



Connections

◆ A Journal by & for Women in Ministry ◆

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God's Tapestry

By Norma Thibault

When the first of our grandchildren got married I began a tradition of making and framing a needlepoint tapestry as a wedding gift. I don't like working with stamped canvases, but prefer to use a chart and count the stitches. It is much more challenging but can also be frustrating when I find I have miscounted stitches so the pattern does not match up as it should.



The first pictures I made were basic, mostly flowers or birds.

When our youngest daughter became engaged, I wanted to do something special for her so I chose a beautiful picture of Maligne Lake in the Canadian Rockies. The picture features a lake, surrounded by trees and mountains in the background. It was quite detailed and very challenging.

With each stitch, I enjoy watching the picture appear. But the underside isn't as pretty. The backside of a tapestry looks like a mess! I see a lot of knots and thread ends and it is difficult to pick out the design. If I only looked at the back, I would never guess the lovely scene beginning to come together on the front.

Years ago we had a minister who talked about God's plan as being a beautiful tapestry he was creating. As humans we see only the underside, which is difficult to figure out, but God sees the beautiful picture being created on top. This is like our confused past lives being re-created in Jesus. In Isaiah 46:10, God says he makes "known the end from the beginning, from an-

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God's Tapestry

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cient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please" (NIV).

Sometimes we are disappointed and we are often frustrated when we look at the world around us. That's because we see only the bottom side of God's tapestry. When completed we will see the most magnificent picture ever created—God's plan fulfilled!



Norma and Dennis live in Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada, where they pastor a small congregation in Castlegar, a 3 1/2 hour drive from their home over high mountain passes. They travel there about twice a month and stay with members. They enjoy the opportunities God has given them and are thrilled the people in their congregation are positive and in tune with the new understanding of God as Three in One and his love. E-mail her at dentbo@shaw.ca.

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Connections

Mission Statement

Primary: The Connections for Clergy Support Department provides intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual support and encouragement in the personal lives of WCG ministry families.

Three primary means of serving are the *Connections* journal, the Connections for a Successful Ministry and Life web pages, and the Nurturenent forum. We highlight women in ministry but are inclusive of the needs of the entire family.

Secondary: To promote respect, understanding and support for women, their personal ministries and ministries that serve them.

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• CALIFORNIA •
TAM 2 U

Real Life

Des, I've been watching *Star Trek* again. No, I never get tired of it. There's something about space travel that excites my imagination. It really is the last frontier.

What's also interesting is no matter how far the *Star Trek* crew travels from the home world, they still can't get away from human nature and the reality of life.

In an episode of *Star Trek Voyager* titled "Real Life," the holographic doctor decided to create a holographic family on the holodeck so he could learn to relate to his flesh and blood counterparts. For those of you who still live on Planet Earth, a holodeck is a "simulated reality facility located on starships and starbases in the fictional *Star Trek* universe" (Wikipedia). You can find out more than you want to know by googling *holodeck*.

The doctor programmed an ideal wife, son and daughter and settled down to enjoy family life. One of his crewmates pointed out his *Father Knows Best*, 1950s style family was a far cry from reality, so she made a few changes to the programming. What followed looked a lot closer to what we experience today: stressed-out, overscheduled wife, kids with questionable friends, and some loud music, backtalk and rebellion thrown in for good measure.

The doctor fared rather well until his daughter fell during a sporting event and sustained a serious head injury. When he and another doctor realized she was beyond help

and close to death, the doctor decided he'd had enough and ended the program.

Isn't that what we wish we could do when things get really tough? Life would be so much easier if we could just say, computer, end program, and all our troubles would disappear. Wouldn't it be wonderful if, like in the doctor's first program, everyone was always cheerful, well-behaved, happy, healthy and no one had any problems? The doctor thought so; that's why he left when things became difficult.

Another crew member convinced him not to run out on his suffering family and go back to his dying daughter. In that way he might learn what being a family was really about. So he did. The doctor's wife and estranged son also came to the daughter's bedside. They were all there with her when she died, holding her hand and helping her not to be afraid.

The holographic doctor couldn't run away from real life and neither can we. We can't say, end program, but we can say, Father, help us, and the most loving, powerful Being alive will be there to give us his strength and help.

