



Connections

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

Vol. 13, No. 2

Summer 2006

With Loving Thanks

By Lorraine Pelley

My husband was asked to preach the sermon at Friendship Baptist church in Pasadena. The congregation was honoring their pastor and wife for their 10 years of service to that church. At the beginning of his sermon my husband announced I would be saying a few words to Genine, their pastor's wife, thanking her for her heart of service and love to the church. I want to share that message because I want to thank all of you for your loving service to your church and our God.



“Congratulations to you for the 10 years you have served your God, your family and your church as a pastor's wife. As a fellow pastor's wife, I know the blessings and the joys you and I share being a pastor's wife.

“But I also know the difficult times. I know there are times when you and your family have just sat down to enjoy a special dinner you have prepared—only to have the phone ring and your husband has to take that call and talk with that member who needs some pastoral love and advice—and 30 or 60 minutes later he returns to the table to find the kids have finished eating and left—and you then place his plate in the microwave to warm up his food that has gotten cold.

“I know there are times when you wait patiently as your husband says, ‘I'll only be 10 minutes.’ But that meeting continues to go on and on and the ‘10 minutes’ turns into 30 minutes or even an hour.

“And I know the heartache you and your pastor/husband feel when you watch one of your church members make a series of unwise decisions or perhaps even walk away from their faith—and you wonder, Is there something we could have

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Thanks

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done to stop this?

“But in spite of the difficult times, you have remained a loving and supportive pastor’s wife. The blessings of being a pastor’s wife far outweigh the hard times. The joy you feel as you sit next to your husband during a counseling and you watch that member respond to what is being said—and in your heart you praise God and thank him for letting your husband shepherd this flock.

“Thank you for the sterling example you set for others. Thank you for loving and supporting your husband in his calling as a church pastor. And thank you for serving God’s people here in your church! May God continue to bless you in your ministry as a pastor’s wife and as my sister in Jesus Christ.”



Lorraine and Dennis serve in New Hope Christian Fellowship in Pasadena. She has the gift of hospitality. After dinner at her house, an elderly man sent her a thank-you note. He mentioned the best part of the meal was the main serving, which was “love.” E-mail her at lorraine.pelley@wcg.org.

◆ CONNECTIONS ◆

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Connections, a journal by and for elders’ wives and families, 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.

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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.



God Is in Our Moments

This issue of *Connections* is No. 54! And this is our 14th year of publication. Our circulation is small, but our articles are great, thanks to you. Does it seem we've been going 14 years? I was surprised to realize how long ago *Connections* started, and how quickly the time has passed.

My dad used to say time goes so fast it seems as if every other day is Thursday.

The seconds, minutes and hours of life can run together and get lost. James was right—life is like a mist that appears for a little while then vanishes (James 4:14).

“Teach us to number our days aright,” Moses asked God, “that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12). How do we do this? Author Mark Buchanan suggests we “work out where time and eternity meet. Pay attention to how God is afoot in the mystery of each moment, in its mad rush or maddening plod. He is present in both. But too often, we are so time-obsessed that we take no time to really notice” (*The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring the Sabbath*, Word, 2005, Mark Buchanan).

Do you pay attention to how God is afoot in the mystery of each moment? Or do you let them blur together in a mad rush to get everything done? I may have mentioned a time or two I'm a big *Star Trek* fan. I enjoyed all the movies (even the odd-numbered ones). In *Insurrection*, a Ba'ku woman named Anij teaches Captain Jean-Luc Picard how to capture a single moment. She slows time, allowing him to see the beating wings of a hummingbird as it hov-

ers over a flower. When her life is in danger, he practices this technique and is able to keep her alive until help arrives.

While we can't slow time in the same way, we can pause to notice the mystery of God in our moments, as Buchanan suggests. Pick a moment and focus on where you are, what you're doing, who you're with and how God is present. Take a mental snapshot and praise God for what you see. In a way, time will slow down and you'll be fully in the moment.

I've heard some of you don't take the time to read *Connections* now that we've switched to delivering it as an e-mail attachment. Please don't let it become just another e-mail to delete from your inbox. Print it out and take it with you. Then when you find a spare moment, take the time to savor each article. Let yourself slow down a little and look for the mystery of God's presence as each author shares a bit of his or her life. Perhaps you'll be inspired to share the mystery and write too!

Tammy

Connections Online

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



A Little Bird Told Me

By Kathy Miller

We finished our women's Bible study and some of us stayed to chat. Our conversation revolved around the place and atmosphere in which each of us especially enjoy prayer. As I'm a nature lover, I shared that having solitude in a private outdoor setting with the sound of birds in the background was probably my favorite scenario for meditation and prayer. One of our group piped up saying she didn't like those nature sounds. They were so distracting to her that when she spends time talking to God, she shuts the windows so she can't hear any birds. She waxed eloquent about

how annoying bird songs were to her until I found myself getting a little annoyed with her!



On the drive home, I talked to God about a number of things and eventually came to the woman who didn't share

my enthusiasm for praying out in nature. I felt sorry for her and her sterile approach to prayer. I prayed God would help her appreciate the sounds of all his creatures and learn to love the sound of birds. I spent quite a lot of time talking to God about this and shared with him all the ways he needed to intervene in her thought process.

Whatever you can do
or dream you can, begin it;
Boldness has genius, power,
and magic in it.



—Goethe

Some days later, as I prayed in my bedroom, a bird began to sing outside my window. Naturally, I thought again of my nature-hating friend. Somehow, my attitude had ratcheted up from “not appreciating bird songs during prayer” to “hating nature.” I thanked God for the little bird he had sent to serenade me during my time with him. I sent up prayers of appreciation for all his creation starting with the smallest living creature to the vastness of the universe and then went on to pray about other things. The little bird continued its serenade all through my prayer time.

