



Connections

◆ A Journal by & for Women in Ministry ◆

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Worship No Matter What

By Sheila Dela Peña

As the new year began, I was filled with gratitude for the physical, emotional and mental rest I enjoyed with my family for a few weeks. The past year was pain filled: losing loved ones, grappling with God and his promises, struggling to keep my head above raging waters and simply striving to survive.

God's many promises seemed irrelevant to me and my situation. They were outdated and were definitely not objective reality as far as I was concerned. I witnessed injustice, suffering, severe pain and loss among my family, friends and countrymen. God's mercy and deliverance seemed far away.

After more than a year of leaving my Bible on a shelf, I fearfully picked it up and leafed through the still crisp pages. It was an emotional experience. I know in my heart Jesus never left me, but I stopped believing in his word—at least those that promise deliverance, provision and help to the widows, orphans and fatherless.

I did not go to my favorite books. I skimmed through and decided to read Habakkuk. This was not a book I often read so I was stunned to see myself and my situation so accurately described by the author. I cried his cry for many months: "How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, 'Violence!' but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong?" (Habakkuk 1:2-3, *NIV* throughout).

Did I receive the answers I wanted to hear? I guess not. I was utterly despondent and wondered if God would ever forgive me for dwelling in negativity and misery for so long. In his unflinching love and mercy, he whispered these words to me:

"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no

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Worship No Matter What

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food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights” (Habakkuk 3:17-19).

He is healing me enough to begin praising him: “to choose to trust God and declare that his character is perfect—even when we don’t understand and our hearts are breaking” (*Insight on Worship, CGSB, NIV*).

My heart is still breaking. My husband and I lost another beloved pet. By God’s strength, I choose to be hopeful and to continue to live my life with all my heart and might because life is too short to remain in pain, anguish and grief. We have a mighty and loving God who continues to save and heal us. And he continues to save and heal me, one small step at a time.



Sheila was able to spend some time overseas, “enjoying every moment being with my sister and niece, and awaiting my husband’s arrival in a week. I am blessed with a much-needed break.” You may email her at sheila_delapena@yahoo.com.

CONNECTIONS

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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

Our Secret Lives

In the short story “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty” by James Thurber, the main character’s life is boring and mundane, so he becomes the hero of his own little world. He daydreams about exciting scenarios filled with danger. He pilots a plane through a hurricane, performs a complicated surgery, takes the stand in his own murder trial, goes to war and finally faces a firing squad, courageous to the end.

In real life, many indulge in secret lives much less innocuous—secret lives that may include drug use, affairs, theft and pornography. These activities are often a symptom of loneliness and are fueled by the media. When exposed, more loneliness and even depression can follow.

Christians have secret lives that should be filled with the good things of God. Often though, their secret lives are filled with guilt, shame and fear. What is your secret life like? Do you daydream to fill lonely hours? Do you walk around with the weight of bitterness and an unforgiving attitude in your heart? Are you afraid of everything and afraid others will find out about your fears?

Deep inside us, where only the Holy Spirit can go, is a place of wonders where he transforms us with the gentleness of a new mother. The secret life of a Christian can be filled with joy and freedom in Christ as we yield to the Spirit and let him lead us to Jesus.

Sometimes we might forget we even have a secret life and it can be difficult to find the time to nurture it. Intentionality and planning

can help. It won’t happen without them. Find a special place or room you can go to be alone. Make sure you have enough time to connect with God. (Put it on your calendar and treat it as a priority.) Get to the center of your heart by throwing off the pretenses and opening your real self to God.

You know this, but it’s good to be reminded. Our secret lives can be like a lush green garden or a dry brown desert. Our relationship with God flourishes with some attention and a nurturing attitude. For anyone in any kind of ministry, it’s also important to remember our ministries can only flow from a rich inner life with God. He is the one who gives us the will, the power and the love to serve others.

Your secret life is important to God. Don’t neglect it or let it get out of control. Tend, nurture and enjoy!

Tammy



Suffer us, O Lord, never to think that we have knowledge enough to need no teaching, wisdom enough to need no correction, talents enough to need no grace, goodness enough to need no progress, humility enough to need no repentance, devotion enough to need no quickening, strength sufficient without Your Spirit; lest standing still, we fall back forevermore.

—Eric Milner-White



Full to Brimming Over

By Hannah Knaack



I've known of the two paths for a long time. The well-used one meanders enticingly, the other is more narrow, yet with a hint of warm Light beckoning from far within. I know the story of Caleb and Joshua well, Lord. When I read it, I always align myself with the path they chose, a path of hope and courage, strong faith and utter assurance the Most High One would lead them where they needed to go.

