

Connections

◆ A Journal by & for Women in Ministry ◆

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A Dry Spell

By Anne Gillam

I have this date, this very dry date seed, I keep coming across as I'm searching for something else. I pick it up, look at it and smile. Then I place it right back where I found it. You may say, well, just throw it out, but I can't seem to do it. It was given to me by my father, gone now for eight years. He handed it to me one day in a teasing gesture to say, I think I let this one go a little too long.

That date was dry then, but now it is even drier. I had plans to plant it and see if it would grow, to see if life would once again emerge from it. It may have had a chance when I first acquired it, but it would take a miracle now.

I feel that is what I am going through now—a dry spell. I remember in her last *Connections* article, Sheila Graham said when she does not know what to write, she just starts writing. And so here I am, trying to do the same thing. Trying to jumpstart a little life in me.

I heard about a desert where rain never falls. I have a hard time believing that is true. And though rain has passed it by, it is a beautiful and peaceful looking place. I can say that because I am here and it is there, and I've only experienced just those few minutes on the television show about the desert.

So how do you bring life back to dry, shifting sands? How do you make it blossom like a rose? How can I bring life back to this dry date seed? I only know one way—by the hand of the one who created it in the first place. I need him to do this in me now. At times I feel empty and alone and I wonder if any of my efforts ever take root and grow. I know I am not alone in this, but at times this is how I feel. Did Jesus ever feel this way?

Our little congregation is aging and drying up with the passing of every valued member as each leaves this world and enters into the next. We are now down to six. I can't help but wonder if my job here is nearly finished.

But though we are aging, we still have life within. We are able to reach out to others through our missions. We know the life within us is the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. We will always be entered into that life as long as we cling to him.

And though we may be at the end of an era, we know life will always go on in the one who created us. Our job here may be ending, but another opportunity will open up before us. It is

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A Dry Spell

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exciting and sorrowful at the same time.

I have always considered God my chief employer. At times I've wondered why a door would shut before me, but soon I would see the open door of a new job, a new opportunity. I did not choose these jobs, and my dream job has not become a reality. But God knows better than I do, and he sees where I can serve him best.

So, just as Sheila said, I worry. It seems to be in my nature. Does God worry? I try not to allow worry to cripple me, or to cause me to focus in the wrong direction, or to sap the life out of me. Instead I allow it to take me to the only one who can bring peace to my soul. I allow it to take me to Jesus where he can anoint my fears with his healing balm. I am trying to overcome this dry spell by soaking in the living water of Jesus.

Lord, you are my hope, my purpose and my life. Rain down upon me the living water, revitalize me and make me alive again in you!



Anne says: "It seems like ages since I wrote this. My prayers were answered in the form of our Pastoral retreat. I was renewed and reassured; given new life. I recommend the retreats to all. I experienced the pain of growth and the energy of the Son's healing touch. Please feel free to write me. I love to hear from you!" You may email Anne at [we-bebass@aol.com](mailto:webass@aol.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 Nurturernet 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

My One Word for 2015

The year is one quarter gone and of the almost half of Americans who make New Year's resolutions, almost half of them have already given up. We make resolutions at the start of a new year because it seems like a chance to start over, to improve our lives, to be happier than last year.

We don't keep them because we set unrealistic goals and when we can't reach them, we get discouraged and fall right back into the old habits. Failure often leads to more discouragement and sometimes, more over-eating, overspending, etc.

I'm just like everyone else who makes them—good intentions, but lousy follow-through. When I first learned about My One Word, I knew I would never make another resolution. Finding and living with a word for a year isn't about self-improvement, finding happiness or breaking bad habits, which is what most resolutions are about. It's a way to simply remind of us of the direction God wants to take us.

The only way to get our values right is to see, not the beginning, but the end of the way; to see things, not in the light of time, but in the light of eternity.

—William Barclay



A single word helps us focus. It *can* be about changing yourself, but I believe if we focus first on God, he will lead us toward transformation. A word should always point you to him and when your focus is right, the Holy Spirit will lead you to knowing him and yourself better. The words God has chosen for me the past three years have been about him—about *immersing* myself in his life; *breathing*—living, moving and having my being in him; and *gazing* at the face of Jesus.

This year, God gave me the word *decrease*. The word was inspired by a radio talk show host who presented a list of 10 ways to be more charismatic, with the goal of being more likable. It struck me he was talking about loving one another and putting others first, as he mentioned listening to others, praising them, putting your ego aside, giving people your full attention, giving before thinking of getting, learning from others, choosing your attitude and words more carefully, not discussing the failings of others and admitting your own.