Life is messy and difficult, but as the doctor learned, it's also worth the struggle. His fictional family learned love is stronger than troubles. What they didn't know is God is stronger than life or death and that real life is in him. We know, so instead of running away, we run to—Jesus, who is our real life.



Tammy

Let your religion be less of a theory and more of a love affair.



—Gilbert K. Chesterton

A Visit to Grandma's House

By Hannah Knaack

My paternal grandmother was a rarity—one of few English to join a community of Old Order Amish as an adult. Years before I was born my grandma, a widow with three grown sons (my birth father being the eldest), married John Lavy, a widower. They began their life together in his old farm home in scenic southwestern Ohio.

As you can imagine, childhood visits with my grandparents were dramatically different from those of my school friends. I had stories to share about chamber pots, kerosene lamps, buggy rides and even a gasoline refrigerator!

On one family visit, after hours in the station wagon bickering over everything imaginable, my sisters and I were much relieved to see their farmhouse, with its vibrant red roses spilling over the old faded fence, come into view. Gravel crunched under the tires as my stepdad announced our arrival with a quick toot of the horn.

Grandpa towered over Grandma when they stepped through the door. She was such a tiny woman. Grandpa was reed thin, exceptionally quiet, and we'd say the same thing each visit, "Look how long Grandpa's beard is!" We were fascinated by his untrimmed snow-white beard, for no one in our immediate world looked like him.

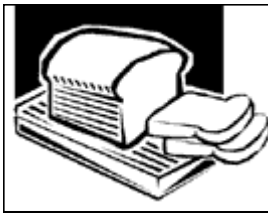
Grandma hugged each of us, but gazed most intently into my older sister's face. I didn't realize it then, but she was searching for the resemblance to her eldest son who had died shortly after my birth. My sister was the image of our father.

After Grandma's sharp appraisal, we girls promptly began arguing again over who would get the first turn at the well pump just inside the screened-in side porch. If it weren't for Grandma's scolding, we'd have pumped the living daylight out of that old thing. Then we'd sip the refreshing cold water from her little tin cup. We made a constant bee line from the pump to the bathroom. By the second day, she'd had enough and hid the cup after we'd been repeatedly scolded about wasting water!

Grandma usually had a meal ready, one that included a favorite and forbidden food, white bread. Mother had already been after us on the way down, "Now girls, Grandma will have plenty of good things to eat, so leave the bread alone." We may have made this trip only once a year, but when it came to white bread, we had memories like elephants.

It was imperative to place yourself strategically at the table, far enough out of Mother's reach, but close to the bread and sumptuous homemade apple butter. An innocent glance at Mom when we took our second piece of bread only added fuel to her fire. Every child is born with the innate understanding that no matter how upset your parents are, they will not scold you to within an inch of your life while relatives are watching.

The kerosene lamps Grandma lit in the evening when the last hint of daylight had disappeared seemed smelly to us. Which reminds me of those chamber pots I mentioned at the beginning (I know you wanted to ask). They were hidden under our old-fashioned high beds to be used at nighttime. The only bathroom was in the



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Visit to Grandma's

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master bedroom, so to avoid waking our grandparents we made use of the portable facilities. Come morning, we high-tailed it out of there before Mom called for help emptying pots.

We were curious, like most children, and had plenty of questions about why Grandma did things the way she did. Why were there no pictures on their walls or framed photos on the end tables? Why didn't they have a TV or radio like us? Why did she wear so many clothes on these hot summer days? Why could she wear a hat in the house and we weren't allowed? Why did we use those smelly lamps in the evening when it got dark?

Mom didn't mind the questions so much as the manner in which we asked, putting Grandma on the spot. We couldn't differentiate between what was Amish tradition (like the questions just listed), Grandma's preference (kitchen utensils old enough to have been brought over on the Mayflower) or done because Grandma was more than 70 and not used to children in her home.

When Mom nudged us into sharing stories

about school or the like, I got the impression Grandma was as confused about our lifestyle as we were about hers. When my husband and I brought our children to see her years later, I realized she didn't mind the stories a bit. What mattered was we were sharing our lives with her, showing her honor.

I have many memories of visiting our Amish grandparents and of our time spent outside at their farm. Join me next time for more about buggy rides, lightning bugs and a runaway Shetland pony.