Now you've opened my eyes to see, through the words of James MacDonald (*Lord, Change My Attitude*) how often—far too often—I've wandered the wilderness path. Oh, the heartache, knowing I'm more like the murmuring Israelites than I ever wanted to be! Jesus, I know what became of those who wandered in the wilderness, for your Word leaves no doubt (Numbers, chapters 11 to 14).

It was on my lips to ask you to help me forget those choices, those words and actions—all that wilderness wandering I've done, all my complaining and murmuring, my lack of heart-peace. But you are gracious to remind me I must learn from those ways and choose a new path; go forward. I've not forgotten your promise to provide fresh healing each day for my painful past choices, for your Word is a balm unto my soul (Lamentations 3:22-23).

I want nothing more to do with wandering, Lord. Yet, much as it hurts to even think it, I know because my body is not yet in its final form I will slip again, my foot falling onto the wilderness path. I deeply desire a

place beside Caleb and Joshua; I desire to bask in the warmth of the Light that glows within the path they chose. I choose to fully trust you, just as my brothers before me did.

In the breathtakingly beautiful words of blogger and author Ann Voskamp (aholyexperience.com), "All is grace." This learning, this painful stretching, is you growing me yet again. O Lord, how my heart rejoices, knowing your purpose and plans for me far exceed my deepest hopes and dreams. This knowing boggles my mind, yet with every breath I take, I know your Word is true. I'm thankful you've reserved for me a new home in the place where Joshua and Caleb dwell, a place full to brimming over.

My heart thrills with thanksgiving to know I have a choice, Father. A choice we all make each day, no matter our circumstances. I choose a grateful attitude, the Promised Land—eyes and heart focused straight ahead. A choice made easier when your Spirit planted that desire deep within the center of my heart and soul. A new place, yet not so very new, for you have been my dwelling place since my beginning (Psalm 90:1). Until then O Lord, "Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days" (Psalm 90:14 *NIV*).

I'm getting the best out of winter this year, thanks to my new therapy light (SAD), so Mr. Winter Blues, you won't bother me! If you're prone to seasonal blues, let a Happy Light work magic for you.



Hannah says: "My daughter's eating gluten-free these days, and as if volunteering as her personal chef wasn't enough, she wants me to start a recipe blog with my new GF recipes. It's been a learning adventure. The blog will be out soon." You may email Hannah at justmomhkl@gmail.com.

Briefly Speaking...
Our Marvelous Earth

Some of you up north are ready for winter to be over already, but here in north Texas, we wonder what happened to winter. Not that we haven't enjoyed our Southern California 70-degree weather, but spring has sprung and somehow we missed winter.

With winter seeming like spring, Ed's gardening fever came over him early. He's had kale, spinach and several other greens growing for weeks, and then he asked me to help him plant a couple of rows of green onions. So, there we were, down on our knees digging little holes, planting sprouts of onions and covering them up. He had already prepared the ground by digging a couple of trenches to plant the onions.

Now, it has been a while since I got down digging in the dirt with my bare hands. My gardening is usually limited to using a hoe in my flower beds, and I wear gloves so I don't dirty my hands.

Actually, this was a good experience. Ed and I talked about the blessing of being able to grow our own food, right there in our backyard. We were in wonderment again over how, with a little water and sunshine, those tiny, dried-up sprouts would become fresh, crunchy green onions. It was also a reminder, in our vacuum-packed, over-processed age, of where food actually comes from—the good earth.

Thank you, Lord, for your magnificent creation! Help us remember to take care of this marvelous gift and never take it for granted.

—Sheila Graham
sheila.graham@gci.org


Old and in the Way
Why Does a Hummingbird Hum?

By Joyce Catherwood

Why does a hummingbird hum? Because he doesn't know the words! OK, I can hear you groan. But that was one of my dad's favorite jokes. That and other zingers like the guy selling candy bars, 10 cents each or two for a quarter. If Dad could be coaxed into standing up and telling jokes at a gathering, the audience laughed until they cried. After he died, I came across his notebooks and scraps of paper filled with humorous sayings and old-timey jokes. To show how nimble his mind was, he had written down only the punch lines.



When he wasn't telling jokes, Dad always had something witty to say. Doctors and nurses who attended him in his final years were often targets. One nurse wanting information for his medical records asked what Dad viewed as nose questions about his lifestyle. When she asked if he smoked, he retorted "No! Do *you*?" They quickly learned to treat him with a degree of respect.

My dad loved his garage. In warm weather, he could be found out there wearing one of his favorite tee shirts, full of holes. He no doubt felt cooler in them, but they didn't look cool.

Hanging on the walls, on every shelf and in every corner, were tools he had accumulated for decades, including a monstrous circular wood saw that took up way too much space. He had antique farm equipment that

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Old and in the Way

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went back to the mule-pulling-plow days. The garage was organized in a cluttered sort of way so that somehow he always managed to find what he was looking for. There was barely enough room to park his old Ford van among all the tools, cast-off lumber and pieces of pipe and scrap metal—all things he thought he might use someday. Most people would have long since thrown it all away.

