



Connections

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

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And the Leaves Turn Green

By Ruth Miller

One of the things I enjoy most is taking prayer walks. We live in an area where I can go walking and enjoy the trees and the singing birds. In the winter, the trees were barren, but there was still a beauty even in the starkness of winter. But what an amazing thing to watch as winter gave way to spring-time and the trees began to bud and grow new leaves.

One morning I thought of a spiritual analogy. I noticed only some of the trees had turned green. Some still looked quite barren and wintry. Others were just beginning to bud. They didn't simultaneously make the transition from winter to spring. It reminded me that as Christians we experience spiritual growth, but not everyone grows at the same rate or in the same way. Some seem to burst into new life, as some of the trees did. But others seem to be moving slowly.



It's easy for us to judge one another, isn't it? It's easy to spot carnality in others and overlook our own faults. I've thought a lot about the biblical principle that we "ought not to compare ourselves among ourselves." But it's natural to notice how we measure up next to others. We feel either superior or inferior. Neither is helpful.

I'm beginning to see why we are warned against judging others and comparing ourselves among ourselves. We are supposed to look to Jesus as our role model. When we become overly focused on others, we can lose sight of the real focus. We can get bogged down in details. We can justify our bad habits by comforting ourselves that others are worse. Or we can get discouraged because we don't feel nearly as spiritual as others. We know we are no Mother Teresa—no way!

But Jesus has tremendous mercy and compassion on us. He remembers we are dust, even if we forget. And what is far more likely is we forget others are dust. We can tolerate faults in ourselves, but are often quite ungracious toward the shortcomings of others. Deep down it seems we believe the way we see and do things is the best way.

Pam Farrel spoke at one of the *Connecting & Bonding* conferences about the differences between men and women. She explained that men are like waffles and women are like

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Leaves

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spaghetti. Men tend to operate out of boxes. For them it is easier to handle one thing at a time—like little squares in a waffle. As women we often move quickly from one thing to another, and have a lot going at once—like spaghetti all mixed together. It helps to understand this, because it's so easy to get frustrated at our differences.

As Christians, we are like those trees. Some of us may not put out new life, or green leaves, fast enough to suit others. Are there times when you remain in a wintry condition? Perhaps others wonder what is wrong with us. But what I noticed about the trees after winter is eventually they all get green leaves! To me, this signifies hope that even when we go through the transformation process more slowly than others, we can trust God will eventually help us put on our brand-new springtime leaves and enjoy the new life in Christ he offers us.



Ruth enjoys women's ministry, including teaching a women's discipleship class. Her hobbies include reading, writing, walking and baking. She is most famous for her chocolate chip cookies! Ruth and Bob have been in "sweet home Alabama" serving in pastoral ministry for 18 years. She is looking forward to her daughter Laurie's wedding in Lakeland, Florida, in November. E-mail her at ruth.miller@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 Nurturernet 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.



An Oasis in the Desert

At a retreat some years ago I met a marvelous group of women. Sheila and I have shared stories from the retreats they sponsor, and both of us have been encouraged and spiritually nourished through them.

My association with them started back in 1998. A woman from a Southern California congregation gave them my name as a possible contact. It took some research to figure out how they got my name and address, but it was one of those God things that has blessed me ever since.

The Network of Evangelical Women in Ministry (NEWIM) exists to minister to women who minister to women. As a group, they have the most serving hearts of anyone I've ever met. From the beginning, it was a dream of mine to join them and become like them.

My dream was realized the past few years, as I first became a chapter president, then took on the role of newsletter editor (big surprise there). I later resigned as chapter president to be their website liaison, a challenging, big-learning-curve job for me. I'm still working on the part of becoming like them.

I'm sharing this with you because I'd like you to get to know them and be blessed too. Over the years, a team has put on a one-day retreat called *The Oasis*. Many of us from the former Pasadena congregation participated in an *Oasis* retreat on the headquarters campus. It was a wonderful day, filled with Bible study, fellowship and most important of all—lunch with Jesus. We took a box lunch,



found a quiet spot and spent time with the Lord, right in the middle of the retreat.

The *Oasis* team, in an effort to make the retreat available to a wider audience, now offers the retreat on DVD. It includes five sessions: "A Quick Look at Your Life" (clearing away distractions), 33 minutes; "Moments With a Friend" (all about quiet times), 16 minutes; "Journal Keeping" (writing for spiritual growth), 23 minutes; "Hidden Treasure" (walking with the Lord through Scripture), 47 minutes and "Lunch With Jesus" (enjoying extended time with the Lord), 2-1/2 hours.

