



Connections

◆ A JOURNAL BY & FOR WOMEN IN MINISTRY ◆

Vol. 15, No. 1

Spring 2008

I Just Wanna Be Normal!

By Sue Berger

I'm not normal. To those of you who know me well, you may now roll your eyes and sigh. But honestly, this came as a bit of a shock to me. I think of myself as pretty average, middle-of-the-road normal. Grasping for equilibrium, I looked up the word: "According with, constituting, or not deviating from a norm, rule, or principle; conforming to a type, standard, or regular pattern; occurring naturally; of, relating to, or characterized by average intelligence or development; free from mental disorder." OK, so the last entry might be borderline for me. I hear you snickering.



So, what brought me to this revelation? I participated in a series of online marketing surveys on consumer activity and preferences. Being an average Jane, I knew I'd be able to give perfectly balanced input to these companies in developing future products I'd be using. After all, it would be in my best interest.

Every few days, I received a new survey about an aspect of life and a particular related product line. The first few questions determined if I qualified to participate in the day's survey. Ah, you're ahead of me. Yes, this is where the dawning of my non-normalcy began. For starters, I'm too healthy. I'm neither on prescription drugs nor do I have a cabinet full of over-the-counter varieties. I don't drink sodas (diet or regular); I don't shop exclusively in the snack food aisles of the grocery store; and I don't chain-smoke or drink beer by the case. My dining out habits are lacking too, as I'm not frequenting the fast food establishments multiple times per week (or day, as it seemed to imply some people do—a scary thought).

But it didn't stop there. I'm apparently not playing enough video games (seems FreeCell doesn't count), I'm not shouldering my share of credit card debt and I am driving a way-too-old car. I was being declined for survey after survey and starting to feel very un-American as the evidence piled up against me. I didn't fit the profile. I didn't qualify to express my opinion. In short, I wasn't a normal consumer.

◆ Contents ◆

- ◆ **Tam 2U**
A Happy Anniversary
..... page 3
- ◆ **Book Review: Dangerous Surrender**
by Vicki Hart page 4
- ◆ **Watching Over the Widow**
by Bill Miller page 5
- ◆ **Temptation and the Strong-Willed Mind**
by Hannah Knaack page 6
- ◆ **Zorro and Me**
by Barbara Dahlgren page 8
- ◆ **Watch Out!**
by Paul Krautmann page 10
- ◆ **What If You Had Never Been Born?**
by Phyllis Rose page 12
- ◆ **What Habbakuk's Prayers Teach Me**
by Carmen Fleming page 13
- ◆ **Lighter Side** page 14

(Continued on page 2)

Normal!

(Continued from page 1)



While my ego was being crushed, I have to confess I also began to develop a rather self-righteous attitude about my clean and wholesome life-style. Yes, I did get to participate in a few surveys about household cleaning products, wine consumption (barely squeaked in with my glass at dinner) and self-funded retirement accounts. Pretty exciting stuff, let me tell you. As my acceptable input was so sparse, I dropped the program. My morale was taking a beating. I hate rejection. I want to be accepted—a part of something. I want to be normal. Or do I? Or am I?

Thank God I am acceptable to him—normal or not. One would be hard pressed to define normal based on the behavior of those recorded in the Bible. The characters span the spectrum from squeaky clean to downright scum. But from God's eternal vantage point, he found them to be terribly normal. He says he loved them and desires all to be his precious children. His desire hasn't changed. We're all precious to him, no matter where we fall on the normal scale.

And that my friend, is Good News!



