



Connections

◆ A JOURNAL BY & FOR ELDERS' WIVES & FAMILIES ◆

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In Awe of Him

By Yvonne Baker

My husband Ollie and I boarded the plane, on our way to the pastor's conference in Palm Springs. We live about a hundred miles from the Little Rock airport, so we left home at 4 a.m. to catch our 7:42 a.m. flight. It was early, but we were so excited, we didn't care.

Upon arriving in Palm Springs, I felt I was in a dream world. It was such a beautiful place. I watched out the window as we flew around a mountain range and then dropped down into a small airport. The mountains formed a backdrop for the beautiful palm trees dotted across the landscape. It was an oasis in the desert.

After the conference, we went to the San Francisco Bay area, where we were met by our son John. He took us many places the next day, but three of our stops had a great effect on me.



At the aquarium were large tanks filled with water. We could walk around below and look through the glass to see all kinds of sea life. One tank contained huge fish. I spent most of my time there, marveling at these gigantic creatures.

As we walked around the aquarium we saw all sizes, varieties and colors of fish. It was amazing to see big fish, all the way down to tiny ones. We saw neon tetras as well as other varieties of tetras, lobsters, crayfish, frogs and minnows. Finally, we sat down on a bench and watched the penguins walk and then swim a while. I pondered in my mind, Why so much, Lord?

I even turned to my husband and remarked, "Why did God make so many fish?"

Next we went to a botanical garden. There again, I was

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In Awe of Him

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awed by so many types and colors of plants. One lily pad was so huge it could support a man's weight.

Later, at Fisherman's Wharf, I saw many people of different races and colors and heard many dialects. I kept asking myself, Why?

As I thought about it, I realized I'd limited God to my little world. My world consisted of a few buffalo fish, a few crappies and some catfish. The flowers in my world were impatiens, hostas, marigolds and lilies.

The people in my world were my friends at church and my acquaintances in our town—a few white people, a few Hispanic people and some black people.

It hit me. God was broadening my horizon. He caused me to see how limited I had been in my thinking. He is a Being so intelligent one cannot fathom his intellect, creative ability, power and might.

Now I know our God is an awesome God. Now I know my prayers will be different when I pray for my brothers and sisters around the world. When I pray for the creation, these images will come to mind and I know my prayers will be more effective.



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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 Nurturennet forum. We highlight ministry wives 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.



Do You Believe?

Mary and Martha didn't know what to think the day Jesus came into town four days after Lazarus was laid to rest. When their brother became ill and took a turn for the worse, they sent for Jesus, who they knew could heal him. They thought because Lazarus and Jesus were such good friends, Jesus would rush to his side and make everything better. But he didn't. It seemed Jesus had more important things to do, so he stayed right where he was, telling his disciples Lazarus was asleep. They thought he didn't understand Lazarus was dead. As usual, they were the ones who didn't understand.

When Jesus and the disciples finally arrived in Bethany where the sisters and brother lived, Martha told Jesus her brother's body was already starting to stink. They were so disappointed, they accused Jesus of waiting too long to come to the aid of his sick friend.

I would have been disappointed too, wouldn't you? Perhaps better words would be distraught, at wits' end, frantic, hysterical! Why did Jesus let their brother die? Why indeed? We often ask the same question today—why did God let my loved one die? Why did he allow this or that disaster to happen? When no answer comes, people turn away from God in anger.

But Mary and Martha, even though disappointed, hurt and a little angry, didn't turn away. His words in John 11 were enough to calm Martha. His tears in verse 35 showed Mary how much he cared.

Those same words comfort and calm me today, as I look forward to a milestone birthday and another Easter Sunday—two

occasions in my mind to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. In John 11, verse 25, Jesus didn't say: *Don't worry Martha, I'll resurrect Lazarus.* He said: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die like everyone else, will live again" (NLT).

I am the resurrection. Powerful words. How could he say that? How did he have the power to lay down his life and take it up again (Matthew 26:61)? We know what Mary, Martha, Lazarus and the disciples didn't find out until later—Jesus was and is and always will be God. He doesn't simply have the power to resurrect dead people, he is the resurrection, which means he is life. Life is inherent and intrinsic to God, which is why he calls himself I AM.

My imminent birthday started me thinking about life and death and what happens after that. When I read Jesus' words to Martha, I felt he was asking me the same question. Do you believe?

Do I believe he is the resurrection and the life? Do I believe that even though I'm going to die like everyone else, I will live again because I believe in Jesus? Yes I do. How could I enjoy whatever time I have left if I didn't?

Because Jesus laid down his life and took it up again, because the tomb was empty and Christ is risen, I will live again. Happy Easter and happy birthday to me!

Tammy

(We) need to learn to interpret our circumstances by (God's) love, not interpret His love by our circumstances!



—Anne Graham Lotz,
Just Give Me Jesus

Book Review



The Yada Yada Prayer Group

Author: Neta Jackson

Reviewed by Hannah Knaack

Have you ever been guilty of judging a book by its cover? My first impression of *The Yada Yada Prayer Group* was probably not what author Neta Jackson hoped for. The title and shocking pink cover with its row of women's feet in funky designer socks teased my eyes but prompted the question—this is a book about prayer? With such doubts of the book's worth, I didn't succumb to temptation until weeks later when curiosity got the best of me.



What I discovered was a wonderful reading journey about ordinary women from every walk of life (a real estate broker, an ex-con, a college student and a former drug addict, to name a few) who live in the real world and are desperate for God in their lives. What's interesting is they don't all yet realize how desperate they are for God, and we get to view their progression as the author blends their lives together.


