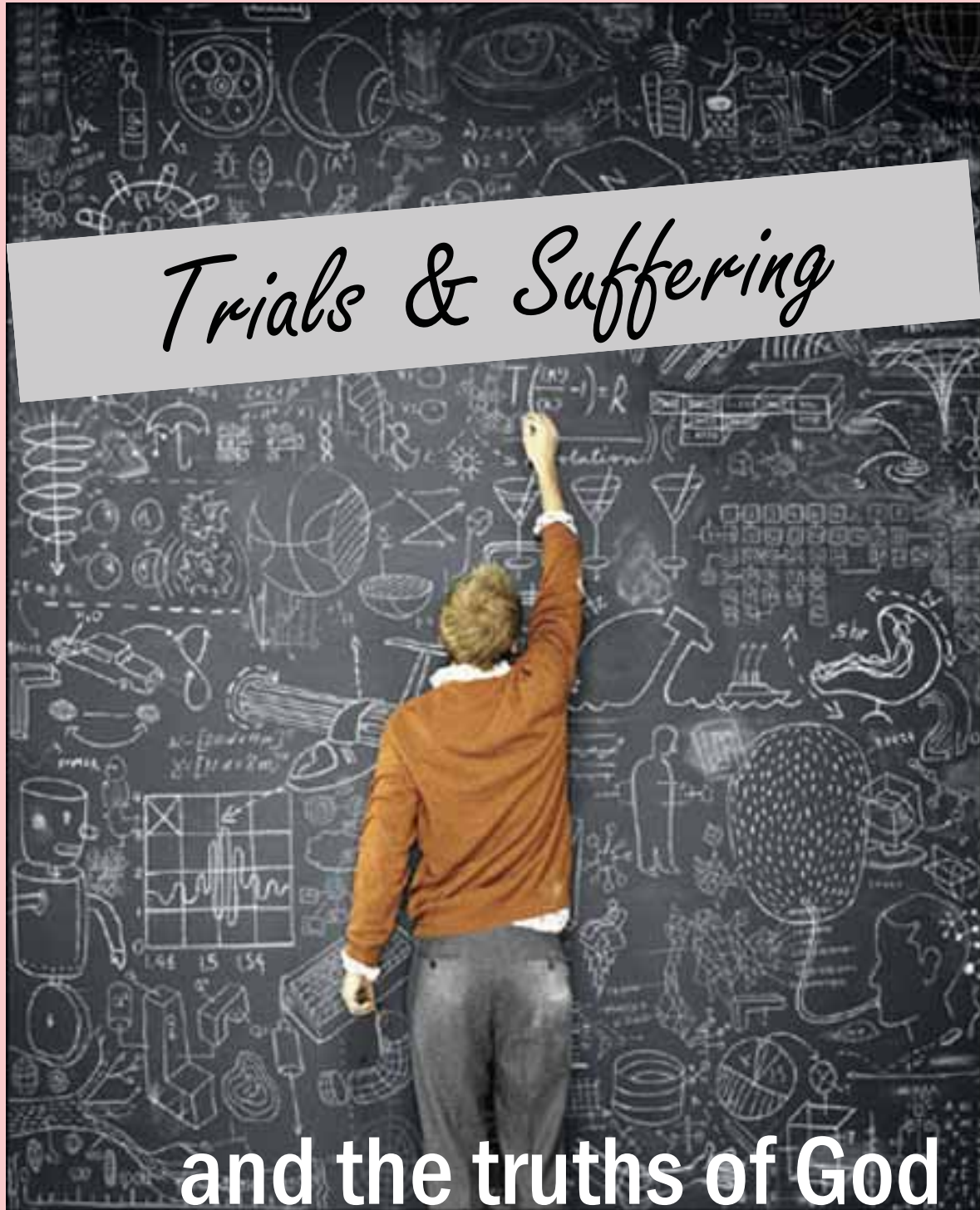


the **+**Helper

June 2010

The Magazine for Women
Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand



Trials & Suffering

and the truths of God

GPCNZ Women share their stories of journeys through pain
Cancer ■ Loss ■ Death ■ Despair ■ Aria in America

Contents

Inside this Issue:

	Editorial	2
	The Challenge Of The Senior Years	3
	My Journey Through Breast Cancer	4 - 5
	Letter to a Dear Friend	6 - 7
	Ashley's Testimony	8
	Northern Presbytery International Night	8
	Redeemer Girls	9
	Dunedin Coffee Group	9
	Ethics Seminar	10
	Book Review: "One Year of Dinner Table Devotions and Discussion Starters"	10
	Book Review: "A Grace Disguised"	11
	Aria in America	12
	In Brief: News & Prayer Points from around the Country	13 - 15
	The Back Page: Photos of International Night	16

Editorial

Most of us have heard the saying, "You are what you eat". While what we eat does have a tremendous impact upon our general well-being, something that has an even greater impact upon our lives is what we think about. Recently I read this statement: "The ultimate freedom we have as human beings is the power to select what we will allow our mind to dwell upon". Think about this for a moment. The ability to think and to control what we think about sets us apart from the animal kingdom and is part of what it means to be made in the image of God. The Apostle Paul challenges us to think upon whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8); telling us to "set your minds on things above, not on earthly things" (Colossians 3:1-2).

As followers of Jesus Christ we need to recognise the power and influence of our mind and the utter necessity of its renewal if we are going to break the habits of our sinful nature and begin to live as citizens in the Kingdom of God. One area where we are all deeply challenged is in our attitude towards suffering and trials when they come into our lives. Are we going to allow our minds to get dragged down in self-pity and despair, feeling hard-done-by because of our situation? Or will we adopt the attitude reflected in the Psalms where in the midst of struggle the writer frequently cries out in deep faith and trust despite

his circumstances. For example: "When I am afraid, I will trust in you . . . in God I trust; I will not be afraid" (Psalm 56:3-4); and, "Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall . . . But as for me I will trust in you." (Psalm 55:22-23)

Those of you who have been following Aria MacDonald's website (www.aria.org.nz) will recognise that again and again Hamish and Anita have taken this stand of faith and have filled their minds with the truths of God even in the midst of their deep pain.

In this issue of *The Helper* we have focused on the theme of suffering and trials as it is expressed in various real life situations. We are grateful to those who have shared something of their journeys and pain. Our prayer is that these articles will encourage you as you face your own situations. We earnestly long that you also will take hold of God, filling your mind with His truths and finding your strength in Him. It is lives lived in such faith and trust that will speak to an unbelieving world of the reality of Jesus Christ and open doors for witness.

