



Connections

◆ A Journal by & for Women in Ministry ◆

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Where Do You Go?

By Carmen Fleming

Habakkuk had a place where he regularly met with God. He climbed up into a tower where he could be alone and undisturbed. In this private place he praised the Lord, he complained to the Lord and he listened to the Lord. He often emerged with a new attitude. God encouraged him to be patient and to wait on the Lord's plan (Habakkuk 2:3, *NLT* throughout). Sometimes the Lord asked him to write what he heard so everyone would know (2:2). Habakkuk didn't realize the message was not just for his people. Many centuries later what he wrote still inspires faith in the Lord.

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

I also believe I can safely bring my doubts and complaints to him in times of trouble. "Was it in anger, Lord, that you struck the rivers and parted the sea? Were you displeased with them? (3:8). Is your plan to "wipe us out?" (1:12). Will you stand by while they swallow us up? (1:13). Life's difficulties can strike fear and doubt in us, tempting us not to stay with him in the high tower and trust his plan. Instead we prefer to trust our own strength and make destructive plans to manipulate, control and seek our own justice. But God's answer to our doubts, fears and destructive plan is: No! I am sending my chariots of salvation, commanding my weapons of power to save and rescue you

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Where Do You Go?

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(3:9-15). In the high tower God gives us a faith to live by. He saves us from trusting in our own strength and devious methods. “But they are deeply guilty, for their own strength is their god” (1:11). “Look at the proud! They trust in themselves, and their lives are crooked; but the righteous will live by their faith” (2:4).

Trusting God brings joy. The mess Habakkuk was in looked bleak. “I trembled inside...my lips quivered with fear. My legs gave way beneath me, and I shook in terror” (3:16). “Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vine; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren...yet I will rejoice in the Lord!” (3:17-18). His joy came from knowing and believing God. “I will be joyful in the God of my salvation. The Sovereign Lord is my strength! He will make me as surefooted as a deer and bring me safely over the mountains” (3:18-19). Habakkuk knew the Lord was with him in the messiness of life and that assurance was enough. He had joy because he trusted in the strength of his sovereign Lord, not in his own.

Where do you go when life gets chaotic? Jesus says come to me. He is our High Tower. Through him and in him we are transformed. Through the Spirit’s work in us we gain a different perspective and a genuine reliance on God. This is our joy!



Carmen enjoys traveling and ministering with Charles on church visits to the Caribbean. She likes to relax by reading and gardening. E-mail her at carmen.fleming@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 women in ministry but are inclusive of the needs of the entire family.

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

Rocks of Rejection, Gems of Grace

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” We all learned this as children, but also quickly learned it wasn’t true. Names do hurt and the hurt can stay with you for a long time. How many of you can remember the childhood taunts you endured? Probably every single one of us has clear memories of pain caused by name callers. They felt like rocks of rejection.

Rocks of rejection come in many forms and sizes. The boulders take the form of being turned down for a job, a marriage proposal, a promotion or any time one’s hopes are dashed.

The Bible is full of stories of rejection. The first one, even though instigated by Satan through deception, was when Eve rejected God’s warning and ate from the tree.

All through the Old Testament we read of rejection after rejection: humanity rejecting God, and God reaching out, seemingly to no avail. God gave Israel the Old Covenant, but they had to obey the laws to be accepted by him. They continually disobeyed and were punished but still God offered his love and acceptance if they would only meet his conditions, which they never did.

We see stories of rejection in the New Testament as well, from the Samaritan woman who was rejected by a whole town, to Mary Magdalene, who couldn’t mingle with polite society, to the woman asking for

crumbs at Jesus’ table.

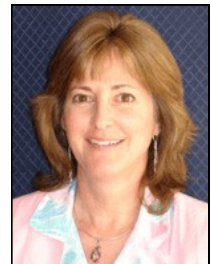
Jesus faced the ultimate rejection when he was unfairly tried and sentenced to death.

Through God’s kindness and love in giving us his Son, we have a place to go for rock removal. Through grace we’re forever accepted through faith in Jesus.

Ephesians 1:3-6 assures us of this acceptance: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us *accepted in the Beloved*” (NKJV, *emphasis mine*).

This gem of grace has made a big difference in my life. Before, I was not sure of my salvation. I worried I wasn’t obeying well enough or overcoming enough. I was insecure and wanted attention and acceptance but sometimes went about getting it in the wrong way. I was sometimes needy and high maintenance. Acceptance by Jesus has taken care of my uncertainties and insecurities (not entirely, I must admit, because I’m still learning) and I’m now able to focus more on others.

I don’t carry that bag of rocks around anymore. Instead I have a velvet bag with shiny, beautiful gems, lightweight, easy to carry and so much more valuable than diamonds. Are you still carrying around rocks of rejection? If so, give them to Jesus at the throne of grace and pick up some gems of grace in return.



Tammy

Black Friday Nightmare

By Hannah Knaack

It's nearly impossible for me to pass up a good garage sale, so one might assume I eagerly await the nation's biggest shopping day. But the day after Thanksgiving, Black Friday, holds no sway over me. Last year's experience might shed some light.

My 83-year-old mom makes the most adorable baby blankets for several needy organizations. When I noticed flannel at a great sale price at our fabric store, I set aside my dislike of crowds, and off we went. After dropping her off at the door, I eventually find a parking spot—way in the back 40.

