



Connections

◆ A JOURNAL BY & FOR WOMEN IN MINISTRY ◆

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Amazing Race— Amazing Life

By Shelba Stanley

My favorite television show was the reality show *Amazing Race*, in which couples raced around the world doing tasks and tests for the prize of one million dollars. It's been canceled, but I have it on my PC because my grandson was able to tape it for me. All of it.



Amazing Race was a show where couples from all walks of life agreed to do whatever it took to win the prize. Only one couple could win. They all were given the same advantages. They started at the same place and were given the same clue. What they did with the clue was up to each team.

They drove cars, bikes, boats and animals of all kinds, rode in airplanes, buses, carts and several other unusual modes of transportation. They climbed mountains, went into scary caves and holes in the ground with bats and spiders. They swam on and under water for clues.

The teams went to different countries where they were given jobs they hadn't heard of before but natives did every day. They had to hunt for the clues while doing these crazy tasks, such as smash grapes with their bare feet in large vats to make wine. They dug holes to bury large eggs filled with water, then drank it through a straw the way the natives do in the deserts of Australia. They carried loads of water or wood or some other needed item balanced on their heads.

They performed rituals in the different lands where people do religious tasks for worship. Some were really weird, but to those people it was part of life. In India they worked in temples. They pushed heavy elephant statues down streets for miles asking for help from the children of the towns. One even had her hair shaved off in a religious ritual to win that leg of the race.

Personalities came through while they worked together and against the other teams. They

◆ Contents ◆

- ◆ **Tam 2U**
The Circle Grows
..... page 3
- ◆ *Watching Over the Widow*
by Bill Miller page 4
- ◆ *I Shall Not Want*
by Pat Rabe page 5
- ◆ *And Who Is My Neighbor?*
by Dixie Marino page 6
- ◆ *Mrs. Walker's Wares*
by Hannach Knaack page 7
- ◆ *Zorro and Me*
by Barbara Dahlgren page 8
- ◆ *Voices of Our Sisters*
by Joyce Catherwood page 11
- ◆ *Connections—A Strong Need*
by Phyllis Rose page 12
- ◆ *Heart's Desire*
by Tine McCarthy page 14
- ◆ *The Discipline of Rest*
by Carla Reinagel page 15
- ◆ *God's Silence or God's Sovereignty*
by Trish Clauson page 16
- ◆ **Lighter Side** page 19

(Continued on page 2)

Amazing Race

(Continued from page 1)



lied, cheated, plotted and gave false advice to their competition. They tried to derail the others or help them, whichever was to their own advantage.

Through it all they learned how to work together. They had to put faith in each other and the rope they might be clinging to at the time. They had to rely on the information they were given to get them through the task. They had to keep trying even when they felt as if they were too far behind and would not make it to the finish line in time to continue on.

Our lives are similar to the *Amazing Race*. We all start out the same, with the miracle of the birth process. We grow from a small helpless baby, to a child, to a young adult, to full adult, to old age, to death, then to a new life with our Creator. What an Amazing Race we are in!

But this is not a TV show. It's our life. We were put in this race for God's delight and he helps us throughout the whole race. He is pulling for us to win. He is helping us to win because he loves us and wants us with him as part of the great prize. That's better than a million dollars.



Shelba's amazing race is taking new turns: she is on the list at Vanderbilt for a kidney transplant. She's not sick and has been blessed with lots of good days. She doesn't have most of the problems of kidney failure patients. God has answered her prayers already by keeping her so well and she's thankful. E-mail her at sestan@comcast.net.



◆ 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 WCG 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.



The Circle Grows

With this issue, we begin our 15th year as a publication. Fourteen years of *Connections* come to a close. So much has changed in those 14 years, both within our denomination and in the world. I almost have whiplash!

My children have gone from elementary school to college, our church has gone from legalism to grace, and the world has gone from relatively peaceful ignorance to checking shoes and water bottles at the airport.

Our journal has changed as well. The first issue, published in August 1994, was 12 pages long, printed on nice paper and featured the color pink.

The intent of the journal, in the words of Bev Kubik, the first editor, was “to share words of encouragement, inspiration and support in the unique role we have in common.” This is one thing that hasn’t changed. *Connections* still exists to fulfill this purpose and does so with every article written by you. The unique role was that of wife of a pastor. But as you are aware, a pastor can now have a husband! So while our intent remains the same and we are still women, some of our roles have changed, which necessitates a change in stating what we have in common.

In the beginning the subtitle said, “By and for Ministers’ Wives.” In December 1998 we changed it to “By and for Elders’ Wives.” A year later it was changed to “By and for Elders’ Wives and Families.” In the last issue, I asked for input about another change. The original suggestion (By and for Elders’ Families) received mixed reviews. After thought and consideration by Sheila

Graham and myself, we have decided to call *Connections* a journal “By and for Women in Ministry.” We will continue to accept and encourage articles by men, whether elder or spouse of elder, and children, but the primary focus of the publication will remain true to its original purpose—women. We will also include women on pastoral teams and those serving congregations in any pastoral capacity.

Connections was created to fill a gap. Even though most elders’ wives attended Ambassador College, they tended to muddle through (graduate, get married and go be a minister’s wife) with little training or support in their new role. We hoped to provide a means of encouragement and long-distance mentoring through articles you wrote for each other. The gap is still there, and the need for peer support in all the roles we now fill is as great as ever.