We don't normally advertise here, and I wouldn't be telling you about this if I didn't believe it is a great resource, both for individuals and for groups. It's a low-cost way to have a one-day retreat in your own church, and also great to do on your own.

You can find out more at the NEWIM website, www.newim.com. You can watch a video clip, meet the speakers and order the DVD, as well as learn more about NEWIM and their nonprofit, all-volunteer ministry.

The Oasis retreat is a drink of cool water in the spiritual desert of life. I encourage you to learn more and let NEWIM bless you as they've blessed me.

Tammy

Personally I am always ready to learn,
but I do not always like being taught.

—Winston Churchill



Book Review



The Shack

Author: William P. Young

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Reviewed by Sue Berger

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Sue@OnePilgrimsMusings.com

At first glance, *The Shack* seems to have a familiar theme. Mack's daughter is abducted during a family campout and evidence indicates she was brutally murdered in an abandoned wilderness shack. Years later, her body never recovered, and prompted by a mysterious note, the still grieving father returns to the shack for closure. The location of his worst nightmare turns into a God encounter that changes Mack's world forever. The intent is to change ours too.

Hailed by some as the *Pilgrim's Progress* for our generation, this book is a provocative read. From chapter six on, I was underlining and writing in the margins. I am on my third read—not my normal behavior with fiction. Through Mack, William Young asks hard questions of God and allows God's nature, love and grace to be revealed in casual out-

door and dinner-table-type conversations.

Many surprises are contained in Mack's journey. Each needs to be experienced by the reader. Be prepared to rethink many of your preconceptions of God. How God appears and inter-



acts individually with us. How the triune God functions. How totally accepting God's love is. The personal attention God pays to our mind and soul. Law and grace. Forgiveness and judgment. God's involvement when horrible things happen. Subjects such as fear, submission, trust, reality, power, rights, freedom and expectations are openly discussed between Mack and God.

While not wanting to spoil your personal reading adventure, let me say you will be changed by the experience. I'll not look at a starry sky, a dock on the edge of a lake, a wild tangled garden or shrubbery nodding in a breeze in quite the same way. And I can't help but be profoundly encouraged in the face of tragedy.

God is near, God is real and God cares—deeply.

Note: This book will be available in bookstores September 1, 2007. Advance copies may be purchased from the author at www.theshackbook.com. ☪

Nurturennet

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



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

Watching Over the Widow

Mom and Mr. Wren

By Bill Miller

I received the call that Dad had to be hospitalized on Pentecost morning, May 23, 1999. I flew to Indiana the next day. Six weeks later, though weak from cancer treatments, he restarted physical therapy in an effort to return home to his wife of almost 58 years. Mom drove 60 miles every day to be with Dad in the hospital. On July 8, she arrived and found Dad was not in his room. She was approached by three nurses who informed her Dad had died that morning while she was en route to the hospital. He died in physical therapy.

Working hard to build up his strength, his heart stopped. He gave word he was not to be revived. Bone cancer had pervaded his body and he was given only months to live. He did not want to spend his last days attached to tubes, lying in bed. Even though all three Miller siblings, their spouses and grandchildren took turns staying with Mom before and after Dad died, Mom still faced life alone.

Mom loved birds. She fed them all year long. In Dad's and Mom's dream home in the woods of Indiana, they could look out the sliding doors of their living room and see dozens of birds feeding on the front deck. When they sat on the front deck overlooking Raccoon Lake, the birds impatiently waited for them to leave their feeding ground. In the meanwhile, they were treated to a chorus of beautiful bird songs, accompanied by the percussion of multiple

bull frogs, locusts and crickets. Mom also had special houses built for bluebirds and wrens. She anxiously awaited their arrival every spring. She prayed God would bring them back every year, and he did.

A few days after Dad's funeral, Mom became concerned because there appeared to be a problem at the wren home. She did all she could to protect the birds from predators. Upon close examination, I discovered the dead female wren on the ground below the wren house. Mom was heartsick. She knew wrens mate for life, so Mr. Wren (as Mom called him) was now alone. Mom observed as he called and searched for his mate. Finally, he gave up and flew away, leaving the wren house empty.



