

News & Views...

to encourage and inform women involved in ministry

Issue 9 Summer 2008

I want to start this issue of News & Views by thanking Sharon James for her work both as Chair of the **FIEC** Women's Ministry Team and as editor of this publication. It is four years since the first issue was published in the summer of 2004. Sharon is now doing research and we pray she will know God's help and enabling as she studies.

The look of the publication has changed somewhat over those four years, from A4 to the more convenient A5, and it is also now enhanced with colour and pictures. Though the look has changed, the aim remains the same - to encourage and inform women involved in ministry. I personally have found it has done that for me. I have been both

challenged and encouraged as I have read of the work of a great variety of women. I have been stimulated by many of the articles and have ordered and read many of the books so helpfully reviewed.

Do you ever find that lots of different influences come together and help you to go in another direction in ministry? This has been my experience, particularly over the last year. I had heard women speaking about the value of 1to1's, I had been meeting up with someone to have a 1to1 and finding it very helpful and had been mulling over how we might get this started for others in our church. In the last issue of News & Views I read about the reading

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group that Jill Finnie is involved in in Suffolk. I also read the review of Jane McNabb's book "Daylight at Midnight" and ordered it. At last everything came together and we have recently launched "Go for growth". Interested women were asked to fill in a form stating when it would be convenient for them to meet up, they were then paired up with someone who was available at the same time. Using "Daylight at Midnight" we have established this pattern:

Week 1 - individually read a chapter, make notes, consider the questions at the end.

Week 2 - meet up, discuss what's been read, look at the questions together, pray particularly that the lessons from the chapter would be put into practice.

24 women are now involved, both young and mature Christians, ranging in age from those in their 20s to one in her 80s, who rarely leaves her home. These pairs will continue until January when people will swap around, hopefully giving others the opportunity to join the scheme. Through people just chatting about what they're learning, more have joined in.

I spend a lot of my time in ministry encouraging women to establish a regular devotional time with the Lord, a time both to draw close to him in fellowship and prayer and also a time to be fed from his Word. We recently got hold of a number of copies of "Gentle Rain on Tender Grass" by Sharon James, at a reduced rate, thanks to our

supplying bookshop. It's good to be able to chat with others about what they're reading, especially when a number of us are reading the same material, whether it's a book or notes. As well as the stimulation of discussing these things together, it's a great prompt to make sure you're keeping up with your own reading! I personally like to vary my diet, by changing what I'm using from time to time.

In

"I have been both challenged and encouraged as I have read of the work of a great variety of women."

this issue we have included a variety of material that the Women's Ministry Team find helpful, we hope you might too. As well as our normal reviews of Christian books, we've included reviews of some novels that we hope you might enjoy reading this summer. It's good to be able to bring a Christian mind to things in the secular sphere.

In this issue you'll find articles from women involved in various areas of work and ministry. Three ministers' wives show how God has led them in various ways to balance secular work with church commitments. You can read about a woman who is a Parish Nurse and another who has developed a music ministry following her time as a professional opera singer!

We hope there's something for everyone. News and Views is for you and we really appreciate any feedback or suggestions for future editions. Don't forget the helpline if you ever feel the need just to talk with someone outside your own situation.

"As well as the stimulation of discussing these things together, it's a great prompt to make sure you're keeping up with your own reading!"

PASTORAL ISSUES

Parish Nursing (for non-parish churches)

In the past decade the holistic, mental, physical and spiritual needs of the community have been recognised in a new way. Parish Nursing Ministries UK has been set up to train, equip and support believers in developing a response to this government-acknowledged need. An FIEC church, Brixworth Christian Fellowship, near Northampton has just recognised a second Parish Nurse after initiating this ministry two years ago and proving that it extends the compassion of Christ to all types of people in their community of about six thousand. Margaret Lawes, a retired Health Visitor who was still active and was seeking what new ministry the Lord would open for her, received help and advice from Parish Nursing Ministries so that her enthusiasm could be directed into parish nursing.

Margaret has now been joined by former District Nurse, Elaine Musgrove, to develop and

“People who have been bereaved, depressed and lonely and those discharged home to an empty house are visited, helped and offered prayer and pastoral support.”

extend the work, bringing their combined experience for the benefit of the community they serve. Each week they visit and follow up people who have been referred to them by the church, the local surgery, District Nurse, Age Concern and Hospital after Care. People who

have been bereaved, depressed and lonely and those discharged home to an empty house are visited, helped and offered prayer and pastoral support, as well as a professional listening ear. This can result in help being mobilised, the nurse accompanying patients on hospital visitation or helping patients speak to health care professionals to ensure all available support is obtained.

“Now several residents come to the morning service at church... and the church is encouraged and stimulated to pray as never before.”

In all of this, strict professional practices are maintained, including confidentiality and training, although the Parish Nurse will not engage in “invasive practices”.

The church gives from its mission budget to ensure that travel expenses and other training fees are paid. Funding was also obtained from a charitable trust and a local company.

Each individual nurse is free to develop his/her distinctive ministries. For instance, Margaret runs “Chairobics”, armchair exercises in order to have opportunities to visit older people in sheltered housing and care homes.

This has led to conversations and on-going relationships. Now several residents come to the morning service at church and a Christmas service was held in two of the care homes for the first time last year and the church is

encouraged and stimulated to pray as never before.

Young mothers who come to the Carers and Tots group benefit from the experience of being able to talk with a Health Visitor about the problems they are facing and relationships are beginning to grow there, too.

This vision is clearly founded on the principle of Christ's concern and love for all people, wherever their starting point. The client will always know that the Parish Nurse is working from a particular church and that they can request to be referred to someone else. The nurse is therefore able to encourage openly about spiritual things as well as physical concerns, they offer to pray with people and leave appropriate booklets and readings with clients - making Christ known is in the original remit of the Parish Nursing vision. In this regard a Parish Nurse will probably make more contacts than most pastors and evangelists!