The book opens in Chicago with 12 women joined together in a prayer group at a women's conference. By the end of their time in prayer, they decide to continue praying as a group and agree to stay in touch after the conference. We see their struggles and growth through the eyes of Jodi Baxter, wife and mother of two, who is still adjusting to city life after her

move from rural Iowa.

Soon this mismatched group begins meeting twice each month—slowly encroaching into each other's comfort zones and allowing room for the Holy Spirit to infiltrate. They choose a group name without knowing the meaning, only to discover God has the last laugh, for *Yada* means: "to perceive, understand, know, discern, to be familiar and to distinguish between right and wrong." As weeks turn into months these words hold more truth than each woman could imagine.

In Jodi's words: "Talk about a rock tumbler—knocking off each other's rough edges, learning to laugh and cry all the way. But when I faced the biggest crisis of my life, God used my newfound girlfriends to help teach me—Jodi Baxter, longtime Christian 'good girl'—what it means to be just a sinner saved by grace."

So, the moral of this story is don't judge a book (or new friend) by its cover! Guilty, as charged. While I enjoyed the book and recommend it, I would have loved it if Jackson had written through the eyes of several in the Yada Yada group, not just Jodi. Sometimes we're left wondering what's going on in the mind of the person Jodi's relating with because we see things mostly from her point of view.

The best thing about *The Yada Yada Prayer Group* is when you get to the end, there's more! Continue with *The Yada Yada Prayer Group Gets Down*, *The Yada Yada Prayer Group Gets Real* and *The Yada Yada Prayer Group Gets Tough*. It might give you ideas for a new prayer group in your home town. 

God does not tell you what he is going to do; he reveals to you who he is.



—Oswald Chambers

Savoring a Season of Suffering

By Gail Stoddart

My husband Ron and I attended a dinner where a woman spoke about a season of suffering.

I listened carefully because I've been in such a season. I had surgery on both feet and two skin cancer operations. Insomnia took its toll on my sleep. At times I've had a feeling of being out of touch with God. I know time and chance happen to us all, but I was sure God had something for me to learn through the pain and discouragement.

One thing I'm learning is God was there all along. He said he'd never forsake me. He was always with me; it was my doubt that was the problem. As the speaker went on I realized I needed to savor my season of suffering. Why do I say this? To savor is to get the different tastes and sensations. A quick gulp won't reveal the nuances of the flavors. Summer and fall, winter and spring, all four seasons offer different types of enjoyment. So it is with the seasons of our lives.

In whatever season, we need to savor it, whether it is a time of joy and abundance or a time of sorrow and temptation. King Solomon writes of these seasons in Ecclesiastes 3. In 1 Peter 1:6 to 7 is a reference to a season of temptation. I know of some whose season of suffering lasted many years.

My season of suffering is producing sweet fruit I'm learning to savor. Hebrews 12:11 talks of the peaceable fruit of righteousness that comes after a season of suffering. So instead of trying to escape from my trial and suffering I am learning to savor this time.

It isn't easy to "count it all joy when you fall into different trials and temptations" as James wrote (James 1:2). But if we prayerfully savor whatever God serves up, we'll get the most out of the season.



Gail and Ron serve the Salt Lake City, Utah, congregation. They have been married 33 years and have two grown children. Gail drives a school bus, which keeps her busy and up early. E-mail her at gailbus@msn.com.



Nurturennet

Nurturennet is a computer forum for elders' wives. Its purpose is to help you stay connected through digest mode communication (each day's messages compiled into one e-mail). You might 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@wgc.org.



Are You Afraid of the Dark?

By Joyce Catherwood

Are you afraid of the dark? I have to admit I am. When my husband is out of town and I am home alone at night, I leave a light on in the hallway. Most of us have at least a little fear of the dark. It makes us feel uncomfortable, maybe a bit insecure, and some of us even panic in the dark. We don't

like the darkness, yet it is inevitable, isn't it? Darkness comes with the closing of each day, no exceptions.

Did you know a medical condition called Sundowner's syndrome

can affect elderly people? As the day ends and darkness sets in, those afflicted feel a deep sense of loss, anxiety and especially loneliness. My dad was affected by this condition for a couple of years before his death, especially after losing my mom. He lived next door and each evening as I checked on him, he talked about how he hated this time of day. As twilight turned to darkness, he would be overcome with a surge of loneliness and anxiety.

In the same way our physical surroundings can't always be filled with light, our spiritual lives won't always be filled with light. We somehow mistakenly feel if we do and say all the right things, our lives will always be filled with light, with never any dark

moments of grief or despair or disappointment.

Inner darkness usually appears uninvited and unannounced. We view it as an intruder. Yet it is a natural part of life just as the outer darkness of night is a natural part of life. This unwanted inner darkness that fades in and out of our lives is an essential part of our spiritual journey and, without it, we won't experience personal growth.

Several years back I struggled through a particularly dark period of depression. On a couple of occasions I made the mistake of attempting to express how I felt in a public forum. The overall reaction to my plight came as a surprise. While a few showed compassion and empathy, what I found in general was an immediate and well-meaning attempt to fix me. They gave wonderful advice on how I should pick myself up and keep going. Their comments indicated the circumstances I described as contributing to my depression were not really as bad as they seemed, that situations really were not the way I perceived them.

Now, all of the helpful comments had credibility and I obviously needed to be fixed. What was sorely lacking was the permission I craved to feel my pain in community and for it to be validated, which is also a part of the healing process.

From those present in the room I sensed a fear of my darkness. This drove me further into isolation and discouragement.

Several authors refer to this inner darkness that affects us spiritually as a "holy dark." The darkness can come in many forms: illness, failure, loss, disappointment and anything else that can strike fear or sadness in our hearts and minds. And it will come to us all, no matter how well-planned our lives may be.