Hannah writes: "All things related to spring is what's been on my mind lately. I'm anticipating my purple crocuses popping up, strawberries ripening, trips to the Farmer's Market, tag sales, birds singing outside our open windows and their fluffy babies hopping about in the yard. Anticipation is half the fun!"
E-mail Hannah at justmomhlc@juno.com.

I believe in Christianity as I believe
that the sun has risen: not only because
I see it, but because by it
I see everything else.

—C.S. Lewis



If human beings are perceived as
potentials rather than problems,
as possessing strengths instead of
weaknesses, as unlimited rather than dull
and unresponsive, then they thrive and
grow to their capabilities.

—Barbara Bush



Coincidence? I Think Not!

By Judy Langfield

I easily get sore throats and bronchitis, so I always like to keep my head, neck and ears covered when I go out in the cold. One day in late fall after it had been very cold for a few days, it warmed up a little, so that morning I headed out without a scarf. On the way to work, I picked up food for a committee meeting later in the day. It came to almost \$10. I put it on my credit card as I had only a few coins in my change purse.

When I got to work I gave my receipt to our accounting administrator for reimbursement from petty cash, expecting to get a ten dollar bill and a bit of change. She said, "Sorry, all I have left is just change." So she loaded me up with the change. I was not too happy about that. I was trying to lighten the load in my backpack because I also had a bad back and the extra change would add to the weight. I was in a grumpy mood about it for much of the day.

I was late going home and the sun had clouded over and it was getting really cold again. I knew I would have to stand in the cold waiting for the bus when I got to the top of the subway. I really wished I'd brought a scarf with me. Then I thought, rather than

risk coming down with a sore throat or worse, I would pick up a cheap scarf on the way home.

On the way up in the subway I wracked my brains trying to think of a store open at that time of day that carried scarves. Then I thought of the Civic Center Station. I got off and walked down into the lower level of the mall area. Two of the clothing stores had been replaced by other stores and everything else was closed. I was halfway along the lower level and thought I'd better go back to the subway.

But I sensed I should continue to the end and then go back along the main floor above, just in case. As I went, I remembered a souvenir shop upstairs at the far end where I had purchased fancy sparkly dress scarves. I wondered if it would still be there and if it were, would it have scarves for cold weather too. As I approached the store, I saw a whole shelf of scarves right outside the entrance. They looked a little flimsy, but when I touched inside the plastic, they seemed adequate. Not only that, they were only \$10!

I decided to buy one, but I didn't want to use my credit card again. I told the sales people all I had was a lot of small change. Would that be OK? One of them turned to the other and said, "Change!" She turned back to me and said, "We've been waiting for you—someone with change—we've about run out of change and didn't have time to go to the bank at the end of the day." I thought what a blessing. God sure knows what he is doing. But as I counted the change out I realized I didn't have enough for the scarf and the taxes. I said I would have to use my card after all. They said: "No! No! Give us the change. Don't worry if it's not enough; we want the change!"

Now this story wasn't exactly the feeding of the 5,000 with just a couple of fish and loaves of bread, but both our needs were taken care of

Remember not only to say the right thing in the right place, but far more difficult still, to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.

—Ben Franklin

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Coincidence?

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and perhaps planned well in advance, from early that morning, beginning with walking out without a scarf.

God is in the small things in our lives as well as the big things. He knows the hairs on our head, and knows when we need to forget our scarves too!



Judy served in the Toronto, Ontario, Canada, area as a pianist for more than 40 years and occasional speaker at Scott Mission for eight years. At Cornerstone Christian Fellowship (WCG), the congregation is blessed to have its own church building and the opportunity to reach out into the community. She and her husband George are active in the church prayer group. They also look forward to possible connections with seniors' homes in the neighborhood. They have three grown children. E-mail her at jmay139@rogers.com.

Our Relationship With One Another

By Chrissy Mankhomwa

The world is established on relationships. A tree anchors its roots in the soil from which it also gets its nutrients. Scientists observe that bees pollinate one third of the flowers on the globe. All this work they do without pay or complaint. The rest are pollinated by wind, birds and other means.