If you are interested in learning more please contact:

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www.parishnursing.co.uk

*Margaret Lawes,
Parish Nurse, Brixworth*

INTERNATIONAL FOCUS

Who is my neighbour?

For the past two years, my husband and I have been working in Rwanda with Africa Inland Mission (AIM). My official ministry focus was the Rwandan women living in our neighbourhood - poor, uneducated, oppressed women. I have to confess that my focus for evangelism was solely on my neighbours, and that I wasn't looking or praying for any opportunities outside this geographical area. However, I would like to tell you how God challenged my attitude in a powerful way.

Our two daughters study at a school in the town centre, half an hour's drive from our home. It is a secular school, made up of about 80% Rwandan children and 20% ex-pat children. I was at the school gate several times a week but I wasn't interested in investing time in friendships with the other mothers as I didn't see these women as being part of my ministry. Despite my disinterest, Linda (name has been changed) initiated a friendship with me. She is a beautiful and elegant Rwandan woman living in a big house in a desirable area of Kigali with a rich husband, well-connected in the highest levels of Rwandan society, two lovely daughters and popular with the other mothers.

To my surprise, Linda asked me to have a drink with her. When we met up, she broke down in tears, and told me that her life was a charade. She said that she was very unhappy in her marriage, and that her

“As Christian workers we need to be available to all whom God would put in our way.”

husband was HIV+ because he'd slept with another woman. He was jealous, controlling and verbally abusive. She wanted a divorce, but knew Rwandan law gave her husband the right to take the children and she

“It’s all too easy for us as Christian workers to be so focussed on our particular ministries that we fail to realise that all of life is ministry...”

couldn't bear to be separated from her two daughters. Sadly, Linda had never told anyone of her situation. I asked Linda if she had a faith, and she told me that she believed in God but wasn't a practising Christian. From the time of that first deep conversation, I have had many opportunities to pray with Linda and to share my faith with her, and I believe that she is more open to making a commitment to Christ than she was before. Linda now considers me to be her closest friend, and I have been greatly blessed by the friendship. I have also learnt some important lessons. Linda wasn't part of my ministry focus, but God clearly wanted me to be a part of her life, and I have had a greater impact in her life than on the lives of my neighbours. My eyes were blinded to the ministry opportunities I had at the school-gate. I was blind to the reality of Linda's situation. As Christian workers we need to be available to **all** whom God would put in our way. God may want to use you to have an eternal impact on the life of the woman you least expect!

I think that many of us in professional Christian ministry make this mistake, neglecting the “ordinary” gospel opportunities that God gives us. When we moved into our house in Bristol, we invited both sets of neighbours round for a cup of tea. We knew that the previous occupant of the

house had been a full-time Christian worker for a local church, and that she'd lived in the house for 17 years. We were saddened when our new neighbours (who had lived in their homes for 30 years) told us that they'd never been invited into our house before, and that they hardly knew the previous occupant.

It's all too easy for us as Christian workers to be so focused on our particular ministries that we fail to realise that all of life is ministry, and that we have a responsibility to share our lives – and hence the gospel - with our neighbours, families and all those people with whom God puts us into regular contact. My friend Linda is also a reminder to us that the women we know who might seem to have it all may in fact be lonely and living behind a façade, and we should make ourselves available to those women, too.

Jan Rossington

CONFERENCE REPORTS

“God Alone, Alone With God” Conference for young women, Liverpool

At 11.15am on Saturday 19th April, after an hour of attempting to navigate the centre of Liverpool by car; I arrived forty-five minutes late at Bethel Church and slipped into a hall full of women I had never met before. For weeks God had been urging me to attend the conference. I sat down stressed and tired wondering what God wanted me to hear that was so important.

As I listened to Val Unsworth speak during the morning I quickly realised the significance of the message. My life need to be re-ordered, busyness needed to be silenced and my relationship with God needed quiet quality time. Incredibly this challenging word was spoken with tender love and passion. The afternoon workshops built upon this foundation, applying biblical integrity to various areas of life and highlighting the need to develop intimacy with God. The women I met were honest, open and felt like old friends. I was not the only young women who left Bethel Church that day passionate to encounter a deeper level of relationship with God.

“God Alone, Alone With God” is perhaps the most important message for young women living in the twenty-first century.

I can't wait for next year.

Kath Topham

Member of Ebenezer Baptist Church, Mold

Bristol Women's Conference

Saturday 1st March saw 200 women of all ages gather for a great day of Bible teaching, prayer and fellowship at Kensington Baptist Church, Bristol. The aims of the conference “to encourage and strengthen women in their faith and to equip them through God's word to

serve him faithfully” were more than met through the challenging and uplifting ministry of Lizzie Smallwood.

The theme of the day reminded us of the importance to be “Grounded in Grace”. Lizzie spoke about “Getting our confession right” showing from Psalm 130 how we can move “From Despair to Hope”.

Secondly we were challenged about “Getting our view of ourselves right” and saw from Psalm 131 how we move “From Pride to Humility”.

The final session focused our attention “In Christ Alone” as we were reminded about what it means to be forgiven, and to forgive, enabling us to nurture true devotion to Christ. The programme included various seminars and practical “bite-size” sessions and the lunch and coffee breaks gave plenty of opportunity to greet old friends and make new ones.

(2009: Saturday 7th March.

Speaker - Barbara Sherwood

www.bristolwomensconference.org)

South-East Wales Ladies Conference

On April 19th Jane McNabb was the speaker at the second Ladies' Conference to be held in South-East Wales at Malpas Road Evangelical Church, Newport. It was well attended by over 100 ladies and Jane's addresses were much appreciated.

