



Connections

◆ A Journal by & for Women in Ministry ◆

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Good Memories

By Lila Millhuff

Wow, I'm in tears—I needed this one! Seeing the commercial “So God Made a Farmer” during the Super Bowl football game brought back good memories.

I remember my dad planning during the winter for the spring seeding. We were mostly living from hand to mouth as many farmers do. With so many children and so many responsibilities, it was a lot of work just trying to survive! So to the bank my dad would go, to borrow money and purchase what was needed for the planting season.



Most of the time he would get the necessary funds, which gave him another opportunity to provide for his family. Then the equipment had to be readied and the process began. He dreamed of good crops, cultivating and nurturing them along the way, thinking of what was needed for the family, what would be needed to pay back the bank loan and what would be left over—maybe!

Then he waited for the rains to come and the crops to grow. Sometimes it was a wonderful season, when bountiful crops flourished. During the summer, crops were gathered and taken to market. That's when school clothes were purchased for the children and canning was done for the long winter months. No one was exempt from work—everyone had their part to help provide for the family. If you didn't work, you didn't eat so everyone was up at sunrise, fed and out to the fields.

During the fall, the rest of the crops were gathered in and sold and the bank loan was repaid. Laying in provisions for the family was the next task. The sweet potatoes were gathered in, the peas were dried and put safely in the barn for later use. Corn was put away for the livestock; the corn stalks, now dried, were stashed away. Anything useful was saved, nothing was wasted. Now was the time to make repairs to the farm equipment and the out-buildings. We settled in to survive another long winter and prayed the supply of food would last.

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Good Memories

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The absolute faith of a farmer living year to year is amazing. God made the farmer and put within him a special gift—faith—to never give up, even when some years brought drought or some years brought floods. The farmer just keeps on keeping on, waiting for a better year, looking to God for his sustenance, for the farmer knows who is the true provider.



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Connections

Mission Statement

Primary: The Connections for Clergy Support Department provides intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual support and encouragement in the personal lives of GCI ministry families.

Three primary means of serving are the *Connections* journal, the Connections for a Successful Ministry and Life web pages, and the Nurturennet forum. We highlight women in ministry but are inclusive of the needs of the entire family.

Secondary: To promote respect, understanding and support for women, their personal ministries and ministries that serve them.

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• CALIFORNIA •
TAM 2 U

Going Green

Everywhere you look, we are encouraged to go green, from saving energy to recycling to using cloth bags for our groceries. Hotel guests are asked to use towels for more than one day. Many businesses and homes have solar power and researchers are working on new ways to power our world.

But what about our spiritual lives? Many in ministry go and go, until they feel they are running on fumes. They burn out and have to take a sabbatical or just quit. Keith Farmer, who works with pastors in Australia, spoke at a conference there about having a sustainable ministry. He began by giving discouraging statistics about dying churches and burned-out pastors. He then moved on to how to keep the burnout from happening. The solution is to go green spiritually, which allows us to sustain and renew our spiritual energy.

To live sustainably, input must equal output. We can't keep giving out without taking in, which happens frequently in ministry. We think we have to accomplish as much as possible and before we know it, our energy and enthusiasm are gone. The tyranny of the urgent and the need to be busy can rob us of communion with the life-giving Holy Spirit. But our time in solitude and silence with God is more important than anything we are doing for him.

Out of our time with him comes the spiritual security of knowing God loves us and is always for us. Dr. Farmer says this is one of

the keys to living a spiritually sustainable life. Along with security is freedom through grace. Knowing we are free and living in the freedom we have in Christ is the only way to do ministry. Living otherwise is to open ourselves up to feelings of guilt, doubt and second-guessing, which all amount to lack of trust in Christ. Our ministries are really his ministry and as long as we are operating from a base of love, his is the only opinion that really matters.

We need to heal as much as we hurt, and unfortunately, hurting is not only a part of ministry, but also a part of life. We don't get through either unscathed. The only place to receive ongoing healing is deep in the heart of Jesus, by living and moving and having our being in him.

Every Christian is a priest in the kingdom of God (1 Peter 2:9), so living a green, growing and sustainable spiritual life is for all of us, no matter who we are or what we do. It's important to recognize the symptoms of burnout before you burn out.

