

CHRISTIAN Odyssey

June-July 2011

Growing Together in Life & Faith



Blessed
ARE
THE **Dung**
Beetles

Dangerous Waters

In the classic Greek poem, *The Odyssey*, after which this magazine is named, the hero, Odysseus, is faced with many dangers on an epic sea voyage. At one point he has to navigate his ship between two formidable hazards—Scylla and Charybdis. Scylla was a grotesque sea monster, with six long necks and six heads, each of which had three rows of sharp teeth. Charybdis was a great whirlpool that could suck a ship down into the depths. Both Scylla and Charybdis were a danger to shipping, and you had to keep your wits about you.

As editor of this modern *Odyssey*, I can identify with Odysseus. Evangelical Christians like to refer to their Christianity as a journey. That journey today is taking us through some dangerous waters, which confront us with difficult choices, unprecedented problems and awkward situations.

I am often asked what this magazine's "position" is on controversial topics like abortion, the conflict between science and religion, homosexuality, separation of church and state, the role of religion in schools or immigration reform. These, along with many other issues, pose challenges to the Christian way of life. They are complex issues, and they cannot be ignored if Christianity is to remain effective and relevant to the 21st century. So some readers urge us to "come out and declare where we stand."

The problem is that it has become almost impossible to discuss these topics, or even raise them, without walking into a buzz saw of contention. Passion-

ate exponents on all sides have made accepting their point of view the acid test of faith. Their agenda has become, for them, *the* work of God. To disagree, or even to agree, is risky—they won't let you go. Engage in the debate and you soon find yourself in the clutches of a hydra-headed monster. When fanatics attach Jesus to their own agenda, it can lead to some very unchristian behavior.

Others proudly display a bumper sticker that reads something like, "The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it!" Maybe they think this offers a refuge from having to honestly face real issues and questions. But it is just another path into a Charybdis, and the gospel of grace and forgiveness is sucked down into a vortex of self-righteous legalism.

Christian Odyssey tries to avoid both these extremes. Jesus' message was the best possible news, showing the way to forgiveness and salvation. But he warned that others would take that message, stir it into the mix of their own agendas, distort it and use it for their own ends.

We firmly believe the Bible is our reliable guide to salvation. We want our readers to understand it for all it is worth, and to be able to find inspiration and instruction within its pages. We are not afraid of the controversial issue, and of course we have opinions. We inform and offer information to consider, but we recognize that these are peripheral to the main message of the gospel. Our goal is to serve you as we "grow together in life and faith," not to add to the clamor of raised fists and shrill voices. ☪

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CHRISTIAN
Odyssey

June–July 2011. Vol. 8 No. 3.
Circulation—9,300

Christian Odyssey (ISSN 1937-500X) is published six times per year by **Grace Communion International**, PO Box 5005, Glendora, CA, 91740. Copyright © 2011 Grace Communion International. All rights reserved. *Christian Odyssey* is

also available on the Internet at www.christian-odyssey.org. For subscriber services in the U.S., phone 1-800-423-4444.

Staff: Executive Editor: J. Michael Feazell. Editor: John Halford. Managing Editor: Michael Morrison. Senior Editor: Paul Kroll. Circulation: Celestine Olive, Scott Wertz. Publisher: Grace Communion International. President: Joseph Tkach.

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Postmaster: Please send address changes and Form 3579 to Grace Communion International, PO Box 5005, Glendora, CA, 91740-0730.

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Contributions: *Christian Odyssey* gratefully accepts contributions to help meet publication costs. If you would like to help us bring the good news of the gospel of grace to others, send your contribution to Grace Communion International, PO Box 5005, Glendora, CA, 91740.



Blessed ARE THE Dung Beetles

By John Halford

Krugers National Park, South Africa: Like all visitors to this world-famous wildlife reserve, my friends and I hoped to see the “big five”—lions, leopards, cape buffalo, rhinoceros and elephants. Well, we didn’t see any elephants, but we did see where they had been.

Elephants need to eat three or four hundred pounds of vegetation a day, and they have a “throughput” to match. That is a lot of manure, and it presents quite a cleanup problem.

That’s where the dung beetles come in. We noticed that some of the piles of dung along the roads were swarming with beetles. These little creatures, about one inch long, specialize in disposal. After the elephants have finished their part of the operation (I am trying to be discreet here), news gets around, and the dung beetles arrive. Some have travelled several hundred yards to start work on a fresh deposit. Once on site, they use their forelegs to roll the dung into a ball about as big as themselves. Then they push, pull and maneuver their prize back home, where they eat some of it, give some to their young, and bury the rest. Then they go back for more. It isn’t much of a life, but the little beetles seemed happy enough. Dung disposal is their only trick, but it is a useful one. And we found it fascinating to watch.

After looking around carefully to make sure none of the big five were around, we got out of the truck for a better look. I dropped to my knees to get a close-up photo—something you do with due care and attention by a large pile of elephant dung—and suddenly realized that perhaps that was an appropriate position.

We are naturally awed at the majesty and beauty of the big five, and the other spectacular examples of creation. One cannot be in the company of lions, buffalo, rhinoceros, herds of impala, grazing giraffes, basking hippos and the other stars of Africa’s awesome wildlife without that verse in Romans coming to mind. “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made...” (Romans 1:20).

