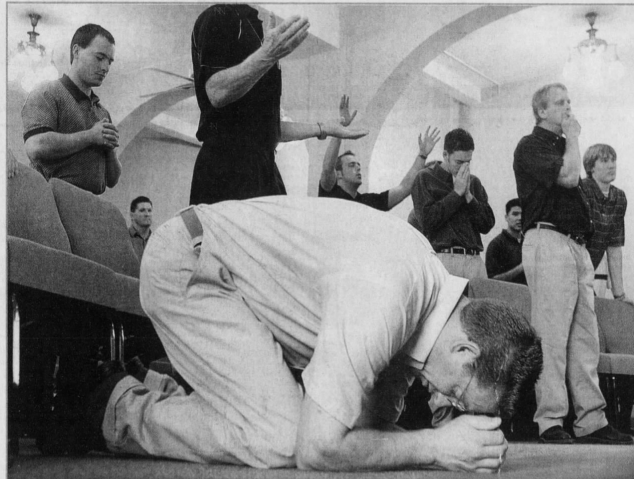


'The Holy Spirit helps men shake free of life-controlling issues,' says the Rev. John Palmer, of First Assembly of God Church in Des Moines.



Open to healing: Roger Freeborn, 39, kneels as he and other Teen Challenge students participate in a daily Christian-based, nondenominational chapel service.

## FIGHTING ADDICTION WITH FAITH

By JEFFREY THOMPSON and SHIRLEY RAIGSDALE  
PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFFREY THOMPSON

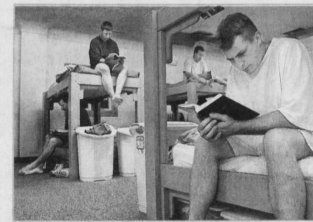
Teen Challenge officials agree it's a "terrible" name, but the people staffing and supporting the faith-based addiction treatment program are sticking with it, even though they work with people who are well beyond their teens.

Critics say Teen Challenge is a Christian indoctrination program, but that doesn't faze adherents, either. They say 70 percent of addicts who make it through the rigorous 15-month program are physically and spiritually saved. In 2002, 76 men were enrolled in the program and 21 completed it.

"The program's not perfect; it's not for everyone and not everyone comes out squeaky-clean," said the Rev. John Palmer, of First Assembly of God Church in Des Moines. The church has partnered with Teen Challenge since its inception.

"But if the students graduate, the program is tremendously successful," Palmer said. "The Holy Spirit helps men shake free of life-controlling issues."

Teen Challenge has 140 autonomous programs in the United States and about that many abroad. Started in Iowa and Nebraska in 1972, Teen Challenge of the Midlands has facilities in Des Moines,



Nightly reading: Kevin Rowray, 26, and others at Teen Challenge read Bibles before going to bed. Bible reading is required every night for 15 minutes.

Colfax, Ia., and Omaha, Neb. It serves only men. It does not accept government funding. The nonprofit organization's operating budget comes from church mission budgets, charitable trusts, philanthropic foundations and private individuals.

"We would be willing to accept federal money, if it came no strings attached, but we're not sure the faith-based initiative has developed that far," said the Rev. Bob Larson, assistant to the executive director.

A provision inserted into the 1996 Welfare Reform Act allows state support of secular services provided by faith-based

programs. Once in office, President Bush issued an executive order known as the Faith-Based Initiative, creating a bureaucracy to provide support to faith-based providers of social services.

Different from secular programs, Teen Challenge uses no therapists, medications or group therapy sessions. Instead, clients who are addicted to a variety of things, from drugs to work, are immersed in a curriculum of Bible study and character development. Addiction is seen as being out of step with God. Students are told their only hope is Jesus Christ.

"Yes, we are Christian — unabashed

and unabashed," Larson said. "It sounds crazy, but it's amazing what God can do." Kevin Rowray, 26, of Cedar Rapids, went through more than a dozen drug treatment programs and still failed to kick his habit. His mother pushed him to try Teen Challenge. Rowray wasn't convinced at first, but six months after joining the program he said he feels God "working on me and the need for a real change."

Teen Challenge of the Midlands works with about 30 men at a time. After paying a \$400 induction fee, the program is free. If a person is receiving disability Social Security payments, half is signed over to Teen Challenge.

Larson says that "a good number" of men come to the program and don't finish. Some critics have said that two out of three leave. The program doesn't count those who leave when it computes recidivism rates.

"We don't see that as a failure," Larson said. "God planted something in that person's heart." Many return, some in a month or two, some years later. If they are kicked out for disciplinary problems, they can't reapply for 30 days.

Some of Teen Challenge's successes can be credited to something secular programs rarely have — aftercare.

Teen Challenge clients have program and church support from the day they walk through the door and long after

### Inside

Stories from three men who count themselves among Teen Challenge's successes.

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