



Connections

◆ A Journal by & for Women in Ministry ◆

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God Who Comforts the Downcast

By Hilary Buck

*"I will never leave you nor forsake you."
Hebrews 13:5 (NKJV)*

After the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus dispatched the disciples off to cross the Sea of Galilee while he sent the crowds home and stayed back to pray. Out on the water the wind rose and stirred up a heavy sea that pounded the disciples' boat. The word Matthew uses to describe their battering is also used to describe the pangs of childbirth, the suffering of a painful illness and even the torments of hell, which perhaps gives us more of an insight into the disciples' plight out in the darkness and far from land (Revelation 12:2, Matthew 8:6, Revelation 20:10). Then toward dawn Jesus is there, coming to them, walking on the water and stilling the storm (Matthew 14:22-32).

But where is Jesus now when we are tossed about in a raging storm? The last anyone saw of him was at his ascension. After the death of my husband, when the funeral was over, when my family had left, when all the busyness of the first weeks was gone and I was alone in the house, the loss took hold of me. One morning I was in great distress. Jesus said he would never leave or forsake us, but much as I would have liked him to, I knew he wasn't going to be knocking on my door to help me.

Instead, about midday, it was a delivery man who knocked and, taking care not to look too closely at me, left a cardboard box that contained a large bouquet of flowers with no note to say who sent them. A little while later the phone rang: "I've been feeling compelled to call you all morning; the thought just won't go away that I must phone," said my caller.

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God Who Comforts

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Paul knew the effect of God's well-timed hand of love. In 2 Corinthians 7:5-6 (*RSV*) we read, "‘Into Macedonia,’ he told the Corinthians, ‘we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus.’"

Jesus no longer walks on earth, but in our seas of Galilee, when in the darkness the wind and waves rage against us, he still comes to us. But now he comes in and through the love and care of his Body here on earth, those who hear the voice of his Spirit.



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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

What Do You Want?

When you're in ministry, you spend a lot of time praying and thinking about how best to serve God with the gifts he's given you. You also try to figure out how best to help and to serve the people in your congregation or group. Ministry is about the people after all.

But after you've prayed, thought, figured and worked all that out, do you take the time to think about what you need? Have you ever heard Jesus ask, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Jesus asked just this question of the blind man in Mark 10:51. At first this seems almost like a silly question. The man was blind. Of course he wanted to see!

You've probably heard or read explanations of why Jesus asked this question. They range from the man might have worried about how he would support himself when he couldn't beg anymore to how we need to examine our hearts to see if we're willing to give up a life-style to follow him.

"What do you want me to do for you?" is a question we need to let penetrate into the depths of our being. The longings of our soul are already open to God, but we might not be aware of them. Opening up with him about our deepest desires gets us to a more intimate place with him and can also expose wrong desires and help us move toward spiritual growth and maturity.

For example, when James and John asked to be on either side of Jesus in his kingdom, they revealed the true desires of their hearts. It was better their false ambitions were exposed, rather than fester inside them and lead

to problems later on. If we talk with God about our inner longings, we can get to the heart of what we really want—to know him better, to be closer to him and to live in the intimacy of a relationship with him.

When I read about this question in *Sacred Rhythms* by Ruth Haley Barton, the answer came to me immediately. My answer didn't surprise me, because I had thought about it before, but it did surprise me I didn't need any time at all to come up with it. I'm going to share it here because I think it might be common. My desire is to be loved, valued, seen, heard, understood and appreciated just for being me.

I'm sure most of us have already learned that while parents, husbands, children and friends can do this in a limited way, they can't fulfill these desires completely. Only Jesus can do that, but we have to let him in. We let him in by acknowledging our deepest longings and giving them to him in silence, solitude and stillness.

What do you want him to do for you? What a wonderful Savior to ask! Spend some time alone with him to talk it over and let him give you the desires of your heart.



Tammy

Faith is to believe what you do not yet see; the reward for this faith is to see what you believe.

—Augustine of Hippo



Empty Nest Is for the Birds

By Amy Warren

Anyone facing a move or coming up to the empty nest stage of life? You're not alone. I could say yes to both of those questions about a year ago. It was an emotional roller coaster. God used a friend to help me get a grip where my grip needed to be and provide some encouragement. Perhaps you will be encouraged as well.



