

The Back Page

Photos of Christchurch Ladies Retreat



The Helper is a publication of the Christian Education and Publications Committee (CE&P) of the Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, through its Women's Sub-Committee. Comments or inquiries are welcome and can be sent to:

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the **+** helper

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The Magazine for Women
Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand



THE JOY AND PAIN OF
CHILD BEARING & REARING

IN THIS ISSUE:

CHILDREN WITH
**SPECIAL
NEEDS**

COPING WITH
CHILDLESSNESS

MISCARRIAGE

ADOPTION

AND HOW TO RESPOND ...

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Editorial

Welcome to another edition of *The Helper*.

Our production team is on the move! As I write, I am surrounded by boxes in various stages of completion as well as a long list of things still to do as our family prepares for relocation to the opposite end of the country, namely Wyndham in Southland.

It has been a time of reflection as I have sorted through many items collected over the years we have been in Auckland (and some that travelled with us from previous places of abode). These past 14 years have seen our children grow from infancy (John, our youngest was 18 months when we arrived back from Australia) into young adults. Already two have left home. Our third will leave with our departure. My sorting has evoked many memories of each different stage. There has been much laughter as we have read some of the ‘works of art’ created as writing skills were being developed or reread much loved childhood books. And then the challenge – what do I do with it all? What to keep? What to toss?

It has certainly reminded me that life is passing. We are here on earth but for a moment and in the light of eternity most of ‘my collectables’ will amount to nothing. Yet they are also part of the development of character, of life itself, of being prepared for our eternal home. Each is part of God’s handiwork, being woven into a beautiful tapestry, which given to Him will be to His honour and glory and praise.

But I am not the only team member on the move. Michelle Willis and her family (husband Daniel, and two sons Toby and Noah) are about to embark on an overseas adventure. They plan to reside for at least one year in Switzerland, the land of Michelle’s birth. Katherine Young has moved base to Gisborne, where she has started her first nursing job and is also involved with Grace Church Gisborne. Only Anne Camp will stay as an anchor in the North.

Cover Photo: Auckland Mums & Bubs Coffee Group: Sarah Leslie with William, Adele Dixon with Peter, Julie Cooper with Caitlin, Catherine Faletanoai with Mia, Anita MacDonald with Aria & Asher, Michelle Willis with Noah & Toby, Corina Eldershaw with Giselle.

Yet we trust that this spreading of our wings is going to enhance our production rather than limit it. With modern means of communication we see no reason why Michelle cannot continue to do her splendid work of layout and design. Katherine will continue with her great work of editing. With my own move south I am hoping that this will give opportunity to be more aware of what is happening south of the Bombays and to source out a greater Southern flavour.

We appreciate your prayers as we adjust to our moves and its impact upon the production of this magazine. If there is anyone out there who would like to join the Team, we would love to hear from you.

However as well as the everyday, ordinary affairs of life that God uses to shape and mould us into His women, at times, God in His wisdom, also purposes more challenging situations to confront us individually and our families and wider communities. In this edition of *The Helper* we have picked up some of these ‘greater challenges’ that some of us face especially in relationship to fertility and childbearing. We realise that the issues covered may not have immediate relevance to each one of you, but we trust that in some way they will yet impact you, even helping you to understand someone else’s struggle better.

We are grateful to the women who have shared their pain, hurt and joys with us. We recognise their courage to do so and thank them heartily. Do pray for each woman, as they have had to visit afresh the circumstances of their situation.

May the Lord continue to bless you where you serve Him. In Our Saviour’s name,

- Nola Young, on behalf of *The Helper* Team.

In Brief

Happenings & Prayer Points from around the country

ASHBURTON / FAIRLIE Evangelical Presbyterian Church

Ashburton:
This has been a time of little things for our ladies, yet we are doing what we can. This year we are using "Damsels in Distress" (Biblical solutions for problems women face) by Martha Peace in our ladies Bible study. We held a very fun gym night last November, which friends from other churches joined us in. There also continues to be facilitating of youth group and Easter camps along with tending to our families.

We have a young Swiss couple, Joshua and Heidi, with us until September to learn English. This is in preparation for more study at home, and then to serve in a guesthouse with the Swiss mission on the Nile. What a privilege and blessing to have them with us.

Fairlie:
The Fairlie ladies hold weekly meetings. On alternate weeks they have been studying "More of God's Women" and hope to begin Matthew's gospel next. The other week they knit vests and small dolls for AIDS orphans in South Africa. These are sent via the Christian mission, Lift Yourself. They are also organising a baby shower this week for one of the ladies who attends.

- For Prayer:**
- Give thanks the Bayne's have been able to buy the home they were renting - one of those "not in your wildest dreams" blessings.
 - Pray that we will grow in Christ likeness through our studies and so glorify our Lord.
 - Pray that the Lord will help Joshua and Heidi learn English - especially written English.
 - Pray that more contacts in Fairlie can be encouraged to attend church.

Southern Presbytery

GORE Grace Presbyterian Church

- Give thanks for Emma enjoying her new BCNZ course and youth work at Oamaru.
- Give thanks that the first baby due this year arrived safely to a new family at church.
- Pray for the next babies due - twins due to a first-time mum and another baby due in the next few months.