The first dealt with a woman's place at the beginning, and covered woman's creation, fall and restoration.

The second focused on her place in the body and included God's view of the body, so relevant in this age of preoccupation with physical appearance.

The last talk covered a woman's place at work and challenged us to consider how contentment at work, defined as not merely paid employment, comes only with and through a focus on the eternal and a determination to apply oneself to learning it. The talks were thoroughly grounded in Scripture (Genesis 1:26-31 and 2:2-25; Romans 12:1-8; and lastly 1 Corinthians 7) and were well illustrated from everyday life

and Jane's own experiences, frankly and humorously shared. Outlines of the talks were provided with questions for our continued reflection at home.

Our thanks to Jane for stimulating us to reconsider our application of Scripture on these issues.

Elaine Adams

South West Pastors' Wives Conference

The 10th May was a stimulating, challenging and encouraging day for the 15 ladies who met at Kensington Baptist Church, Bristol. Although our numbers were much lower this year, the teaching and fellowship had certainly not diminished! Peter & Sian Baker focused our thoughts on "Authentic relationships in our broken world" and over three sessions challenged us on: "Renewing our relationship with God", "Living in relationship with others" and "Growing in relationship through conflict". This year our focus abroad continued in Hungary as we heard about and prayed for Orsi Revesz and her husband and family, pastoring young churches 80km from Budapest. Ladies brought a variety of luxury gifts to send as an encouragement for Orsi. A wonderful day!
(2009: Saturday, 9th May).

Midlands Pastors' Wives Conference

Thirty three wives of evangelical ministers met at Bethel Evangelical Church, Wigston, Leicester on 19th May. The theme of the day was understanding the pressures on young people, and a biblical framework for ministry among youth. Our speakers, Ian and Nina Fry, were school teachers for many years, youth leaders in a local church, and involved in a ministry sending Christian workers into schools in the Chessington area. They also have three grown up children. Ian now trains Christian youth workers at Oak Hill College, London. Ian began by explaining the historical background to the current mindset where submitting to any authority is seen as

repressive; conventional morality is seen as harmful; and each person has to define their own values from scratch. Christian young people absorb this mindset from the education system and media as well as from their peer group. Nina then gave us biblical principle for pastoral care, both in working with parents and nurturing young people in our churches. Ian concluded with a biblical framework for nurturing young people in the Lord.

Along the way Ian and Nina gave a very honest and God-honouring testimony relating to some of the pressures in their own family and how God has overruled for his glory. I certainly found the day very helpful in terms of how to understand the challenges faced every day by the youngsters in our church. The vital importance of providing a clear Christian world view was emphasised. The day was also inspiring in reminding us that the Lord overrules the darkest of times to draw us closer to himself. The date of the next Pastors' Wives Conference in the Midlands is Saturday 25th April 2009, with Kath Paterson speaking.

Details from Hazel Watts:
02476 670 694

Sharon James, Leamington Spa.

London Ministers' Wives Conference

At the end of January 24 Ministers' wives from the London area met at London City Mission. This was our third year and it was good to see old friends as well as new. Ann Benton spoke very helpfully on The Practical Minister's Wife and The Positive Minister's Wife and we had time for prayer and discussion as well as sharing a delicious lunch. We would love to get to know you next year if you are able to join us: January 31. Trinity Road Chapel, Tooting
Speaker: Ruth Williams
Contact: Jane McNabb 020 83170557

RESOURCES

Ideas to reinvigorate your time alone with God

Explore Notes (Available from the Good Book Company £3 - for three months of notes)

Explore Notes are a handy resource for those of you who need something which takes about 15 minutes in the morning! They go through a Bible book at a time during the week and a Psalm at the weekends. Clear and good at application, these notes are spiritually challenging and helpful. A good one to try for a while, if you want to keep your quiet times fresh.

The Bible in a year - start anytime

Scripture Union 99p
ISBN 185999086X

I've read the Bible through a few times over the years and used different schemes to guide me but in my opinion this is the best. I love the way the passages are selected and also the fact that the readings aren't dated. That means that if I miss a day or so I'm not frantically trying to catch up. It also means that if I want to take a break to use a study book for example, I simply pick up where I left off. I've also switched to the New Living Translation which has brought freshness to some well read passages.

The Bible Speaks Today (IVP £9.99) books are really helpful to use devotionally, especially the thematic ones. I have found Tim Chester on 'Prayer' & Paul Beasley-Murray on 'The Resurrection' particularly helpful.

The great thing about these is that they take you through the Bible's teaching on the subject being addressed, giving a broad understanding. The other great advantage is that there are no dates, which means no guilt, but also the opportunity to spend longer in study when time allows.

The series title is worked out in each book as the teaching of the Bible is helpfully applied to our lives today.

The One Year Bible (published by Tyndale) conveniently divides up the whole of Scripture into 365 dated sections. Each day has an Old Testament portion, a New Testament portion, a Psalm and a few verses from Proverbs. In this way you not only read through the whole of the Bible in a year, you also read through the Psalms twice. It comes in a variety of translations (NLT, KJV, NIV, NKJV) and even has alternative reading plans should you wish to read through in two or three years. The value of such a scheme is the systematic way one can work through Scripture and my suggestion would be to avoid the "catch up" mentality if a day is missed and just read the portion set for each day. It takes about 15 minutes to read each day's portion and

allows you to hear what God's Word itself is saying without reference to aids provided by others. Of course this does mean an alert mind is required which can be aided by a notebook and pen to record observations and questions that emerge from the text.

Try reading large sections of the Bible and then think about what has struck you. For instance, I will often take a book and read it through in large sections. I find listening to God in this way sometimes helps me see things differently. I have also found using the Murray McCheyne bible reading card helpful. McCheyne has kindly divided up the Bible into New Testament and Old Testament daily readings. There are four chapters to read a day and it takes a year to read the whole Bible. In that time the Old Testament would have been read once and the New Testament would have been read through twice.