Sue was disappointed she didn't receive a survey in her area of expertise (or lifelong vice, depending on how you want to look at it): milk chocolate. E-mail Sue at sueberger2000@gmail.com. © 2008 Sue Berger

◆ CONNECTIONS ◆

Pastor General: *Joseph Tkach*
Advisory Panel: *Senior Pulley, Marilys Green, Pat Shan, Susan Dick, Norva Kelly, Trish Clauson.*

Editor/Managing Editor: *Tammy Tkach*
Senior Editor: *Sheila Graham*
Contributors: *Our readers*

Connections, a journal by and for women in ministry, is published by the Worldwide Church of God to promote the constructive exchange of ideas and experiences. Opinions of the writers do not necessarily reflect official church policy. Submit your ideas and articles to *Connections*, WCG, P.O. Box 5005, Glendora, CA 91740-5005, or fax (909) 823-3705, or e-mail: tammy.tkach@wcg.org.

Copyright ©2008 Worldwide Church of God, Glendora, California. All rights reserved. A.R.B.N. 010 019 986

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.



A Happy Anniversary

Anniversaries happen every day. Some are happy; some are sad. With the change we've made to the byline for *Connections* ("a journal by and for women in ministry"), I'm reminded of the first time I heard those two words in the same sentence. In our vocabulary at the time, *women* and *ministry* just didn't go together.

About 12 years ago, Sheila Graham introduced me to this concept. It seemed to us a wonderful byproduct of the monumental changes that occurred a few months before our first women's ministry meeting.

We both envisioned active women's ministries in most congregations around the world and ourselves as the helpers of our joy. We started out with a bang, with conferences, retreats, women's Bible studies and small groups and even several national conferences. Many women enjoyed newfound freedom to serve others in heretofore unimagined capacities.

As things always do, women's ministry changed. With large conferences such as *Women of Faith* available, the number of our self-sponsored conferences dwindled. We still have active women's ministries, but many congregations choose not to have them. They organize in different ways or participate in community service with the whole congregation.

But just because women's ministry



doesn't look like I thought it would, doesn't mean I'm not excited and thrilled about where we've come in the past 12 years. Women are in ministry! We now have 17 women serving as ordained elders and they are doing a marvelous job. I hope to feature articles from some of these women in future issues of *Connections*.

For the majority of us who are not ordained, we are women in ministry! We've realized the priesthood of all believers and are participating in kingdom work. I know you all appreciate, as I do, what a blessing and a privilege this is.

For those of you who meet with women from your congregation, I hope you will remind them of this privilege and encourage everyone, regardless of age or life circumstances, to minister to others as God has gifted them.

Let us not be weary in well doing, as that is how we let God's love flow through us to others. Let's die daily to self, and thereby let the grace of God also flow freely.

And let's rejoice in the grace that allows us to participate in the life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Happy anniversary to all of us as we celebrate the freedom, joy and grace of being women in ministry!

Tammy



The world dares say no more for its device, than "while I live, I hope" but the children of God can add by virtue of a living hope, "while I expire, I hope."

—Robert Leighton



Book Review



Dangerous Surrender

Author: Kay Warren

Reviewed by Vicki Hart

I read a most disturbing book, and my life will not be the same. I think the author would find this statement a compliment. She is Kay Warren and her book is *Dangerous Surrender*. Kay and her husband Rick pastor Saddleback Church, one of the largest congregations in the United States.

Kay Warren is not a typical celebrity author with a quick-read book on feel-good Christianity. This book cuts to the chase and gets to the core beliefs of our Christian faith. It touched me deeply and led me to examine my life in Jesus and to question whether or not I have fully surrendered—dangerously surrendered to him. She quotes from C.S. Lewis and *The Chronicles of Narnia* where the children ask if Aslan (the Jesus figure) is “safe.” “No, he is not safe, but he is very good.”



To be a true disciple of Jesus requires getting out of our comfort zones and getting in touch with those suffering in the world. Jesus’ heart is broken over this world and the suffering we find in it. When we begin to get in touch with his heart we will find our own hearts breaking.

God has brought Kay in touch with many suffering people in the world and especially those who are suffering because of HIV. Kay touches the conscience of the church and calls us as people of God not just to live comfortable and safe lives but also to expose and oppose evil and push back the darkness. She calls it being “gloriously ruined.”

