



Connections

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

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The Sand Dollar

By Anne Gillam

The ocean is overpowering. It's not the size and strength of the waves alone but the immenseness of it all. The beauty carved by each wave is like a fine artist's tool. Each wave is a stroke of the brush on a canvas. The picture is continually in rebirth. The sky hangs heavy on your shoulders because there's way too much to take in. The sound of the sea birds

and the waves as they rush in is a song that enters deep into your inner being. The song sings, "God is here, God is here," and it keeps playing until it's embedded within you.



All of my senses are overstimulated. My eyes are not able to take in the whole picture at once, so they run from view to view trying to connect the dots. My ears are filled to overflowing with an orchestration of sounds.

My feet are caressed by the sand as the breeze gives my body a mystical touch. The smells are so alive I can taste them.

What calls me back over and over is the closeness I feel to my creator God. I am comforted and frightened at the same time. I am comforted seeing the great love and detail that went into his creation—a creation I belong to—and I am frightened because next to this beauty I feel small and blemished. How could God love me in this blemished state?

As I walked along the sandy beach with my good friend, Connie, I felt a burden way too heavy for me to bear. I silently asked for a sign from God showing me he still loved me—a whole sand dollar, just one. It was not the time of year for sand dollars, but my God can do anything!

As we walked along the beach the darkness began to fall and this made the burden even heavier. I stopped to look into a pool of water left by the ebbing tide. My friend, who was also trying to take in the view, did not see me stop and collided with me. As I put out my hand to cushion the fall, my hand fell on something in the water. It was a whole sand dollar.

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Our Father in Heaven

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The shock of falling turned into amazement. The sand dollar was what I had asked for. This for me was confirmation of God's love. God didn't stop with just one sand dollar. As we walked along the beach more and more came into view until I could no longer hold them or stuff them into my pockets.

The Father was not just saying, I love you still; he was standing with his arms open wide saying, I love you this much! God loves you too! He, through the gift of his Son, was standing with his arms open wide saying to the world, I love you all this much!



Anne says: "It seems as if God has given me new wonders and delights everyday, but I am beginning to see they are not so much new as they are new to my vision. God's love is eternal and ever present. My eyes are just now adjusting to the light." E-mail her at WEBEBASS@aol.com.



Editor's note: While we know God is not our personal, cosmic vending machine, in his sovereignty over eternity, it appears he sometimes provides answers that most certainly appear to us as more than coincidental. Sometimes he gives us individual assurance in special ways, but often he expects us to rely on the evidence he has already given (Romans 5:8). We experience his pleasure and joy as part of our spiritual formation.

◆ CONNECTIONS ◆

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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.



Remember Him With Joy

In some fellowships, communion or the Lord's Supper is a quiet, solemn occasion, at times almost funereal. I used to be afraid to talk before or after our ceremony in an effort to preserve the solemnity. It was almost worse than a funeral.

But it's not a funeral, even though we remember the One who died shortly after sharing a last supper with his friends. Jesus said whenever we partake of the Lord's Supper, we are to remember him.



But how should we remember him? Should we wail and grieve like a group of paid mourners? Should we cry and be sad? Do we remember him by being guilt ridden and apologetic because our sins caused

him to go through an awful death—a criminal's death—on a Roman instrument of torture?

Perhaps there's a time and place for that—not the guilt, but a time of repentance and confession. Possibly that is best done in private, although sometimes those emotions come out when we think on Jesus' death.

But what if we approach this time of remembrance from a different point of view? Jesus had a lot on his mind the night he sat down with his disciples to eat his last meal and talk with them one more time. He had spent three and a half years with these men and felt great affection for them. In Luke 22:15 he said, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer"

(NIV). In Matthew 26:18 he said he was planning to *celebrate* it with them. He knew he wouldn't eat it again until the Kingdom of God.

Let's remember him (Luke 22:19) as the son of God who came to earth to live among us and to be one of us. He's the One who gave us, in the form of his person, freedom from the law, the chains of sin and the oppression of death. He gave us freedom from fear of the future, freedom to know the Father and freedom to be called children of God.

Let's be joyful as we remember the One God anointed to preach good news to the poor, who was sent to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and to release the prisoners from darkness. He came to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who grieve and he bestows on us a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair (Isaiah 61).

Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before him. It's hard to imagine joy so great. It certainly was not human or earthly joy. It had to be the joy of being God! The joy of heaven! The joy of eternity! It's joy we can't begin to imagine or describe!

This is the One we remember—the One who changed our grief into joy and who invites us to share his life, now and in eternity. Let's remember him with smiles on our faces, a shout of joy on our lips and with light hearts filled with the delight of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord!

Tammy

Happy Easter!

Book Review

Ruthless Trust The Ragamuffin's Path to God

Author: Brennan Manning

© 2000

Reviewed by Sue Berger

Readers of Brennan Manning instantly recognize the troubled and humble spirit of a broken human being—a heart loath to admit sinfulness, yet jubilant it can cast itself on God's infinite mercy and grace. Manning's exploration of trust does not disappoint the reader. Weaving stories and Bible accounts together, in *Ruthless Trust* he shares his thoughts on faith, gratefulness and confidence.

In a society focused on possession and accomplishment, Manning challenges us to trust God by deconstructing our lives. So life-changing is this ultimate act of confidence (from mistrust to trust), he views it as a "second conversion." In accepting Jesus Christ, we have to also experience self-acceptance, as any self-rejection indicates a lack of trust in the total sufficiency of Jesus' saving work. Total trust is the benchmark of accepting grace. Granted, this day-by-day process requires God's help to sustain.

