

*We always thank
God for all of you
and continually
mention you in
our prayers.*

1 Thessalonians 1:2, NIV

Connections

◆ A Journal by & for Women in Ministry ◆

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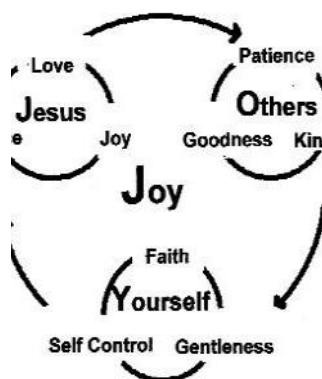
The Joy of the Holy Spirit

By Norma Thibault

On the Day of Pentecost my husband gave a sermon titled “The Holy Spirit Comes.” It brought to mind one of my favorite scriptures, one I have spent much time pondering: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance (patience), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22, NIV).

After much thought and meditation about the joy of the Holy Spirit, I began to think about this verse differently. I saw the fruit of the Holy Spirit in three different parts. The first three fruits relate to God, the second to other people and the last to ourselves.

Fruits of the Spirit
Galatians 5:22-23



The first three fruits, love, joy and peace, are indeed about God: God is love, God is joy, God is peace. These are the attributes God wants to share with us and as we receive these fruits we are motivated to reach out to others and share what God has given us. In doing this the second three fruits, patience, kindness and goodness, become active in our lives.

My husband and I have the privilege of serving in a volunteer program where we are involved in helping elderly and disabled people get to their appointments and do their shopping. One of our clients is a woman who is totally blind and another has severe dementia. Patience and kindness are important in our relationships with them.

As our relationships with them grow, we are beginning to see changes in our own lives. Our faith is increasing and we are becoming gentler and have more self-control, a necessity when caring for the elderly. This is not something of our own doing but a gift from God.

This has prompted me to come up with a diagram to illustrate my point. Notice there are three circles, one for *Jesus* (God), one for *Others* and one for *Yourself*. When you take the first

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The Joy of the Holy Spirit

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letter of each circle and put them together you come up with the acronym *JOY* (Jesus, Others, Yourself).

Over the years this has intrigued me because living by the Spirit is indeed a life of joy. Experiencing this joy has kept me focused on Jesus, which completes the larger circle of the Holy Spirit and what God is doing in our lives. I thank God every day for the joy he has given us through his Spirit.



Norma says: "My husband and I are busy trying to keep up with our ever-growing family. Earlier this year, we flew to Indiana to visit our daughter and her family. Our children and grandchildren are now planning a family reunion for the summer of 2016, which we are all looking forward to. As well we enjoy pastoring our little congregation in Castlegar, British Columbia, Canada. They are our second family and a real joy to us." You may email Norma at dentbo@shaw.ca.

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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

He Cared for Them

Most of us have been reading the Bible for a long time, years and years in fact. It's comforting to read familiar verses, to wrap up in them as if they were a warm blanket. At the same time, our familiarity can cause us to miss things. Reading with fresh eyes and a new perspective from the Holy Spirit can help us see more or maybe just remember what we forgot.

As I read through the book of Acts again, I came across chapter 13, verse 18, which is a verse I'm sure many of us have read and glossed over, "for about forty years he endured their conduct in the wilderness" (*NIV*). The *New Living Translation* says God "put up with them" and others say he *endured* or *suffered*.

This is how I always remembered reading it—and hearing about it—that God put up with the whining, complaining Israelites, as if they were a burden to him. But then I read

the cross-referenced verse in Deuteronomy 1:31 (*NIV*), "There you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place." I discovered *The Message* and *Contemporary English Version* say God cared for them.

A light bulb went on. Of course he cared for them—they had food, water and shoes that never wore out. Even though I'm sure I already knew this, it was encouraging to be reminded. It was even more encouraging to read about God carrying his people as a father carries his son. Now that's something I don't remember reading!

