

TouchPoint

The North American Baptist Conference Women's Connection Newsletter

Fall 2020

In the midst of crisis – God is faithful!



AMBER DOWD
FOLSOM, CALIFORNIA
WOMEN'S CONNECTION
LEADERSHIP TEAM

Churches often endeavor to emulate the early church in their worship and community practices. Sharing belongings, breaking bread together, corporate worship and serving

the poor all harken back to the values laid forth since the start of the church. But another “early church” element has been introduced to many of us as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This is the experience of physical separation. (Although many worldwide churches have dealt with separation for years.)

Throughout the book of Acts, we regularly read about Paul and his companions saying farewell to dear friends in Christ, not knowing whether or not they will meet again. We read stories of persecution, forcing the church to scatter far from one another. I wonder if their hearts battled feelings of fear and anxiety as they faced unknowns regarding their future. Paul regularly expresses effusive words of love and encouragement sent from afar to the various churches he influenced. This leads me to wonder, as we face this time full of fears and physical separations, how can we emulate Paul and the early church in this regard? How can the experience of distance and separation teach us new ways of “being the church” to one another?

We are hoping that this issue of TouchPoint may provide a moment of love and encouragement to you. There's no disputing that this has been a challenging time, and fulfilling a calling in pastoral ministry has become intensely challenging. The pandemic has impacted our NAB family around the world, keeping us out of physical reach from one another. In light of this, we have reached out to several of our NAB missionaries to share with us how this time has

been for them.

Living overseas, of course, involves being distant from friends and family, but the pandemic created an element of being cut off. The onset of the pandemic induced much fear, isolation, and even a season of loss and suffering for many of our missionary families. For some, it was at times a daily struggle to recognize God's goodness in a sea of uncertainty. However, as you'll read, God has faithfully redirected many of their hearts to Him and blessed them

with important insight through this time. In the midst of intense difficulty there is always to be found evidence of God's faithfulness and provision. They have discovered sacred spaces to allow for meaningful reflection and creative spiritual connection. They have leaned in to perseverance and are clinging to God as their anchor. In the articles below you will find a special collection of testimonies that share what God is doing in our Church.

Take a moment to read how your sisters around the world have been

doing. Then maybe take a moment to ask yourself how you have been doing. Finally, consider taking a moment to connect with someone you've been separated from and share your story of God at work. Our hope is that, in the midst of fear and separation, you will be encouraged and even spiritually sparked as you discover ways to creatively connect with, encourage and love one another.

How can the experience of distance and separation teach us new ways of “being the church” to one another?



IN THIS ISSUE

Voices From the Field	pg 2-6
Triennial 2021	pg 6
Book Links	pg 7
Baptist Women's Day of Prayer	pg 8

Voices From the Field

Missionary responses to how their life is since Covid



Shan Reed
Osaka, Japan

I think 2020 will go down as one of the most difficult years for many of us. However, I think it may also be a year that brings us closer to God, closer to our brothers and sisters in Christ, and brings a creativity we have not seen in the church for a long time. Like most of the world, our ministry and lives in Japan changed drastically this year.

In my twenty plus years of ministry in Japan I have rarely been homesick or worried about my family on the other side of the world. When life started changing in March, I started talking to my sister and my mom more often as well as other friends and family. I was not worried about life here in Japan or about my family. We all seemed to be handling the changes and new structures well.

Then I saw a news segment on

what was happening in Italy. One of the images in the segment was rows of caskets lined up in a church. I suddenly realized my mother living in an assisted living facility was one of those most vulnerable being talked about. I also realized that if something happened to her or my sister or brother in law, I would not be able to get back to help because the airports were closed. Also, even if I could get back, I would have to quarantine for 14 days and then would likely not be able to get back to Japan.

I panicked. I forgot to run to God. I let my fears overtake my thinking.

God, in his gracious timing, lead me to an app for my phone, of all things. It is an app that reminds you to pause and refocus on God and his goodness. Two times a day for 76 days I paused for 3-10 minutes and pulled my mind from the downward spirals of thought and turned them back to Jesus, the lover of my soul. I continue to use it, just not as faithfully as I did the first 76 days! (The app, "One Minute Pause", includes a counter so that you know how many days and how many pauses you have taken.)

