



Connections

◆ A Journal by & for Women in Ministry ◆

Priceless

By Sue Berger

What am I worth? That question rears its head from time to time in my life. Society tries to label my worth in many ways and I occasionally find I fall victim to its rule of measure. I get wrapped up in things and circumstances and think those things are determining my value to my family, to society, to my church and even to God.

But I'm not the car I drive. I'm not my job. I'm not my bank account or my investment portfolio. I'm not the house I live in or the furnishings inside it. I'm not the clothes I wear. These things are useful and often necessary, but they don't determine my worth.

It's not just the *things* that trip me up. It's the emotional stuff too. Again, I have to remind myself I'm not my problems. I'm not my frustrations. I'm not my disappointments. I'm not even my failures. These events force me to grow, but they're not a permanent state and they don't determine my worth. However, I do find they limit my thinking. My focus shifts to myself and I start thinking I can't measure up to being worth much to God.

In Romans 12:3-8, I read about many things God has given to all of us. We've been given a measure of faith. We each have different functions and together form one body (of Christ). Each member belongs to all the other members. We've all been given grace. We all have different gifts. We're all held responsible to use those gifts.

That's God's perspective. We're each valuable, even critical, in the bigger scheme of things.

I ran across a good illustration of this issue of worth. Take a brand new, crisp \$20 bill. Fold it several times and make sharp creases in it. It's not as unblemished now as it was, but it's still worth \$20. Now wad it up in a tight little ball. What's it worth now? Drop it on the ground and grind it into the dirt with your

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Priceless

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shoe. Would you walk off and leave it there? No, you'd pick it up because it's still worth \$20. Run it through the washing machine. It's still worth \$20. In fact, you can tear part of it off and throw it away and it's still worth \$20.

No matter how often I feel folded, creased, dropped, ground into the dirt or run through the wringer, I'm still worth the same to God. My value doesn't decrease. I'm still priceless to him.

In Romans 8:35-39, I read that nothing can separate me from the love of Christ. Nothing can affect my value and worth to God. No trouble, no hardship, no persecution. No house, no clothes, no car, no person, no failure, no disappointment—nothing!

How can that be? It's because God set my value a long, long time ago. Before I existed God decided I was worth the sacrifice and death of Jesus Christ. That's what I'm worth. And so are you. It's done. The value has been set. Nothing can change it. Thank God!



Sue says: "It's been a dry, hot spring in Texas and rain would be priceless right now! My thoughts and prayers go out to the grass-fire areas. It's gonna be a long summer." You may email her at sueberger2000@gmail.com.

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 GCI 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.

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• CALIFORNIA •
TAM 2 U

Is God in Control?

Many Christians like to say God is in control. He has a plan for your life and everything that happens is part of the plan. Some will tell you he arranges the events of each day for us, including the trials. When you hear people talk like this, do you feel relieved at the thought God has every minute planned out for you—or do you chafe a bit, like me?

I've always wondered why I don't like hearing people say God is in control. While I believe everything is ultimately under his control, I have a problem with the notion that he micromanages our lives. What about free will and making choices?

I think the answer may be in the Trinitarian relationship. Father, Son and Holy Spirit do what they do together. Jesus said the Father, living in him, did his work (John 14:10). It's all about participation: the Father with the Son with the Holy Spirit. Jesus called us friends (John 15:15) and what do friends do? They

participate in a relationship together. Friendship isn't about control or planning things out for each other. It's about love, freely given and freely accepted. It's about sharing experiences and helping each other.

Friendship with God works the same way, with some differences of course. God isn't just a friend; he's the sovereign Lord of the universe and as such, a relationship with him is on a higher plane than the one I have with my human friends. My relationship with God is in Christ, through the Spirit and is more of a participation in the relationship Jesus has with his Father. I get to participate because God loved me first and not because of anything I do.

Based on that concept, when I read Jeremiah 29:11-13, I envision an overarching plan for my life—salvation, life in Christ, knowing God in and through the Spirit, and eventual life forever in God's eternity. I don't discount God working in the little things in my life however. I see his hand every day, from the ways he encourages me and reminds me of his love, to the way he guides and protects me. Because he lives in me, we go through life hand in hand so to speak, and each day my prayer is that I will listen to the Spirit and respond to him as he leads me.