That spring, as usual, Mom began praying God would bring back the bluebirds and the wrens. She especially kept looking for Mr. Wren, wondering if he would return. One evening as she was sitting on the back patio, Mr. Wren appeared. He landed on the swing about 10 feet from Mom and started singing his song. Mom comforted Mr. Wren, telling him she understood how much he missed his mate. Mom would say a few words, and then Mr. Wren would sing his song. Mr. Wren was content to stay with Mom for as long as she sat there. Sometimes, both would sit there silently, as if they understood how the other was feeling—very much alone, but comforted by each other's presence.

Mom liked to work outside and when she did, Mr. Wren flew close to visit with her, singing his song. When Mom felt particularly lonely, she sat on the back patio and called for Mr. Wren. Every time, he flew to

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Mom and Mr. Wren

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his swing perch and talked to her. When tears were shed, he sang his song, giving her comfort. Mom believed God sent the bird to her, to keep her company during those especially lonely times.

God truly takes care of the widow. He is such a loving Father. The same Father is there to take care of us.

Epilogue



Mom began to notice a change in Mr. Wren's behavior. He still came to visit, but didn't stay quite as long. He also acted a little more excited. Upon close examination, Mom discovered a new Mrs. Wren sticking her head out of the wren house. Mom told Mr. Wren she was happy for him and understood he wouldn't be able to visit as often. Mom only called for him occasionally, as she suspected babies were on the way.



Bill and Kathy live in Everett, Washington. He pastors the Everett and Bellevue churches. This is part one, written in August 1999, of a four-part series about Bill's mother. Bill grew up in Chicago. He enjoys fishing, softball, golfing and gardening. E-mail him at bill-miller@verizon.net.



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WWW

By David Gibbs

A television advertisement asks if the Internet is a good thing. In my opinion it's one of the greatest inventions of the 20th century. It gives us easy access to a wealth of information, research, news, finances.

But not all agree. No matter how good a thing may be it can be put to wrong use and abused. On the negative side is the growing availability of pornography and other explicit material. A number of surveys reveal this is an increasing problem among Christians, especially men. Like any addiction it is not as simple as saying, "You shouldn't do it!" Many need encouragement, help and counsel.

As I reflected on this topic, Psalm 15 caught my attention. Verse 1 asks the questions: "Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill?" (NIV). The remainder of the chapter gives the qualities such a person would possess. As we read, it should become obvious only Jesus fully fulfills this description. My prayer for each of us is that we will allow Jesus through the Holy Spirit to do these things so we will not be shaken (verse 5).

If you use the Internet you are aware of WWW. Instead of World Wide Web, I propose we use these letters as a summary of the remainder of Psalm 15. May it influence the use of our computers and help guide us in other appropriate areas as well.

Walk:
May our heads be held high and our hearts burn within us as we walk with Jesus. May we walk with those in need, extending the grace of God. Then all we view and do will be to the honor and glory of God.

Work:
Pass all our activities through the filter of asking, in the words of Charles Sheldon, "What would Jesus do?" From his earliest years he was about his Father's business. He worked as his Father did and directed.

Word:
In all our communications, "tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth." Whatever we say or view must be wholesome and profitable. Remember Jesus is the Word and he is truth.

We are blessed to know that Jesus dwells among his people. His desire is for us to dwell with him forever. May he guide our walk, perfect our work and influence our word.



David loves reading and sharing the best of what he learns with others, especially good quotations. At the moment he is reading three books; one fiction, one on changing careers and one on theology—all recommended by friends. His favorite subject at present is William Wilberforce and the fight to abolish slavery, Amazing Grace. E-mail him at dwgibbs62@btinternet.com.

Only God is permanently interesting. Other things we may fathom, but he out-tops our thought and can neither be demonstrated nor argued down.



—Joseph Fort Newton:
My Idea of God, p. 5

Giving is the secret of a healthy life. Not necessarily money, but whatever a man has of encouragement and sympathy and understanding.



—John D. Rockefeller

Second Fiddle to One

By Hannah Knaack

Music has been a big part of our hearts, home and family for many years. Tiny fingers tinkling the piano keys, squeaking chords coaxed from violin strings, trombone and saxophone notes loud enough for the neighbors to “enjoy.” While these instruments were at times difficult to master, no amount of instruction compares to the lessons learned while playing second fiddle in real life.



One such lesson began quite innocently in the second floor bathroom of our home. It was a secret from Mom, Dad and little brother—for little brothers often say too much. The 8-year-old mastermind had a plan. In theory it was a good plan, but did not account for human error—his own.