As time went on, the bird seemed to become louder and I noticed its song was quite simple—four notes. Those four notes seemed to come one after the other in a monotonous drone. Fleetingly, I wished it would fly away or add a few notes to its repertoire. I mentioned to God perhaps he could send a different bird to add a little variety. God's answer was no.

I continued my conversation with God but that stupid bird was getting on my nerves! I thought of removing the screen so I could throw something to make it go away. Suddenly, I recalled the conversation with my friend and how righteously (or self-righteously) I had prayed for her enlightenment. A smile came to my face and then I laughed right out loud at what God had done. He had answered my prayers all right. He held a mirror to my face so I might understand what my friend was talking about by letting me have a taste of what annoyed her.

The next time I saw my friend at church, I shared this whole experience with her, apologizing for my previous attitude and letting her know I now understood her point of view. I thought she was going to fall off her chair she was laughing so hard. In addition to taking it well (almost too

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A Little Bird

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well) we probably boosted our immune systems with all the hilarity we shared.

We know God loves us and helps us make course corrections in our lives. I love it when he shares his sense of humor in the process. What a gentle and funny way to correct me. It was one of many times my wonderful Father has tenderly steered my feet along the path.



Kathy Miller serves with her husband, Bill, in the Seattle, Bellevue and Everett, Washington, churches. She has her master's degree in special education and teaches in the Mukilteo School District of Everett. She loves to read, make greeting cards, play cards, fish, camp, flower garden, spend time with her family and friends and she loves to find the humor in life. Her husband provides her with plenty of opportunities to laugh as he has a wonderful sense of humor. Bill and Kathy love the same activities. They have two grown children, Shari and Elizabeth, who live in the Everett area. E-mail her at kathym2u@hotmail.com.

I Was Just Thinking...

...about not being thankful. I have God as my provider, good health, financial stability and live in a land of relative peace, calm and comfort. I should always be thankful!

I shouldn't need a Thanksgiving holiday to remind me. In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Paul said: "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." To me, this means changing from occasional thankfulness to a life of thanks-living.

My focus should be giving thanks to God at all times, even if plagued with an illness, having a stressful day or losing my home in a fire or tornado. As long as I'm alive, the situation can improve with God's blessing and hard work. Considering that, what more could I ask for?

Thanks-living is making a decision to change my life to *always* express thanks in all I do everyday, everywhere, to everyone. God loves me and is all around me. Christ is within me. I am blessed and thankful.

I was just thinking...

—Vera Gibbs
Coppell, Texas

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.

Voices of Our Sisters

The Widow of Nain

By Joyce Catherwood

The widow from Nain had lost her last hope for someone to love and care for her. She had lost her only son (Luke 7:11-16). This widow's heart was broken. Listen to the voice of our sister.

"The last place I wanted to be was in another funeral procession, with my anguish laid bare in front of everyone. I was the center of attention, but all I wanted to do was curl up in a corner and die myself. It was too soon to go through this again—first my husband, then my son.

"As we followed the funeral bier being carried through the streets of Nain, villagers came out of their shops and homes and joined the procession. Some were truly sympathetic. But others joined the flow of people out of duty as they always did. They meant well—strangers gazing at me as though they understood. Shaking their heads, they wondered what would happen to me with no husband, no son to provide for me.

"I no longer cared. Blinded by tears and faint with grief, I could hardly put one foot in front of the other. Just keep going, I told myself. Just keep walking. The sound of shuffling feet on the stone streets was strangely mesmerizing, helping numb the reality of my loss. Even though I was surrounded by people, I had never felt so alone and abandoned.

"Then, suddenly, a man close behind me gently touched my shoulder and said, 'Don't cry.' As I turned to see who it was, I felt someone rush past me. It was Jesus. He went right up to the bier and laid his hand on it. Those carrying my son came to an abrupt halt, startled that someone had in-

terrupted a funeral procession.

"A huge crowd had followed Jesus to our town. Everyone, mourners and onlookers alike, stood still as Jesus, visibly moved with emotion, said, 'Young man, I say to you, get up!' Immediately, my son sat up! I gasped. My heart stopped as I heard my son begin to speak. Staring at everyone around him, he blurted out, 'What's going on?'

"My son had no idea what had happened. He thought he had just awakened from a dream. Seeing his friends, he asked, 'What happened to me?' Stunned and speechless, they just stood there with their mouths open, watching a dead person talk to them!

"Jesus quickly loosened the white linen burial garments that bound my son in death. Helping him off the bier, he put his arm around my boy and led him to my open arms. In the presence of the supernatural, the bystanders trembled with fear and awe, and glorified God.

"Since that day, I've often wondered, why me? As he came upon our sad procession that day, what compelled Jesus to dry a widow's tears? Had he been thinking of his own widowed mother and how broken her heart would be as she watched her firstborn son die on a cross? Even in his last moments of life, Jesus comforted his mother, making sure she would be cared for. Maybe that's why his heart went out to me. I can't say for sure. I only know Jesus was so deeply affected by my grief and uncertain future, he raised my son from the dead. And in so doing, he restored my own life."



Joyce says she thought grandchildren kept you young until one day she noticed her 10-year-old granddaughters observing her and her husband. She says they smiled sweetly at each other and said, "Old people are just so cute!" E-mail her at joyce.catherwood@wgc.org.



Dried Hummingbirds

By Richard Parker

This winter, a hummingbird built a nest in the olive tree in front of our house. She then laid two eggs in the nest. The eggs hatched, and the mother bird carefully tended her brood. That is, until one day when the mother hummingbird stopped coming to the nest. She had probably died, and thus, the babies also died.

Today I was examining that olive tree, and I came across the hummingbird nest. As I looked into it, I saw the dried forms of two baby hummingbirds locked in an eternal stare, looking off into space for the face of their mother. It was so sad to see the futile gaze of those two frozen youngsters.



We exist in a world of religiosity in which we can be left with the feeling we are far removed from God. This feeling is often reinforced by works and law regimens that play on the idea God won't appear until the right hoops are jumped. Christians are often left futilely gazing off into space not seeing the face of their God. This is commonly played out in modern Christianity and is a sad sight.