On behalf of *The Helper* Team.

- Nola Young

Ladies

The Challenge of the Senior Years

Anne Camp recently had the pleasure of spending a morning with George and Mary McKenzie to gain an insight into what life is like in the senior years. George and Mary are a delightful couple in their 80's who are a great encouragement to all who meet them. George is a retired pastor, wonderfully supported by his wife Mary, and they worship at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Auckland.

I asked George and Mary the following questions:

What particular blessings and challenges have you found in your senior years?

We were looking forward to the retirement years as it would free up more time for us to devote to the church. Previously, George had worked as a schoolteacher and pastored a church at the same time. Although we had both experienced health issues before retirement (George had a heart attack and bypass surgery, and Mary had breast cancer) we were in good health. Initially, there was a period of adjustment as we gave up some responsibilities (Mary missed teaching her Sunday school class and Bible-In-Schools) but we were able to enjoy time in some new activities. We started researching family history and this led to two trips overseas to England, Scotland and Northern Ireland as well as Denmark, where our son lives. It was greatly satisfying to visit the land of our forbears and to discover that many of our relatives were believers. We both feel that the greatest challenge is to remain active, both physically and spiritually and to continue to be involved in the church family. As we get older we seem to spend more of our time going to doctors and clinics and we have both needed operations and are not as mobile as we once were.

Are there particular actions/disciplines that have enabled you to face these challenges?

We believe it is really important for older folk to maintain as much interest in the outside world as possible. George still loves to plant a vegetable garden (although he sits on a seat for much of the time) and is grateful for his grandson's aid. We both do a crossword puzzle in the mornings which keeps us mentally stimulated. We like to continue doing as much as possible in the house although we have homehelp for some tasks. We participate in keep fit exercises for the elderly as much as our physical limitations allow. When George has been in hospital he prays that the Lord would either help him to be a useful witness to Christ or take him home. Each time in hospital he has had the wonderful privilege of sharing the good news of Christ with some of the nurses. Both of us believe that the retirement years are a wonderful opportunity to be intercessors for Christ. We can still be active for Christ through the ministry of prayer when physical limitations sometimes restrict our other activities. Currently we are having discussions with the family about our living situation and we are exploring options of living in an extended family situation in the future.

Have there been specific temptations that you have faced that were not so obvious in earlier life?

The greatest temptation would probably be to just sit back and take it easy. However we find that although it may sometimes be an effort to go out, the rewards far exceed the effort. We regularly attend Bible studies, home-group and outings for seniors and George has a special responsibility for helping to organize and sometimes lead the midweek service for seniors. We continue to study the Scriptures and enjoy vigorous discussions with others on Christian themes.

Are there particular Scriptures that have brought encouragement to you?

1 Peter 1 about the trials of life always encourages us and also the great prophecy chapters of Isaiah 52 and 53 which are completely fulfilled in Christ. The constant refrain in Isaiah where the Lord says, "I will be with you", which assures us of God's presence with his people is a great comfort. God continues to bring us fresh insight into his Word. Recently we have studied Exodus and Revelation and have learnt so much about God's sovereignty.

What ways can the Christian community support seniors?

It is important for the church family to continue to include us as much as possible. We really enjoy interacting with people of all ages and love to see a new generation of children growing up in the church. Mary finds it a special blessing to be part of a Ladies Bible Study group that is for women of all ages and to be part of a Spiritual Mothering group where she can get to know other women in a more informal setting. Regularly praying for seniors in the worship service reminds older folk that they are still an important part of God's family. Older folk really value a visit by their elder and older men in particular need to be encouraged to press on with the spiritual discipline of feeding regularly on God's Word. Women in the church can be a wonderful support in helping others in the home with tasks that they simply can't manage any more and the church family can be a great help in transporting people for doctor's visits and hospital appointments.

"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:25



MY journey THROUGH breast cancer

It is indeed a journey as many people tell you, but my testimony to date is that God has graciously met us along the road, blessed us, provided for us, encouraged us and restored me to a right relationship with Him. I trust that in sharing our story you might also be encouraged and full of praise that we have a Heavenly Father who is loving and faithful to all.

The journey began in 2008 when we were facing the inevitable - our eldest daughter Rebecca was in her final year at school and was preparing to leave home in the coming year. Like most parents, we were anxious about her leaving home and how well she would cope in Dunedin. One of my frustrations was realising those precious years of having Rebecca in our home were coming to an end and I found myself asking the question, "Had I modelled true Christian faith to her on a daily basis?" As I thought more of this I realised how discontented I was in my relationship with the Lord. I felt I was not doing a good job as a Christian wife, mother and school teacher. Over the years many so called 'important' things had silently crept into my life that had caused clutter and left less room for God. Many of these things started with good intentions. However, looking back, if they were not from God they then had drawn me away from Him. I remember calling out to the Lord because I felt my faith was not real - it was just part of my life.

Well, God answered that prayer in the form of breast cancer. I found all those things that I thought were important and that had taken up so much time in my life, now meant nothing and could do nothing for me in this time of crisis. What did matter is that I had faith in a God who is real. In His love and kindness He allowed this to happen and lovingly provided for me and my family in ways that I could have never imagined.

The week I was diagnosed our two daughters were away at a netball tournament. It was important for us to get through to them to tell them the news before the texts! That morning for my devotions I read Psalm 34. I felt God speak to me directly through His Word and provide me with the strength I needed for the day. Experiencing the power of His Word in that situation encouraged me to realise that God was going on this journey with me. When I told the girls, there were tears and panic but then I shared with them Psalm 34 and again I saw God speaking through His Word to the girls. They too became calm and encouraged that we were not facing this alone. This was a precious time for me realising that God, in His love, would also meet the needs of my family.

Many people were saddened by our news and some even angry. What I found strengthened me was **not focusing on the problem but on the purpose** for this suffering (Phillip Yancy's book, 'Where Is God When It Hurts?'). And that I already knew - to bring me into a right relationship with God, one that I had been craving for but looking for in the wrong places.

The weeks ahead again saw God demonstrate His love and faithfulness. Surgery went very well and I recovered well. I was very aware of God's blessing on me physically and our family at that time. A few weeks after surgery we had an appointment with the oncology department. It was there that I learned that the cancer had spread to my lung. This was a devastating blow as the doctors told me they could now no longer heal my cancer but would try to control any further spread. They used words like **aggressive** and **unfortunate** which didn't help in trying to keep a positive outlook!