I am grateful for the way God reminds us of his love for us. As a person who does not use many apps on her phone, an app is the last thing I expected to bring me those reminders during this challenging time. Creatively staying in touch with loved ones has been a theme of this pandemic. I did not expect God to teach me creative ways to stay in touch with him!



Melissa Ewing
Osaka, Japan

Sometimes being between two worlds is strange. As we navigate Japanese information on the pandemic and stay up to date as to what is happening in the States, I find myself worrying and fighting fear on two fronts. We get an eye witness account of how two countries, their perspectives, and attitudes can be completely different and the same. The Japanese government is not helpful and we rely mostly on the information from the States and Paul's science expertise to navigate through this time of the pandemic. We did close the church's door to formal meetings for three months, but someone was still there during office hours to be available for anyone who would drop in. When the formal meetings stopped we looked at different ways to conduct service. With most of our attenders

being older or not having the ability to stream a worship service, sermons were typed up and hand delivered to each attender until there was a stay at home order during the month of May. Then the sermons were mailed. We were encouraged that many shared the sermons with family members and neighbors. Now, that we are meeting in person, we continue to be cautious, especially since many of our attenders are older and have ailments. We have shortened our service times and created three service gatherings to accommodate having fewer people meet in our small sanctuary. We do not sing, but hum along as Paul leads. Temperatures are checked and everyone wears a mask. Attenders comply without complaint, with understanding and appreciation for the cautious procedures. They are thankful to have the opportunity to meet. We miss the fellowship times but hold onto hope that soon, it will be ok again. We have even started communion, everyone brings their own grape juice and bread so as not to share elements but have a shared fellowship of communion.

We have resumed English classes and our students' temperatures are checked and all wear masks. Seating is separated and students have complied and expressed thanks for the added precaution. There is an understanding and they appreciate the leadership's steadfastness.

Though, we have had to creatively problem solve and rely on members being cooperative, the most emotionally and difficult part was making the decision to keep Elijah home and not have him travel the 3 hours commute, on public transit, back and forth to his school. We are hoping and praying that this situation would only be for the fall semester. Elijah's world has become quite small and we are hoping we are making the right decision for this situation. We are praying for opportunities in our local area where we should put our focus. Instead of being stretched across a large geographical area, how should we focus our time within the

smaller area.

God continues to remind us that we are not alone. That He is still working and blessing. We are thankful for the church members' and English students' cooperation and understanding as we have changed routine, times, and incorporated temperature checks and mask wearing. God continues to remind us that He loves us and He is with us.

God continues to encourage me to trust Him and give my fears to Him. Some days it's a give and take but I know that He doesn't change. He is the same, waiting patiently for me as I once again, set aside my fears, choose to be in His presence and trust that He is God.



Elsie Lewandowski
Cameroon, West Africa

Praise God I feel very blessed. I am living in a large house with a family of seven next door and a friend upstairs. I always have a welcome in their homes and they help me in so many ways — shopping, repairing, opening the gate for my car, moving things, playing table games, joining meals. Our little community has really been a blessing. The biggest challenge is social distancing. For a culture that is usually squashed and sees any space as an invitation to fill

it, this has been difficult. One foot is definitely a social distance - in conversations, line ups, walking on a road, in a store.

Technology has been incredible in my life. Having facebook, What's app, zoom meetings, DVDs and the internet has changed my life. I never really felt lonely or lost or out-of-touch. I was able to get spiritual encouragement and worship services and information and long conversations with long time friends including Cameroonian friends. I have enjoyed our COVID isolation but am glad that we get to do more interaction now. I have never felt afraid or angry or frustrated at the situation. I have been grateful for all the technology that has helped me keep in touch. **HOWEVER**, I have felt overwhelmed and frustrated with teaching online and learning the system (For all of the challenges Elsie is facing click the link for her entire response to how Covid has/is changing her life).

WHAT HAS THE LORD TAUGHT ME?