As I enter the store, I'm astounded to see the line for cutting fabric backed up to the front entrance, and it's barely 8 a.m.! I find Mom, grab a bolt of her flannel and head over to save our place in the sprawling line.

Within seconds, I catch a whiff of something dreadful. I pull the bolt up to my face and discretely sniff. Nope, it's not that. I tell myself it's my imagination—but my imagination's never been that bad. Then, I realize I'm smelling skunk. I live in the



country; I know polecat when I smell it. I sniff a bit louder. The woman in front of me turns, looking embarrassed, and says quietly, "It's me you smell and I'm so sorry."

Her dog—freshly skunk sprayed—had rubbed up against her as she'd opened her car door. She had to get to this sale early—no time to change. So Ms. Stinky, as I've already named her, is kindly sharing with the rest of us shoppers her great love of the outdoors. Still panting from my hike in from the back 40, I'm finding it a bit difficult to take baby breaths.

Mom soon arrives with her full cart and slips in behind me. Knowing we'll be awhile, I urge her to pick out the wrapping paper she wants while I hold our place. Stepping behind the cart allows me a few more feet of breathing space, if you catch my drift.

When Mom returns, I notice she's selected the wrong brand for the advertised sale price. I offer to exchange it for her. I see the little wheels turning in her mind when I return. She's thinking, That's not what I would have picked out. I'm struck by how much fresher the air is over in the wrapping paper aisle.

Having finally finished at the cutting table, and now standing in the extremely long checkout line, I suggest Mom slip over and re-exchange her wrapping paper. I'm keeping busy discretely taking in great gulps of air to ward off an oncoming headache.

I realize the line is really moving now, and before you know it, I'm next. But what's happened to Mother? I'm holding the coupons, so she can't check out without me. I smile at the person behind me, "I'm waiting on someone; why don't you go ahead." Five

Looking for a good women's Bible study? Have you participated in one you'd like to share? Send your reviews and recommendations and we'll include them in a Bible Study exchange column.

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Black Friday

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more shoppers slip past and still no Mother. Steam begins to build.

I find her a mere 20 feet away, chatting with another customer, not a care in the world and not a single roll of wrapping paper in her hand. I hustle her through checkout and out the door as quickly as possible, searching for my aspirin as we go.

Hindsight tells me it would have been wiser to go home at this point, but the half-price bra sale at JCPenney was too tempting. That sale alone wouldn't have gotten me out of the house, as I rank bra shopping right up there with toilet swishing, but as I'm already out—

I expect Mom to wait for me in the car, but she decides she's coming in with me. Then I realize she intends to follow at my elbow as I make my selections! A weird *déjà vu* scene enters my mind—of me, at age 11—with Mom in tow. It was just as embarrassing then. Soon I'm engrossed in styles and choices and don't notice my shadow is gone.

As I make my selection and head for the checkout, I count at least 14 shoppers in line. No way am I spending an hour in line for one item—even at half price. Completely frustrated, I set the bra down on a display table just as Mom appears around the other

side, anxiety in her features. “Oh, there you are!” she exclaims. “I just reported you missing to the nice saleslady.”

You did what? my mind screams. Who reports their middle-aged daughter missing in the bra section at Penney's? This is insanity, I tell myself. I was desperate to give her a piece of my mind, but I have so few pieces left.

Taking her hand, we head for home. Ah, home—such a comforting place to be. A place I don't intend to leave ever again on Black Friday.



“It would do my heart good to brag on my mother for just a bit. Not only does she make lovely receiving blankets for newborns, but she spends hours each week cutting, sorting and pasting magazine pictures into scrapbooks. These scrapbooks are donated to area hospitals and nursing homes. She also wraps all the shoe boxes (100 this year) our church donates in support of Franklin Graham's Operation Christmas Child. When I grow up, I want to be just like Mom.” E-mail her at justmomhlc@juno.com.

I always felt that the great high privilege, relief and comfort of friendship was that one had to explain nothing.

—Katherine Mansfield



Young man, the secret of my success is that at an early age I discovered I was not God.

—Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.



About nine years ago Conexiones came into being to serve the women in leadership in Latin America as a way to communicate and encourage one another. Connections was its inspiration. Over the years it has also borne evangelistic fruit. In this and future issues, we will include articles written by our Latin American sisters for Conexiones.

The Right to Kindness

By Paulina Barrero

We live in a fast-paced and violent world. And many women allow themselves to be entrapped by it. The way of kindness, true love and gentle expression is lost. It is more and more common to hear women using harsh and unpleasant language, even in public. Can you imagine what their vocabulary is like in their homes?

In Ephesians 4:29 we read: “Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them” (NLT). A book titled *The Right to Kindness* by Luis Carlos Restrepo caught my attention and helped me understand this trend.

The book speaks to the violence many experience in their homes. The author writes:

“If we could film people’s attitudes during their social as well as private lives, we would frequently find that their gestures are much harsher in their homes than in the work place.”

Yes, in the work place and in front of others we show our best side, but how do we act in our homes and in private? There’s shouting, emotional manipulation and pressure. Our society reflects what happens in the privacy of family life.

