



# The Christian Connection™



*A Quarterly Newsletter from Christian Resource Network, Inc.*

**SOARING COMMUNICATION FOR CHRIST**

## PEACE LIKE A RIVER

By: Joan M. Blake



Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27 RSV).

Have you been in a situation where you don't know what to do, how to do it and where to go? You have been praying and waiting on God for a certain answer but it hasn't come. Life continues to deal out stumbling blocks and you just cannot proceed with the things you have planned. You suddenly realize that your life is on hold and you have no choice

but to wait on God for his guidance. I am in that situation, forever going in circles: planning, reinventing the wheel, and taking care of family matters, especially those concerning my special needs daughter. You and I should ask ourselves the question: "Where do we go from here?"

During my retreat in May of 2009, God whispered this verse to me. He said: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27 RSV). He also went on to say: "Let not your heart(s) be troubled, neither let it (them) be afraid." Jesus said these words to his disciples before his crucifixion, knowing that he would depart from the earth and be with his father. He was giving them the assurance that all they had to do was believe and they would do greater works than he did (verse 12); and that God, his father, would send the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, who would teach them all things (verse 26). This peace that Jesus offered to his disciples and apostles, he is offering to you and me.

We can have peace even when things seem overwhelming because Jesus has given us peace, a peace that the world cannot give to us. We do not have to live with a troubled heart: one that is restless, wavering or in doubt, listening to the decisions of others. Our God knows what we need and he is in control of our situations. All we need to do is listen to the voice of God and believe that God would turn our impossible situations around in his time and for his glory.

With belief, comes waiting and resting in the arms of our Savior. We look to him, thanking Him in all circumstances for this is the will of God concerning us (1 Thess. 5:18). When we believe, wait and rest in God, we have inner peace, knowing that regardless of the outcome of our situations, God knows best.

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## The Christian Connection

The Christian Connection is published by the Christian Resource Network Inc., a non-profit 501 (c) 3 organization whose main mission is to provide support to those who are experiencing emotional pain. Other related services include women's small group training and mentoring services.

If you would like to become a member of Christian Resource Network, Inc., make contributions, advertise in *The Christian Connection Newsletter*, or be on our email list, please contact the editor or visit our website.

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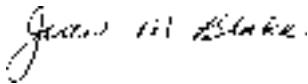
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Leah M Blake

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May the God of peace fill your hearts this day with his presence.

In Christ,



Editor/Publisher

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**DESCRIPTION OF BOOK**

This book is a moving story of Joan Blake's journey from her island home of Trinidad and Tobago to attend college and work in America. She expresses the joys and challenges of being a wife and mother, and shows by her personal testimonies that even when life deals out times of sorrow, we can find comfort, hope and purpose by resting in God.

The prayer, scripture, and reflection sections at the end of each chapter enables one to use the book for personal as well as group study.

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## PERSEVERANCE

By Jessica Hilliard

Recently, I had the opportunity to observe a conversation between a group of hard-working and highly stressed parents of children with special developmental and medical needs. It started out with the question "Do we have the right to complain?" Basically is it justified to "complain" about the various unrelenting difficulties that accompany caring for a child with special needs? As the conversation progressed, the question slowly seemed to evolve from "Is complaining justified" to "Is it useful- does it provide the needed healthy relief from stress?"

As I witnessed the different parents voice their opinions and experiences, I wondered myself what the best way of dealing with this type of high-level stress should be? Most people can testify that the chance to explain (and perhaps dramatize just a tiny bit) daily struggles to a sympathetic listener does in fact provide at least a temporary sense of relief from intense stress. Although spouses, friends and family are ideal listeners, as Christians we have access to someone much more capable of truly understanding our situations- God Almighty. As unbelievable as it may seem, it is indeed the only God of the universe who is most suited to comfort us in the midst of our daily trials.

Of course, God is not merely a semi-interested third party. He actively participates in our conversations, and at times that can be upsetting to us. For instance, God will not merely nod, smile weakly, and make sympathetic noises when we tell how we just HAD to lose our temper after the third difficult conversation with the insurance company. He will challenge us to do better with His help. He will say that YES, we can face another trip to the in-laws, and we can do it with a positive and caring attitude. When others will insist we can't be expected to do better than to snap at the thoughtless cashier who made the extremely rude comment about our child's obvious medical issues, God will insist that we can do better- if we let him help us. These responses are not always what we have in mind, so frequently we seek out those whom we know will act as nothing more than an outlet for our steam.