1. He is a **ROCK**. Everything around me is changing but He is a rock!
2. He is faithful. Even when I blow it and feel helpless when trying to help others, God is there providing in amazing ways. He never stops loving or caring or being patient or forgiving. My friends in the Northwest Region who are still experiencing difficult times, are telling me how God is providing and protecting. They are getting taken to the police station to pay "a fine" because they're not wearing their COVID mask and God provides. I shake my head in wonder and amazement.
3. God hears and answers prayer — over and over and over again! He provides plane tickets and COVID tests on time. He provides work and transportation. He heals from COVID and malaria. He protects

kids who write exams while there is shooting outside. He delivers the SAT tests on time. He even provides a wife for someone who's prayed a long time. Over and over God has answered prayers.

4. This is a spiritual battle. So many stupid things have happened and been overcome. A family of seven are denied visas because the background of their passport pictures are too dark. The ministry of education says no schools should open before October. (Our school opened in August) Water leakages, robberies, "official visits", crazy power outages — always unexpected and at the wrong time. But our God is greater! He answers prayer and is faithful. I have NO idea how people survive without our God. Truly.



Marci Jones
Porto Alegre, Brazil

COVID-19 hit Brazil in mid-March and the governor of our state acted very quickly. Schools had barely begun their new year when they were shut down and switched to online. Non-essential businesses were closed. Churches switched to online services. Brazil closed its

international borders, and our bustling city seemed to come to a halt. Shortly after this, my mom called to let me know that my dad who had been fighting cancer was being put on hospice.

By this time global travel was difficult, and as much as I prayed for peace to run to my dying father, I knew in my heart I had to stay here. My dad died, and I watched his funeral online. This year has been painful. We have suffered a lot of losses. Not just the loss of my father and my kid's only living grandfather, but the loss of opportunities to make friends and build relationships, loss of time in language and acculturation, and loss of face-to-face worship and interactions. Even in the loss, God is at work here. Now that we are home and our schedules look so different, we shifted toward a project our field has long desired, bringing Masters and Doctoral programs to our seminary here in Porto Alegre. We are doing this through partnering with Sioux Falls Seminary and their Kairos Project. This has been months of prep work, as each aspect of Kairos needs to be translated and adapted to our context. We are excited that we have a pre-enrollment of over 30 students, and we hope to have the program ready for open enrollment by mid-September.

Christians have long referred to God as an anchor, a solid rock, and a mighty fortress. This is because pain and loss are no strangers to a Christian. As a matter of fact, such things are promised to us. Our trials and troubles can often be perceived as if God has somehow abandoned us or that He is letting us down. We ask why bad things happen. We wonder how come we are given these trials even though we have been trying to be faithful followers. But James tells us to "consider it pure joy, whenever we face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete,

not lacking anything." This is where the daily pain is felt; the deep painful feelings of loss, anger, and sorrow - the crying out; the hard feelings; the painful praying. It is in perseverance that we cling ever so tightly to our Heavenly Father, our anchor and the solid rock.



Lyndell Campbell-Requia
Porto Alegre, Brazil

My husband, Paulo and I are doing well. We have been in isolation for 5 months now. We leave the apartment for necessities, to walk (usually with our dog) and to attend to our church people. Because I am involved in education, if anything, COVID has increased my workload. Fortunately, we were already using Zoom for our classes so it was just a matter of getting the students physically attending classes to go online. July was winter break so we have just started our second semester of the school year and have 7 new students in our Pastoral Formation program, praise the Lord! Also, for the last year or more we have been in the process of partnering with Sioux Falls Seminary to bring the Kairos Project to our Seminary here in Brazil and we have just launched our promotional phase this month!

We have almost 30 people who have demonstrated real interest by filling out our on-line pre-application form, so in the midst of challenges, it is an exciting time for the Seminary. Paulo serves as both a pastor and a missionary. All of the classes he was teaching have been put on hold for now, but he continues to serve the church people by social distance visiting as well as the poor community by putting together food baskets. One day he ran into a woman and her son who were selling sweets on the street to survive. The church was able to provide her with a food basket. Just last week we ran into this woman working at a bakery. She was so excited! For now, she is on probation but is very hopeful it will turn into a full-time job to support her family. Also, in the midst of COVID-19, two couples have come to Christ and are attending our church via Zoom. Paulo has also been meeting with one of the couples for weekly discipleship.