The next morning both Hugh and I felt a real urgency to get up and read and pray. God drew us to Proverbs 3:5-6, "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways commit to the Lord and he will make your path straight.*" We had learnt these verses as children through Sunday School and yet that morning again I experienced God talking to me and strengthening me. I began to realise that in recovering from surgery so well I had started to look to myself to beat this cancer through keeping fit, eating healthy food and maintaining a positive attitude. Despite all that I had experienced about God's love and faithfulness, I had returned to trusting in His gifts and not the Giver.

Having the cancer on my lung took away those things that I had trusted in and made me seek the Lord daily. It also helped me again to look beyond the problem and to His purposes. This meant facing up to the real possibility of a premature death. Over those weeks of chemotherapy the reality of death was very real and at times there were many anxious nights. Again God was my source of strength and peace as He sent other people to help in those times to remind me I was not walking this path alone. Along the

journey God sends His 'angels' to keep us looking on His face. One such example was a radiographer named Cheryl. I was going for a bone scan and after knowing it had spread to my lungs, I was not too sure I wanted to go looking elsewhere! I remember being anxious that day but on walking into the unit I was immediately struck by the kindness in the radiographer's face. The procedure takes about 45 minutes and early on I had a real sense that I needed to tell this lady I was a Christian. The opportunity came and I was able to share with her my belief. She told me that she too was a Christian and then we talked all through the scan!! She was so encouraging. At the end of the scan she pushed the machine away and asked if she could pray for me! Hugh met me after that scan and said my face was radiant, like in Psalm 34 and it was not the drugs!

I later found out that Cheryl was not from Invercargill but had been flown down that week because the usual radiographer was ill and they could not get a replacement locally! I knew God had sent her to meet me and encourage me along the journey! Breast Cancer is often described as a journey but when you are a Christian you have a guide, the Lord Jesus Christ, who has walked the path before you and will not only guide you but also send people to encourage you along the way.

In February 2009 I finished chemotherapy and started on hormone treatment. Chemotherapy treatment was not easy but each day I had to learn to look to the Lord to provide and to be able to rest in His arms knowing that *"In all things God works together for good to those that love him and are called according to his purposes"* (Rom 8:28). The peace that comes from knowing God as a God of love and that He is in control even when you feel like you could shatter at any time astounded me and brought me into a deeper relationship with my Lord that I have never known before.

The hormone treatment consists of taking a simple little tablet once a day! However there is a page and a half of side effects that go with it along with some horror stories of how some women have suffered on this treatment. I gave thanks to the Lord for this treatment and asked for the strength to be able to cope with the possible side effects. Besides my thermostat rising slightly (which is not a bad thing when you live in Southland) and a disturbed sleep pattern, I have not suffered any of the side effects that I was warned about! I am very thankful to the Lord for this.

Many people have commented on how well I look and I have enjoyed getting back into sports, part time work and enjoying my family life. Personally I feel I have been blessed by the Lord. I really enjoy good health and have never been a good patient but I am thankful to the Giver of good health and not just the gift of good health. This was brought home to me not so long ago while awaiting my oncology check up. This had always been an anxious time and it struck me that even though I had been following a healthy diet (even drinking carrot juice!), exercising regularly, and keeping calm none of these

things could give me any assurance or peace that all would be well. Again I was reminded of the importance of trusting in the Lord and not leaning on my own understanding.

Where am I at today? My last scan showed, to the surprise of the medical staff, nothing on my lungs!! While they will not give me the 'all clear' they were certainly surprised at how good the result was. I believe God has done immeasurably more than we could ask.

While this has been great news it is not my greatest joy. My real joy comes from having faith in a God who is real and alive. I have seen God work graciously in the lives of my children, using the breast cancer to make their faith real to them. I have seen our church, the body of Christ, come together and pray and know God in a closer way. I have had so many opportunities to share the goodness of God to people in my community and have been excited to do so. And I have seen a restored relationship between myself, my husband and my children.

The greater healing that I have known is being restored into a right relationship with my Lord. When I look back I realise that I had pulled away from God and yet He lovingly restored that relationship and even provided for me on this journey in ways that I pray I will never forget how great is our God.

Many of you reading this will have prayed for me and my family and I want to thank you all for your prayers and support, they have meant so much to us as a family. But mostly I would like to think that you too will rejoice with me in the knowledge that we serve a God who is loving and faithful and hears us when we call upon His name. Psalm 34:4, *"I sought the Lord and he answered me; He delivered me from all my fears."*

- Jayne Diack
Wyndham Evangelical Church

Jayne, married to Hugh, lives on a sheep farm in the Wyndham district. They have four children, of whom two are currently studying at University.



Letter to a Dear Friend

Recently, my friend said to me (after having finished doing all my vacuuming, bathroom cleaning and washing of floors!), "Imagine I was sick from a long term illness. What would you say to me to encourage me?" So emerged the following letter:

My Dear Friend,

I was indeed grieved to hear of the onset of this illness and know that the journey ahead is not going to be an easy one for you. I would like to share with you some things that have encouraged me along the road as I too have gone through some prolonged patches of poor health.

Firstly let me say – do not be afraid and do not fear what is ahead. It has been during those times of sickness and great weakness that God has been the most real to me and where I have learned my deepest lessons of what it means to walk by faith in the Son of God. Indeed I can say with the psalmist, "It was good for me to be afflicted, so that I might learn your decrees" (Ps 119:71). How thankful I am that God in His mercy has enabled me to profit from these times. Anticipate with excitement that this can be a period of great growth spiritually and that God has good things in store for you. God does not make mistakes in what He sends us!

Foundational truths about God such as; He is trustworthy, all wise, all loving, get tested to the core on these occasions and become lifelines for holding onto for the long haul. Will I believe them, or will I cast them aside and allow anger and frustration to reign? Making a conscious decision to trust God no matter what, becomes a key to contentment and peace in the midst of struggle.