If you want to see how we as the church can make a difference in alleviating some of the suffering in the world, I recommend this book. Kay concludes by asking: “Are you willing to offer yourself to God’s loving fingers, to become broken bread and poured out wine that can minister life to spiritually starving, thirsty souls? Are you willing to risk it all for his sake? Will you say yes to God? If so, the world is waiting.”



E-mail Vicki at vhart@fuse.net.

Confidential Peer Listener Line

We’re here for you!

Lorraine Pelley

626-836-3199, Pacific
lorraine.pelley@wcg.org

Ginny Rice

225-756-0519, Central
ginny_rice@wcg.org



Darlene Schmedes

626-792-2329, Pacific
leslie.schmedes@wcg.org

Helen Jackson

626-284-8256, Pacific
helen.jackson@wcg.org

Watching Over the Widow

Mom and Cancer

By Bill Miller

After living alone in Indiana for five years, Mom finally decided it was time to sell her dream home and move. We encouraged her to relocate to a wonderful senior facility in Wisconsin, about eight miles from my brother's home. We were able to sell, pack, give away or burn just about everything. God blessed us with great weather for the sale. We moved Mom in April 2004.

As far back as I can remember, during the fall of every year, Mom developed a bad respiratory infection and 2004 was no exception. She lived next door to a branch of the Mayo Clinic. She went for X-rays and the doctor called her and my brother for consultation. They found a tumor under the breastbone. The tumor was visible in previous X-rays but went undiscovered by the technicians and doctors in Indiana.

Needless to say, we were upset by the ineptitude of the Indiana crew. Evidence showed it had grown and surgery would be necessary as soon as possible. They were going to have to break the breastbone and pry open the chest area. Mom was 80 years old and had osteoporosis too, but she

agreed to the surgery, leaving the situation in God's hands. She was ready to die, if God willed it.

In December 2004, Mom had her surgery. The tumor was malignant and had attached itself to the pericardium and the diaphragm. The doctor removed the diseased tissue and sewed her back up. He was convinced the cancer was contained. Further tests proved that to be true.

When Mom awoke after surgery, the first thing she said was, "I hope you boys have been getting your sleep." We stayed with her at the hospital, helping her through the slow recovery. It was determined I would be the mean son by insisting she use the breathing exercise apparatus, whether she felt like it or not. I knew she was better the day someone came in to take blood. He asked where she would like him to draw the blood, and she pointed at me saying, "Take it from him."

Mom shared how thankful she was that God opened the doors for her to move to Wisconsin. He helped her never look back with remorse or overwhelming nostalgia.

She was convinced God expedited her move so someone would discover the tumor. She was of the mind that if she had not moved, the cancer would have spread throughout her body, which is probably a right conclusion. God helped her heal quickly.

After she went home, a 90-year-old man named Joe started showing more than a casual interest in Mom. She said he made her laugh and vice versa (the Bible does say laughter is good medicine). He was intelligent and interesting company for her. Joe said he loved my Mom, and she told him



Happiness is neither within us only,
or without us;
it is the union of ourselves with God.



—Blaise Pascal

(Continued on page 6)

The Widow

(Continued from page 5)

she wasn't interested in getting married, but would enjoy being his friend. We then got to hear about Joe all the time.

We were thankful God took care of Mom and so was Joe!



Bill and Kathy live in Everett, Washington. He pastors the Everett and Bellevue churches.

Bill grew up in Chicago. He enjoys fishing, softball, golfing and gardening. E-mail him at bill-miller@verizon.net.



No man ever sank under the burden of the day. It is when tomorrow's burden is added to the burden of today that the weight is more than a man can bear. Never load yourself so. If you find yourself so loaded, at least remember this: it is your own doing, not God's. He begs you to leave the future to Him, and mind the present.



—George Macdonald.