If someone needed it, Dad could usually make it—handy items such as a sturdy stool, exactly the right height for my petite mom to step up easily into their van. It had always been this way. Dad was the fixer, the inventor, the provider, the protector. When he could no longer walk as quickly as he wanted, he used a Rascal (motorized chair). It made my head spin watching him zooming by, cutting through my back yard to go down to the creek. We had three acres between us, so he had plenty of room to zoom.

I was so accustomed to his mobility and sharpness of mind, the complexities of advanced age crept up on me, and him. Dad always seemed to have most things under control, including the foresight to stop driving for safety reasons at age 91.

And then one day when my husband and I were away on a short trip, a neighbor called informing us Dad had fallen during the night. Before we left, I'd made arrangements for him to be checked on daily and for hospice to regularly attend to him. Unfortunately he became disoriented because of the fall and was unable to get back up, so he was on the floor for several hours before someone found him.

We rushed home. Friends had taken him to the hospital. He suffered no injuries from the fall but tests disclosed a chronic severe infection his worn-out body could not overcome. Three weeks later, he died.

Dad wanted with all his heart to be with the Lord. He often had vivid and colorful dreams of the Holy City. He joyfully anticipated the bliss of his first conscious moment in eternity. It was foremost on his mind. So maybe it was time.

In retrospect, even though he appeared to be self-sufficient, how I wish we had all been more protective. It would have been circum-spect to have arranged for my dad to have an emergency alert device. Dad and I had discussed it on a couple of occasions, but at the time he felt he didn't need one and I agreed.

I didn't want my dad to feel old and in the way. He valued his independence and I made every effort to honor that, but being so close to the situation, I had blind spots. He and I assumed he could still handle the unexpected. But he was 93, after all. In the final analysis, extra measures could have been taken that might have extended his life or at least minimized the distress of the fall.

If any of you have a loved one or know someone full of years and still going strong, try to gently reason with and explain to them how they can make caregiving easier by accepting additional assistance even though it may appear to be premature. And let's face it, it may be necessary for the caregiver to make unpopular decisions for the good of everyone concerned. Better to be safe than sorry.



Joyce says: "For years, one of my granddaughters has been telling me, 'Mema, you worry too much!' I think it finally sunk in. How did she get so smart?" You may email Joyce at joyce.catherwood@gci.org.

Letting Go

By Anne Gillam

My grandfather and father could fix anything. They would often take what others discarded and give them new life. I loved it when they brought renewal to an old familiar friend.

I have a hard time letting go of things so it wasn't easy for me to agree to the remodeling of our home. I admit a lot was wrong with the old section. It was built sometime in the 1920s and it did not have a foundation. There wasn't a straight line in it. The floors rose and fell; the cupboard doors opened on their own and the air flowed through the electrical sockets. But it was my home for the last 32 years and it served me well. It wasn't until the skunks started taking up residence under the floor that I finally agreed something needed to be done.

The preparation seemed to take forever (you need a permit for everything now), but the day finally arrived. It didn't take long. A large back hoe, a dump truck and a crew of five made short work of it. It was a little shocking at first to see the bucket come down on the house and watch it crumble like

a dry leaf. The back hoe took bites out of the walls and ceiling and pieces rained down everywhere. The crunch was so loud it seemed to pierce my soul. I kept reminding myself I had to let go.

The dump truck piled up the remnants of my old home in our back field. At first I couldn't make myself go out there. That would be admitting it was really true. But after the noise ended and the dust settled, there was nothing left to hold onto, only a hole where the old section of my home once stood.

I finally made the trip out to the rubble. I circled the piles of broken pieces of wood and brick. I took pictures and kept wandering back to repeat the ceremony. I circled it over and over again, looking for some treasure, but I found none.

We cling to many things in our lives: old sins, worldly ways, works of righteousness, our own abilities and strengths. And even though God has started to remodel our lives, we often return to the old pile of refuse we once were, trying to find some treasure we can hold onto. We return, circling over and over again, looking for something we can

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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.

Letting Go

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reclaim. But God does not want us to remain in the past; he wants us to move forward. To do this we have to let go and allow God to rebuild our lives. He wants to remodel us from the ground up, making us into a building fit for God's dwelling.

Nothing is worth clinging to in our old lives. We were dead in our sins and we could do nothing about it. But God had mercy on us and began stripping away all the dry rot and old paint we used to cover things up. He is making something new and beautiful. Thank you Lord!



Anne says: "We finally passed the final inspection for our home. We still have things to do, such as building a deck and planting new grass, but that is a constant process in our lives isn't it? We must constantly move forward, and this we do in our relationship with Jesus Christ. Hallelujah! I love to hear from everyone, so please write and do it often." You may email Anne at webebass@aol.com.