WYNDHAM Wyndham Evangelical Church

We held a meeting to plan our women's meetings for 2008. Devotions were from 2 Corinthians 5:14-20 and they motivated us to: recognise each other as new creatures in Christ, to take up the ministry of reconciliation Christ has given us, to be His ambassadors entreating others to be reconciled to God. We hope to keep these thoughts before us throughout the year.

Our first outing was in March to a "Garden Walk and Supper". A scenic area has been created in a disused lignite pit. It is on the southern scenic route and has a campervan stopover. Maria Sanderson made us a beautiful supper while her husband David showed us around and explained the history. Visitors joined us and Alison Ure took devotions on Trusting God.

- For Prayer:**
- Pray for our witness in our community through the church and our individual influences through work, community activities and family involvements.
 - Pray for holiday programme we will conduct for children during the school holidays.
 - Pray for two Bible studies for women conducted by Alison Ure and our regular Sunday school teaching, Bible in schools and missionary meetings.
 - A local girl Bronwyn Dumbleton has just returned with SIM to Ethiopia and needs prayer for completion of the project she directs. We were greatly encouraged to see her faith so dependant on God and her great love for those she is working with.

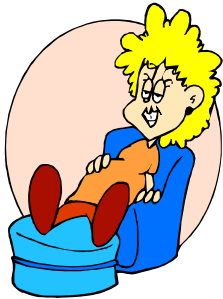
OWAKA Catlins Evangelical Church

- Pray for love and opportunities as we continue our hospitality roster and helping in everyday situations as needs are revealed.
- Although our ladies study group is getting smaller, give thanks that we still can meet to share the Word and encourage one another.

INVERCARGILL Grace Presbyterian Church Thank God for encouragements:

- New folk coming to the worship services and Sunday School.
- A new fortnightly evening Ladies Discussion Group. “Good numbers”, “great fellowship”, “thought provoking and challenging”, “learning lots” and “just great” are some of the words describing this new group!
- New families represented at TAG, with attendance ranging from 16-23. New learning series on “Life of Moses”.
- An extra prayer meeting - fortnightly in the evening.
- A men’s fellowship group started “Breakfast Together” & a Finger Food Tea meeting
- For “stretching”, “challenging”, “thinking times” as the Morning Ladies Bible Study look at suffering, death and heaven.
- Good fellowship at the monthly TOOT program.

- For Prayer:**
- Remember our expectant mums, for good health and strength along the journey.
 - For outreach through TAG, TOOT and Youth Group, that families will be touched and bridges built.
 - Thank God for the progressive healing in lives and pray for those struggling with continuing health problems and difficult situations.
 - Give thanks for Pastor Barry, the elders, Peter and others who preach week by week.



In Brief

Happenings & Prayer Points from around the country

Northern Presbytery CONTINUED

MANUREWA Covenant Presbyterian Church

In February, the women at Covenant Presbyterian Church greatly appreciated being able to meet with Ruth Ghent, a missionary from Japan. Ruth spoke to us on the theme "Outreach with a Difference - creative ways to reach out to others with the gospel". It was an encouragement to hear how Ruth committed herself as a young person to be always prepared to speak of Christ to others, despite her naturally shy personality, and the ways in which God has blessed her as she has been obedient to Him. We were challenged to be honest and vulnerable in our witness to non-Christians and to be reassured that Christ ministers to others through both our strengths and weaknesses. It was a privilege to be able to share together.



Speaker Lesley Flinn

On Saturday 8th March, we held a Ladies' Afternoon tea to launch our spiritual mothering groups for the year. Lesley Flinn shared her testimony and spoke of God's covenant faithfulness in her life. Six groups of women will meet once a month from March to September with discussions on: Lifestages, Feminist or Feminine?, Sexuality, A Christ-centred Home and Contentment as well as one evening devoted to practical ministry and sharing of gifts.

For Prayer:

- Pray that the women's bible study on "The Lord's Prayer" in term two will encourage all those who attend to develop a deeper prayer life and to take seriously the wonderful privilege and responsibility God has called us to in prayer.

- Pray for ladies of different ages, backgrounds and cultures as they meet together in Spiritual Mothering groups that they may minister to one another with the love of Christ and appreciate the joys and struggles in each other's lives.
- Pray for the many contacts that the women in the church have with non-Christians through the ministry of ESOL, the school, the pre-school and children's ministry groups. Pray that we may be faithful in sowing the seeds of the gospel.
- Pray for the new "Bookclub for Women" group involving ladies from several churches in the northern presbytery as we begin studying "Respectable Sins" by Jerry Bridges. We plan to read three Christian books a year on varied topics. Pray that this will both challenge and inspire us in our Christian walk.



Covenant Ladies Afternoon Tea - Margaret Reynolds, Cherry Peek, Sabina Huber, RONALDA WARNER

Central Presbytery

NEW PLYMOUTH Grace Community Fellowship

- Pray for Ann Farr and the family as they mourn the loss of John. Pray that the Lord may comfort and strengthen them at this time.
- Pray for David & Shelly Farr as they settle into the Grace Church in New Plymouth. May the Lord give grace and wisdom to the congregation as they seek to reach out into the community.
- Pray that the Lord may send new families along to the church.