His 6-year-old sister and assistant, a.k.a. Ms. Second Fiddle, was stationed in the basement beneath the laundry chute with arms extended. Mr. Master Mind, intent on discovering if cats do indeed have nine lives, lifted the family kitty into the laundry chute, closed his eyes and let go. Kitty suffered, limped, recovered and lived, but sister would forever have the memory of her kitten’s pain. For three days tears poured from her eyes as she hiccupped, “He was ’posed to tell me when to catch!”

My older sister had similar mastermind genes (I’m beginning to wonder if this is a firstborn gene trait) that resulted in a painful lesson for me. Hmm—seems to be a pattern here—playing second fiddle and experiencing pain! I don’t recall what my parents did to irk her so at the tender age of 7, but she told me in her best imitation mother voice she was “fed up.” She announced this while Mother was in the gar-



den and couldn’t overhear her plan to run away and take me with her! Seeing as I wasn’t given a choice, I placed my hand in hers and down the road we went.

I played my little second fiddle tune for about 30 minutes as I waltzed hand in hand with sister down Maple Avenue on that sunny summer afternoon. Then Mama caught up with us. To say she was upset would be to say the ocean is damp. To this day, I fail to understand why the board of education was applied to my posterior, when I was truly an innocent victim in my sister’s poorly thought-out plan!

No doubt over the years you have played second fiddle to the devious plans of others. Perhaps you willingly went along or maybe you were coerced. Could it be you were the one with the master plan that didn’t succeed? If so, it’s never too late to repent!

Our dear sister, Martha, of Martha and Mary fame, had a master plan as well. She was determined to set a most impressive table, and when her Lord arrived, she demanded her sister’s help. To Martha’s irritation and chagrin, Mary chose not to play second fiddle. She opted instead for the real Master Plan, a wise and wonderful choice.

I suspect somewhere in Mary’s childhood she had learned the lesson of playing second fiddle to a faulty master plan. This time she chose a true Master and a perfect plan—one she gave her life to. I, too, desire to follow Mary’s example and play second fiddle to One—what sweet music we shall make together!



Caring for her mother after her knee replacement surgery has taught Hannah that playing second fiddle can be a good thing if it means lifting someone else up so they feel better. Helping her mom regain some independence lets her give back a little of what her mom did for her when she was young. E-mail Hannah at justmomh-lk@juno.com.

Zorro and Me

Almost Busted in Nigeria

By Barbara Dahlgren

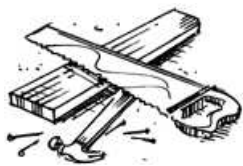
(Zorro goes international. The following is the second in a series of three articles about going to Nigeria: "Nigeria or Bust," "Almost Busted in Nigeria," and "Busting Out of Nigeria.")

To say we were clueless about this type of international travel is an understatement. Yet, here we were in Nigeria.

We were greeted by Mr. and Mrs. Okai, our contacts, carrying a *Plain Truth* magazine, and the local ministry in charge of the festival that year. They helped us forge our way through a barrage of people wanting money to "help" us with our luggage. It was difficult to ignore the beggars, but we were warned. If you give money to one, scores will end up following you. You must say, No! and move on.

On the ride to our hotel, we were given a crash course in surviving our stay. Crash course could be taken literally, for in Lagos, driving was quite an experience. There didn't seem to be many traffic lights, road signs or stop signs. Drivers made lanes wherever an opening appeared, blocked oncoming traffic and honked at people. And people were everywhere—walking in the middle of the street, congregating here and there, spilling out of buses and hopping off

A determined soul will do more with a rusty monkey wrench, than a loafer will accomplish with all the tools in a machine shop.



—Robert Hughes



trucks.

Mr. Okai said, "You must be alive to live in Lagos." At first we thought he meant Lagos was alive with activity, hustle and bustle. Actually, he was cautioning us to stay alert if we wanted to survive.

Here were a few guidelines for survival: Stay together. Don't share taxis. Don't relinquish your passports to anyone. Don't take pictures around officials or your camera will be taken away. Be careful of scams. You may need to bribe people to get what you want. Learn to dicker at the markets. Time is more of a concept than a reality—nothing ever starts on time. Policemen are not your friends.

Yes, the police were corrupt. A bank robbery occurred a couple of weeks before we arrived. As the police chased the thieves, the robbers threw a handful of money in the air. They escaped while the police were busy picking it up and putting it in their pockets.