Manning explores how it is possible for God to be incredibly infinite while at the same time being so personally intimate. He discusses how the artists, mystics and



clowns among us give us insight to the personality of God and challenge us to listen to the internal beat of our relationship with him. He also challenges us to view our cracks and faults as God-given potential and purpose, rather than imperfections God has to find uses for after the fact.



Perhaps the most inspiring aspect to me was the reminder to live in the moment. Manning explores living in the "now" and the "here." As the past is behind us and we have no control over the future (even if it's only ten minutes from now), he challenges us to fully engage in the moment and glean every benefit from it possible. Whether it's receiving blessing or giving to another, right now is the only life we have. God is manifest in the smallest of details if we'll only pay attention to what's going on around us.

I've known people who seem to be happily content with whatever they're doing at the time. Perhaps they've captured the awareness that preoccupation with yesterday or tomorrow robs us of living today to the full with all God has to offer in it. Manning contends being in the now also relieves us of endless (and often fruitless) self-analysis. In the absence of self-observation, we're freed of guilt and shame. Our focus shifts to others, to the moment and to what God is doing around us.

Note: Don't go haywire with this in-the-moment thing. Make that shopping list for next week's groceries, make the doctor's appointment and those concert ticket reservations. Calm foresight is responsible behavior. The key is being attentive to and engaged in whatever is at hand at the moment.

Ruthless trust is not an abstraction, but a concrete and visible choice and reality. It can shape our decisions, what we say and how we relate to others and to our God. Everything is possible. ☪

A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices.



—William James

Voices of Our Sisters

By Joyce Catherwood

Have you ever wondered what it would have been like to be Mary, mother of Jesus, the child? Except for his birth, little is written about his first years. We do know Jesus as a child was still God. So, incorporating attributes of God such as creator and love, let's use our imagination and listen to the voice of our sister, Mary.

"Only after his death and resurrection did everything begin to make sense. I knew my son was to be the Jewish Messiah. I knew he was set apart because of the extraordinary way he was conceived and what the angel said about him. Others like old Simeon foretold astounding things, even frightening things, about our baby. And the Prophetess Anna spoke of Jesus and the redemption of Jerusalem. Joseph and I wondered at what was said about our child, but we did not fully comprehend who Jesus was. We did not know he was God!

"Loving and nurturing Jesus as an infant and as a child was pure joy. He was the dearest baby imaginable. But now, when I realize he was God, with tiny fingers and toes, grabbing my hand, staring at me with a big adorable smile on his face, I don't know what to say! I am filled with awe knowing I kissed the face of God! I carried him in my arms!

"As he grew to become a plucky 1-year-old, taking his first steps, he was engagingly animated and didn't miss a thing. He laughed and jabbered on as he marveled at the sights

and sounds of nature—watching the birds perched in the trees, pointing at the stars, stroking a flower petal, hugging the neck of a playful lamb and rubbing his nose in its fuzzy coat. Everything he touched, everything he encountered, made him squeal with delight. It takes my breath away now to grasp that my baby was actually the Creator, rediscovering his own creation through the eyes, heart and mind of a tiny child. And nature itself seemed to respond to him. I think the creation sensed its maker.

"As a toddler learning to talk, he chattered continuously, tugging at my robe so I would look at him while he gestured broadly, trying hard to make me understand what he wanted to say. My heart would melt, watching his bright eyes and the innocence of his face as he drew me into his little world. His zest for life was contagious.

"As soon as he learned something, he never forgot it, picking up quickly on the

consequences of right and wrong. He also had unusual powers, which truly puzzled us at the time, though now we understand. But he (and we) learned quickly it was unwise to use his powers often, as some people reacted negatively, not knowing the source of his powers. But from earliest childhood, he had a huge loving heart, so it was difficult for him to resist miraculously helping someone or to refrain from raising up a tiny sparrow that fell.

"Times were not always easy. Once we were forced to flee to Egypt to escape the madness and jealousy of Herod. Then as now, there was much political unrest and we



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God and *American Idol*

By Ron Stoddart

The popular TV show *American Idol* is not all about finding the most talented singer. I think many people watch it just to chuckle at the barbs and insults from the judges.

Imagine standing in front of Jesus Christ to be judged. I can guarantee it would be with mercy and kindness and nobody, not even the angels, would be sniggering. How do I know this? Well, I read about it!

Some really uptight people lived in Jesus' day. Being uptight and religious is not a new thing. Several of these fine religious folk found a woman committing a sin and

hauled her before Jesus. The religious experts quoted the law and hoped to make life difficult for Jesus (John 8:6). Maybe they expected him to agree with them and be a hard judge. I'm sure sniggers and sidelong glances were aimed at the poor, terrified woman. If you were in her place, like a contestant in front of the TV judges, knowing you were the object of ridicule, wishing the ground would just swallow you, you'd expect harsh treatment.

Oh, she deserved harsh treatment. The law was clear: death for adultery.

Jesus gave a preview of how he'll judge most people one day. This adulterer knew she deserved to die, but the penalty was replaced by mercy. How did she feel about Jesus after that? Do you think she loved him? But wait, Rabbi Jesus also told her to change her life-style and sin no more.

Wouldn't it be uplifting if the judges were kind on the next *American Idol*? (I have to admit some people need to hear the words, Go and sing no more.) It seems to me there's enough cruelty without a TV show adding to the problem.

If you happen to see the show you might also like to know Jesus said something else about being a harsh judge. "For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged" (Matthew 7:2, NIV).

Voices of Our Sisters

(Continued from page 5)

Jews were an oppressed people. But regardless of circumstances, my precious boy was like a light shining in the darkness, a remarkable child who put a smile on the faces of all around him. I feel humbled over having had this blessing. It's like an amazing dream. How incredible, how surreal to have been the mother of the child, Jesus."