Temptation and the Strong-Willed Mind

By Hannah Knaack

Spring is in the air and I'm soaking it all in—the sunshine, the warm breeze, the deep purple crocuses so happy to be in bloom. As I draw closer to the blueberry bushes my joy suddenly evaporates. Those naughty rabbits have chewed right through the netting and devoured most of the new tender shoots! If that's not enough, they've left behind their calling card—thick as can be—enough to fertilize every blueberry bush in this county and beyond.

Miffed as I am, a different rabbit problem on a similar spring day years ago comes to mind. Our eldest child, just 4 at the time, ran into the kitchen where I was preparing lunch, proclaiming loudly, "Guess what? Guess what, Mommy!"

He had spent the morning slaying his imaginary dragons in the back yard and had made a surprising discovery. Up near the house and in amongst the early spring flowers was a small hole in the ground. Within the hole tiny fuzz balls of fur were cuddled up tightly together. My son curled on his side on the kitchen floor, scrunched up small with eyes squinted, mimicking what he had seen.

I knew immediately which part of the yard he was talking about. "Oh, those must be baby bunnies, honey," I told him. "I've seen the mother near that area for several days now. But," I added, "you must not touch them because mother rabbits will not tolerate human scent—so you leave them

(Continued on page 7)

Temptation

(Continued from page 6)

be.” I explained briefly what the mother rabbit might do if she realized her babies had been handled.

As I pulled an endless stream of clothes from the dryer the next morning, my son came to me and without a word, buried his head in my side and broke into sobs. The only coherent words I could decipher were “sorry” and “mean mommy.” After some time I was able to glean that this was about the baby rabbits. I took him in hand and out we went to check. Sure enough, the hole was empty and lying just to the right of it was the remainder of a tiny bunny.

I nudged my son’s chin up with my finger so we could see eye to eye. Pitiful blue eyes swimming in tears stared back at me. I didn’t have the heart to ask what I already knew. “I’m sorry,” he whimpered again. He hesitated, perhaps expecting a scolding or a punishment, but there was no need. I knew his little mind would torture him for many days. As the morning’s scene played over and over again, it would be accompanied by the deep, hurtful ache of knowing who had brought it about. It was such a difficult lesson for one so young.

I drifted back to reality as I stood at the edge of my ravished blueberry bed, and recalled he’d had another tangle with temptation later that same summer. I had helped him plant his own pepper plant, and he eagerly anticipated the first blossom and then the first pepper. He ran into the house,



shouting that his pepper was ready. I came outside and peeked at the nearly microscopic green blob.

“Hon,” I said gently, “this pepper is nowhere near ready. You’re going to have to be very patient, because it must grow until it is five or six inches long.” That pepper plant was the most prolific plant I’ve ever seen—at least 24 peppers harvested. I believe that’s because frequent picking stimulates growth in some vegetables. That boy sure was proud of his peppers though, and it mattered not that the largest measured no more than two inches before it was plucked.

I realized with a chuckle that my son was not the only one learning a lesson that summer. A relatively new mother, I had told our son what not to do and expected our high-energy, spirited boy to take that at face value. Talk about dangling the apple a little too close to Eve! I’m sure some children are that compliant but sadly, not a single one of them reside in our family lineage.

As the warm spring breeze ruffles through my hair and I turn my face to soak up the sun, I make a mental note to add Eve to my list of “people I really must chat with in heaven.” Surely this woman, author of the book *Temptation and the Strong-Willed Mind*, would have a few words of advice for mothers of boys and girls who find the dangling apple just a little too hard to resist.



Hannah says: “I’m a staunch believer that nothing improves one’s spirit more than chocolate. However, I do believe the first true day of spring may rival even that tried and trusted remedy. Add to that the graduation of your last child and it makes this mother smile. Hurray for spring!” E-mail Hannah at justmomhlc@juno.com.

When my spirit soars,
my body falls on its knees.