One of the challenges of chronic illness is its enduring nature and the uncertainty of its end, if ever, this side of heaven. A broken leg has a set timetable in the vast majority of cases. It is also easy for others to see that you are injured and they know that in a few weeks or maybe months the plaster will come off. After some rehabilitation all should be as good as new. But other conditions are not so obvious. The days drag into weeks, into months, into years! Your life is on hold, while all around you, others are getting on with theirs. How are we to be sustained? Again I found a key to this in Psalm 119:92: "Unless your Law had been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction". We can expand 'the law' here to mean all of God's Word. I decided to grasp these times as times when I could soak in God's Word. How often as a busy wife and mother I struggled to find time to be still before

the Lord. Now here before me was time without end... time when I could do nothing else! Some days I could not even read and then I would just have to lie content in the knowledge that my God knew what He was doing. 'Being' rather than 'doing' became central – and that was no easy thing for me to learn. By nature, I like to be active and find a sense of accomplishment when I am able to tick off things from my 'to do' list! Coming to the end of the day and knowing that I had done 'nothing' (as far as worldly attainments go) was okay. If my heart had stayed fixed in quiet trust upon the Lord, then that was a sweet smelling sacrifice to Him. I found music would often minister to me – especially Christian songs. How often the words would lift me up and allow my heart to worship and be filled with thanks to God.

I realised too that I can not look sideways. It is so easy to look at others and think "why me?" or "how come her recovery was so much quicker?" and so on. God wants us to look only to Him. He has marked out a race for each of us (Heb. 12:1). During one period, I received tremendous comfort from considering Jesus' words just before he went to the cross "Shall I not drink the cup which my Father has given me?" (John 18:11). For me, this was my cup for this period of time, but it was given to me by my Father, who loved me dearly and wanted the very best for me. This is my cup. He has another for the other person. And for my cup He promises me grace and strength to keep trusting, my eyes fixed on Him.

"Making a conscious decision to trust God no matter what, becomes a key to contentment and peace in the midst of struggle."

Sometimes it is harder watching how our own illness affects the other members of our family. For some of my times of sickness the children were young. How was it going to affect them? I was not being able to be the mother to them that I wanted. What about my husband? It was so easy to feel that I was letting him down. You may have other concerns relating to your loved ones. For all of these we have to lay them out before the Lord and then roll those burdens onto Him. Again we have to trust Him that He also loves our families and knows what He is doing. And God worked in so many wonderful

ways to make these times of profit to my family as well. For my children it was used as a key factor in drawing them closer to Himself. How exciting it was to see how God did provide for the children and meet their needs. How grateful I am for the 'borrowed mothers' who stepped in and supplied what I could not.

There are many humbling things that get learned during such times. Becoming dependent on others is never easy and yet for me learning to be dependent has been an

important step to learning deeper dependence upon the Lord. Jesus tells us again and again that “without Him we can do nothing” (John 15). It is easy to say that in theory, but in times of much weakness, we begin to learn it on a practical, daily basis. For me, that learning of physical dependence became a doorway to experiencing the depths of the grace of God for which I am so thankful.

Do not be afraid to ask for help. For most of us this is not an easy thing. So often people want to help but simply do not know how, so asking for things that you actually need help with is easier than leaving them to guess. Yes, it is humbling asking someone to come and clean your toilets but I learned that it is good for the breaking down of pride!

Loneliness can be a real challenge at times, especially if you have only a very small network of contacts and no family close by. People may want to come and visit yet they are afraid to in case they make you too tired. It is helpful to be honest. Ask people to ring beforehand to find out what time would suit best. It is not easy to say, “you need to go now, I am losing it”, but sometimes we need to do that. Maybe getting another member of the family to help in this can make it easier. I found it a comfort to realise that Jesus in the time leading up to his darkest hour wanted his friends to be with him. And again and again at the times of most need, the Lord would provide, often in unexpected ways.

Try to keep an outward focus. There are still other people out there who need your prayers. Maybe this time will make you more aware of someone else who is lonely or struggling with their own situation. On a better day, why not pick up the phone and ring them or write a short note. You may not be able to be active in ministry ‘out there’ at this time, but if you are accepting by faith and trust your present situation then that is all that God asks. I love the words that Jesus spoke concerning Mary when she poured the alabaster jar of perfume on him at Bethany: “She did what she could” (Mark 14:8). God

knows very well our situation and does not expect us to do what we cannot do. But this less active time can become an opportunity for prayer for all sorts of ministry needs. There have been many faithful prayer warriors over the years who never left their homes but who prayed steadfastly and saw God answer in mighty ways.

“A grumbling spirit is not only displeasing to the Lord, it makes life miserable for everyone.”

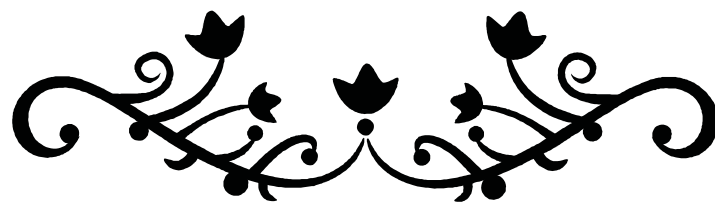
And endeavour to keep a thankful spirit and one that expresses appreciation. This makes the task of caring for you so much easier. A grumbling spirit is not only displeasing to the Lord, it makes life miserable for everyone.

Recently I read this by A W Pink in his little book on the life of Elijah; “Faith is not occupied with difficulties, but with Him with whom all things are possible. Faith is not occupied with circumstances, but with the God of circumstances.” (pg 67). We do well if we can keep this approach in all of our struggles.

Well my dear friend, I will be praying for you and look forward to hearing what great things that Lord is doing in your life and trust that in His mercy He will indeed restore to good health. There are many other things that I could share, but they will have to wait until another opportune time. I will close with a favourite verse that encouraged me on many an occasion: “And the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To Him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 5:10-11)

- Nola Young
Wyndham Evangelical Church

Nola and her husband Andrew currently live in Wyndham with their youngest son John.



“God's love for us is not a love that exempts us from trials, but rather, a love that sees us through trials.” - Anonymous

Ashley's Testimony

Ashley Smith was one of the group of students from Elim Christian College, Auckland who went canyoning in the Mangetepopo Gorge in April 2008. Below is her testimony which she shared with students who attended Excel Camp this year.

Life is full of hardships and trials. I know that all of you here have been through your own troubles.

Deuteronomy 31:6 says, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

One morning, Tuesday 15th April 2008, I felt God urge me to open my Bible. I was at camp with the rest of the Year 12's from my school, Elim Christian College. That morning I skipped breakfast, went to the lounge and opened my Bible to that verse. I didn't know it, but God was preparing me for what was to happen.