-A passage that has really struck me during this time is Jeremiah 29:1-14. Many people are familiar with verses 11 and 13 but the context is in some ways comparable to what we are going through. While we are not in exile like the people of Judah were, we are isolated from our brothers and sister in Christ and the building where we meet to worship and share in communion. We also have no real expectation of what tomorrow holds. It is a time of separation, uncertainty and transition. Interestingly, the verb “to wait” in Portuguese is the same verb for “to hope.” As I have studied this passage it is truly a message of waiting and hoping in the Lord. Jeremiah’s letter, his message from the Lord, to these exiled people instructed them to build houses, plant crops, get married and to pray for the welfare (the Shalom) of the city where they were living and by doing they would also receive Shalom from the Lord. And a time would come in which they would be freed from their exile. God’s purpose is sending them into exile was not to harm them, but

to prosper them and give them hope for the future. If anything, this time has strengthened my capacity to wait and hope in the Lord. It is a time to be content and find the Shalom in where I am and be thankful that I can trust in our Sovereign God. And He has also shown me over and over again that it is a time of hope as I have seen so many prayers answered, I have witnessed people come to Christ and I have had the joy of preparing people for Kingdom work.



Tanya Gericke
Romania

I was sitting with eight youth from our village around a campfire at Lake Capra up in the Fagaras Mountains in Romania, when I was thinking about all the things they had missed out on as a result of the pandemic: formational time with friends, education opportunities (though some were excited about that), graduation celebrations, and of course summer camps. Days before we left, supplies that had been ordered were MIA, my husband Paul was dealing with a painful back issue, and the weather forecast called for rain for the entirety of our trip. We were feeling discouraged. Yet as we sought prayer, we saw God faithfully provide for all of our needs. This

final campfire scene was a testimony of God’s provision as he held off a storm, so that we could have one more campfire experience before we headed home. A sacred space had been created. This was a space for God to come meet with us, to speak to us through his Spirit. We were in the midst of our summer series with the teens called “Ask Anything”. I was tasked with speaking to a deep question asked by one of our teens. ‘How can I understand what God is calling me to do in my life and how do I obey in following him?’ Wow--what a question to come from a 16 year old boy who just a couple years prior proclaimed he didn’t want to be a disciple of Jesus, for very real and painful reasons that he had experienced in his life. This question he asked extended far past a desire to know what profession he should step into after high school. It was a question that wondered what it meant to live life with God in submission to his mission and calling even in the midst of struggles and difficulties. I’m sure it’s a question we all are processing as we face a world-wide pandemic and even more political and cultural upheaval, as well as incredible disunity in the church. During this time, I have been struck by the space that has been forced upon us due to social distancing measures. Many of us have been restricted from our normal rhythms and schedules. This has been true for us here in Romania too, as there was a couple of months where we were not allowed to leave our house without a permit--not even for a walk! Yet in all of this, we can see that a space has been created. I believe God wants to use this as a sacred space in our individual lives and within the church body as a whole to speak to this big question posed earnestly by this teen.

As I prepared to answer this question, I was led to the story of Jonah. This is a story I’m sure we are all familiar with. A story I can clearly remember learning about growing up—that big whale is hard to forget!

Jonah receives a call from God, he flees from this mission and tries to hide at sea. In his disobedience it is determined he must be thrown off the boat, and subsequently he's swallowed up by a whale where his heart is then transformed and he is led to complete the mission God had originally called him to. Seems like a simple story with a simple message. And yet as I read deeper into this story and I sat with Jonah in his wrestling, I saw this deeper journey he was on...one where God was pursuing Jonah and creating a space for his questions and confusion. In chapter 1 verse 17 I was struck in a new way by the purpose of the whale that came and swallowed up Jonah. It is written that the Lord provided the whale. As I studied the meaning of this wording I was convicted that the Lord's provision of the whale was two fold. One, he was protecting Jonah from the storm that he was thrown into. And two, God created a sacred space for Jonah to process with Him -- the belly of the whale

nonetheless! What seems to us as a terrible and even stinky place for Jonah to be, was actually a place that God used to transform and soften Jonah's heart toward the things he was calling him to.