As women, let’s not allow the world to tear our feminine beauty and tenderness in speech from us as we express affection to our loved ones. Let’s be tender and loving among our family members. May our children and husbands experience our kindness, love and gentleness.

May our speech be filled with uplifting words. This does not mean we should not be firm in our convictions about God and what is right. We can correct with wisdom, but let’s be careful how we speak.



Paulina and her husband Hector pastor the congregations in Colombia. She has a bachelor’s degree and a masters in theology. Paulina enjoys teaching and reading. They have two sons who serve in the worship band of the Bogota congregation. Her motto is “always there is something to learn from others.” E-mail her at pausalita@gmail.com.

Don’t flatter yourself that friendship authorizes you to say disagreeable things to your intimates. The nearer you come into relation with a person, the more necessary do tact and courtesy become. Except in cases of necessity, which are rare, leave your friend to learn unpleasant things from his enemies; they are ready enough to tell them.

—Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.

Silver Angst

By Anne Gillam

One morning I sat quietly by the fire reading a good book. In my case the fire was from the glow of our pellet stove, but it was a fire nonetheless. As I enjoyed the peace of the morning I had a feeling I was about to learn something new from the Lord. A pay-attention-to-this word entered my head, so I did. And immediately my peace was shattered by the presence of a large silver roll.

I bet you know what that silver roll was. It's loved so much by our husbands and, if you're like me, hated by us. It was a roll of duct tape. I saw an advertisement not long ago for a duct tape wallet for men. Believe me, this was no new invention. I had seen it before. I have half a mind to look up the origin of duct tape. I am pretty sure it was invented by a man, but I stray from my point.

Just the sight of that silver roll brings back antagonistic feelings. I remember the time my husband told me how he fixed the handle of my beloved shovel by wrapping it in that silver idol. It sent shivers down my spine and I immediately felt as if I were sinking in a quagmire. He meant well, of course, and I love him for his concern. I tried to express my thanks and to cover my revulsion at the sight of my newly refurbished shovel. I inwardly mourned the passing of an old beloved friend.

So what is it that makes us so different? Was the little voice in my head that said pay attention trying to show me the advantages of duct tape, or to see the differences between men and women? No. Differences do exist,

and they are a gift that makes us special, but that was not the lesson. It was in the different way we handle our broken existence. Some people, like me, for example, would rather make an invisible repair, and some, like my husband, will acknowledge the brokenness and make the obvious repair.

I am not saying either method is right or wrong. I am not saying a roll of duct tape is bad if used as intended. It's a matter of what needs repairing. When we are repairing everyday objects, trying to extend their use and not waste what we are given, that's one thing, but when we are trying to repair our broken existence with God, that's another.

I see two main ways of dealing with our pain and darkness. We either pretend they don't exist and try to make an invisible repair, or we recognize our brokenness, and try to make that repair by covering it up on our own, with duct tape. When it comes to the brokenness in our relationship with God, neither of these methods are right.

This reminds me of a dream in which I was busy making repairs to the walls of my living room. I had tried to paint over the peeling and warped walls but the results were far from perfect. I was not satisfied. I could still see all the defects in the wall. It was then I noticed my father standing nearby and I asked for his help.

My father was always the one who helped me make repairs in my life, so I was relieved when he agreed to help me. In my dream I imagined how beautiful the walls would be. But he reached up to the corner of the wall and ripped off the existing wall board, exposing the frame. My heart sank at the destruction of the wall I had tried so hard to paint over. I felt a shock such as those whose homes have been ravaged by flood or fire. I



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Silver Angst

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felt paralyzed with pain.

God does not want us to paint over our pain and darkness or cover them over with duct tape, trying to make temporary repairs on our own. He wants us to let him make those repairs, and sometimes that requires more than just a little patch up. Sometimes God needs to strip away all the darkness and rebuild us again, from the ground up.

If we need to repair something like the box my husband was trying to fix today, a little duct tape will work fine. But if our lives and the relationships we have with God and one another need repair, take them to the expert. It may be a little painful and the Lord may have to rebuild you from the ground up. But the end result will be well worth it, and it will last a life time.



Anne recently served in the kitchen at Washington SEP. She says it was a real eye opener. "I now realize how much work it is to get meals on the table for so many people. Though it is a lot of hard work it is very, very rewarding. I recommend it to all. You will be blessed as well as those you serve." E-mail her at WEBE-BASS@aol.com.

God created man in His own image, says the Bible; philosophers reverse the process: they create God in theirs.

—Georg Christoph Lichtenberg

Reflections on Ministry

By Ruth Matthews

Many of us have been in ministry for many years, whether in partnership with our husbands or in a specific ministry of our own. Ministry offers many rewards and emotional blessings, not the least of which is being with families in the midst of their deepest joys: weddings, blessing of children, baptisms. These events and milestones give us a lift and pick us up.

My husband and I attend a small congregation made up of 98 percent retirees. At a blessing of children service for grandchildren of one of our members, we shared a special moment with the grandmother and her extended family. It was a highlight for the family circle of our congregation.

Ministry also has dips and deep valleys. Over the years I, like many of you, have known or been personally touched by some of the uglier aspects: death threats, name calling, harassing phone calls and all by those we call our own and their families. Such incidents don't happen often, but they do happen.