At our hotel we experienced our first scam. Zorro received a phone call early next morning from a Dr. Stevens instructing him to leave the hotel and go to the airport immediately. There was going to be a strike. This ruse was used to get patrons out of the hotel to get mugged. So common was this scam, a disclaimer about it was in the hotel lobby.

The Okais were most gracious hosts and we found our Nigerian brethren to be well educated, sincere, dedicated and a delight! These happy people, victims of a country's poor leadership, truly made this trip worthwhile. Our first time at church they formed a long line and everyone kept saying, "You are welcome"—their way of saying, We welcome you! They were full of love and generosity, which wasn't easy as the average income was about \$100 a month.

Conceptual time meant church would start around 10 or later. The music was

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Zorro and Me

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lovely. Hearing songs praising God in their native tongue was inspiring. Zorro gave great, basic sermons the Nigerians seemed to identify with. Our daughters were asked to distribute the presents we brought to the children. Matthew (our 12 year old), whom they nicknamed “Mac,” was more content trying to catch the large, red-headed lizards.

Our trip was a whirlwind of activities—church, meetings and tours. We ate *jollaf* rice, noticed people carrying everything from coolers to stacks of wood on their heads, saw anthills higher than buildings and shopped at open markets. Thirty-five *naira* was the same as one American dollar. Sherisa never quite got the knack of haggling over prices. Even the natives tried to help her. One said: “No, no! You don’t understand. You give a price; then I give a price. You give a price; then I give a price.”

All in all, the trip had been pleasant and pretty uneventful—until the last day. We were scheduled to go to church in Benin City about two and a half hours away. Later that night we were to attend a leadership dinner meeting in Lagos. The road to Benin City was rough and considered dangerous, especially at night, so we planned to be back in Lagos before dark. We took two cars. One was a hired car from our hotel with a driver named Alfred. The other belonged to

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the Okais. Our children, along with Sam from church, would ride in the hired car. Sam was about the same age as our daughters and would help with communication if anything came up. Zorro and I rode with the Okais.

All went well until the trip home. Alfred’s car ran out of gas. Both vehicles had plenty of gas when we started the trip, but Alfred decided to do a little joy riding while the rest of us were at church. Here we were in the middle of nowhere, on a dangerous road at dusk. There were no gas stations, so we began praying. Mr. Okai noticed a house in the distance and decided to walk over and see if they had gas. He negotiated a deal to get enough to make it to Lagos. It cost 10 times the going rate, but we were thankful to get it.

Our original plan was to drop our kids at the hotel where they would eat and pack since we were leaving in the morning. Zorro and I would go to the meeting with the Okais. But since it was so late, we had to split up. Sam would come with the Okais and us, and Alfred alone would take the kids to the hotel, which was fairly close. It was such a short distance; surely everything would be okay. Alfred had already blown it once that day, so he said he would take the kids straight to the hotel.

Well, in Alfred’s zeal to get Shelly, Sherisa and Matthew straight to the hotel, he went the wrong way on a one-way street. Granted, it wasn’t marked clearly. As there was no traffic light or sign, this could be viewed as an honest mistake. The five policemen who surrounded the car didn’t see it that way. Some carried machine guns. They told him to pull over. Alfred refused. One officer jumped in the car and yelled at him until he pulled over. They asked for Alfred’s license



The ministers of the Church of Christ are appointed for the hearers, not the hearers for the ministers.



—*The Adam Clarke Commentary*, 1 Corinthians 3:22

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Zorro and Me

(Continued from page 10)



and papers. He wouldn't give it to them. He kept saying, "Anyone can make a mistake."

This upset the police who started to slap him around. They forced him out of the car. They told him to open the trunk. Alfred refused. They beat him up some more. Our kids were frozen in the back seat. Matthew was eating a fruit rollup that he squeezed so hard purple juice ran down his arm. He asked the girls, "Aren't you scared?" They were scared to death, but kept reassuring their little brother that God would take care of them.

One officer started letting the air out of the tires, but another told him to stop. One came back to the car and shined a flashlight on the kids. "Your driver has broken the law and must pay the penalty. He must go to jail." The kids agreed. Alfred had proven to be a pain. They asked if Alfred could please take them back to the hotel first. There was a communication barrier. The policeman didn't quite understand what the girls were saying. "No!" he said. A different officer poked his head in the window and said: "Your driver is stupid! He is brainless! He will have to pay a fine or go to jail!"