Connections will continue to help you connect as long as you continue to share your hearts with each other. We are women in ministry, part of the priesthood of all believers and we need each other now more than ever. If you haven’t submitted an article in the past, please consider doing so now. Let’s make the next 14 years better than the first!



Tammy

The God who has the whole world in his hands has grace for the whole world in his heart.



—Lewis Smedes,
*Things I’ve Learned on My
Way to Eighty,*
Program #4411

Watching Over the Widow



Mom and the Refrigerator

By Bill Miller

God shows us in his Word that he takes care of the widow and the fatherless. My mother became a widow in July 1999. She has shared some inspiring incidents when God helped her through the rough times. She has been a Christian and a woman of faith as long as I have known her.

After my dad retired in 1982, it was the custom of my parents to spend the month of February in Florida. They made a lot of friends, so even after Mom was alone she decided to make a trip there. She lived in a rural area of Indiana, so her source of water was a well. To avoid any problems while she was away, my uncle came over and turned off the breaker that powered the water pump.

Mom was gone for five weeks and came home to find the electricity to her new refrigerator-freezer had been turned off. Dad had changed the pump to an additional breaker system. He had forgotten to write in the change on the other breaker box, so the wrong switch was flipped. Everything in the refrigerator had spoiled and the stench was intense.

My aunt, uncle and mother did the best they could to try to clean up the mess and to remove the smell. The unit had an auto-

matic ice maker and cold water dispenser. The ice and water both smelled bad. No matter how many times Mom cleaned the refrigerator, the smell would not go away. She was a woman of strong resolve, but after weeks of trying everything to get rid of the smell, the situation finally wore her down. Mom had always been one to take things to God, especially when she realized the situation was beyond her control.

With tears, she called out to God to intervene. She went over to the refrigerator, laid hands on it and asked God to remove the stench that permeated the appliance. When she opened up the door, the smell was gone. The ice cubes didn't smell and the water tasted normal. She got up in church and told the congregation

about her experience. Some praised God and some wondered. We do have nose witnesses to attest the fact. I visited her shortly after the cleansing. My wife says I can smell things many people would not detect. I did a nose test and can assure you the odor was gone.

Sometimes we forget to ask God about the small things. We usually look to him for deliverance in the big things in life. My mother's experience reminded me to trust God for all things, big and small.



Bill has pastored the Everett and Seattle-Bellevue, Washington, churches for 14 years. He has served in the WCG ministry for 37 years with his wife, Kathy. Bill is a die-hard fan of the Chicago Cubs and Bears. He enjoys fishing, softball, golfing and working with youths. This is part two of a four-part series about Bill's mother. E-mail him at bill-miller@verizon.net.

Adversities do not make the man
either weak or strong,
but they reveal what he is.

—Faith Forsythe

I Shall Not Want

By Pat Rabe

Last week I went to the kitchen to do some baking, but when I opened my flour tin, it was almost empty. Strangely enough, when I measured it out, it was exactly the cup of flour I needed for my chocolate cake. I couldn't help thinking back to many years ago, when we were in third tithe year. As many will remember, this was a time of pulling in our belts, having faith and trusting our Heavenly Father to supply our needs.

We had three children, one a baby and the eldest 6 years old. How well I remember those Friday preparation days. One day I wanted to bake a pie for the weekend and went to the flour tin to discover very little flour there. But when I measured it out, there was exactly the cup of flour I needed. There were times too when I had just enough sugar or just the few teaspoons of coffee we needed to see us through to the end of the month—payday.

At that time we had a next door neighbor, an elderly woman whose husband worked for an electricity company. He was employed to service the power lines in a certain farming area. These farmers would give him vegetables, eggs, fruit, even chickens and meat as gifts. Aunt Marie, the neighbor, would call me to the fence and offer me some of the produce, as she and her husband could not consume all those goodies. She passed on to me wool she had left over from knitting or remnants of material I could use to make clothes for the children. If only that dear old woman knew she was

“And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

—Philippians 4:19, NKJV

being used by our Heavenly Father to help us in our third tithe year! But as you know we didn't talk about our religion and church to outsiders.

We learned such valuable lessons from those third tithe years, and I don't regret one of them. We learned to trust and have faith in God to supply our needs. We lived by faith and not by sight (definitely not looking into the almost empty flour tin). We learned to budget our income, something we have carried over until now. We learned not to waste and to use our goods to the best advantage. Most of all we learned to be thankful and grateful to our Heavenly Father for all the many blessings he bestows on us, daily. Our three children are married now with their own families, and they have been blessed too with the background and teachings of our church.

Although we are not required under the new covenant to pay third tithe, all those lessons we learned have stayed with us, even now, with the wonderful understanding we have of the new covenant. We look to God in faith to supply our needs. We rely on him to direct and guide us each day, and we pray and trust him for protection, especially in the times in which we live.

Those lessons evidenced in a physical way then are applied in a spiritual way today. Walking through the Old Testament physically equipped us so much better to be able to walk in the New Testament spiritually. I stand amazed at the way he constantly intervenes for us.



Cliff, a retired minister, and Pat attend the Krugersdorp, South Africa, church. They live on a farm and enjoy gardening, reading, wildlife and touring around the country with their caravan, visiting the many game parks there. They have three married children and seven grandchildren who keep them young. E-mail her at cerabe@telkomsa.net.



