



Connections

◆ A Journal by & for Women in Ministry ◆

Vol. 24, No. 2

June 2017

It's Just Dirt!

By Sondra Peters

I volunteer in a kindergarten class. One day, I sat on one of the tiny chairs, all 5 feet, 9 inches of me, waiting to be assigned a student who needed extra attention. One of the assistant teachers who floats from class to class came in and was eagerly greeted by a student I'll call Tiny. Tiny ran to the assistant teacher (I'll call her Judy) and called out, "Miss Judy! Miss Judy!" Tiny threw her arms around Miss Judy's waist and squeezed her with all her might.



Miss Judy looked at me with an expression of *what can you do?* then carefully and lightly put her fingertips on Tiny's shoulders in what could only loosely be called a return hug. Now some people might assume

the teacher's reaction was because of warnings against the appearance of improper behavior, but my initial reaction was, "Oh man, that's cold!" My second reaction was, "No that's not it! She's afraid of lice!"

I'm probably the only person on the planet who would jump to that conclusion, but I admit I am paranoid about lice. Who else would take a hoodie to the movie theater or on an airplane solely for the purpose of protecting my hair and the back of my neck from these creepy crawlies?

I went to an out-of-town conference and after staying in a hotel (and sleeping in a hotel bed), my scalp itched for a week. When the week was up, my imagination moved on to something else and my scalp stopped itching. My husband says, "It must be hard being you!" And it is! I have friends whose children have been host to these critters before, like the majority of adults with young school-age children. My friends say: "It's no big deal. You wash heads with the special shampoo, wash clothing and bedding, and then move on."

I can't help but compare the interaction between Tiny and Miss Judy with what we, as Chris-

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It's Just Dirt!

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tians, are called to do—get dirty. If we're going to be Jesus to others, we're going to have to get a little dirty. We're going to have to hug (see to the needs of) those who are dirty, those who are homeless or those who have AIDS. That means getting out of our churches and going to where the dirty, sick and homeless are.

Jesus didn't just sit in the temple and expect people to come to him. He went out to the people, into the streets and alleys and doorways where the prostitutes, the crippled and the lepers were. He didn't preach *to* them; he talked *with* them. He talked *with* them, not down to them. He talked with them as a friend would. He wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty, just as he's never been afraid to get his hands dirty with me. After all, whether or not the dirt is spiritual or physical, it washes off.



Sondra and her husband Ed attend the GCI Grace Fellowship Church in Clarksville, Tennessee. She leads a weekly Bible study at a nursing home as well as You Matter, a weekly program about Jesus for children in an affordable housing community. She recommends The Debt by Angela Hunt, about a minister's wife who learns sometimes a person needs to leave the shelter of the church to help those no one else wants to help. An inspiring and great read! You may email her at sondrapeters@bellsouth.net.

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Connections, a journal by and for women in ministry, is published by Grace Communion International to promote the constructive exchange of ideas and experiences. Opinions of the writers do not necessarily reflect official church policy.

Submit your ideas and articles to *Connections*, GCI, P.O. Box 5005, Glendora, CA 91740-5005, or email: tammy.tkach@gci.org.

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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

Where Did Martha Go?

When Jesus told Martha that Mary had chosen the better thing and it wouldn't be taken away from her, many assume Martha slinked back to the kitchen, tail between her legs, duly chastised. The exchange in Luke 10 has often been used to characterize Martha as a whiny, petulant woman with a bad attitude. But is that the truth? Perhaps Martha has received a bum rap all these years and deserves another look.

Martha had three recorded conversations with Jesus and in this first one in Luke 10:38-41, all we know about her is she was busy preparing a meal for Jesus, her brother Lazarus and perhaps some or all of the disciples. In those days, cooking, baking and serving a meal was a lot more work than it is today. It's understandable she felt overworked and abandoned by her sister, who was supposed to be helping her. I've been in that situation—well, not serving Jesus and the disciples, but slaving away in the kitchen with no help. Did she go back to the kitchen or did she join Mary at Jesus' feet?



We may think God wants actions of a certain kind, but God wants people of a certain kind.