Zorro and Me

Apples of Gold

By Barbara Dahlgren

Zorro isn't the only one who suffers from foot-and-mouth disease in our home. Open mouth, insert foot! Although he once asked a woman when her baby was due only to find out she wasn't pregnant, I'm afraid I've made my share of *faux pas* as well. I long to be the one speaking "apples of gold in pictures of silver" (Proverbs 25:11, *KJV*), but that precious word so fitly spoken seems to elude me. I have blooper-itis. "Kids say the darndest things," but we adults can give them a run for their money.

When we lived in Kentucky a neighboring church choir came to sing for us. I thanked a man for coming. He looked at me blankly and said, "But Mrs. Dahlgren, I attend church here with you." Churches were much larger in those days, but nonetheless, there is no excuse for ministry not knowing everyone in their congregation.

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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
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Helen Jackson
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Apples of Gold

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At a church festival one year the song leader encouraged us to meet someone new from each age group every day: a preteen, a teen, an adult and a senior citizen. I went up to the first woman I saw and said, "Perhaps I could meet you and you'd be my senior citizen for today." She looked offended and replied, "Perhaps you could, honey, but I'm *not* a senior citizen." I was much younger in those days.

Once I even forgot the name of my best friend when I was introducing her to someone. The list could go on and on.

Then there are those thoughtless statements we wish we could suck back into our head. They aren't meant to hurt. They're mistakes, blunders, slips of the tongue. We know they are wrong the minute we say them but it's too late.

Like the time I was having lunch with a group of women. One of them asked how I was. I jokingly answered, "Fine! At least I'm not pregnant!" I had no sooner gotten the words out when I remembered she had just had a miscarriage. For the first time I knew the meaning of dead silence. A dead silence that only lasts a second can seem like a lifetime. I wanted to die. I said, "I'm so sorry. That was such a wrong thing to say."

Then a miraculous thing occurred. This gracious woman touched my hand gently and said: "No it wasn't. It was just the right thing to say, for you. I don't want people feeling uncomfortable around me." Her statement made the awkwardness of the moment dissipate.

Usually we think of the word fitly spoken as advice or encouragement. But to me, true apples of gold speech is the ability to turn an uncomfortable situation around by simply saying the right words.

I remember the time four friends and I went to dinner and the symphony for a girls' night out. What fun! After dinner we shared an elevator with a middle-aged man (I try to be very careful who I call a senior citizen now). We chatted with him and found out he was headed for the symphony, too. Since we were within walking distance but not sure which way to go we said, "Great! We'll follow you."

He good naturedly replied, "That would be like the blind leading the blind." Then there was that dreaded dead silence. You see, my friend, Rose, is blind. It was apparent by the man's expression he wanted to die. I knew that feeling all too well!

Then graciously, without skipping a beat, Rose laughed and said, "Oh, you want me to lead then, huh?" We all laughed.

Now that's what I call apples of gold! Maybe if I hang around enough with gracious people, some of it will rub off. One can only hope!



Zorro and Barbara like to travel as cheaply as possible. Using frequent flyer miles, they were able to go on vacation in February to Hawaii. They spent the majority of the time just watching the waves. Barbara says: "I'm not a sun and surf gal, but Maui and Oahu's north shore were gorgeous. And I got to spend a lot of time doing one my favorite activities—nothing!" Check out Barbara's blog at www.barbdahlgren.com. You can email her at bydahlgren@pacbell.net. She loves hearing from you.

My Public Speaking Journey

By Anne Marie Caristi

In the movie, *The King's Speech*, Colin Firth portrays King George VI. He utters the line, "I have a voice!" Each of us has a voice, too. That voice is our unique way of expressing all that is in our heart. We can use our voices in many ways. One way is through public speaking.

Public speaking wasn't always terror-inducing to me. I could give presentations in high school without a problem. Once I arrived at Ambassador College in Pasadena, I sailed through my freshman year of women's club speeches, impressing many older students and my club adviser.

In my sophomore year, I decided to enter a speech in the Speak-Off, a competition in which each speech club entered one speaker. Two winners would be chosen to speak at a student banquet. I came up with a funny speech about the stereotype of airheads or dumb blondes.

My club voted my speech best out of about seven or eight speeches given. I was on to the finals where I would compete with about 10 other women's clubs for the chance to give my speech at the banquet. This event turned out to be my public-speaking Waterloo.

Before I went up to give my speech, I overheard several people commenting on how my speech was going to be really good, funny and entertaining. Why those kinds of comments would shake me, I'm not sure. I hadn't realized people had any expectations when I spoke. When I heard those comments, I automatically didn't feel worthy of them and felt as if I were being ultimately set up for criticism.

I don't like to remember the speech I gave that night because it turned out to be a major flop, with me stuttering around and speaking the words I had memorized, but not feeling them. When I slunk into my seat afterward, I could feel the humiliating exhale of the audience who I'm sure couldn't believe what they had just heard.