That Tuesday afternoon, our group went canyoning in the Mangetepopo Gorge. That day my life turned upside down. My group was caught in an unexpected flood. Out of our group of 12, seven passed away. They drowned. Those seven were Tom, Tara, Floyd, Portia, Anthony, Natasha and our 'Christian Living' teacher, Tony McClean. What it says in Deuteronomy is true. God will never leave us nor forsake us. No matter how alone we feel, no matter what, God is always there.

I just felt God place this on my heart to share with you this evening. Someone this morning said that there is nothing that you and God cannot handle together. Still today I ask God, why? Why did they die? Why did I survive? Why did Peter, Sarah, Kish and Jodie survive? I prayed and cried and prayed some more and then Christ lead me to a verse that I knew well. It was our school motto: "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a future and a hope." Jeremiah 29:11.

When I asked God why I was still here, again He replied. He said, "Child, I placed you here for a reason. You weren't ready to meet me yet. I have other plans for you. You may not yet know what my will for you is, but you will. I don't promise that it will be easy but it will be rewarding."

I just want you all to know that you are here on this earth for a reason. And I urge you to listen to God's call and follow Him for He has something in store for everyone.

- Ashley Smith
Trinity Presbyterian Church



international night

The International Night was a fun event for ladies and girls from Auckland congregations of the Northern Presbytery to get together to share with one another about their culture.

There were many varieties of table displays, which showed how different we are within our churches yet we are all one in Christ. The countries that were represented were Chad, China, England, Fiji, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Maori, Netherlands, Portugal, Samoa, South Africa, Switzerland, and USA.

At the Chinese table they had Chinese writing, which you could do with a brush and traditional ink. I learnt how to write the word 'China'. Sushi was presented in a traditional Japanese lunchbox. We were able to sample it – yum. Swiss chocolate was great too. Wearing brightly coloured Korean traditional dress, Deborah Song and her friend looked beautiful. Mum liked chatting with Joyce Hogg about a

particular 'place of refuge' in England. The door was enormous and the doorknocker was the size of your head.

I borrowed a puipui and we did a Maori table. Nana made fried bread and my cousin and I made poi. My friends helped present a Dutch table. They had a really cool game like a bowling alley. You try to get disks into the four holes at the end.

Then we had devotions from Mirelle Cross. She was born in France, a missionary in Chad and now lives in New Zealand: a real cultural mix. Valiantly attempting to sing "God Is So Good" in seven different languages provided us with much tongue exercise and was a fun way to conclude the evening.

- Miriama Rakete
Redeemer Presbyterian Church
(see photos on back page)



Redeemer Girls



It's a scientific fact: women use less energy talking than men do. Their shorter vocal chords not only make their voices higher pitched but they also require less oxygen to vibrate, making it easier for women to talk than men.

This was one topic of conversation in our Bible study on "Taming the Tongue" as part of our newly commenced study group with the teenage girls at Redeemer Church.

The study, aimed at girls both from church families and those from the community, seeks to answer the question: What does being a Christian look like in everyday life as a teenager growing up in South Auckland?

When considering topics for the group, Joanne Ennion and I were convinced that some serious time was needed to look at issues these girls face in everyday life. Over the past

few years at Redeemer, we have had studies looking at theology and how to become a Christian. However, if asked how to relate that to their lives in high school, many of the girls are stuck.

Can I have a boyfriend? Why shouldn't I sleep with him like everyone else is? Why can't I swear? What does my relationship with my parents and friends have to do with my relationship with God? These are some of the questions we have been seeking to answer – over a bowl of popcorn or a plate of hot cookies of course!! Continue to pray that the girls' hearts will be open to hearing the gospel and applying it to their lives, and that those who do not know God yet will come into a real relationship with Him.

- *Deborah Young*
Redeemer Presbyterian Church

Dunedin Coffee Group



In 2009 my life changed – I became a mother. After being a full-time worker for many years it was a huge adjustment. I often wondered what women did at "coffee mornings", thinking that life as a stay-at-home mum sounded very relaxed. I now realise that instead of being a luxury or mother's indulgence, a coffee group where Christian mums meet together is a necessity. We miss out on so much in those first few months and years – adult conversation, Bible studies, prayer meetings and even just the

opportunity to get out of the house. Sometimes we are so focused on being mums that we can not think about anything else. It is so important to consider other things such as 'what are you reading?' or 'what questions have made you think lately?'.

Dunedin Grace Bible Church has a coffee group for mums every Tuesday morning. We start by sitting around the table with a cuppa and something to eat. Even though we can not really explore a Bible passage in depth while

feeding babies, consoling crying infants and with the noise of children playing, we bring along a question to discuss or something that has spoken to us in our own personal devotions. We spend time sharing ideas and experiences. We then talk about any prayer needs and end with a time of prayer.

As a new member to the group I have found these mornings really valuable. I have the opportunity to build relationships with other mums by connecting through mutual understanding and honest, open conversations. We provide support to one another and get to spend some much needed time considering God's Word. My daughter also gets the opportunity to play with the other kids, who I pray will become her close friends in years to come. This group is a blessing and encouragement to us all.

- *Rachel Roff*
Grace Bible Church, Dunedin

Ethics Seminar

If you had visited Covenant Church, Manurewa on Saturday 10 April you would have heard some big words: utilitarianism, beneficence, consequentialism, eugenics, assisted reproduction and others. Sandy Oster, a very experienced nurse who has come from the USA to help with City Presbyterian Church Plant in Auckland, was conducting a seminar on "Life and Death Issues".

What relevance can that have to everyday life? Well quite a lot. Ethical views can affect how we and our loved ones are treated, especially at crucial times of conception, illness and death. While confessing to not having all the answers and that many of these issues are difficult (with no Bible concordance reference for many modern technologies), Sandy was able to helpfully guide the group through some important issues.

First she looked at some general ethical principles that help us to understand why certain decisions are made. Secondly she looked at some of the newer technologies around assisted reproduction and cloning. She highlighted that these technologies have often been developed out of a desire to help people, but we have to use biblical principles to evaluate them. Thirdly she explained some end of life issues and legalities. She stressed the importance of having as much information

as possible to enable good health decisions, knowing about the goals of treatment and being clear on what treatment you want near end of life.

