt or shame! No more anger or rage!

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Hebrews, when we sin we are “crucifying the Son of God . . . and subjecting him to public disgrace” (6:6).

We tell our students that they do not have a substance abuse problem. No, it is much worse. They have a God-abuse problem. God takes a man’s alcoholism and a woman’s drug usage personally. Such a person is implicitly saying to God, “You don’t do me like . . .” What could be more demeaning?

“Sin is drinking of the Fountain of Life, spitting it out and saying, ‘Yuck!’”

So why all the fuss? How we see the problem determines how we treat it. If we view the problem as a disease, we will seek medical intervention. If we deem the problem a disorder or dysfunction, we will look for psychological treatment. But if we see drunkenness and pill-popping as ultimately a sin issue, we will seek a Savior.

There is more.

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OUTREACH



We partnered with Samaritan’s Purse last month in sending relief workers to Redtin Mountain in Dallas, Georgia. Our group of three men was responsible for gutting out homes devastated by recent flooding.



Alumni Update



Niki Beebani (Wood)

Niki Beebani (formerly Wood), class of 2001, will be graduating this December with a Master’s degree in social work from the University of Michigan. She is currently interning at the Department of Human Services in Lansing writing policy for youth aging out of the foster care system. She has a passion for children in the inner city. She attends Revival Tabernacle in Highland Park and does missionary work with the Book of Hope (she recently returned from Nicaragua). Niki was married on December 22, 2007 to Ranj Beebani. She writes, “My time at Life Challenge gave me the chance to build a foundation in Christ upon which I stand today.”

Testimony (continued from page 1)

I see the world in a whole new way now. I love Jesus with all my heart and can honestly say that I am glad for what He put me through to get me to where I am today. I was overwhelmed in a life of sin without hope, and now I am a new creation in Christ and look forward to each new day. Praise God!!”

P.S. Melinda graduated from the program in September and is currently active in her local church. She is working on a horse farm, starting college in January, and rebuilding a relationship with each of her three daughters.

2009 FINANCIAL UPDATE

(1/1/09—10/30/09)

Budget: \$581,500

Income: \$550,492

Deficit: (\$31,008)

How we see the problem also determines how serious we are in dealing with it. We need to feel the weight of our wickedness. We need to be devastated and repulsed by our sinfulness. Our attitude is far too casual about our wrongdoing. But when I tell people their drug addiction is on par with child abuse, I get their attention. They start waking up to the gravity of their problem. This is important. The shallowness of many people who are saved is due to the fact that they never knew how *lost* they really were.

Puritan writer John Owen (1616-1683) wrote, "Our earnestness for grace, our watchfulness, and our diligent obedience depends upon (our discovery of the evil within). *Upon this one hinge the whole course of our lives will turn.* Ignorance of it breeds senselessness, carelessness, sloth, self-sufficiency, and pride—all of which the Lord's soul abhors."

"We need to feel the weight of our wickedness. We need to be devastated and repulsed by our sinfulness."

CONCLUSION

Recognition of sin's depth is not meant to cause us to despair. The record of the Apostle Paul's conversion (reported in detail some three times in the book of Acts) gives us hope in God's saving power and mercy. No one would have expected Paul to convert. His opposition was too deep, too concentrated, too deliberate. Nonetheless, he writes:

"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life" (1 Tim. 1:15-16).

So take heart! He that comes to God, He will not turn away! (Jn. 6:37)

*"For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight."
(Ps. 51:3-4)*

MINISTRY NEEDS

- Transportation (safe and reliable)
 - Bus (44 passenger or more)
 - Maxivan (12-15 passenger)
 - 2 Minivans
 - Economy/Midsize Car
- Black Baby Grand Piano (for chapel use)
- Guitar (ovation acoustic electric; \$200—\$400)
- Industrial Can Opener (\$107)

ASK THE DIRECTOR

Q: Talk about relapse. What advice can you give to help someone avoid falling back into a life of drugs and/or alcohol abuse?

A: In the first place, just because a person is "clean" does not mean he or she is righteous before God. An individual may be free of various chemical dependencies but be bound to other idols. Many a man and woman has quit drinking and drugging for selfish reasons (e.g., the love of praise from others, the desire for money, etc.). Those who leave the idol of addiction for such reasons are but one step away from "relapsing."

So the first issue that must be addressed is whether or not a person is truly saved. Assuming a man or woman is, God's Word assures us, "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God" (1 Jn. 3:9). God alone is the guarantor of our perseverance (see Phil. 1:6; Rom. 8:29-30; Jn. 10:27-29; 2 Tim. 1:12). Left to ourselves, we will stray from God. Our only hope is His faithfulness.

Q: On a practical note, are there some steps a person can take to minimize risks or, in your words, "put himself or herself in the stream of God's grace?"

A: It goes without saying that if a person is to stay spiritually healthy, he or she must read the Word, pray, and be involved in a local church. But if I could say only one thing, it would be this: **Reaching out to the lost is one of the surest antidotes to backsliding.** In fact, being actively engaged in the work of evangelism keeps one in the Word, prayer, and fellowship. Paul penned these words to his beloved friend and fellow worker, Philemon: "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ" (Phil. 6). There is a strong connection between sharing one's faith and growing (and remaining) in Christ.

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

Life Challenge

Christmas Tree Sale

Support Life Challenge this season. We have over 300 freshly cut Christmas trees & handmade wreaths available to help you capture the warmth, joy, & peace of the season.

You can choose from Douglas Fir, White Pine, Scotch Pine or Blue & Black Hill Spruce. While you're at it, browse through our Christmas shop for decorations or gifts and enjoy a cup of hot chocolate or hot apple cider.

Location: 20741 Grand River
(near 6 Mile Road on Detroit's west side.)

Dates: November 29th–December 24th

Times: Monday-Friday 1:00 PM-10:00 PM
Saturday 10:00 AM-10:00 PM
Sunday Closed



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