And Who Is My Neighbor?

By Dixie Marino

On our country road, we know every one of our neighbors and most of the folk who visit them. When we pass one another on our narrow dirt road, we always give the country wave.

My husband knows car models and makes, so he already knows who we are about to salute. I rarely know one car from the other, so I do a lot of guessing and give the country wave to anyone coming my way.

One day when my husband and I were on the road, we saw a car coming and I asked him who it could be. He didn't know, so I told him to wave anyhow as it might be one of our neighbors. Does anyone see the—what's the word—*hypocrisy*? What kind of thinking is that? Well,

I didn't mean it that way, but it brought to mind a Jesus saying—a commandment.

"One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: 'Teacher, what must I do to receive eternal life?' Jesus replied, 'What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?' The man answered, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind. And, love your neighbor as yourself.' 'Right!' Jesus told him. 'Do this and you will live!' The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'" (Luke 10:25-29, *New Living Translation*).

And who is my neighbor? Well, from all Jesus teaches us, everyone falls into that category. He teaches us to forgive, so I can't leave my offenders out. He teaches us to treat others as we want to be treated, so I

should be respectful to people. (I don't like feeling excluded.) He teaches us not to condemn others, not to have anger in our hearts or harbor resentment.

Jesus teaches us to sow seeds, live the gospel, be a lamp and have faith that all things work for good. And what about giving of our time and resources, and praying for our enemies—whoa! This neighbor thing could really become complicated.

Why don't I just skip the selection method and give the country wave to everyone I meet, because, as it turns out, everyone is my neighbor. The ones I know from around the neighborhood and the ones I don't know. Some who might wave back and some who won't. Some who might recognize me before I do them. Some who just need a good ol' country wave right at that moment. Some who could use a little cheer and encouragement to face the day. It makes me want to pass it on when I am on the receiving end of the wave.

So, if everyone is my neighbor, I probably should start thinking of the whole world as my neighborhood. I should pray for peaceful relations among nations and cultures and think good will toward all peoples. I should let God love me and shed abroad that love from my heart to my neighbors, near and far.

Therefore, the country wave is not a bad idea. It's right up there with God fearing, because as Jesus taught us, it's not the people you know that makes a neighbor, it's how you treat people that makes good neighbors. It's part of that eternal life thing.



Maggie Cat had to have a little surgery on her eye lid. She came through it just fine and she's 14 years old this month. E-mail Dixie at CMARINO001@ec.rr.com.



Mrs. Walker's Wares

By Hannah Knaack

Reading my favorite devotional is something I look forward to daily, even though I've read through this particular book numerous times. As often as I've studied it, some passages still give me pause. I ask myself, Did the author mean this or did he mean that? The words are not difficult, yet the meaning is somewhat vague. As a child, I experienced this when my parents spoke about what they didn't want little ears to pick up. I would hear the words they spoke, yet was unable to connect all the dots.



One such conversation occurred in our home when I was about 8. Perhaps the reason I recall it with such clarity is because, as my dad would say, Mother's temper matched her hair color. She was a bit red in the face and was setting lunch items on the table with such force as to send them through the table. My younger sister and I were supposed to be helping, but it was much more exciting watching Mama at the moment.

I couldn't understand what had upset her. Daddy had come in from working in the garden and had whispered rather loudly to Mama that our neighbor, Mrs. Walker, was "at it again"—whatever that meant. Then I thought I overheard him say Mrs. Walker was sunbathing by her pool. I was clueless about sunbathing and thought, How silly to be taking a bath by your pool when you had a bathtub in the house! But Daddy said it with a hint of a smile. Had I not known better, I would have thought he meant to rile Mama even more.

As she stomped from the counter over to



the table, Mama whirled around to face Dad, waving the spoon just under his nose. She told him he could find work in the house after lunch because she "would not have that woman parading her wares in front of him!" Now she was almost shouting and about to break her own rule about no shouting in the house. Then I saw the twinkle in Daddy's eyes, "Now, honey, she's covered somewhat—she's got her birthday suit on." Mama went from red in the face to full head of steam in no time flat. Curiosity tugged at us, so my sister and I quickly slipped outside to see what all the fuss was about.

As we walked the property line toward the back yard, I was still trying to figure out what wares were. Were they like arms or legs? Maybe wares were like swimming pools. Some people had them and some didn't. I hadn't heard that word before yet somehow I knew wares were bad things if they upset Mom so. I did know what great fun parades were, so sister and I tiptoed closer to the chain link fence and pressed our faces up close to catch a peek.

What a disappointment! There was no parade. I couldn't identify any wares either. Just old, wrinkly Mrs. Walker lying on one of her lounge chairs near her pool. She was so old she had forgotten to put her swimsuit on. My grandma was forgetful, too, but she always wore her clothes.

Disappointed, we returned to the house for lunch only to find Mama was not in the mood to talk. I wanted to ask Daddy what wares were, but I didn't think he would talk about it just then in front of Mom. It was several days before I learned the meaning of my parent's not-so-discreet conversation. Mother's ire had cooled by this point and somehow I felt better having her explain things to me.