Did he provide the parking place I got at the store or arrange for me to break a glass and cut my foot? I can't say for certain, but I'm pretty sure God doesn't micromanage my life. What I do know is he leads me, guides me and is always with me and reminds me of his presence throughout each day.



Tammy

God's Unending Mercies

Through all eternity to thee
A joyful song I'll raise;
But oh! Eternity's too short
To utter all thy praise.

—Joseph Addison
1672-1719



This Chosen Path

By Hannah Knaack

If you've never experienced a woe-is-me moment, I envy you. *Woe* and I have been chummy on occasions too numerous to count. As a hurting child, I didn't understand God's plan for my life was his to choose. Years passed and a pattern was set. Allow me to share a few of the bumps along this chosen path.

Mama returned to our tiny cabin that day many years ago after taking my sister to the outhouse to find my dad standing over me, his hand pressed over my mouth and nose. I was 4 weeks old. She knew he'd been affected during the war, but this was her worst nightmare. She flew at him, enraged. He pinned her to the wall, arm to her chest and snarled, "Either you shut her up or I will." The Father of all life was watching; one life he saved, one he took two weeks later.

Hearing these details years later only fueled my long-term depression. The years spent with my first stepdad did little to express God's love to me in ways little girls need. An excellent provider of physical needs, he'd been raised by strict, undemonstrative grandparents. I've no memories of him telling me he loved me, hugging me or holding me, as I'd seen other dads do. Often I wondered if the Father up high was the same. He bent low his ear, listening.

When you're the odd one out in a tight cluster of school friends, it takes a toll. "But I still don't get why you can't celebrate your *own* birthday. And Christmas! Don't you believe in Jesus? It's so dumb that you can't come to the Friday night games." This young teen heart struggled with issues of those who could, yet I could not. Of those who had, and oh, how I wished I did too. But the Gentle

One saw and felt every arrow that pierced this fragile heart.

By the time I attended my first pastors' conference years later, those feelings pressed hard. There was young, unsure me; there were also those older and wiser, albeit often cliquish pastors' wives. *Woe* lurked nearby. I didn't come away feeling as though I'd like to repeat the experience. My Shepherd felt my insecurities too.

When you've grown up with only sisters, raising a choleric firstborn son with ADHD, in a fishbowl lifestyle, is quite the challenge. I was more closely acquainted with the principals of each school than I care to remember. Sparing the details, I'll admit each mother I knew with seemingly perfect children had a generous dose of my envy. And *woe* thrived. I've spent 18 years chasing a child who now makes a living chasing criminals. Oh, Father, I love the way you bring justice!

Several years ago, our youngest son blacked out and fell down the high school stairs halfway through his junior year. It was the beginning of a trial that's as yet without end. But it's his reaction to the severe headaches that torture him and have caused him to miss so much of life that's changed my life. My life of woe. What were his words? "Why not? Why not me?"

You mean all these years I asked, *Why me?* I should've been asking, *Why not me?* Can a child teach a mother such a deep lesson? My son's words, spoken through pain, helped me finally see the light.

With Jesus alongside, I'm well along the path from why to why not. Through heartfelt prayer and fasting, deep, printed words and kindly spoken ones, I'm beyond *woe's* easy reach. Now I see that for every hurt, each

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This Chosen Path

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woe, I'd turned to the Source of comfort. He whispered, "I know the bumps were painful, but now you're here in my arms, right where I want you to be." He'd known all along this path would lead me closer to him.

Our loving Abba always sees, always hears, always understands. Ever faithful, he tenderly takes us down the path chosen just for us. I whisper the words of a king, "You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand" (Psalm 16:11, *NIV*). He bows low, "Oh, the plans I have for you dear one!"



Hannah says: "Our farmer's market is open and I'm collecting new recipes for all my favorite veggies. Looking for the low-calorie versions so I can shed those few pounds that have hung on way beyond our long winter!" You may email Hannah at justmomhik@gmail.com.