—C.S. Lewis

The second time we see Martha is in John 11. Lazarus was sick and Mary and Martha sent word for Jesus to come and heal him. Knowing of his powers as a healer, Martha confronts him in verse 21 about why he didn't come earlier, and then in verse 27, she states that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God. She could have said this only if she had spent time sitting at his feet, absorbing not just his words, but him and who he was and is. This is a different Martha from the sweaty faced, frustrated one we saw earlier.

We next see her in John 12. It's six days before the Passover and Jesus, along with Lazarus and the disciples, is again in Bethany, at a dinner in his honor. Again, Martha is busy serving. But this time, she doesn't seem to mind doing the work alone. I have an idea she was in full agreement with Mary's beautiful act of worship as she anointed Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair.

Something had definitely changed in Martha's heart and mind. She seems to have matured and grown as a result of her time with Jesus. As she watched and learned, Martha became a theologian! Her theology had formed while she listened to Jesus and discovered his true identity. And that's what theology is all about, isn't it – "the essential business of faithful reflection on human life lived consciously in the presence of God" (*Invitation to Theology*, Michael Jinkins).

Where did Martha go? She went to Jesus. And that's where we need to go—straight to him, to sit at his feet and not only to learn from him but also to *learn him*. Then we will also be able to say, with the conviction of our whole hearts, "I know you are the Messiah, the son of God."

Tammy

(Inspired by *When Life and Beliefs Collide* by Carolyn Custis James.)



Zorro and Me

Laughter Is Good Medicine

By Barbara Dahlgren

Our family loves to get together, eat, share stories, play games and laugh. Our kids are all grown now with lives of their own, so getting together is not as easy as it used to be. That's why when we do come together for holidays or other occasions, they are special times indeed!

Last Christmas we were sitting at the dining room table when some funny family remembrances came to mind, and we all doubled over in laughter. Tears were running down our faces. It felt sooooo good!

I must admit with Zorro in our lives, we have many such memories. There's the time he bent over to pick up a piece of paper while giving a sermon, which split his pants down the back seam, so the kids and I had to walk in tandem behind him to get out of church during the closing song. Or the time a bee flew up his pant leg while mowing the lawn, and he stripped to his boxers for the whole neighborhood to see. There's so much to laugh about. And I'm thankful our kids have learned to laugh at themselves as well.

A good belly laugh sets off a rejuvenating, emotional release. The cares of the day evaporate and life is good again. The Mayo Clinic website lists the health benefits of laughter. It soothes tension, relieves stress, increases endorphins, improves the immune system, produces natural pain killers and lessens depression. Plus laughter stimulates the heart, lungs and muscles. One could assume those who laugh, live longer. If not, at least they have more fun while they are living.

We know Jesus understands our sorrow. He wept when Lazarus died (John 11:35). That doesn't mean he wants us to feel sad



and somber all the time. Christians have much to smile about. William Barclay said, "A gloomy Christian is a contradiction of terms." Are we gloomy Christians?

Jesus had a bit of a merry outlook on life. He enjoyed himself. He had wit and a keen sense of humor. How else would he come up with examples like a camel going through the eye of a needle and getting a wooden plank out of the eye (Matthew 19:24; Matthew 7:3)? Why else would he affectionately nickname James and John the "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17)? These were humorous concepts of the times he lived in.

We need to have a sense of humor. Harriet Beecher Stowe once said, "A person without a sense of humor is like a wagon without springs—jolted by every pebble in the road." What does that mean? It means those who can't see the funny side of life turn the most minor upsets into major offenses. We need to lighten up, people!

If you've lost your sense of humor or didn't have one to begin with, it's not too late to find your funny bone and tickle it. Here are a few suggestions:

- Practice smiling at others. Studies show even a forced smile lifts the spirit.
- Humor doesn't have to be crass or crude. If you find an appropriate cartoon that makes you chuckle, put it where you can see it often.
- Surround yourself with people who love to laugh because laughter is contagious.
- There's no need to demean others to get a laugh; just stop taking yourself so seriously and you'll have plenty to laugh about.
- Ask God to help you enjoy life.