(Continued on page 8)

Mrs. Walker's Wares

(Continued from page 7)

It's that way for me now with my reading and study. I enjoy the journey of reading and if I don't quite understand everything, I know help is just a prayer away. I can ask our Lord anything and stretch my understanding of things once vague. Jesus has placed the answers to my ponderings squarely in front of me numerous times, and I have confidence he will continue to do so. All I need to do is ask.



Hannah says: "Finally our daughter is out of college and paying her own bills, so now I'm able to spend a few dollars updating our home. I didn't imagine that after three layers of primer and the glossy white on the window trim, I'd be painting in my dreams as well. This is exhausting! But the fun is in shopping for new decor and getting a great bargain. Kitchen flooring is next—if I have the energy." E-mail Hannah at justmomhkl@juno.com.

A wise lover regards not so much the gift of him who loves as the love of him who gives. He esteems affection rather than valuables, and sets all gifts below the Beloved. A noble-minded lover rests not in the gift, but in Me above every gift.

—Thomas a Kempis,
The Imitation of Christ



Zorro and Me

Busting Out of Nigeria

By Barbara Dahlgren

(Zorro goes international! The following is the last in a series of three articles about going to Nigeria: "Nigeria or Bust," "Almost Busted in Nigeria," and "Busting Out of Nigeria.")

We thanked God no harm had come to our children in their unfortunate encounter with the corrupt Nigerian police. Our trip was coming to an end. Tomorrow we were scheduled to fly out of Nigeria. What more could possibly happen?

Our flight was to leave at 11 a.m. Mr. Okai and Dennis, the church member who would take us to the airport, met us in the hotel lobby at 9 a.m. They assured us we had plenty of time. After all, we were flying on Nigerian Airlines and we knew they rarely leave on time. I wanted to get some postcards, but Mr. Okai said: "Just get them at the airport. You'll have lots of time and they're cheaper. You probably won't leave until 3."

There was some discrepancy about our bill. It took a little time, but Mr. Okai worked it out with the hotel. We thanked Mr. Okai for a wonderful time and waved good-bye. By the time we got to the airport it was 10:30. Dennis found two men to help with our luggage. He instructed us that no matter what happened we should stay right with our luggage and watch the men—and do not let our passports out of our sight.

When we got to the check-in counter, it was closed. Dennis found someone to talk to and guess what? The plane really was going to leave around 11. They said we were too late. They handed us some forms to fill out. We rushed with Dennis to the other

(Continued on page 9)

Zorro and Me

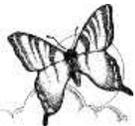
(Continued from page 8)

end of the airport to talk to an official. We showed him our passports. He couldn't help us. We rushed back to some other official at the other end of the airport. We showed him our passports. We did this about four times. It was confusing trying to hang onto our luggage, which our two helpers kept abandoning, stay together as a family and try to figure out what was going on.

Soon we had a crowd of officials around us. They were all talking, yelling and waving arms in the air. Dennis was pleading for us. Finally, they agreed to let us get on the plane, but not our luggage. They might send it on the next flight. Dennis pleaded to get our luggage on this flight but "No! No! No!" they said. One official grabbed our passports and told us to follow him. We tried to confer with Dennis. The official was perturbed. "Don't you know I'm trying to help you?" We weren't so sure. We didn't know who we could trust.

Dennis said to go with the official and get on the plane. He would pray for us. We were moved by his godly confidence and bravery. Zorro gave Dennis the airport tax money we were supposed to pay for each piece of luggage and a little extra in case he needed help persuading someone to get our luggage

Whenever you're in conflict with someone, there is one factor that can make the difference between damaging your relationship and deepening it. That factor is attitude.



—William James
American Philosopher



on the plane. We hugged and parted. He would be in our prayers as well. The last we saw of him, he was struggling with 10 suitcases and talking to more officials.

We ran with the official carrying our passports—through visa checks, through passport checks and through radar detectors. All kinds of buzzers went off, but we just followed the man with our passports. One official looked at our passports and said we didn't need this guy leading us. Our leader said, "Yes, they do! I'm a transit officer." The official gave a look like, Yeah, right! But he let us through. We didn't know who to believe.

When we finally reached the boarding area, we were exhausted. We saw the short ramp where we would enter the plane. The transit officer said we needed to pay him the airport tax.

Zorro said we gave our money to Dennis to pay the tax. He's the one who had our luggage. The transit officer was upset. "This is a bad man. He has taken your money and run away!"

This upset me, so I said, "You are wrong. He is a good man."

"You must pay your airport tax to me," he said. "I will go and find this man!" And off he quickly disappeared through a crowd—with our passports. Zorro was torn. Should he stay with us or follow the man with our passports? He opted to stay with us.

Now here we were—in a foreign country, all alone, no passports and in quite a mess. Our family looked at each other, formed a circle, bowed our heads and prayed. We didn't care who saw us or what they thought—sort of like the sign you see in some schools: "In case of an emergency, all ban on prayer has been lifted."

(Continued on page 10)

Zorro and Me

(Continued from page 9)

10

No sooner had we said “Amen” when our transit officer returned with another official. There was yelling and hand waving. Suddenly, the copilot came to the door. He started shouting at our transit officer! “Let these people pass. Their luggage is loaded.

We are behind schedule. It’s already 11:15.” We were too stunned to even laugh at this statement, having lived with time as more of a concept than a reality for the past week.

Then the pilot appeared and insisted we get on that plane. The

transit officer shook his head, “No! They must give me money.” The pilot rushed to the officer, grabbed our passports from his hands, and gave them to us. We quickly followed him onto the plane.