But when belief in the name of Jesus is embraced, a new reality comes into play. When we believe, Jesus lives in us, and we walk into the light, looking into the face of a Being truly powerful, dynamic and life changing. As Paul said about his experience: "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6, NIV).

Oh, by the way, if you have a hard time envisioning this concept, look in a mirror. Jesus will be looking back at you as he indwells your very flesh. This is indeed a marvelously startling revelation, and it is one that can give you true life with God in the here and now, if you just believe.

May Jesus live in you always!



Richard pastors two churches in Southern California (Long Beach and Orange County). He and Sally have been married 35 years! Together they produce an award winning TV program in Seal Beach, California, called Just Another Religious Program. They have four grown children. E-mail him at jrpsapdap@worldnet.att.net.



George Washington Carver, who began his life as a slave and ended it as a horticulturist, chemist and educator, once said: "I said to God, 'God, tell me the mystery of the universe.' But God answered: 'That knowledge is for Me alone.' So, I said; 'God, tell me the mystery of the peanut.' Then God said: 'Well, George, that's more nearly your size!'"

Listen

By *Dixie Marino*

The Cats are wonderful listeners! They listen intently, and with discrimination. Anything concerning their grooming, meal times and treats gets immediate consideration. All else is up for grabs. It depends on their frame of mind.

At some point in my personal journey, I thought it was time for me to listen, really listen, to the person speaking to me. I decided to practice on a long-time friend. I did really well while she recounted her grandson's latest cute saying. After all I had a grandson story I could tell. And so I listened.

My next conscious thought was: I know my eyes are glazing over. I wonder if she's noticed. I really meant to listen. What was the last thing I remember hearing her say? How can I possibly respond if I didn't hear a word after Dick won the race at school today and...?

My gracious friend didn't let on she noticed the stupor I fell into as she told me about her grandson. She is a very special friend.

Of course, the next step was to perform a complete psychoanalysis to find where I had gotten off course. I watched the Cats again. (It's easier to analyze them than to get into all my stuff). They listen, but they hear and respond only to those things that affect them directly.

Why, the little creatures are completely self-centered! Could it be? I mean, could I be a little self-centered still? Oh, how I need a guide for this one—someone completely true and able to show me the way. I need to hear from the Word.

I looked up scriptures on hearing and listening. The first one in my concordance (in the New Testament) was Mark 4:24: "Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto

you that hear shall more be given." Whoa, I am already in big trouble. I meted out little in the way of hearing, and little shall be measured to me! Oh, please let me find a scripture that will simplify it for me.

And then this wonderful thought from Romans 12:15 came to me, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." You can't get simpler than that. Listening is more than hearing with our ears, it is listening with our heart. Our heart knows how to listen.

It's that spiritual thing about the soft heart that comes with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He lets us know how to extend affection to the troubled one. He makes us able to understand a verbal response is not always necessary. A soft touch on the arm or an arm around the shoulders goes a long way. To cry with and laugh with is the guide and advice the Word gives. The Spirit gives the wisdom that lets us know when to speak and how to listen, with our heart.

When our response comes in sincerity and loving concern then we have blessed with the same blessing God so willingly gives to each of us.

So, in Cat Land at least, the Cats have listening down purrfectly. For them it's a matter of choice; do I act deaf and dumb, or not?

It's also a choice for us. Do we listen with the compassion of Jesus, the extreme emotional response he so often experienced? And are we willing to extend the same compassion to our friends, or do we just hope we won't have to become involved?

As for myself, I'm keeping an eye on the Cats. They make a lot of sense sometimes.



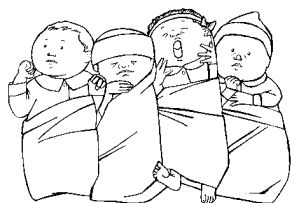
Be sure to read the sad news about Littleboy on page 21. E-mail Dixie at cdmarino@clis.com.



Mom, What Were You Thinking?

By Hannah Knaack

I'm sure when Mom found out I was pregnant, she had every intention of passing on every speck of motherhood information she could. What she failed to mention is when a baby boy is changed, he turns into a heat-seeking missile the instant his diaper is removed. Perhaps she forgot to mention this as she had four girls and no boys, but I think that's beside the point. I'm convinced



she hadn't a clue God ordained boys for target practice, whether at diapering time, with rubber bands or any imaginary weapon.

So there I was, standing at the changing table at 3:14 a.m. on our first night home from the hospital, completely drenched. As I began the mopping up process, my mind took me back to the first time I realized boys and girls were not of the same design.

My older and much wiser 9-year-old sister had hinted at such, but it was Mom who confirmed, indeed, boys did not have the same "plumbing" as girls. Theirs was different. Being a placid and nearly perfect 7-year-old, I accepted this definition until a few weeks later when Kevin came over to play.

My mother held to two cardinal rules about having friends over. They had to play nicely and they must return to their own home to use the facilities. When Kevin decided to buck Mom's rules (ghastly), my sister and I watched in fascination. Imagine that, being able to stand and do the same thing we girls had been doing sitting down all these years!

Eye opening as it was, that viewing was destined to be abbreviated, for if my moth-



er came around the corner of the house and saw Kevin watering the daisies in front of her darling daughters, I am quite certain his plumbing would have become even more different than my innocent 7-year-old brain could possibly imagine.

That image remained with me until the age of 15 when one day Mom asked my sister and me to get the mail. We walked the mile to the Post Office where my sister flipped the combination dial and pulled out the mail, revealing the new issue of *Playgirl* magazine! As the older and wiser sister, she should have realized it had been misplaced and simply turned it over to the Postmistress. But, no, she decided she should discuss this problem with Mom and promptly headed out the door.

It was a much slower walk home than it was to the Post Office and by the time we got there, we both arrived at the same conclusion. Mom was definitely the queen of understatement. Different plumbing, my eye.