If you're a woman and have been ordained for ministry, we'd like to hear from you. Please consider writing a 500-to-750 word article for submission to *Connections*. We'd like to know your experience as a pioneer in this exciting new world of women elders. Please send your article, photo and bio to Tammy Tkach at tammy.tkach@gci.org.

Briefly Speaking...

He Only Visits Church

I saw a sign in front of a country church: "Jesus lives in the community. He only visits church." I've been intrigued with that statement ever since. I think I agree. When I read about Jesus in Scripture, he was actively doing his Father's will everywhere he went. And, yes, he visited the synagogue and the temple, where he also did his Father's will. Maybe I'm over thinking the whole thing. Probably.

But if Jesus is working everywhere and only visits church, why have church? If I asked that question of churchgoers, I would no doubt get a variety of answers. Jesus visiting there is good enough for me, actually. But I'm meandering away from the writer's original statement, which is, Jesus lives in the community. He's not just around one day a week, conveniently going his way right before Sunday football comes on.

At first I thought the writer was referring to the church as church services or church buildings, not the *ecclesia*, the body of Christ. The more I think about it, maybe not. "The body of Christ lives in the community. They only visit church."

As followers of Jesus we are the body of Christ. We should visit church but more than that, we should be living in the community. That's where Jesus lives and works all week long. That's where we are the lights in the darkness and the salt of the earth.

—Sheila Graham
You may email Sheila at sheila.graham@gci.org.



Should a Christian Feel This Way?

By Anne Gillam

I am feeling down and depressed right now. Yes, me a Christian. I feel down about that as well. I have many promises that haven't been kept—not mine, but those of others toward me. I've been told, "I will get back to you on this soon," but I'm still waiting. I am not the type to complain (until now). I usually accept things and try to move on. I have sent requests or questions that never get answered, or even acknowledged.

I feel a failure at most things I try to do. I love to write, poetry included, and I love to sing. My voice cracks now because I have an enlarged thyroid and my writing, well, it seems to have gone sour too. I've been offered jobs I didn't feel adequate to do. I know I am not adequate for these jobs, yet I feel responsible to serve the Lord with my best and I constantly plead for the help I need. Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 4:2 that those who have been entrusted with a responsibility by God must be faithful to that trust.

I am not sure why I feel this way. I feel lost and abandoned, and I am not sure why. I am a Christian and I should not feel this way. So where does the pastor turn? Where does the shepherd get shepherded? I keep telling myself, "You are a Christian, and you should not feel this way!" Did Jesus ever feel lost and abandoned? He was rejected and spat upon by the jealous and the fearful. He was praised as he entered Jerusalem and, within days, abandoned and rejected by the same crowd.

Did he ever wonder if anything he did would make a difference? Did he tell his Father he was depressed and felt abandoned? When I think of all my Savior went through

for me—me, the one so inadequate—stand convicted and ashamed. I am a Christian and I should not feel this way. Or should I? Didn't Paul make the statement that he was inadequate for the job? We all are!

I remember what is written in 2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV): "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

I am inadequate and my inadequacy pulls me to Jesus my Shepherd. He is my strength and my power. He is the Shepherd of the shepherd. He accepts me in my weakness and he loves me despite my failings. He often reminds me of that verse in 2 Corinthians. It encourages me, for I know I don't have the strength I need and I need to trust Jesus for help.

So, I will make my complaint to my Master and my Savior and Friend. I know he understands and I know I need to crawl into his arms, cry and rest a while. His strength is sufficient for me. He is all I need. He is all we need! Come with me to my Savior's arms and rest awhile. His grace is truly sufficient for us.

Father, I come to you for I know you understand me better than I do myself. I feel lost and abandoned, yet I know you will never leave me. I believe in you, help me with my unbelief and allow me to rest a while in your arms of grace. In Jesus' name I pray.



Anne says they are starting their remodeling project, but it's slow going. You may email her at webebass@aol.com.



Old and in the Way

Credit or Debit ?