The bees have a fascinating story. Hardly anyone imagines a third part of the food on our dinner plate wouldn't be there if the bees decided to go on strike and stop pollinating flowers. Flowers have built-in attractive features for the bee—good and colorful landing pads, some pollen to share, nectar and a pleasant scent. Though deaf and blind to some colors, the bee cannot miss the pleasantness of the flowers and enjoys its exciting work each day.

How much more such relationships are needed in our homes, at work, but also in our Christian circles. Establishing good relationships is important if we are to accomplish

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We need your articles!

You may have heard the phrase “government of the people, for the people and by the people.” *Connections* works the same way. It's only as good as the articles YOU send in. And you always send in good articles. But the file for 2009 is virtually empty and we need you to resolve to write something for us in the coming year. Are you writing in a journal? You can use an idea from your journal and turn it into an article. Has a familiar verse in the Bible struck you in a new way? Have you learned a lesson you'd like to share? Please don't be afraid or too busy to write. Let us hear from you!

Our Relationship

(Continued from page 7)

much in our communities and in our groups, choirs or women's ministry. We need each other and, like the flower, we need to develop the attractiveness and the sweet-smelling scent loved by all. Even bad people establish good relationships that enable their schemes to work, albeit for a season. It's also important to acknowledge that the complex relationship between the bee and the flower was put there by a master Designer. Similarly, how well we relate with one another depends on how grounded our faith is in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is he who planned that we should work in unity. He declared, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18, *NKJV*). He is the One who designed and sustains our relationships.

Jesus often illustrated the importance of a loving relationship among his people in his stories and parables. In the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-36), Jesus showed how futile it is for us to trust in our good services as depicted by the actions of the priest and Levite. In contrast, by showing compassion on the wounded man, the Samaritan, despised in the community of the Jews, did the will of God. God wants us to treat one another as brothers and sisters irrespective of our differences in color, creed or ethnicity.

We will all continue to fall short of the expectations of others. But Christ provides us

a bountiful store of patience we can use in our interaction with others—even in dressing their emotional and spiritual wounds. Christ declared he has called the spiritually maimed, the rejected ones of the world and sinners to prepare them for his kingdom (Luke 14:21). But we all must grow in a loving relationship with our Master and amongst ourselves as we are gently being ushered into his glorious kingdom.

The success of our journey does not depend on any virtues we may possess. He died for us to clean up the mess in us and offers his Holy Spirit to develop us into pleasant and desirable personalities. This is a lifelong process. We are yet unfinished products in the hands of our loving God. As such we should be ready to accept one another into our lives.

The relationship between the bee and the flower is successful only because of the vital relationship both have with the sun that gives them warmth and light. Everything in the physical world depends on the sun. Without it, life as we know it would not exist. Likewise, our relationship with one another thrives only through Jesus Christ, the Son of God "for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things" (Heb. 2:10, *NKJV*). It is only in him our life and relationships mature and have meaning at all.



Chrissy has been a member of the WCG for 16 years. She and her husband live in Zomba, Malawi, Africa, and attend and serve the Blantyre church, about an hour's drive away.

Her husband is a civil servant and she raises broiler chickens to supplement the family income. E-mail her at wjmankhomwa@yahoo.com.

I would rather live my life as if there is a God and die to find out there isn't, than live my life as if there isn't and die to find out there is.



—Albert Camus

Mothers-in-Law and Daughters-in-Law

By Piedad Gómez de Mozquera

In popular circles the mother-in-law doesn't have a good reputation. That's why we hear such sayings as, "Long live my mother-in-law but may she live very far away" or, "This daughter-in-law (was not) the right woman for my son."

What does a good mother-in-law look like and what does a good daughter-in-law look like?

The book of Ruth has a wonderful example of a relationship between in-laws pleasing to our heavenly Father and worthy of imitation in our daily lives. The relationship between these two women was close, more than the love a mother has for her daughter, because they shared the love of God. Although Ruth was a Moabite, a foreigner, she was humble and submissive. God is not a respecter of persons. He resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.

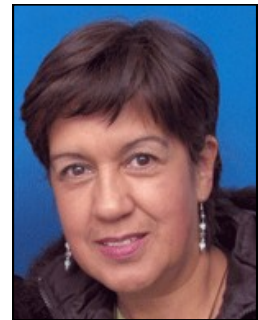
What a mother respects and likes about her daughter-in-law is that she loves and remains faithful to her son. A good daughter-in-law is better than seven sons (Ruth 4:15). God blesses and sees the contrite and humble heart. After Naomi's bitter trial, the loss of her husband and her sons, abandoned in a strange land, God blessed her tremendously as she revered him. This example of reverence for God and her love for her own positively affected the life of her daughter-in-

law to the point Ruth did not want to leave her.