Next time you are reminded to go green, think of Jesus and how he keeps us green as we remain attached to the life-giving Vine.

Tammy



It is a great mistake to be looking at obstacles when we have such a God to look at.



—D.L. Moody
Short Talks

Being Peaceful With My One Word

By Senior Pulley

It amazes me how God works with us. I'm learning more all the time why it's so important to be committed to him, because he is so committed to me. Have you ever stopped to think how much time God spends with each of us? He invests a lot of time in us: comforting, feeding, clothing, listening, speaking, teaching, providing, helping, sheltering, protecting us, to name only a few.

One of the ways God amazes me is in how he inspires us, and many times in the simplest of ways. I was especially excited about the last issue of *Connections*. I devoured it almost immediately from cover to cover. I was particularly inspired by Tammy Tkach's article, "My One Word." What a wonderful concept! And it made an extra special connection with me.

I attend a weekly Chi Kung class (breathing, relaxation and strengthening exercises). Some months ago, our instructor began starting each class by asking us to describe our week or our day or how we were feeling in one word! Because of some recent trials, my one word was always something negative, such as *challenging* and *stressful*. However, the following week, I noticed in

my personal Bible studies and readings and in church services, the words *peace* or *peaceful* kept cropping up.

One morning as I logged on to my computer at work I realized how coincidental it was (or was it?) that several weeks earlier I had changed my password to "*peaceful*." I then expressed to God that I felt he wanted me to focus on his peace and to realize his desire for me was to be peaceful during the challenging trial I was going through.

Then I received *Connections* and read Tammy's article, "My One Word." It was an eye-opening lesson for me. At the next week's class, my word was *peaceful* and it's decidedly "my one word" for 2013.

I have since found myself studying the lesson of Moses and how the children of Israel panicked when they saw the Egyptians coming after them. God inspired Moses to tell them "the Lord shall fight for you and ye shall hold your peace." I used to think this meant they were supposed to "stop talking and be quiet" while God delivered them. But I now believe, in addition to being quiet, God wanted them to hold on to their *peace*, to maintain their *peacefulness* and not to worry because the Source of Peace would be fighting for them.

The same is true for God's people today. I am inspired by how Jesus expressed peace when greeting his disciples, especially when he realized they were worried or afraid. It was a way to calm them. When he knew he would soon be parting from them, he encouraged them by saying, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27).



"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

John 14:27



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Being Peaceful

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After Jesus' death and resurrection, the disciples were together in a locked room for fear of the Jewish leaders. Jesus came, stood among them and knowing they would be fearful on suddenly seeing him, said, "Peace be with you." (John 20:19). A week later, he appeared again when Thomas was present, and even though the doors were locked, Jesus stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" (John 20:26).

When He was sending them forth to preach in his name, he said: "'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (John 20:21-22).

I am inspired by the love of our awesome God and how he has inspired me with one single word. As Tammy mentioned in her article, having one word to focus on for the year is a little easier than trying to make a New Year's resolution. It is a simple con-

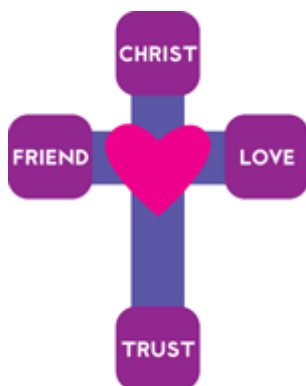
cept, but I find it extremely effective and powerful. I am reminded to draw strength and encouragement in such a simple way—just by remembering one word.

I foresee this to be an effective and wonderful annual exercise in choosing words that, for all intents and purposes, will remind me of the vast love of our one and only Great God—our *One Word*, holy and true—Jesus Christ!



Cecil and Senior Pulley pastor the GCI congregation in Devonshire, Bermuda. Senior enjoys writing poetry, spending time outdoors, listening to inspirational music, practicing Tai Chi and Chi Kung and especially loves butterflies! You may email her at cjpulley@logic.bm.

How comprehensive is the love of Jesus! There is no part of his people's interest that he does not consider, and there is nothing that concerns their welfare that is not important to him...



The breadth of his tender love is such that you may resort to him in all matters.

—C.H. Spurgeon

In perplexities—when we cannot tell what to do, when we cannot understand what is going on around us—let us be calmed and steadied and made patient by the thought that what is hidden from us is not hidden from him.