Sometimes we can feel as though God only puts up with us or gets tired of us and our constant problems. Our prayers seem repetitive and our sins recurring. Even though we sometimes gripe and act like ungrateful Israelites, God always cares for us, no matter how much whining we do, although I'm sure he'd rather we say thank you than complain.

It's possible for those in ministry to get tired and burned out. We can begin to see the ones we shepherd as insufferable Israelites, giving rise to the temptation to put up with them or suffer through their "annoying" problems. To put up with something means to tolerate what you don't like or accept something that is bad. But God doesn't see us as that way.

All of us are God's children, deserving of respectful, compassionate and loving care. With God's love flowing through us, merely putting up with the people we serve won't happen, especially if we remember how God cared for his people in the desert and how he always cares for us.

Little self-denials, little honesties, little passing words of sympathy, little nameless acts of kindness, little silent victories over favorite temptations—these are the silent threads of gold which, when woven together, gleam out so brightly in the pattern of life that God approves.

—Frederic William Farrar



Tammy



I Am Going to Give Him Back to You

By Trish Clauson

As I drove home from church, it happened again. Everything still reminds me of him, so I should never be surprised. Unfortunately it seems it is often at the most inopportune time my tears will be begin to flow—so freely—so painfully. Unable to contain them, even at such a precarious moment as this, I began to cry out.

How did this happen? The only life I have known for nearly half a century has been obliterated and no one even asked me if I would be okay with it. And to add insult to injury, I am not only being forced to make a new life out of the shattered pieces and shards, I am also expected to find a way to be OK with it.

But OK with what? The colors and sounds of life have been fully leached from it. I feel no joy in being alive. Thankfully, I have found a way to operate on autopilot, without anyone knowing the difference. At least I hope they don't sense the outrageous emptiness in this barren landscape called my life.

When Arnold passed I simply took a deep breath to prepare myself for this unknown land I was about to enter. Yet as the days, weeks and months moved painfully forward, it seemed no matter how well I accomplished everything in front of me, none of my efforts brought me any closer to a place where I could finally exhale and begin to breathe again. So on that day my continued cry was: "I don't want to do this anymore. Please God, give him back to me. I. Just. Want. Him. Back."

As often happens in the midst of such pleadings, I felt his gentle presence as he took my tears and joined them with his words, transforming them into a cascading salve that now began to flow over my broken heart. "That is exactly what I plan to do," he

said. "I AM going to give him back to you." And in that instant everything I had ever known about the resurrection and eternal life took on new meaning, so clear and uncluttered and yet so profoundly encased in one simple statement: "I AM going to give him back to you!"

And isn't that what life and death are all about? For millennia, others like myself have suffered such pain from loss and have most likely cried out to the heavens for relief that would never be forthcoming in their lifetime. And yet, even before the foundations of the earth, God was already holding our sorrows and bathing them in a plan that would finally culminate in the simplicity of one statement: "I AM going to give him"—and all the *hims* and *hers* that have ever lived and are now waiting for their glorious return—"back to you!"



Trish is in the process of paring down 45 years of accumulated stuff in order to put her home on the market. She is planning to move closer to Dallas to be near her daughters and her congregation. "God has been so very good to me throughout this transition in my life. I constantly feel his presence making it as easy on me as possible." You may email Trish at trishannson@yahoo.com.

It is extremely doubtful if a soul can really know the love of God in its richness and in its comforting, satisfying completeness until the skies are black and lowering. Light comes out of darkness, morning out of the womb of the night.

—Malcolm J. McLeod

The Eyes of My Heart

By Joyce Catherwood

In the past few months, I experienced a complicated and serious infectious illness that backed me into a corner where surrender to God's sovereign will became my only option. As I struggled to process and accept my dilemma, I fervently asked God to open the eyes of my heart so I could see him more clearly. Little did I know his presence would be magnified through his beautiful children—family, friends, neighbors and strangers.

While feeling especially alone during one of my bad days, I came across this story in a book authored by Sue Monk Kidd, *God's Joyful Surprise: Finding Yourself Loved*. She writes: "One of my favorite sermon stories is about a little girl who went to play with her friend Marcy. She was late returning home and her mother met her at the door. 'Why are you late?' she asked. 'Marcy's puppy got lost,' the little girl replied. 'Did you stay to help her find it?' the mother asked. 'Oh, no,' she said. 'I stayed to help her cry.'"