There we sat—numb from what had happened. It was hard to relax. There was still the possibility someone would jerk us off the plane. After a couple of minutes I looked at Zorro and said, “I guess I’ll just forget about the post cards.” He smiled. Then I said, “Do you think our luggage really did make it on board?”



Returning Home

He glanced at the torn, frayed seats and threadbare carpet, then replied: “I wouldn’t worry about it. We’ll be lucky if the plane makes it.” It was a small jet, but looked more like a reject from World War II. We clutched our passports. Soon we were in midair.

I don’t know how Dennis did it, but our luggage arrived safely. And so did we—older, wiser and with more faith. Some may think we survived by chance, but we know better. We experienced God’s deliverance every step of the way.

Perhaps we were foolish to volunteer for this trip. I don’t know. I do know our family treasures our time in Nigeria. Our Nigerian brethren inspired us. The kind of deliverance God granted us, they must rely on every day.



Zorro and Barbara excitedly await the birth of their first biological grandchild. Baby Sophia is due in mid-October and Barbara plans to be in Austin, Texas, for the blessed event. She says, “Having a grandbaby will bring joy and happiness to our lives—and it’s a great way to get even with our children!” She loves hearing from you. You can e-mail her at bydahlgren@pacbell.net.

I think we have lost the old knowledge that happiness is overrated—that, in a way, life is overrated. We have lost, somehow, a sense of mystery—about us, our purpose, our meaning, our role. Our ancestors believed in two worlds, and understood this to be the solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short one. We are the first generation of man that actually expected to find happiness here on earth, and our search for it has caused such unhappiness. The reason: If you do not believe in another, higher world, if you believe only in the flat material world around you, if you believe that this is your only chance for happiness—if that is what you believe, then you are not disappointed when the world does not give you a good measure of its riches, you are despairing.

—Peggy Noonan

Voices of Our Sisters

Martha

By Joyce Catherwood

There is nothing like making a fool of yourself. Poor Martha learned the hard way—like most of us. But it must have been especially difficult to come to the full realization that she lost her cool in front of the Son of God, accusing him of not caring about her. She didn't know him well enough. But that would all change. Listen to the voice of our sister, Martha.



“Mary was really beginning to get on my nerves. There was so much to do. I had invited

Jesus to our home and was in the middle of preparing an elaborate meal. But my sister Mary was not the least bit interested in helping me. Instead, she sat at the feet of Jesus, with all the men, hanging onto his every word. I thought to myself, what if I did that too? Who would prepare the meal? I had made special trips to the markets, searching for the freshest produce, the finest of everything. Nothing was too good for our fascinating friend.

“As I hurried around making sure everything would be ready at the appropriate time, I grew more and more irritated with

11

Mary. Finally, I couldn't hold it in any longer and I marched into the courtyard where Jesus and the others were sitting in the shade of our olive tree. I blurted out: ‘Lord, don't you care that this sister of mine has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me!’

“I gave Mary a hard look and then turned back to Jesus. He had every reason to react negatively to my curt interruption and snippy attitude. Instead he soothingly said, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about so many things, but only one thing is worth being concerned about; Mary has chosen it and it shouldn't be taken away from her.’ I was so embarrassed, but not by Jesus' discreet response. No, I had managed to humiliate myself by my own foolish conduct.

“As I held back the tears stinging my eyes, I knew deep down Jesus cared about me. I knew he appreciated all my efforts to create tasty meals and an environment in which he could relax and rest. I was even a little jealous of Mary who always seemed to react with her heart, eliciting warm responses from people. All I usually received was appreciation for my hospitality and carefully planned meals. Most of the time I was too busy to relax and interact with my guests.

“Only a few days before his arrest, I had prepared another special meal for Jesus. I was surprised when Mary unabashedly displayed her love and honored him in front of everyone by anointing him with expensive perfume. And yes, she did interrupt my carefully planned meal. But at least this time I did something right by holding my tongue. There was no need to say anything because the disciples took it upon themselves to severely criticize my sister for wasting money on Jesus. He told them to leave Mary alone and praised her for doing such a beautiful thing.

The main purpose of prayer is not to make life easier, nor to gain magical powers, but to know God.



—Phillip Yancey

(Continued on page 12)

By Phyllis Rose

“Because Mary spent every moment she could with Jesus when he came to our home, she intuitively sensed his death was near and that he needed support and reassurance from his friends. If I had been quietly listening to Jesus during his visits instead of anxiously rushing about, I might also have understood his needs, especially as he struggled with the imminent reality of an agonizing death on the cross.

“Later, as details emerged of his brutal crucifixion, I was filled with regret because I had been insensitive toward Jesus. It still haunts me when I realize I had accused my Savior, who died for me, of not caring! I wished I had understood sooner what Mary had understood all along—that knowing Jesus was the one thing worth being concerned about. Now, like Mary, I have chosen it too.”



Joyce tells us she has developed a serious interest in all manner of antiwrinkle creams and potions.

After being told to be proud of her hard-earned wrinkles, she found it a little hard to take when she realized what she always assumed were smile lines turned out to be frown lines. E-mail her at joyce.catherwood@wgc.org.

Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.