CHRISTCHURCH Evangelical Presbyterian Church

We are limiting our Women's Events to one each term this year. This term the Ladies have organised a weekend away together for April 12 and 13. They are going to stay in a holiday house up near the mountains, beside a river and some bush. They will listen to some CWCI videos from past conferences and enjoy fellowship together. We are hoping that quite a few women can go (see back page for photos).

Our Term two plan is for a Progressive Dinner in May. We have also planned terms 3 and 4 (wow!) but you will have to wait to hear what they are, we cannot spoil the surprise for our ladies!

For Prayer:

- Several EPC ladies are involved with Bible-In-Schools. **Please pray** for them as they love and teach the children each week. Also **please pray** for the children who hear - this could be the only opportunity they have to hear about God and His magnificent plan of salvation in Christ Jesus.
- We are losing Pastor Ron and Cathy Ellis back to USA in the middle of the year which we are sad about. We have loved and greatly appreciated Cathy's input and fellowship amongst us. At the time of writing they were uncertain of the plans God has for them, so **please pray** that He will reveal them clearly and that Ron and Cathy will be strengthened in Him as they wait.
- Also, **please pray** for our new pastor. Who is he? We do not know yet, so please pray for clarity and patience for our congregation as we wait!

Miscarriage

Pain, Anger and Comfort in Miscarriage



Many of you will have met Dawn and Ken Harris and their son Noah when they visited our country in 2006. They currently live in St. Louis, USA. Dawn has courageously shared some of her story with us:

It was a chilly rainy morning as we climbed the hill that overlooked our village of West Kirby, England. I remember the distinct smell of the Irish Sea. As we reached the top of the hill we found a small tree whose branches touched the ground, which created a small place for us to sit. That morning I watched my husband bury the child I had just miscarried. We placed this little one, no bigger than my thumbnail, into the ground along with our hope for who he/she was going to be in our family. This was our fifth pregnancy lost. As we cried under that tree we felt the rain falling from the leaves, as if the tree was weeping with us. At that moment we both felt the reality of Romans 8:22-23, "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."

This was our fifth pregnancy lost. As we cried under that tree we felt the rain falling from the leaves, as if the tree was weeping with us.

For me these were dark years intermingled with amazing beauty. Years that I questioned God's love for me, questioned the purpose of prayer, and felt a growing anger towards the God who created life and chose to take it away. I did not feel loved by God nor could I believe that this was his best plan for my life. Some people in their love for me quickly tried to find meaning in our situation. Surely God must have something great in store for us, some great ministry. Maybe the Lord was working on my character. I know there were kernels of truth in their words, but at the time I felt I would have traded any future ministry to have my children back. The beauty of comfort came not so much through words, but through presence. The pastor of our church and his wife came to our flat and simply sat and cried with us. No words were exchanged, just their loving embrace and respect for our pain.

Although my story does include the birth of my two sons, my sense of God's presence and promises did not begin there. My journey is best described in two stories. One night after church my husband and I were sitting in the living room of our flat. My anger towards God for the last two years was unveiled and it finally got ugly. I felt able to be angry and stand before God in all my wearied messiness. My husband wrapped his arms around me and told me that this was the embodiment of the Lord's love for me. Through the embrace of my husband I felt the compassionate love of the Father. My heart broke. I began the journey of believing that God did love me as His daughter. I must admit that I am still on that journey.

After many prayers of begging the Lord to allow our children to be a part of our family my heart became jaded. What was the point of praying when He had already made up His mind? How was I supposed

to pray with bold faith and yet pray that "thy will be done"? I stopped praying altogether. As the weeks went by I found myself pondering the juxtaposition of praying with boldness and asking for His will to be done. I thought about each word that others were praying when it seemed like maybe they were not. I began to long to have a conversation with God. I longed to pray honestly. I found myself going to evening prayer at the Anglican church in our village. The reverence and beauty of the old stone building and the gardens quieted my soul. As I listened to the ladies read the Psalms, my heart cried out to God. I wept while I prayed for the first time in months. Even though I did not and still do not completely understand prayer I realize that the Lord wants to hear my thoughts, as beautiful and ugly as they are. I began to realize that my prayers were not simply about the desired outcome of a situation, but were also a time for the Lord to unearth and shape my heart. Prayer is meant to be an honest revealing of my heart as well as a time for it to be shaped by saying what is true both about God and myself.

My story does include two beautiful boys that I love dearly, but it also includes another miscarriage. God has not promised an easy road in this life, but He does promise to walk it with us. The path is mysterious, but the Lord's love is steadfast and His mercy is new every morning. In C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Mr. Beaver describes Aslan to Lucy saying, "Safe? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King."

RECOMMENDED READING:

Empty Arms: For Those Who Suffered A Miscarriage, Stillbirth, or Tubal Pregnancy (by Pam Vredevelt).