The holy dark experience is not pleasant



Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal.



—Henry Ford

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Reflections on the Year That Was

By Sheila Dela Peña

For most people, a new year is the time to write down new resolutions. For others it's the opportunity to review last year's goals and resolutions, revise those that no longer fit and improve on those not faithfully followed.

For me, I can't help but reflect on the events of the past year and how they affected or changed me. It's also inevitable that last year's experiences will affect this year's, I hope in a positive way.

Year 2005 was a difficult year for my husband and me. We rode on a number of emotional roller coasters that left us drained, off balance and gasping for breath. Many times we felt as if we were sinking into a financial abyss, with no safety nets or handles to grab onto. Hope was unsteady and seemed to come and go like the mist over the sea.

An empty fridge and pantry became regular sights, and missing a meal or two ceased to be a strange occurrence. Disillusionment in the church and workplace developed and truly tested our faith in, love for and obedience to God. Disappointment in people and betrayals from friends and fellow Christians weighed heavily on our hearts. Christ's promises seemed to blur in the midst of trying and emotionally pain-filled experiences.

Our dire circumstances behooved us to get on our knees more and fix our eyes on Jesus. After all, people let us down, situations let us down and even our own snail-paced growth let us down. And, yes, we encountered that bump in the ceiling where our tear-filled prayers

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Afraid of the Dark?

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or fun. It makes us vulnerable and needy. We cry out for intervention, mercy and grace. This helplessness sends us directly into the arms of our Savior, so the results are eternal. We are never the same afterward.

We don't need to be afraid of the dark. Just leave the hall light on. That light is Jesus. He experienced the darkness of rejection and crucifixion. He understands what we go through when darkness falls.



Joyce says as she gets older, for some reason deciding what to wear gets harder. Then she watches "What Not to Wear" on TV and gets even more confused. But she says she has made her 40-something daughters promise to tell her when she should stop wearing jeans. E-mail her at joyce.catherwood@wcg.org.

Reflections

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seemed to endlessly and hopelessly collect.

If there was anything I learned from all the pain and troubles of the past year, it is this: God answers our prayers according to his perfect will.

I prayed for faith—he gave me challenges to test and grow his faith in me.

I prayed for a deeper knowledge of him—he gave me pain to see people, things and circumstances through his love-filled eyes.

I prayed for thirst for him and his word—he gave me desolation to bring me to my knees and desire him over anything and anyone.

I prayed for utter dependence on him—he took away all forms of security to teach me to pray for my needs and trust he will provide.

I prayed for courage—he allowed my fears to surface to lead my wavering heart to Jesus.

I prayed for more of his revelation in my life—he gave me an inner ache to direct my heart and soul to the Holy Spirit and open

There are nine requisites for contented living: health enough to make work a pleasure; wealth enough to support your needs; strength to battle with difficulties and overcome them; grace enough to confess your sins and forsake them; patience enough to toil until some good is accomplished; charity enough to see some good in your neighbor; love enough to move you to be useful and helpful to others; faith enough to make real the things of God; hope enough to remove all anxious fears concerning the future.

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

myself to his loving and powerful enlightenment, as well as visions of his everlasting kingdom.

When my husband and I reflected on what one thing we would ask God for in this life, if he would grant us only one prayer, we knew in our hearts we would ask for more of Jesus and less of us in our lives. We are nothing if not servants of the Most High God, and he is most gracious and merciful to call us his children and heirs of his kingdom.

We realized despite our frequently desperate financial situation, we would rather have Jesus than material wealth. We can take physical hunger but would be utterly desolate without Christ's spiritual nourishment in our lives. We will go where the Father leads us, even if it means a lot of physical, financial and emotional sacrifice. If there's anything we're certain of, it is God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. God was, is and always will be!

My husband and I don't have it all together yet—perhaps we never will in this lifetime. But 2006 suddenly doesn't look so daunting. God has prepared us for this year, and will continue to do so in the years to come. And even when we find ourselves ill-equipped, Christ is more than enough and he's certainly more than able to pull us through life's hurdles.

Jesus Christ is more than enough—he is everything! Let us throw away everything that hinders us (superficial faith, self-righteousness, self-sufficiency) and fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. It's 2006. Isn't it about time?



Sheila is learning to train their new labrador pup and is learning patience and endurance in the process. She says he may be an inspiration for her next article. E-mail her at sheila_delapena@yahoo.com.



Blessed Be the *Pink*

By *Hannah Knaack*

Nothing spelled bliss to my 5-year-old heart like the glorious experience of being first in line after church to wear Mama's high-heeled pumps. The weeks my older and much faster sister beat me to the punch I was destined to "make do" as Mama so aptly put it.



So I would rummage through the toy box to find two chunky alphabet blocks and with the aid of two fat rubber bands, attach my "heels" to the underside of my flip-flops. These weren't just any flip-flops mind you—they were pink. Next to wearing Mama's real church shoes, this clearly elegant footwear was the best thing. Or so I told myself as I clip-clopped clumsily down the hallway after my sister in my best grown-up manner.

Having experienced pink, I should have been able to handle anything my daughter sent my way, yet life is not so simple. Oh, she had the usual requests: pink shoes, pink socks, pink shirts, pink coat, pink nail polish, ad nauseum. I'm quite positive I overheard her reciting Matthew 5 one day: "Blessed are those who wear pink, for they will be called the daughters of God."

In addition to the pink clothing, she had to have a pink book bag, a pink purse, a pink linen set and other such paraphernalia too numerous to mention. All of this pales in comparison to the day she discovered hot pink in the medicine cabinet.