So with a desperate need for additional support, maybe even someone "to help me cry," I did something I would not normally do because I don't particularly like to be transparent in a public format. I posted a brief, rather timid message on my Facebook timeline requesting prayer.

I was not expecting to be overwhelmed, but that is exactly what happened. The generosity of heart, the immediate willingness to pray on my behalf, the sincere concern for my well-being from my dear Facebook friends brought a burst of tears to my eyes.

The eyes of my heart were opened wide and I saw and encountered God through others. As they entered his presence through prayer on my behalf, they brought me into his presence as well. Their prayers became

my prayers. Intercessory prayer is loving co-operation with what Jesus, who will never leave us or forsake us, is already doing in a person's life. It is meant to expand and intensify his presence in the minds and hearts of those who pray and the individual on the receiving end. I truly was comforted by their concern and lifted up by their prayers.

To be the recipient of a chorus of prayers is both unique and humbling. The effect is profound and long lasting. This sort of intercession is an infrequent occurrence as it's usually prompted by a serious and traumatic event in someone's life.

More often than not, a lot of details aren't provided when the urgent call for prayer goes out. Having all the facts isn't necessary because the pivotal purpose of the prayer being offered is not to fix something. It's simply enough to know someone is hurting and to express heartfelt compassion and empathy, to be with a fellow human being in spirit, "to stay and help them cry."

What a fascinating, miraculous dynamic. With this form of prayer, we "experience God in spontaneous community," to again quote Sue Monk Kidd. She goes on to say, "Every prayer is important, primarily to the one for whom we pray, but it's important for us, too. For in intercession we yield ourselves to God, sharing in his compassion and opening ourselves to his presence."



Joyce says: "Regarding the infectious illness I refer to in my article, I am much improved though still have a way to go. Nonetheless, there have been many divine interventions, sometimes things I didn't think to ask for, yet our Lord provided. I am reminded to take one day at a time, trying to live in the present and appreciate what I have and where I am in that moment. All good." You may email Joyce at joyce.catherwood@gci.org.

Zorro and Me

By Barbara Dahlgren

Growing Older

Zorro and I used to go back often to visit my folks who lived in a small town in Illinois. When they were nearing 80, one of their favorite things to do on Tuesdays was go to the Senior Center for lunch, play a little Bingo and participate in whatever activity was offered that day. If we happened to visit on a Tuesday they would take us along with them.

It doesn't take long to figure out that a small town senior center is sort of like high school for old people except not as cliquish. There's a little bit of flirting, a lot of "did you hear about" this or that, and some who need to grow up—but unfortunately won't have the time to do so.

My parents loved us to go with them and we enjoyed it, too! On one particular visit, Zorro and I were seated side by side with my folks across from us. I struck up a conversation with a little old lady sitting next to me. She finally asked, "Sweetheart, could you introduce me to your father?"

I pointed across the table and said, "That's my dad."

She said, "Oh—well, who's the attractive man sitting next to you? I really want to meet him. Is he married?"

Talk about making my day! She thought Zorro was my dad. It was a lot funnier to me than Zorro, though. Thanks to Ms. Clairol, those gray hairs described as a glorious crown in the Bible are just a metaphor to me (Proverbs 16:31).

That was quite a few years ago. Now both Zorro and I qualify to be members of a senior center. We look at others who are our age and say, "Surely we can't look that old." Then we say, "No, we don't! We look great!" Ah, the joy of not wearing your glasses!

It's a fact of life we all grow older, which they say is not so bad when you think of the alternative. While it's true I can no longer spike a volleyball and Zorro can't dock-start on water skis anymore, thankfully we still get around pretty well. And just because we can't remember what we walked into the next room to get, doesn't mean we have totally lost our minds.

Here's a thought I find comforting: the seasons of our lives may change but God never does. The aging process can weaken our bodies and sometimes our minds, but if

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Nurturennet

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



Do we
have
your
mail
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.