Putting the hurtful aside, working in ministry can also be downright discouraging and frustrating. Think of some of the Christian aid ministries. The enormity of need in the world and the seeming insignificance of our part to help out can be overwhelming. Witness the efforts to get aid into Myanmar. All can see what needs to be done, but clearing the obstacles on the ground to make it happen is beyond even the scope of some of the

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Reflections

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most experienced NGOs (nongovernment organizations).

Many of our ministry situations can be like this—we see a need and know how to fill it, but obstacles (often people-shaped) are in the way. Each of us can also be a frustration to those working with us from time to time, so we probably shouldn't be surprised that every ministry involving working with people (and which one doesn't?) comes with its difficulties and frustrations.

A short narrative by Ron Mehl helped me put a few of these situations into perspective:

“A little boy was helping his father move some books out of an attic into more spacious quarters downstairs. It was important to this little boy that he was helping his dad, even though he was probably getting in the way and slowing things down more than he was actually assisting.... Among this man's books, however, were some rather large study books, and it was a chore for the boy to get them down the stairs. As a matter of fact, on one particular load, the boy dropped his pile of books several times. Finally, he sat

down on the stairs and wept in frustration. He wasn't doing any good at all. He wasn't strong enough to carry the big books down a narrow stairway. It upset him to think he couldn't do this for his daddy. Without a word, the father picked up the dropped load of books, put them into the boy's arms, and scooped up both the boy and the books into his arms and carried them down the stairs. And so they continued for load after load, both enjoying each other's company very much. The boy carrying the books, and the dad carrying the boy.”

God is big enough to move the people-shaped obstacles, negate the setbacks and handle the insults. We don't need to take them personally. In our busy-with-ministry lives, whether arranging the home library with our offspring, leading a prayer group, assuaging hurting and hurtful people or trying to feed refugees, effective ministry emerges when we are enjoying his company and are secure in his embrace.

It is said: “God works in, around and through us.” And that is true, but I have

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Confidential Peer Listener Line

Shall we talk? We're here for you!

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Zorro and Me

Endearing, Childlike Qualities

By Barbara Dahlgren

Zorro has a wonderful rapport with kids, so we've done a lot of youth work through the years. I think the rapport comes from Zorro not losing those endearing, childlike qualities God smiles on: positive outlook, trusting heart, humility, quickness to forgive, spontaneity, and really, really, really loving to have fun. All wonderful characteristics, but they can sometimes annoy your wife. (But in all fairness, almost anything a husband does can annoy his wife).

Reflections

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come to think of it more like this: God is always at work in me. When I get in the way, he works around me. And he works through me when I, like the little boy, realize and accept I can't do it and am content to rest in his arms and hold on to the books he gives me.



Ruth and Rod, her husband of nearly 35 years, live on the Gold Coast in Queensland, Australia, where she is on the pastoral team. Ruth works with preschool children and serves as liaison-support for Women in Ministry in the Southern Asia-Pacific Region. She is unabashedly proud of her six grandchildren. E-mail her at rod-ruthm@bigpond.net.au.

Zorro and I tend to differ in our approach to life. He might stop to pick daisies on the side of the road, whereas I would think, Doesn't he know we're going to be late? He might delight in stomping through a puddle in the rain, whereas I would think, What a mess! Who's going to wash those pants? He might find joy in making snow angels, whereas I would think, What a mess! Who's going to wash those pants?

Years ago we were bringing teens back from a weekend ski outing on a Sunday night, when Zorro started a snowball fight at a rest area. The kids loved it, but soon retreated to the cars. I can still hear them begging him, "Please, take us home. We have homework to finish."

Once during a water balloon fight at a church picnic, our daughter, Sherisa, was asked, "What would your father say if he could see you?" Someone is always trying to lay a guilt trip on a PK. Sherisa said, "He'd probably say, Quick! Fill one up for me. I think I've got a good shot at this guy." And when our daughter, Shelly, was little, I tried to get her to go to sleep by threatening, "Do you want me to go get your father?" She said, "I wish you would. I think he'd let me stay up a little longer."

Teen trips for our congregations have always been part of our ministry. We've taken teens from West Virginia and Kentucky to Florida where they've seen Disney World, Cypress Gardens and floated down Ichetucknee Springs in inner tubes. We've taken teens from Washington and California to Hawaii where they've stayed on the beach, seen the Polynesian Cultural Center and toured pineapple plantations. We've taken teens from Michigan to Washington, D.C., where they've seen the Smithsonian, visited

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Endearing, Childlike Qualities

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Arlington Cemetery and toured the White House.

I have such fond memories of the White House. Our son Matthew was about 9 at the time and came on the D.C. trip with us. He got ill on the White House tour. The Secret Service men took him outside for some air, where he promptly barfed behind a big bush. I always get a twinge when I see photos of the shrubs around the White House. Matthew christened the one on the left.

Trying to make these trips affordable was a challenge, so we didn't always eat the best cuisine or stay in posh accommodations. You might go so far as to call us cheap. One such cheap trip was when we took our Detroit teens to Florida. We found a conveniently located, camp-like facility. It had two dormitory-like buildings (one for the boys and one for the girls) with several rooms and bunk beds (we'd bring our own sheets) plus a separate kitchen. Each dorm had one bathroom and one shower at the end of a hallway.