My speeches in college from that point on weren't very good and beyond college I think I had every speech ailment known to mankind. I felt my face getting red, I forgot what I was talking about, my sentences were riddled with "ums" and I suffered through nightmarish pre-speech jitters. It got to the point where I gave up the idea I would ever give a good speech again. I declined each and every speaking opportunity for many years.

I ended up marrying a guy who was good at speaking and had no problem with nervousness before or during a speech. One good speaker in the family is enough! I reasoned, and during the years my children were babies, I had little time to even think about public speaking.

As my kids got older, however, the subject began to come up again. I noticed a few other women at church who were jumping into speaking opportunities even though they told me they were afraid. One friend told me she knew she had to face her fear of public speaking by just doing it. I admired her for speaking in the face of fear and I began to notice other women speakers who I also admired.

One speaker at a women's conference said, "I am *not* a speaker by any means, but I was asked to contribute to this conference, so here I am doing my best!" I thought as I listened to her, Well if you're not a speaker,

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you could have fooled me because your delivery is awesome! I began to wish I could speak too.

My path to a renewed ability to speak before audiences started with speaking to groups of children. I had little anxiety telling a group of five Cub Scouts about the principles of scouting. I also began to teach our children's ministry class twice a month at church. Now I am able to give the children's message in front of our entire congregation once a month. I just concentrate on talking to the children and filling them with the two-minute message I prepared.

I learned that even though audiences benefit from what I say, it helps me to think that in reality nobody is going to care about this message 10 minutes from now. It takes the pressure of what everybody is expecting of me out of the equation. These are small steps to public-speaking competence, but I fully intend to take more opportunities to speak as they come and let my voice be heard!



Anne Marie is happy it's spring and she no longer has to worry about why the winter was so warm! She's also diving into more ministry opportunities. The needs are all around and she says we need to spread the love of God where we can. You may email Anne Marie at jacaristi@gmail.com.

The love of liberty is the love of others; the love of power is the love of our ourselves.

—William Hazlitt



Christian Reward?

By Rumbidzai Masawi

When I was young I was rewarded for brushing my teeth, making my bed and going to the shops to buy bread for my breakfast. I even got extra marks for finishing all the food on my plate! To that effect good behavior became synonymous with reward.

Unfortunately I still struggle with this expectation as a Christian adult. For a period of 10 years as a professional, I always felt my efforts for living right were not rewarded, even more in an environment of deceit, corruption and ill-gotten wealth. Surely dear God I deserve a 20/20, and a star (in the form of a promotion and well-paying position), for remaining resolute. Disappointingly, I got a downgrade instead for my noble efforts.

I am discouraged when my good works are not translated into a medallion. Surely some material wealth would come in handy. Instead I get challenges. My company buckled under maladministration and declared insolvency. At one time I had to confront an unfair labor practice in court. I have since left the organization without my severance package—a fitting prize for an epic tenure?

Does my story sound familiar? Does the Christian walk sometimes seem unrewarding in comparison to what we give up? In an increasingly myopic and self-seeking world do we sometimes feel our good works are not rewarded with peace, prosperity and happy families? Do we witness insurmountable challenges instead: failing health, nagging in-laws, disobedient children, unemployment, increasing family responsibility and poverty?

When I read Paul's message to the Romans I am ashamed, "You see, at just the

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Christian Reward?

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right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6, *NIV*). I realize God does not need to give marks each day I do good.

God gave me 100 percent before I knew him and nothing I can do could earn his undeserving pardon, it is free. When he sees me he sees his Son, who clothes me and my flaws in his righteousness. Is there a greater reward than Christ crucified? Is it not for my own benefit to live right and strive for goodness? Am I not supposed to live right anyway when I am in Christ since “I am dead to sin” (Romans 6:11)?

Living right in itself is not a human feat we can boast of. It is made possible by his mercies, for on our own we are incapable of goodness and living as Christ. Neither are we exempted from daily woes nor painful experiences, though Christ in his infinite love is with us through it all. Almost always we do not realize he is actually carrying us through because our gaze is concentrated on the magnitude of our discomforts instead of on him.



Rumbidzai Masawi is from Zimbabwe and is studying in India. You may email Rumbidzai at faith.sawi@gmail.com.

Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not be bent out of shape!

—Sign on Ruth Miller’s desk

Please Write!

Connections needs you! When I ask for articles, the first thing I hear is, “I’m not a writer.” Well, I wasn’t either, but with practice and a good editor, I’ve become one. You can too. 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.

Blog Roll

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Joyce Catherwood:

<http://i-love-to-tell-the-story.blogspot.com>

Barbara Dahlgren:

www.barbdahlgren.com

Sheila Dela Peña:

<http://velvetconfections.multiply.com>

Leslie Howard

Sister Circle Prayer Network on Facebook

Tammy Tkach:

www.gemsofgodsgrace.wordpress.com

Send us your blog address.