My peaceful and nearly perfect 6-year-old knew better than to drag the kitchen chair over and raid the forbidden cabinet but the call of pink was so strong. So with a Queen Esther (if I perish, I perish) toss of her



head, she downed the entire bottle of Pepto-Bismol.

I will be eternally grateful the dear woman answering phones at the Poison Control Center in Kansas City couldn't read my mind. I'm sure it's not kosher to plan your child's demise while you're seeking ways to keep her alive.

After I thoroughly explained to my dear one that pink was for the outside of the body, she promptly asked for a pink bicycle. Add to that a pink bicycle basket, a pink bell, a pink helmet and, well, you're getting the picture.

To show her I harbored no hard feelings about the medicine cabinet catastrophe, I promised to stencil lovely pink ballet slippers along the entire wall in her bedroom. This was my first stenciling experience, so I read the how-to book, followed by a viewing of the video. Next came a well-planned trip to town to purchase the best quality stencil brush, just the right size stencil and, of course, the perfect shade of ballerina pink paint.

After hours of meticulous stenciling, as my brush cleared the last stroke with a silent swish, I overheard my daughter saying to her friend, "I think my new favorite color is blue."



Hannah planted flower bulbs last fall and is anxiously awaiting her new pink tulips. She has over 50 types of perennial flowers in her flower beds, with hundreds of individual plants, so when spring comes, she's busy! Flowers are like chocolate, one of each please! She's proud of her daughter-in-law, Andrea, who graduates college in May. E-mail Hannah at justmomhkl@juno.com.

Zorro and Me

The Church Picnic

By Barbara Dahlgren

People can't call themselves church members unless they've attended a church picnic. Actually, you have to attend quite a few to be considered spiritual or holy. I've attended many picnics through the years, but my holiness is somewhat tainted by the fact that I hate picnics.

This admission could be tantamount to sacrilege. Perhaps hate is too strong a word. Let's just say I'm not really a picnic-type person. To me it's counterproductive to dirty up your kitchen, place your food, silverware, drinks, plates and tablecloths in baskets and coolers, load it all in a car, haul it to a wooded area and share it with every bug in the neighborhood, including ants who sing, "The ants go marching two by two, hurrah, hurrah," as they carry your goodies away. Did you know some ants can carry up to 50 times their body weight? But I digress!

I know most people think a picnic is a beautiful family outing and church bonding experience. To me it will always be a potluck with flies. With that said, I have to admit I've learned a few life lessons over the years because of church picnics.

About 35 years ago, when we first started working in Valdosta, Georgia, Zorro, a great

The highest type of heroism is not the courage and nerve of the warrior facing the foe, but the courage to face the daily issues of life, opposing wrong and upholding right.

—Roswell C. Long

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picnic lover, announced to the congregation his plan for a church picnic. It would be a swell way for us to get to know everyone. He also said it would be a potluck.

We were bombarded with people after church thanking us for our benevolence. Imagine our surprise when we found out the term *potluck* in that particular area (in those days, anyway) meant we would provide all the food. In other words, when everyone shows up they just eat whatever you happen to have in your "pot." By church definition, potluck to us had always meant all people bring food to share.

Life lesson #1—be careful about terminology in new areas.

Many years later we worked in London, Kentucky, and the men were to make all the desserts at our yearly picnic. One memorable dessert was a delicious looking chocolate cake. It was actually a cake tin turned upside down and frosted. So each time someone came through the food line and tried to cut it, they hit metal. Then there was the yummy looking frosted sponge cake that turned out to be—you guessed it—a frosted sponge. This cake gave the impression it was a real cake because it was so springy. It was funny watching everyone try to cut through that one. Many were quite determined to get a piece of that cake! Then some joker always made a mud pie with real mud and thought it was hilarious.

Life lesson #2—men have a warped sense of humor.

My favorite picnic story occurred in Detroit, Michigan, where the annual picnic was a highlight for the children. One of our members worked at a toy factory. Each year the factory donated toys for us to distribute to kids at our picnic. One year I was running a little late getting everything



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The Church Picnic

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ready—you know, cooking the food, putting it and the silverware, drinks, plates and tablecloths in baskets and coolers, getting it all in a car, so we could haul it to a wooded area to share with the ants.

We decided Zorro would go ahead in our van loaded with the toys and I would soon follow. He made a quick stop for gas and headed for the park. Driving along he noticed an angry man in a little white car pulling up next to him, pointing to him to pull over. The little white car was actually trying to force Zorro off the road. Zorro wasn't about to pull over for some crazy guy. So he started praying for God to send a police officer. Lo and behold within minutes Zorro saw a police car in his rearview mirror. Lights were flashing, sirens were blaring, and Zorro was thanking God for answering his prayer so quickly.

The police pulled up right behind Zorro's van and motioned for him to pull over. Zorro thought the police needed to go after the angry guy in the white car but wanting to observe the law, he pulled over to the side of the road. The policeman walked up to Zorro's window, looked him square in the eye and said, "Do you make a habit of not paying for your gas?" Zorro was dumbfounded, but it all began to make sense.

He remembered going into the office of the gas station to pay for his gas with a credit card, but the man said, "Just pay afterwards." In a hurry to get to the picnic, Zorro had filled up, hopped in the van and hit the road.

By now the guy in the little white car had pulled over too. He was the owner of the gas station. He had called the police. Zorro apologized profusely. The policeman told Zorro the owner would not press charges if he would return to the gas station and pay for his gas. So that's what he did.