—Frances Ridley Havergal



Empire State of Mind

By Afrika Afeni Mills

I am not surprised my husband became a church planter. Dishon was giving the sermonette on youth day when I met him. What does surprise me is that I don't live in Brooklyn. I am a Brooklyn girl, through and through. Ask anyone who knows me, or look at the wallpaper on my Twitter page.

We live outside of Boston, but unlike my husband, I am not a Red Sox fan and when we went to see the Celtics play the Brooklyn Nets in a preseason game, I had my Brooklyn T-shirt on under my jacket (which I never unzipped, because Boston fans can be a bit intense). Being from Brooklyn and a product of the Hip Hop generation, Jay Z's "Empire State of Mind" song (the clean version) is almost my anthem.

After the Worldwide Church of God underwent major doctrinal shifts in the mid-'90s, Dishon and I wanted to learn more about mainstream Christianity. We belonged to a Baptist church for a while, and we were heavily involved in ministry. Once we found out we were pregnant with Serena, we sought out a more multicultural church. We briefly tried a mega church, but at the risk of sound-

ing like Goldilocks, it was just too big. We spent seven years in a Pentecostal church in Boston, where Dishon served as the youth pastor.

We moved from Boston to Randolph, and around the same time, a friend posted a link to the online ministry *Called to Be Free* on Facebook, so we began to look into Trinitarian theology. It was like finding the perfect wedding dress, and in a way, like coming home.

Being a church planting family has been an interesting journey. From 2010 to 2012, I worked as a literacy coach and then a kindergarten-through-5th-grade ELA (English Language Arts) director in our town, which is where we're church planting. I felt more connected to the community then, because I saw the faces of the children we wanted to reach every day.

My position was cut last year and now I'm working as the curriculum and instruction director for a Boston-based nonprofit organization. It takes more creativity to stay connected so I take advantage of the time we spend sitting next to other parents at Cairo's basketball games and participating in our town's Amazing Race. I also serve on the Recreation Board and the Board of Trustees for our library.

Maintaining balance is also challenging. Until recently, we were meeting in our home, so our weekends were packed with getting the house ready for church and the meeting each Sunday. Dishon is a bivocational pastor, and he works from 10 to 6 in downtown Boston, which enables him to take the kids to school. It also means he gets home after we've already had dinner, and he's not as available as he'd like to help with afterschool

The peace of God means being grateful
for his past mercies, conscious of his
present mercies,
and certain of his future mercies.



—Author unknown

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Empire State

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activities.

I had a difficult interchange with a woman who attended our small group meeting for a while. She shared she was upset that although she was host to a sleepover for our son, we had not done the same for her.

Our weekends are jam packed. Doing normal things like having a sleepover are really difficult when our Sunday mornings are filled with getting ready for the service. Being a church planting family isn't something others easily understand, or are willing to accommodate.

At the same time, church planting is rewarding. As a planter, I read the newspaper with a different eye, looking for opportunities to show love to our community. Each time we have a community dinner and I see people connecting meaningfully with people they haven't met before, it feels worthwhile. Within the next few months, Dishon and I will be facilitating a series of marriage workshops for the community, and I look forward

to seeing how God will reveal himself there.

I agree wholeheartedly with the focus of Dishon's sermonette the day we met, "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

I still have an "Empire State of Mind," but it's God's Empire as we join in his mission, and I wouldn't have it any other way.



As well as planting a church in Randolph, Massachusetts, with her husband Dishon, Afrika Afeni Mills is a curriculum and instruction director for Discovering Justice, a Boston-based nonprofit organization. Dishon and Afrika have two amazing children—Serena and Cairo. Afrika enjoys blogging and creative writing in her spare time. She can be reached at Joyspirit418@gmail.com.

Nurturennet

Nurturennet is a computer forum for women in ministry. Its purpose is to help you stay connected through digest-mode communication (each day's messages compiled into one email). You may use it for requests for information, prayer requests, to share ideas and resources, to receive updates on *Connections* news or just to stay connected!



To join or update your email address, please send Tammy a message at tammy.tkach@gci.org. Please do not reply to a post unless you want to address the entire list.