It is humbling to understand God's sovereign will being worked out in the pages of scripture and seeing his beautiful and just character on every page and how sinful we are and yet grasping the truth that he cares for me today!

The Daily Reading Bible for people on the move

Tony Paine

Matthias Media (Available through The Good Book Company) £3

I've always struggled with disciplined devotions during the holiday period so last summer was thrilled to discover this series.

Each reading comes with full Bible text (which makes it great for underlining as well as ideal for the beach!), a couple of questions to get you thinking, "points to ponder" and some prayer ideas. It was refreshing to spend time studying shorter passages and would be ideal for those struggling to re-establish a devotional routine.

Take your Bible, pen and blank piece of paper. Write out a short passage from the Bible and then scribble your thoughts on paper asking God to help you hear him speak. While I am doing this, I may notice phrases being repeated and that gets me thinking about what God wants me to learn. It may be that I see a verse and think, "well I wouldn't have said that" and that gets me thinking about why God has said it! By the end of my time, my paper is covered with lines and thoughts and scribbles and I have seen something that is fresh that I can then take into the day and often find myself sharing it with others. I then pray about what I have learnt asking him to use it for today!

Gentle rain on tender grass

Sharon James

EP ISBN-13 978-0-85234-630-3

This book takes you through the Pentateuch, giving understanding of the overall story of God's people at this point in history and also applying lessons for us today. As the title indicates, it is a gentle and encouraging guide. It will also often stimulate thinking about situations in our world. Each day is summed up with a "Text for the day", I have found it helpful to write this verse on a slip of paper to chew over throughout the day.

Women of the Bible

Ann Spangler & Jean E. Syswerda

Zondervan ISBN-13 978-0-310-27072-0 £7.99.

52 women are presented, each with readings for five days.

This includes "Her story" described as an inspirational portrait, "Her life & times" giving background information, "Her legacy in scripture" is a Bible study with personal application, "Her promise" looking at appropriate Bible promises and "Her legacy of prayer". I have found this a refreshing way to meditate on different Bible women and a good way of varying my devotional diet.

BOOK REVIEWS

Pickups for Hiccups

Simon & Hazel Robinson.
Ambassador Int.
ISBN 9-78-184030-7

This small, easy to read book is full of godly advice born from Hazel and Simon's experience of being partners, parents, grandparents and having more than two decades of pastoral ministry. They share their distilled wisdom on many subjects in a very accessible way. The hiccups they deal with in the home range from those with babies, children and teens to the empty nest. They then move on to Hiccups at Church. Whilst giving advice on dealing with problems at church, they also issue the challenge of resisting the consumerism that our society moulds us into, looking rather at what we can and should be putting into church life.

Hiccups at Work range from "office wars" to the temptation of the affair. Hiccups in the Christian Life looks both at spiritual problems, including Bible reading and prayer as well as personal problems with our own character and with others. Hiccups for Youth challenges young people to live radically different lives so that Jesus might be seen in them and Hiccups in Education gives advice on coping with

the pressures. It encourages a recognition that God needs to be involved in this area of life too. Although any one person is unlikely to need this entire book at one time, it's a great book to dip into as need arises.

Calm my Anxious Heart - A Woman's Guide to Finding Contentment

Linda Dillow

Navpress ISBN 1-57683-047-0 £7.99

Linda Dillow is a fantastic author. She manages to blend straight talking with warmth, honesty, sensitivity, humor and true humility. Through her book runs a passion for the Lord's glory in and through women's lives. She is American, yet her wide experience in ministry in Europe and Asia gives her book cultural relevance to all. She introduces each chapter with uplifting accounts of women she has encountered in various communist countries and allows their quiet trust to challenge us in the whole area of contentment and anxiety here in the west.

The foundation of this book is the awareness of God as the sovereign, loving and blessed controller of our lives. There is nothing complicated

in the way this crucial theology is presented. Rather, the practical outworking of our faith in this truth is gently probed as we are guided through chapters on contentment with our roles, relationships, circumstances and possessions. Others, examining our focus, our faith and our trust for both past and future, follow these.

If I'm honest, one of my greatest struggles has been with worry and discontentment. I'm sure I'm not alone in this. *Calm my Anxious Heart* is amazingly relevant. Again and again it hits the mark and then practically helps us find the solution. The twelve-week Bible study is particularly useful in this. I cannot recommend this book enough. Nor can I adequately thank the friend who recommended it to me in the first place. If you haven't received a copy from me as a gift, go and order one as soon as you can! It's great value for money. You will probably return to it many times and if you let him, the Lord will change your life through it!

(This review was on our website for many months but the book is so helpful it deserves another mention for those of you who missed it.)

Feminine Appeal: Seven Virtues of a Godly Wife and Mother

Carolyn Mahaney

Crossway

ISBN-13: 978-1-58134-615-2, ISBN-10: 58134-615-8 £9.99

Living as a godly wife and mother is a great challenge in today's world. In this book Carolyn Mahaney uses Titus 2 verses 3 to 5 to biblically face those challenges. She writes in a warm, God-centred, practical, and easy-to-read way, and I found it a very useful, challenging and stimulating read.

A quote from the first chapter will give you an appetizer.... *“consider the loveliness of a woman who passionately adores her husband, who tenderly cherishes her children, who creates a warm and peaceful home, who exemplifies purity, self-control, and kindness in her character and who gladly submits to her husband’s leadership..... there are few things that display the gospel jewel with greater elegance. This is true feminine appeal”.*

A chapter is devoted to each of these seven characteristics, and there are study and discussion questions at the back of the book. Most of the young wives and mothers in our congregation are reading a chapter a week, then discussing it informally – why not try it!