At the gas station, Zorro paid up and

asked the owner if he had kids. He did, so Zorro opened the back of the van displaying all the toys and told him to take his pick. This made the angry owner very happy. He did share with Zorro that had he not looked like a clean-cut, decent-type guy, he might have legally shot him for robbery. Boy, was Zorro glad he showered and shaved that morning!

Life lesson #3—God always answers your prayers—and the other guy's too!

I'll see you at the picnic! You'll be able to recognize me. I'll be the grumpy one on the blanket singing, "The ants go marching two by two, hurrah, hurrah!"



Barbara and Mel (Zorro) have been married more than 35 years. They have served churches in Florida, Kentucky, West Virginia, Washington, Michigan, Georgia and now serve in San Jose, California. Barbara loves to read, write, sing, watch old movies and play board games. Please e-mail her at bydahlgren@pacbell.net. She loves hearing from you! (© January 2005)

I was irrevocably betrothed to laughter, the sound of which has always seemed to me to be the most civilized music in the world.

—Peter Ustinov (1921-2004)



Some Blessings Won't Wait!

By Lorraine Pelley and Rich Huber

This past year brought many blessings for the Pelley family. In May, our daughter Karen received her doctorate in physical therapy from the University of Southern California. She was engaged the same month to Kelvin Langford, a man she attended Ambassador College with in the 1990s. They married in September.



We were also blessed with the birth of our second grandchild. Our daughter Lisa had a 30-hour labor with the birth of her first child, so she was apprehensive about going through it again. I asked a number of

my friends to pray for her. Those final weeks many prayers were prayed for her and for the health of our grandson.

Two years ago when Katie was born, we offered a weekly date night for Lisa and Rich while we took care of Katie. (This was a bit selfish on our part as we wanted special time with Katie, but we said this was our gift to help their marriage continue to blossom!) On August 9 we were babysitting Katie so they could enjoy a date night. When they dropped her off, I asked Lisa if she was experiencing any labor pains. She told me she was fine. That would change shortly, but the best way to relate the rest of that evening is to share a letter written by our son-in-law about the birth of our grandson, Brady.

Birth of Brady George Huber

“Lisa and I had planned everything down to the smallest detail. After all, we were seasoned vets. The overnight suitcase had been

packed for weeks and stowed in the van. So when the contractions began Tuesday night around 7, we gave each other the knowing we-are-in-control nod and kept eating dinner. We executed plan A, which was hunker down, make ourselves comfortable and expect a long haul.

“We timed contractions and sized intensity with the great accuracy of my stop watch (down to the 100th second). Everything was in order and Lisa seemed quite content, even though the thought of going through a 30-hour labor and natural childbirth scared her half to death. I told her I would drive down to Blockbuster to pick up a few movies to pass the time. I took my time selecting the right movies for the occasion. I didn't flinch when people cut in front of me or when I got behind a slow driver on the ride home.

“I walked in with the movies, laid out some pillows on the living room floor and got some body cream to massage Lisa's back between contractions. Lisa was on the computer paying one last bill. I did some odds and ends, such as fill the dog dish and place a couple water bottles in the van. When I walked in from the garage Lisa mentioned she had passed a small bit of blood. ‘Well,’ I said, ‘although not common, this does happen. Here, I'll show you on page 456 of *What to Expect When You're Expecting*.’

“As I flipped through the pages, thinking I could calm her, she said the words every father-to-be dreads, ‘I really need to push.’

“‘Are you serious, we haven't been through stage one, stage two, or stage three; we can't be there already.’ We decided to head to the hospital immediately. When the second big contraction hit, Lisa's screams reverberated through the van. In the midst of that awful noise, I dialed the wrong number for hospital labor and delivery. I don't

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Blessings

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think the message I left on John Doe's voice mail made much sense to him.

"Lisa, we are only eight minutes from the hospital. We can make it if you can hold on for a few more contractions,' I said with some composure.

"We headed out of the driveway and down the street, as I again dialed the hospital. 'Yes, this is Rich Huber, we are preregistered and we'll be there in less than 10 minutes,' I said with accuracy. I was back in the driver's seat. I turned the corner, then WOAHHAAAAHWOAAAAAA, a bunch of screaming and, 'There's the head!' I told the phone attendant I was heading to the fire station, one block away. She said that might be a good idea. I turned the corner and the shoulders were out. I pulled into the driveway of the fire station and Brady was in Lisa's hands. I still had the cell phone to my ear.

"The moral of the story: If you think it's possible your baby might be born in the vehicle on the way to the hospital, remember to take your wife's car. You wouldn't believe the mess!"

So, as you can tell, sometimes blessings won't wait. My friends and I prayed for an easier and quicker labor and God truly answered our prayers! As I watched Lisa holding our precious grandson, I reminded her of all the prayers. She laughed and said: "Thanks Mom. But maybe your prayers should be a bit more specific next time! This was really fast!"



Lorraine and Dennis serve in New Hope Christian Fellowship in Pasadena, California. She loves being "Mimi" (grandma) to their two grandchildren. She's very involved in the music at New Hope but her delight is opening their home to people. E-mail her at lorraine.pelley@wcg.org.



Connections

I Was Just Thinking...

...about my great-niece. She's 19 months old, bright, cute and all-around terrific! You will note that doting grandparents have nothing on doting aunts. She regularly attends services and is taught about Jesus by her parents.

The time came for her to visit her grandparent's church. There, prominently displayed near the altar, was a large crucifix. The service goes on, the congregation sings, the minister preaches and the great-niece begins to speak. At first, it is a little mumble, but it becomes louder, and louder, and more and more intense. "Careful, careful. Careful, Jesus, don't fall. Careful, Jesus!"