I came to realize those feelings of homesickness and of missing the days when our kids were little are normal. We grieve our losses. It's OK to grieve when you are uprooted from a family home. It's OK to grieve when we lose our job as mom. God will carry us through this stage as he does the other stages of our lives. And he will teach us about hanging on and letting go.

This reality came to me by way of a snail-mail letter from my friend, Debbie. (Debbie became my friend in kindergarten. Yes, that was half a century ago!) We both faced moves and our children became independent adults at the same time. We agreed this was good. When we saw God's hand in our moves, we knew they would be adventures. We would have opportunities for growth and God was already there. We wanted our children to be able to live apart from us. That was what we'd been training them for. Yet

A great many people are trying to make peace, but that has already been done. God has not left it for us to do, all we have to do is to enter into it.

—D. L. Moody

we felt a tug on our hearts that couldn't be ignored.

Debbie has a large aquarium that houses a variety of sea life including hermit crabs. She added new shells to the tank so the crabs could move to larger shells as they grew. She watched as one hermit crab quickly switched to a different shell and off he went. Another crab seemed to take forever to decide which shell to move to. She was amazed as she watched him. He finally got into his new shell, but he was pulling the old shell along with him. He tried to get it under the rock where he was hiding in his new shell.

God is pretty creative and amazing at teaching us lessons. Through this little crab, God taught her (and she taught me) that we need to hold onto him in everything. And we need to let go of everything and everyone else by putting them into his care. He is trustworthy!

In his devotional, *Every Day With Jesus*, Selwyn Hughes says, "When we arrive in heaven I think the idea will grip us that here on earth we have never really been 'at home.'" We can only begin to imagine the sense of safety and security, of belonging he alludes to.

In the meantime, we are surrounded by people who are lonely and insecure, who are holding onto whatever they can, trying to find meaning in this life. What they need to know is they can cling to Jesus. He has gone to prepare a place for them. And it won't be just a shell!



Eric and Amy have been in ministry with our fellowship for 30 years. They recently moved to Toronto West, Ontario. The size of the city is rather intimidating for Amy. "I will probably always be a small-town girl at heart!" You may email Amy at amywarren56@hotmail.com.

Briefly Speaking...

Blessed Rain

I love the rain. As I write this, it's raining outside. It's God pouring down his blessings on our thirsty north Texas pasture land. We'll have at least one cutting of hay, maybe two, before the summer drought with its weeks of 100-degree-plus temperatures begins.

When I lived and worked in the Los Angeles area, I didn't think much about rain. Not much rain to think about. Living in the country surrounded by horse and cattle ranches, rain or the lack of it is an important subject of conversation. One year it was so desperately dry that some 30 or 40 of us gathered at the courthouse to pray for rain.

Sometimes with the longed-for rains come tornado-strength winds, floods and golf-ball-size hail. That's not welcome. I'm reminded that although Christ has redeemed this earth, we're in the in-between times. As Paul wrote, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" (Romans 8:22, *NIV*). And it's still groaning!

The earth is redeemed. I am redeemed. You are redeemed, but we're still awaiting his triumphant return. Someone once asked me why I still confess my sins when I'm already forgiven. It's because I still sin! I confess them in grateful acknowledgement of the momentous sacrifice made to free me from the bondage of sin and guilt. Thank you, Lord, for the rain, and most of all, for your overwhelming sacrificial love for me and for all your creation. And please Lord, come soon!

—Sheila Graham
sheila.graham@gci.org



Old and in the Way

C'mon, Mom, Unlock the Door!

By Joyce Catherwood

"C'mon, Mom, unlock the door!" I pleaded as I rang the doorbell. Nothing. I knocked loudly, then rattled the door knob. Still nothing. I knew Mom was at home. I noticed her peeking out the window as I walked from my house next door. She had a perfect view from her small bathroom window and often kept track of my comings and goings from that little perch of hers.

"What in the world did I do?" I asked myself out loud. I figured I was in trouble somehow, but I was only coming over to do some housecleaning. I tried to call her first, but no one answered the phone. I wasn't sure where my dad was at this juncture—probably taking his afternoon nap.