Free to Grieve: Healing & Encouragement For Those Who Have Suffered Miscarriage and Stillbirth (by Maureen Rank).

The Davy Monster

Parenting Children with Special Needs

Three year old Davy van den Brink (below) and 20 year old Jonathan McKinnon (see page 5) share a special bond - both have Downs Syndrome, but have the blessing of being raised in covenant families. We have asked their parents to share their story of life with a special needs child.

Davy recently turned three and is a delightful chap, affectionately nicknamed “the Davy monster”. His older brother and sister love him to bits and occasionally yell at him when he annoys them. Peter and I despair (and try not to laugh) when we find him standing in the toilet again or saying, “ahhhah, o dea” as he surveys his trashed room. Our hearts melt when he climbs up on our knees for a cuddle. Basically, he is just like any other 3 year old and we’re just like any other family... but Davy has Down Syndrome (DS). Some days that makes no difference, other days it has huge significance.

What is it like to have a child with special needs? In writing about this topic I can only speak for our family. Every family’s experience of having children will vary, and a child with special needs is no different.

Davy was clinically diagnosed with DS within hours of his birth. As I look back, my response to that diagnosis happened at so many different levels. And our ongoing experience of “special needs parenting” continues to happen at all those levels.

At a very foundational level was a trust in God and His word. There was the firm and total assurance that God was in control. Ps 139: 13-16 assured me that this little boy was a significant human being, made in the image of God. God has a purpose for my son. He had already planned “good works” for him to do in his lifetime. I am so thankful for the theology that had been laid down before I had to face this trial, and the grace God gave me to take up that theology. God is so gracious. I am sure that the prayers of many kept us at that time and continue to do so.

At a different level was the confusion about what that trust looked like at a practical level. If I am to testify to God’s goodness and sovereignty and if I am to “consider it pure joy” to face this trial,

should I even acknowledge that it is a problem? Is it a problem? Do I need support? When people ask how they can help, what should my response be? Can I admit that life is hard at times without undermining God’s goodness? For me, this dilemma is an ongoing one. I suspect though that in my case much of this struggle is rooted in pride. While I desire to give glory to God, I also desire for people to see me coping, maybe even overcoming. All of these factors combined make it difficult for me to express needs or accept help. I am fortunate that I have people around me who ask probing questions and I am grateful for a wise husband who overrules my independent streak sometimes!

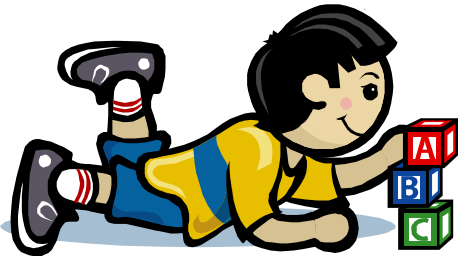
Then there were the practical issues. Initially we had a difficult time with feeding and slow weight gain. I spent a lot of time expressing, supplementing, sterilising, trying to feed etc. It was a wonderful blessing to us that many stepped in to help with meals, housework and other practical aspects of keeping the family going. I am sure this practical help impacted on the emotional aspects of that time. Over time we have not had to face many of the huge practical needs others facing special needs have faced. Davy has just been a “baby” for much longer. We are not sure if this will continue or what the future holds but it is still a blessing to us when people step in to meet practical needs like looking after Davy so that we can do something with the older children.

There are many other aspects which I could talk about, but I think the final one which sticks out in my mind is the thoughts we have as parents for the future. As soon as DS was diagnosed, part of my response was, “What will the future look like?” All the ‘normal’ assumptions were gone – education, faith, job, independence, marriage, family, support when you get older. None of these things are guaranteed with our other children, but we do not

often challenge those assumptions consciously. “Will people accept Davy? Will he have friends? Will he be able to do the things he wants to? Will Peter and I ever face empty nest syndrome? Who will watch over Davy when we can not? How can we share our faith and God’s love, with Davy in a way he can understand?” These are questions which dwell in the back of my mind. I am conscious that these are areas which I need to place in God’s hands. There are also things we need to do to influence the answers. It is such a delight and blessing to me as a mother of a child with special needs when other people make the effort to interact with Davy, especially those who go the extra mile and really get to know him. They find out he communicates with sign, and they learn his signs. They spend time with him and are his friends. I would love to see Davy establish relationships with a variety of people, to see people allow Davy to bless them, as well as being a blessing to him.

The joys, challenges, blessings, and struggles of parenting are often intensified when special needs are thrown in. But it is wonderful to see how God uses these things to refine all of us as we allow Him to. It is also wonderful to see how God uses His people in so many ways to help carry the load, both emotionally and practically. Davy’s presence in my life reminds me again and again that God is a good and gracious God!

- Ruth van den Brink
Grace Presbyterian Church, Invercargill



How to Respond

To the needs of the afflicted

Responses that Encourage:

- A commitment to pray
- Be a comforting presence. Sometimes silence is better than words.
- Speak words that comfort: “I’m so sorry to hear...”
- Speak words that affirm the difficulty of the situation.
- Speak words that give hope, for example words that point to the sovereignty of God over all of life. Revelation 1:18b is a wonderful encouragement in

times of sudden death where Jesus says “...I hold the keys of death...”