The responsibility of the older women is to teach the younger to love their husbands. Naomi's example in her own life of love toward family and God was the best instruction Ruth could have.

Good relationships between in-laws may not come naturally, but they can be developed. If a decision is made to work toward that end, good relationships can be achieved by the Spirit of God who lives in the heart.

Let's allow his work in our lives and the love of God to help us love our daughters-in-law and our mothers-in-law. Let us practice the way of giving and the Lord will develop close relationships like that of these two women of God.



Piedad has been a member of the Worldwide Church of God for 30 years. She is grateful to God for her membership in the Bogota congregation where her four children came to know the Word of God. She works with her husband David Mozquera on the pastoral team of their church along with Hector and Paulina Barrero as co-pastors. Piedad has a degree in advertising and worked for five years in the field before making the decision to stay home and devote herself full time to raising her children. She has taken a few handcraft classes and art classes that she passes along to the women in her church. Now that her children are all professionals, it is Piedad's desire to dedicate herself to serving God in whatever he wants within her church and country. You may e-mail her through Paulina Barrero's e-mail address: pausalita@hotmail.com.

Joy is the simplest form of gratitude.

—Karl Barth

Zorro and Me

A Very Special Trip

By Barbara Dahlgren

After I wrote the article about youth trips I received some lovely e-mail messages from kids sharing stories about Zorro's youth work and trips I had forgotten. These "kids" are all grown up now. Some wouldn't even be considered young adults, but more like middle aged, which makes me feel old. But that's OK. There's joy in just surviving. And I don't feel a day over 65. Of course I'm only 61, but I try not to think about it.

Phyllis Warren from Kentucky wrote: "I was one of those who probably wouldn't have gone anywhere if Mr. D. hadn't had a compassion for kids. One of my favorite memories is when he took a bunch of us to West Virginia. We played games all day, ate all we wanted and got to meet teens from other churches. The girls slept on the floor in an upstairs room of someone's house (I can't remember where the guys stayed) and rode home with a carload of other teens (after the all-day picnic and fun) in a car that was colder than a well-digger's rear because the heat didn't work. Ah—memories! Those were some great times. Thank Mr. D. for me for all those great memories."

Another suggested I tell how we took the Tacoma and Olympia, Washington, teens to Hawaii about 25 years ago. It's a story worth sharing.

Being on the West Coast Zorro thought a youth trip to Hawaii would be educational and fun. Most had not been to Hawaii so they

were delighted. Many adults in those congregations hadn't been to Hawaii either so we had quite a few chaperone volunteers. There were 84 of us in total.

Usually our trips are a myriad of uncomfortable accommodations, cramped travel and tons of fast food. This trip was an exception. The pastor in Hawaii found a former army barracks that had been converted into a camp for traveling groups. It wasn't the Hilton, but it was on the beach near the Polynesian Cultural Center. When we weren't touring we could swim and play beach volleyball. They even provided the equipment. Not only was the price right, but also it included three meals a day we didn't have to prepare. This was not going to be our average youth trip. Praise God!



The kids worked hard for about a year, having bake sales and selling candy and citrus fruit

to earn enough money. We used a booking agent from Hawaii to make our travel arrangements and sent him our money about a month before we were scheduled to leave. The excitement was euphoric. Then—we received the phone call. The booking agent's company went into receivership. Our travel money was in this company's account and now frozen. It looked as if we had no recourse but to cancel the trip. Being the pessimistic spouse I am I said, "I knew it was too good to be true!"

Zorro sprang into action. He contacted our church hotline and told everyone to pray and fast about the situation. God is infinite and powerful. In the scheme of worldwide problems our little trip to Hawaii was not earth shattering, but on the other hand—God does

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A Very Special Trip

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care about the intimate details of our lives. Maybe we needed to let him know we would place the situation in his loving hands, trust him and accept his decision.