Suddenly a light bulb went off in Shelly's head. "A fine?" she said. "How much?"

He shouted, "\$100!"

"We don't have that much."

"How much do you have?"

The girls rummaged through their purses and found 230 *naira*, which was worth about \$7. "If I give this to you, will you let Alfred take us back to the hotel?"

He conferred with the other officers. "OK!" He took the money and handed Sherisa Alfred's papers and license and started to leave. Alfred got back in the car. Whew! They thought. That was close.

But when Alfred got back in the car, it wouldn't start. Shelly and Sherisa got out of the car and pushed it. Suddenly the police

ran back to them. The girls glanced at each other as if to say, Oh, no! What now? They told the girls to get in the car and they started pushing. They pushed the car around the entire intersection before it started. As they drove off, the police were actually smiling and waving good-bye.

As soon as the kids got into the hotel room, they dropped everything, knelt down and thanked God for delivering them. That's where we found our three children when we returned that night—on their knees. They shared their story with us. We all said prayers of thanksgiving. Tomorrow we were scheduled to fly out of Nigeria. What more could possibly happen?



Zorro and Barb had a wonderful time in China. Zorro's new hip did not slow him down at all! They saw lots of temples, pagodas, gardens, dynasty tombs, plus climbed the Great Wall. They ate lots of authentic Chinese food. Everyone loved that except Barb, who lived on white rice and soy sauce. Her conversation at meal time consisted of, "What do you think that is?" She loves hearing from you. You can e-mail her at bydahlgren@pacbell.net.



At cool of day, with God I walk
My garden's grateful shade;
I hear his voice among the trees
And I am not afraid.



—Anonymous

Dry Bones

By Sheila Graham

12

My daughter e-mailed one morning that she had “tripped across” these verses in her Bible study—Ezekiel 37:1-14. And then Eileen said: “God doesn’t want us in the grave.” If you recall, this passage is the account of Ezekiel’s vision of the resurrection of dry bones. I had to think about what she said.

We are crucified with Christ, yet we live in him as well. We are dead to sin, but living sacrifices. Paul wrote: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17, *NIV* throughout).

But what is our focus? Is the old truly gone? Are we alive in Christ or still focused on what’s buried in the grave? Christ died and took our sins with him to the grave. Is that still our focus? Worse yet, is that still how we see ourselves?

I have to admit I occasionally wake up in the morning feeling like Christ’s new person, but by night time, it can be a different story. After chalking up a few successes against more than a few failures, sometimes I’m more focused on that grave.

Ed is an optimist. (I need to come up with a cool name for Ed, like Zorro. Don’t you love reading about Zorro’s latest antics? Although Mrs. Zorro seems to get involved in her share of misadventures as well.) Ed

always wakes up happy and alert, ready to face the day with a smile and an off-key tune. He even belongs to a club for people like him—the Optimist Club.

Don’t get me wrong. Ed’s not perfect, but while I may moan and groan inwardly for days about something stupid I’ve done, he doesn’t seem to focus on his short comings that much. He looks at mistakes as learning experiences.

When we do or say something we shouldn’t and are feeling down, it’s good to remember how much we are worth to God. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight” (Ephesians 1:3-4).

And nothing or nothing we’ve done can lessen the love he has for us. “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

Familiar scriptures, but sometimes we need reminders of our significance to God. His whole plan revolves around us; we are at the center of his attention on this earth. We are children of God. That’s who we are.

Labeling yourself as a loser, loading yourself down with guilt and shame, can cause you to live your life with a fake identity. This false perception of yourself can make a big difference in how you live your life day by day—in the decisions you make and in how you interact with others.

Getting older, seeing a few more gray hairs and wrinkles? Yes, we change in outward appearance, and usually not for the

Grant me, O God, the power to see
In every rose, eternity.
In every bud, the coming day;
In every snow, the promised May.
In every storm the legacy
Of rainbows smiling down at me!



—Virginia Wuerfel

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Dry Bones

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Wondering Where the Wonder Went

By Sue Berger

better. But, that's not our true identity. Our identity is not in the physical but in Christ.

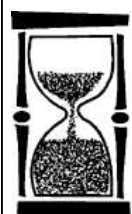
Why is the way we see ourselves so important? It's not just so we can feel good about ourselves, although through Christ we have every reason to feel wonderful. It's because how we see ourselves makes a big difference in how we act toward others and in how others view us.