Growing Older

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our relationship with God is our priority we have nothing to worry about. We can realize each day is a gift no matter what age we are (Psalm 118:24). We can rejoice and be glad all our days (Psalm 90:14). We can make the most of our time and apply our hearts to wisdom (Psalm 90:12). We can resolve to finish the race God has set before us (2 Timothy 4:7). We can keep our sense of purpose and our sense of humor (Proverbs 17:22).



I think it's kind of nice that Zorro and I don't think we're all that old. This positive outlook might be in Zorro's genes. When his aunt, who had never had children, was in her late 90s, we flew back to Rhode Island to help her move to the West Coast to be with family.

While going through her things we found she had saved quite a bit of money. We asked her if there was anything special she had ever wanted to buy or a trip she would like to take. She was appalled and said: "I can't spend that money! I'm saving it for my old age."

I looked at Zorro and whispered, "I'm not going to tell her she's old!"

He said, "Neither am I!"



Barbara says: "Zorro and I went on our first trip to New Zealand with our traveling buddies Steve and Karon Smith. The trip surpassed all our expectations and reconfirmed just how GREAT our God is! Kia Ora! A loose translation is 'live long and prosper!'" Be sure to check out Barbara's weekly blog at www.barbdahlgren.com. You can email Barbara at bydahlgren@pacbell.net. She loves hearing from you.



Got Face?

By Linda Wheeler

I've had the privilege of having an awesome ministry singing at retirement homes in and around my home town of Salem, Oregon, over the last couple of years. This is my second tour if you will.

While singing at these homes, I've noticed the audience's facial expressions. Some faces are happy, laughing or smiling. These are encouraging to me. Some are sad and some even cry. Others are participating in what they're hearing and seeing by tapping their feet or moving around in their chairs or singing along. I have also caught a yawn or someone getting up to leave.

Some are immobile and nothing shows except maybe a tear. I found out later the person wasn't wondering, "Why haven't they come to take me back to my room?" but an emotion prompted by a song reminding him or her of the past or future with God.

At first, the battle became: Oh! They don't like the singing, or worse, Oh! They don't like *me*! It would affect my delivery of the songs. After the concerts, I heard people say they "really liked it" and "We will tell the enrichment coordinator to bring you back." What a joy!

My self-doubt and anguish were over fears that were obviously all in my head. I have since learned not to interpret facial expressions, but rather to ignore them altogether. I acted as if they were really enjoying it and in the end it was true. I have a lot more fun that way.

I also found out some who left came back after a visit to the powder room. They weren't walking out on me!

When I sing, I try to put expression in the songs, with my voice and sometimes with

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Got Face?

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my hands. Occasionally someone will start clapping in tempo and others will follow. Sometimes I hear the residents singing along with me. That is great fun most of the time. During one concert, a German woman with a great accent but who was somewhat deaf sang about three words behind during the whole song. How precious!

What does our pastor see when he looks at our faces in church? Here we are receiving the joy of the word, inspiration and education so we can fulfill our ministry on the earth. I have an acronym in the front of my Bible. It is **BIBLE: Basic Instruction Before Leaving Earth**. When a pastor delivers those *basic instructions*, what does he see? A smile? Maybe he tells a joke to get his point across. Do we laugh? Do our eyes light up when we get it? Are we yawning or leaving for the restroom?

What does God see in your face? Are you whining at him the entire time you pray? Is your forehead furrowed and pinched? Do you mentally shake your fist at him with glaring eyes because you don't get what you want when you want it? Are you yawning and thinking of something else you need to do?

Maybe that powder room break.

Or do you have a listening expression, happy, sad or crying? Maybe you are praising him for the great things he has done and will do for you today and forever. Do you have a big smile on your face or tears in your eyes from gratitude? Do you say, as I do when I am overjoyed with something, "WooooHoooo"?

When God sees our facial expressions, he doesn't have self-doubt or anguish over fears or questions that for us, are all in our heads. He made everything perfect and he sees us through the sacrifice of Jesus. How great is that?