The world has come to see what the Bible told us all along: "A merry heart does good

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Laughter

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like medicine” (Proverbs 17:22, NKJ). Our great Physician has given us a prescription for a better life—laughter! Why not follow the doctor’s orders?

P.S. Here’s a little exercise for developing a sense of humor. We all know the old poem that says, “Laugh and the world laughs with you; cry and you cry alone.” See what you can come up with to change the last line to something funny and send it to me. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Laugh and the world laughs with you; snore and you sleep alone.
- Laugh and the world laughs with you; talk to yourself and you’re all alone.
- Laugh and the world laughs with you; smile and tickle your funny bone.
- Laugh and the world laughs with you; moan and groan and you’re on your own.
- Laugh and the world laughs with you; come up with something of your own.



Zorro and I went skydiving in May. It was awesome! Zorro explains how it happened: “Believe it or not, it was Barbara’s idea.

The kids asked what she wanted for Mother’s Day and she said to skydive. After the kids picked themselves up off the floor, they asked me about Father’s Day and I said—no way! But that good old male ego got to me in a few days and I thought, I don’t want to live the rest of my life knowing Barbara skydived and I was too chicken. So that’s the rest of the story.” You can email Barbara at bydahlgren@pacbell.net. She loves hearing from you!



Mummy the Barber

By Grace Situtu

My 14-year-old son is still my baby. I’m sure most mothers would agree with me. We teach our children to be independent; meanwhile we continue doing certain things for them including making some decisions for them. In my case I have cut my son’s hair since he was born. I always told him how handsome he looked in mummy’s haircut.

The year 2016 came and he went to high school and boy! I started having difficulties cutting his hair. He wanted to wear his hair long or cut a certain way and mummy only knew one style. So once in a while he would ask his friends to cut it and he would be happy.

One day I shaved his hair and he protested and told me how I did not know how to cut hair the way he likes it. This displeased him and he wore a head sock close to a month. I thought to myself, what has happened to my baby boy? He has become independent and feels he should do what is comfortable for him.

I don’t blame him anymore because I do the same to my Dad in heaven. I often think I can do everything on my own or get a few friends here and there to help. God is all I need all the time to get everything I need sorted out. God is our Dad and he will never say we are too independent for him.



Grace lives in Zambia and attended the University of Zambia. You may contact her on Facebook.



Skydiving With Jesus

By Susan Booze

Our younger daughter Debbie became a certified skydiver while getting residency in Arizona. Her goal was to become an aerospace engineer, so skydiving was her chance to be in the sky while she waited for college. She graduated from the School of Aerospace Engineering at Arizona State a few years later, but that's another story.

I flew out to visit Debbie before her freshman year of college. As I looked out the window, I wondered, Could I *really* jump out of a perfectly good airplane? I wanted to share the experience with my daughter since skydiving had become an important part of her life, so when she picked me up at the airport, I told her I was going to do it. Before I could change my mind, we were on our way to the drop zone.

We checked in and after watching the mandatory warning video, I signed the waiver that if I were to be injured—or worse—it wasn't their fault. I decided to tell my acrophobic husband after the fact, hoping our insurance would cover me.

Debbie and I were scheduled to jump a couple of hours after a team from Switzerland. She would jump solo; I would do a tandem jump with a jumpmaster. While we waited, I noticed the other tandem jumpers were practicing how they were to jump out of the plane. I would be coached during the hour before we went up, so I didn't pay much attention.

Debbie checked on the schedule and came running back with a huge smile. We could go on the next plane. There was just enough time to get in my harness and run for the plane. I protested that I needed some coaching first, but my jumpmaster said, "I'll help you. You'll be fine."

The interior of the plane was bare bones,

with a long bench seat on either side of the aisle. Nothing muffled the roar of the engines. My jumpmaster had a parachute; I had him. The back of my harness had a chain that hooked to the front of his harness. He pretended to have trouble with the clip that hooked our harnesses together and then shouted playfully, "At this altitude, *No* sounds like *Go!*"

The Swiss team was on our plane. When we reached 13,000 feet the plane leveled off and the door opened. The Swiss jumped out in rapid succession, followed by a couple of other jumpers. Then my daughter dove out headfirst. My stomach turned a little flip as I watched her disappear somewhere below.