By Joyce Catherwood

What type of gas are you putting in your car?" asked a senior citizen who pulled up on the other side of the pump. It struck me as an odd question, but I didn't give it a lot of thought. Instead I found myself wondering if I were older or younger than he. This is what I do now that I'm a senior. My husband and I look at other golden agers and say to each other, "Do you think we look younger or older than them?" Sounds silly, doesn't it? But just wait until you get to that magic age.

Back to the story: "Regular," I replied as I continued filling my tank, trying to avoid a heart attack as the dollar amount soared. In the meantime, I noticed out of the corner of my eye that several times the older gentleman opened his car door, spoke to his wife, then returned to the pump, but still didn't use it. When I finished, it occurred to me I should check to see if his pump was working. So I peered around the gas pump and asked if something was wrong. He timidly said no

and that he wasn't accustomed to a pump offering three types of gas.

As I drove off, it dawned on me perhaps he actually needed some help. Duh! This delayed reaction is typical of me. Sometimes I don't think on the spot. As I turned into an adjacent parking lot, I could see him standing there motionless, staring at the gas pump screen. His wife was still inside their car, banging her cane on the closed car window, trying to get his attention. So I turned around, went back and asked if I could help.

He said there were so many buttons and he must have pressed the wrong one because he couldn't get it to work. So there we were, glaring at the screen, trying to figure out what went wrong. I had a difficult time finding the cancel button because I didn't have my glasses on. Big help I was! By that time, the attendant came out and offered to assist, so I left.

It's easy to get confused by a computer screen. Credit or debit? Pay inside or outside? What's your zip code? Do you want a car wash? Do you want a receipt? This poor man was totally befuddled by it all and the so-called simple task of filling a gas tank

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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 email). 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!



Do we
have
your
email
address?

To join or update your email address, please send Tammy a message at tammy.tkach@gci.org. Please do not reply to a post unless you want to address the entire list.

Credit or Debit?

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made him feel inadequate. In his younger days, he might have been a professor or a CEO. But it doesn't matter who he had been, he no longer has the same quickness of mind. To find himself at a stage in life where he needs help to buy gas can be devastating to the ego and disconcerting. I should have been more observant and offered to help him much sooner than I did.

By the way, I concluded he was older than me, in case you were wondering.

It brought to mind an incident that occurred about two years ago. My husband and I walk for exercise every day. We live in Texas where it tends to get extremely hot in the summer, so we search for streets with shade trees. One day we were standing in the middle of a neighborhood intersection, talking animatedly and pointing here and there, analyzing which street had more shade. A younger woman in an SUV stopped and kindly asked if we needed help.

Later, we realized we must have looked bewildered and lost. She probably assumed we had wandered away from the nearby nursing home. Happily that was not the situation. But she did exactly the right thing by noticing, being concerned and stopping to make sure.

I guess what I am trying to say is be alert, observant and sensitive of the circumstances surrounding elderly people. They often need assistance and are too embarrassed to ask. Sometimes they may feel they are in the way or being a nuisance. There is always the risk of insulting them because they may not welcome intervention. But if help is offered discreetly, in a caring, friendly way, it is unlikely to be interpreted as an insult.

As the Son of man on this earth, Jesus was keenly observant and noticed so much that went right over the disciples' heads. For example, he noticed a grieving widow's tears as she trudged along in her son's funeral procession. His heart went out to her. He immediately stepped away from the massive crowd following him, went right over to her, and said gently "Don't cry." Then he raised her son from the dead.

Assisting a slight, timid older man at a gas pump doesn't begin to measure up to what Jesus did. But the point is, Jesus noticed the widow's plight and lightened her burden. To one degree or another, we can all do the same if we become aware and responsive to the needs of those of an advanced age, doing whatever it takes to help them avoid feeling inadequate, old and in the way.

They might not need me;
but they might.
I'll let my head be just in sight;
A smile as small as mine might be
Precisely their necessity.

—Emily Dickinson



Joyce says: "Just when I thought my four teenaged grandbeauties had outgrown spending the night together at Mema's house, they descended on us, filling our home with life, love and laughter. Can't wait for the next time!" You may email Joyce at joyce.catherwood@gci.org.