This season that we find ourselves in is not a desirable one. It's challenging, painful, and full of loss... and it too is even stinky as we've been revealed to some of the rotten fruit we've allowed to reside in our hearts. Many of the issues being revealed in the church, in politics, and in our cultures, have been proven as not producing a pleasing aroma. What I have come to see in the midst of this season is that God is carving out a sacred space to meet with us individually and collectively, to transform and soften our hearts to the calling he has on us to participate in his kingdom mission that is breaking through the turmoil of this broken world. The question is in what posture will we enter into this sacred space? Unfortunately, the story of Jonah ends rather

disappointingly for him. We see how Jonah's posture leads him to a place of anger and bitterness as he wrestles with God's mercy and compassion for the Ninevites.

In this season would we not flee from this sacred space God has carved out for us. Would our posture be like this 16 year old boy from our youth group who is humbly and submissively inquiring of the Lord for direction and clarity. Would we be vulnerable with God and with others as we process this difficult reality and the way ahead. When we create space with this kind of intent and posture, we too, like the disciples who made space to process the passion as they walked the road to Emmaus, will find Jesus walking along with us, offering his peace and his Spirit to bring about his revelation.

Psalm 42:1-2 "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?"

**Reimagine
Hospitality**

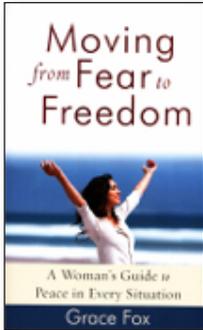
**Women's
Connection
Luncheon
July 9**

Triennial 2021
Saint Paul, MN

Plan to Join us
July 8-11, 2021

BOOK LINKS

Living by Faith and Not by Fear



Moving from Fear to Freedom

Grace Fox

FEAR! In these days of coronavirus pandemic, the newspaper headlines scream it out – Fear is

contagious and can spread quickly! Uncertainty in the face of the pandemic can easily breed fear! Pandemic fuelling fear and mistrust! What are we going to do?

ABOUT THE BOOK

Fears like this can plague women like you every day. Left unchecked, they can paralyze you and keep you from enjoying life. In this book, Grace Fox gives a practical guide on how to face your fears and let them be catalysts for change. When you bring your fears to God and cry out for help, He answers and you experience a wonderful new relationship with Him.

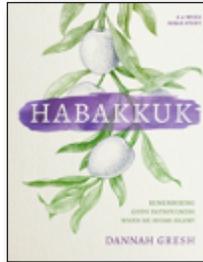
With profound insight, humour, sound advice, amazing stories and strong spiritual principles, Grace inspires you to face your fears, learn, grow and come out stronger on the other end.

The last page of the book says it all with verses from Isaiah:

“Do not fear anything except the Lord Almighty. He alone is the Holy One. If you fear Him, you need fear nothing else.”
– Isaiah 8:13

“See God has come to save me. I will trust in Him and not be afraid.”
– Isaiah 12:2

In these days of fear, anxiety and uncertainty, this book will give you good help and hope, and move you into the freedom God so desires for all of us. The book comes with a companion study guide, and can be ordered from amazon or through www.gracefox.com.



HABAKKUK Remembering God's Faithfulness When He Seems Silent

Dannah Gresh

ABOUT THE BOOK

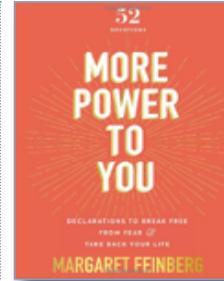
Learn how to live by faith and not fear. Why does God seem silent when I need Him most?

The prophet Habakkuk faced great storms in life. His fears of the future crippled him with doubt and left him questioning God. How is it, then, that he is now a shining example of how the righteous live by faith?