You are supposed to jump out, arch your back and flip over so you are facing down. When it was our turn I moved to the open door and froze. I held on to the sides of the door as if my life depended on it, but "No!" must have sounded like "Go!" so my jumpmaster pushed me out. Somehow he managed to get me into position, but it wasn't pretty.

Most people worry about the landing. My problem was the freefall. Sixty seconds is a very long time to be falling through the air at 120 miles per hour. I had been told my contacts could come out during freefall, so I kept my face down. That meant the air hit my face and nose so hard I could barely breathe.

In the middle of the sky with all that space around me I felt claustrophobic, as if I were suffocating. I began to panic. The air rushing by was so loud I could hear nothing else. And I had absolutely no awareness that my jumpmaster was still attached to my harness. I could not feel him above me, or hear him, or see him. I felt absolutely alone.

Far, far below was the drop zone, a tiny bright green square of grass. It looked like an impossibly small target in the vast desert landscape. But the tiny green square was getting larger by the second. After what seemed to be an interminably long time, my jump-

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Skydiving With Jesus

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master tapped me on the shoulder and offered me the chance to pull the cord. Nothing doing, I had a death grip on my harness and wasn't about to let go.

He pulled the chute and it became instantly quiet. We could talk. I could breathe! The chute looked glorious above us. There was no sound at all because we were floating with the wind. I loved floating down and wanted it to last longer. And yes, we landed gently in the middle of the bright green drop zone.

Later, the jumpers gathered to watch their videos. The Swiss were impressive. Debbie was great. It seemed to me all the other jumps were graceful and coordinated. Then came mine. Arms and legs flying as my jumpmaster tried to air wrestle me into the right position. Everybody laughed. How embarrassing! It was awful.

But I was amazed to see how close the jumpmaster had been to me all the time. Even though I had felt completely alone and out of control, he was right there only inches above me, checking the altitude, perfectly in control. It is a memory that is still vivid, even after all these years. It was worth the humiliation of the video.

My skydiving adventure happened in 2002. You may remember that time. In 1995 our denomination was in freefall. It was as if we had been thrown out of a plane. By 2002 attendance was still plummeting. Every time you turned around, someone else left, usually without even saying goodbye. The campus had not sold and there was no retirement program. No parachute. Would Jesus let us hit the ground? We had no idea what to do or

how it would all turn out.

At times I had to fight panic as I contemplated our financial future. We had no social security. I had been working only about a year and was making entry-level pay. I couldn't see any way it could work out. But all the while, I firmly believed and told God even if we lost everything, it was worth it. I had gained far more in Christ than I could ever lose. Knowing him was worth it.

During those difficult years, I often thought of Jesus as my Jumpmaster. He was always with me, always in perfect control. He wasn't waiting to see how everything was going to turn out. He was already there.

It turned out we didn't have to lose everything. I found a new career that I love and can do from home, and we have been blessed beyond anything we could have hoped for. Our little congregations are still here, still loving each other, still wanting to stay together. It's amazing.

Sometimes I still go skydiving with Jesus. When trials hit, when the bottom falls out of my life and the ground rushes up at me, I find comfort remembering my skydiving video and picturing myself with Jesus right there with me.

Old age is looming and we have no idea what we might face before it's all over. But I don't have to know how it is all going to work out. Jesus knows how to make it all work out. Whether I go skydiving or stay on the ground, Jesus is my Jumpmaster. He has the parachute and all the control. I have him.



Susan is an insurance broker who specializes in Medicare. She loves gardening and spending time with friends and family. She lives in Shreveport, Louisiana, with her husband Mike who pastors GCI congregations in Shreveport and Monroe. You may email her at susan_ib@comcast.net.

Joy is peace dancing.
Peace is joy at rest.

—Frederick Brotherton Meyer

With God

By Ruth Miller

Before Christmas, we were busy and I didn't take time to thoroughly enjoy the Christmas cards we received. I decided after Christmas I would sit down in my favorite chair and go through them carefully, praying for the ones who sent them and then part with them.