This past January, Carn and Joyce celebrated their 44th wedding anniversary. Joyce says being married 44 years isn't what makes her feel her age. It's having kids who are now 40-something! E-mail her at joyce.catherwood@wcg.org.



Ron was born in Liverpool and left home to live in South Africa when he was 16. He met his wife Gail in 1971 at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and they married in 1973. They ministered in London, England, until 1975 when they moved to Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. They have two children who live in New Hampshire. Ron and Gail pastor the Salt Lake City congregation of the Worldwide Church of God, Grace Fellowship. E-mail him at ukman1@msn.com.



My Proverbs 31 Wife

By Michael Houghton

I have long understood the truth of Proverbs 31, though not in the way one might expect. As a minister I've found it interesting everyone assumes you were raised by Wally and Beaver Cleaver's parents, experiencing proper Christian role models and having only wonderful experiences. The details are not important and too personal to display in this forum, but let it suffice to say no Proverbs 31 women were anywhere near my life until I met my wife of nearly 31 years.

I fell in love with her the moment we met, but I did not pursue her because I knew she was way out of my league. Somehow God brought us together and has held us together through the "better and the worse," "richer and poorer" and "in sickness and in health"—even though many times the better was hardly distinguishable from the worse. Having been a musician who became a police officer and then finally a minister, the richer was continually only pennies above poorer.

We laughed and cried, struggled and pulled together, side by side, until it seemed as if we really were of one flesh, with the same dreams and goals and joys in life. Together we could take on the world without worry and we have done so many times over the years. I haven't lost the feeling my wife is far too good for the likes of me, and I will go to my grave knowing God gave me a special gift when he fixed us up. Lately though I have come to see an even greater strength in her, far greater than I could

imagine.

When I developed Parkinson's disease, and a more rapidly progressing and more quickly debilitating variation at that, the marriage became progressively less than a 50-50 proposition. One by one what we had always done together became what she did alone. Too proud to ride in a scooter yet unable to walk far, I stayed home as she did the shopping. The gardening we once shared became so hard for me all I could do was sit and watch.

As the months passed she had to do up my buttons as I dressed for church and even tie my shoes as I lacked sufficient dexterity to do these things myself.

She rode with me on a four-year roller-coaster ride through the serious depression that so often accompanies Parkinson's disease. She was there when my world became darker and darker to the point I would hide myself in a cave of books and research to escape the reality of what was happening to me. Each time she would bring a light and find me. She has become my chauffeur, nurse, physical therapist and druggist and yet remains my beautiful and loving wife.

She does not rise up before the dawn now, and I am not sure about her real estate speculation skills, but as the husband of Elizabeth (Lori) Houghton, I can only follow the lead of the Psalmist and say, "There are many wives in the world, but you, my dear Elizabeth, surpass them all."



Michael and Lori are now retired from their duties as senior pastor to Elkhart and Michigan City, Indiana. They live in Benton City, Washington. Michael is still working on his doctoral dissertation and writes for ACCM and Christian Odyssey when he is able. Lori has devoted her life to caring for Michael. E-mail him at mvhsr@msn.com.



An excellent wife, who can find?
For her worth is far above jewels.



—Proverbs 31:10, NASB

Pass the Chicken, Please

By Hannah Knaack

My son placed a huge portion of roast-Med chicken onto his plate, then reached around the vegetables for the homemade gravy. Catching my frown, he grinned. “Chill, Mom,” he said, “I’m going to take some vegetables after I get the good stuff on my plate. I love chicken and gravy—can I have seconds?”



Little did he know once I was quite certain chicken would never pass my lips again. As I handed the veggies to my son, I shared with him my hard-to-forget childhood memory.

On a warm day during the summer I turned 11, my parents pulled into the driveway and began unloading crates from the back of our station wagon. When I asked what they were doing, Mom responded, “Saving money!” I heard a squawk and peeked into the first crate. Chickens! Live chickens! “Oh, wow,” I grinned, “We’re going to have little baby chicks soon and collect eggs?” I envisioned holding one of the sweet yellow peeps in my hands while the others followed me around the yard.

Oh, if only my mother’s plans were so innocent! I listened in horror as she began to describe how Dad would first butcher the chickens, my older sister and I would pluck and clean them and she would process them for canning. Wouldn’t it be lovely to have all that nice meat in the pantry this winter! My stomach gave an immediate reaction to the “pluck and clean” part and I knew something had to be done!

I dashed into the house and unloaded the story to my older sister, who in between gasps of “sick” and “gross,” came up with

the flimsy idea that we needed to stay too busy to help with this fowl plan. The vision of jars filled with slimy chicken adrift in brownish broth brought a shudder over both of us. Our busyness did not deter my mom in the least, however, and down the stairs she dragged us, stepping over to the window to see how Dad was progressing.

What I saw next would be indelibly etched in my mind. Apparently Dad hadn’t quite severed the poor chicken’s neck and it staggered around the backyard, head flopping wildly about. In shock, I realized I would be the next one to touch that poor, suffering creature! I slapped a hand over my mouth to keep my breakfast in place and in the overly dramatic way of a preteen, knew at that moment no one had a life more horrible than mine!

My sister suddenly turned theatrical diva, promptly turned white and nearly passed out. Mom rushed her to the sofa and said I’d have to clean the chickens myself. (She later explained how “that time of the month” could have been a determining factor, but I was convinced it was my sister’s ploy to remain housebound.) So much for sisterhood! When I pointed out to Mom that my two younger sisters were good workers, she gave me her *I mean business* look and I knew it was hopeless.