—Georg Christoph
Lichtenberg

Zorro and Me



The Perfect Union

By Barbara Dahlgren

In the spring of 1990 Zorro found out he was to be the local coordinator for a visit from our denominational leader, Mr. Tkach Sr. Surrounding churches were invited to Detroit for a combined church service. So we sprang into action, planning the blessed event with the help of the other three pastors in the area: the Mounts, the Symkowiaks and the Washingtons.

Working with the Renaissance Center in Detroit, we arranged everything so the event would run smoothly. We were assured we had nothing to worry about because all the workers were unionized and knew their jobs well. With no stadium seating, folding chairs would be set up, the stage taken care of, as well as the lighting, and the rooms we needed for the choir to practice would be ready. Not to worry. Everything would be under control.

This was the first time I heard the word *union* emphasized so much. Now don't get me wrong. Coming from humble roots, I am all for the common man making a fair wage. When I think of unions, visions of Sally Field, aka Norma Rae, standing on a table in the middle of a noisy textile mill holding up a paper with the word *union*



As the earth can produce nothing
unless it is fertilized by the sun,
so we can do nothing without the
grace of God.



—Vianney

scrawled on it pops into mind. Go Norma!

However, like every good idea humans have, it has gotten a bit polluted and extreme in some ways.

When the day arrived, we were there early to be sure the preparations were made. As we waited for the lighting expert to arrive to light the stage, I tried to put a glass of water behind the lectern in case Mr. Tkach got thirsty while speaking. I was informed this was a no-no. Only authorized union people could put the water behind the lectern.

The lighting expert finally rode in on one of those little motorized carts—like a knight in shining armor. He walked up the stairs to the left of the stage, flipped a small switch (we are not talking huge lever) marked “lights” and like a miracle, the stage lit up. He received more than \$300 for that masterful feat. I would have done it for half the price, but then, I'm not unionized.

The children planned to sing Mr. Tkach's favorite song, “Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken” for special music so they arrived early for a practice. The union changed the location of the practice. I still have visions of pastors with walkie-talkies herding over 200 children from one place to another.

When more than 3,000 people from all over Michigan and Ohio started flooding into the hall on that rainy day, we learned the union decided every group overestimates how many will attend, so they were a few hundred chairs short. When the extra chairs finally arrived we had men from the local churches who were old hands at setting up chairs ready to assist. They were told, “No! Only those from the union could set the chairs up.”

So this union experience proved to be quite a challenge. Then an interesting thing

(Continued on page 9)

Zorro and Me

(Continued from page 8)



happened. Some may call it poetic justice. I prefer to believe our great God has a sense of humor.

It seems one union supervisor got locked in a room behind the stage the whole time Mr. Tkach was speaking. I guess he didn't have his walkie-talkie. He had to hear everything from the melodic tones of kids singing "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken," Mr. Tkach's whole sermon and presentation (which was quite an earful), right down to the closing prayer and "Amen." We could have let him out, I guess, but by then we had learned our lesson well. We were not authorized to unlock the door—we weren't in his union.



Barbara works part time as a chiropractic assistant (CA) and likes to read, write and watch old movies. E-mail her at bydahlgren@pacbell.net. Copyright September 2007.

Gratitude is from the same root word as "grace," which signifies the free and boundless mercy of God. Thanksgiving is from the same root word as "think," so that to think is to thank.

—Willis P. King,
Pulpit Preaching



My Wife the Gardener

She dug the pot on Monday
The soil was rich and fine.
She forgot to thaw our dinner,
So we went out to dine.

She planted roses Tuesday,
She says they are a must.
They really are quite lovely
But she forgot to dust.

On Wednesday it was the daisies,
They open with the sun.
All whites and pinks and yellows,
But the laundry was not done!

The poppies came on Thursday,
A bright and cherry red,
I guess she was really engrossed
But she never made the bed.