Esther Cowley, Crowborough

Iran – Open Hearts in a Closed Land

Mark Bradley

Authentic Media, 116

ISBN – 13: 978-1-85078-770-9 £5.99

Do you ever watch news reports about Iran and despair? Perhaps your knowledge of Iran is like mine stemming from a collection of news bites and your prayers restricted to the odd cry for help, for this seemingly hopeless case. This little book by Mark Bradley seeks to set straight some common assumptions about Iran.

The book gives a simple outline of the socio-political and religious situation in the country, concentrating on events since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. It has two sections: Closed Land and Open Hearts. It is a quick and easy read, if clumsily written in parts.

The first section helpfully explains the background to the current regime and President Ahmadinejad’s fundamentalist position. The second section gives some interesting reasons why the Iranian people are currently more open to the gospel. The author, who remains understandably anonymous, gives much anecdotal evidence about the Christian scene. As Iran is largely closed to Christianity, it is difficult to independently verify. One can’t help thinking that so much is not being said, because of restrictions. The lives of fellow believers are at risk.

The first section of this book may cause sighs of despair at such a fundamentalist and cruel regime. However the second section is full of gospel hope, although the Bible is not referred to much! Hope given by Christ, in the power of His Spirit to move in amazing ways to convert many in this closed land. Psalm 2 reminds us the Lord is in control of all peoples, we only have to look at world history to see how he has toppled empires. After reading this book, I for one will be praying for Iran, and its persecuted church in a more informed way.

Heather Stephens

(This review first appeared in Evangelicals Now)

Captivating – Unveiling the Mystery of a Woman’s Soul

John & Stasi Eldredge

Nelson Books 2005 234p ISBN: 978-0785264699 £11.99

To say this book left me feeling frustrated – and angry at times - is an understatement!

From a positive point of view, *Captivating* does express the Bible’s teaching that God created male and female as equal in status but complementary in function. Parts of the book also speak about the importance of developing a close relationship with God. However, the main emphasis of what is written overshadows these things by displaying a distorted view of God and a distorted view of women. As the book progresses some general questions are answered. *“What is it that a woman wants? What does she dream of?”* And the writers tell us that it is three things - *“To be romanced, to play an irreplaceable role in a great adventure and to unveil beauty”*. Above all this, they say, *“The Question”* that every little girl should be looking to answer is - *“Am I lovely?”*

Stasi says there’s not enough taught about the goal Christian women should be aiming for. She says women are tired and guilty and *“we’re all living in the shadow of that infamous icon, ‘The Proverbs 31 Woman’... (who has) sanctified the shame most of us women live under which is biblical proof that we don’t measure up!”*

If biblical proof is important, why does the book contain so little of it? The theology is poor and often inaccurate and “truth” is illustrated more through dozens of films, novels or songs than by God’s Word. Where Bible passages are used, they are often not used in context or are quoted from a translation called “Alter” (Robert Alter) which tends to misinterpret the original text.

Captivating pushes an inaccurate perspective on life and encourages an unhealthy pre-occupation with self. This book is about ME! Who I am, and what I need or feel or want. What it doesn’t tell me is how to grow in my relationship with my Creator and live the way he intended. The Bible’s teaching about his relationship to men and women has been reversed. Rather than beginning with the character of God and seeing our relationship to him as one made in his image and for his glory, the writers start with us (or woman to be precise) and try to show how God fits around her. *“She is the crescendo, the final, astonishing work of God. Woman. In one last flourish creation comes to a finish not with Adam, but with Eve. She is the Master’s finishing touch... Given the way that creation unfolds, how it builds to ever higher and higher works of art, can there be any doubt that Eve is the crown of creation?”*

More alarming is the image painted of a God who is lacking unless women can help him out! *“How many of you see God as longing to be loved by you? We see Him as strong and powerful, but not needing us, vulnerable to us, yearning to be desired. God wants to be loved...from beginning to end, the cry of God’s heart is, ‘Why won’t you choose Me?’”*

God doesn’t need us. God’s purpose in creating Adam and Eve wasn’t for the purpose of filling a void in his relationship. The Trinity demonstrates that perfection in harmonious relationship.

I would strongly suggest you don’t waste your time or money on this book – unless you know of women who have read it and need some guidance!

Fresh

Krish Kandiah

IVP 2008 ISBN: 978-1-84474-275-2 £6.99

Do you know anyone heading off to University this autumn? If you do, then buy them a copy of this book! It is written for Freshers as they start out on Uni life. Divided into five weeks, there is a small part to work through each day. The sections are faith, relationships, evangelism, study and holiness – summarised as FRESH! All are biblical, practical, creative and contemporary and therefore very student friendly. There is also a website linked to the book to provide extra support and discussion forums. So do your new fresher friends a favour and buy them this book! As you do, pray for them. Pray that Fresh will be used to help confirm and challenge their faith in the sometimes hostile world of university.

Heather Stephens

Lifting the Veil: The world of Muslim Women

Phil and Julie Parshall

Authentic ISBN 1-884543-67-7 £6.99

After many years living amongst and ministering to Muslims, Philip and Julie write with both understanding and sensitivity on the issues facing Muslim women today. They help us to understand some of the traditional views on women based on the Koran as well as more contemporary teaching. Although as western Christians we can have the tendency to lump these women together they are careful to differentiate between cultures and countries within the Islamic world. Plenty of real life illustrations also remind us of the fact that behind the veil every woman is an individual with her own character and beliefs. The chapters are varied and comprehensive including the veil, fundamentalism, modernity, marriage, divorce, western converts as well as a helpful chapter on discipleship. This is a book that challenged many of my preconceptions and is one I highly recommend...