If you're feeling empathy for my lack of knowledge, let me say once I learn something, I've got it. It's 6:28 a.m. and any minute now my new bundle of joy is going to squawk for Mama. And I'm ready. Apron, check. Mask with visor, check. Gloves, check. All systems set to go.



Hannah's cherries will be ripe soon, so she's going to try her hand at some new cherry recipes (Cherry Almond Scones sound yummy, she says). She'll be sharing the job of teaching Andrew to drive (there are benefits to "lastborn") and spending time with Sarah while she's home from college. E-mail Hannah at justmomhlc@juno.com.



Pearl of Great Value

By Barbara Dahlgren

Pearl, 81 when she passed away, had a most unusual funeral. The music was the usual somber selections. The flowers were the usual beautiful arrays. The preacher preached. The mourners mourned. The pall bearers lifted and carried. The funeral director directed. It was your ordinary, everyday funeral service except—no one there was a blood relative. Yet the pews were filled. Pearl had no family except for those of us who knew her from church.

Pearl was born in Hampton, Virginia, the youngest of eight children. Her parents didn't teach their kids much about the Bible except that it's more blessed to give than receive and don't store up goods in barns. Pearl never felt loved by her parents. She gained her joy from growing things. She had a magic touch with plants. Her specialties were African violets, orchids, cacti and succulents. She also liked to sketch animals and birds. She loved God's creation.

She moved to California in her early 20s. She had several jobs but settled in to work for 20 years as a home-care provider. She liked looking after others. Pearl never married. She never had children. I don't know



where her brothers and sisters are, if they are living or dead. She became a Christian in 1969 and had attended our church ever since.

Pearl wasn't the friendliest member in the pew. It wasn't so much that she wasn't friendly; she wasn't what you would call a people person. Her face seemed to have a perpetual look of gloom. She wasn't gloomy, but her face was made that way. It could be quite scary to those who didn't take the time to get to know her. In spite of her daunting appearance, Pearl had a heart of gold. Even when her health was failing she asked the pastor, "What can I do to help at church?" She provided him with plants to give to people who were ill, in the hospital or just needed a lift.

Pearl could be quite humorous. Although, one never knew if it was intentional or not. Like the time last year when a new fellow helped with communion. She leaned over to the woman next to her and said, "Who the hell is that?" It happened to be that woman's son. Or during her last days when a dear friend said, "It won't be long now Pearl until you'll be sitting in the lap of God." Pearl replied: "Now won't that be funny? A big woman like me sitting in his lap." Her advice was always, "Put your trust not in mortals, but trust in God—and don't believe everything you hear."

Pearl suffered from that Christian malady called "not good enough-itis." She never felt good enough. Intellectually she knew God loved her, but emotionally she thought, How could he? I'm just not good enough. But it's not about how good we are; it's about how great he is. Even Pearl's name can teach us a lesson.

A pearl is known as the Queen of Gems.

When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, you don't throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer.

—Corrie Ten Boom,
author and Holocaust survivor

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Pearl of Great Value

(Continued from page 10)



I Don't Want to Be an Example

By Charles B. Fleming

This unique treasure is produced by a living animal. It requires no mining, extraction, cutting or polishing to reveal its splendor. It's the only jewel that doesn't need a human's help to be beautiful. Pearls come in a wide range of shapes and colors: white, silvery white, pink, salmon, red, copper, bronze, brown, lavender, purple, green, blue, cream and yellow. Today many women have pearls, but they used to be the most expensive jewelry in the world.

Maybe that's why Jesus uses the pearl in a parable in Matthew 13:44 to 46. He tells the story of a merchant who searched for the pearl of great value. When he found it, he sold everything he had to purchase it. Many say we represent that merchant and the kingdom of heaven is the pearl. But analogies can work both ways. We could never afford to purchase the kingdom of heaven, so others say God is that merchant and we are his pearls. I like that!

Pearl was not alone when she died. The Bible says no one who loses his or her family and follows God is alone (Mark 10:29-30). God purchased our Pearl with the blood of Jesus and we became her family. We did not have her blood in our veins, but we had the same Holy Spirit living in us she had in her. We can learn much from our dear friend who now rests in God's lap. She was indeed a "pearl of great value."



Barbara and Mel (Zorro) just returned from a trip to Spain. When she recovers from jet lag, she promises to write more Zorro stories. E-mail her at bydahlgren@pacbell.net. She loves hearing from you!



Connections

"When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me" (1 Corinthians 13:11, NIV).

Years ago a pastor friend mentioned to me that someone told his son he should be a better example as he was the son of a pastor. The poor kid answered: "I don't want to be an example. I just want to be a kid!"

Sometimes the children of Christian leaders have to deal with unnecessary, even unfair, pressure. This pressure can come from members who expect too much of their leaders' kids. Sometimes it comes from us. We fear our credibility may be undermined if our kids act up and embarrass us. Whatever the cause, I am appealing to all of us to help create and maintain a culture in which all kids can be kids. And this includes the children of ministry leaders, deacons and pastors.

When my friend told me his son's comment, my own kids were all less than 6 years old. I decided in spite of any personal embarrassment my kids might cause me (and over the years they did!) I would just have to take it on the chin. I was not going to ask them to "be an example." I realized I couldn't do this on my own. Not only must my expectations change, but also I needed the cooperation of all my brothers and sisters. Each congregation develops a culture of its own, and to change behavior we must all change our expectations.

I explained to the brethren in Kingston, Jamaica, my concerns and asked them to

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Example

(Continued from page 11)

help. I asked them to correct my kids if they saw them doing anything wrong, but not to say they should do the right thing (or do better) because of whose kids they were. Rather, they should be corrected for doing wrong. That is reason enough.