- Help at a practical level.

All of us struggle in some way in the course of our lives. As my friends have struggled with their baby they have known the comforting presence of family and friends as well as the enabling that comes through the prayers of many. Such responses provide the kind of support that often makes it possible to keep going in

times of affliction. Ultimately God is glorified in those who suffer and in those who respond.

- Margaret Reynolds
Grace Counselling & Conciliation Services.

1. Dr. David Calhoun used this phrase in class, Covenant Theological Seminary, 2004

In Brief

Happenings & Prayer Points from around the country

Northern Presbytery

PAPAPATOETOE
Providence Presbyterian Church

We are continuing to have a ladies' meeting each holidays, with the study at the end of Term 1 on "Overcoming Fear", based on Ed Welch's book 'When People are Big, and God is Small'. Adelle Levi will also share her testimony at this meeting. These meetings are open to other Grace Church ladies and we are always encouraged and strengthened in our faith through those who attend.

Our Little League Programme is run by Megan and Janina, who have shown real commitment and perseverance in this ministry. They meet fortnightly, in a home or for an outing. This has been a good way to befriend Mums and keep in contact with them. As Uaita has a lot of contact with young Mums through his work, he hopes to be able to make referrals to this group. We have about ten children and teenagers who come to Sunday School each week. We thought we would have no teachers this year but the Lord has provided us with several people going on a bimonthly roster.

For Prayer:

- Give thanks that some ladies are attending church more regularly.
- Pray that the Little League programme would encourage young mums in their walk and that contact will be made and developed with young women in the Papatoetoe area. Pray that Uaita will be able to refer some of the Mothers in need that he meets to this group.
- Pray for our ladies studies each school holidays, particularly for Shirley as she prepares these, for time and ideas.
- Pray for our small Sunday School and for contact with children in the area.
- Pray for Uaita as he seeks to start a Friday After School Club for teenagers. Pray the teenage boys in our church will bring along their schoolmates.



FLAT BUSH
Redeemer Grace Presbyterian Church

- Pray that God would bless changes in church (new pastor, new worship time and venue, incorporating our Kid’s Church into the regular worship service) and use these to bring more community contacts.
- Pray that God would bring more helpers as we are shorter on helpers than in the past have been unable to run some of the community ministries.
- Give thanks for evening getting to know Shona Rakate, our new pastor’s wife and pray that god would bless the Rakate’s ministry.

TAKANINI
Trinity Presbyterian Church

- Give thanks for the Youth Groups (Junior Youth, Girls Group, Boys Group), for the large numbers and new contacts attending.
- Give thanks that we have been permitted to use Takanini School Hall not only for Church on Sunday mornings but also for youth meetings, evening church and music practises.
- Pray for the Girls Group as new leaders take charge
- Pray for Pastor Andrew and Pastor Steve and others as they continue to minister and work in the Takanini Community.

GISBORNE
Grace Church

- Ruby Williams celebrated her 93rd birthday recently. Give thanks for God’s continuing grace in her life.
- Hawea Carter would appreciate prayer as she recovers from a recent stroke which she suffered less than two weeks after her husband, Dave, had a stroke. Both are making a good recovery.
- Please pray for our Sunday School teachers: Ani Kaa, Nicole Welch and Katherine Young.

How to Respond

To the needs of the afflicted

One day I received an email to say that a young couple I knew well had just been informed that their baby of a few months had leukaemia. Oh no I gasped. How could this be? How could their beautiful baby have been struck down in such a way?

When a tragedy like this happens we are forced to grapple with suffering in this world. A biblical view of suffering will enable us to accept the inevitability of suffering. However the question is: how do we respond to people who are in the midst of different kinds of trials?

Our reactions tell us that this is a difficult area. We often feel shocked about the situation and baffled about how to respond. We do not know what to do or say. We try to help only to be uncertain about whether we did the right thing or not. We sense that at this time of suffering and vulnerability it is important to do and say that which will be most beneficial. But where do we go for that kind of direction? As Christians we go to the Bible for our answers. The Bible has much to say about suffering and how to respond to it.

Responses that Miss the Mark:

In John 9 the story of the man born blind provides some clues about ways *not* to respond. The disciples ask the question, "...who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" The disciples are looking for a reason, something to blame for the man's blindness. Maybe they were aware of the warnings contained in the second commandment about idol worship, in which children would be punished for the sins of their fathers (Ex. 20:4). However in the situation with the blind man Jesus states categorically "*Neither this man nor his parents sinned...but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life*" (John 9:3).

When we try to come up with *reasons* why something has happened we are on shaky ground. In such situations we rarely have the mind of God. So to say God has done this because of, for example,

something you did, or did not do, or to save you from something worse or other reasons, is not helpful. In many cases this creates either guilt or despair on the part of the recipient.

In the case of the blind man we see that despite the tragedy of being born blind, God had a much higher purpose. This provided an opportunity for Jesus to not only heal the blind man, but to show that as the light of the world he is able to heal both physical and spiritual blindness.