It was dahlias on Friday,
In colors she adores.
It never bothered her at all,
The crumbs upon the floor!

I hired a maid on Saturday,
My life is now complete.
My wife can garden all she wants,
The house will still be neat.

It's nearly lunch time Sunday,
I cannot find the maid.
OH, NO! I don't believe it,
She's outside with a spade!

—Hannah Knaack



Watch Out!

By Paul Krautmann

Have you ever been conned? In Guyana during the 1980s food imports were banned by the government in an attempt to promote the use of locally produced food. Consequently, a thriving black market of goods smuggled in from the neighboring countries of Venezuela, Brazil and Suriname emerged. Commodities such as wheat flour, biscuits, corned beef and sardines were highly prized and highly priced.

One day I was approached by a man who offered to show me where these items were available at a good price. I agreed to drive him to the house where all these goodies could be found. When we pulled up outside the house, he told me: “Now you stay here, while I go inside and buy the goods. You being a foreigner, they’ll charge you double. So give me the money, and I’ll go and get the goods for you. Just wait here, and I’ll be right back.” You guessed it. I handed over the money and waited and waited. And waited. Finally, the penny dropped, and I realized I had been well and truly conned.

Just a few weeks later, I was walking in the downtown shopping area of Georgetown when a man told me he worked at the main supermarket and could get me some

10



cheap sardines and corned beef. All I had to do was hand over the money and he would go in and purchase the goods for me. So, I waited outside—again. Once more I returned home with no money, and no sardines or corned beef. When would I learn? I saw the warning signs, but somehow I concluded they didn’t apply to me.

Jesus said the way is narrow and difficult. Satan is the master of disguise and deceit. He can appear as an angel of light and work through people who seem to be genuine and righteous, but who are full of darkness on the inside (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). He is the supreme confidence trickster. It seems some of us fall for the wiles of the adversary every time.

So what can we do? In a nutshell, Jesus tells us to watch. In Guyana we sometimes hired night watchmen to guard our house and car. They were often not effective. They slept or were drunk or didn’t show up at all.

At various times during the night, a supervisor checked on the guards and that helped a little. We still had several break-ins and numerous items stolen from the car, including the wheels, the battery and even the front bumper. The day after the bumper was stolen, a man in town asked if I wanted to buy a front bumper. I’m pretty sure it was the same one. Clearly, as Christians, we need to do a better job at watching than those night watchmen!

Jesus has employed you and me to be watchmen, whether we like it or not: “Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the

What sort of God is so generous as to share with persons the capacity to originate things and events, to exercise freedom and creativity? What sort of God allows humans to move outside his influence with power to do what is good or evil?

—Dallas Willard & Jan Johnson,
Renovation of the Heart



(Continued on page 11)

Watch Out!

(Continued from page 10)



rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!” (Mark 13:33-37, NKJV throughout).

“Watch” is translated in this passage from two Greek words: *gregoreo*, meaning to keep awake, being spiritually alert, and *agrupneo*, meaning to be sleepless, watchful. We are to watch and be ready. We are to watch our own walk with God. We are also to watch out for the thief, who comes “to steal, and to kill, and to destroy” (John 10:10).

What should we be doing while we watch? Jesus explains: “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing” (Matthew 24:45-46). We are to feed and take care of God’s household. That is, we are to be nourishing, strengthening, encouraging, protecting and taking care of one another. We are our brother’s or sister’s keeper, no matter who they are.

In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus shows that those who will enter his kingdom will be those who feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, take care of the stranger, give clothes to the naked, visit the sick and visit those in prison. In so doing, he said, we are doing the same to him. Watching involves looking out for others, not just ourselves.

Don’t allow the enemy to deceive you and steal your reward (1 Peter 5:8). Don’t fall for his plastic promises. Stay wide awake, ever vigilant, no matter how long or dark the night. Keep your eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith.