The words of John the Baptist came to mind: he must increase and I must decrease. Giving God more room in your life, putting others first and considering them better than yourself, are ways to decrease. There are more, as I've discovered. The word seems packed with meaning.

A few have shared your One Word with me; I'd love to hear from more of you. I'm laying down a challenge and it's not too late for 2015. I'm sure you'll find the experience intriguing, thought-provoking and helpful.

You can find more information about choosing a word and what to do with it at myoneword.org. Please send me your words and I'll share them in the next issue.

Happy Easter!

Tammy



Ray's True Story

By Lila Millhuff

We had been praying for Ray for some time in Grace of God Fellowship, Tucson, Arizona. He had struggled with health issues and then began to lose his memory. But he didn't let that stop him. He continued doing the work he had to do, day by day.

One Sunday, our friend, Addie, Ray's mother, shared Ray's story with the congregation. Ray was a mechanic who worked on motorcycles. A customer called asking him to pick up a motorcycle for repairs. Ray hitched up his trailer to his truck and picked up the motorcycle, tying it down securely to the trailer.

As he drove back home, the trailer began to weave back and forth, with such force it pushed the truck and trailer off to the side of the road. It was out of his control. The shock was so great, Ray had to shake his head to clear his mind and assess the situation.

The driver's side of his truck was on the very edge of a drop off into a canyon. If the truck had not stopped at that point, Ray and the whole truck and trailer would have gone over the side. Death would have been imminent.

No one can prepare for such a situation, but having cleared his mind as to what to do next, Ray climbed carefully to the passenger side, got out and worked on the trailer. After fixing the problem, he was able to climb back into the truck cab and safely move away from the dangerous edge.

God had intervened—this highway is the main thoroughfare in that area and traffic is always heavy. There was no traffic from either direction for the entire time this took place—none! The truck stopped just short of the drop-off area, and Ray could not leave the truck through the driver's side or he would have fallen to his death.

Can't you see those angels holding the truck and trailer tightly to avoid them top-

pling over the cliff! Ray is thankful and knows a miracle took place for him that day. It's a day he will never forget, for God was there for him.

Ray goes forward, knowing God intervened and he was granted more time in this life. Addie, Ray and their whole family are so thankful for God's intervention. It touched my heart as well and I'm sure it will touch your heart. God is still in the miracle-making business. He is there for us—always. It's called love for his children. We are blessed above all!

Thank You, Lord for always being there for us.



Lila is retired now with her husband Ted in the Saddle Brooke Community of Tucson. Life in the desert is never boring, always something new to observe in God's Creation! You can contact her at lmillhuff@att.net.

Happy Easter to you, my friend!
This day's light shall have no end.
For Christ did rise
In the golden morn
And by His life are we reborn.

Happy Easter to one and all!
The night is over, the sun is tall.
The day did break with a tiny beam
And flooded life with Light supreme.

—Paul F. Kirtepeter
Holly Pond Hill:
A Child's Book of Easter



Going Deeper

Reconciling God's Love With Our Pain

By Trish Clauson

One year ago I wrote an article titled "Reconciling God's Love With Our Pain." At that time my husband was alive, with the expectation he would remain so, but that wasn't to be. I think it's easier to understand God's presence in our pain when we experience deliverance. But many of us experience losses that are not so forgiving and whose permanence pulls the proverbial rug right out from under our feet. Since Arnold's death I have found a God who is also able to meet me in a space where there was no deliverance, just incredible pain.

For as long as I can remember, I have needed to understand the purpose of living. Even as a child I found life to be so perplexing I couldn't go through it without asking why. Life to me felt more futile than productive and happiness was too elusive to be trusted.

When life is easy and carefree, its purpose seems either irrelevant or obvious. Life is good. There is no need to worry about why; just enjoy it. But when life becomes tumultuous—which it will—when the sun becomes darkened by turbulent clouds of pain and suffering, *Why?* becomes all too relevant and not the least bit obvious.

Maybe it depends on how many sunny days we experience against the cloudy ones that push us toward a quest for meaning in our pain. Maybe it exists entirely in the person we are and what we believe will fill our life—something more than the unexpected, unwelcome and inexplicable chaos that intrudes on our joy. Unfortunately, the tragedies that find us are as much a part of life as the joys we chase after. And when they come we are left to wonder what the purpose might be—if there is any purpose to it at all.