...and as we approach holiday time most of us are looking for a few good novels for the beach. Why not pack one that will deepen your understanding of this subject? Here are three unforgettable stories I've read over the last year all concerning Afghanistan. (You might also consider packing a box of tissues.)

The Bookseller of Kabul

Asne Seierstad

Virago ISBN: 1-84408-047-1 £12.99

Seierstad is a journalist who spent the Spring of 2002 living in the household of a Kabul bookseller. This book is her written portrait of the family living through and after Taliban rule. It vividly describes customs, proposals and marriage, hopes and fears, crime and punishment as well as the streets in which they live.

A Thousand Splendid Suns

Khaled Hosseini

Bloomsbury ISBN: 978-0-7475-8297-7 £11.99

This story tracks the incredible relationship between two women tied together by the same husband during the rule of the Taliban.

It tells of loyalty and heroism in the face of cruelty and loss.

The Kite Runner

Khaled Hosseini

Bloomsbury

ISBN: 978-0-7475-6653-3 £7.99

This was Hosseini's first book and although there is less about the specific challenges facing Muslim women it's well worth reading for its gripping story line and its description of the recent history and landscape of this war torn country.

FOR MINISTERS' WIVES

Three perspectives on work and the minister's wife

*Ruth Shaw, wife of Spencer,
Emmanuel Evangelical Church, Chippenham*

I was born and brought up in South America where my parents were missionaries and came to live in England when I was 13. My ambition was to become a missionary somewhere in the Spanish speaking world so everything in my life was directed towards the fulfilment of that "dream", including studying for a degree in Spanish and Latin American studies. God closed the door to overseas mission but the challenge to full time Christian work still remained and I met my husband also heading in the same direction. I worked as a primary school teacher until my eldest son was born. Subsequently my husband was called to be a pastor. We've always viewed what we do as a joint calling, with distinctive but complementary roles. What does my "**work**" involve? Being a "Pastor's Wife" is more about what I am than what I do, so my relationship with God is primary as it impacts on my own spiritual growth and maturity and on my ability to "give out" in all my other relationships.

I see my main role as a pastor's wife to support and encourage my husband in his ministry; praying for him, giving him the opportunity to off-load, listening to him bounce and clarify ideas and offering him constructive feedback, in public, loyally affirming his actions and decisions. Devoting time to my four boys is my next key concern with the unique pressures they face because of what we do. The rest of my time is shared between church and community. My main involvement and

passion is to encourage the women in my church to grow, serve and reach out to other women with the Gospel. We run a monthly, all age, women's evening with the goal of addressing issues especially applicable to women, through Bible studies and appropriate themes. We organise a termly evangelistic women's evening in our church-linked tea shop.

I'm involved in the running of a mother and toddler group in the community centre on the estate that I live on. The simple goal is to build bridges with people that we can eventually take the Gospel across. The group includes ladies from eight different nationalities (several of them Spanish speakers!) for whom we run occasional coffee mornings in our home. I work one day a week as a supply teacher in one of the primary schools on my estate. This has led to great openings for building links with folk in our community who we would otherwise find very difficult to reach.

I count it a huge privilege to serve alongside my husband. Having struggled in the early years with various issues, I can now see God's hand in teaching me lessons that are fundamental to our ministry: learning how to forgive, how to handle criticism, to trust God's refining work in my husband's life and to accept weakness and failure.

At times I feel overwhelmed by the circumstances in the lives of some of the folk we minister to and I struggle with a sense of incompleteness about much of what we're involved in. I have moments when I just wish

"Being a "Pastor's Wife" is more about what I am than what I do..."

people would treat me normally and I do

have to battle against caring about and being motivated by what people think. However, the joys of ministry are unrivalled by anything else: front row seats to Gods work of change in peoples lives!

"We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from ourselves" 2 Cor 4:7

**Sara Edmonds, wife of John,
Pontrhydyrun Baptist Church,
Cwmbran**

“It seems to me the key thing in life is to do what God has led you to do...”

My Aunt Jean died nearly two years ago, she had never married because if you were a female and wanted to be a teacher the law said you had to remain single. She was a fantastic teacher, even at the age of 79 when she died there were grown-up children and their parents telling of her wondrous effect on the children in her care many years before. I wanted to share something of my heritage and share with you a glimpse of someone who knew what she was on the planet to do; she knew her gifting and the occupation fitted her seamlessly.

I had the blessing of a godly mother, and a good grounding in an evangelical church. I first learned how to serve others through attending a local Crusader Class where the example of two lovely Christian women, Flora Sarpy and Sally Piper, brought out qualities that mattered: a deep love of the God of the Bible, a desire to serve and a love for sinners. I became an assistant leader in Crusaders, teaching and leading and helped at Crusader camps, catering and leading study groups. I also taught Bible classes at church and later was involved in Youth ministry. It was the experience of teaching the Bible in these arenas that led me to love teaching and not the other way around.

I originally intended becoming a social worker, but felt that I would rather put something into people's lives at an earlier age than just help with the problems that they had later on. Teaching seemed a “natural” choice, but I had the feeling that it was a supernatural decision that I was making.

Once qualified, I began teaching pupils with literacy difficulties and immediately felt like the round peg in the round hole. If my pupils learned to read effectively then they firstly, would have the opportunity to read God's Word and secondly, be less likely to end up as criminals in our society. [Statistics prove this]

I have continued to teach throughout my life and John, my husband, has encouraged me to do so because he has seen it as part of my “calling” as a person, fulfilling God's purposes in his world. When my children were both at school I returned to full time teaching, providentially getting a post in the same school as the children.

As well as my paid employment as an SEN English teacher I am deputy Sunday School supervisor; I assist John in running pre-marriage classes; I teach Christianity Explored classes for women when there are a group of seekers interested; I organise girls' nights in at the Manse for all the ladies in the Church once a term and am available for those folk who urgently need us in times of difficulty. Next term I hope to team-teach a series on “How to be a Godly Woman” which is a rather sobering thought I have to admit.