Zorro and Me

Three Sides to Every Story

By Barbara Dahlgren

Years ago Zorro and I worked near a pastor who was having some difficulties. Folks from church headquarters labored diligently to help this man as he struggled through his problems. Finally the pastor asked for and was granted a leave of absence so he could spend some reflective time praying and studying without the added responsibility of taking care of his church.

Others not in our area heard that this man was treated unfairly and basically given the ax. As we were in the adjacent area, we began receiving phone calls from all over the United States. “What a raw deal!” they would say. “How could they treat him that way?” Without sharing details of this man’s struggle, we assured our callers their information was faulty.

Zorro and I learned a valuable lesson from this experience. How many times had we been guilty of making snap judgments or believing the worst without having all the facts?

It’s hard enough to accurately assess a predicament when we are knee-deep in it, much less forming opinions based on hearsay. Yet life is filled with situations we must evaluate and sometimes even offer guidance. Teachers deal with student problems, parents work with their children, friends want to help friends, and we in ministry are called upon to counsel others.

Wisdom is knowing when to speak your mind and when to mind your speech.

—Author Unknown

One principle my mother taught me about dealing with people is there are at least three sides to every story. If you are counseling a couple, there is his side, her side and what really happened. If you are trying to sort out a sibling dispute, each has a version of what happened and then there is what really happened.

Of course, the more people involved, the more sides to the story you will have. One hundred people can hear a sermon and each have a different idea of what was said. Most of us don’t deliberately try to deceive when offering an account of what we think happened. We just all tend to see things from our point of view. Our perspective becomes our reality.

When we hear only one side of a story we need to be cautious about what we say. Sometimes those in dispute end up reconciling. Then the person we were talking with shares what we said about the other person, usually out of context, and we end up looking like the adversary.

It’s better to get as many facts as we can before forming an opinion about a situation—and it’s probably better to think long and hard before sharing it with others. I think there’s a biblical principle there (Proverbs 18:13). Anyway, it’s another little tidbit my mother taught me. Zorro and I don’t always follow it like we should, but we try.



Barbara continues to recover from her surgery. Her energy level is increasing. She wanted to share this comment she got from her dear friend Lorraine Pelley about her last article: “LOVED your article—happy that when they took out some of your body parts they left in your sense of humor!” You may contact her at bydahlgren@pacbell.net.



The Day I Met the Prince

By Denys Fell

It was almost exactly a year before the royal wedding that I was invited to meet with Prince Charles at his family home, Highgrove House. The call to attend came because our farm is part of what is known as the National Care Farming Initiative. This is a scheme whereby people with all sorts of mental health issues and learning difficulties can come to the peace and tranquillity of a farming and countryside environment.

I have held a soft spot in my heart for the Prince of Wales ever since the awful foot-and-mouth outbreak in 2001 when he did so much to offer succour and support to the farming and rural communities. So I was delighted to have the opportunity to meet with him and, yes, a little daunted.

April 26, 2010, dawned with a beautiful blue sky and throughout the day the weather maintained its smile upon us. I met with about 50 other farmers and 50 academics. We thoroughly enjoyed the tour of the grounds with artifacts from around the world. At one point we were shown a little sanctuary the prince had built that was consecrated by the Bishop of London. Our guide told us there was an inscription inside with the sentiment: “Oh Lord, we beseech thee, please lighten our darkness.”

Then it was time to meet with His Royal Highness for the noon day meal.

I’ve often thought over the years if I got the chance I would like to buy Prince Charles a pint in the pub and have an informal chat. And that’s what it was like, except for adding

quite a few *sirs* after addressing him—and he was the one providing the drinks.

It was great to share in his humanity and his undoubted passion for the environment. We had a number of interests in common, not least of which were organic farming and the care sector.

The time to converse was over far too quickly and I appreciated his hospitality so much I decided to return the compliment and invite him to my farm to open a new building. I was quite taken aback when a reply came the very next day. The email read:

Dear Mr Fell

Thank you so much for your email. The Prince of Wales was delighted that you enjoyed your visit to Highgrove.