Yet it seems in the midst of our confusion, a far deeper anguish plagues our soul—our inability to reconcile a God who is love with the outrageous and unthinkable agony pain can produce. Believers and nonbelievers alike find little comfort in a God who can allow such pain to exist. What makes it worse is knowing he has the power to prevent or stop it and yet often does neither.

But are we asking the wrong questions? Have we made a god in the image of who we feel he should be, while missing the truth of who he really is? Is it possible his love is somehow intrinsically tied to our pain?

Scripture is straightforward when it says God is love. Because there are no promises he will always deliver us, but will more often walk with us instead, we struggle to understand what kind of love God's love is. When we try to reconcile what we believe love should look like with what we are experiencing, we can only imagine one or the other. To us love and pain seem mutually exclusive.

So now I wonder: Is the true meaning of life, of living through the phenomenal joys and unconscionable sorrows meant to give us the one thing we need most—glimpses of who God really is? Would the greatest blessing we could experience be the knowledge of God's presence, not only in our sunny days or in moments of miraculous deliverance, but also with even more depth of conviction within the midst of our deepest sorrows, our greatest losses and our most ominous storms? Is an understanding of God's love only or more fully revealed to us there?

Is the true purpose of life and living not freedom from pain but a peace that passes understanding in midst of it? Can we only say "it is well with my soul" when our soul is threatened to be or is already quite unwell? Is it possible, as Laura Story sings in her song, "Blessings," our trials are God's mercies in disguise?

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Going Deeper

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Yet, in the midst of these possibilities, don't we still find it hard to totally trust God? Pain and suffering demand relief. And in the depth of our pain, our only desire is deliverance or at least some kind of guarantee we will be OK. But, when God doesn't do what we believe he could or should have done, a very different god emerges in our thinking, one that we begin to redefine through the lens of our pain. To do this is dangerous, and can thwart our faith.

What we can't know for sure is what God can or will do. But what we can know unequivocally is who God says he is. Placing our trust solely in who he is allows our faith to rest firmly on an immovable reality that guarantees us whatever the outcome, it will not only be filled with his deep abiding love for us, but will also in some way be a blessing for our greater good; one so incredible, yet so outside of ourselves, we simply cannot comprehend it within the context of our pain.

I know I have found him in both the joys and the sorrows. Ironically as much as I enjoy his presence as we walk beside the still waters or are together in green pastures, my glimpses of who he is there pale into insignificance against the God who walks beside

me not only through my own "valley of the shadow of death" but also in death itself.

In that space he has revealed parts of himself I could not have imagined without the shroud of darkness and death surrounding me, without the knowledge deliverance would not be possible in this lifetime. It is in the midst of such pain I have more fully experienced God's grace and his love. It is there, in the depth of my being, God has lovingly embraced my anguish and surrounded me with his peace—a peace that not only defies human logic, but that opens my soul to an even greater wonder of who this inconceivable God really is!



Trish says: "It's amazing how life can go on and continue to be filled with so much beauty and wonder in the midst of heartache. This can be nothing less than God's grace and mercy, like a sweet salve poured over a deep wound. Even though time alone doesn't heal all wounds, it certainly does assist us in our endeavor to do so. In my case the time seemed right to bring life back into my home, where death still lingered. I chose to do it in the form of a tiny Yorkiepoo named Brigitta. I have only had her a few days and already I am completely in love with her. Will keep you posted." You may email Trish at trishannson@yahoo.com.

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
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.

Zorro and Me

By Barbara Dahlgren

Small Town Charm

Last year Zorro and I traveled to the small town of Belmond, Iowa, so Zorro could perform a wedding. When I say small, I really do mean *small*—by today’s standards anyway. I know a little about small towns because I was born in one in Southeast Missouri called Kinder.

Kinder had a population of about 10, if you counted everything that moved. In other words, if you were to drive by the sign “Entering Kinder,” you could turn around and read the same thing on the other side. Perhaps these are slight exaggerations, but not much.

Small towns have a certain charm. In Belmond the one theater still charged \$1 for children and \$2 for adults—all day, any day. Of course they only ran one movie a week, but it was a first-run film. We wondered if they could possibly make any money.

Well, they made enough to go digital. It helped to have the concession stand operated by volunteers who got free popcorn, soda and entrance to the movie.

There was no McDonald’s or Starbucks, but the coffee shop had a standard routine. The older farmers arrived around 6 a.m. to discuss the weather, crops and politics, but they were gone by the time the ladies arrived to discuss the more important issues such as who was having a child or grandchild, who was getting divorced or who moved into the old Randall house.