Next I decided to part with the hundreds of Christmas cards we have received over the years, but I wanted to save the accompanying pictures. Sorting through them was a slow process. Seeing names and faces and reading the personal notes brought back memories. I had an overwhelming desire to reconnect with these dear friends, some we were no longer in contact with.

I ran across a picture of a couple no longer together, divorced. I saw signatures of couples who were no longer couples, because of the death of a spouse. There were pictures of precious grandchildren now grown and gone, and folks rejoicing and celebrating their lives but who are now having major struggles. In a nutshell, I saw the ups and downs of life.

From the Christmas cards, I moved on to a basket I had held onto for more than three years. It was filled with get-well cards from when I broke my arm in two places and had a rather lengthy recovery. That happened in the fall of 2013, and it was now January 2017. It was time to let them go.

But as I went through those cards, I was reminded of so many dear people who took time from their busy lives to think and pray for me. It gave me a whole new perspective on why it is important to pray for one another and to send cards and notes.

I wanted to be with all of those people who sent cards—both Christmas and get-well. They represented nearly 40 years of friendships—the amount of time Bob and I have been married. They reminded me of how precious it is to have friends who are there for you through all the seasons of life—those you

remain in contact through the years, those whose stories you know.

And then it hit me, with God that is exactly what we can look forward to. God is relational and he wants all of us to be together as a family—forever! What tremendous hope we have and how joyful the marriage supper of the Lamb will be. We have hope for the binding of the wounds that hurt, the broken lives, the pain, the suffering. God will redeem it all!

One of the get-well cards had powerful and inspiring words on the front. No author was listed, so I don't know who to credit, other than Tender Thoughts, the greeting card company.

*With God, every day is a day
to hope for the very best—
to believe our prayers are being heard,
to believe good news is on its way,
and that anything can happen
between yesterday and tomorrow.*

Yes, with God every day is a day to hope. Our hope is truly an anchor to the soul. Our hope is in God alone. We know we live in a broken world and we feel helpless in the face of terrible tragedy and suffering. But knowing God will make the crooked ways straight, bring beauty from ashes and make the desert bloom like a rose helps us put everything into perspective.

We so often want to fix what is broken and make our lives happy in every way. But sometimes we have to live with the “not yet,” and we have to learn to cast our concerns on him, because he does care for us. As human beings this is hard, but with the grace of God we can learn to trust in him, now and forever!



Bob turned 70 in May and they celebrated with family at Hilton Head, South Carolina. You may email her at ruth.miller@gci.org.



In the Garden

By Norma Thibault

I enjoyed reading Tammy's article in *Connections* about having a word for the year. I have tried but could not come up with a single word that would reflect my feelings about God and what he is doing in our lives. But inspired by "In the Garden," a song I love, I now have a word: *garden*. The hymn was one of my father's favorites and a long-time favorite of mine.

In the morning (my favorite time of day) when I begin my devotions, the words of that song come to me. I feel as if I am in a beautiful garden and he is walking with me and talking with me and indeed, "The joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known."

Sometimes when I wake up I feel grumpy. I may not have slept well or it may be some of the aches and pains that come with the ageing process bothering me. Sometimes it is just apprehension about what the coming day will bring. After spending time in the garden with Jesus I come away feeling a new zest and vigor and looking forward to the rest of the day.

The year 2016 was a year of ups and downs for us. My husband and I gave up our 10-year span of pastoring a small congregation 300 kilometers (180 miles) from where we live. We loved to serve and the people were and still are very dear to us. However driving three and a half hours each way over mountainous roads in the winter at age 78 became a little much for us.

By the time we decided to give it up God supplied a replacement. When we told a fellow elder our plans, he said he and his wife were thinking of moving there, which they did. Now the congregation has a resident pastor and the congregation is well served. You can imagine how much gratitude and joy was in God's garden of prayer when this

happened.

But it does not end there. God provided a new opportunity for us in our city. We are now assisting the chaplain at a senior citizen's residence close to where we live, helping him with Bible studies and hymn sings. It is an inspiring experience for us.