Mom stepped outside and relieved my dad (who was really quite relieved), and butchered the remaining chickens in short order. Coming to check on my work, she discovered I had pulled three whole feathers in the last hour, with my eyes closed and nose pinched shut. I didn’t see why Mom was so grumpy when this had been her idea to begin with, and none of us had the slightest clue about running a home meat market. After all, every girl keeps a mental list of “most disgusting and gross things”

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A Prayer to Jesus, Son of Man and Son of God

By Joyce Catherwood

You raised your hands to die for us. We could never lift our hands that high. Our hearts ache for the pain you endured for us. To think on your suffering is almost unbearable. But for our sakes you bore it perfectly to the very last.

Now it is finished and

Instead of scorn and cruel mocking, we raise our voices to you in adoration and song.
Instead of an ugly crown of thorns, we anoint your head with the fragrance of
worship.

Instead of a rugged cross, we build you a throne with our praise.

Instead of nails piercing your feet, we wash your feet with our tears.

Instead of a spear puncturing your side, we yearn to be by your side.

Instead of hateful rejection and betrayal, we cannot live without you.

Instead of a sentence of death, we long for your life.

You were deemed worthy to be beaten and crucified, but now you alone are worthy
to be praised and exalted forever. Amen.

Pass the Chicken

(Continued from page 8)

and that day, we surpassed snakes and spiders!

After butchering, cleaning and canning all of the chickens, Mother was yet under the impression we would be delighted with her efforts and want to share the bounty. Except for Dad, who I suspect felt sorry for her, not one bite of that chicken touched our lips. Our younger sisters mimicked our behavior and could not be convinced to touch the limp stuff, in spite of Mom's stories of starving children around the world. In the long run Mom did save money as I don't believe we purchased chicken for a very long time and certainly not of the live variety ever again.

Somehow I completely lost my appetite in reliving the memory, but the last words were barely out of my mouth when my son eyed the platter and said around a mouthful of potatoes, "Pass the chicken, please." Thankful to have the platter cleared, I quickly complied!



Hannah says: "Our son, Andrew, informed me just days ago that I would be living with him and his future wife after they marry. I figured he meant as a nanny, and said so. It turns out he wants me to come cook for them! When I asked about his father, Andrew graciously conceded that I could bring him with me. It's nice to cook for a child who appreciates your efforts and wants to take you home with him. We'll also appreciate our minuscule food budget once he leaves for college!" E-mail Hannah at justmomhkl@juno.com.

Mission (Im)Possible:

God-sized Challenges Meet Mountain-sized Faith

By Sheila Dela Peña

It's happening again. It's the Christmas season. It lasts until the first week of January here in the Philippines, and my husband is away on a trip. As I try to distract myself from feeling lonely and helpless, I remember that these times of isolation and solitude bring to fore the deepest thoughts and realizations. And this time is no different.

I went back to what I wrote at the start of the year to help me reflect on God and the lessons he has taught me in 365 days. It was not difficult to see that God has poured out on us, and on me specifically, some huge and impossible (from a human being's standpoint) challenges.

God reminded me of the many impossible dreams he already granted to me and my family. My husband and I are facing a lot of impossible tasks, challenges and dreams coming up in 2007. And my reply to all these is, bring them on! We have the almighty God on our side, and nothing is impossible with him. But one thing we need to do—we need to believe.



This truth jumped at me everywhere I turned the past few weeks and even today. Let me quote a couple of them:

“We have a God who delights in impossibilities” (Andrew Murray).

“Our God specializes in working through normal people who believe in a supernatural God who will do His work through them” (Bruce Wilkinson).

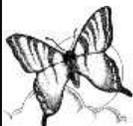
“The Christian life isn't difficult—it is impossible. If we don't know that, we will try to do things ourselves. Faith is not necessary when we think we can do it ourselves. Faith comes along when we realize that we cannot do it on our own” (Joseph Garlingen). (I found this serendipitously just below my article in *Connections*).

More affirmations followed through the movie *The Polar Express*. Yes, I know, it's a Christmas movie for kids, and I was probably more skeptical than most because of Santa, the elves and the commercialism of it all. But I guess today was the best time for me to see it, alone in the house as I ate my breakfast with tears streaming down my cheeks. Take away all the other symbols and characters and you will get to the heart and message of the movie.

Just when I was beginning to wonder if all the miracles really happened to me all these months (yes, the questions do come at your lowest moments) and if God will do more, this line from the unbelieving boy rang loud and clear: “Now that I'm older, the bell (referring to the lone bell that fell from Santa's reindeer that he gave to this boy for Christmas) still rings for me as for all who truly believe.”

Does the bell of faith still ring loud in the ears of our hearts? When did we all grow up

Neither go back in fear
and misgiving to the past,
nor anxiety and forecasting
to the future; but lie quiet under His
hand, having no will but His.



—Bishop H.E. Manning,
1808-1892

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Mission (Im)Possible

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and stop believing? When did we stop having that childlike trust in our Father? God is the God of the impossible and we need to keep believing and trusting in him. If faith can only move a molehill, then it is not faith at all. We need to have God-sized tasks and mountain-sized faith for God to step in and do the impossible.

The Word of God is rife with faith lessons and reminders. “We live by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7, *NIV* throughout); “The righteous will live by faith” (Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11); “According to your faith will it be done to you” (Matthew 9:29); “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1); “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

How does our faith measure up? Do we still insist on seeing before believing? Do we dream only small dreams and pray for what we can achieve on our own? When all things look hopeless and negative circumstances surround us, does the loud peal of faith become a faint chime? Have we lost sight of God’s greatness and awesome power?

Let’s ask God for the manifestation of his awesome power in our lives and the faith to believe it is. Battle-scarred and soul-

Many people know so little about what is beyond their short range of experience. They look within themselves and find nothing! Therefore they conclude that there is nothing outside themselves either.