I purposely hired someone to clean my own house so I would have time to clean my mom's. No way would my parents allow anyone else to come into their home and do the job, especially if it cost money. And their house was no easy task. They never wanted to throw anything away. Knick knacks and mementos were scattered all over, everything from 1920s salt and pepper shakers to a rock collection from the California Mojave Desert, all collecting dust.

Occasionally I tried to discard an item I thought no longer had sentimental or monetary value. Big mistake! My parents would fetch it out of the trash can and place it right back where it belonged, even if it were broken or had long since lost its purpose. My mom often wandered wistfully around her house



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Old and in the Way

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looking at all her things. She was unable to do much else in her late 80s. Her memory was fading rapidly, but now and again as she handled some of her little treasures, she would have happy flashbacks of days gone by. So most things I left undisturbed.

An inveterate caregiver in overdrive, I tended to wholeheartedly jump in and get things done, a bit like the Energizer Bunny. I always felt pleased with myself afterward, assuming I was being such a big help to my mom. So the day she locked me out, I was in for a big revelation.

Once I persuaded her to open the door, I followed her to her favorite rocking chair in the sunroom. This was where my parents spent most of their time. The huge windows provided a view of woods and wildlife and the neighbors. They especially enjoyed watching one neighbor, sitting on his riding mower, wearing a huge straw hat, mowing his acreage in the midday sun. For some reason this was major entertainment.

When I asked why she was mad at me, my mom said: “You insult me by coming over here and cleaning my house all the time. My house is not dirty!”

Hello! This was news to me. Though her memory would come and go and she had serious health issues, this clearly did not prevent Mom from feeling embarrassed she could no longer do her job. Of course her house needed attention, but it was *her* house. She had always been the housekeeper until she became frail. I could have approached the tasks at hand with more respect for her territory, rather than blow in like a tornado, vacuuming and dusting and washing and cleaning. My eager-beaver demeanor drove her nuts.

Most of us are familiar with the gospel story about sisters Mary and Martha. In one

instance, Martha ran around frantically trying to prepare a meal for Jesus and be a super-hostess. She was quite upset with Mary who, instead of helping her, sat attentively at Jesus’ feet listening to his every word. Jesus gently explained to Martha she was missing the point by being overly involved in the preparations. Though the lesson in that particular story has a much deeper spiritual meaning, Martha’s well intended but misguided zeal described me perfectly. I rushed about focused on getting things done, overlooking the more pressing emotional needs of my mom.

The moral of the story is to tread lightly when you find yourself helping an aging senior, particularly if you are in their territory. I thought Mom would be overjoyed and relieved to have someone take over and do all the work. But I had forgotten it was her house. Keeping it up had been an integral part of her identity and no longer being able to do so meant her life, as she once knew it, was slipping away. Being unaware of this dynamic makes it easy for a caregiver to step on toes or come across as dismissive or insulting. This can cause an elderly person to feel expendable, old and in the way.

The tasks can still be accomplished by using tact and diplomacy, easing into situations rather than showing up, mop and broom in hand, and vigorously invading their space.

Oh, and just so you know, Mom never locked me out again.



Joyce says: “My 25-year-old high-tech grandson, whose goal is to go totally paperless, just rescued me from drowning in technology as I struggled to set up and move data over to a new computer. I was actually staring at the screen, weeping, when he called and said he’d be right over.” You may email Joyce at joyce.catherwood@gci.org.

I Cried

By Sharie S. Meyer

Jesus wept.”

Two words. Simple. Powerful. Devastating. Two words. Only two words but whose impact has rolled across the ages.

I cried.

I cried for hours, for days, for weeks. I was not prepared. I was not expecting the words of deep-cutting cruelty. Someone said something to me—not a friend, but someone for whom I had done favors, provided opportunities. And then her words struck, fast and hard and brutal. It was so unexpected my defenses did not react quickly enough. The painful words slashed deep within my brain and my emotions and they were there to stay.

Much time has passed, but I will cry occasionally when I remember. Fifteen words, two sentences. That was all. But I can still hear her voice, the indifference. Was she right? Was she wrong? It doesn't matter. It was said and it hurt, so badly. Time dulls, but it is too simple to say, “It hurt,” because this type of experience does more than that, it devastates.