Thank you so much for your kind invitation to visit your farm. Unfortunately, as I am sure you appreciate, His Royal Highness’s diary is simply frenetic and it is just not possible for him to accept every invitation. I am sorry to be the bearer of such disappointing news. However, The Prince of Wales has asked me to pass on to you how much he admires the work you do.

This comes with His Royal Highness’s warmest best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

Benet Northcote, Deputy Private Secretary to TRH The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall

When I watched the royal wedding I felt a particular closeness to the family, something I’m sure I wouldn’t have felt if it had not been for the kind hospitality of Prince Charles.



Denys has farmed most of his life but in the past four years has begun working with the care sector. He is excited that out of this community farm a community church may develop. More details at www.densholmefarm-action.co.uk. You may contact Denys at denys.fell@btinternet.com.

Simply Stress Free

By Sheila Dela Peña

I believe life was meant to be simple. By simple I mean free from the stresses caused by the minute-by-minute bombardment of information on our brains by the marvels of technology. My husband and I just came from serving at a six-day youth summer camp in the suburbs. It was a most welcome break from everything causing us much stress the past 12 months.

It was such a blessing—such freedom!—to be off the grid known as the social network. We may not realize this, but there is so much pressure to project a certain persona, to greet and to respond to all our Facebook or Twitter friends, to accept all friend requests and invitations to join other social networks, to never unfriend anyone, to always be online and to comment on people's photos and status.

Just a few days ago, we lost our Internet connection again, because of some freakish factor. Even though we pay for the Internet, I felt relieved to have an excuse not to check mail or FB. Believe it or not, it's not all good news and pleasantries in social networks. A lot of conflicts, bad news and personal attacks are masked as famous people's quotes, and wars are being waged online for the entire world to see. No one cares anymore if personal conflicts are not for general consumption. The more people know about it, the more powerful the weapon. It's not only sad—it's downright tragic!

Here are my thoughts about social networking:

It is to be used to seek peace and pursue it; not to wage war. It is to be used to build bridges; not burn them. It is to be used to affirm and encourage others; not to berate or malign anyone. It is to be used for decency;

not for obscenity. It is to be used for thoughtful truth; not for hurtful lies and deceit. It is to be used for good; not for evil.

It is also healthy to rest from social networking every once in a while. I believe meaningful relationships are built, developed and sustained in personal, face-to-face encounters. Any misunderstandings can be cleared faster in a face-to-face conversation. Loving and forgiving touches can be given and received, promoting healing in the most profound ways.

We are relational beings. We need to experience touch; we need to be able to smell aromas and associate memories with them. The same goes with sights and sounds. We need to speak and listen, eye to eye and ear to ear. More importantly, we need to connect with other human beings: people with whom we can grow, laugh, cry, hurt or just *be*.

Life was meant to be simpler than it has become. It behooves us to simplify our lives and get back to the basics. Spend real personal time with family and friends. Lay down our mobile phones, PDAs and laptops and learn to communicate verbally and listen attentively. Turn off the TV. Slow down. Leave the car home and take a walk to the bakery. Stop and smell the roses, because they may soon be gone. Pray. Meditate. Heal. May we all learn to give up what we don't need and keep what matters most. Have a stress-free day.



Sheila says: "I am enjoying our new 6-month-old pup, Eloise, a Jack Russell Terrier. She is a livewire and keeps our older dog, Peanut, company whenever we leave for the day. She continues to show me what unconditional love is. You may email her at sheila_delapena@yahoo.com and see her blog at <http://velvetconfections.multiply.com>.

Friends in the Faith

By Ruth Miller

We are studying the book of 1 Samuel in our women's discipleship class. One of the most interesting aspects of the book is the wonderful relationship between David and Saul's son, Jonathan. It appears Jonathan deeply respected David's faith. We might expect him to resent David, knowing God had chosen him to succeed Saul as king of Israel, but there is no indication this was the case. Jonathan accepted that his father was no longer fit to rule and that David was the rightful successor to the throne.

Jonathan appears to be attracted to David's character and his abiding faith in God. This was a difficult period in David's life. Even though he had been anointed as the future king, Saul was still on the throne, and wanted to kill David. David was discouraged, unable to understand how Saul, whom he loved, honored and served, could now be out to get him. The number of men on his side was increasing, but Saul's relentless pursuit was wearing him down. In 1 Samuel 23:16 we read, "And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God" (NIV).