—Helen Keller

weary, we Christian soldiers need to be reminded of who’s in charge and who has already won the battle for us—Jesus Christ. Let’s start believing again in the impossible and continue living with Everest-sized faith in him who started it all and will finish it all. Have a blessed New Year.



Sheila says, “While I still wonder how to cope with the demands of our mongrel and lab, I’m beginning to dream of a pug dog named Peanuts. Perhaps when our Father knows I’m ready, a cute black-masked face with large saucer eyes will find itself on our doorstep.” E-mail her at sheila_delapena@yahoo.com.

Fear imprisons, Faith liberates;
Fear paralyzes, Faith empowers;
Fear disheartens, Faith encourages;
Fear sickens, Faith heals;
Fear makes useless,
Faith makes serviceable;
and most of all,
Fear puts hopelessness
at the heart of life,
while Faith rejoices in its God.

—Henry Emerson Fosdick



Zorro and Me

Nigeria or Bust!

By Barbara Dahlgren

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

In years past, our church provided many opportunities for travel. When we were still devoutly keeping Old Testament holy days, our family volunteered to go to an international area to help with the fall festival. At first we were told we were too late, but then we received a call saying they did have an opening for Nigeria. Would we be interested?



After a family discussion, we enthusiastically said, "Yes!" Our daughters, Shelly and Sherisa, were in college at the time so we would have

to pay their way, but the church would cover expenses for Zorro, Matthew (age 12) and me. We scraped the money together for the girls and proceeded to make plans for the trip. As we had not traveled abroad before, we were excited about the prospect of adventure.

In retrospect, certain clues should have warned us that perhaps this would not be an ideal family trip. But there's a kind of naiveté that comes with inexperience and

blind trust—a fine line separating faith and foolishness—which is just another way of saying, "Boy, were we stupid or what?"

Clue #1: When one receives a last-minute call to go somewhere, one should always ask, why is there an opening?

Clue #2: It was 1993—a time when Nigeria's political and socioeconomic situation was tenuous at best. The Lagos, Nigeria, airport was considered so dangerous the United States had suspended all flights there. Perhaps that's why we were flying *British Airways*?

No one at HQ seemed concerned about this. I did receive a call from the friend of a VIP who said, "Barbara, you don't have to go on this trip, you know." But so enthralled were we with the thought of travel, I replied, "They wouldn't send us anywhere dangerous, would they?"

Clue #3: We would need vaccinations, passports and visas—all things we knew about. When applying for the visa we were instructed not to say anything about being a minister or going to a religious convention. We would receive a letter from a "personal friend" in Nigeria inviting us for a visit. We were going to Nigeria for a "vacation."

Clue #4: Yes, we could bring gifts for the children such as pencils, crayons, books, toys, candy, clothing. If these things were found in our suitcases during the customs check entering Nigeria, however, they would be confiscated.

Our visas arrived the day before we left. Our congregation was so thrilled about sending items to youths in Africa we ended up taking ten suitcases and five carry-ons. Looking a little like "Ma & Pa Kettle and Family Visit Africa," we headed for the airport.

Clue #5: At the airport in San Francisco, we saw a huge disclaimer in the lobby about

There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, "All right, then, have it your way."

—C.S. Lewis,
The Great Divorce



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Zorro and Me

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not being responsible for anyone traveling to Lagos, Nigeria.

Well, it's a little late now, I thought. I was beginning to have visions of VIPs at HQ waving to us and saying, "Bon Voyage and hope you don't die!"

Off we went—first to our British offices in London where we would be given further instructions. While there we voiced a little concern about this trip as we were so inexperienced. "Not to worry," they said. "We've arranged for you to meet someone on the plane who is an old hand at all this."

Clue #6: "He will take care of you on the plane, but when you arrive in Nigeria you will recognize your contact by the *Plain Truth* magazine he or she will be carrying."

Clue #7: "And by the way, would you please get this money into Nigeria without it being confiscated?" Hmm? The family gave this a little thought and decided to divide it three ways and stuff it in Shelly's, Sherisa's and my bras. We had never felt so well-endowed!

Clue #8: When we went through the passport check at Gatwick Airport, the British official asked why we were going to Nigeria. We said, "For a vacation!" He laughed and replied, "No one goes to Nigeria for holiday."

Clue #9: When we met our "someone on the plane who is an old hand at this," he was not as experienced as we hoped. He said:

Truth is incontrovertible. Panic may resent it; ignorance may deride it; malice may distort it; but there it is.



—Winston Churchill

"This is my first time. They told me you knew what you were doing and would guide me through everything."

Clue #10: Getting off the plane that night in Nigeria was like entering a military state. Uniformed officers with machine guns were everywhere. After a two-hour wait in 95 degree heat, we finally reached the passport and visa check area.

There was a bit of a language barrier. The man didn't want to let us through unless we paid money. He said, "I am an official!" Zorro looked confused and gave him a dollar. The man scoffed and said, "I am a high official!" Zorro sheepishly asked, "Do you take MasterCard?" Miraculously, the man laughed and let us through.

Clue #11: It took another hour to get our luggage. We headed for customs fearing all our gifts to the children would be taken and praying they wouldn't strip search us and find the money. The guy looked at all our luggage. He chose to inspect one of Shelly's smaller bags. It was just filled with her clothes. Another miracle! He let us pass.

We trudged out the door—hot, tired, thirsty and laden down like pack mules. Like a vision, before us a woman carrying a *Plain Truth* magazine appeared. Praise God! The clueless Dahlgrens had arrived!



Barbara and Mel (Zorro) are busy planning a 10-day trip to China in March with dear friends Steve and Karon Smith.