When I thank God for the spectacular orchestration and fulfillment of his glory and promises I want to burst out in song and a great big smile. How about you? The next time you are contemplating and watching his creation in motion just give him a big sparkly-eyed smile. He'll enjoy it and so will you.



Linda and her husband Bob live in Salem, Oregon. Singing has always been one of her passions. You may email Linda at song1mom@yahoo.com.



Being a Light...has a lighter side!

This weekend a couple from Connecticut will have the longest marriage ever recorded in the U.S. They said the secret to their long-lasting marriage is love, compromise and the fact that neither one of them has been able to hear a word the other one has said in more than 30 years.

—Jimmy Kimmel

Today is national dog day. Dogs, as you're probably aware, were widely considered to be man's best friend, until 2007 when the iPhone was invented to replace it.

—Jimmy Kimmel

The federal government has a new plan that will let people send texts to 911. Yeah, it's a little frustrating when you try to text, "Burglar! Please hurry!" and it auto-corrects to, "Burger, please. Hungry."

—Jimmy Fallon

The best illustration of the value of brief speech was given by Mark Twain. His story was that when he had listened for five minutes to the preacher telling of the heathen, he wept, and was going to contribute fifty dollars... after ten minutes more of the sermon, he reduced the amount of his prospective contribution to twenty-five dollars...after a half hour more of eloquence, he cut the sum to five dollars. At the end of an hour of oratory, when the plate was passed, he stole two dollars.

My wife, a registered nurse, once fussed over every pain or mishap that came my way. Recently, however, I got an indication that the honeymoon is over.

I was about to fix the attic fan, and as I lifted myself from the ladder in the attic, I scratched my forehead on a crossbeam.

Crawling along, I picked up splinters in both hands, and I cut one hand replacing the fan belt.

On the way down the ladder, I missed the last two rungs and twisted my ankle.

When I limped into the kitchen, covered in dust and blood, my wife took one look and said, "Those better not be your good pants!"

Once upon a time in their marriage, my Dad did something really stupid. My mom chewed him out for it. He apologized, they made up.

However, from time to time, my mom mentions what he had done. "Honey," my Dad finally said one day, "why do you keep bringing that up? I thought your policy was 'forgive and forget.'"

"It is," she said. "I just don't want you to forget that I've forgiven and forgotten."

The new father ran out of the delivery room and announced to the rest of his family waiting for the news, "We had twins!"

The family was so excited, they immediately asked, "Who do they look like?"

With a confused look the father said, "Each other!"

Nature gave men two ends—one to sit on and one to think with. Ever since then man's success or failure has been dependent on the one he used most.

—George R. Kirkpatrick
—clean laffs

Candlelight

By Grace Situtu

During the last rainy season we did not have enough rainfall. As a result our hydropower station did not have enough water for power generation. The utility company decided to ration the power supply countrywide. We have had to switch to alternative sources of energy such as firewood, charcoal, solar, gas and candles.

A candle is made from wax with a little string inside. You light it to make a flame to give light so bright it lights a big room (Mathew 5:14-15).

Just as the flame on a small string in a candle brings light to a big room, so we can help bring hope to someone going through a difficult situation through little acts of kindness.

These acts of kindness could be a smile, a phone call, a visit to say hi or offering a cup of water. The list is endless and most don't require money to be carried out. Often, the most important acts of kindness are free to give. Each one of us can give our smiles away!

Grace lives in Lusaka, Zambia. You may connect with her on Facebook.

How can God stoop lower than to come and dwell with a poor humble soul? Which is more than if he had said, such a one should dwell with him; for a beggar to live at court is not so much as the king to dwell with him in his cottage.



—William Gurnall

Briefly Speaking...

Who Are You?

Who are you? How would you answer that question? I would probably respond, I'm just an ordinary person, nothing special. I'll never be famous or rich. And I'll never do anything extraordinary that I'll be remembered for. No one will put up a bronze statue with my name on it when I die.

Maybe that's how you feel too. If so, C.S. Lewis says we're both wrong.