I'm crying as I write this. I started to cry

as I read words that were so true, so fitting. “We were made to live in community, so we are affected by the words and actions of others. When we encounter unkindness, we are diminished—no matter how strong, self-sufficient, and independent we may be” (*A Short Course in Kindness*, Margot Silk Forrest).

Can you see why I cried as I read those words? Because that is what happened to me. I am strong and self-sufficient and independent, and I am known by a loving God. Still, her words, her unkindness diminished me, shattered me.

Dear God, please, please don't let me have done this to others. Professionally, I have had to do and say things to others they did not wish to hear: students who could not pass my college courses, employees who had to be corrected, friends and relatives to whom I did not speak as I could have or should have or might have. But, oh, may it never have been deliberately vicious.

I cried.

I cried when a birthday card came from someone I know. Beautiful card, beautiful message. Personal words were added, words

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Nurturenet

Nurturenet 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!



Do we
have
your
email
address?

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.

I Cried

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written to me, about me by the sender, words that were balm to my lacerated soul. Words of kindness and love and appreciation and, yes, praise. I cried and I laughed through my tears, and some of the pain eased.

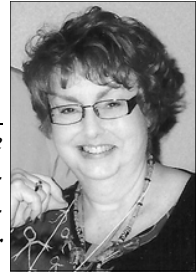
Eventually, I wrote this person a note to tell her how much her personal message meant to me, to thank her for her words. I've kept that card and when I need to, I reread it. When I next encountered her, we hugged and laughed and she thanked me for my note to her, for being so kind to her. Imagine!

Kindness to each other with so different a result. Love beyond kindness. "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12, NIV). So simple. So beautiful. So oft ignored.

"I scarcely know where to begin, but love is always a safe place"
(from a letter written by Emily Dickinson).

God told us how to treat each other. Humans may not recognize it as his way but they recognize it as best.

Dear Lord, teach us to be kind to one another.



Sharie continues to revel in the company of a retired husband. This means she has a constant companion available for taking road trips, enjoying restaurants, discussing books, trying recipes and exploring life. You may email Sharie at smeyer1@mindspring.com.

Measure not God's love and favor by your own feelings. The sun shines as clearly in the darkest day as it does in the brightest. The difference is not in the sun, but in some clouds which hinder the manifestation of the light.

—Richard Sibbes



Confidential Peer Listener Line

Shall we talk? We're here for you!

Darlene Schmedes
626-815-1960, Pacific
glysch@gmail.com

Ginny Rice
225-205-2901, Central
ginny.rice@gci.org



Helen Jackson
626-284-8256, Pacific
HHelenjac@aol.com

Zorro and Me

Little Children

By Barbara Dahlgren

When the disciples didn't want Jesus to be bothered by little children hanging around, Jesus was upset and displeased. He told them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:13-16, *NIV*). That's some pretty *big* emphasis for some very little kids.

Jesus is telling us we can learn a lot from children, so much that I'm convinced we should make an effort to be around or even play with little ones periodically or we'll forget what Jesus is talking about. Matthew 18:2 goes so far as to say unless we become as little children we won't inherit the kingdom.

Those of us blessed with children have a built-in opportunity to see them in action. Unfortunately, when our children are young we're usually so busy trying to feed, clothe and provide for them we can be too tired to appreciate what they have to offer. That's why I find grandchildren such a delight. They don't mind being transparent and uninhibited. They openly trust, love, laugh, cry, hope, sing, endure, dance, ponder and generally enjoy life to the fullest. Not only do they help adults keep perspective, they share their perspective as well.

For example, last Christmas when Zorro adjusted our 4-year-old granddaughter Sophia's chair so she could more easily partake of Christmas dinner she declared in a loud voice, "You're a genius, Grandpa!" Do you know how good it feels to have someone actually think you are genius?

This has become quite a catch phrase at our house. When Zorro or I do something noteworthy we praise each other with, "You're a genius!"

Sophia, just like your grandchildren I'm sure, is so smart—and very literal. Here are some choice responses her mom shared with us in a recent email:

Babysitter: "What a nice toy; where did you get that?" Sophia: "From the toy box" (with a *you idiot* expression on her face).