I love small towns. They have a sense of community. They have community activities the community actually attends. Whether raising money for the ambulance, fire department or school band, people are supportive by baking or buying homemade goodies, purchasing raffle tickets and volunteering to help.

While major league sports teams get some attention, the athletic focus is usually on the high school games. A Belmond restaurant offered free chili after a big game.

Neighbor helping neighbor is a way of life in a small town; even helping a stranger is commonplace. For example, when Zorro needed a hair trim before the wedding he called the local salon. They said, “Come on in!” They quickly trimmed him for free. Yes, I said free. Of course, he insisted he wanted to pay, but they wouldn’t hear of it. It was a sort of “Welcome to Belmond” gift.

Long before the sitcom *Cheers* coined the phrase, “You want to go where everybody knows your name,” small towns had that covered. When Zorro was looking for that hair salon he checked MapQuest and ended up at the previous owner’s door. She steered him in the right direction.

The next day we strolled down Main Street for their Fall Festival. Vendors had tables outside their stores with merchandise for sale, craftsmen offered their wares and the library sold books for the library fund.

A woman greeted us. Zorro didn’t recognize her but she remembered him. It was the woman from the house he accidentally went to the previous day. She wanted to be sure Zorro had found what he needed. We had a wonderful chat. Most everything charming about a small town revolves around community, people connections or relationships.

Let’s face it, God created us to be relational. From the beginning God told us, “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). The New Testament is full of scriptures about loving our neighbors (Matthew 22:36-40) and being kind and caring to one another (Philippians 2:4, Romans 12:10). This is not surprising considering God lives in community: Father, Son and Spirit. He wants us to live in community as well—community with him and others.

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Small Town Charm

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Somehow I think it's easier to embrace this concept in a small town. Big city people guard their privacy to the point of shutting themselves off from the world. But consider this: we in big cities live in smaller communities as well, such as churches, neighborhoods, offices, schools, clubs and leagues. Here is where God can help us start building relationships with others.

We can start small with a handshake, smile or act of kindness and let the Father, Son and Holy Spirit take it from there. Maybe we can develop small town charm in a big city world.



Barbara says: "Zorro and I continue to enjoy our 7-year-old granddaughter Sophia. One day her mom was explaining the age of dinosaurs. Mom said, 'They are older than you, older than mommy and daddy, older than grandpa and grandma....' Sophia said, 'Wait a minute! Older than grandma? Nobody's older than grandma!' And there you have it, friends. No one is older than ME!" 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.

"If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world."



—C.S. Lewis

Being a Light...has a lighter side!

A little son of a Baptist minister was in church one morning when he saw for the first time the rite of baptism by immersion. He was greatly interested in it and the next morning proceeded to baptize his three cats in the bathtub.

The first kitten bore it very well, and so did the young cat, but the old family cat rebelled. It struggled, clawed, tore at him and got away.

With considerable effort he caught it and proceeded with the ceremony. But she acted worse than ever, clawed at him, spit and scratched his hands and face.

Finally, after barely getting her splattered with water, he dropped her on the floor in disgust and said: "Fine, be an atheist."

I had been teaching my seventh-graders about World War II, and a test question was, "What was the largest amphibious assault of all time?"

Expecting to see "the D-Day invasion" as the answer, I found instead on one paper, "Moses and the plague of frogs."

As the lone female in our house, I find that certain male habits have really begun to get on my nerves. One day, I emerged from the bathroom completely exasperated when I bumped into my husband.

"What is it with guys that they won't replace the toilet paper?!" I raged.

"I know," he said, nodding in agreement. "I noticed that when I was in there earlier."

—cleanlaffs.com

They Fell Asleep...

By Joyce Catherwood

Jesus died on the cross for our sins, which is humbling beyond words. But what's essential is he suffered because he loved us. The road to Calvary speaks volumes of that love, clearly revealed in Jesus' final hours on earth.

From a human perspective, it literally took blood, sweat and tears for Jesus to face the cruelty, rejection, degradation and violence of an execution by crucifixion. Let's reflect for a moment on the emotional agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, where just before his arrest, Jesus offered up supplications with loud crying and tears. Before we rejoice that Jesus as the Son of Man was destined to choose the Father's will over his own pain, we should take a hard look at the desperate struggle involved.