Along with retiring, during the past year I had a knee replacement and two cataract surgeries, with successful results.

In God's garden of prayer I can reflect on the positive as well as my concerns. I know God loves to be with me, to put his arms around me, to encourage me, comfort me and share in all my joys and sorrows—and all this is available to everyone. He has promised he will never leave us or forsake us. I find it interesting that God's plan beginning at creation began with a garden and it ends in the book of Revelation with the Kingdom of God, a garden on earth.



This past August Norma's and Dennis' family all came to Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada, and celebrated a week-long family reunion. All their five children and spouses, twelve grandchildren and nine great grandchildren attended, a total of 39. They said it was wonderful. This year they are expecting two more babies to be born. You may email her at dentbo@telus.net.

Have you ever learned the beautiful art of letting God take care of you and giving all your thought and strength to pray for others and for the kingdom of God? It will relieve you of a thousand cares.

—A.B. Simpson (1897)

Briefly Speaking...

To Forgive

I sing with a choir in my community. We sing at a nondenominational chapel service once a month and otherwise, wherever we're asked: gospel sings, rest homes, Christmas parties, Easter sunrise services.

Yes, we wear robes, blue and flowing. Unless the men complain they're too hot, then we wear white tops and black pants.

At the monthly chapel service, the pastor, a volunteer from a local church, opens with a prayer that ends with the congregation reciting the Lord's Prayer. We repeat it by rote, hardly thinking about the words for the most part.

While praying this morning I thought about the words, especially those that say *forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us*. I've considered them to mean I will be forgiven only as much as I forgive others.

But wait a minute, aren't I already forgiven, forgiven even before I come to ask him for forgiveness? Maybe there's more to that statement.

Maybe Jesus also expects his followers to forgive *as* he forgives. That's quite an expectation to live up to. He forgave those who were torturing him to death while they were doing it! He is the perfect forgiver. That's who he is.

He's forgiven me totally without reservation, so I must be a forgiver too. That's who I am in him. Lord, help me!



You may email Sheila at grahams@ntin.net.



Phenomenal Journey—Leads Me to Reflect—and Then Reflect

By Senior Pulley

Great! Wonderful! Fantastic! Fabulous! Inspiring! Many words could describe my annual One Word Journey, but phenomenal seems to encompass them all, as well as how I'm feeling in the process.

Since beginning this journey in 2013, I have learned so much. You might wonder how one could benefit from studying just one word, but I've learned when the Lord is involved and you ask to be led in this venture, you will be amazed how your study progresses.

I began with the word *peaceful*. I learned this should be the make-up of my life—even for the entire world. And should conflict be occur, the Lord has it covered and I can *hold my peace*—be quiet, stop reacting and *hold on to my peace*—focus on the Source of Peace and realize he is with me.

In 2014, I learned I have every spiritual blessing *in him*. (I know, two words, but it worked.) He has blessed, chosen, predestined, redeemed and forgiven me, and proclaimed me holy and blameless. Wow! If the Lord is for me, who could possibly be against me?

My 2015 word taught me extensively about *rest*. I had not really understood or thought about the many segments of rest, but at the end of that year, after losing my brother, I had to rely on Jesus to enter his rest physically, mentally and emotionally. And as difficult a time as it was, I wondered how I would have fared if the Lord had not pre-

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Phenomenal Journey

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pared me with that one word.

Last year's study was on being *renewed* in Christ. What a wonderful way to keep our focus on the positive and understand no matter how many times we err, God gives us endless chances to try again. With new beginnings, we don't have to feel as if we've failed. Besides, being renewed in Christ helps us realize that because Christ has succeeded, so have we. We share in his life and in his success.

Late last year, I again pondered what I would learn through my word for 2017. Soon after, I was inspired during a sermon by a word I recognized from last year's study on renew—*reflect*. It jumped out and I immediately recalled some of the lessons: stop and think, ponder, consider again and learn the intended lesson.

As I listened to the sermon's instruction to reflect on where we've come from and where we're going, my mind ran off with many wonderful ideas. I felt God had provided me with my one word for 2017. *Reflect* was reiterated in the next week's sermon and chosen as our church theme for 2017. How coincidental—or was it?