Barbara said she's glad Zorro's hip replacement surgery was a success. She would hate to abandon him on the Great Wall because he couldn't keep up. She loves hearing from you. You can e-mail her at bydahlgren@pacbell.net.



I Will See You, Peter

By Cathy Emerson

I held him in my arms, wee Peter, my first-born grandson. He has great-grandpa's eyebrows, his mommy's nose and his daddy's generous grin and chin. He is perfect, beautiful and so sweet. And he is still-born at 7 and a 1/2 months.

What is this thing called life? Our little grandson looked whole. Is this a cruel deception? I want so badly to give him CPR, to breathe the breath of life into those virgin lungs. But that is not my prerogative. Only the Creator has the right to give or take away that breath. Someday I will talk to the Head of this universe and ask him for the answer. For now I mourn.

Ah, Peanut, I was looking forward to the day when you would come running into Grandma's outstretched arms with your hands full of freshly picked flowers to show me. I can hear your giggles, just like your father, as Grandma tummy-gums you. And I can see Grandpa swinging you into his arms, with a smile as wide as yours. And—I can't go there anymore.

I asked that every brain cell, every nerve and sinew would be knit together soundly. I asked that your nature would be loving, loyal and a joy to your parents' hearts.

Oh, God, I do not understand. The statistics in one book say 20 percent of children

are stillborn or miscarried. It can't be that high, can it? And yet, my 81-year-old neighbor lost a set of twins and another son. A 96-year-old friend buried two sons on the South Dakota prairie, two nieces both lost their firstborns, and my son's wife has an older brother, also still-born. A dear friend had two babies who did not come to full term. One after another, the stories of heartbreak and tears come to light. And this is just within my circle of friends and acquaintances. So, yes, maybe it is 20 percent.

So what can we learn from all this? First, life is incredibly fragile. How miraculous it is when a baby is even begun in the first place. So many factors have to come together in just the right order. Most doctors and midwives will tell you this. King David of Israel explained it so well in Psalm 139:13-16 (*NLT*):

"You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—and how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed."

We also learn empathy and concern for others who will face these trials. Who better to help them than someone who has cried similar tears? In 2 Corinthians 1:4 we read: "He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us" (*The Message*).

The other lesson, for Peter and for all the children who are sleeping, is that someday they will live. They are on hold right now.

The world is divided into people who do things and people who get the credit. Try, if you can, to belong to the first class. There's far less competition.



—Dwight Morrow

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I Will See You, Peter

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Their time is coming. This gives incredible hope. First Corinthians 15:54 tells me the dead in Christ will be caught up in the air at Christ's return. My grandson has faith-filled parents, so I think he will be caught up in the air to have his perishable earthly body transformed into a heavenly body, and he will live, for the first time outside the womb. I am comforted too by the knowledge God doesn't want anyone to perish. He is in the rescue business. Though some parents may not have heard of Christ, "through whom we can be rescued," I have faith God is big enough to work things out.

So my dear son's and daughter's arms are empty now and I know they long to fill them. My arms were empty for years after we lost our precious boy at two days, and perhaps I had hoped they would again be filled. I am like Rachel mourning for her children. I mourn my own little one, I mourn my son's and daughter's little one and I mourn all the little ones whose parents still cry. I know

someday they will live, maybe for the first time. Many people, myself included, will rejoice as those innocent lives unfold. God speed that day.

And, no, I admit I still do not truly understand—that is where faith comes in.

(Erik and Tori learned little Peter was lost because of placental abruption. That means the placenta was not properly attached to begin with. Does this make the pain any easier to carry? Not really, but at least we know the physical reason.)



Cathy and Ken are so pleased to serve in the Everett, Washington, congregation. They have two grown sons, both living in the Everett area. Cathy's hobbies are gardening, flower arranging, sewing and quilting and, of course, writing. She is also known to curl up with a good book at times. E-mail her at ceewee@juno.com.

Nurturenet

Nurturenet 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 to request information, to request prayer, 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@wcg.org.

Forgiven to the Measure I Forgive?

By Sue Berger

The Lord's Prayer always makes me squirm. I rationalize I must not understand what Jesus really meant. Asking God to forgive me as I forgive others? I hope God's not listening right then because I'm a lousy forgiver. Not that I carry around a lot of anger or bitterness, but I'm not very tolerant of other's shortcomings and have little patience for being around those who irk me.

I'm sure I have shortcomings and occasionally irk God. So if the theory holds, God's acting as if he's busy and doesn't see me, is hiding behind a magazine hoping I don't see him or is not showing up somewhere because he knows I'll be there.

Jesus often hammers away on the importance of forgiveness. If while I'm praying I remember a conflict I have with someone, I'm to go take care of it right then so God can forgive me (Mark 11:25). I'm to forgive an offender seven times a day (Luke 17:4) and in another verse 490 times (Matthew 18:21-22). That instruction is followed by the parable of a debt-forgiven slave who after beating a lesser repayment out of a fellow slave has his debt reinstated and is turned over to torturers (Matthew 18:23-35). It closes with an assurance God will deal with me in that way as well unless I wholeheartedly forgive others.

I don't know about you, but I'm sunk. I don't have the gracious capacity to let things go as Jesus describes. Resentments play over and over in my head like a stuck phonograph needle. (I'm dating myself!) Angry feelings from the past can be unexpectedly triggered by something that happened at work today. I know from experience time doesn't always heal wounds.

While most of my grudges seem petty by comparison, I wrestle with how others who have had crimes committed against them can ever forgive their perpetrators to a degree God will then forgive them. How is that possible? Yet Jesus is clear that if we don't forgive others, God will not forgive us of our sins (Matthew 6:14-15). I can't live up to that.