The buildings were old, but functional and we would use the camp as our base of operation. We'd eat breakfast there, leave for the day to see sights, go to the beach, or have activities and return to fix our own dinners to save money. The best part was it was soooooo affordable.

Well, this place was soooooo bad they should have paid us to stay there. It wasn't that it was dirty, just very, very old. The minimal décor was not even up to Goodwill standards.

Posted on one wall by the bathroom was a list of rules. Our favorite: "Under no circumstances should you take any items from the camp home with you, including curtains or pictures." As a couple of us waited to get in the bathroom one chaperone looked at the rules, pointed to a 2,000-year-old plastic curtain covering the window and said, "I'm so disappointed because I really wanted to take this home."



To make matters worse, Florida was having a heat wave. It was hotter than (excuse my vernacular, but no other way to describe it) hell and, of course, no air conditioning. The rooms had very little ventilation. Sleeping was difficult. Not only was it stifling, but also the sweat literally poured off us. If you could open a window, there was no breeze. And mosquitoes—

the really big ones that say, Should we eat him here or take him with us?—loved to visit us. My souvenir for the trip was a fan I bought at K-Mart.

In spite of all the hardships and complaining, the teens seemed to have a great time. Ah, the resiliency of youth. However, the chaperones were suffering. This was evident at the beach when the teens said, "Let's throw Mrs. D in the water!" Sometimes teens mistakenly think Zorro and I have the same easy-going disposition. I yelled, "If you do, I'll see to it that you never get another teen trip like this again!" The kids backed off immediately, but all the chaperones chimed in, "Throw her in! Throw her in!"

We survived and managed to take these

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Endearing, Childlike Qualities

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same teens on other trips, but none remotely as bad as this one. Years later we took a teen survey. Several—not just a few, but several—stated this Florida trip was the best trip ever. One went so far as to say we needed more trips like this one.

I'm glad they had fond memories, but wondered which childlike quality these opinions reflected. Were they idealizing the past or having a distorted view of this trip? God says to become as little children, but I don't think he wants every childlike quality to be emulated. Then again, maybe they were looking on the bright side, being content no matter what and determined to have a good time in spite of the circumstances. If so, God would be very pleased.



*Barbara and Zorro are looking forward to the holidays when all the family will be home for Christmas. They haven't seen granddaughter Sophia since July. Barbara is excited about her new column in Christian Odyssey Magazine called *Thinking Out Loud: One Christian's (a) musings about everyday life*. You can e-mail her at bydahglren@pacbell.net. She loves hearing from you.*

I take a very practical view of raising children. I put a sign in each of their rooms: "Checkout Time is 18 years."

—Erma Bombeck



Defusing Explosive Emotions

By Carla Reinagel

Oppression, division, injustice, anger, difference, bitterness, misunderstanding, segregation, hatred—words used by the media to describe the racial climate in St. Louis where I live. When these emotions spill over, the result is often murder.

"Thou shalt not murder" is more than a Jewish law. Murder is one act all cultures throughout history declare to be wrong. This commandment is defined as a moral law. It is true for all peoples for all times. That every conscience worldwide agrees that something is wrong is evidence of God's existence.

When Jesus revealed himself as God he clarified the moral law. He defined murder by not only the act but also by the hateful emotions stored up in our hearts. "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell" (Matthew 5:21-22, NIV).

In one of our suburbs, an African American man, deeply embittered by years of bickering with city hall over where he could park his construction equipment, took matters into his own hands—with a gun. The result was five dead city officials, a critically wounded mayor and the man's own death. Because all the victims were white, racial turbulence once again

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Defusing Explosive Emotions

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came to a boil in my city. I don't condemn because I know how all-consuming racial injustice and bitterness can be.

When my family moved onto a Montana reservation I looked into faces filled with hate. My family did not belong to this tribe plus, my beautiful, blonde sister quickly became the center of a local war filled with jealousy and revenge. Even now, the death threats, the promises of rape if I were caught alone, the knife fights and the experience of being spit at every day of high school makes me sick to my stomach. I recognized this historical pattern of how people often treat one another, and I was able to endure two years of turmoil without taking it too personally—except for frequent migraines. Two sisters and a brother, in the thick of the battle, were forced to quit school and move away to live with other families. My sisters eventually finished their schooling in other towns; my brother never did. The other half of my family was accepted and enjoyed living in that community for nearly 30 years.

It came as quite a shock when years later I looked into a face filled with hate—and it was my own. My heart had slowly filled with anger and was hardening because of bitterness over years of hurt from the people I thought loved me—those in my family and church. The hatred I felt was personal and seemed impossible to control. I had a choice—either continue down the road of hate or choose to walk a path of forgiveness.

Jesus gave me a way out of my emotional and moral mess. He extended such tangible forgiveness to me that I was enabled to extend that same forgiveness to those who harmed me.

Lewis Smedes sets out the struggle this way: “Forgiveness is a process with four stages:

- a. Acknowledging the hurt.
- b. Blaming the person who has hurt you.
- c. Surrendering your right to get even.
- d. Beginning to reverse your feelings until you wish the other person good.”

I know where I would be without Jesus—hardened and hateful. It doesn't take much for such emotions to erupt, spreading even more hurt. The results are all around us and often grab the newspaper headlines. Jesus showed us life doesn't have to be this way—if we choose to forgive. By embracing forgiveness we can make a difference in the hatred that tears at our hearts and our land.