An Aspect of Grace

By Cathy Emerson

Della is driven to be holy. She attends church three times a week. She craves to be with God and serve him. Yet for all her dedication, her service is never enough. Not long ago she was admitted to the mental ward of the hospital for having visions and seeing things. So what happened here?

My husband and I watched this bright young woman grow up. She joined in most of the youth events and seemed to thrive in the system. She was always a serious girl and when she went off to a reputed Christian college to learn to deal with people with mental health issues, no one was surprised.

Della changed while there, though she remained in our fellowship for some time. This was when we were just beginning to evolve from WCG to GCI mode. After a time, Della married her friend of several years (my husband performed the ceremony) and took a new job.

Della and Josh began withdrawing into their own little world. Now her mother-in-law is desperately worried by all that goes on in their household. Though she wants to understand, she feels she no longer knows her son. I try to relate.

I too was a serious young woman when I entered the freshman class of Pasadena's 1969 Ambassador College. As a church we

were legalistic in the profession of our faith. I can remember nursing my children and feeling guilty because I wasn't being holy in the use of my time. Other times I would fall asleep while trying to pray—from many midnight feedings and overall tiredness. When our second son was born he kept me up nights far longer than my older son. So the cycle continued and the guilt multiplied.

This same son told me as a preteen, "All you do is study and pray so you aren't fun to be around." I felt as if someone had hit me right between the eyes. I had to repent of crucifying my family on my neurotic need to be holy.

I asked the question, "What do you want from me, God?" I have come to the conclusion, after tears of repentance, that God alone, Jesus alone, Spirit alone, are able to fulfill the desire to be holy! Jesus took that with him to the cross.

I see young Della and Josh withdrawing into their protective cocoon. I think they are fooling themselves about being holy. To go to Bible study every night, to do church three times a week, will never be enough. Satan is subtle, telling us we are not good enough. And we will never be! That is why Christ had to die.

Sometimes we set in our minds what we will do for God and feel anguish or guilt if we miss the mark. I realize much of what I want to accomplish is just that—*me* wanting

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Light gives of itself freely, filling all available space. It does not seek anything in return; it asks not whether you are friend or foe. It gives of itself and is not thereby diminished.

Michael Strassfeld, Habitat for Humanity Partner

An Aspect of Grace

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to *do*. There is something so sweet about saying I am doing this for my God. Then I realize I am putting self over the God I promised to love and obey. Sometimes the battle to believe is so difficult. How did the apostle Paul put it, “Oh wretched man that I am, who will save me?”

I wonder if Della realizes she can have peace. To be holy is to follow Jesus where he is. To be holy is not to be so withdrawn from the world that one isn’t in touch with the common people. (And who among us is common in God’s eyes?) Rudyard Kipling said, if you can “walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch.” Holiness comes by living a life freely in Christ. We do not withdraw but share and care for those with troubles, just as Jesus did.

“An Aspect of Grace”—we need the grace to help us get over ourselves and follow our Creator, Jesus, our Emmanuel. Only he can grant us peace in knowing we are serving him. Satan’s wrong teaching is a siren song that can lead us into despair so we never feel good enough for God.

I hope Della can come to know God truly loves her the way she is. To think otherwise is an outright deception foisted on this world by the great deceiver.



Cathy says: “We have fed our stray cat Simeon through the winter. He always has to butt my hand when I feed him and always demands a big petting or massage. When it comes to eating, he literally scarfs down the food as if he will never eat again. We made a bed for him with a nice warm blanket in our barn. He keeps on purring.” You may email her at ceewe@juno.com.



Zorro and Me

By Barbara Dahlgren

In the Eyes of God

A few weeks before the movie *42* was released, Zorro and I attended a free preview sponsored by a Christian organization. Not exactly what you would think of as a Christian movie, this Jackie Robinson biopic paints a painful yet inspiring picture of what it was like for him to become the first black baseball player to make it to the major leagues in 1947. We might like to envision the ’40s as an age of innocence, but racial prejudice and bigotry were the social norm.

Discrimination and prejudice are not limited to race, of course. They can include gender, ethnicity, social status, disabilities, tribes, nationalities, politics, educational levels, position, wealth, religion—the list goes on and on.