About a week later Zorro received another call from our booking agent who, incidentally, worked for the company and was not the owner. He was heart sick about what happened to us. The receivership was not lifted, but he couldn't stop thinking about all those kids who worked for a year to save money for this trip. He told Zorro he was taking a second mortgage on his house and sending our money back so we could make our own air flight arrangements. Zorro told him he didn't have to do that, but the man insisted. He felt it was something he needed to do. There was much rejoicing in Tacoma and Olympia that night. Our church hotline was buzzing with "glory hallelujahs."

We scrambled around to find good deals at different airlines on such short notice. One bargain included a free rental car with ticket purchase. We ended up with twice as many rental car vouchers than drivers. We were able to trade them in and upgrade our vehicles to vans, Cadillacs and other luxury cars. We toured Hawaii in style. When God blesses you, it really does overflow.

The thought God had heard our prayers made this trip very special indeed. It's as if he said, Aloha! Have a wonderful time on me! And we did!



Barbara attended the C&B conference in Lexington, Kentucky in March where she enjoyed the fun and fellowship. E-mail her at bydahlgren@pacbell.net. Copyright February 2009.



In the Garden

By Dixie Marino

It might have been chilly that evening as Jesus and his disciples strode along the familiar lane toward the Mount of Olives. It had been a long day of walking to get to Jerusalem and supper had gone on longer than usual. They would welcome a rest and a good night's sleep. Most of them settled in when they got to the garden grove of Gethsemane, but Jesus took Peter, James and John with him to a more secluded area. He felt in need of the companionship of these closest friends.

As Jesus went a bit farther along to pray he asked them to wait for him, telling them he was deeply distressed. He said his sorrow was such as was crushing his soul to the point of death (Mark 14:33-34, *NLT* throughout). And then he went off to pray: "Please take this cup of suffering away from me" (verses 35-36). He needed, as he so often explained to his followers, to fulfill scriptures portraying him as the Suffering Servant, to fulfill the requirements of High Priest as he experienced his humanity to the fullest degree. This is what he knew he must do, but he was feeling, let this cup pass. Isn't there some other way?

Jesus agonized with emotions so extreme it's unimaginable. The Gospel writers were inspired to record his agony in the garden that night. And by doing so Jesus has given us permission, if you will, to grieve, to sorrow, to agonize unto death. He also gives us a pat on the shoulder to encourage us. He encouraged Peter that night, when he said: "Keep alert and pray. Otherwise temptation

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In the Garden

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will overpower you. For though the spirit is willing enough, the body is weak” (verse 38).

The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Don't you just love that? He knew first hand! His spirit never wavered, but the emotional battle was about to engulf him. He knew the feelings of aloneness and neediness. Luke records in chapter 22, verse 43, that an angel came and strengthened him.

Think about it. He had fallen onto the ground in agony to pray. His face was dirty and needed wiping. His throat was dry; he needed water. Most of all he needed to know, to see, that someone was there to help him. How much more human can you get! He knows our spirit is willing but our poor humanity is so weak and, indeed, betrays us so much of the time.

Jesus knows all about it. He knows in a been-there, done-that, way. But thanks to God, he shows us how to get up off our face, to rise from our knees, to stride out of our place of agony to face whatever awaits us. Because he, being forever yielded to God's will, ended his praying, “Yet I want your will, not mine” (Mark 14:36).

That's the secret. That's how we get through things. That's how we can go on in spite of our agonies and heartaches. We be-

come forever trust in the knowledge that the Father hears, Jesus knows, the Holy Spirit makes sense from our stammering attempts to pray, and God has the best, most loving outcome already in our next reality.

What a Savior! And again, What a Savior!



Dixie says: “We are having our 50th high school reunion this year. The organizing committee sent out a questionnaire asking what are some of the things you have on your bucket list? I replied: ‘What is a bucket list?’ I was glad to find out I was not the only one who didn't know it's a list of things you want to do before you die! I couldn't think of anything and I still can't. I feel I'm doing the things now that are important to me—keeping up with family members and spending time with my husband. I sing with an ensemble at church and still bake cookies when the refreshment committee needs them. And, of course, I try to stay tuned in for any thoughts for the next article!” E-mail her at cmarino001@ec.rr.com.



You can never get a cup of tea large enough or a book long enough to suit me.