Carla says: “This summer our family is celebrating a new record: we have lived in the same house for six years. We have been painting each room with a clean, soft color in commemoration. I also paint in watercolor. My fine art can be viewed on-line at www.artofcarla.com.”



Mom and the Great Fish

By Bill Miller

Mom was a country girl, born and raised in the rolling green hills of Wisconsin. In her late teens, the family moved to Harvey, a suburb of Chicago. Harvey is famous for a lot of things, but mainly the birth of Larry, Bill and Cindy Miller. The country girl eventually became citified.



After Dad retired, they moved to their dream home on Raccoon Lake in Indiana. The lake was filled with largemouth bass, crappie, blue gill, catfish, white bass and carp (the only fish I know of with lips). During their 16 years on the shores of Raccoon Lake, Mom learned how to catch fish. She didn't fish often, but when she did, she caught smaller pan fish. Her desire was always to catch a big one.

It was unusual for Mom to go by herself down the hill to fish off the dock. But one day, she decided she was going to catch a big fish no matter how long it took. She prayed and asked God to bless her efforts. After bobber fishing for about an hour, she noticed

her bobber was no longer visible. She reeled in the slack and set the hook in the mouth of a fish so big it threatened to pull her into the lake.

She fought the fish mightily, hoping her line wouldn't break. No one was around to assist her. She was on her own—just her and God. Eventually the fish tired and Mom began to reel it in. She stepped off the dock onto the steep bank of the lakeshore to drag in the fish.

Suddenly, with renewed strength, the fish tried to escape. Mom ran up the bank, dragging the fish with her. The fish flopped wildly, trying to get back into the water. Mom's line broke. The fish rolled to within two feet of the water when Mom made her move. Afraid to touch the thrashing fish with her hands, she sat on it. She sat there for five minutes waiting for the fish to settle down and for her heart to stop pounding. Mom had caught her big fish—a 5-pound carp.

I'm sure many have asked God to help them catch fish, but I doubt their vision of that prayer being answered would ever match Mom's experience.



Bill just returned from a successful fishing trip in Wisconsin. He caught one amazingly large bluegill (if you believe that...) and numerous northern pike that were filleted, skinned and



deboned for consumption or pickling. He is now a certified archery instructor for SEP. E-mail him at bill-miller@verizon.net.

My GRANDson, American Hero

By Joyce Catherwood

When I walked into the kitchen, my cell phone was making its usual weird noises. I figured it probably needed recharging, but I had missed a call. The voice message was from my 22-year-old grandson who had just the day before landed in Dallas for an 18-day leave from his military deployment in Afghanistan. I was thrilled and honored that so soon after arriving home, he asked his grandparents to go to lunch. He has tons of friends and even though they were probably all at work or in class, we were glad to be on his list.

So we picked him up and drove to Macaroni Grill, which is becoming a traditional place for lunch for us when he's on leave. Jeffrey is our first grandchild and we have

loads of special memories stored up in our hearts.

When he was very young and got fed up with everyone and everything, he packed his little bag, took a few snacks, made a cassette tape about why he was running away, which he conveniently left behind, and marched a few houses up the street to a neighbor's lawn. He sat there for several hours until his mom decided it was finally time for him to come home. By the way, his dad has every word, nuance and intonation on that tape memorized and can repeat it word for word to this day.

And lest you think I've misspelled grandson, let me explain. Through the years, every time Jeffrey and I communicate in writing, I am always GRANDma and he is my GRANDson.

But as we sat across the table from each other in the restaurant, it was obvious Jeffrey had become someone different from the last time we saw him—this time he was returning from the frontlines. In his eyes, once bright and eager, there is a maturity, clouded with a

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Nurturenet

Nurturenet is a computer forum for women in ministry.

Its purpose is to help you stay connected through digest-mode communication (each day's messages compiled into one e-mail). You may use it for requests for information, prayer requests, to share ideas and resources,

to receive updates on *Connections* news or just to stay connected!

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



Do we
have
your
e-mail
address?

My GRANDson

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tinge of sadness and fatigue. On his wrist he wears two bracelets, each bearing the name of two fellow warriors recently lost in battle. One left a wife and five children, the other a young wife about to give birth to their first child. And these are just two of several fallen soldiers he knew well. You see, his base in Afghanistan is only several hundred yards away from a neighboring valley written about in *Vanity Fair* magazine and labeled the "The Valley of Death." The article states the area "is among the deadliest pieces of terrain in the world for U.S. forces."

I could go on and on trying to convey the life-changing circumstances he has lived through—the brutal physical exertion and humiliating obedience exercises in his first year of special forces training, the rugged and dangerous missions near the Pakistan border and the dodging of bullets in the frequent attacks on their base. But I have not lived this nightmare and any attempts to describe it would go lacking.

As Jeffrey reconnects with his friends at home, many graduating from college this year, I know he wishes he could be in their number. He wishes he didn't have to live on a rudimentary military base high in the Afghan mountains in extreme cold in winter and blistering heat in summer. He wishes he could be back in civilization but instead, he rubs shoulders daily with the local Afghans who live in mud huts, have no running water, no electricity, and most have no education. The men can have several wives and the women are miserably oppressed and have no rights. But he has two more years to go in the military, including one more deployment.