Her grandfather, my brother, says he can never look at that crucifix in the same way again. Her mother, my niece, is delighted everyone knows they are teaching her about the adult as well as the baby Jesus. The great-aunt, me, after laughing hysterically, began to think: How often do we see a cross or a crucifix and think of how much that means to us rather than thinking of what that sacrifice was like for our Lord?

I was just thinking...

—Sharie Meyer,
Tracy, California

Life is the childhood
of our immortality.



—Johann Wolfgang
von Goethe

Spring 2006

I Only Know...

By Dixie Marino

I don't know why things are the way they are or how God works them out. I only know he does. I don't know when I may see certain desires granted, if ever in this realm. I only know God has made certain promises to me. I don't know what the future holds for us, I only know God will be with us. He never leaves us alone. Sometime it seems if we had some answers life would be easier.

I'm not sure answers will be as important to me when I live in God's dwelling place. So it makes me wonder if answers should be that important now. Maybe if we just let go and give things to God, it will be answer enough.

I only know it gives me great peace now that I don't need a reason for everything past, present and future. It's restful to stop wishing some things had been different, and to understand and accept the things I can't change.

If I really believe God has been with me, then I must believe he has worked all the events of my life into his plan for me. I can't question that. God loves me and he allows only what will bring me closer in my walk with him. He is faithful to me with integrity. Even when I can't see him he is there, smoothing the path and taking the killing blows. He guards my soul. He is jealous about my well-being.

There is so much comfort in surrender, though I had to get used to it. My personality wanted to tell me it was a sell-out. I needed to take some responsibility to make sure everything and everyone was doing all right. I needed to prod myself and monitor my goodness level. I needed to look all right to everyone even if it was just a show.

That was my old self. My new surrendered self knows only what Jesus tells me. Come unto me all you who are weary (with your own way) and heavy-laden (with all your real and imagined responsibilities) and I will give you rest (see Matthew 11:28).

I only know he made that promise to me and I took him up on it—even though it was later in my journey—and he has kept his word. It's not a one-time deal. It is every day, in every way. It is all throughout the day and when I lie down to sleep.

It's in the car as we rush to the next appointment or child pick-up. It's when the laundry has piled up and the chores seem to have no end. It's when your choral concert was scheduled on the same afternoon as Women's Discipleship class.

I know it's sometimes hard for us to believe the Great God is interested in our laundry piles, but he really cares about our peace of mind. In John 14 when Jesus was having a last private talk with the disciples, he told them he would give them his peace. He was going out to face the hardest time of his life, but he had peace. He trusted God. He trusted him with his life.

I know only since I have started trusting God I have rest and peace.

I know I am experiencing only a small taste of what waits in heaven.

I know there is much I don't know, but that's all right.

I know as we journey through this life, Jesus is with us.

I know when all here is said and done, heaven waits.



Changing the World, One Person at a Time

When I was young and free and my imagination had no limits, I dreamed of changing the world. As I grew older and wiser, I discovered that the world would not change, so I shortened my sights somewhat and decided to change only my country. But it, too, seemed immovable. As I grew into my twilight years, in one last desperate attempt, I settled for changing only my family, those closest to me, but alas, they would have none of it.

And now as I lie on my deathbed, I suddenly realize: If only I had changed myself first, then by example I would have changed my family. From their inspiration and encouragement, I would then have been able to better my country and, who knows, I may have even changed the world.



—Unknown

The commitments that people make to values beyond the self are manifested in various ways—in their family and community life, in the way they treat any and all humans, in the goals and standards they set for themselves. There are men and women who make the world better just by being the kind of people they are. They have the gift of kindness or courage or loyalty or integrity. It really matters very little whether they are behind the wheel of a truck, or running a business, or bringing up a family. They teach the truth by living it.

—Donald Kennedy,
President of Stanford,
Commencement, 1991



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Not-So-Doubting Thomas

By Sue Berger

Have you ever tried putting yourself in Thomas' shoes—or maybe you've already been there?

Jesus enters Jerusalem with a lot of hoopla and crowds honoring him as a king. Over Passover dinner, Jesus' discourse confuses the daylights out of the disciples (John 16:17) to the point they ask him to speak more clearly, which he apparently does (verse 29). The evening hasn't gone smoothly.

Jesus makes an issue of washing the disciples' feet, to which Peter objects, prompting an exchange between them (John 13). Jesus discusses his own death, predicts his betrayal and fingers Judas, who leaves in a huff. Peter gets defensive and Jesus tells him by night's end, he will disown Jesus—three times. Peter? Impossible! The evening is strained; confusion reigns.

Jesus reassures his disciples he's going to prepare a place for them and that he'll come back for them. Then he says they know the way to where he's going (John 14:1-4). Huh? Thomas dares to voice what they're all thinking; that they don't have a clue what he's talking about. "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (verse 5). Don't you love the person who asks the obvious question? Thomas didn't understand and was willing to admit it and ask. Jesus honored his question by explaining he himself is the Way, the Truth and the Life (verse 6).

But the evening isn't over. After more last-minute instruction to the disciples (John 14-17), they head out of town. Jesus is betrayed, arrested, tried, convicted and crucified (John 18-19). The disciples scatter like rabbits. How confusing would that have been? To go from triumphal entry to crucifixion. My head swims at the thought. Imagine the discussions among them as they tried to make sense of Jesus' last words in the light of the reality they found themselves in.

Then the women report seeing the resurrected Jesus. Oh come on! What next? But sure enough—Jesus appears in a locked room with the gathered disciples (John 20:19). As proof it was truly him, he showed them his hands and the wound in his side. The disciples were overjoyed (verse 20). It was really Jesus!