I will forever be indebted to the brethren. Over the years some of them did correct the kids, but I didn't hear them demand more because they were a ministry leader's kids. My kids have all kinds of funny stories to tell about growing up as a minister's kids, but they haven't expressed a feeling of having excessive expectations placed upon them.

The irony is after making this request I was embarrassed by one of my kids and gave that child a tongue lashing for "not being a good example." Later I caught myself and had to go and apologize. But I learned from the experience and did not repeat it. The kid doesn't even remember it, which is encouraging to know. Our kids do forgive and overlook. So even if you have made some mistakes in this area (recently or a long time ago), a sincere apology can

make a difference.

So, please join in helping us create a culture where our kids are free to be kids, and our ministry leaders are free to raise their kids without excessive demands. Let's make it our goal to leave one message our kids can take away from growing up in the church. Let it be the voice of their older brother saying, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14, NIV).



Charles and Carmen serve the Caribbean region from their home in Orlando, Florida.

They have three adult children whose favorite activity is nailing their parents with quotes from the e-mail message circulating among young people who grew up in the WCG, titled "You might have grown up in the WCG if..." (sample answer: "...you lived in the Caribbean and know where Big Sandy, Texas, is!"). E-mail him at charles_fleming@wcg.org.



Robert, Michelle, Annie and their dad.

Whatever you do, you need courage. Whatever course you decide upon, there is always someone to tell you that you are wrong. There are always difficulties arising that tempt you to believe your critics are right.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson



What's in a Name?

By David W. Gibbs

My parents tell me I was named after two great men—King David in the Old Testament and Winston Churchill, the inspirational leader during World War II. From their youth God prepared these people for what he would have them do later in life.

Other names I have include Christian, pastor, husband, father, friend, employee. Each of us has a list of names and titles, some given, some earned or acquired. These all present opportunities and carry responsibility, great privileges and even history.

Churchill and David were men of strength, courage, tenacity, compassion and vision in times of great adversity. They were not perfect, but this does not detract from the great roles they played in history and their status as heroes. It's humbling to stand on the shoulders of such giants as we strive to lead in the areas of responsibility God has given us. In all this we must realize our Lord is close and guides the hands of history.

Asaph tells us in Psalm 78:70-72: "He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance. And David shepherded them with integrity of heart and with skillful hands he led them."

Churchill quoted this call and spur to the faithful servants of truth and justice to the British people in his first broadcast as prime minister, on the BBC, May 19, 1940, in London. "Arm yourselves, and be ye men of valor, and be in readiness for the conflict; for it is better for us to perish in battle than to look upon the outrage of our nation and our altar."

These men after whom I am named in-

spired their nations and earned their loyalty. Both left a lasting legacy through their writings. Their lives were filled with wisdom and hard choices. Monuments were erected in their honor. Their humble origins, determination, successes and failures give us hope.

One lesson positively reinforced to me is the need for "mighty men" around each servant leader, as detailed in 1 Chronicles 11. I thank God for family, friends, brethren, colleagues and others whom he has inspired and blessed to help us learn, lead and serve in various capacities. God gives the wisdom to set the right example with the right balance between family, work, leisure, friends and church.

Our names, titles and reputations are important. Each area of life must reflect the glory of God. Through his grace we have and will bear much fruit. As Sir Winston said at Harrow, his alma mater, "Never give in—never, never, never, never, in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy."



David and Alberta serve the Birmingham, England, church. They will celebrate 20 years of marriage in November. Their two richest blessings are their children, Sarah and Michael. David works for the Royal Bank of Scotland and also serves as a Magistrate. He is on the Board of Trustees for both the British Plain Truth and Worldwide Church of God. Hobbies include reading, trying to write, annoying people and chess. E-mail him at dwgibbs62@btinternet.com.

Is Our Help Line Busy?

By Sheila Dela Peña

I received two phone calls from two distressed friends. It had been a long and stressful couple of weeks and I hardly felt capable of handling any more problems. Let's just say I'd reached my stress limit and any more would have sent me spinning into the orbit of depression.



As servants in the ministry, we are often placed in situations where we need to be—or are expected to be—dispensers of comfort and encouragement. I usually don't have any complaints, but when I have some painful and difficult issues to deal with myself, it becomes difficult to be a source of comfort. When my own world is filled with noise and unrest, listening to people's problems becomes a source of distress and even pain.

It's difficult to emotionally detach myself from other people's problems, especially when friends and family are involved. I believe as women, we were created to be more empathetic toward others because of the nurturing spirit we were given. But what if, weighed down by our own hurts and concerns, we have nothing left to give? What if we have reached our stress limit, but our hurting brothers and sisters continue to dump their emotional burdens on us?

What if the noise inside our heads becomes a deafening drum beat, where other people's concerns are pounding mercilessly on our own? What do we do? Who can we turn to for help?

As humans, we can give only so much of ourselves at a time. The emotional re-

sources God gives us get depleted too. As we have so often heard, we cannot give what we do not have. With this in mind, do we stop giving of ourselves from time to time? Can we excuse ourselves and turn away a hurting soul? After all, we might cause more harm than good when our judgment is clouded and our emotions are far from rational.

God never turns us away whenever we approach his heavenly throne for help and comfort. He is always available for us even though we may sometimes feel he is awfully quiet up there. And while, unlike him, our resources get depleted, the Lord Jesus always has a fresh supply of resources ready for our taking. His Holy Spirit not only dwells in us, but he also eternally speaks to our hearts! And his Word is replete with wisdom and promises of encouragement, comfort and our daily provision.

Jesus loves us. He has not left us here on earth without leaving the tools we need to cope with the challenges of our daily lives. He has left us with a help line we can call anytime, any day. It is never busy! And when we begin to feel we no longer have the strength and comfort to give others, we can rely on his promise: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, *who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God*" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4, italics mine).