The Gift of Wonder

By Ruth Miller

One evening my husband Bob and I were out in heavy traffic in a particularly congested area of town. As we slowly moved along we saw a swoop of geese overhead. They were in perfect formation and as they did their graceful sky dance I thought of the gift or grace note of this beautiful air show. No admission charge. I began to think of the many gifts of wonder God provides in our day-to-day experiences.

My daughter Laurie sent me an email message that explained how much fun she was having watching Jackson (our little grandson) “figure out life.” Children express wonder all the time. They are discovering life in all its facets on a continual basis. It’s such fun to watch their first time experiences: a trip to the ocean, a dip in a swimming pool, a run freely in the grass or a romp in the snow.

Perhaps we lose some of the spirit of wonder and adventure as we grow older. Nothing excites us much anymore. But I don’t believe God ever intended our lives to become boring and mundane. I believe he wants us to have abundant life and to enjoy the awesome splendor of creation.

We live in a world of uncertainty. People are worried about health care and pensions. They are troubled by the economy, political factions, the threat of terror, health concerns, employment issues and so much more. How are we, as Christians, supposed to cope and act in a world of trouble and complexity? The biblical writers often made references to the created world. In times of distress they took note of the amazing wonders of their Creator God. The Psalmist David noticed the ways God had provided for the natural world

to exist and flourish. Job reflected on the amazing world of the sea.

Maybe we ought to reflect on those things God has given us to show his mighty power and faithfulness. Whether you are more likely to spot a sunrise or enjoy a sunset, you are constantly reminded the sun does indeed come up the next morning. We have no doubt evening will come. God’s faithfulness is revealed powerfully in creation. The apostle Paul encouraged us to think about the good things in Philippians 4:8.

A friend sent me a cartoon of a woman sitting cross-legged on the ground. The caption reads, “I try to live in the moment, unless of course, the moment is difficult, in which case I will eat a cookie.” Our problem is we *don’t* live in the moment. We worry about the next moments instead. It’s hard to cultivate the spirit of wonder if we are always ahead of ourselves in thought and always rushing about.

When it’s especially hectic at work (we’ve been through a change of pastor and a burglary), it’s more important than ever for me to take time apart from the commotion and try to experience a little wonder in my day. If the weather permits, I love to get outside at lunchtime, to breathe some fresh air and have a little time to read and think.

We have to be deliberate to experience the wonderful gift of wonder God has provided. God’s wonders are everywhere to behold, if we have eyes to see.



Ruth and Bob are entering a new phase of life as Bob turns 65 and will be retiring. He will continue to serve the church part time. Two major events planned for this year are Brian and Kristin’s wedding (their youngest son), and a fall women’s retreat. You may email Ruth at ruth.miller@gci.org.

Everywhere I Go

By Keysha Taylor

I've been many places in my life but none so precious as the natural forest at various parks in Florida. We hike all our gear into the campsite and get busy setting up the basics for survival in the wild: sleeping quarters, water, food and wood for the fire.

But before I go on my outdoor adventures with my sisters in Christ, I ask God to open my eyes to see him in his creation. I ask God to heighten my awareness of his creativity and understand a little of how his mind works. For the next three days I wait on God. He's so quiet sometimes it's deafening. So when the leaves rustle in the wind and the crickets begin their audacious song service, I know the Master is beginning to speak.

There's a wonderful story in the life of creation: an old oak tree, an enormous ant hill, a raccoon and her babies, an osprey, a blue heron. Then there are bobcats and snakes of every kind, spiders and beetles, ants of every color and size, worms and (oh great, no mosquito in sight because it's 48 degrees) the smell of the morning dew and the sight of my breath on the cold wintery air.

I admire the river, so serene at first glance but when I observe it closely, how wild and powerful it flows. With such zeal, it follows its path over rocks, fallen tree trunks and manmade structures like bridges and walls. How God's presence permeates everything. Nothing is hidden to his sight—he has created everything; he has made it all. Our Master passionately, tenaciously and zealously made a natural world to connect with him. It takes my breath away.

Even though God has made everything for our enjoyment we still choose to run after fallible things that only bring short-lived pleasures. We run after fantastical thoughts, ideas and even people. We sometimes seek money, fame and prestige, which bring shame, pain, blame, insecurity and lies.

Why do we seek these things when we can run into the arms of real, assured strength and precise power—El Shaddai! Like an eagle, he spreads his wings and covers us. Like the wind, he blows through our mind and keeps our thoughts clear. Like a river, he is strong and flowing and moving and we must move along with him. For here is the awesome truth that brings comfort:

Where can I go from your Spirit?
 Where can I flee from your presence?
 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
 if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
 if I settle on the far side of the sea,
 even there your hand will guide me,
 your right hand will hold me fast (Psalm 139:7-10, *NIV*).