Wow! This is a powerful example of what a real friend can do. David had witnessed God's intervention in his life on numerous occasions. He had defeated mighty Goliath. He had been delivered from wild animals as he tended the sheep. He had been spared from several attempts on his life. But even with all those miracles, he was still subject to doubt and disillusionment. How blessed he was to have a friend who could help him find strength in God.

Yes, we all need faith friends. Jesus emphasized to his disciples the importance of love and friendship. Building friendships

takes time, but it's time well spent. Many people go into a period of withdrawal when they have a crisis in their faith. At a time when we need help finding God's strength, we try to go it alone. Sometimes we are embarrassed that we need help. Sometimes we feel no one else has ever gone through the feelings and problems we are experiencing. Perhaps we need to be reminded of how very human the servants of God were. After all, Moses started out as a basket case!

At a *Connecting & Bonding* Conference, Susan Booze told us she had prayed to God for a "close friend who was close." In other words, she wanted a strong friendship with someone nearby who could share her life and faith journey. It's possible to have many friends and yet not be close to any of them, especially when we are in ministry. We may only ever have one such friend in our entire lives. Even Jesus had only a limited number of truly close friends, but he made spending time with them a priority.

If you haven't found a close friend who is close, you can have a close friend long distance. I have such a friend, and over the past 40 years we have seen each other through many ups and downs in life. She's the kind of person who will mercifully let me share pictures of my new grandchild, and who keeps track of the important things going on in my life. She can gently help me regain my perspective and I can confide in her in times of need.

We have logged hundreds of hours on the telephone, solving the world's problems and sharing our faith. Whenever we've had a chance to visit over the years, it's never been long enough. But the love and trust is there, and it's a friendship I treasure.

It can be said there are friends for a sea-

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Friends

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son and friends for a reason. God provides many types of friendships over the years. Some come and go, lasting only a short time, but those special friendships that last for a lifetime are truly needed to help us find strength in God.



Ruth is enjoying a new phase of life—being a grandmother! She says her heart was “sold down the river” when she was able to be with Laurie and Mike for Jackson’s birth. Bob and Ruth are serving in pastoral ministry in “Sweet Home Alabama.” You may contact her at ruth.miller@gci.org.

Blog Roll

Sue Berger:

www.onepilgrimsusings.com

Joyce Catherwood:

<http://i-love-to-tell-the-story.blogspot.com>

Barbara Dahlgren:

www.barbdahlgren.com

Sheila Dela Peña:

<http://velvetconfections.multiply.com>

Leslie Howard

Sister Circle Prayer Network on Facebook

Tammy Tkach:

www.tkach.wordpress.com

Connecting & Bonding

Out of My Comfort Zone

By Esther Doele

Do you remember your freshman year of high school and the mix of emotions—awkward, nervous, but still excited? It was a trip out of your comfort zone. I took a step out of my comfort zone. It wasn't a clothes- or shoe-shopping spree, although I could use one with spring here and summer not far behind. Believe it or not, the step out of my comfort zone was a trip.

As I write this, I'm thinking, Seriously? How could any trip be out of your comfort zone? I have wanted—no, *needed* a trip forever.

I have two daughters, Christianna and Eula, ages 9 and 7, whom I homeschool. Their request before the school year: “Don't give us easy work. Make sure it is challenging!” It is indeed a challenge for the three of us, but it's been a lot of fun and we will do it again next year. Then there are Sunday school classes, children's programs at church and women's ministry. Does any of this sound familiar? Again, how could any trip be out of my comfort zone?

Well, this was not just a trip but an invitation. Although I thought it was extended from my mom Eula Carlisle, the weekend proved she was only the messenger. She told me about the conference in Kentucky and explained that Jannice May called and personally invited her to attend. She said my dad told her she should go and I agreed. This would be her first time because of past

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Comfort Zone

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scheduling conflicts. However, it seems someone changed our last name to Job. This name change included trials of all sorts that could occur at any time.