I admit to sometimes being tempted by vain ambition, or by being too work focused but along with the temptation there has always been the escape route, as he has promised, although I have not always readily taken it.

It seems to me the key thing in life is to do what God has led you to do and as a wife to be in agreement about what that means practically with your husband.

“...as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life...” 1 Peter 3:7

**Ruth Williams, wife of Paul,
Swindon Evangelical Church**

I have always believed that my place in the Church was alongside my husband as his helpmeet both in the home and in our service to the Lord's people. It came rather hard to me, therefore, to have to take on full time employment when our three children reached a point of financial demand in their education.

I well remember the morning I was to tell our Ladies Bible Study Group that I would no longer be able to come. As I prepared to share my news, I took my turn in our Bible reading.

My verse was " ..an elder is not greedy for money" (1 Tim. 3:3). To my already sensitive conscience, this was a step too

far and I read the verse and then had to leave the room, overcome.

I would stress that our Church family generously provide in their practical care for us. However, further education has made it a necessity that I work outside the home. Initially, I struggled against this and was filled with guilt every time I passed the Church on my way to work. Wise counsel helped me to accept this as a "season" in my life and to find contentment in it. I'm doing that, looking forward to the day when I can be full time again in my work for the Church. Meanwhile however, I thank the Lord for a fulfilling job and many opportunities to share my faith that I did not have before.

When I took up employment I *did* step down from a number of committees in the Church and my role as a LEA Governor at a local school. I realised the need to safeguard time for my family. I do find it very difficult to balance my time between home life, Church, and school.

I still run two children's clubs and make four visits to ladies each week. This is probably too much, but it is hard not to find time when folk come to share a need on a

Sunday. In addition, there are still guests for meals and various meetings: e.g. marriage preparation classes, and when women come to speak to my husband it has always been our practise that I be there too. A team of Lady Visitors ably assist our Elders in the regular visitation of the elderly and sick.

In the Church, there has been a mixed reaction to my taking on a full time job. Some of the older generation believe it should not be necessary, other ladies have been upset that I no longer have the time to

visit them as often as before. We are in a very loving Church

"Initially, I struggled ... and was filled with guilt every time I passed the Church on my way to work."

family who are always concerned about demands upon us in the ministry and my working outside the home has resulted in some feeling I am too busy.

On the plus side, having a full time job has given me a new insight into the lives of many working women in our congregation. I do miss being involved in the Ladies Groups at Church and midweek speaking engagements. The biggest change for me, apart from tiredness (!), has been the fact that it is rare now to have a day off with my husband. Thursdays used to be a very special time together but Saturdays are not an easy time to be away from the study with Sunday looming.

My greatest challenge in this "season" is to safeguard my time for in-depth Bible study and prayer. However, I have come to accept the current situation as an opportunity to trust the Lord and grow spiritually.

"...I have come to accept the current situation as an opportunity to trust the Lord and grow spiritually."

NOTICEBOARD

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Forthcoming Conferences:

For Women in ministry:

Women In Ministry Conference

19 - 22 January 2009 *Running the Race* (for those in paid Word ministry)

www.proctrust.org.uk

For Ministers' Wives:

North West Ministers' Wives Conference

Saturday 1 November 2008, Calvary Baptist Church, Liverpool

Speakers: Alison Elliott & Gill Kilpatrick

Contact: Kay Kinnaird 0151 924 8246

London Ministers' Wives Conference

Saturday 31 January 2009, Trinity Road Chapel, Tooting

Speaker: Ruth Williams.

Contact: Jane McNabb, jane3mcnabb@yahoo.co.uk

Spring Wives Conference

March 2009 (for wives of those in paid ministry for *more* than 5 years)

www.proctrust.org.uk

Midlands Pastors' Wives

Saturday 25 April 2009

Speaker: Kath Paterson

Contact: Hazel Watts, 02476 670 694

South West Pastors' Wives

Saturday 9 May 2008

For all Women:

Females @ Fellowship, Bridgend, South Wales

Saturday 13 September 2008, Brackla Tabernacle, Bridgend

My Sister's Keeper - Reaching Others for Jesus

Speaker: Debbie Meroff (Operation Mobilisation)

Contact: Katherine Orchard, 01656 653403 or Janet Howells, 01656 663749

London Women's Convention

Saturday 4 October 2008 – www.christianconventions.org.uk

Northern Women's Convention

Saturday 11 October 2008 – www.christianconventions.org.uk

Coventry Ladies Day

Saturday 22 November 2008, Holbrooks Evangelical Church, Coventry

Speaker: Julia Jones – *Let your Light Shine*

Contact: Janet May, 024 7664 4294, janet@mayway83.freemove.co.uk

Bristol Women's Conference

Saturday 7 March 2009, Kensington Baptist Church, Bristol

Speaker: Barbara Sherwood, plus various seminars

www.bristolwomensconference.org later in 2008

FOR WOMEN IN MINISTRY

The UCCF Experience

98% of students have not heard about Jesus in a way that makes sense. I first heard this statement whilst studying at Bristol Uni and, coupled with my own experience of the huge amount of evangelistic opportunities at uni, I felt compelled to spend some time after graduating working with students. So since September 07 I have been working with UCCF as a Relay worker at Bath Uni Christian Union (CU). Relay is a one year voluntary programme which aims to train up and disciple its Relay Workers in order for them to train up and disciple students at the CU. It's a great opportunity as the CU is a mission team on campus strategically placed to live and speak for Jesus surrounded, literally, by thousands of unbelievers full of questions, time and energy – what an opportunity! Here are a couple of highlights.