Learn how the storms of life can become opportunities to activate your faith in Habakkuk: Remembering the Faithfulness of God When He Seems Silent. You'll study the book of Habakkuk—which maybe you've never done before!—and discover how remembering is essential to understanding the faithfulness of God. Through daily Scripture, prayer, and meditation, you'll enter the life of this prophet, and:

- Gain freedom to express your fear and frustration to God
- Remember that God is at work—even when He seems silent
- Increase your capacity to practice the art of waiting on God
- Learn how to navigate through the storms of life to live free from fear and full of joy

This six-week study provides daily interactive Bible study and an easy-to-use leader's guide for group participation. Dannah Gresh also hosts a six-session podcast series to kick off each week of study. Find it at dannahgresh.com.



More Power to You

Margaret Feinberg

In More Power to You, popular Bible teacher Margaret Feinberg offers bold declarations

of biblical truth to help us overcome old patterns of thinking and welcome the power available to us when we embrace the truth of who God says we are.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Each of the 52 devotions in More Power to You by Bible teacher Margaret Feinberg examines a popular lie in our culture, helps us understand how that lie shows itself in our lives, and invites us to replace that lie with a biblical affirmation of truth that will bring joy to your soul.

In a culture that constantly tells us we're not good enough, not beautiful enough, and not doing enough, it's easy to feel as if we have nothing to offer. Lies about who we are and how we are failing slip into our thinking until we believe they are reality. But that's not what God intends for us.

In More Power to You, Margaret Feinberg exposes these false beliefs and shows you that the places of your deepest hurts can become wellsprings of your greatest healing. Here Margaret shares the daily practice that has been so life changing for her: the 90-Second Daily Declaration Challenge. You'll launch into each day by reading the Daily Declaration aloud, paying attention to what the Holy Spirit may be highlighting for you. Then you'll read through the weekly devotions that examine each line of the Daily Declaration, exploring the what and the why behind those biblical truths. These brief but powerful devotions are designed to unleash the true you—and remind you of who you really are.

Baptist Women's World Day of Prayer

THE DAY OF PRAYER STORY



JEAN EWING
NORTH AMERICAN
BAPTIST WOMEN'S
CONNECTION

Are we women who do the Day of Prayer? Or, are we women of prayer? Day of Prayer began as women in Europe emerged from World War II. Women, who had been on opposite sides of the battle, realized they had work to do in order to tear down walls the divisiveness of war had been erected. Pain and atrocities had led

in our world. Walls are built through war zones and polarization in theology, politics, cultures, ethnicities, and economic statuses. We, as Baptist Women, continue to call each other to break down walls in love, expressed through prayer. When we come together, we stand with each other at the foot of the cross, holding hands as we look up to our Saviour to bring healing and hope in a troubled and broken world. Day of Prayer is our biggest, most earth-shattering, ground-breaking opportunity to dispel the darkness and love the world and each

other on a massive scale.

Prayer matters. Our voices are rising up to God with thousands upon thousands of our sisters'. God hears. God answers. Let's continue to come together to shake the world and dispel forces of darkness.

Most of the women in our NAB churches no longer assemble to observe this special time of prayer. The Women's Connection Leadership Team encourages you to gather with a women or two and pray for women around the world using the program found at www.bwawd.org Day of Prayer.

They came together, wrapped their arms around each other through prayer, and the walls came tumbling down.

to feelings of anger and these women knew only God could dismantle these emotional barriers and bring reconciliation. These women were women of prayer. They came together, wrapped their arms around each other through prayer, and the walls came tumbling down.

Since that eventful period, the Day of Prayer movement among Baptist women has grown. Observances now reach women in nearly every country where there are Baptist groups, currently seven Continental Unions connecting women from 156 countries with translations of the program into over 80 languages.

Today we continue to see division



BAPTIST WOMEN'S WORLD
DAY of PRAYER



Life!

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2020

*Standing together, unified
amidst our beautiful diversity!*

CONNECT
WITH US

North American
Baptist Conference

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