When there was nothing else comforting I could say to my friends as they spilled their hearts out over the phone, I turned to God's Word and sent them messages of encouragement through their mobile phones. I pored over the Psalms, looking for a prayer I could send them and ended up praying those same verses myself. It's amazing how God can literally give me the com-

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Help Line

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fort I need through his Word, so I can give the same comfort to others. Text messages are a great way to be of help and are instruments God can use to deliver a message of comfort and encouragement to his dearly loved children.

We don't always have to speak to give comfort and encouragement. But we can always listen and keep our well-meaning advice to ourselves. And if we ourselves are going through a rough time, we can always go to the One who never gets tired of helping us—the One who never runs out of love and encouraging words for us. We don't have to take it all in by ourselves—in fact, we shouldn't! Let's give it all and give it up to God. He can take it!

The next time my friends or others come to me with their burdens—and they will!—I'll be sure to have my Bible next to me or in my memory. I am by no means

ready to handle all their concerns, and I don't intend to. I'm still going through a rough time, but I know God is more than able to help me and my friends. He may still choose to use me as his help line for others in the midst of my own difficulties, but I also know he will continue to supply me with the strength and comfort I need to do so. After all, he is my true help line.



Sheila and Rex serve in Manila, Philippines. Rex is area superintendent for Metro Manila and executive assistant to Eugene Guzon (national director). She is now enjoying a long-awaited vacation with her sister in Malaysia. It's a good time to reflect on the more important things in life, like family. E-mail her at sheila_delapena@yahoo.com.

Confidential Peer Listener Line

We're here for you!

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The great use of life is to spend it for something that outlasts it.

—William James
(permission to reprint
granted by Paul R. Reynolds & Son)

Being all fashioned of the self-same dust, Let us be merciful as well as just.

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:
Tales of a Wayside Inn, Pt. III

Living in the Far Country

By Sue Berger

Oh, no! Not another message about the Prodigal Son! Does anyone else have as much trouble as I do relating to this guy? Honestly!

I did not demand an early inheritance from my parents. I did not run away from home, much less buy a passport for a distant country to put family and responsibility far behind me. I didn't squander my youth on sex, drugs and alcohol. I have not lived in the gutter or in such poverty that I attempted to survive on livestock feed. I just fail to identify with him.

While I realize the main thrust of this parable is to illustrate God's incredible love for us, over the years I've settled with identifying with the elder son. Oh, come on, you've heard those sermons and read those articles too. The ones about our self-righteousness for not living a life of excess. About being judgmental toward those who bring pain and poverty upon themselves. About being able to celebrate with the angels when sinners repent. All valid points! After all, this son is part of the parable as well.

But the Prodigal? No way. He's for the people who have really made a mess of their lives. Not me.

In reference to "the far country," the late Dr. Ellis A. Fuller said, "It is anywhere that a man tries to live without God." In other words, the far country is just one step away from the will of the Father God.

Ouch! Okay, now you're stepping on my toes!

Could it be the far country is so close all of us are familiar with it, yet don't recognize we are either living in it or are camped right on its border?

The far country begins when I demand my freedom to do what is contrary to the Father's good will. It begins when I see life as an opportunity to be selfishly happy. The far country begins when I show absolutely no concern to improve the quality of my relationship with God, or my effectiveness in communicating the great love of God to those around me. I just don't care!

Perhaps I'm not so different from the Prodigal after all.

Have I departed from where I once was in my Father's house?

Have I ever wasted my time, talents and treasure in selfish pursuits?

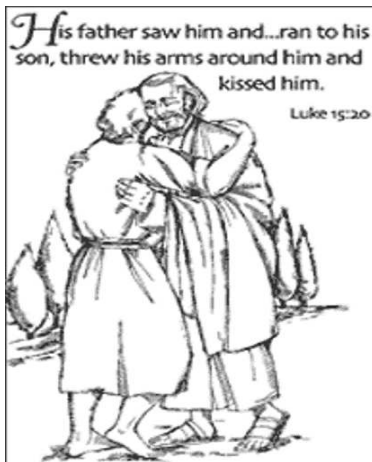
Have I found my heart hungry and thirsty for the food and fellowship of God and family?

Have I neglected to nourish my soul on the food of God?

Has my greed for material possessions caused me to drift into the far country?

Has resentment led me into the far country?

Has trouble, trial or difficulty caused me to stray away from God?



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The Far Country

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Have I found life to be a fruitless rat race that brings no satisfaction?

Am I in the far country without even knowing it?

The Prodigal acted in an irresponsible and self-destructive way. Can I relate? Oh yeah, and I'm betting so can you. It doesn't mean we have to stay that way. All we have to do is head toward Home. The Father is watching the horizon and "while we're a great way off" will run toward us to meet us.

Just go home. Sounds simple enough, but how do we do that? I wish I could give you a 1-2-3 program in response, but I can't. Our wanderings in and out of God's house are as unique as our personal walk with him. The Prodigal gives us a key: Attitude. He came to his senses and realized he needed his Father's help to survive. He'd blown it and couldn't fix it. I usually try to fix the situations I mess up before I go to God with them. I'm like a kid trying to glue Mom's vase back together before she notices. It doesn't work any better with God than it did with Mom!

So ask yourself (and I'll ask myself), what am I afraid of? What am I hiding? What don't I want anyone to find out about? What are my insecurities? What am I

ashamed of? Those are the areas where I'm camped out in the Far Country. I haven't come home and allowed God to accept me and help me.

It doesn't matter to God if we're the Prodigal Son staggering on the horizon or the Elder Son sulking in the barn—he will come out to meet us!

Provision has already been made for us back Home. We just have to accept it!

The special occasion robe is laid out, ready for us to wear to our homecoming feast as the guest of honor. The signet ring is sized and polished, ready to slip onto our finger so we can resume conducting official family business. Slaves weren't given footwear, but new sandals are ready for us as we're restored to family status at God's table.

Let's not stay in the Far Country of self-destruction. Let's go Home!