—C.S. Lewis



*C*onnections—now that’s a word after my own heart. The first issue I received carried the lead article by a dear friend, Ruth Miller. It was easy to connect to her description of a walk leading to thoughts of love, beauty and God’s richness. I felt she actually visited me. Then I reached her by e-mail and we had a small chat, though it loomed large in my heart and mind. Being connected is vital to me now, more than I ever realized.

The day I was included in the *Connections* family (my husband was a deacon) was a total surprise and an answer to prayer, many prayers. Reaching out to others and receiving from others is a great source of joy. It produces a sense of love and belonging, leading to well-being. Without these warm, loving relationships we can feel isolated from the world.

I had such a lot of connections living in Pasadena. When I moved back to Maine after my husband retired from Lockheed, things were very different. My son was battling cancer, which eventually caused him to lose his left leg from the hip. He’s had an awesome attitude for nearly 20 years, but it still hurts his mother deeply.

A few years later we moved to my hometown to care for my mother who was close to 90. During this time a tremendous blessing came to me. I was helped to attend an International Women’s Retreat in Dallas. I know it was God’s way of strengthening me to go on.

Mom eventually went to a nursing home, and we visited her daily to encourage her and show our love until she died at age 90. I had no idea my husband was seriously ill at

(Continued on page 13)

Connections

(Continued from page 12)

13

the time. Six months later he died from lung cancer. A year later, nearly to the day, my oldest brother died.

I felt like a bowling pin, being spun around by many players before falling. Getting up was not easy. I felt devastated and had a long bout with depression, wondering if I would ever again be back to normal. Without my church, I probably would have lost my mind. It was such a tower of strength. And not only my small, local church, but my connections with many I had known over the years and from e-mails from one of our elders—all helped me so much.

But being alone was difficult for me. I am a people person. And sometimes neighbors are not neighborly. I tried working for a while and that was a help but after foot surgery, I had to stop.

All these factors had a tremendous effect on my health and emotions. Our world be-

comes smaller and it is so hard to talk ourselves out of the feeling we are alone. Isolation keeps us stuck in that frame of mind.

I read about it somewhere on the Internet: “The Japanese have a word *yuimaru* meaning ‘circle’ or ‘connection.’ It refers to the sense of belonging and feeling important, being necessary to the larger community. Okinawans believe it is vital to making people want to wake up in the morning and be productive. It is real and meaningful. It is more than a tradition; it is a way of life.”

Difficult and lasting trials take a toll on all of our life—minds, emotions and body—and we are filled with fear, anger and anxiety. These have a negative effect on our health in many ways. I lost weight—reaching 122 pounds was scary.

Now I have an idea. I want to go to our hospital and see if there’s an area where I can help people who are going through similar situations. I will ask if there’s training available to help me do it better. Maybe it can ease some of the pain and despair for others—maybe branch out from there. It is my prayer.

This call to be a part of *Connections* was an answer to prayer. We never know how God is going to reach out to us and give us opportunities to reach out to others, a needful part of the healing process. His answers are not always what we expect. We can go in the direction of compassion and grace and have our spirits renewed to serve him and his people. It’s a tremendous blessing. Thanks for pulling me into the circle. It will help me heal.



Phyllis lives in Bangor, Maine, and deeply enjoys being a part of the WCG there. She enjoys all opportunities to serve. She loves to write, read, sing, knit and crochet. E-mail is a special joy that helps her connect and collect friends. E-mail her at mouse@gwi.net.

One Idea at a Time

Busy is the way most of us would describe our lives—especially those who work fulltime. You may think there’s no time to write for *Connections*, but think again. I’ve found a short cut: I’ve begun keeping a separate small notebook with my devotional materials and each time an idea, thought or phrase comes to me that’s worth remembering or sharing it goes in the journal. I’m amazed how quickly a page fills up, and soon another. In a brief time, I have enough on paper to pull together for an article. Granted, it may take an hour or two to pull the thoughts together, but it’s time well spent to share our hearts and thoughts with our sisters in Christ.

—Hannah Knaack

Heart's Desire

By Tine McCarthy

14

Between sobs our young cleaning woman, who was by no means timid or a weakling, asked, "Why is it that people can be so unfriendly, so hard, never a kind word, even from the family?" She was suffering harsh and heartless treatment from a money-grabbing landlord as well. From childhood, animosity and malicious treatment has been her lot.



My heart went out to this young person, but the little that could be done to encourage, to hearten and to ease her anguish seemed so inadequate. I wished I could help her see human nature for what it is in its raw reality and as

the Bible states: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it!" (Jeremiah 17:9). Human nature is a godless nature, without godly love and concern for another human being. It's selfish, self-important and self-centered and, more often than not, ready to hurt, harm and assassinate.

But how much more gratifying it would have been to tell her about God's love, what it is like, how it works and what it does as so clearly expressed and illustrated throughout God's Word. There can be no more fulfilling experience in life than to give love from one's innermost being. And also to receive it, be it however trivial, generous or gracious.

Trying to find the true meaning of love, this all-encompassing, greatest of all virtues, can be confusing. Picturing love by an analogy may be a poor substitute, but if it could be envisioned as the wheel of love, it may bring about a clearer mental image.

This wheel of love operates and functions exclusively by the power of God passing through its center toward the hub of

faith revolving around this force of power and, in turn, being firmly connected to the outer sturdy rim of perseverance by spokes or strong bars, each bar representing an act of goodness.