Born in England, Paul trained as a librarian, then worked for two years in Guyana at the National Library as a Voluntary Service Overseas volunteer. During that time, through the ministry of Herbert W. Armstrong, Paul surrendered his life to God, and in 1972 entered Ambassador College, graduating in 1975. He returned to Guyana to work at the National Library, and also to take care of the fledgling church there. He served as full time pastor from 1978 to 1989 when he was transferred to the Caribbean to pastor churches in Grenada, St. Vincent, St. Lucia and Dominica. In 1999 Paul and his Guyanese wife Unita moved to Perth, Western Australia. They have three children: Emil, Lorna and Paul. This article is excerpted from Paul’s book, The Rich Hiker’s Guide to Walking with God. More information on the book can be found at his website www.upnup.ws. E-mail him at upnup@westnet.com.au.

The WCG pastoral WebPages (www.wcg.org/pastoral) includes *Connections for Clergy Family Support, Resources for Successful Ministry and Life*. You’ll find 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 are welcome (e-mail tammy.tkach@wgc.org).

What If You Had Never Been Born?

By Phyllis G. Rose

After watching the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, starring Jimmy Stewart, I started thinking about this question. What if I had never been born? Sometimes it's easy to think, who am I to feel I have any particular importance? But the more I thought about my life, the more thankful I became.

I wanted my first child to be unique, and he is in a good way. He's intelligent and quiet, but kind and sensitive. It's difficult to imagine that in December my child will reach his 56th birthday. His brother will be 55 in May. They experienced many hard times as children because of the antagonism between their father and me when I joined the Worldwide Church of God. Many trials ensued and when my sons were 15 and 16, I was forced to get out on my own. This was a frightening experience, but I managed to do so with a lot of help from the church in New Hampshire.

My son got through the rest of high school where he graduated with honors. He won a grant to the University of Chicago, went for part of the year but then decided to come back home. Later he lost his left leg from cancer. Through it all he has had a fantastic attitude. He has a wonderful wife and they share many of the same interests. They took me out to dinner and as I watched them I thought, If I had not been born, how could this wonderful relationship have taken place?

Let prayer be the key of the day and
the bolt of the night.



—Jean Paul Richter

When I went to Pasadena for a visit in 1973, I became involved in the work and stayed on and remarried. My son and wife came to visit often and it was such a joy for them to be there. They loved the Rose Parade. It's a rather humbling thought but a gratifying one to realize that because of me, these two young people could enjoy life so fully. What a thrill!

Through my second marriage I gained three stepsons and so I have a large, though scattered, family. One son is in Seattle, one in Monroe, Washington, and the other in Chicago. The last time we were all together was the Thanksgiving just before their father died. It was a surprise and he was happy.

When we realize these pleasures and how they come about, it gives life a whole new perspective. How much of a part has God had to play in all these events? We don't know, but I suspect a great deal. He loves to give blessings to his children, as we do, but is far more adequate at planning and developing them.

What if Jesus had not been born? That's a thought I don't want to contemplate. When the angel showed Jimmy Stewart what the town would have been without him, he saw the angry, unstable and selfish mob and it shocked him. It made me think the whole world could be like that without the tempering life of our great Savior.

What deep thankfulness this brings to our hearts and minds as we see what has happened because we were born, but most of all because Jesus was born. What a change in perspective. Knowing him is the greatest blessing of all. Praise God!



Phyllis lives in Bangor, Maine where the winter has been horrific. She says she seriously considered selling all and moving back to California. Thankfully spring is around the corner. E-mail her at momouse@gwi.net.



What Habakkuk's Prayers Teach Me

By Carmen Fleming

I have three wonderful children, all grown, but at times my heart feels as if it could break into a million pieces. I feel so vulnerable when it comes to my children. My conversations with God don't always lead to changes in circumstances. But a look at the book of Habakkuk and his conversations with God tells me there's a lot more going on in our conversations with God than just getting out of our troubles.