Luckily for me Paul comes onto the scene with the instruction for us to be kind, tender hearted and forgiving of one another, as Christ has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13). Paul reverses the order! I forgive because I have been forgiven. Instead of being motivated by fear of punishment, I gratefully forgive because I haven't earned the forgiveness already extended to me. What's free to me I can freely pass along to others.

While I definitely like the sound of Paul's teachings better, the nagging worry of what Jesus meant tugs at me. Jesus' ministry laid the foundation for the saving work he would do on the



Be kind and compassionate

*to one another;
forgiving each other,
just as in Christ
God forgave you.*

Ephesians 4:32

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Forgiven

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cross. Grace wasn't available yet. Jesus hadn't died for sin. Many of his teachings set forth impossible standards to point out people's need for a Savior. No matter how many laws they kept (from the decalogue to all 613 commands of Torah) they would never achieve God's standard of perfection.

The magnitude of my sin (debt) against God is huge, yet he forgives it.

That's the good news of the cross. His forgiveness is unimaginable and unlimited—more than I can grasp. Paul's post-crucifixion instruction is to forgive others out of my gratitude, not my guilt. One must understand the timeframe to see that Jesus and Paul were not contradicting one another.

Whew! Being forgiven doesn't hinge on me being able to perfectly forgive everyone else. What a relief! I still want to be at peace with others and not carry grudges. If I mess up (again) today or trip over an old emotional hurt, I'm reminded of how endless God's forgiveness is and that I still need him. Without him, I'm a hopeless failure. I'm thankful my salvation doesn't depend on me. Neither does yours. Amen!



Spring finds Sue and her husband Lee prowling the nurseries for new plants to try in their landscaping and patio pots. "We're still in a learning curve about central Texas horticulture," Sue says. Check out her website at: www.OnePilgrimsMusings.com. E-mail her at sue@onepilgrimsmusings.com. (© 2006 Sue Berger; Sue@OnePilgrimsMusings.com.)



God pardons like a mother, who kisses the offense into everlasting forgetfulness.

—Henry W. Beecher



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In the Shadow of His Grace

By Trish A. Clauson

“We Have This Hope as an Anchor for the Soul, Firm and Secure,” Hebrews 6:19

Secrecy is the life force of abuse. The silence it perpetuates only validates the illusion that nothing bad is happening.

Shame is the power that maintains the secrets. To speak is not only to bring shame upon the family, but also to become the shame itself.

I was bound by that shame. Although I'd been asked to write my story many times through the years, the thought it might shame my family prevented me from even considering it. I would not be free to write until I had a more powerful reason to speak than the one keeping me silent.

Three years ago, that reason emerged. I became convinced God wanted me to tell my story, not only to witness to the fact that when abuse is over, it's far from over, but also to give testimony to his power in my life.

I have no doubt God's power brought me to where I am. When I contemplate my beginnings and imagine the statistic I could have become, I marvel that I didn't.

I left home without a support system. I didn't have a mother or father I could depend on. I didn't have a house or a city or even a state I could call home. I couldn't reach out to members of my extended

family, as my father broke ties with them when I was 12. This lack of connection, along with being forced to grow up too fast, instilled in me some deep-seated insecurities.

These insecurities left me feeling I was living on the edge of a cliff, waiting for that one mistake to plunge me into its chasm. No matter how hard I tried, I could not move myself away from that edge. Something happened a few years ago when I read and studied Hebrews 6:17-19 again. “By two unchangeable things (God's unchanging nature and the impossibility for God to lie) we have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”

When I first read these verses many years before, I focused only on the fact God couldn't lie, which in turn made his promises sure and true. Knowing this gave me something of substance to hold on to, though I still didn't feel anchored or secure.

Reading this verse again, I realized I missed something important. The reason God can't lie is connected to his unchanging nature or character. I had not studied his character before. I began to pore over his names and the attributes that defined him. As I talked to God about each one and praised him for who he is, something inside me was strengthened.

I began to see a God I had not seen before. His character astonished and amazed me. What seemed even more amazing was that he was offering to anchor my anchorless soul with it.

Today, one of my strongest anchors is in his sovereignty. It tells me no matter how threatening the world becomes, it will never catch him by surprise. He is not only aware of everything, he also has the power to change the outcome. As long as my life is in his hands, nothing can happen to me to

Some people are making such thorough preparation for rainy days that they aren't enjoying today's sunshine.



—William Feather

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In the Shadow

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catch him off guard. What an incredible anchor it is to know I am being watched over in ways I can't even imagine.

Another anchor is God's righteousness. There is no righteousness in abuse. But I didn't know that. As a child I believed what I was being taught was right and good for me. The consequences proved otherwise. Because of God's righteousness, I am now anchored to beliefs that are right and good.

Another anchor is God's impartiality. God does not view fairness as treating everyone equally. He is able to direct my life and care for me in the exact way I need, as if I were his only child. His impartiality also gives me the freedom to ask him for anything, no matter how insignificant, knowing he will never provide for me at the expense of someone else.

The name *El Roi* means "the God who sees me." This name for God occurs only once in the Bible, in Genesis 16:13-14. When Hagar encountered God in the desert she addressed him as *the God who sees me*. Even in my attempt to be invisible, I always knew God saw me. I just didn't think he liked what he saw. Given the context of this kind of "seeing," I realize it means so much more than just seeing me. It's about God seeing me with affection. Although I no longer believe God looks away in disgust, I still don't quite comprehend "seeing me" with affection. This anchor is still a work in progress.

I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use.



—Galileo Galilei

So many other aspects of God's character provide anchors for my soul. And each one can do so in a number of ways. As my life has been filled with countless changes and insecurities, I also find great strength in knowing everything about God is constant and unchangeable.