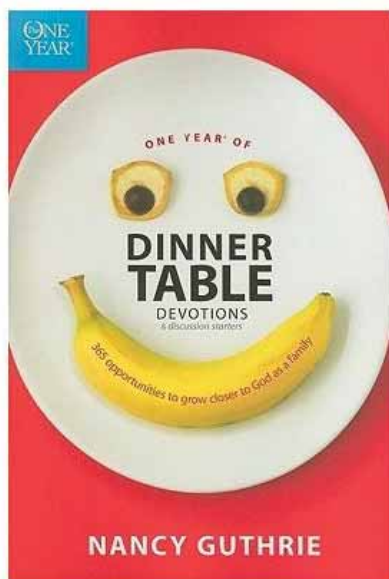
This seminar was a good opportunity to raise questions and gain more clarity on often confusing issues. It was also encouraging to see how someone's professional expertise could be used to encourage and help the church family.

- Katherine Young,
Redeemer Presbyterian Church



Book Review

"One Year of Dinner Table Devotions & Discussion Starters"



One Year of Dinner Table Devotions & Discussion Starters: 365 Opportunities to Grow Closer to God as a Family.

Nancy Guthrie, Tyndale House, 2008

Here is a family devotional book that you can use no matter what age your children are. In fact anyone from 5 years to 90 years can participate! Rather than focusing

on either Bible stories or practical moral lessons, this book discusses biblical themes, concepts and words in ways that children can understand, but without being too simple for either adults or teens. Nancy starts with looking at the big picture of what God is doing in the world and His purpose and plans in creation and redemption. She then covers the attributes of God, major

theological concepts such as justification, redemption, covenant, adoption and other spiritual realities such as hell and angels.

Each day is structured around a short devotion with three supporting scripture passages. There are three discussion questions at the end designed to promote good family discussion. The first question is fairly straight forward and can be answered by the youngest child. It also aims to get everyone talking about their own thoughts and experiences. The other two questions are more complex and encourage honest sharing as you seek to apply biblical truths to daily life.

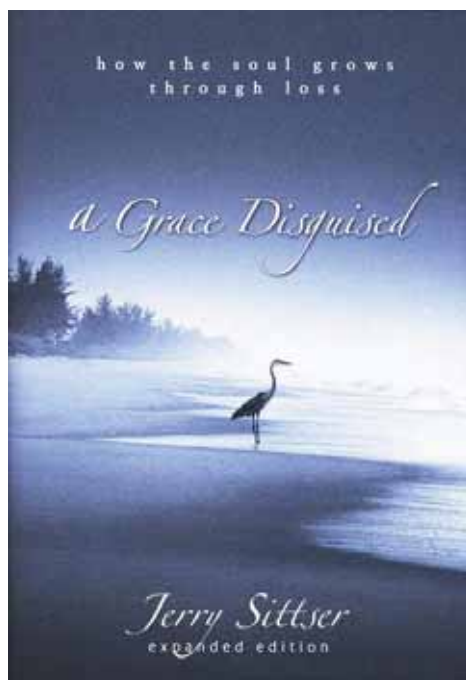
Nancy has a deep grasp of theology and her passion for sharing God's Word is reflected in her writing. Our family has found this devotional book to be refreshing, stimulating and challenging but very practical and relevant to daily living.

- Reviewed by Anne Camp
Covenant Presbyterian Church

(You can check out the introduction and the first ten devotionals from the book at www.nancyguthrie.com)

Book Review

“A Grace Disguised” by Jerry Sittser



A Grace Disguised
Jerry Sittser, Zondervan, 1995, 2004

When Jerry Sittser’s wife, mother, and four year old daughter were tragically killed in 1991, after a head on car crash with a drunken driver, his world came crashing down. He not only had to deal with an unbelievable loss but he was also faced with the care of his three surviving children: Catherine (8), David (7) and John (2).

This bereaved man then began a journey into the unknown; a journey that would lead him through the

valley of tears into a place of real transformation and eventually to a place of accepting that God does indeed work in mysterious ways.

This journey involved all those aspects of grief and loss experienced by those who suffer any kind of tragedy. During a lifetime all of us suffer loss of one kind or another. Jerry Sittser says, “It is not . . . the *experience* of loss that becomes the defining moment of our lives . . . It is how we *respond* to loss that matters.”

Jerry Sittser experienced the shock, darkness and pain of sudden loss. He talks of turning towards his pain rather than away from it. This involved allowing himself to grieve; to cry without restraint or embarrassment and to permit “one wave of sorrow after another” as he remembered each person he had lost. He overcame the darkness by entering into it and feeling sorrow thereby “learning wisdom and growing in character”. He realized that to run from the darkness would only lead to greater tragedy. This led in some paradoxical way to growth.

This growth came about in many ways. He developed a new confidence in God. He no longer took any part of his life for granted. In opening up his grief to others, he allowed them to

both mourn with him and to help him in the extra tasks of caring for his children and home. He was willing to admit that he had failed as a father but now he began to see the ways in which he could fulfill this role as he gave his children freedom to face their pain and grief.

Another aspect of facing loss is the myriad of questions that come. Which losses are worse than others, or can or should they be compared? What about the randomness of loss; why this person and at this time? What of the issues of justice? Can we expect that those who have taken a life should be penalized and what happens if justice is not seen to be done?

To make sense of it all the author points to Jesus Christ who on the Cross defeated sin and death and bore all our grief, and ultimately is the only source of hope in this valley of tears.

A Grace Disguised is one of the best books I have read on grief and loss. It reinforced to me that any difficulty in life needs to be faced, so that the grace of God which is given in struggle, does its perfect work.

- Reviewed by Margaret Reynolds
Covenant Presbyterian Church

“But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” - C. S. Lewis

Aria in America

What happens when things don't go to plan? Welcome to America!

We arrived safely and touched down in the Land of the Free: Omaha, Nebraska, to be exact, just before a snow storm (the first of many). We arrived in December and Aria was placed on the organ waiting list just three days later. Two months later she received her gift of life, a new intestine, two kidneys, a liver and pancreas. She was saved! - In the physical sense anyway. That is what I thought while we slept during the night while her surgery was taking place. Most parents cannot sleep but we rested peacefully knowing our girl was finally getting those new organs that she needed to live.