Habakkuk was in pain for his people. Looking back on Jewish history we can better understand how wonderful God's plan really was, even though suffering was still ahead for the nation. God's interventions accomplished more than Habakkuk knew how to ask or think.

I can understand why God said, "Be astounded at what I will do! For I am doing something in your own day, something you wouldn't believe even if someone told you about it" (1:5, *NLT* throughout). This inspires me to believe God has a plan that transcends my temporary concerns. In the meantime, God still draws nearer in prayer to share my troubles and comfort me. He is able to keep events marching toward his goal to save the whole world yet still intervene by holding my life together as he did for Habakkuk.

I am inspired to believe I can safely bring my doubts and complaints to God. "Was it in anger, Lord, that you struck the rivers and parted the sea? Were you displeased with them?" (3:8).

Life's difficulties can strike doubt in us toward God, tempting us to devise our own way out. We might want to make destructive plans to manipulate and control our circumstances. But God's answer to our doubts, fears and destructive plan: No! I am

sending my chariots of salvation, commanding my weapons of power ...to save and rescue you (3:9-15).

Habakkuk received a deepening faith to keep him from trusting in his own strength and devious methods. We too can heed his warning: "But they are deeply guilty, for their own strength is their god" (1:11). "Look at the proud! They trust in themselves, and their lives are crooked" (2:4).

Habakkuk developed a conversational friendship with God that changed him from the inside out. He emerged with a new attitude. He wrote out his prayer describing his panic: "I trembled inside...my lips quivered with fear. My legs gave way beneath me, and I shook in terror" (3:16).

Then a light comes on for him: "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vine; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren...yet I will rejoice in the Lord!" (3:17-18). "But the righteous will live by their faith" (2:4). "The Sovereign Lord is my strength! He will make me as surefooted as a deer and bring me safely over the mountains" (3:19).

Our circumstances may not instantly change, but we are changed. Perhaps that is the greater miracle; panic turns into assurance, doubt to faith and sorrow to joy. We grow up into Jesus, learning to trust the Father's love even when things look bleak, "But the righteous will live by their faith" (2:4).



Carmen and Charles enjoy traveling and ministering on church visits to his area of responsibility in the Caribbean. She says it's exciting to see the growth and development in participation and leadership skills among the membership with the new thrust in missions. Carmen enjoys reading, gardening, going for long walks and dancing. E-mail her at carmen.fleming@wccg.org.

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

A businessman driving down a country road spotted a little boy with a lemonade stand. It was hot and he was thirsty, so he decided to stop.

When he got up to the little boy's stand, he noticed a sign that said: "All you can drink 10 cents," and a single glass.

He thought it was an awfully small glass, but as it was only 10 cents for all you can drink, he decided to get some anyway. He gave the boy a dime, and shot down the whole glass in one swig. He slapped the glass back onto the table and said, "Fill 'er up."

The kid replied, "Sure thing, that'll be 10 cents."

To this the businessman said, "But your sign says all you can drink for a dime."

"It is," said the little boy, "that's all you can drink for a dime."

—Clayton Davis, www.cybersalt.org

Five things you don't want to hear from Tech Support:

1. "Duuuuuude! Bummer!"
2. "In layman's terms, we call that the Hindenburg Effect."
3. "Your problem can be fixed, but you're going to need a butter knife, a roll of duct tape and a car battery."
4. Press 1 for Support.
Press 2 if you're with *60 Minutes*.
Press 3 if you're with the FTC.
5. "Hold on a second, please ... Mom! Timmy's hitting me!"

—Clayton Davis, www.cybersalt.org

"I notice my wife when she's on the phone with her friends, man they will share every intimate detail of their lives with each other. See men, once we become friends with another man we may never say another word to him, unless there's valuable information that needs to be exchanged. Things like "Hey Jim, your shirt's on fire."

—Jeff Foxworthy (Big Funny)