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Everywhere I Go

(Continued from page 14)

My Master and Savior, let me always look to you and what you have made as a testimony of your awesome endless love. Let the love of your Son, Jesus, run through my veins as the river runs through the forest and refreshes everything in its path. May his sacrifice be ever before me and may the truth of it stay in my eye gate. Launch my sight to everlasting Kingdom vision and may my speech be pure lyrics of enduring compassion for the lost.

Thank you Father for being everywhere I go.



You may email Keysha at tenomkt@yahoo.com.



Letters to the Editor

I appreciate receiving these wonderful, insight-filled, heart-lifting articles. Keep up the good work.

Murdock "Doc" Gibbs
Coppell, Texas
www.docgibbs.com

Thank you all for an inspiring end to 2011 (or in my case a wonderful and inspiring beginning of 2012 since I am behind on emails, desk work, housework, yard work, etc.). The articles were full of "meat & potatoes" and really made this gray rainy winter day have a ray of sunshine and hope for spring! Thank you for the "warm spiritual soup" for the soul—the December *Connections* filled me up!

Priscilla Krupp
Woodbine, Georgia

Being a Light...has a lighter side!

Eric is sitting at the bar staring morosely into his beer. Tom walks in, sits down and asks him what the problem is.

"Well," said Eric, "I ran afoul of one of those awkward questions women ask. Now I'm in deep trouble at home."

"What kind of question?" asked Tom. "My wife asked me if I would still love her when she gets old, fat and wrinkly."

"That's easy," said Tom. "You just say 'Of course I will.'"

"Yeah," said Eric, "That's what I did, except I said, 'Of course I *do*.'"

There's a statistical theory that if you gave a million monkeys typewriters and set them to work, they'd eventually come up with the complete works of Shakespeare. Thanks to the Internet, we now know this isn't true.

—Ian Hart
—*cleanlaffs*

The Power of An Apology

By Jannice May

For 16 years I've had the privilege of traveling and attending workshops my husband Curtis does for *Reconciliation Ministries*. These workshops can last one day or the whole weekend. No matter the length the results are always the same. At first people are nervous because they are not sure what to expect. Then by lunch the climate has warmed up. People are saying they wished this person or that person could have come. I'm always amazed to see God use these workshops to change lives.

Because of the nature of *Reconciliation Ministries*, I often hear people apologize for the pain or hurt they have caused others, even though it might have been unintentional. I'm always moved by that. Curtis emphasizes the importance of an apology even if you're not to blame. Acknowledging what others have gone through and saying, "I'm sorry," helps them with the healing process.

On a trip home from Dallas, Texas, I learned how important an apology can be. Our flight left at 8:30 a.m. for Phoenix, Arizona. We had to get to the airport early, so we hoped to get some sleep on the plane. As we boarded and put things away, Curtis asked me to put his iPhone in my purse, something he'd not asked me to do before. I put the phone in my purse and placed it under the seat in front of me. The plane was packed with passengers and we settled in for the three-hour flight.

Curtis went to sleep, so I put my ear plugs in and slept too. When I heard the captain on

the intercom say we were 25 minutes out of Phoenix, I decided to put my ear plugs back in my purse. Then I noticed my purse was on the opposite side of where I had placed it. I picked up my purse to check the contents. Curtis's phone was gone. Only the case was there. I asked Curtis if he took his phone and he said, "No, I gave it to you." It was gone.

Then I opened my wallet. All my cash, about \$135, was gone, including a two-dollar bill I had hidden away for our granddaughter Jaden's 2-year birthday. I was in a state of shock. It was disconcerting to know a thief was near. We did a lot of praying because we really wanted the iPhone back.

When the plane pulled up to the gate I got up and looked at the seat ahead of us. On the floor, at the feet of a young woman, was a phone. I asked her to see it and sure enough, it was Curtis's phone.

There is no way it could have fallen out. We were not able to talk with the woman because she was off that plane at what seemed like lightning speed, but we had the phone back. What an answer to prayer! Fortunately, Curtis has a code on his phone so his information was protected.

Our son Bradley who is a police officer suggested we find a security guard at the airport and make a report. Three officers of the five assigned to us boarded her connecting flight and pulled her off. Curtis took the opportunity to share with the remaining two officers about *Reconciliation Ministries*. Is he committed to this ministry or what?

Of course the woman denied taking our phone and money. They searched her bags, but to no avail. The whole ordeal really affected me. Even though we weren't bodily harmed, I felt vulnerable and violated.



Continued on page 17

Apology

(Continued from page 16)

The next day I was depressed. I did not realize I was still having a hard time dealing with the airport theft. I called to share the story with my daughter Angela and her husband Bryan. After I finished Bryan said, "Mom, I am sorry you went through that." I could hear in his voice he was truly sorry.