He doesn't realize he's a hero. Jeffrey sometimes feels it's a losing game because no matter what they do, the villagers are told

by their leaders not to trust the U.S. military. Still there is progress. More children are attending school, and with time and education, perhaps future generations in Afghanistan will be able to make a difference. So he will be returning to his valley for four more months of his deployment and keep doing his job.

Even though he may have some misgivings he knows he is involved in an effort to help some of the least privileged people on earth. He already has a broad worldview most Americans of his generation only read about. At age 22, he has endured a lifetime of trials and hardships that can only make him stronger and hold him in good stead when he returns to civilian life. And as far as being called on to lay down his life for his country, and all that that involves psychologically and physically, well, how can you measure that? So, not only will he always be my GRANDson, but also he is now an American hero.

Post Note:

Since this article was written, Jeffrey completed his 15-month Afghan deployment and returned to his main base in Italy. Two days before he left Afghanistan, he was involved in a fierce battle between 200 enemy insurgents and 45 U.S. soldiers. He became one of 20 ground reinforcement soldiers who came to their aid. Because of other duties, he was not originally chosen to go, but begged his base commander to allow him to fight alongside his comrades. The battle went on for hours. He barely escaped with his life and lost 9 more friends on the battlefield.



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A Page From My Journal

By Hannah Knaack

As I finished my journal entry, I heard a quiet voice prompting me to share it. That's really not easy to do. I was reminded at the *Connecting & Bonding* conference that when God taps on your shoulder, it's best to respond. I pray my journal entry connects with you.

"I've done it again, Lord. I put the desires you had to draw me closer into a neat box labeled "Not for Me" and I was wrong. You wanted to move deeper into my heart, and I told you I wasn't available. How patient you are, Abba Father, to tolerate my lack of vision and understanding with such kindness. I love that about you.

"Years ago at my first *Women of Faith* conference, you wanted to show me more of you during worship and what did I do? As the woman in front of me raised her hands in worship, I thought *that's fine for her—but not for me*. During the weekend, as we heard from various speakers, you did that thing only you can do, Lord. You pressed through the crack in my heart and slipped inside.

"As thousands stood for the final worship sequence and I again saw the woman's hands raised above her tear-stained face, my soul whispered, I want what she's got. You delivered. How could you not? Your dearest desire is to draw me ever closer and I stand in awe of your Holy Majesty.

"Soon after, Lord, you wanted to speak to me daily through music. My new friend was listening to Christian CDs constantly and my feeling was, *It's fine for her—just not for me*. You knew better. You delved deeper into my

heart through all the wonderful praise music and now I couldn't live without it. You knew what I was desperate for before I did, filling my heart richly with more of you. I stand in adoration of you and your perfect wisdom.

"So God, why is it I have yet to learn not to say *not for me*? How can I forget that not only do you want to bless me, but also only you know the blessings that perfectly fit my needs? When those letters from Jannice May began arriving for the *Connecting & Bonding* conferences, I played the same song, same verse.

"Don't you get tired of hearing my excuses, Lord? It's not for me. I can't afford it. I can't take the time off. It's too far away. I have *issues*. Only you knew what I really meant. I have some emotional baggage deep inside and it could get ugly. Who wants to share ugliness with people they see so seldom?

"Again, you won. You made a way for all my excuses to disappear and brought me to an oasis in the desert. May you always win in my life, Daddy. May you never turn your face away from my hardheadedness, my blindness to what's best for me.

"I'm so glad you won this time and placed me in the middle of a group of women who also had *issues*. And there was no ugliness, was there, Lord? When you're in the midst of something, beauty, joy and growth are the outcome. Your love transcends all our issues and your ways are beyond description.

"There is beauty and joy in the way women who haven't met before, but who dwell in your Spirit, can not only find common ground, but also connect at a heart level deep enough from which to draw strength.



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A Page From My Journal

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With such tenderness, you mixed us together as an aromatic stew, Lord. You brought our individual strengths and needs together, and as the Holy Spirit seasoned us generously with your love, you breathed new hope over us. All because you want what's best for us. May you never stop wanting that, for I am desperate for more of you.

"Only you knew how much I needed to be pampered and Jannice and her wonderful team were pros at it. Somehow, after being spoiled for a weekend my issues have faded and my spirit is lighter. It's what we ministers' wives crave, Holy Father—to be on the receiving end occasionally and hear your sweet whisper, "You are deserving of this special treatment and a little extra attention." This weekend you came to me with skin on, Jesus, and it was what I needed most.

"The speakers you sent to fill our cups did just that, Lord. But then you knew each and every thought, phrase and word that would touch our tired and hurting hearts in the perfect places. Once you've placed something in our hearts, Abba Father, we carry it with us forever. That's the beauty of you.

"Lord, please erase *not for me* from my vocabulary. In my Psalm 91 reading this morning, you reminded me that those "who dwell in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty." That's where I want to be always, Lord—in your shadow. That's what it felt like at the conference—secure and comforted in your mighty and endless shadow.

"It's so good to praise you, Lord. Let me always proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night. May I always be ready for you to speak into my heart."