On a weekly basis I meet up with some individuals to study the Bible. One of these girls became a Christian just a few weeks before coming to uni and is from a non Christian background with almost no prior Bible knowledge. Whenever I ask her a question, she delves into the text searching for the answer. She never gives you a carefully rehearsed answer, it is often the first time she's ever read the passage! She is struck by what is written in the Word, she responds, she feels the power of what is said. My Staffworker ("boss") has the following motto: "Word ministry in the context of relationships", and I have seen the truth of this in Emma. Her understanding of the cross, of her sin and of the need to respond has grown so

much through studying Mark and Romans, and this has in turn transformed her life. Each week we meet she will have at least three stories of evangelistic conversations she's had, and when we pray together you can see her growing dependence and trust in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! Most uni CUs host "Mission Weeks" – focused times of evangelism, normally involving lunchtime apologetic talks, evening events, free lunches to attract ever hungry students, lots of flyer-ing, prayer meetings and exhausted CU members! So in February "RE:think" week arrived aiming to give all students on Bath campus the opportunity to rethink their views on Jesus.

"Please join me in praying for all students...they need to persevere and grow in this great, hard and vital work."

I have never been more encouraged by the CU! At each 8:30 am prayer meeting there were about 30 students – all praying for their friends to come, hear and respond. Our speaker Paul Hinton was clear and faithful in answering questions such as "RE:relationship – why Christians hate religion", and "RE:levant – is Christianity just a crutch for the weak?". This is a great time for students to speak out to their friends which is a courageous and often hard thing to do. By the grace of God five Freshers at Bath have become Christians this year!

I have been greatly challenged by the student's commitment to the truth found in God's Word, their desire to see other students saved, and their creativity, time and energy poured into proclaiming the Word. Please join me in praying for all students that they would receive the support, prayer and encouragement they need to persevere and grow in this great, hard and vital work.

"...when we pray together you can see her growing dependence and trust in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!"

*Jo Walker,
UCCF Relay Worker, Bath*

Introducing Ann Gall

Ann is a mezzo-soprano who spent 17 years working with the English National Opera in London. She became a Christian during her first year at art college and went on to teach art before working with UCCF for four years. Ann answers some questions for News & Views about how she is now spending her time...

So Ann, what do you do ?

Well, I'm a singer and do concerts for all sorts of people, with all sorts of songs – Christian and non-Christian, usually a real mix, (nothing too heavy these days as I'm getting older!) to suit a wide range of tastes. Concerts can include songs from the shows, comedy songs, ballads old and modern and some of the more interesting Christian songs with good words.

Who for?

To be honest, I'm not a young person's singer, but then there's a lot going on for young people in Christian circles these days. So my audience is more likely to be made up of older, more discerning persons.....erhum.... The concerts are designed for Christians (say – 40 years upwards but I don't actually turn younger people away!) to bring their non-Christian family/friends to.

What for?

A good afternoon or evening out I hope, usually accompanied by refreshments of some sort, but mainly to hear something of the Gospel. Oh – and I do like to make people laugh....if possible.

How does that work?

Well, I might plan a concert around a particular theme, (nothing complicated) and in between songs, talk about their meaning/give brief background, some with, some without Christian content. Or I may choose a group of songs that I particularly love and weave my own testimony and Christian life experiences through. And I write a script for each concert.

Are you an evangelist then?

The concerts are intended to be low-key presentations of the Gospel, as I said, so I

suppose that does make me an evangelist - but with the recognition that much non-Christian music contains God's truth even if people don't realise it and can reflect true human experience.

Do you do anything else?

I speak at Ladies' meetings, sing solos at church or private celebrations, do some music group/choir/congregation singing coaching and lead Bible studies and seminar discussions. And I'm happy to travel from one end of the country to the other. I was singing at a church in Chicago recently and in Spain and Khartoum last year.

What about finance?

I don't have a scale of charges as I don't want money to be an issue. So I'm happy with what folk feel they can afford. That can range from £250 to £5, a cup of tea and a bun.

How do we contact you?

If you'd like more information, hear a bit of my singing etc. please go to my website: www.anngall.com

If you'd like to chat to me, ring me on: 01704 566757 or 07981 153 380 or email me on:

vocalann@yahoo.co.uk

or if you prefer snailmail – address :
Flat 4 Lulworth Lodge
Lulworth Road
Southport PR8 2AT

I really look forward to hearing from you and hopefully, meeting you in the not-too-distant future!

Ann

WEBSITES

Websites with some useful resources and information:

www.sophianetwork.org.uk

A networking website providing “*wisdom for women in youth work*”. Aimed at all women involved in youth work whether in a voluntary or paid, full or part-time capacity. The website acknowledges the diversity of women this will encompass whilst still seeking to “*enable women in youth work to connect with each other, share skills and experiences and offer encouragement and support.*”

www.peacehopeandhealing.co.uk

A Christian response to rape -

“*For all victims...: Christian and non-Christian.*”

The author says:

“*Rape is...that act which is surrounded by either silence or myths. The silence is equally found among the Christian community.*”

Includes testimony, articles on Christian suffering, information on national support networks for male and female victims of abuse.

www.girltalk.blogs.com

A blog by Carolyn, Nicole, Kristin and Janelle Mahaney which they refer to as “*conversations on biblical womanhood and other fun stuff*”.

Includes a comprehensive index of subject matters and some helpful links to other websites and resources.

HELPLINE

We encourage pastor's wives and women in ministry to have prayer partners, ideally with someone in a similar position, so that difficult issues can be shared and prayed over. But if you feel there is no-one you can share with, and would value being put in touch (by phone) with an experienced pastor's wife or woman worker, you can contact Elisabeth Smyth at the FIEC office on 01793 619603, and she will do her best to help you.

Privacy will be respected.

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