Let us not presume that we understand why things happen but let us bow to the eternal purposes of God which he is working out for good. It is often better to admit that we do not know why things happen.

However, one thing we do know is that God allows trials and tragedies to happen. Job is a man who lost children, livestock, servants, and health. These were huge losses and Job suffered greatly in the midst of his grief. As Job's three friends came to comfort Job we can learn much.

Job's three friends started out well. They set out to "*sympathize with him and comfort him...began to weep aloud...sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.*" (Job 1:11-13)

Then they began to speak. They thought they were speaking truth and that their arguments were well reasoned theologically and logically, but in the end they received the condemnation of God (Job 42:7).

When God responds to Job he never answers the why question, instead he says in essence "I take responsibility for everything that happens on earth". At this Job is able to bow in submission to God's perfect purposes in his dealing with all who live on earth.

Responses that Discourage:

- Do not say "I know how you feel." Even if we have had a similar experience, we often do not know exactly how it is for this person.
- Do not give advice, judge, minimize or moralize.
- Do not answer the question 'why'.

Responses that God desires:

In Galatians 6:2 Paul encourages the believers to "*carry each other's burdens...* (and so) *fulfil the law of Christ*". We know that Jesus summarized the law into love for God and love for others. As we love others we will seek to help carry the concerns of others and by doing so will be able to see the law of Christ worked out in practice in our lives.

The difference between helping and not helping comes down to how well we understand the needs of those who are struggling in some way.

Firstly we need to understand the nature of the problem. If a baby has leukaemia what does that mean? What kind of treatment will be implemented? What will that mean for the family? What kind of supports do they have? Do they have supportive families?

Secondly we need to understand the particular situation that *this* family finds themselves in. Maybe there are certain factors that make this situation particularly difficult.

As we draw alongside to bear other's burdens there is a need for much patience and gentleness. In this James so wisely cautions us to "*be slow to speak*" (James 1:19). If we speak *before* we have the facts our response is considered both foolish and shameful (Proverbs 18:13). Instead our words are to be appropriate to the situation, filled with grace, and the kind that are effective in bringing encouragement to the heart.

Growing Jonathan

Parenting Children with Special Needs



It is hard to believe our Jonathan will be twenty-one in August. For twenty years we have always been aware that eventually we will have to consider work and day activities when he finishes school.

From birth our lives have been busy with physio's, early intervention, special education services, speech therapy, individual education plans at school and regular hospital trips. However, once he leaves school at the end of this year all of this

support will finish and we just do doctor check-ups. In a way it is good news and it is as though we have graduated.

In February 2009 we will be starting a whole new day programme. Thankfully we have a few options available. Jonathan will be going to several different organisations during the week, with lots of activities planned to fill his day - swimming, cooking, fishing, pottery, bowling, gardening etc. Jonathan has high needs so will be unable to work unassisted, however as time goes on they maybe able to find him work with an aid helping him.

I can't deny that at times I feel anxious about how he will adjust to a new environment. Jonathan has been at Sara Cohen Special School for nearly ten years with most of the same staff. They have been very caring so maybe it has been

more of a comfort for us. Jonathan can be quite a character, he enjoys making people laugh and loves drama at school. On more than one occasion, he has been found posing as a mannequin in a shop window, however, he is not so popular with the Ear, Nose and Throat Department at the hospital after twice putting his hearing aids down the toilet (the second time he flushed them)!

When I look back over the last twenty years, I clearly see God's hand holding mine. From the day he was born, God has placed just the right people around us and I need to remind myself He will never leave us and will continue to uphold us as we all travel into the next chapter of our lives.

- Debra McKinnon
Grace Bible Church, Dunedin

Book Review

Same Lake Different Boat

Same Lake Different Boat: Coming alongside people touched by disability
-by Stephanie O. Hubach
(P&R Publishing, 2006)

Most of us have already come across disability in ourselves, our family or our church family, and if not, we will face this in the future. *Same Lake Different Boat* is a helpful book for all members of the body of Christ, regardless of current abilities or roles. It presents a Biblical world view on disability, and calls us to action, in the context of both the family and the church. Its author, Stephanie Hubach, speaks with the authority of someone who knows her Bible, has experienced disability in her own family, and is an active member of her local church and community.

Stephanie explains that disability is not something abnormal in a normal world, but it is a normal part of life in an abnormal (fallen) world. Since Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit brokenness and difficulty have affected all parts

of life, including peoples' intellectual and physical abilities. When we have a clear view of our broken world, we can then have a clear view of ourselves and other people.

Stephanie reminds us that God views the church as a body - many parts working together, each with different roles and gifts. We are called to relate respectfully to other parts of the body. Firstly because we are all created in God's image - our worth is found in Him, not in what we can and cannot do. Secondly God is gracious towards us. Once we have received grace, we can extend it to others.