I won't go too much into the story before and after transplant as it is a long and complex one which could probably take up the whole issue of *The Helper* plus more! Personally I found the American culture to be vastly different in many ways to New Zealand and I have struggled with this new and perhaps harsher country I find myself in. Many troubling things have happened to us on top of our daughter being extremely sick and having a multi organ transplant! It was and is a time that can only be described as a spiritual assault designed, we believe, to crush us and our faith.

That faith was tested even more when reality came crashing home less than six weeks after transplant. Aria had been taken to surgery and opened up not once but ten times during those first weeks. Each surgery was to fix holes in her new intestine or wash out her abdominal cavity as she fought infection. It was a hard battle those first weeks. Later they decided to do another biopsy of her intestine to see how it was doing. The results were shocking and devastating - her bowel had no lining. Aria's body had attacked and rejected the very organ that was to save her.

Her transplant had failed. She was not saved.

The surgeon came in and gave me the news. Hamish returned with Asher and I gave him the news. I spent the next week crying every night. The days were busy and I kept it together but at night I cried. Cried for the fact we would have to ask our government for more money for another shot at transplant, cried at the intensely lonely journey this was, cried at the complete madness of having to do this not once but twice.

There was a moment during that week as I sat and cried bitter tears that I found myself saying emphatically to Hamish, "God is still Good, He is still Good". I was not telling Hamish but rather myself as I knew a part of me wanted to get mad and tell God He was wrong and I was very mad with Him. But God is still good, of course, and we really have to believe the 'all' in Romans 8:28 really does mean ALL.

Job 5:8-9

But if it were I, I would appeal to God;
I would lay my cause before him.
He performs wonders that cannot be
fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted.

Humanly speaking Aria is in a very tight spot, but we know God can do amazing things. We stand in faith knowing He is capable of fully healing and restoring Aria, even without a second transplant.

Psalm 27:13-14

I am still confident of this
I will see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the FREE
Wait for the Lord;
be strong and take heart
and wait for the Lord.

I changed the word living to FREE. But this is a beautiful verse that fully captures our thinking in this dark and difficult time. Waiting has become the theme of our life. Many people wait for many things, but waiting for decisions that will decide whether your child lives or dies is perhaps the hardest type of waiting. We waited for a top up of government funding which we received and as I sit here and type this we wait for a call for organs and a second transplant. A call meaning the life of one child has ended and their parents have made a difficult but kind decision to give my child life. We also wait to see what comes first, that call or the decline of Aria's health through infection and full rejection of her organs which would lead to her passing.

I would just love to know the point of all this pain right now. We keep clinging tight to God and not because we have this amazing faith but because it is the only option and the only thing I know to be true when everything else is wrong. If you are waiting for something or there is pain in your life, God is real. Ask and He will do something real in your life. I hope Aria's life and her struggle and our struggle alongside her can encourage you. This story is only just beginning.

Update: Aria has received her second set of organs on 9th May - see www.aria.org.nz for reports on her progress.

- Anita MacDonald
Omaha, Nebraska, USA

News & Prayer Points from around the Country

While not all our congregations feature in this edition, please still be faithful in praying for them in their work of the Kingdom as well as those listed below. We trust you are encouraged by what you read, gain new ideas for what would also work for you, and are helped to pray more effectively for each location.

Northern Presbytery

MANUREWA

Covenant Presbyterian Church

For a number of years at Covenant we have been encouraging women to be involved in Spiritual Mothering groups (teams of 4-5 women who meet monthly for six months of the year). The purpose is to have mixed teams of ladies from all different seasons of life getting to know one another for fellowship, prayer and encouragement in the faith. It is also a great way for new women in the church to become involved. This year the theme for the devotions is "Six Steps to Encouragement – How Words Change Lives" by Matthias Media, which challenges every Christian to speak in a way that encourages others in the message of God's grace. It has some helpful video clips on "how not to greet a stranger who comes along to church" As the church as a whole is involved in the "Introducing God" outreach meetings we thought this series was a good complement.

A new ministry that has just begun for Mums and toddlers "Music & More" is held fortnightly on Tuesdays. Here is an update from one of the women involved on the organising team.

"The time finally arrived for us to put our planning into action; last week we held our second session for the term. We have been really encouraged both by the turn out and the feedback. The mums come from different places such as Preschool, church, personal friends and other Grace churches. The first session we had 36 and last week we had 47 mums and children. We are really blessed that God has provided so many families so far, particularly some that don't attend church. A true indication that there is a real need in the community!"

As you may already know, we start off with a mini music session (some of which are Christian songs) followed by a simple craft. It has gone really well so far. We then finish off with a relaxed morning tea; a couple of wonderful ladies in church have offered to help out in the kitchen, this has been a huge help! It is also a great time (and really important time) to get to know the mums. May God use this group for His purposes and glory."

Prayer Points:

- Give thanks for God's blessings on the new 'Music & More' group. Pray that it would be a good opportu-

nity to reach out to other Mums in the community.

- Pray that the Spiritual Mothering teams would help to encourage women to learn more about being godly women and witnesses for Christ wherever God has placed them. Pray especially for the leaders, that they may know the Lord's wisdom, grace and enabling.
- Pray that the "Introducing God" series would challenge us to be willing and eager to share the gospel of Christ in appropriate ways with those that we come into contact with in our daily lives.

GISBORNE

Grace Church Gisborne

Christmas Card Making: As Christmas approached, some of the Gisborne ladies got together to make Christmas cards to give away.



95th Birthday Celebration: In February our own Ruby Williams turned 95. The seniors Growth Group met with Ruby at Dunblane Rest Home to sing Happy Birthday, sings some hymns, and eat sponge cake with jelly on top!

Prayer Points:

- For Ruby Williams in Dunblane Rest Home, for Betty Winning whose sight has mostly failed, and for Nancy Macpherson (Geoff's mum) who is awaiting a hip replacement.
- For mums with babies: Marie Macpherson with Nikau, Gabby Zyzalo with Jesse, and Amy Robertson with Sienna. Amy is now expecting her and Logan's second child.
- For Grace Church to find new ways to bring the gospel to mums in the community.

In Brief

MANGERE

Providence Presbyterian Church

We have been encouraged by having several new ladies regularly attending our fellowship and bringing along their children as well. We recently had a ladies afternoon where we looked at some of the teaching from Jerry Bridges book: *Disciplines of Grace*. We looked at the importance of the gospel in the work of sanctification as well as our salvation and the need to preach the gospel to ourselves every day. Please pray for a clear understanding of the gospel and for spiritual growth.