Sue loves hot weather and sunshine, so summers in Central Texas are perfect! She enjoys tending potted plants and hanging baskets on her back patio oasis; the perfect locale for her sunset glass of wine. E-mail her at sueberger2000@hotmail.com. (© 2005 Sue Berger; Roster Artist of Incubator Creative Group)

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."

—Luke 15:20-24, NIV

No Limit With God

By Anne Gillam

I am a firm believer in prayer, and I do not limit myself by asking for help in the big things of life. I admit I even ask God for a good parking place down town. I'm not fond of parallel parking and even though I can do it, I refuse to if I can find a way around it.



In Philippians 4:6 we are told not to “be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” I get anxious about the little things in life and these little things get me out of focus with God.

Can you imagine not being anxious in our day-to-day lives? It sometimes seems the impossible dream. We aren't going to be free from fears or worries, but we don't have to bear them alone or allow them to rule our lives.

When little things trip me up and I begin to lose focus, I bring them before God. I don't feel I'm bothering my Father. The nature of a loving and caring father is to be concerned for the health and welfare of his children. As parents and grandparents we stop whatever we are doing to help ease the troubles of our children. It doesn't grieve us to help them, but gives us pleasure knowing we can give them comfort. I'm convinced our requests also give our Lord pleasure as he fulfills them.

We've had horrible static on our phone line ever since we moved into our home in 1978, but it really began to disrupt our lives as we tried to move into the age of computers and the Internet. We thought getting DSL would solve our problems, but it

wasn't the solution.

We hounded the phone company and they sent out many a repairman. They gave reason after reason for our problem, but nothing worked. I was told the main problem was in the old phone line and though it needed replacing they refused to do so. The cost was too much.

I took this problem before God. I went so far as to pray for God to send a big storm to take down the phone line. I soon took that one back—how unfair it would be to the others on the same line and how wrong my request. I again placed control for the situation in God's capable hands.

We are told we can ask for anything in prayer and we shall receive it (1 John 3:22; Matthew 17:20). If we have the faith we can move a mountain from here to there. Our phone problems seemed like a mountain at the time. It's not always the kindest solution to our problems to move a mountain or blow down the phone line. I don't think God would handle things that way and this isn't what the verse means. God will not disregard the needs and safety of others for our requests, but anything God would do, we can do in prayer, if we have faith.

I know God heard my prayers and even though a long time went by without a solution, I knew our situation was well in his hands. I admit I began to give up on my dreams of staying connected and I wondered if the answer to my prayer was no.

It wasn't until a new repairman started working on the connectors at the end of our road that my hopes for a solution began to surface again. I remembered my prayer to take down the phone line and the temptation of it still hovered in the background. The repairman came and went and still we had static.

I again began to lose hope until the next day when he came to check the connections

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No Limit With God

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to our home. He said some of the connectors were more than 30 years old and ours was the worst he had seen. As he touched the connector our phone went dead and at his second touch the line fell to the ground. That prayer came to life again. God had a better solution.

Even when it seems as though God doesn't hear our prayers and the solution is taking too long, God has the right answer and the right timing. I'm glad he's in charge of things in my life.

Now I still believe we can ask God for anything, but I know I need to place my anything in his hands, trust him for the right solution and ask for the patience to wait for his answer, in his time. We will always be blessed by that faith.

The next thing on my agenda is to seek a solution, kind and gentle, for the skunk who has taken residence under our house. I'm sure God has a better solution than the one I have in mind right now.



Anne serves the small congregation in Klamath Falls, Oregon, as a small group leader or shepherd leader. She has been a dental assistant, a kindergarten aide and a raiser of sheep, but most of the time she's been a stay-at-home mom and grandmother. When she left her job as dental assistant she asked God where he wanted her to serve next. Anne didn't think she heard correctly when the job of SGL was offered, so she resisted at first. It was not until she thought she heard a small voice ask who her favorite prophet was that she understood the offer was genuine. She said, "Why Jonah, of course!" The last thing she wanted to do was to run away from serving God. Anne says though the Lord Jesus is the head of her little group, she feels it is an honor to be a tool in his hands. E-mail her at WE-BEBASS@aol.com.

Connections

In the Shadow of His Grace

"...And The Truth Will Set You Free"

—John 8:32

By Trish A. Clauson

Honesty is a virtue I've valued all my life. As a child I was terrified of being dishonest, knowing I would suffer severely if caught. When I disobeyed, I would often confess before it was discovered. Even now, I tend to disclose too much for fear of lying by omission. I was shocked when I began to learn of the lies permeating my entire belief system.

Every book I read on abuse and dysfunctional families opened my eyes to the reality of my past. The more I read, the more I had to accept what happened to me was indeed abuse. But where did the lies come from? I found the Bible had the best answer.

1 John 4:8 says God is love; John 17:17 says, "Thy word is truth," and Numbers 23:19 says God does not lie. The lies didn't come from love, as truth comes from God who does not lie and who is love. They came from the abuse, which is never committed in love. I define abuse as any action or neglect of action perpetrated in the absence of love. As abuse prevailed in my home, the lies did too.

I also discovered these lies came from different facets of the abuse. Some came from what my parents said, while others came from the implied messages of their actions. Still others came from the neglect. And because I had to distort my realities to survive, these distortions became lies as well.

In spite of this evidence, my greatest obstacle was seeing the lies for what they were. As I had believed them all my life, they

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Shadow of Grace

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didn't feel like lies to me; they had become my truth.

This scripture took on new meaning for me: "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Though I was no longer the victim of abuse, I was still a prisoner of these lies. God was telling me I was responsible for bringing them into captivity to the obedience of Christ. As long as I allowed them to remain free, they exalted themselves against the knowledge of God.

To bring these lies into captivity, I first

had to recognize them. I began listening to what was in my heart and mind. I discovered these lies could surface as thoughts: *You are disgusting; even God can't stand to look at you*, or as feelings: *I feel so worthless, I deserve to be dead.*

No matter how they surfaced, they fed off each other. If I felt bad, thoughts

would soon echo with the lie *I am bad*. If I thought I was bad, it wasn't long before I felt bad. It was a vicious circle from which I could find no escape.