The peaceful garden, thick with twisted-trunk olive trees, was familiar to Jesus and the disciples. But this time something was different. They had not seen their master like this, severely distressed and troubled, as though he carried the weight of the world on his shoulders. They glanced at each other, wondering what to expect. As they entered through the gate, Jesus asked the group, with the exception of Peter, James and John, to sit down and wait for him. Then as the full moon illuminated their way, the three followed Jesus deeper into the recesses of the garden.

Finally, unable to contain the crushing sorrow any longer, he uttered: "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch." Wait. Did you catch that? Grieved to the point of death? These are words laden with mental anguish and affliction of the soul. Then Jesus turned from his three companions and went a short distance. With tears streaming down his face, he fell to the ground, crying out to the Father as he began to wrestle with the preordained plan to

redeem mankind. His voice echoed in the dark night, heart-wrenching pleas from the pit of his being. Could there be another way?

An hour passes. In the moonlight, he notices Peter, James and John across the way and approaches them. Did he hope to be comforted? Did he expect a show of concern and support? He had asked so little of them. He simply wanted them to be there for him in his hour of great need. But what did his best friends in the whole world do? They fell asleep.

Jesus walks back. The battle in the garden continues, waves of emotion threatening to drown him with their force. An angel came to strengthen him. Even so, the fervency and agony was so intense, his sweat mixed with blood. Again he reached out to his slumbering friends. They looked up at him through drowsy eyes. He searched for a glimmer of reassurance. But they didn't know what to say to him. With a disheartened sigh, he told them, "It's OK, go back to sleep."

Exhausted, Jesus returned to his special spot. After a final time of prayer, the saga of blood, sweat and tears was over. He went to fetch his friends, finding all three sound asleep again, totally oblivious to his grievous personal struggle. As he studied their faces, remembering the camaraderie, his heart filled with compassion. His love for them had not lessened. He awakened them with renewed determination in his voice.

Startled, they looked around, confused. For the past few hours, through groggy sleep, they'd heard him sob uncontrollably. Now they stumbled along after him, trying to match his rapid pace as he went back to the garden entrance to meet his betrayer face to face.

So here's the question. If Jesus' closest companions, his friends who were in his very presence, fell asleep in the midst of all that transpired, how much easier is it for me to

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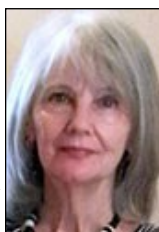
They Fell Asleep...

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miss the point as well? Do we have a tendency to gloss over the words of the story—words heavy with raw emotion and feeling?

To stop, reflect and unpack events described in the Gospel accounts leading up to and including Jesus' ultimate sacrifice is to measure the length and width, height and depth of his amazing unconditional love. It is meant to be taken personally. It is intended to touch our hearts. In the final analysis, it is an invitation to respond.

"Only one act of pure love, unsullied by any taint of ulterior motive has ever been performed in the history of the world, namely the self-giving of God in Christ on the cross of undeserving sinners. That is why, if we are looking for a definition of love, we should look not in a dictionary, but at Calvary" (John R. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*).



Joyce says: "My three daughters and five grown-up granddaughters and I are cat crazy. So far, we've adopted 8 rescue cats among us. We started a closed FB group, "Catherwood Cat Ladies," where we share photos and other cute stuff about cats. It is becoming a sweet, intimate exchange that provides a pleasant break in the day or brings a smile. All good." You may email Joyce at joyce.catherwood@gci.org.

The great gift of Easter is hope—
Christian hope which makes us have
that confidence in God, in his ultimate
triumph, and in his goodness and love,
which nothing can shake.



—Basil C. Hume

Briefly Speaking...

For Ears That Hear

Years ago when I was writing for church publications, I also recorded my articles so they could be heard by our blind church members. The radio studio was a windowless, soundproof room where I sat at a desk by myself with a microphone before me.

At first I felt strange, isolated, though I knew a technician I couldn't see was listening and recording my every word. If I had to cough or made a mistake, the recording stopped, the error was deleted and I started over where I left off.

Recording the articles made me conscious of how I sounded. How was I coming across to those hearing me? They didn't know what I looked like or whether or not I was smiling or frowning.

Then I visited a church where one of our blind members attended. He wanted to meet me, and when I went up to him and spoke, he knew immediately who I was.

It was a reminder to me that as Christians we live by faith not sight. It's easy enough to say Jesus is my guide, but it can be scary. We can't see Jesus there before us, leading the way, but we have his words in Scripture and in our hearts. He says those who are his will recognize his voice.



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

We live and die;
Christ died and lived!

—John Stott