Central Presbytery

NEW PLYMOUTH

Grace Community Fellowship

New Plymouth Grace ladies love a good social opportunity! Start with a shared pot luck dinner demonstrating some amazing culinary skills with pizza, pasta bake, quiche and Yvonne's famous soup and rolls; throw in some cheesecake with lavishings of cream, chocolate cake, warm feijoa and apple crumble, fruit salad (for the healthy ones among us) and a tonne of chocolate; combine with a couple of hours falling in love with Mr Darcy from *Pride and Prejudice*; and you've got yourself a winner of a Saturday night.

Yvonne very kindly offered her home and flat screen TV for the occasion. I am sure my fellow sisters in faith would agree it was a very successful night of fellowship together. At GCC we are committed to developing a community of God's people and to this end we endeavour to organise social activities for our family in Christ, giving us the opportunity to bond and develop stronger relationships outside of the Sunday morning and evening services and various Bible study groups.

CHRISTCHURCH

Grace Presbyterian Church

In November, we farewelled Jeong Hee and her daughter Annie (from Korea) who have been with us for over six years. We had a lovely evening together and Jeong Hee was interviewed by Dianne Eyre. Jeong Hee told us how she came to know Jesus and how GPC had helped her grow in her faith over the years. We were all encouraged to hear her story and to realise that God holds each of us closely to Him as we take our own special journey with Him.

During Term 1 this year, we held a Bible Study on *Colossians*. We experimented with doing the same study twice during the week - one morning study (9:30am so

Mums could come on the way home from dropping children at school) and one afternoon study (1:30pm, more convenient for some ladies and also suitable to attend before collecting children from school). This worked well because it gave ladies flexibility. They could 'mix and match' their attendance without losing continuity in the study. This system was no extra work for the leader because it was the same study on consecutive days, although, it was great to see how God tailored each study to suit the particular group of ladies on the day. These studies have continued in Term 2, looking at the lives of various women in the Bible.

We finished the term with a happy evening with Mojgan and Esmail. Mojgan taught us how to cook Adas Polo which is a yummy Iranian meal. Esmail provided a very welcome taxi service up and down the hill to their home. We had a lovely mix of ladies of all ages and we all enjoyed talking and tasting. Louise gave a Bible talk which tied in our recent sermons and the Ladies Bible study.



Prayer Points:

- Sue van Rij is now studying in Wellington and enjoying being an on-site aunty. Pray that God will help her study and lead her to the job He has for her next year.
- Holly Sterne relocated to Auckland in April. We pray God's blessing upon her as she lives for Him up there.
- Trevor and Mary plan to return to Cambodia (Poipet) this July/August. Please pray for wisdom and strength for them in the heat and different culture, and that God will clearly guide them as to the work they do for Cambodia Hope Organisation.
- We are looking forward to having Rusty and Jennifer Milton, with their three children, come to be our Pastor family, maybe in July. Please pray for their preparations for moving here, and for the wider family they leave behind. (All us 'off-site' grandmas can identify with this prayer item!)
- Please pray for our elders as they continue to lead us as a Church as well as do their 'day jobs'.
- We thank God for His continuing help to each of us.

Southern Presbytery

DUNEDIN

Grace Bible Church

Give thanks for:

- Our new Ministry Centre only one block from the University. It is already being put to good use with Grace Theological College Classes and Grace Student Ministry working out of it.
- The great experiences had by some of our students involved in various mission projects over the summer. Particularly Christine Bayne, who served the Lord helping out in the Hidden Treasures Home in Fuzhou, China; and Helen Lawrence and Theresa Retief involved in a Summer Beach Mission in Nelson.

Pray for:

- The Coffee Group that meets each Tuesday seeking to be a place of refuge and encouragement to mothers during the busy years of raising young children.
- The group of young people and particularly a good bunch of girls involved in our Youth Group (Y.O.G.A). Pray for their spiritual growth but particularly that God would build up a strong leadership team to minister to them.
- Our women involved in service at GBC Dunedin from being a part of the worship team, to hosting home-groups, to serving in the kitchen each Sunday or even at church birthday's or weddings. Pray that they would be blessed and strengthened to continue joyfully in the service that God calls them to.

WYNDHAM

Wyndham Evangelical Church

'Women in the Bible' is the present focus for our Wednesday morning Bible study group. We plan to begin a Saturday morning women's prayer time on a monthly basis, followed by breakfast for those who can stay. The recent holiday programme was an encouraging time as children attended with eagerness and gave good attention during the story on the life of Gladys Aylward. A team of teachers continues to go in each week to take Bible in Schools at the local primary school and we continue to be thankful for the wonderful support the school gives to this programme.

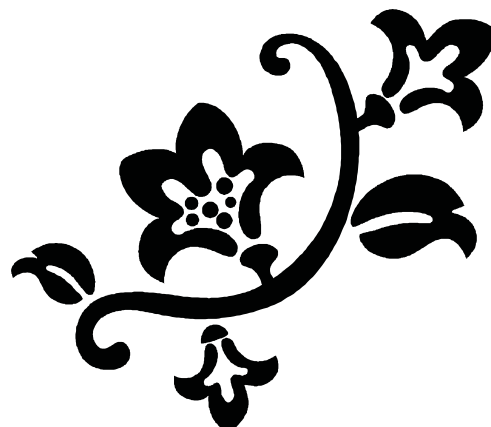
INVERCARGILL

Grace Presbyterian Church

Grace Invercargill currently has four ladies Bible study groups. All of the groups meet on a Thursday - two in the morning and two in the evening.

We are currently working our way through a topical study called "Woman of God" (a Matthias Media publication). The purpose of these studies is to clarify our identities based on our relationship with God, and as a result to be able to develop our "values and priorities with a greater sense of confidence and security". The studies start with the topic of "The Lord, my Creator" where we looked at what it means to be made in the image of God and the relationship between men and women. From there the studies guide us through the topics: Lord as Saviour, Father, Comforter, Husband, King, and being a part of His body. We are finding these studies most encouraging and challenging. We are enjoying diving into God's Word, and taking our time to mull over it.

We had our term break-up mid March. Our four groups - plus extras joined together at the church for an evening of games, chat, coffee and dessert, and a unique devotion by Bev Farlow. This was an enjoyable time where we could all mix and get to know one another a little better.



The Back Page

Photos from Northern Presbytery Ladies 'International Night'



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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