Identifying the lies was the first step. The next was to find the corresponding truth, so I could exchange one for the other. The information I read gave me many truths; it was Scripture that anchored me in all truth.

My head accepted the new truths more quickly than my heart. The feeling of being worthless was such a powerful one my heart would fight with my head, unwilling to believe I was anything but worthless. As my head tried to believe the new truth, my heart tenaciously hung on to the old one. This caused my realities to collide, creating a cacophony of insanity. Depending on the lie,

this conflict could go on for days, weeks or even months.

I couldn't force my heart to feel differently, so the choice to act on the truth had to be made with my head. I didn't have to fully believe it was the truth to act on it. I just had to make the choice to do so.

The first time I did this, I was completely blown away. The truth worked. Needless to say, I was more willing to try again. With every positive result, my heart was released a little more from the lie, until it finally accepted the truth. In time, I didn't have to make a conscious decision to act on the new truth; it was now the only truth. The lie simply faded away.

As my belief system contained hundreds of lies, I went through this process again and again. Many of the lies were so interconnected, I had to work through several others first, before I could eliminate the host lie. This was especially true of the intrinsic lies I believed about myself—who I was and what I was capable of accomplishing.

These lies could have destroyed me. What the abuse failed to do, they almost accomplished. It took nearly two decades to eradicate them from my thinking. Even though today the truth prevails, from time to time a new lie or some aspect of an old one can still emerge. Thankfully, it doesn't take as long to dismantle its effect and the disruption is usually minimal.

The greatest blessing gained is a sense of control over my internal self. I am no longer a victim of lies that can turn my life upside down without warning. The truth has blessed me with a way to live that has genuinely set me free.



Trish is staying busy serving the three churches her husband Arnold pastors and is enjoying the break from so much heavy recovery work. E-mail her at trish-hanson@juno.com.

Littleboy

By Dixie Marino

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Littleboy came to live with us when he was about 2 months old. He was sweet and gentle from the beginning. His unusually round eyes with that innocent stare endeared him to us immediately—except for Maggie Cat. She was in a snit for two days, but then her innate curiosity got the best of her and she began to warm up to him. Soon they were best friends and never far apart.



Some might think all cats are the same, but when you get to know them their unique personalities show up. Yes, there are the apparent traits all cats have, but each brings a special way of making a difference in our lives. Littleboy definitely had all the cat instincts. He loved to stalk big game (lizards), bird watch from the living room window and chase Maggie around the house. He considered it his duty to patrol the screened-in porch and keep watch for any territorial intruders. He was a wonderful companion.

You may have noticed I speak of Littleboy in the past tense. It hurts so much to tell you we had to let Littleboy be put to sleep in the vet's office May 11. He developed fluid in his lungs from an unknown cause in a very short time, maybe three weeks, and there was no way to reverse it. We had him with us for nine years. Maggie misses Littleboy and is lonesome when she is left alone. We all miss him.

Things come to us that seem too hard, and times of trouble that seem too much to bear. I hoped I would never have to make this decision for one of my cats, but guess what, the time came and I did. I had no experience on which to draw, no wisdom on which to make a decision. I prayed for God to let Littleboy stay with us, but it wasn't to

be. And so I prayed for strength to accept what would be best for him, although it hurt so much.

I'm reminded of our Father and the times he grieved over Israel even as he allowed them to go into captivity. I'm reminded of his greatest sacrifice, his only begotten Son, because it was the only way for us to have life with him.

The loss of a beloved pet in no way compares to God's sacrifice, of course. The parallel is God does what is best even when it grieves him, because he loves us. His agape love has our eternal future in mind. His love allows troubles and trials into our lives because he knows we grow in grace in those times. "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8). He walks with us through storms and is able to mold and shape us with a zeal we might resist in times of calmness. As he reveals himself, he is transforming us, with ever-increasing glory, into the likeness of his beloved Son (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Can rejoicing come from the grief and heartache we experience from time to time in our sojourn here? Zephaniah 3:17 gives us the heart of God: "The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."

We can find great quiet in God's love. His promises bring the comfort that can always be found in his heart. I love all of you who have loved Littleboy with me. I appreciate being able to share him with you. And now I delight in the memories of him and rejoice with singing (and a few tears yet) whenever we go out on the porch in the mornings to watch the birds.

Dixie (and Maggie), May 31, 2006. E-mail her at cdmarino@clis.com.

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

Always keep your words soft and sweet, just in case you have to eat them.

I couldn't find my luggage at the airport baggage area so I went to the lost luggage office and told the woman there that my bags never showed up. She smiled and told me not to worry because they were trained professionals and I was in good hands.

"Now," she asked me, "has your plane arrived yet?"

—www.cybersalt.org

Did you hear about the dyslexic Rabbi? He walks around saying, "Yo."

—www.cybersalt.org

One evening, two girlfriends and I went to a nightclub, only to find the place packed with young people. At 40, we felt old, but before we could make a dignified exit, a tall, handsome man approached us.

"Perhaps we were being a little hasty in leaving," I thought.

Then with a big smile, the man extended his hand to one of my friends and said, "Hello. Remember me? You taught me in third grade."

—www.cybersalt.org

"I get those maternal feelings sometimes, like when I'm lying on the couch and can't reach the remote, I think, 'Boy, a kid would be nice right now.'"

—Kathleen Madigan

Bernie and Esther were not the most religious couple and, in fact, they only went to church once a year. As they were leaving the church, the minister said, "Bernie, it sure would be nice to see you and Esther here more than once a year!"

"I know," replied Bernie, "but at least we keep the Ten Commandments."

"That's great," the minister said. "I'm glad to hear that you keep the Commandments."

"Yep," Bernie said proudly, "Esther keeps six of them and I keep the other four."

—www.cybersalt.org