If you have a desire to attend a *Connecting & Bonding* conference, place your re-

**Lessons From
the Stable**

By Sue Berger

"Hey look!" my friend exclaimed. "A herd of horses!" A pasture full of horses is admittedly a visual treat. For my friend, the sight was a curiosity. But all she saw was a group of horses grazing in the late afternoon sun. Except for a variety of colors, they were all the same to her.

Living at the time in cattle and dairy country, my perspective was different—much different. I worked summers at the nearby stable as a trail guide. When I drove by the pasture, I couldn't help but take inventory, seeing who was grazing with whom and glancing at the stock tank by the fence to make sure it was full. It was habit. I couldn't help myself.

I knew each horse by name and was familiar with their personalities—critical information as a trail guide. Inexperienced

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quest before the Lord. When the timing is right, may he move issues or mountains to get you there, just as he did for me.



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Lessons From the Stable

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or fearful riders could be assigned to Bingo or Mac, a couple of big, gentle, dopey geldings. Novice riders would be OK with the bulk of the horses in the field. Rocket and Lightning I rarely took out on a public trail ride. As their names imply, they were more spirited and required knowledgeable riders, like us trail guides.

I also understood how the horses got along with each other. The nipping order applied on the trail as much as it did in the pasture. A fast-paced lead horse like Trigger could cause problems at the back of the line. Or an hour ride could take half the morning if unmotivated plodders like Shadow or Spook (so named because he was an albino) were at the front. Group them correctly and the drama disappeared. We could all relax and enjoy the ride and the countryside.

As I often worked at the stable alone, understanding each horse was also critical for my own safety. Ribbon and Candy were more bad-mannered and prone to nip or kick. Letting all the horses into the barn one at a time in the right order for feeding insured I didn't get trampled in the rush. Knowing Queenie was a leaner when cleaning her hooves prevented my getting pinned against a stall wall. Taking mental inventory every day became habit. Did I detect a slight limp there? A runny nose? A weepy eye? A cut from a fence wire? I became familiar with every nuance.

Over time, I learned to respect and deal with each horse based on its own merit. Sure, I found some more enjoyable to work with than others. Teka was always a sucker for an ear-scratching session and Royal Gem enjoyed human company so much he'd follow me like a puppy while I did chores. With others it was a constant battle for cooperation.

Many an evening I'd sit on the top fence rail while topping off the water tank. The herd would gather around, jockeying for position, fascinated by the cool, splashing water. As a teen seeking to find myself, I'd wonder where I'd fit into the nipping order if I were a horse. Am I pushy or a fringer? Am I cooperative or do I frustrate those around me? Do I have bad habits that hurt myself or others? What do I do well? The herd's interactions and sense of order was honest and transparent. Oh that my life and relationships were so easy to understand!

We find ourselves in God's great pasture of humanity, but we're not just a huge herd to him. Our Stable Master knows us by name and reads every nuance. He knows when we're feeling frisky and when we're off our feed. He knows if we're leaders or followers and how to maximize our personalities and abilities.

Question is, do we trust him or do we buck under his authority? He loves us and wants the best for us. His intentions are pure and straightforward. He won't expect of us what we're unable to give. Instead, he provides everything for us: a green pasture, a full water trough, a safe barn during life's storms, companionship and even a good ear-scratching now and then.

That beats a brass nameplate on any stall door. That's Good News!



Sue and Lee changed pastures in late August, moving from a pastorate in central Texas to a real estate development job in northeast Texas. They're both looking forward to new opportunities the Stable Master has in store for them in their new location. ©2008 Sue Berger. See her website and e-mail her at Sue@OnePilgrimsMusings.com.

Being a Light...has a lighter side!

The little girl went to church for the first time. As she was leaving with her parents, the minister asked how she had liked church. "I liked the music," she replied, "but the commercial was too long."

Inscribed in stone over the great front doors of an old church being restored was: "This is the Gate of Heaven." Just below it someone had placed a small cardboard sign which read: "Use Other Entrance."

The little church in the suburbs suddenly stopped buying from its regular office supply dealer. So, the dealer telephoned Deacon Brown to ask why.

"I'll tell you why," shouted Deacon Brown. "Our church ordered some pencils from you to be used in the pews for visitors to register."

"Well," interrupted the dealer, "didn't you receive them yet?"

"Oh, we received them all right," replied Deacon Brown. "However, you sent us some golf pencils...each stamped with the words, 'Play Golf Next Sunday.'"

—All the above from www.basicjokes.com

My sister has the courage, but not always the skills, to tackle any home repair project. For example, in her garage are pieces of a lawn mower she once tried to fix. So I wasn't surprised the day my other sister, Pam, and I found our sister attacking her vacuum cleaner with a screwdriver.

"I can't get this thing to cooperate," she explained when she saw us. Pam suggested, "Why don't you drag it out to the garage and show it the lawn mower?"

The child comes home from his first day at school. His mother asks, "Well, what did you learn today?"

The kid replies, "Not enough. They want me to come back tomorrow."

As a trail guide in a national park, Danny ate with the rest of the seasonal staff in a rustic dining hall, where the food left something to be desired. When they were finished with their meals, they scraped the remains into a garbage pail and stacked the plates for the dishwasher.

One worker, apparently not too happy after his first week on the job, was ahead of Danny in line. As he slopped an uneaten plate of food into the garbage, Danny heard him mutter, "Now stay there this time."

—All the above from www.cybersalt.org