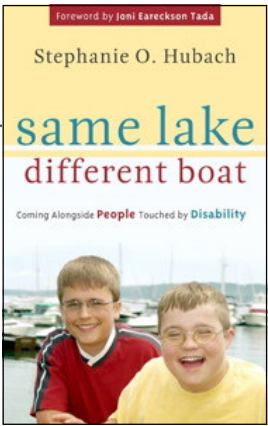
These two principles are the basis for four 'P's that help us relate to others in the church, identifying with them as one in Christ:
A **powerful** message: we can communicate to others that they are valuable, and admit our own frailties and reliance on God's grace.
A positive **perspective**: we can look for the image of God in people, seeing their

potential (not their limitations) and their dignity (not their disabilities). This requires seeing ourselves as we really are, aware we are all recipients of grace.

Proper motivation: we can be truly pro life - every life, no exceptions.
Protection: we cannot lose our value - it cannot be taken away, because we are made in God's image and our worth is in Him.

I have been encouraged and challenged in my view of the world and of disability by *Same Lake Different Boat*. I recommend it to you, and pray you will also be blessed by it as we live together as the body of Christ,

- Gina Young
Trinity Presbyterian Church, Takanini



Sing, O Barren Woman?

Grappling with Childlessness

What remains the quintessential activity for a woman in the 21st century? Bearing and rearing children. I have been unable to do this. If I were in an overcrowded lifeboat after a shipwreck and we ‘played’ the values game of who should be allowed to stay in the boat, I would probably be tossed overboard! I have been unable to produce a ‘utility’ (human resource) for society which in turn can be productive. I have also used the medical and pharmaceutical systems, probably negatively affected ecological sustainability, will possibly live past seventy, and although I work consistently and hard, because I am not in paid employment I am considered unemployed.

I thank our great God, He sees me as His – a significant human made in His image, and reconciled to Him through my Saviour Jesus. But where does this leave me as I journey through life with a beloved husband and no offspring of our own?

The night after agreeing to write this article was a long night. I revisited the years of ‘trying’: the longing, the hope, the tears, and the seemingly endless surgical procedures. I remembered situations: the often fixed smile when friends and their children visited, going to visit mothers with their newborn in hospitals, attending baby showers where women chatted about their children’s activities, being expected to be interested in ‘little people’ as that would be ‘good’ for me, when a ‘bub’ was deposited in my arms and so on – all night. I realized afresh childlessness is for life! The hurt mellows but no sooner am I free from babies and growing children, then I am facing graduations, engagements, marriages, grandchildren and ‘granny brag books’. Allied to this is the realization that when Barry and I die, memories of endearing eccentricities, our family jokes and sayings, treasured photographs, and articles of sentimental value passed down through our families will totally end, be wiped out, of no enduring consequence. As my sister is also childless, not only have my parents never experienced the joy of being grandparents - and they would have been marvelous at it - but our original family names will cease, as will my husband’s. Living in a Christian ‘family’ can be difficult for people who are older and single or married and childless. We do not fit the regular pattern. Yet there is life after childlessness and we have our roles in God’s family. I

have learned about graciousness and really considering others better than myself. For example, a common conversational question after church when meeting someone new is “Do you have children?” I’ve learned not to embarrass folk with a blunt “no” – it is a conversation stopper. Instead I reply (depending on the person) “we would have enjoyed having our very own children but enjoy and are interested in our church family’s children”. I sometimes continue that I would probably have been one of those mothers who constantly compared her offspring unfavourably with other children. Further my husband and I can pray for other peoples’ children, without the green eyed monster of envy, and be truly interested in their welfare. By this time our conversation is well on its way...

It is a challenge to meet people when one does not have young children or grandchildren. Barry and I work consistently at relationship building with all age groups. One of our joys is being among the first to learn of a young couples’ pregnancy, especially if we have prayed with them as they have walked through perhaps not being able to have children.

Some suggestions for those who want to help childless couples:

- Please refrain from quoting passages like Isaiah 54 (go on read it...) or talking about how God works everything for good (we know He does but at times it’s not encouraging), or suggesting a vacation – with a loving, caring smile, or casually talking about adoption, IVF, and more faith, or pushing involvement in children’s or young peoples programs. Childless couples have all sorts of different life situations and have probably thought about and/or explored these and more long before your well intended suggestions.
- Please include us in your family celebrations – Christmas springs to mind. Recently we were included in first, the bride’s parents then the groom’s parents, cars at weddings – you have no idea how wonderful that was!
- Tell us about your newly expected babies – at my age the entire world no longer appears pregnant. Ask us to pray for your offspring of all ages, and keep us informed.

- Do not notice teary eyes at times.
- A hug is always great.

Some suggestions for childless couples:

- Be honest before our God – spiritualizing the reality of being childless will be less than helpful – face it and go forward.
- Bring your hurts and fears before our loving heavenly Father – He does have a plan for your lives. There is life after accepting childlessness.
- Think through the many ramifications of IVF and adoption (particularly of overseas children) for you and your extended families.
- Remember you are unique in that you can up and leave for the Lord and His work more easily than brothers and sisters with children.
- Do not compromise your spiritual, physical, emotional or psychological health by overbalancing on surgical procedures.
- Do not compensate in career ambitions and only live *alongside* one another rather than *with* one another.
- Use avoidance techniques when necessary – e.g. must you really attend that baby shower right now?
- Be creative in your relationships. Practice hospitality even if it hurts – and it will – not forgetting avoidance techniques if required.
- People with children do not generally intend to be insensitive – love them where they are at - but if you think they are being intrusive do tell them.
- Locate another childless couple who are mature in the Lord if you really want understanding and perhaps ask their input.
- Love and talk with your husband/wife – remember he/she is going through this with you. You married them NOT your possible children. Keep talking! Eph 4 ‘speaking the truth in love...’ You will grow a GREAT marriage.

