



September 2008

Savior in the Storm

By Jeff Bonzelaar, Executive Director

I've never been in a storm at sea, but I have been in one on land.

It was a cold, snowy February morning in 1977. My mom, dad, my two younger sisters, and I piled into our little '73 Ford Pinto station wagon and anxiously set off from our home in Western Michigan to make our yearly family pilgrimage to sunny central Florida.

Traveling conditions were already unsafe because of heavy snow accumulations. Local schools and businesses were shut down. It took us well over an hour just to get our vehicle out of the driveway because of snow drifts. And the forecast was anything but promising. More snow. High winds. Dropping temperatures. Not to worry, though. Dad said we were going to Florida and that was that.

Thinking conditions would improve further inland and away from Lake Michigan, Dad decided to head east before south. So we set our sights on Interstate 75.

We made the perilous trek across state, but conditions had only gotten worse. With the snow swirling about us in a blinding manner, my dad had to open the driver's door several times just to make sure we were still on the highway.

We eventually wound up stranded along with other motorists near Bowling Green, Ohio. Thankfully, the National Guard came to our rescue and led us to the nearest armory.

But that's not the end of the story. We made it (yeah!) to Florida (albeit two days later).

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In Mark 4:35, Jesus said to the disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." So after a time of successful ministry, the disciples packed up and set off for the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Things could hardly have gone better. They had been newly appointed by

Jesus to become part of His inner circle. Jesus' popularity was increasing. Miracles were happening. Life for them was on the up.

But then came a storm.

The disciples were completely caught off guard. They were out in the middle of the lake in the middle of the night. Mark tells us that the "waves broke over the boat so that it was nearly swamped" (4:37). They were about to sink.

Perhaps you can identify. You find yourself currently in the midst of a storm. Your marriage is falling apart. Your son is using drugs. The business isn't doing well. You wonder how you're going to make the next mortgage payment. The doctor said the dreaded word "cancer."

Maybe it's not a single crisis per se. Just the combination of all your day-to-day responsibilities. Your house is a mess. The car broke down. You

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can't make your daughter's soccer game . . . again. You're behind in your studies. And then there's that stubborn habit you can't shake. You feel completely overwhelmed.

Maybe your reaction is similar to the disciples: "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" (4:38) Your frustrated. Tired. Confused. Depressed. You wonder how much longer you'll be able to last.

We find out that at the end of the story in Mark,

the disciple did make it to the "other side." Wet. Cold. Sea sick. And *afraid*.

Perhaps a better word is "amazed" or "awe-struck." Jesus had rebuked the wind and waves and a supernatural stillness had settled over the lake. Madness meets Majesty.

Jesus promises to take you to the other side too — provided you take Him in your boat. The "other side," however, may not be what you are thinking of. It may not be physical healing or financial blessing or reconciliation with a loved one from whom you are estranged. God does not indiscriminately shield us from pain and suffering or exempt us from trials and difficulties. The Good Shepherd who leads us beside the still waters is the same Good Shepherd who leads us into (and through) the valley of the shadow of death.

But be assured that the other side is always better than we could ever imagine. We get to see aspects of Jesus we would never have seen otherwise. And the result? We become more and more of a worshipping people.

Friend, trust Him and take confidence that "even the winds and the waves obey Him."

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

*And tho' this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph thro' us.
The prince of darkness grim,
We tremble not for him—
His rage we can endure,
For lo, his doom is sure:
One little word shall fell him.*



Testimony

Luke McKinnon

“I grew up in a good Christian home. My mom and dad were loving, committed believers. We faithfully went to church as a family each week. I accepted Jesus into my heart at the age of five. By all indications, my life was full of promise and possibility.

But then I was molested. I was unable to tell anyone, thinking it was my fault. Loneliness swallowed me up. I felt completely lost. In the early years, I tried to escape the pain through friends and sports. This brought some relief, but it was only temporary.

At the age of eleven I began getting high with inhalants and marijuana. I moved on to harder drugs and alcohol. My mother and father knew nothing of it.

At age fifteen I was arrested and jailed for breaking into a liquor store. In spite of all the problems I encountered with the law and my parents, I continued down a destructive path.

I soon learned that selling drugs could support my habit with money to spare. With the extra cash came friends and the acceptance I desperately wanted.

When I was twenty-five I wound up serving a nine-month jail sentence. After release, I stayed out of trouble for awhile but found myself missing the feeling of being high. One day I was at my uncle's house, and he convinced me to try crack cocaine. My life then spiraled completely out of control. I ended up sleeping in crack houses and doing all I could to chase a high that always let me down. I had little contact with my family. I couldn't imagine them caring about me when I didn't care about myself.

After one of my week-long binges, I realized I needed serious help or I would die. I left the crack

house where I was staying and called my mother. She put me in contact with Life Challenge. Someone prayed for me and encouraged me to enter the program. I agreed.

I walked through the doors on March 29, 2006. The first couple of months were not easy. I struggled with my classes and the discipline. It went against everything my rebellious nature had led me to be. But God was patient. Things started to look up and each day got easier and better. Jesus Christ took away my pain and forgave me of my sins. I rediscovered the love of Christ and what it means to belong to Him.

During my year at Life Challenge I was able to attend GED classes and earn my GED Diploma. I am now attending Southeastern University in Florida where I am majoring in business. I have a growing passion to reach the youth of today and to help those who are in the same situation I was in. Thanks be to God!”

FAREWELL

Many thanks to Paul Hamlin for seven years of faithful service to this ministry. Paul became affiliated with Life Challenge in the early 90's. He was instrumental in establishing an endowment fund with the Community Foundation of Southeastern Michigan which has greatly benefited this ministry over the years. Paul has been a rich source of blessing to many of our men by lending an ear and giving a word of encouragement to those struggling in the program. May God continue to use Paul for His glory!

As I write this, we are nearly \$100,000 behind in revenue comparing the first 8 months of 2007 with this year. Please help us “get to the other side.”

Together for souls,

Jeff