I still live with some powerful insecurities that surface without warning. When this happens I am always surprised by how anchorless I can feel. Then I remind myself of the power holding me, in the character of God, and these insecurities lose their power. My soul is reanchored, and I begin to feel secure again.

As I conclude my story, I would like to thank Tammy for not only encouraging me to write but also for giving me a safe place to do so.

I believe the effects of abuse should be exposed. I am living proof that the ongoing damage of abuse doesn't disappear in the shadow of its secrets. My prayer now is for my story to bring hope to others burdened by the shame that keeps them silent. What is real is that God is a far more powerful force than the most destructive effects of abuse. What he has done for me, he can do for anyone.



Since Trish began writing the story of her life three years ago, she has had many more breakthroughs. Each one presented a trial and a blessing. Today she looks forward to each new day, either to enjoy the peace and joy she has been given or to anticipate a new level of growth. E-mail her at trishanson@juno.com.

Stumbling Blocks to Stepping Stones

Darkness descends as the sky surrenders its hue,
 Lightnings flash and the heavens roar.
 The wind pushes, then pulls, the ground shakes,
 All life flees for shelter's door.
 The storm rages with a fearsome foreboding,
 As thunders crash with deafening sounds.
 The rain proceeds with methodical force,
 Impending doom surrounds.
 As suddenly as it began, the turbulence moves on,
 Leaving the firmament battered and torn,
 Until the clouds peel back, revealing a brilliance,
 Nonexistent before the storm.
 The earth is now warmed by the sun's rays again,
 As life gently steps out. . . unafraid.
 To examine the changes that ensued in the chaos,
 To absorb the price that was paid.
 This same storm with its force and its pain,
 Now feeds rivers and streams for miles.
 The new life that springs forth, offers us hope,
 To find the blessings in our trials.

—By Trish Clauson
October 1991

Twenty years from now you will be
 more disappointed by the things you
 didn't do than by the ones you did. So
 throw off the bowlines. Sail away from
 the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in
 your sails. Explore. Dream.

—Mark Twain,
 American humorist,
 writer and lecturer, 1835-1910



Let me be a little kinder,
 Let me be a little blinder
 to the faults of those around me.

—Edgar A. Guest

Upon Further Reflection

Encouragement Comes With Spring

By Dixie Marino

Littleboy seemed much more eager to get out on the porch one morning, and it wasn't long before I knew the reason. Our whole front lawn was covered with robins. He immediately went into full slinking position with tail swishing, slowly and softly. His nature keeps him in readiness to cash in on every hope-filled situation. Who knows, he thinks, my chance might come along one day. He lives in hope!



Littleboy

As I watched the beautiful robins with their bright red breast feathers, I was reminded of a fable. It seems the robin was a simple brown bird, but on the day of Jesus' death, they became so agitated about the cruelty of the crucifixion they began to pick at the nails in his hands to loosen them. After so much trying they simply fell to the ground in exhaustion. As they lay there, great drops of blood fell from his hands and side down onto the upturned breast feathers of the exhausted robins. And that is how robins came to have their unique red

Aren't fables wondrous things? They have absolutely no basis in truth but are perfectly suited in symbolism. Since hearing this tale, I never look at a Robin Red Breast without thinking of Jesus' blood dropping down on me, covering me and making me his own unique child.

Nature is unsurpassed when it comes to encouragement. To see the birds with all their wonderful colors, to hear their songs as they diligently hunt for food and stock up twigs and other material to start building their nests is to see hope for new life in action. Daffodils are bulging ready to burst forth in the brightest of yellows. They are so dependable. They come back every year without fail. Every year we celebrate new life all around us, displaying the beauty of God's creation.

Springtime brings encouragement and hope in so many ways. During the Lenten season we look in hope to the exaltation of our Lord in his resurrection, and then in the Easter season we look in hope to Pentecost and the giving of the Holy Spirit.

Yet the greatest celebration of hope is constantly going on inside of us, as the Holy Spirit transforms us into the image of God's Son. With his help we become fixed in our hope of living with God forever.

So, let's be encouraged and as Littleboy did, with great patience and eager expectations, let's live in hope!

Endeavor to be patient in bearing with the defects and infirmities of others, of what sort soever they be; for that thyself also has many failings which must be borned with by others.

—Thomas a'Kempis



Dixie and Charles are enjoying their new great-granddaughter. Dixie started crocheting for the new arrival and enjoyed it so much, she's now making blankets for the Pregnancy Crisis Center in her community. E-mail her at CMARINO001@ec.rr.com.



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

“Cash, check or charge?” I asked, after folding items the woman wished to purchase.

As she fumbled for her wallet, I noticed a remote control for a television set in her purse.

“So, do you always carry your TV remote in your purse?” I asked.

“No,” she replied, “but my husband refused to come shopping with me, and I figured this was the worst thing I could do to him legally.”

—www.cybersalt.com

I want nothing to do with natural foods. At my age I need all the preservatives I can get.

—George Burns

One day, a housework-challenged husband decided to wash his sweatshirt. Seconds after he stepped into the laundry room, he shouted to his wife, “What setting do I use on the washing machine?”

“It depends,” she replied. “What does it say on your shirt?”

He yelled back, “Texas A&M.”

—www.cybersalt.com

If you think nobody cares if you are alive, try missing a couple of car payments.

—Earl Wilson

I try to take one day at a time, but sometimes several days attack me at once.

—Ashleigh Brilliant

A well-developed sense of humor is the pole that adds balance to your steps as you walk the tightrope of life.

—William A. Ward

There will always be death and taxes; however, death doesn't get worse every year.

—Anonymous

You can observe a lot by just watching.

—Yogi Berra