With four identical wheels of this nature supporting a carriage carrying a number of occupants, one could visualize a vehicle sustained by love, transporting its travelers to a far country—the kingdom of God!

God's love is pure, perfect and complete, radiating outward for the well-being of all. It is of a magnitude incomprehensible to the human mind. And unless godly love blends and becomes an integral part of eros or sexual love, of brotherly love toward others and tough love when necessary, these forms of love will inevitably descend to unreliable human affections.

True love is from God, through Christ, by his powers. Toward God first and foremost and only then to be reflected toward others. It can only be from the heart in a giving attitude, in every way of goodness coupled with soundness, knowledge, understanding and wisdom, in the right manner, at the right time and in the right place.

It is enduring, never failing and eternal. Such is and indeed so much infinitely more is true love, the love that comes only from God. It is this love that brings hope, acceptance, peace of mind and joy unrivaled to the soul of man.

I believe these things firmly, and when the time is right, I will sit down and share all these thoughts with our young domestic helper.



Roy and Tine have been retired since 1992, living in a retirement village in Somerset West on the coast, about 45 kilometers from Cape Town, South Africa. They served in the WCG for 25 years in England, Holland, South Africa and finally in pastoring the Johannesburg East Church.

The Discipline of Rest

By Carla Reinagel

I've not been very disciplined lately. I'm struggling to regain the daily exercise habit I lost during months of physical therapy and extensive travel. My Bible study has been sporadic. And praying, well it has disintegrated into a simple litany of thanksgiving with bouts of crying for mercy.

Needless to say, attending a conference on spiritual formation and sitting just a few feet from Dr. Spiritual Discipline himself was a bit uncomfortable. I also knew not asking for a remedy was akin to giving up and accepting defeat. So feeling full of guilt and shame I admitted to Dr. Richard Foster that I'd lost all the spiritual discipline I'd practiced since my youth. His advice was stunning.

"When in training, when an athlete is injured, what does he do? He takes time to rest. Resting is in itself a discipline."

Was I injured? Did he know I'd just endured the most intense year of my life? Not only had I sat for weeks at my father's deathbed, but, all in the same month, my firstborn was married, my father-in-law died, as did a brother-in-law and a dear friend in Iraq. Yes, I'm hurt.

And the remedy is—rest.

So seeking the quiet of my garden with the refrain of "Thank you Father for your mercy," as I struggle with my emotions, is also spiritual discipline? Wow!

In the quiet with my Lord is where I need to be right now. I'm finding it a lot more comfortable and profitable, free from the taint of guilt and shame.



Carla's watercolors were recently juried into the Best of Missouri Hands, an organization promoting excellence in the arts. Her work can be seen at www.bestofmissourihands.com where you can read a long biography. E-mail her at oursanctuary02@sbcglobal.net.

Nurturennet

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



To join or change your e-mail address, please send Tammy Tkach a message at tammy.tkach@wcg.org.

God's Silence or God's Sovereignty

By Trish Clauson

It was early. The sun was just peeking out above the horizon. Karen had been awake for several hours, pondering yet another lonely day. It had been three months since she lost her beloved Charles. They would have been married 38 years next month. That thought shattered her.

She was thankful for all the support. The outpouring of love she received was overwhelming. But as the days wore on into weeks, and the weeks into months, she found herself more and more alone.

Karen was busy with a challenging job, a family and her service to the church, but somehow she felt her life slipping away. It no longer held the same meaning. Life's landscape had turned gray and colorless. Living had been abruptly thrust into a fractured existence and was lapsing slowly into a meaningless and hollow state of survival. But worst of all, the God she had known for so long, the One with whom she had walked through so many trials, now seemed to be completely quiet and the silence was deafening.

Why did things have to change so abruptly and why did God appear to be so silent?

It seems life by its mere existence is totally fluid and full of change. We buy the new home or the new car and before we know it they have gone from new to old, in need of repair or replacement. Nothing ever seems to stay the same. And this constant motion of change brings with it many losses—losses all of us experience at one time or another. Some are small enough that we move in and out of them without missing a beat, while others reach the point of shattering our lives, changing them forever.

(Continued on page 17)

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Silence or Sovereignty

(Continued from page 16)

17

How many of us, like Karen, have gone through one or more of these life-shattering experiences while at the same time feeling God was being silent? Why is it when our losses seem the greatest, God can feel the farthest away? When we can't feel his presence, when we don't see evidence of his working in our lives, when we don't feel our prayers reaching his throne, is he really being silent? And if so, why? Why when we need him the most is he the most unattainable?

There are times when God is silent. I, like so many, have lived in that silence. But, I also believe his silence is not indicative of his absence. Instead, I believe the answer lies in one word—*sovereignty*.

The book of Job probably explains God's sovereignty with the most clarity. Job suffered the loss of all his children (how unthinkable), all his wealth and security, as well as his health. This was loss upon loss! As he sat in the ashes with his so-called friends he felt alone, rejected and abandoned by the God he loved and worshiped so faithfully. Job struggled for days trying to understand all the whys that had turned his life upside down, while at the same time experiencing what seemed to be the deafening sounds of God's apparent silence.

But was God ignoring Job? It certainly seemed that way to him. Yet, when we read

the book of Job, it doesn't take us long to find out how involved God really was. It was God himself who gave Satan permission to bring all this upon Job in the first place. In the end, what we find is that Job had to wait in this silence until God decided to make his presence known, which he did in a powerful way.