Then the women report seeing the resurrected Jesus. Oh come on! What next? But sure enough—Jesus appears in a locked room with the gathered disciples (John 20:19). As proof it was truly him, he showed them his hands and the wound in his side. The disciples were overjoyed (verse 20). It was really Jesus!

But Thomas wasn't with the group. We can only guess why. Maybe he was tired of all the theories and endless speculation. Maybe he needed some time alone to sort out his thoughts. He must have questioned everything he'd learned and believed over the past several years. Some people seek solitude under pressure. I can relate to that.

The disciples seek him out and excitedly tell him they've seen Jesus. I can see Thomas rolling his eyes and saying, "I'll believe it when I see him with my own eyes" (verse 25). I can't



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Doubting Thomas

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say I blame him. He wasn't being unreasonable. The other disciples were convinced only after seeing Jesus' hands and side.

Another week goes by (verse 26) before Jesus appears to the disciples again. Can you imagine the anticipation every time they were together? The disciples' excitement and Thomas' skepticism? I'm sure he wanted to believe Jesus was alive, but he hadn't experienced what they had.

Finally Jesus appears to them again behind locked doors, and he addresses Thomas personally (verse 27). It's not an accusation. It's an invitation. To touch and handle Jesus' wounds. To no longer doubt, but to believe. Don't miss the love in this personal exchange between them. Thomas responds, "My Lord and my God!" (verse 28). What worship and what insight! Not only did Thomas recognize Jesus, he acknowledged him as God.

It encourages me to see Thomas listed in the group of disciples out fishing together (John 21:2) when Jesus appears to them again and cooks breakfast on the shore. He's back interacting with the group.

I don't view his doubt as a character flaw. Scripture shows us he took personal responsibility for what he didn't understand and wasn't ashamed to ask questions. He was an independent thinker, perhaps seeking solitude to sort out his thoughts. Thomas didn't jump on the bandwagon just because the other disciples were on it. He sought personal conviction and Jesus honored that in a touching and loving way.

I believe Jesus is the same today as he was then. He'll meet us in very personal ways too, if we'll just ask.



Sue has become addicted to books on CD! The inspiration for this article came from listening to them while walking on her treadmill. She listens to them in the car too, then passes them on to a little network of gals at church who like listening while commuting. They have their own "mobile library." E-mail her at sueberger2000@hotmail.com. (© 2006 Sue Berger; Roster Artist of Incubator Creative Group)

Connections Is on the Internet!

You may now access *Connections* at www.wcg.org/online; click on *Connections for Clergy Family Support*; the link for *Connections the Journal* appears on the left.

The updated WCG pastoral web pages also include links to information on personal counseling for clergy families, conferences for ministers and wives, books, magazines and Internet sites that offer support and encouragement for ministry workers.

It is accessible with your joint password. Please take advantage of the resources provided. Comments and suggestions about what you'd like to see on this site are welcome (e-mail tammy_tkach@wcg.org).

In the Shadow of His Grace

**Trust in the Lord
With All Your Heart
And He Shall Direct Your Paths**

—Proverbs 3:5-6

By *Trish A. Clauson*

I emerged from childhood a mere shadow of myself. I had no life skills apart from survival. I wasn't connected to anyone or anything. I had learned to act like everyone else, but I didn't understand life or living.

What I did have was a small piece of divine evidence there was a God who knew I existed and enough money to attend college.

Immediately I reveled in the freedom of my new life. I wanted to absorb everything—the classes, the friendships, the wisdom—the entire environment.

What I didn't know was that abuse had so cluttered my mind with misinformation, overdeveloped survival skills and an endless, ever-present need to be vigilant, that it struggled to hold the new information I was so eager to keep. Despite the new beliefs I managed to internalize, I left college completely ignorant of the firm grip my old beliefs still had on me.

Within a week, my world began to fall apart. I was bombarded with what I now know to be emotional triggers from my past. My abuse was so pervasive that almost every normal sight, sound or smell became a trigger.

I experienced one of these triggers when Arnold and I were looking for our first apartment. As we walked into the front room, I began to feel an overwhelming need to run. With no reasonable explanation and much to my new husband's confusion and disappointment, I told him I couldn't live there. I stood helpless, becoming more and more haunted by a deep and growing fear that something was very wrong with me.

A few years ago I found an explanation

for the panic I felt that day. The ceiling light in the room was so dim that it created shadows much like the ones I lived with as a child. These shadows triggered emotional memories of my abuse. All the oppression and the terror I experienced so many years before were now right there with me. Yet I was oblivious to that connection.

My life had just begun and it was already riddled with hundreds of triggers, all inexplicable, all reinflicting pain and confusion, and all driving me to my knees. I pored over the scriptures that had become so familiar to me in college. I will never leave you or forsake you. I will not try you beyond what you can stand. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not to your own understanding and he shall direct your paths.

Yet, with every passing day, I was pulled back into the environment of my childhood and subjected to a barrage of belittling, condemning messages of worthlessness. I had no understanding of what was happening to me, no answers, no emotional strength, no advocate, nothing but to trust God would be true to his Word.

But answers did not immediately come. Instead, God remained silent, so I locked away the cries of my heart and silenced myself. I shut down my needs as much as possible and gave away what was left of me.

This decision allowed me to quietly exist for more than a decade. It also allowed me to live as a pastor's wife and a mother, in spite of what lay menacingly ready to destroy me. Although shutting down didn't stop the triggers, focusing away from myself kept me from becoming desperate enough to do something I would regret. If I truly wanted God to direct my path, I had no choice but to wait.