Mom told Mrs. May she would like to attend, but she needed to be available to go to Connecticut at short notice. She explained one of her daughters was awaiting a kidney transplant. Mrs. May told her the airport is only a few minutes from the conference location, and husbands often come to hang out and talk while their wives attend the conference. Mom was almost in agreement if not for the long drive. Could her daughter come to help drive? Mrs. May said, "Sure!" and that is how I became involved.

Three problems: first, I thought the conference was for pastors' wives only; second, who would take care of my daughters? And third, I could not afford it. Well, God took care of the problems (aka excuses). I found out as I am a ministers' wife I could attend. My sister, Jackie, volunteered to take care of the girls for the weekend. My mom talked to my sister, Juanita, who took care of my expenses, making the whole idea an offer too good to refuse. The weather was perfect for a trip to beautiful Kentucky, referred to by some natives as "God's country," and we stayed at a beautiful hotel. My husband Phil worked overtime so he could come as my driver.

The conference exceeded the beauty of the trip and hotel. My mother and I were truly refreshed. The presentation by Curtis May about the book of Luke gave us a deeper appreciation of the book and also of God's great love for women. Carol Rischer's talks on Genesis 2 and 3 about God and the Garden renewed, refreshed and inspired us. What encouragement to know God extends an invitation to us daily in his garden and he is there

waiting for us. The testimonies affirmed God's sovereignty in all things. The women were pretty on the outside but God with them through their trials is making them just as beautiful on the inside. Their trials allow them to relate better to the women and people they serve as ministers' wives.

My mother, who was in the ladybug group, which she loved, evolved into a butterfly. I could see her and the other women connecting by talking, sharing and encouraging one another. The bonding occurred as we hugged, cried, praised and prayed for and with one another before our Father.

I am glad I accepted the invitation and stepped out of my comfort zone. I went and drank of the living waters and indeed was refreshed. Don't take my word for it—just accept your invitation to the conference. Get out of your comfort zone because that is where the blessings are.



You may email Esther at esther33@bellsouth.net.

To the Editor:

I love *Connections*...very much. It's so ordinary, so real and touching. I read every article. Thank you for sharing *Connections*.

I will print it for the women if it is okay. They will be encouraged.

Rumbidzai Masawi
Zimbabwe

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

Talking to a friend of mine the other evening we were reminiscing about when we gave birth to our precious children. I was reminded of when I was in labor with my daughter Luciano and I were told to come to the hospital when I was no longer able to handle the pain. So we went shopping, took a shower, went to the student center and then finally back to the Huntington Hospital. By then it was around 1:30 pm. We drove around looking for a parking space and found ourselves smack in front of a sign that read No deliveries after 12 pm! Uggghhh!

—Sue Cozzi

A preacher of the old school was describing the events of Judgment Day and, of course, he used Biblical phraseology whenever he could.

“Oh, my friends,” he intoned, “imagine the suffering of the sinners as they find themselves cast into the outer darkness, removed from the presence of the Lord and given to eternal flames. My friends, at such a time there will be weeping, wailing and a great gnashing of teeth!”

At this point, one of the elders of the congregation interrupted to say, “But Reverend, what if one of those hopeless sinners has no teeth?”

The preacher crashed his fist on the pulpit. “My friends, the Lord is not put out by details. Rest assured—teeth will be provided!”

—Cleanlaffs

Confidential Peer Listener Line

Shall we talk? We're here for you!

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C&B Ministers' Wives Conference 2011

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Please mark which type of room you need.

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Double (\$417/person) or 3 payments* of \$139
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If you should cancel, the registration fee
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*If you are making 3 payments the due date for the
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If final payment is not received by August 13,
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The prices include accommodations, meals and registration fees.

Please indicate if you have any physical limitations that would require wheelchair accessibility or limit your stair use:

No Yes If yes, please explain:

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If you have questions, contact Jannice May at 626-379-0505 or conbond@acninc.net.

Please send completed form to:

Connecting & Bonding, 300 S. Highland Springs Ave., Suite 6-C #156, Banning CA 92220, or register online at www.connectingandbonding.org.