I learned *reflect* is an important word relating to renewal. Realizing God allows new beginnings so we can keep going, it's important to take time to reflect on what he's done and what we need to do or redo. Building on that premise, reflection is something God apparently intended for us to do often because of the phenomenal minds he gave us and the ability to remember or pause often to think.

Reflect is truly a word defining an inner task one does that benefits and brings growth to an individual. However, in the sermon that day, I learned *reflect* is a word also defining an outer task that greatly benefits others. We were instructed to reflect the love of the Lord, to let our lights shine in the world so others can see the difference in us and glorify

God.

When we look in a mirror, we see a reflection of what we truly look like. And we spend a lot of time cleaning ourselves up so we can make a good impression and look presentable to others.

By the same token, we have been cleaned up spiritually and washed by the power of the Word. When others look at us, do we reflect the life given to make us holy and acceptable to the Lord? Does the Light shine in and through us?

After reflecting on how Jesus has reflected the love of the Father to us, I am inspired to reflect often on his love and goodness and am encouraged to reflect that love this year to all I meet.

My one Word journey is truly phenomenal!



Senior says she is grateful for the inspiration she received from Tammy's 2013 article sharing information about "My One Word." Having an annual one word is a wonderful ongoing, life-changing experience, which she hopes others will be inspired to try. You can email her at: cjpulley@logic.bm or cecil.pulley@gci.org.

We should never see the stars if the sun did not go down. We should never discover the grace and loving kindness of God if there were never a break in our earthly joy. We should never know the wonder of God's comfort if we had no sorrow. It is when the visible mountains depart, that we have them no longer to hide in, that our hearts find the mountains of God, with their eternal refuges.

—Mrs. Charles E. Cowman
Words of Comfort and Cheer

A Point of Reference

By Anne Gillam

January is my least favorite month of the year. It is usually cold, windy and dreary. By March the snow is normally over, but last fall started with rain storm after rain storm and then turned to continuous snow. We had to cancel church a few times because of dangerous road conditions.

We didn't have much of a break over the winter, but I figured we were over the snow so it didn't cross my mind to check the weather before I headed out the door one Sunday. I was surprised to see the snow falling once again.

As I eased out of our long driveway and on to our road, it became so heavy I could not see where the lanes were. It was suddenly white-out conditions. What have I gotten myself into, I thought. Turning around and going back to bed crossed my mind. OK, I said to myself. I can handle this one. It will let up soon.

I weaved back and forth trying to stay in my lane, but the edge of the road was not distinguishable. Everything was white and blended together. It was hard to tell where the sky met the horizon. Good thing no one else is out right now, I thought. I stayed as close to the middle of the road as I could. It went on this way for the first five miles. It was not letting up.

My mind kept focusing on my desire to meet with God's people, to talk to someone who was a lover of Christ and who desired, as I did, to draw closer to God. I did not want this storm to stop me. I give a ride to one of the members, and she would be waiting. It was too late to call, so I drove on slowly. God help me to see where I am going, I prayed.

I would like to say God heard me and immediately responded to my needs, but the truth is he was already working before I sent up that prayer. Headed toward me in the next

lane was a snow plow.

Now in my heart I was wishing he were ahead of me, plowing ahead, and making my trip a little less precarious. But as he passed me I realized he had given me a point of reference. I wanted a perfectly smooth and easy highway. I wanted all my troubles to slip away and never return, but what I wanted was not what I needed. In my mind, I heard the words, Pay attention to this. We all need a point of reference.

I could now more easily determine my side of the road. And with the passing of the snow plow, the snow slowly lessened until it stopped altogether. The sun broke through as I made it into town. But I could still hear those words in my head—a *point of reference*, and I knew God was telling me something important. There was more to come.

Joseph Rogers, in a sermon titled, "Our Arsenal part 1," put it well: "[that] Truth is essential to the well-being of life and civilization. Without truth, we have no moral or directional compass. Absolute truth is our true north—it is that guiding presence that gives us hope and purpose. It is what enables us to have peace and conviction of character."