Lewis said, "There are no ordinary people.... Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses." He said that's because Christ dwells in us.

Hard to comprehend? Yes, when I look at myself with my bad habits and no telling what sins I don't even recognize in myself yet, I sure don't feel special.

Maybe we won't have bronze statues set up, engraved with our names and mighty deeds, but we are not ordinary people. We are going to live forever. The ever-living Christ is in us. We are immortals!

So, let's treat one another that way, with joyful love and respect.



You may email Sheila Graham at grahams@ntin.net.



Prayer enlarges the heart until it is capable of containing God's gift of himself.

—Mother Teresa

Body in Motion

By Ruth Miller

One Wednesday morning when I got to the church where I work, I couldn't help but be inspired. Saint Mark was a virtual hubbub of activity. The preschool teachers were arriving to face a busy day with the children. In the kitchen, two groups were at work. One crew was preparing for the Wonderful Wednesday meal for that evening. Others were busily preparing a meal for a funeral, as one would take place later in the day.

One staff member tended to the parking spaces and signs needed to manage the carpools for the preschool, visitation and funeral. A volunteer was preparing a Hospitality Room for the grieving family. Later the church music director, organist and pianist would get involved providing music. The two pastors would be officiating at the service. Other members would be arriving to help with whatever was needed—ushering, helping with the family meal and just being extra pairs of hands and feet.

I was in the midst of all of it—loving every minute! What inspired me most was watching the body of Christ in motion. I've been privileged to serve in ministry at Saint Mark for almost 17 years and what I love best is seeing the amazing amount of ministry accomplished here. I wish all the members could see the church from my perspective. Though not a member of this church, I love being on staff at a church that is not a museum. Saint Mark's fabulous facilities are used throughout the week. Jesus loves it when the body is carrying

out his ministry of love to a lost and hurting world.

Bob and I attended a Pastors' Retreat in Georgia. Our regional pastor, Ted Johnston, and his assistant, Dennis Wheatcroft, planned an inspiring and encouraging time for us to be together in an atmosphere of honesty and openness.

One of the topics discussed was our small churches. We talked about how even our small groups can make a difference for the kingdom. The purpose of corporate worship is to prepare God's people for works of ministry, and that can be done quite effectively, even in our small congregations and small groups.

At one point we were described as a mega church with lots of locations. We came to realize we are part of a bigger picture, including a rapidly growing international work. It seems GCI, like other churches, is growing most outside the United States.

Churches have life cycles and we are living in an era where larger metro churches are replacing the small country churches. It has been a challenge for many of us as we wonder exactly what God has in mind for our future.

But I believe what I experienced at Saint Mark as I saw the body in motion is an important lesson for us. We have to be about our Father's business. I like to consider the words of Oswald Chambers, "God has not called us to success but to faithfulness."

At the retreat we heard many inspiring stories of individual and group ministries. Sometimes we wish to do some great thing, but Mother Teresa was right when she said: "I have an opportunity to love others as he loves me, not in big things, but in small things with great love" (Nobel Lecture, 1979, nobelprize.org).

The Scriptures speak of ministry as small as giving a drink of water, washing feet, sewing clothes for others and visiting the

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



—William Hazlitt

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Body in Motion

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widows and fatherless. As the body of Christ we are to be sharing God's love with a broken and hurting world and we are to be showing fervent love among ourselves. We are to do good, especially to the household of faith. As church congregations, no matter how large or small, we still have the call to be lights, to serve, to be salt flavoring the world and to share the Good News!

Let's not be weary in well doing. Instead, let's pay attention to Jesus' words in Matthew 24:45-46 (ESV): "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes."



One of Ruth's passions is women's ministry and part of that focus is organizing an annual fall retreat in Cullman, Alabama. The dates for next year's event are October 14 to 16. She would love to hear from any of you who might be interested in attending. Her email is ruth.miller@gci.org.



When we are linked by the power of prayer, we hold each other's hand, as it were, while we walk along a slippery path, and so by the generous bounty of charity it comes about that the harder each one leans on the other, the more firmly we are bonded together in love.