Although letting off steam is usually a satisfying experience, if true long-lasting peace is what we actually seek, we are much wiser to follow the advice given in the Bible: "Do not be anxious or upset about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God, and the peace that passes understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7, NIV).

Of course passing up ALL anxiety and upset is nothing short of a miracle, but it is an achievable miracle according to the Bible, for it's the miracle of God's presence in our lives. It takes time, determination, and practice to consciously recognize that we are slipping into anxiety, and to then consciously take those thoughts and feelings and turn them over to God in prayer. Frequently we fall short. For myself, I have noticed that it is paradoxically the smaller problems in which I am more likely to miss God's peace, rather than the true crises.

This was recently confirmed as I stayed with my daughter through another of her regular hospital stays. Suspecting an infection, I had asked that the doctor covering the night shift write an order to send a culture to check. Everyone I spoke with agreed this was a good idea, including the head doctor in charge of the unit. Unfortunately, the night doctor never heard this, and when the request came through for the culture, he assumed I was over-reacting and downgraded the order to a very basic test that usually, but not always, detects some signs of infection. In my daughter's case it is a test that almost never works, which is why I had asked to simply by-pass it for the more accurate procedure. Both the test I had requested and the test performed were very basic and easy to do. While it was wrong of the doctor to act without checking, it was nowhere near an actual crisis and merely required five minutes of extra time to resend the correct test. Despite this, when I found out the next morning what had happened, I was beyond furious! I snapped at our nurse (who had NOTHING to do with the mix-up) and mentally railed against the night doctor for "daring" to not do as I had requested. At several points I practically burst into tears! The fit of anger lasted for almost 20 minutes until God was able to get my attention and point out the ridiculous and inappropriate nature of my reaction to a very simple problem.

(continued on page 6)

## VISION FOR THE SEMINARY

Lecture given by Dr. Dennis Hollinger, President of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Summary by Joan M. Blake



Above: Dr. William Spencer (middle) poses with several scholars

Drs' William and Aida Spencer hosted the **annual Athanasius scholars' reunion** at their home at South Hamilton, Mass., on April 20, 2009. Dr William Spencer did the welcoming address and said a prayer before the start of the potluck dinner. He presented awards to outgoing scholars who shared their experiences and gave the following advice to incoming scholars: "Be a minister to students; be agents of light; spend time with your students and encourage them; read students' papers in their entirety before correcting them; and focus on learning instead of grading."

The keynote speaker for the evening was Dr. Dennis Hollinger, President of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary South Hamilton, Massachusetts. His message was entitled: "**Vision for the Seminary.**" The question at hand was "how could the Seminary nurture students without losing them to character flaws?" The college needs to implement a leadership model incorporating faculty, administration, and student body working together to gain wisdom, vision, and manage conflict; and one that understands that the mind (theological education), the heart, (sustained by God), and evangelism, (the activist) must be nurtured when they are together.

Dr. Hollinger stated that "a vision must be about Christ in every sphere of life."

- a) Equipping pastors and lay leaders, encouraging and enabling them to think theologically in light of the issues in today's world
- b) Thinking globally by reaching out and partnering with those who are underserved and giving students broader opportunities in other settings
- c) Allowing senior faculty to nurture and guide adjunct faculty and optimizing part-time faculty
- d) Implementing curriculum reviews to get feedback on what is taught and how it's taught
- e) Finding creative ways to provide courses for the glory of God

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## "LUGGAGE FOR A LONG JOURNEY"

Message by Dr. Michael Haynes

Summary by Joan M. Blake

On May 2, 2009, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary-Boston (Center for Urban Ministerial Education) celebrated its 33rd graduation ceremony at the Cambridge Community Church located at 575 Cambridge Street, Brighton, Mass. Teen Challenge of Brockton MA., hosted the banquet. Students, faculty, staff, friends and family attended the memorable event.