—C.S. Lewis

Character in a saint means the disposition of Jesus Christ persistently manifested.

—Oswald Chambers



The Badge of a Christian

By Sheila Graham

Several years ago we planted two fig trees in our back yard. Actually, they're more big bushes than trees. We put them within reach of our sprinkler system so they would have plenty of water during the summer. My mother encouraged us to plant them because she loves fresh figs. We do too. While I'm mowing in the back yard, when they're ripe, I'll swing by the fig trees on my riding mower and grab a bite or two.

Usually at least once during the winter we have a hard freeze for several days. After we planted the trees, that next winter both our trees froze. We thought we had lost them, but come spring time they sprouted up again from the ground. I wasn't so concerned about them freezing then, but from that time on only one of the trees grew any figs on it.

Then one milder winter neither tree froze back. We watered and Ed fertilized and pruned the trees. Both trees grew, and I kept looking for figs. Maybe this time the barren tree would produce. I checked both trees for weeks. Sure enough the one tree was loaded with figs again, but the barren tree only grew leaves, no figs. I was disappointed again.

Have you ever felt like that barren fig tree—all leaves and no fruit? I have to admit I have at times. I look like a Christian. I sound like a Christian, but I don't feel I'm bearing the fruit God expects. Sometimes it may be because we've had a hard, killing, heart-breaking freeze in our lives. We feel dead. We're up walking around, but we feel dead inside. Sometimes it may be because we've made some bad life-changing decisions, and the scars we've created are still

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Nurturenet

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

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



The Badge of a Christian

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fresh and throbbing.

Whatever the reason for the bone-chilling scars in our lives, I've come to the conclusion they shouldn't keep us from following our Savior in reaching out to the world. Those scars are the badges of a Christian. Those scars, whether from losing a loved one or suffering a debilitating illness or from creating a problem for ourselves through some sort of sin; they are the badges of a Christian.

See these scars. See what Christ did for me. He is willing and able to do the same for you, no matter what you have suffered. Feeling all alone? He'll comfort you. Are you hurting? He'll heal you. Have you sinned? He'll forgive you. Whether we deserve them or not, either way those scars are our badges.

I was surprised when a few weeks later Ed came in the house all excited to tell me tiny figs were starting to grow on the barren tree. It reminded us of Jesus' parable about the fig tree. Ed's patient care of the barren tree over several years finally produced fruit. Though we may not always be as productive as we

would like, for whatever reason, Jesus never gives up on us either. If abundant fruit isn't being produced in your life right now, maybe this time for you is a time for loving care and healing from our Savior.

Even after we're healed, we'll have scars to show for our troubles, but that's OK with Jesus. He has scars too.



Sheila and Ed enjoy attending Hope Community Fellowship pastored by Arnold and Trish Clauson in The Colony in Texas. Along with several others, Sheila is on the sermon list. She may be contacted at sheila.graham@wcg.org.

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

Laughter is the closest thing to the grace of God.

—Karl Barth

There was once a young man who, in his youth, professed a desire to become a great writer. When asked to define *great* he said, “I want to write stuff that the whole world will read, stuff that people will react to on a truly emotional level, stuff that will make them scream, cry, wail, howl in pain, desperation and anger!” He now works for Microsoft writing error messages.

—Jokes.com

The irate customer calling the newspaper offices loudly demanded to know where her Sunday edition was.

“Ma’am,” said the employee, “today is Saturday. The Sunday paper is not delivered until Sunday.” There was quite a pause on the other end of the phone, followed by a ray of recognition. “So that’s why no one was in church today.”

—Jokes.com

An efficiency expert concluded his lecture with a note of caution. “You need to be careful about trying these techniques at home.”

“Why?” asked somebody from the audience.

“I watched my wife’s routine at dinner for years,” the expert explained. “She made lots of trips between the refrigerator, stove, table and cabinets, often carrying a single item at a time. One day I told her, Honey, why don’t you try carrying several things at once?”

“Did it save time?” the guy in the audience asked.

“Actually, yes,” replied the expert. “It used to take her 30 minutes to make dinner. Now I do it in ten.”

—Jokes.com

Sigmund Freud once said, “What do women want?” The only thing I have learned in fifty-two years is that women want men to stop asking dumb questions like that.

—Bill Cosby