—St. Gregory the Great
540-604
*101 Inspirational Stories
of the Power of Prayer*

In Over Their Heads

By Sheila Graham

I sing in a community choir. Every third Sunday about 20 of us, attired in our long blue choir robes, sing hymns for the local chapel services. The service is only 30 minutes long so I can sing in the choir there and we can still make it down to our church. It's traditional to end the pastor's opening prayer by the congregation joining in to recite the Lord's Prayer.

As I say the familiar words along with the others, I have to admit I usually repeat it without thinking too much about what I'm saying. Are we really talking to God or is it just rote memorization? I think the latter. I suspect our private prayers are when we really express who God is to us.

If you're like me, you're most fervent when you're in deep trouble or one of your loved ones is in trouble, ill or in the hospital. It reminds me of the story in Mark 4:35 about Jesus sleeping through the storm.

The disciples were in big trouble. They knew these waters. Several of them were fishermen, but they hadn't experienced a storm like this one. They were frightened out of their minds. I imagine they were frantically bailing water, but to no avail. They were being flooded by the high waves crashing over the sides of their boat. The water was coming in so fast they couldn't keep up, no matter how hard they tried.

The disciples handled this situation by first doing everything they knew how to solve their problem. But they seemed to have a little too much confidence in their own abilities. They waited until the boat was actually swamped and beginning to sink before they sought Jesus' help.

But finally, in over their heads, soaking wet, bedraggled, worn out and desperate, they wake Jesus who was sleeping soundly in the stern of the boat. And how do they wake him?

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In Over Their Heads

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The first words Jesus hears are accusations. Why aren't you concerned? They insinuate he doesn't care about their situation. How in the world can he be sleeping when they are all about to die?

Jesus was probably exhausted—how else could he sleep in a boat being tossed around like a cork by roaring, raging winds and waves? Though he may have been somewhat protected from the wind and water in the stern, he certainly was exposed to extreme

ups, downs and sideways movement as the boat struggled to keep upright in the storm.

But then Jesus gets up, yawns, stretches, looks out and rebukes the winds and calms the sea. To the disciples' surprise, he speaks to the material world as its

creator and master and it obeys. Like a parent speaking to an upset child: OK, wind, OK, water, now just calm down.

And the wind and the water obey! In an instant it's all over. What a rollercoaster of emotions that must have generated in the disciples. One minute you see your life flashing before your eyes and the next, no waves, no wind; it's as if the storm never happened.

It makes me think about my own prayer life. I wish I could tell you I'm in a constantly prayerful attitude, but I can't. How about you? No big deal, we can handle it—that is until disaster strikes, and then, like the disciples, we get fervent about going to God for help.

When we do finally go to God, are we impatient for his answer? The disciples delayed going to him, but they were impatient with Christ. Don't you care, Lord? Are we also like the disciples, surprised when God does answer our prayers? Even though our

prayers have been answered many times, he sometimes shows his purpose and plan in an unexpected way. He is a surprising God.

When we come to God in prayer, we bring our images of him to the forefront. Quoting A.W. Tozer: "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."

Let's picture God the way Jesus taught us to see him, as both loving father and mother. The Gospels portray Jesus as moved with compassion for the multitudes, seeing them as sheep without a shepherd.

He loves us. He hasn't changed. This is who God is: loving, kind, compassionate and concerned about us. We can trust him with our lives now and for all eternity. Just as Jesus did when his disciples cried out to him in their distress, so can we, knowing in faith, God, through his Son, is eternally there for us.

So the next time we repeat the Lord's Prayer, let's think about who we are talking to and be oh, so grateful.



Jesus Calms the Storm



Sheila says she is still battling the squirrels attacking her bird feeder. She is now greasing the pole holding the feeder, which works, she says, at least most of the time. You can email her at grahams@ntin.net.



God the Father is the giver of Holy Scripture; God the Son is the theme of Holy Scripture; and God the Spirit is the author, authenticator, and interpreter of Holy Scripture.



—J.I. Packer