Daddy: "Deal, let's shake on it." Sophia pauses, thinks and then shakes her behind!

As she's slowly climbing the stairs after a hard day of play: "We need a faster house."

Surgery nurse, when Sophia was to have tubes from her ears removed, explaining she would need to breathe from a mask: "Can you breathe?" Sophia: "Yes,

and when I'm angry I do deep breaths." (Yeah! She has been listening.)

Checking in for surgery, the nurse asked Sophia: "You are so cute. How did you get to be so cute?" Not missing a beat, Sophia said: "Well, Daddy planted a seed in Mommy...." She didn't get to explain any further because mom and the nurse were ROFL.

At preschool, out of the blue and not in context to anything, Sophia told her teacher Miss Dee: "I love my mommy; she takes good care of me."

Of course, as children grow they learn to be a little more guarded with responses—and that's not necessarily a bad thing. Although I wonder sometimes if God wouldn't love it if we threw our arms up in the air and spontaneously declared, "You're a genius, Father!" Or out of the blue we sincerely pronounced,



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Lessons From My Grandchildren

By Karon Smith

Today is a preparation day for an exciting event. Our two grandchildren are coming for a visit! And without their parents! Not that I don't enjoy the parents, I do. But it is really fun to have the kids all to myself for a few days. (A few days are all I can handle. I have to admit after a few days I am exhausted and more than willing to pack them up and send them back home.)

So today I am baking chocolate chip cookies, marinating meat for shish kabobs, and preparing a fresh batch of hummus. Our 2-year-old grandson is a picky, picky eater but,

surprisingly, hummus is one thing he is always willing to eat. Go figure. Actually, I have never had him turn down chocolate chip cookies either but can't offer him those too often in good conscience.

I am also pulling out the foam pad we need for extra bedding. Of course, the only reason it's needed is our 4-year-old granddaughter prefers to have me sleep in the same room with her. And over the years I have found it less disruptive to my sleep to accommodate her rather than having to get up and comfort her during the night when she wakes up screaming, "Grandma!" Papa has learned to deal with it. He gets to sleep with me every night except when the grandkids are sleeping over.

As I was thinking about our grandchildren's visit and smiling to myself about how much Papa and I anticipate and plan for these visits, it occurred to me our Father in heaven also anticipated and planned for the arrival of his children, we humans. And just as I look at the precious faces of my grandchildren and love them so, God loves us. My grandchildren are far from perfect and have some traits that frustrate me, but these traits are not what come to mind when I think of them. It's their zest for life, their enjoyment of learning, their curiosity and their laughter. What joy they bring with their carefree, uncomplicated approach to life.

And this brings to mind my favorite passage of scripture, Matthew 11:28-30: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." I revisit and sit with this passage often. I get weary, taking too much

Little Children

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"I love you, Father! You take such good care of me!"

It's true we should all grow up and mature, but at the same time we are still God's children. I guess it wouldn't hurt to occasionally be like a little child.



Zorro and Barbara live in Silicon Valley. They have been in ministry for more than 40 years, living in Florida, West Virginia, Kentucky, Washington, Michigan and now California where Zorro pastors the South Bay Christian Church in San Jose. Barbara says, "Time flies when you're having fun!" Zorro and Barbara love to have fun! Check out her blog at www.barbdahlgren.com or email her at bydahlgren@pacbell.net.

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Lessons

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upon myself and acting as if there is no Savior, no loving Father who promises to carry me and my burdens, as if Jesus has not overcome the world (John 16:33). I thus rob myself of joy and peace. And rob Jesus as well because I believe Jesus gets great pleasure out of our coming to him, trusting him, allowing him to care for us. The same kind of pleasure I get out of my grandchildren running into my arms with complete abandon, secure in knowing I adore and accept them. It is this kind of relationship and joy Jesus offers. All I need to do is come.