Feeling down today? No more dry bones for you. You have been changed, from the inside out. So out with the old identity and in with the new—every single day. Go forward confidently living your new life, and people will notice and be drawn to you. That's so important in personal ministry.

Read this out loud: Therefore, as I am in Christ, I am a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!



Sheila and Ed are hoping by the time you read this, the rains will have slowed down in north Texas. Otherwise they may have floated away. Sheila can be reached at sheila.graham@wcg.org.



I have only just a minute,
only sixty seconds in it.
Forced upon me—can't refuse it.
But it's up to me to use it.
I must suffer if I lose it.
Give account if I abuse it.
Just a tiny little minute,
But eternity is in it.

—Anonymous

Progress may not be all it's cracked up to be. Technology is passing me by even though I don't think of myself as being old. I've carried a cell phone for only five years and don't know how to use most of the features on the menu. That my phone even has a menu is bewildering. Now I could dig out the instruction book and learn to use all the options it affords me. Or I can simply use it as a phone and be impressed it's capable of doing so much more. Perhaps it's my resignation triggering these thoughts. That, and stargazing.

I once spent a long summer evening reclined on a friend's country deck, amazed by the brightness of the Milky Way. Being a city girl I don't often get to admire the expanse of the heavens. Several weeks later, my husband and I visited an astronomy party at a lakeside park. Astronomy club enthusiasts had their telescopes pointing skyward, trained on points of interest. We admired star clusters and the moons of Jupiter. As we stumbled back to our car I realized I didn't feel as awed as I had by the simple deck experience. Seeing the details hadn't impressed me as much as admiring the sky as a whole.

That's when I started thinking about my sense of wonder, something we seem to relegate to children. Could it be they experience wonder because they don't understand how their world works? Waves on the seashore are a wondrous thing until someone explains the rotation of the earth and the gravitational pull of the moon. Now I can predict when the tides go in and out and how many hours I have to build a sandcastle. Handy information, but the wonder and

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Wondering

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adventure has been jeopardized. Suddenly I'm more calculating about my shell-hunting walks and sand-art projects.

We tend to think it quaint that ancient cultures worshiped the nature around them—fire, wind, rain. We're certainly more sophisticated today. We can create, control (generally) and harness fire. We can predict the wind, rain and severe weather of storms, tornados and hurricanes. We understand global weather patterns and have removed the mystery. Progress, yes. But I'm less inspired by the power of rain pounding on my roof, of wind sculpting dunes and of fire revitalizing forests.

Somebody watched birds (in more detail than I do, apparently) and learned to fly around the world and back. From the comfort of my couch I can visually tour the world and the heavens. At a push of a button I can enjoy a full-blown concert or "read" a book while strolling a park's walking trail. Now don't get me wrong. I'm thankful we can improve and save lives through science and chemistry. But by focusing on the details and reducing everything to the basics, am I losing the wonder? Is it possible to come to a point where I won't believe anything I can't explain? Can this affect my faith in a God who is beyond

explanation? Who refuses to be bound by time and space? Who somehow has always existed; in three "persons" nonetheless! Who managed to walk this earth as flesh and blood, yet still be God? Is it possible I'm supposed to be impressed by the wonders around me? That those things are my spiritual link to God? It's worth considering.

Now if you'll excuse me, a sunset out back is begging to be admired. I'm not going to think about the rotation of the earth, water droplets in the clouds and airborne dust particles refracting light. I'm not going to take a picture of it with my phone (that's what cameras are for!). I'm just going to enjoy the spectacle and allow God to wow me.



The heavy rains and flooding in central Texas this summer have prevented much stargazing, but Sue still loves sitting on her patio watching whatever weather is on display. E-mail her at sue@onepilgrimsmusings.com and see her website: www.OnePilgrimsMusings.com. (© 2006)



Looking through the wrong end of a telescope is an injustice to the astronomer, to the telescope, and to the stars; likewise, looking at our neighbor's faults instead of the attributes gives us an incorrect conception of ourselves, our neighbor, and our God.

—William A. Ward:
Tulsa Herald,
All-Church Press

Upon Further Reflection

Credit Where Credit Is Due

By Dixie Marino

Maggie has a project. She's been working hard at it for many years, but it was only last November I recognized it for what it was.



I was doing a bit more polishing than usual as Thanksgiving was right around the corner. When I got to the dining room chairs I automatically went for the furniture stain. As I was staining away at the claw marks, I thought, this looks like a genuine piece of distressed furniture!