Jesus Christ is our point of reference. Without him and his truth, we wander aimlessly, hoping not to fall into the ditch, hoping to make it to our destination. Jesus is that one true guide who not only leads us but also points the way for us to follow. We do not have to fear because we know he will never lead us astray or leave us on our own.

Father, we thank you for our point of reference, the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.



Anne says: "My niece has been going through a personal journey to find her worth, to challenge herself to improve her health. And she challenged us to go out of our comfort zone. So I am. I did my first 5K walk and am taking a women's self defense class and finally made it on Facebook. I am enjoying the challenge." You may email her at annegillam48@gmail.com.

My One Word

Anne Gillam

I am still slowly working my way through the last issue of *Connections*. I got side tracked as usual, but when I glanced at the one I had not read yet, I was filled with a peace and excitement that is hard to describe. I snatched it up and began where I had left off.

Thank you again Tammy, for *Connections* and for your article “Another Year, Another Word.” As far as my word, I believe it is still the word *trust*.

It appears all around me. And the way this world is spiraling downward with every day and being reminded with every news headline, trust is the thing we need to cling to. Trust in God, that is, and in his working in our lives and the lives of those around us.

“Those who know your name trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you” (Psalm 9:10). That will lift up any day.

Love in him!

Anne

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Jesus invited us, not to a picnic, but to a pilgrimage; not to a frolic, but to a fight. He offered us, not an excursion, but an execution. Our Savior said that we would have to be ready to die to self, sin, and the world.

—Evangelist Billy Graham



Nurturennet

Nurturennet is our 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 to request information, to request prayer, 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.



Please let us know if your email changes!



—churchart.com

Being a Light...has a lighter side!

At a workshop on dog temperament, the instructor noted a test for a canine's disposition was for an owner to fall down and act hurt. A dog with poor temperament would try to bite the person, whereas a good dog would lick his owner's face or show concern.

Once, while eating pizza in the living room, I decided to try out this theory on my two dogs. I stood up, clutched my heart, let out a scream and collapsed on the floor.

The dogs looked at me, glanced at each other and raced to the coffee table for my pizza.

A farmer had many pigs. One day someone came to the farm and asked the farmer, "What do you feed your pigs?"

"Well, I give them acorn, corn, vegetable scraps and things like that. Why?"

"Because I am from the Animal Protection Association and I think you don't feed them like you should; they shouldn't eat waste." Then he fined the farmer.

Some days later, another person arrived and asked the same question. The farmer answered, "Well, I feed them very well. I give them fish, whole grains, hot corn mash and as much fresh fruit and vegetables as I can get my hands on. Why?"

"Because I am from the United Nations Organization and I think it's unfair you feed your pigs like that when there are people with nothing to eat." He fined the farmer.

Finally, another man came in and asked the same question.

The hesitant farmer answered after a minute of careful thought: "Well, I give five dollars to each pig so they can buy whatever it is they want."

After their expulsion from paradise, Adam was walking with his sons Cain and Abel. As they passed by the ruins of the Garden of Eden, one of the boys asked, "Father, what's that?"

Adam replied, "Boys, that's where your mother ate us out of house and home."

What the doctor says and what he really means:

Doctor: This should be taken care of right away.

Translation: I'd planned a trip to Hawaii next month, but this is so easy and profitable I want to fix it before it cures itself.

Doctor: Let me check your medical history.

Translation: I want to see if you've paid your last bill before spending any more time with you.

Doctor: We have some good news and some bad news.

Translation: The good news is, I'm going to buy that new BMW. The bad news is, you're going to pay for it.

Doctor: Let me schedule you for tests.

Translation: I have a 40 percent interest in the lab.

Doctor: I'd like to prescribe a new drug.

Translation: I'm writing a paper and would like to use you as a guinea pig.

Doctor: If it doesn't clear up in a week, give me a call.

Translation: I don't know what it is. Maybe it will go away by itself.

Doctor: I'd like to run some more tests.

Translation: I can't figure out what's wrong. Maybe the kid in the lab can solve it.

—clean laffs