Karon says: "Retired after 15 years working as a marriage and family therapist and social worker, I'm having so much fun spending time with my seven grandchildren and working in my yard and garden. I love digging in the dirt and watching things grow. I also enjoy taking pictures, traveling, cooking and entertaining. God has plopped us down in one of the most beautiful areas of the world with easy access to Napa Valley, San Francisco Bay and Lake Tahoe, to mention a few favorites. Anyone wanting to spend a few days with us and enjoy the area is welcome to send me an email and see what we can arrange. We love sharing what God has blessed us with. Email me at karonsmith@yahoo.com."

There is not one blade of grass, there is no color in this world that is not intended to make us rejoice.



—John Calvin

Seven Lessons From My Experience With Connecting & Bonding

(Because we love things in sevens)

By Silvia Burns

We've all heard analogies about life. Life is like an onion, you peel off layer after layer and sometimes you weep. Life is like a coin, you can spend it anyway you wish, but you can only spend it once.

But when I think about my own life I often think of it as a book with me as the author. Every day is a new page and chapters begin and end.

I started a new chapter in my book 16 years ago when I married my husband, Steve, and moved myself and my teenage son cross country from Chicago to a West Texas town where the tallest structure was a 13-story building. At the time Steve was an elder in this West Texas church and within weeks of our marriage he became the lay pastor. Having been a member of our denomination since childhood I was familiar with how things worked, but it was one thing being a member and quite the other being the pastor's wife.

Two months after our wedding we were in California for training and then back home to our congregation. As my husband ministered to the congregation, issues came up for me the training had not addressed. I didn't know the appropriate way for a pastor's wife to handle these situations.

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Seven Lessons

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For example, a woman in our congregation, who I considered overly needy, talked to my husband every week and let him know what an “idiot” her husband was. As I watched from across the room I’d see her take a step closer to my husband, then my husband take a step back, then she would take another step closer and thus the dance began. My antenna would go up and I’d start getting upset. What I wanted to do was stand by my husband and mark my territory, so to speak, but was that the appropriate thing to do?

Now don’t get me wrong, it wasn’t because this woman needed to talk with my husband that I was getting upset. It was because this was a continual week after week, same song and dance, and I knew it would be all too easy for her to start to eye my husband as her fantasy boyfriend.

Please Write!

Connections needs you! If you journal, blog, jot down ideas or record your life experiences in a diary, please take that idea, journal entry or *aha* moment and put it in article form. Just make sure it’s between 500 to 700 words, read it over a few times and self-edit before sending it in.

We’d love to hear from our ordained women! We’d like to share your experiences as a pioneer in this exciting new world of women elders. Please send your article, photo and bio to Tammy Tkach at tammy.tkach@gci.org.

My husband was also involved with four West Texas churches, which meant two circuits with two churches each. Most weeks we attended one service then drove two hours and attended the other service then drove two hours home. But once a month we attended one service two hours away, then drove three hours to the second service, then drove five hours to return home. Quite a difficult schedule for a newly married couple who worked full time and had a teenage son!

Stress mounted.

I attended a conference in Dallas where I heard Jannice May give a speech on marriage and ministry. As they say in Texas, “bless her heart,” she had no idea the can of worms she was opening. Or, was it God opening a door? You’ll need to make that decision yourself.

During a break I sought Jannice out and dumped on her my feelings of inadequacy as a pastor’s wife and my not being able to deal with stressful situations. She listened. I’ll say that again because it’s important. She listened.

Lesson #1: LISTEN.

She said she’d have to get back to me on a few things and she did. Then Jannice gave me a piece of advice to take home and put into practice, and I did just that.

Remember the needy woman I mentioned? Jannice advised the next time I should go up to Needy Woman and my husband when she’s giving him her weekly monologue, put my arm through my husband’s arm and just stand there and smile. I did. My husband thanked me afterward. Little did I know the weekly dance was stressing him too. That was the last weekly “my husband’s an idiot” talk. Did you guess that

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would be the case?

Lesson #2: Be aware of your antennae as you interact with others.

A few weeks after the conference Jannice followed up with me by telephone. She had spoken with a few other women, made some contacts, and ideas started swirling around. *Connecting & Bonding* was born!

Lesson #3: It's important to follow through on your word—always—but especially when in ministry.