Well, of all things, Maggie has been designing furniture—"The Distressed Design" by Maggie Marino. I have not given her the credit due for such creative work. She's received absolutely no appreciation from the one who loves her best.

It was a moment of clarity for me. I've come to see it was a labor of love—her calling, if you will. Maggie does what she

knows to do in an effort to communicate with me, usually about meal times, or when she gets a little jealous for my attention or wants to know where I am. It has changed my whole outlook about polishing the furniture and given me a better insight as to her calling. A little stain and some polish and we have in-vogue furniture compliments of Maggie.

This revelation also caused me to reflect about what else I might be considering with a negative slant. Perhaps I could start by seeing the efforts of others in a positive light and try encouraging them. I am not privy to the hearts of all the people in my world as to their perceived callings in their lives. I could give the benefit of the doubt, consider their contributions and come to appreciate their efforts.

We have various callings in our lives if we are in Jesus, and most likely, not any will become great headliners: "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (Ephesians 4:1, *NIV* throughout). "And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ" (Romans 1:6). "God has called us to live in peace" (1 Corinthians 7:15b). "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

It may seem to us we are merely covering up scratches and claw marks with furniture polish, but God has a plan. And what is God's good plan and purpose in our calling, in all he gives us to enjoy, to learn and to add to our life? "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Maggie puts her stamp on my furniture

Finish each day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities no doubt crept in. Forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day. Begin it well and serenely and with too high a spirit to be encumbered with old nonsense.



—Ralph Waldo Emerson

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◆ LETTERS TO THE EDITOR ◆

Perhaps my wife is the primary target for the Connections newsletter. But I also read and very much enjoy every word of every issue. I encourage you to keep up the great work!

With our new understanding regarding the ordination of women, have you considered changing the subtitle of the publication to remove the reference to elders' wives? How about this,

instead: A JOURNAL BY AND FOR ELDERS' FAMILIES.

In many ways, this subtitle would just be a reflection of what's probably been true all along, in that men and other family members also read (and even contribute to) the publication. Just a thought for your consideration...

Again, Connections is great. Thanks for all you do.

YBIC

—Mark Queener
Pastor, Christian
Family Church
Belleville, Illinois

Readers: What do you think? Please let us know if you like this suggestion or e-mail yours to tammy.tkach@wcg.org.

Credit Where Credit Is Due

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and I add the stain and polish to dress it up so it looks pretty good—with some stretch of imagination. I give her credit for her persistent efforts. God is creating something anew without stain or blemish and the credit is all his. It is he who works in us both to will and to act according to his good purpose (Philippians 2:13).

God is always at work. Jesus said his Father works and so does he. Even though we cannot see the invisible efforts on our behalf, we have God's promise we are in the process of design and change.

God has also stamped his work—"Child of God"—and we won't need any touching up when he's finished with us.



Dixie and Charles celebrated their 48th wedding anniversary in June. E-mail her at CMARINO001@ec.rr.com.



Certain thoughts are prayers. There are moments when, whatever be the attitude of the body, the soul is on its knees.

—Victor Hugo

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

While walking through a parking lot, I tripped and fell flat on my face. As I was lying there, a woman stopped her car and called out, "Are you hurt?"

"No, I'm fine," I said.

"Oh, good," she continued. "Will you be vacating your parking space now?"

With high-definition TV everything looks bigger and wider—kind of like going to your 25th high school reunion.

These days, I spend a lot of time thinking about the hereafter. I go somewhere to get something and then wonder what I'm here after.

Always keep several get well cards on the mantle—if unexpected guests arrive, they'll think you've been sick and unable to clean.

A woman walks in a store to return a pair of eyeglasses that she had purchased for her husband a week before. "What seems to be the problem, madam?"

"I'm returning these glasses I bought for my husband. He's still not seeing things my way."

My pastor friend put sanitary hot air hand dryers in the rest rooms at his church and after two weeks took them out.

I asked him why and he confessed that they worked fine but when he went in there he saw a sign that read:

"For a sample of this week's sermon, push the button."

A minister delivered a sermon in 10 minutes one Sunday morning, which was about half the usual length of his sermons. He explained, "I regret to inform you that my dog, who is very fond of eating paper, ate that portion of my sermon which I was unable to deliver this morning."

After the service, a visitor from another church shook hands with the preacher and said, "Pastor, if that dog of yours has any pups, I want to get one to give to my minister."

—All jokes from www.cybersalt.org