The Mistress of Ceremony was Cherry Gorton, who received a special award for her work and commitment to the students at the college. Highlights of the evening included prayers in French, Cantonese, and English; music by Minister Robert Maxwell of Mt. Moriah Baptist Church of Brockton, MA; testimonials by three students, distribution of diplomas and certificates to graduates, special awards, recognition of partnering churches, a keynote address given by Rev. Dr. Michael Haynes, Emeritus of Twelve Baptist Church of Roxbury, MA., followed by comments by Dr. Dennis Hollinger, President of Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary and Dr. Alvin Padilla, Dean of the college, and a closing prayer by Dr. Mary Hollinger.

Dr. Haynes' message was entitled, "Luggage for a long journey," in which he mentioned the state of the country, the condition of the church, and gave advice to the graduates referencing Apostle Paul's life and experiences. (continued on page 6)

(Luggage for a long Journey continued from page 5)

## CHALLENGING TIMES

He stated that "We live in challenging times," noting the recession, the H1N1 virus, and "the institutional Church" which is in "a state of impotency" making the need for a vision more apparent.

### APOSTLE PAUL

Apostle Paul had a vision for his ministry when he instructed Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:13 to bring his "cloak, books, and parchments" for his long journey, a journey in which Paul would experience beatings and perils in his quest to do the work of the Kingdom and satisfy his master, the God of the universe. But Apostle Paul's vision came about when he was transformed by Christ on the Damascus road where he was "focused, obsessed, driven to destroy Christians," explained Dr. Haynes. With his transformation, came a vision "to minister to both Jew and Gentile."

## ADVICE TO GRADUATES

It is clear from Paul's life and experiences, that one should not "put limits" on one's self, but should give one's "strength to the master," explained Dr. Haynes. He continued, "Take care of your body. God wants you to be at your best. Appreciate your body. Consecrate and adorn it with sanctified modesty." He encouraged the graduates "to seek more learning," understand what is going on globally, "preach the gospel simply and free for people to see, that 'will draw all men unto me.'"

Dr. Dennis Hollinger reminded the students that what each received from Gordon Conwell was "a gift, the beginning, not the end." He advised them to use it for "the advancement of God's kingdom." Dr. Alvin Padilla expressed words of appreciation to the students, staff, faculty, and partnering churches for working closely together.

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### (Perseverance from page 4)

It was a moment of truth in which I realized exactly how much I needed the divine peace only God could offer. On my own, in an only moderately stressful situation, I easily fell-apart into a total wreck! I was confused at first, for I have come through true crisis with much more grace, assurance and calm peace.

Eventually I realized that in those obvious make-or-break moments I knew I could not get by without God's help. To seek God with all my strength and to rely on him seemed the obvious thing to do, so I did it and was blessed as a result. Unfortunately, its not so obvious that I need God just as much for the everyday stressors, and so I rarely seek him as I should, usually assuming that I can "get by" on my own strength and just leave God for the "biggies." Of course it's this exact misunderstanding that landed me in tears and terrible anger over a simple miscommunication with a doctor.

The truth is that every situation we face is an opportunity to either turn toward God or turn away from him. It's easy to think that only the serious, tragic, or complicated episodes we face have any real value in our progression toward godliness, but that just isn't the case! Most of us will face only a few extreme crises in life, but every day we face minor stressors that just as clearly reveal where our priorities, and our trust, really lie. The Apostle Paul compares daily living to training for a race: "All athletes practice strict self-control. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I am not like a boxer who misses his punches. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should..." (1 Corinthians 9:25-7 NLT). Like the athlete training for the race, we have practice seeking God constantly, making every step count not just the "big" ones.

For myself, I still have a lot of "training" to do when it comes to turning over every stressful situation to God-especially in a hospital setting. I don't know how long it will take for me to fully break free of the habit of turning away from God and toward myself, but I do know that I have seen more than enough damage caused by these "missed punches" to believe that the peace God offers those who fully rely on him is truly worth it. Some aspects of life will never be easy or happy; they aren't meant to be. But, every aspect of life can be traveled through with peace if the journey is made with God, and made in his strength.