I was blessed to attend the first *Connecting & Bonding* conference in California. As a new pastor's wife I didn't have the advantage I thought many wives had of knowing each other because of attending college together. Jannice arranged a roommate for me, choosing her because she also lived in Texas. What Jannice didn't know, but God did, was that this pastor's wife used to live in Chicago and we had attended the same congregation. She was familiar to me and spearheaded my meeting many other women.

I realized two things, first that I was not alone. A lot of women married to lay pastors were unsure of their role. Second, even those who had married pastors from the onset faced stresses and struggles. I began to become anchored in my role and a new chapter was about to begin.

Three and a half years later the church hired my husband for full-time ministry and moved us from Texas to the mid-Atlantic region with two congregations. I could write a book on those years, but suffice it to say I continued to grow into my role as pastor's wife and was able to attend another four *Connecting & Bonding* conferences. I took the women from my area whose husbands were taking on the responsibilities of lay pastor and each by default the pastor's wife.

Lesson #4: Remember how someone reached back to take your hand when you were in need and helped pull you through. As you go through the journey, reach back to those behind you and help them through.

At each conference I could see my own growth. From "I don't know if I belong here" to "Here I am, girls!" Stories shared at the table changed meals into a night at the comedy club. The level of detailed love and care we received as women from *C&B* was enough to fill anyone's cup, give us a pat on the back and send us home for another year of service to others.

LESSON #5: Details do matter, even little things like a letter of encouragement left under a door, a mint on your pillow, a late night chocolate fest, a gift bag with a surprise—all make a difference in expressing love to others.

After 12 years in the mid-Atlantic area with increasing responsibilities, the time came for my husband to retire and thus the next chapter of my life's book was about to begin. In our desire to live closer to family and build a more self-sustaining life, my husband and I purchased a small farm in rural west Arkansas. Now our husband and wife ministry continues as an outpouring from our hearts to those we come in contact with.

Is there life after ministry? Absolutely!

LESSON #6: Your identity is not in your position or role but in who you are as a person and whose we are, which doesn't change no matter where in our life's book we find ourselves.

Today, Steve and I feel a little like Adam and Eve in blue jeans. We dress and keep and plant and harvest. We have two Great Pyrenees dogs, a half dozen baby chicks (future egg layers of the farm), and we're happy with the life we are building. We are

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thankful for the years we served in the ministry and the chance to meet some of the most wonderful, dear, beloved people one could ever meet, with a sprinkling of interesting others to keep things from being boring.

Connecting & Bonding was born out of my need that obviously reflected the needs of many others and heartfelt compassion on Jan-nice's part. It has grown and become a living ministry and is now in its 15th year. I think often of some of the simple things discussed at the conferences, such as not letting things or people rob you of your joy, or trust God and realize that thoughts and ideas remain in our mind and are called up as needed.

The last thing Jannice probably thought

would happen when she prepared to attend the women's conference in Dallas all those years ago was that a speech would launch her into a ministry.

Lesson #7: Always be open to where God leads.

It may start a new chapter in your life too!



Silvia says: "I live on a small farm in rural Alma, Arkansas, where my husband and I tend our garden, orchard and animals. I enjoy reading, travel and photography, which leads to my hobby of scrap-booking. Also started Designs DeAlma jewelry, which will be available at very reasonable prices during C&B as a fund raiser for C&B." You may email Silvia at silviamburns@yahoo.com.

Being a Light...has a lighter side!

In the small, family-owned store in Spokane, Washington, where I work, we often get folks from out of town whose idioms are a little different from our own. One day, after parking her car across the street in an attended lot, a young woman came in. She made her purchase and then asked, "Do you give validation?"

Without batting an eye, my manager replied, "You are an excellent, successful person, and I love your hair."

A man was sitting next to me in one of the two "husband chairs" in a ladies' clothing store. After 30 minutes and five outfits, the fellow's wife came out of the changing room again. He looked at her and immediately said: "That looks good on you. Get that one."

"Honey," she replied, "this is what I was wearing when we came in."

—cleanlaffs

There has been a lot of talk about conserving energy. Like keeping the thermostat down in the winter. Using low energy bulbs. Turning off lights. Using less gas. It made me realize my dad was like the first environmentalist. He would walk around the house yelling, "Turn off those lights! Turn the heat down!" He was green before his time.

—Jay Leno