Watching this movie brought back memories of a few places Zorro and I have served in ministry where we encountered prejudicial thinking. In the early ’70s we were transferred to West Virginia. Zorro replaced a man who the members had a hard time accepting after he made some derogatory comments—although in jest—about their area. We learned that once people accept you it might be OK to joke about certain things, but best not take that liberty until then.

After a year in West Virginia we moved to Kentucky, spending the next 10 years in Appalachia. These areas were not much of a culture shock for me as I was born in the Ozarks, but Zorro was a city boy through and through. Before we moved I remember him saying he’d love to get rid of that Bluegrass

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In the Eyes of God

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music. I cautioned, “You might not want to go messin’ with the music!”

Fortunately he listened to me and before long he was pickin’ his guitar and grinnin’ with everyone else—and loving it. He loved the people. He respected them. He humbly approached them as one who had a lot to learn about the customs, ways and history of those he came to serve. They were eager to educate him and willing to embrace his spiritual understanding.

I was in California for a conference one time and went to a Sears store. When I presented my Sears credit card the cashier saw the Kentucky address and said, “You mean they actually have a Sears store in that part of the country.” I smiled and said, “Yes! And I wear shoes, too!”

In the ’80s we moved to the Detroit area. We were somewhat naïve about racial prejudices. Although I remember some of my Ozark relatives having bigoted opinions, I had grown up mostly in south St. Louis where many schools, including mine, were integrated. Zorro and I weren’t even thinking about such things when we drove up to the church-owned home in Michigan where we’d be living. The church copy machine was in the basement and the choir director happened to be down there making copies when we arrived. Zorro went down and introduced himself to the black gentlemen who eyed him suspiciously. The man said, “I just want you to know that my wife is white.”

God loves you as though you are the only person in the world, and he loves everyone the way he loves you.



—Augustine of Hippo

Without hesitation Zorro smiled, shook his hand and replied, “So is mine. So we have a lot in common.” The man laughed and embraced him. So began our six-year ministry and a learning curve in an area that had suffered severe riots in the late ’60s, leaving a wake of economic desolation still prevalent today. Once again Zorro’s love and respect for those he served bridged a gap. As the black brethren got closer to us they shared some of the atrocities they’d encountered, many depicted in the movie 42.

Some of us have never and will never know the brunt of prejudice, but many we serve do. Biblical principles can help us minister to them. Here are a few Zorro and I have found particularly helpful through the years—although I must admit Zorro lives them much better than I:

- Esteem others better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3).
- Love everyone as Christ loves us (John 13:34-35).
- We are all one in Christ (Galatians 3:28).

Jesus Christ is Savior to *all*—Jew and gentile, male and female, rich and poor, black and white. May we always remember that in the eyes of God we are *all* his children!



Barbara says, “This summer I visited Austria, Germany and Switzerland with a dear friend who lost her husband. Evonne and I have been buddies since the second grade—and that’s a LONG time! Just two wild and crazy girls off to see the world...well...wild and crazy middle aged women—seniors if we can get the discount!” You can check out Barbara’s blog (Barbara’s Banter) at www.barbdahlgren.com or contact her at bydahlgren@pacbell.net. She loves hearing from you.

Briefly Speaking...

Grandma Said So

If it isn't worth mending, it isn't worth keeping." I could hear my maternal grandmother's words as I folded Ed's undershirt with the tiny hole under one sleeve. He can wear it once more, I thought. But grandmother won out. In the sewing basket it went.

OK, to be clear, I don't sew anymore, but I still mend if forced to. And though long gone, my grandmother is still a force.

It made me ask myself, what kind of influence am I, not only on my children, but on my grandchildren? What will they remember that I said or did 30 or 40 or more years from now? It may not be what first comes to mind. My kids already remind me of sayings or deeds I've long ago forgotten and am amazed they remember.

You've heard the saying, "Hey, as long as I'm only hurting myself, what difference does it make?" Not true. Quoting William Barclay: "It is our terrible responsibility that we leave something of ourselves in the world by leaving something of ourselves in others."

We are links in a chain. We are made up of family past, present and future through our offspring. Our influence can go well beyond our families as well.

I'm praying I'm a strong link in that chain for good, and I look to Christ to make it so!

—Sheila Graham
sheila.graham@gci.org



God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us.

—Ephesians 3:20
The Message Bible



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