Remember our good Lord promises that HE cares for each of His sons and daughters. Whether we are straining our tent pegs (see Isaiah 54) with children or childless of our ‘very own’ children we aim to love and serve HIM and bring HIM glory.

- Cynthia Swann
Grace Presbyterian Church, Invercargill

An Adoption Story

The Trials and Blessings of Adoption

Nola Young met Hope during her stay in the USA last year and heard her precious story. Hope kindly agreed to share it with us.

March 31, 1983 was a memorable day for two women in Birmingham, Alabama. It was also a tremendous day for one blessed little child. For years to come, God would weave an intricate tapestry into the lives of these women and their families. It was one that would tell of His great mercy, His sovereignty, and His infinite love.

For a 20 year old single college student, that day was overwhelming and heart-breaking. She was giving birth to a child she knew she couldn’t care for, yet she longed to keep her first-born. How could she give away the precious child that had grown inside her for the last nine months? What would life be like knowing that she had a daughter somewhere out there that she might never know? Who could she turn to for comfort when only a few people even knew she had been pregnant?

For the other woman, that day was a long one. After 11 years of trying to have a child with her husband, she had finally reached her breaking point. She was exhausted from juggling marriage, a demanding career in sales, and countless visits to the doctor for blood tests. Infertility had taken its toll on her body and her spirit. That day she took an official leave of absence from work to rest and recover. She and her husband discussed adoption and filled out the paperwork, but there had not been a baby for her yet. All she wanted was a child to love and care for.

Thankfully, God knew what was best for both of these women. I am blessed beyond measure to know the intricate details of how God used their suffering, waiting, and uncertainty to shape their lives and bring glory to His name. I was born on March 31, 1983. My beautiful birthmother made the difficult and unselfish choice to give me up for adoption. Her hope and prayer was that her baby would have a wonderful life with Christian parents. She wanted a godly couple who could love and provide better than she could. God answered that prayer. After a short time in foster care, I went home to live with my parents on June 14, 1983. I still celebrate that day with them every year.

I have known from a very early age that I was adopted. In fact, I don’t remember the first time my parents told me because I was so young. My parents always made me feel loved and taught me what a special thing God had done when he gave me to them. I have always felt that the Lord granted me an ability to understand my situation at a young age. That ability, combined with the openness and honesty of my parents about the adoption, allowed me to have a wonderful experience as an adopted child. I was never ashamed of the fact that I was adopted; nor was I uncomfortable talking about it. In fact, I wrote a poem about it when I was 10 years old. At the time, I had no idea how much

it touched my family and others who read it. Already, God was using my adoption for good.

I was always amused at the reactions of my peers when I told them about it. My friends always expected me to feel angry or abandoned. They were shocked at how openly I spoke of not knowing exactly where I came from. I can understand why they might think I’d feel that way, but God had shown me a different perspective. I knew that I had not been abandoned, that I was never left out on a doorstep in the cold. More importantly, I knew that my parents loved me and that God loved me.

God continues to open doors for me to share about His greatness through my story. Although the majority of my experience as an adoptee has been wonderful, as I’ve grown older I have experienced some obstacles. It is important to me to be open and honest, just like my parents were with me. One thing that became difficult for me in my young adult years (I am 25 now) was having an appearance and a personality so different from the rest of my family. Of course there were some similarities due to my nurturing environment. However, I often found myself feeling misunderstood, like the “black sheep” of the family. This was most apparent when the behavior of my siblings was discussed. My younger sisters were not adopted, but they were certainly a work of God in my parents’ lives. After infertility treatments and In-Vitro, my mother had twins two years after adopting me! One of them is just like my mother (Blaire), and the other (Brooke) just like my father...and then there is me. As I have grown, developed opinions and made life decisions, it has been challenging to be wired quite differently than the rest of my family.

Yet even when I have felt insecure or misunderstood, God has been faithful to show His wisdom and purpose. I want to briefly share a tremendous blessing the Lord gave me this year. This past January, God graciously orchestrated the meeting of my birthmother. It was a beautiful time and I will never forget what it felt like to finally be reunited with the woman that loved me enough to give me life. In sharing with each other the events and details of the past 25 years, so many amazing works of God were revealed. It would take pages and pages to share all that he has done through an unplanned pregnancy and a decade of infertility. Despite the somewhat painful circumstances, God can bless the hearts of many through adoption. How deep is the Father’s love for us and how great is His infinite wisdom! May I encourage you to look to Him for answers and trust in His glorious plan.

Gratefully adopted by Him,

- Hope Gresham
Birmingham, Alabama, USA