What happened next was a surprise to me. My depression lifted. The sadness was no longer there.

At that moment I understood what Curtis has been saying for years about the importance of an apology. My son-in-law hadn't hurt me, but he wanted to make me feel better. He empathized with my situation. I will never forget how much this warmed my heart and changed my life that day.

Offering an apology sends a powerful message, one that says we care. I hope we never miss an opportunity to make someone feel better and change lives by saying, "I'm sorry."



The next C&B retreat is in September. See page 18 for the registration form. You may email Jannice at conbond@acninc.net.



May God Bless You

May God bless you with the discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that you will live deep in your heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people and the earth so that you will work for justice, equity, and peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer so you will reach out your hands to comfort them and change their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with the foolishness to think that you can make a difference in the world, so you will do the things which others say cannot be done.

—Franciscan Prayer



Pray like the old peasant who had a bad foot. Since he did not know which was best for him, to be cured, to be lame, to be in pain or out of pain, he just went to church and said, "Lord—foot."



—Unknown

**Ministers' Wives Conferences 2012
Registration Information**

Full Name	
Address	
City, State, Zip	
Phone	
Email	

<p style="text-align: center;">ONTARIO, CA Hilton Ontario Airport Aug 31 - Sept 3, 2012</p> <p> <input type="checkbox"/> Double (\$417/person) or 3 payments* of \$139 <input type="checkbox"/> Single (\$555/person) or 3 payments* of \$185 </p> <p>If you should cancel, the registration fee of \$150 is not refundable.</p>	<p>I plan to share accommodations with the following person/people: (No need to send forms together.)</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;">*If you are making payments the remaining due dates are: June 15, 2012 August 3, 2012</p> <p>If final payment is not received by August 3, there will be an additional charge of \$50.</p>	<p>Please indicate if you have any physical limitations requiring wheelchair accessibility or limited stair use: <input type="checkbox"/>Yes <input type="checkbox"/>No (If yes, please explain in comments below.)</p> <p>Please indicate if you have any dietary needs: <input type="checkbox"/>Yes <input type="checkbox"/>No (If yes, please explain in comments below.)</p>
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Comments:

If you have questions, contact Jannice May at 626-379-0505 or conbond@acninc.net
 Please send completed form to:
Connecting & Bonding, 300 S. Highland Springs Ave., Suite 6-C #156, Banning, CA 92220

Sometimes even editors make mistakes. The last paragraph was left out of Barbara's article in the last issue. We are reprinting it in its entirety, with apologies to Barbara and our readers.

Zorro and Me

By Barbara Dahlgren

Are We There Yet?

Zorro never takes the direct route anywhere. I don't say this to be demeaning. It's just a fact. If he ever dies *en route* somewhere I will never know where to tell the police to look for the body because he takes a different road every time. This of course drives me crazy.

Once we had been transferred from the Midwest to the Northwest. It was almost evening when we finally got the car all loaded, kids belted in and headed out. About two miles down the road I asked, "Where's the map?"

He said, "I don't have one."

"You mean we are moving 2,000 miles and you don't have a map?"

"I don't need one yet. I'm just following the sun. The sun sets in the west so I know we are headed in the right direction."

Needless to say "following the sun" became one of the catch phrases in our household. It wasn't the route I would have chosen but we got there just the same. Actually it's a life lesson we can all learn from because it seems God doesn't take the direct route in our lives either.

A good example is the children of Israel wandering in the wilderness. "When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on

the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, 'If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt'" (Exodus 13:17, *NIV*). Therefore a trip some suggest would have taken nearer to 40 days ended up taking 40 years.

Today we are on a journey as well and it often doesn't seem to be the direct route. God will almost never take the route we would choose if we were in charge. We want that direct route because we don't want to waste time. And as we travel I'm sure we must sound like a bunch of whiners.

It reminds me of an *Animaniacs* (an American animated series from Warner Brothers) song (I do love *Animaniacs!*) called "Are We There Yet?" It's a takeoff of three kids in the back seat of a car driving their parents crazy as the family forges ahead to their destination. I often wondered if they didn't spy on our family to get some of these lyrics: "Are we there yet?" "I'm tired." "I'm hungry." "How far?" "My nose is snotty." "Gotta use the potty." "Ow, he hit me!" "Ow, she bit me!" "He said he's gonna get me." "No I didn't!" "Yes, you did!" "Are we there yet?"

Do you get the parallel? We're the little kids in the back seat of the car. Well, the bad news is, we aren't there yet! The good news is, we're on a journey with God. And if he is guiding us, we will reach our destination. You might say we're just following the *son*—the Son of God!



You can read Barbara's blog, Barbara's Banter, at www.barbdahlgren.com and contact her at bydahlgren@pacbell.net.