I now understand why God waited so long to give me answers. I wasn't ready for them any sooner. In his deep and abiding love, God was waiting for the right

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Shadow of Grace

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time—the right time for me. God knew me inside and out. He knew my deepest heart's desires, hopes and dreams, and he honored them. If he had opened my eyes when I was a young mother, I would have begun the long, painful journey through recovery too soon. My children and husband would have suffered in ways God knew none of us could bear.

God also was waiting for the right resources to become available to see me through a successful recovery. He wanted to give me every advantage and he weighed that in the context of how much I could withstand, both in the years before recovery and through it.

I know God was not responsible for what happened to me. And even though he had the power to stop it or to at least make the journey a little less agonizing, he chose not to. I am certain my cries pierced his heart. But no matter how much he may have wanted to change the course of my life, first he needed me to trust that he could. To do anything else would mean wrenching the control of my life away from me. That he would not do.

Instead of miraculously delivering me from the effects of abuse, he entered my reality and patiently taught me to overcome them. God not only walked with me, he also orchestrated every detail. No matter how abandoned I felt, he never left me alone. I am where I am today because God stayed true to his word to direct my path. But things from my past still haunt me.

My childhood overwhelmed me with too much pain and too much fear. Instead of being allowed to feel those emotions, I had to stuff them, remaining calm and obedient. Those emotions are still buried deep within me. Any number of unsuspecting triggers can bring them to the surface, recreating that same overwhelming en-

vironment. And feeling overwhelmed is the worst trigger of all.

Through recovery I learned to will disturbing memories to my mind, so I could analyze and deal with them. This gave me some power over them. But I can't will the emotions. They come unbidden and without warning, leaving me temporarily disabled.

The threat of what these emotions can do keeps me on my knees. Knowing how much they intensify the pain of my normal day-to-day life, my greatest fear is what would happen to me in the event of a tragedy. As I can't keep them from emerging, I'm unable to comprehend the magnitude of what I'd be facing as they combined with the profound kind of emotions borne out of tragedy. Trusting God is the only way I can live with this constant angst.

Matthew 10:29-31 (NIV) says, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. . . So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." If a sparrow can't fall to the ground apart from God's will, I have to believe I won't either.

I cling every day to the hope that whatever God plans for me, he knows exactly what he's doing. Given our history together, I believe I'm in very good hands.

Next Issue: ". . . And the Truth Will Set You Free."



Trish prayed God would honor her desire to refocus away from recovery by showing her if she had missed anything. He honored that prayer in spades. During the month of January she felt herself "coming into existence!" She is now eager for whatever he has in store for her. E-mail her at trishanson@juno.com.

Upon Further Reflection

Countertops

Have you ever wiped your countertops and walked away just to look back and see an area you completely missed? That's the way scripture happens for me. I read a certain verse and feel blessed with revelation, only to revisit the same passage and find another viewpoint.

I think it has to do with light. The light shines all over the countertops, but when I look from another direction, I see an area that needs more attention. The same holds true of scripture reading. A verse such as Philippians 4:7 (“and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”) sticks in my mind because the thought is so beautiful and comforting.

But for a more revealing reflection, read the whole passage that begins in verse 4 and concludes in verse 9. The apostle Paul tells us rejoice in the Lord always and don't worry so much, but always be thankful and prayerful and talk to God about our needs.

Paul goes on to say thinking on things true, noble, just, pure, lovely and on things that have virtue and are praiseworthy cultivates and nurtures this state of peace.

And so as more light falls on our countertop, we see from another place—a greater vantage point—areas where we need to apply “Jesus shiner.” A little more time, effort and attention polish up our lives and our pathway becomes brighter.

I think about it every time I give my countertops one last wipe down. Have I checked it from every direction or did I miss a spot?



—Dixie Marino (and Maggie)

Dixie crochets for a prayer shawl ministry. E-mail her at cdmarino@clis.com.

The Easter message tells us that our enemies, sin, the curse and death, are beaten. Ultimately they can no longer start mischief. They still behave as though the game were not decided, the battle not fought; we must still reckon with them, but fundamentally we must cease to fear them any more.

—Karl Barth: *Dogmatics in Outline*,
Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc.

Tomb, thou shalt not hold Him longer;
Death is strong, but Life is stronger;
Stronger than the dark, the light;
Stronger than the wrong, the right;
Faith and Hope triumphant say
Christ will rise on Easter Day.



—Phillips Brooks; *An Easter Carol*

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

Noah was standing at the gangplank checking off the pairs of animals when he saw three camels trying to get on board. "Wait a minute!" he said. "Two each is the limit. One of you will have to stay behind."

"It won't be me," said the first camel. "I'm the camel whose back is broken by the last straw."

"I'm the one people swallow while straining at a gnat," said the second.

"And I am the one that shall pass through the eye of a needle sooner than a rich man shall enter heaven," said the third.

"Well, I guess you had better all come in," said Noah. "the world is going to need all of you."

—www.cleanlaffs.com

Spring is Nature's way of saying "let's party!"

—Unknown

A man and his wife are sitting in the living room and he says to her, "Just so you know, I never want to live in a vegetative state dependent on some machine. If that ever happens, just pull the plug."

"OK," says his wife as she gets up and unplugs the TV.

—www.cleanlaffs.com

I felt like my body had gotten totally out of shape, so I got my doctor's permission to join a fitness club and start exercising. I decided to take an aerobics class. I bent, twisted, gyrated, jumped up and down and perspired for an hour. But by the time I got my leotards on, the class was over.

—www.cleanlaffs.com

Earth laughs in flowers.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Whoever thought up the word *mammogram*? Every time I hear it, I think I'm supposed to put my breast in an envelope and send it to someone

—Jan King