**Jessica Hilliard graduated from Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary in 2006 with an MA in Theology. She currently stays home with her two children, and works part-time as the Head of Women's Ministries at All Saints Anglican Church in Attleboro, MA.**

## PASTOR'S CORNER

### CONTENTED WITH THE SHEPHERD

(PSALM 23)

Excerpts from Pastor Francis Balla's sermon of 2/09

What did it mean when David said "The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want? Philip Keller who had spent many years in agricultural research wrote a book titled: "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23." He expounded on the word "Want." The word has a broader meaning. No doubt the main concept is that of not lacking-not deficient- in proper care. But it also emphasizes the idea of being utterly contented in the Good Shepherd's care and consequently not craving or desiring anything more.

When David wrote Psalm 23, his situation was nothing but peaceful. His enemy Saul, and his own son Absalom, repeatedly hounded him; he was running for his life. Certainly, he wasn't rich as one would imagine; in fact, he was living in the wilderness and in caves. So when he said: "I shall not want," he was not implying that the child of God will always have all he wants, but he will also have troubles and heartaches, but in the midst of that he has learned to be content in the presence of the Good Shepherd.

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians shared what he learned in this regard (Philippians 4:11-13). Paul had known plenty and then he also knew need. He learned the secret of being content in any and every situation whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. Paul said: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength."

When David said: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want," it was not about what he had, but it was about who he had that was--the Lord himself, therefore he could confidently say: "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not be in want." Full Stop. In other words, David was saying this is the God I belong to; this is what He does for me. All my needs are met in Him.

Pandita Ramabai who started a rescue mission to rescue child prostitutes in India in the mid 19th century said: "A life totally committed to God has nothing to fear, nothing to lose, nothing to regret." During these economic hard times many live in constant fear and trepidation. You hear the news of your fellow employees being laid off and you are worried because you never know when you will be laid off. Under these circumstances whom could we really trust? Will trusting God really work for every one or only for a selected few? Besides trusting God what else do I have to do to see God providing for my needs?

In order to find answers, we must turn to God's unfailing, unadulterated, proven words recorded in the Bible and to some life experiences of God's children who have walked before us expressing unshakable faith during their time of need and crisis.

#### **Scriptures that are pointing to God's mighty power:**

"For the Lord your God is the God of gods, and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty and the awesome God who does not show partiality" (Deut 10:17).

Joshua repeatedly acknowledged God as " the Mighty One God, the Lord" (Joshua 22:22 RSV).

King Nebuchadnezzar marveled at the Greatness of God when he saw that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were not burned in the fiery furnace and said : "It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. How great are His signs and how mighty are His wonders! His Kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation" (Daniel 4:1-3).

David wrote this Psalm when the Lord had delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul: "The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God and my rock in whom I take refuge; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge" (II Samuel 22:2-3).

To Job's complaints, God responded with a set of over 50 questions. After this confrontation, Job had nothing else to say except "I know that you can do all things" (Job 42:1).

Towards the end of his life, David said: "I once was young and now I am old, yet, I have never seen the righteous forsaken and their children begging for bread" (Psalm 37:25).

"To whom then will you liken Me, that I should be his equal says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these stars, The one who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power; Not one of them is missing" (Isaiah 40:25-26).

The beauty of our God is that though He is all-powerful and all mighty,yet, he can be gentle enough to be our Great Shepherd. Isaiah describes God's gentle shepherd's heart: "Behold, the Lord God, will come with might, With His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with him, And His recompense before Him. Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs, and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes" (Isaiah 40:10-11). This Shepherd King fascinated David, so he called him his shepherd and he calls all of us to worship Him:"Come before Him with Joyful singing. Know that the Lord Himself is God. It is He who has made us

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## Letters To The Editor

If you were blessed by the articles published in this volume, we want to hear from you.

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(Contented with the Shepherd-continued from page 7)

and not we, ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture” Psalm (100:1-3).

By saying: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want," David actually paved the way for Jesus who later on said: "I am the good shepherd. The Good shepherd gives his life for the sheep." And again, "I have come so that you might have life and life in abundance." Jesus also said: "My peace I leave with you" not according to how the world gives. So when we come to Jesus, the good shepherd, we are satisfied. All our longings are fulfilled; our needs are met. As we delight in his presence He will give the desires of our hearts. Therefore, we too can truly say just like David: "The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want. "

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