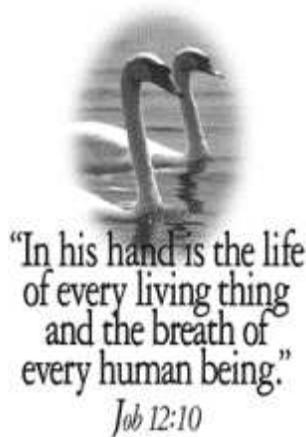
As we examine the story of Job, several things become clear. God was completely aware of everything taking place in Job's life, allowing all of it to happen. He left Job alone for a while, appearing distant and silent, even though he was always present. And finally, in his time and in his way God responded to Job's prayers. All of this points to one thing—his great sovereignty.

God's sovereignty is an awesome concept. To accept the reality that there's a Being in

heaven who knows everything—everything there is to know—is beyond our ability to grasp. Due to his great sovereignty, God not only knows everything about us in this moment, but also every detail of our past as well as every possibility of our future. Within the bounds of his great sovereignty also abides his unconditional love. What this ultimately means is that whatever happens to us, good or bad, we can count on it always fitting into his great plan.

With this in mind, how then do we reconcile his sovereignty with a life-shattering tragedy? Doesn't this same sovereignty give him the power to protect us from unjust or unfair situations?

In 2 Chronicles 19:7 we are told with God there's no injustice or partiality. "Now let the fear of the Lord be upon you. Judge carefully, for with the Lord our God there is



It's not me who can't keep a secret, it's the people I tell that can't.

—Abraham Lincoln



Silence or Sovereignty

(Continued from page 17)

18

no injustice or partiality or bribery” (NIV). Because God knows all, past, present and future, he is not confined to measuring justice within the parameters of our physical lives. Instead he is able to measure his justice within the framework of eternity. This is why we don’t always understand the seemingly unjust events that occur. They seem unjust because we are seeing them only within the context of our earthly lives and not within the framework of our eternal lives.

When we are looking for an answer to an immediate problem, we need to keep in mind that God is always weighing that answer against our eternal life. If a situation has the potential to shatter some aspect of our life, two things often happen simultaneously. Our need for God’s intervention becomes profound. Yet, at the same time, our fears may become so overwhelming we also feel compelled to find our own solution. Unless we keep our minds focused on his sovereignty, any delay in receiving the answer we want not only becomes unbearable, but also often is felt as unjust. In an attempt to endure the pain, we may feel driven to find an escape in the noise of our distractions.

If we are waiting only for the profound answer, the one that will sweep us off our feet, then in midst of the noise, we might miss the answer coming in the still small voice of his whisper. “‘Go out and stand before me on the mountain,’ the Lord told him. And as Elijah stood there, the Lord

passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper” (1 Kings 19:11-12, NLT).

God doesn’t always make us wait for answers. But at times an immediate answer is not possible. Other things may have to occur before he is able to give us what we really need. If we truly want his will in our lives, our only choice is to wait in the silence for his still, small voice.

This is what Karen finally surrendered to. She took a chance and trusted that, in God’s sovereignty, he knew what he was doing. Instead of living with the noise of her many distractions, she reluctantly decided to sit with her pain and to endure the silence. She accepted that with loss comes grieving and with grieving comes pain and solitude. This was a process she needed to experience and one God respected as well. It was a slow process, but the more she trusted in God’s sovereignty to take care of her, the more she felt his presence. Eventually the silence was broken.

We may have already had or will yet experience a tragedy so life-altering as to question God’s presence, or absence, in our lives. If we remain faithful, we will always find God’s silence is never about his absence. It is always about his sovereignty.

If I discover within myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.



—C.S. Lewis



Trish is busy serving the three churches she and her husband care for. She is also continuing her writing. Life is good! E-mail her at trishanson@juno.com.



Being a Light...*has a lighter side!*

The only survivor of a shipwreck was washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for God to rescue him, and every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming.

Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect himself from the elements and to store his few possessions. But then one day, after scavenging for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, the smoke rolling up to the sky.

The worst had happened; everything was lost. He was stunned with grief and anger. "God, how could you do this to me!" he cried.

Early the next day, however, he was awakened by the sound of a ship approaching the island. It had come to rescue him. "How did you know I was here?" asked the weary man of his rescuers.

"We saw your smoke signal," they replied.

—www.cybersalt.com

Little boy goes to his father and asks "Daddy, how was I born?" The father answers: "Well, son, I guess one day you will need to find out anyway! Your Mom and I first got together in a chat room on Yahoo. Then I set up a date via e-mail with your Mom and we met at a cyber-cafe. We sneaked into a secluded room, where your mother agreed to a download from my hard drive. As soon as I was ready to upload, we discovered that neither one of us had used a firewall, and since it was too late to hit the delete button, nine months later a blessed little Pop-Up appeared and said:

You've Got Male!

—contributed by Nelson Haas

Frustrated at always being corrected by my hubby, I decided the next time it happened I would have a comeback. That moment finally arrived, and I was ready.

"You know," I challenged, "even a broken clock is right once a day."

He looked at me and replied, "Twice."

—www.cybersalt.com

Vacation: A two-week-long experience where money and time race against each other until both are totally exhausted.

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