But there are lessons to be learned also from the smaller, humbler creatures. Dung beetles are never going to make the big five. But as they go about their humble task, they do teach us something of God’s “eternal power and divine nature.”

Sometimes God shows his divine nature, with great eloquence, through the small things in his creation.

We tend to look for evidence of God’s power to be demonstrated in whatever we might consider the spiritual big five—maybe healings and other miracles, big, growing churches, natural phenomena of biblical proportions, fulfilled prophecies, or powerful preaching to huge audiences. Well, maybe.

But sometimes God shows us his divine nature even more eloquently in smaller, less dramatic ways. This was the lesson the prophet Elijah had to learn. Perhaps you remember the story in the Old Testament book of 1 Kings. In chapter 18,

God's work is not always glamorous, but he can be seen in little acts of humble service.

God used Elijah powerfully in a showdown with the pagan priests. Outnumbered 400 to one, Elijah emerged spectacularly triumphant, but shortly afterward found himself fleeing for his life. Discouraged and exhausted, cowering in a cave, he no doubt hoped God would once again intervene in a dramatic way.

"I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty," he pleaded. "The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too" (1 Kings 19:10).

God told him to go outside and watch.

"Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord..." Ah, this was more like it. Except that "the Lord was not in the wind."

The display of what seemed to be an example of the "big five" continued. "After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake."

"After the earthquake came a fire." A tornado, an earthquake and a wildfire...surely God had a message for Elijah in all this. But no—"the Lord was not in the fire."

But then, "after the fire came a gentle whisper," and in that gentle whisper, Elijah heard the voice of God.

I thought of this story as I watched the dung beetles going about their humble task. An encounter with Kruger Park's big five does take your breath away. A few minutes earlier we had come across a rhinoceros, almost as big as our car, grazing by the roadside. It gazed at us impassively for a while as we oohed and aahed, before it lumbered off into the bush.

By contrast, the dung beetles evoked more of a chuckle. There is something comical about them as they scurry about, shoving the (comparatively) huge balls of elephant dung back home. But these lowly specimens of the animal kingdom were performing a very valuable service. As the poet John Milton, struggling to come to terms with his blindness, wrote, "They also serve who only stand and wait." Or push balls of dung around.

In the last week of Jesus' life, his disciples came to Jerusalem expecting big things from him. Surely the Master was about to show his true colors. A showdown with the Romans was imminent—the kingdom was coming, which would catapult them to fame and fortune. They were already arguing with each other about who would get what. But at



the Last Supper, Jesus did the last thing they expected. He washed their feet.

This was the task of the lowest slaves—the dung beetles of Roman society. The disciples were appalled, but Jesus knew what he was doing. "When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. 'Do you understand what I have done for you?' he asked them. 'You call me "Teacher" and "Lord," and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them'" (John 13:12-17).

Like those first disciples, we look to God to demonstrate his power in dramatic and decisive ways. But Jesus was showing us that that is not how the kingdom comes. It will one day, when God is ready. But until then, Jesus expects us to do what we can, where we can, and take advantage of the opportunities to serve as they present themselves. God's work is not always glamorous or spectacular, but he can be seen and heard in the little acts of humble service, just as his eternal power and divine nature can be glimpsed in the labors of the dung beetles.

The noted British biologist J.B.S. Haldane, who was an avowed atheist, was once asked whether studying biology had taught him anything about the Creator: "I'm really not sure," he replied, somewhat tongue in cheek, "except that he must be inordinately fond of beetles, because he made so many of them."

I think Haldane was right on this point, in spite of himself. I think God looks on the labors of his dung beetles with great appreciation. And perhaps God wants us to learn something from them, too. **co**

Embracing Trinitarian Theology

By Jonathan Stepp

Five years ago Jesus called me, and the two churches I serve, to a profound awakening in our understanding of the gospel. This article is a brief description of what we have learned so far in that journey.

After several years of reading the New Testament, praying, and being mentored by such Christian writers as Athanasius, T.F. and J.B. Torrance, Mike Feazell and C. Baxter Kruger, I had come to see that the Trinity is not just “a” doctrine. It is “the” doctrine of the gospel. The gospel is about nothing less than human participation in the eternal communion of the Father, Son and Spirit.

The triune God created humanity to participate through the Holy Spirit in the incarnate Son’s communion with the Father. As Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, “In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will” (Ephesians 1:4-5).

James B. Torrance put it this way: “He who was the eternal Son of God by nature, enjoying eternal communion with the Father, became the Son of Man that we ‘sons and daughters of men’ might become ‘sons and daughters of God’ by grace and be drawn into the Son’s communion with the Father, that through the Spirit we too might call God ‘Father’” (*Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, p. 82, IVP, 1996).

As I began to take seriously the statements in the Bible that speak of “all” being included in Christ, it became clear to me that the Father didn’t create some people for adoption and some for destruction. In Christ he has adopted everyone and delivered everyone from sin and death. Paul wrote in Colossians 1:19-20, “God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” Jesus

said in John 12:32, “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

Beginning in September 2006, I began to make the Trinity foundational in my preaching to my congregations. I made it clear from the Bible that the Father’s plan is humanity’s adoption as his own beloved children in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. And I made it clear that in Jesus God has delivered all of humanity from bondage to sin and death.

The reaction in my congregations ranged from cautious optimism to electric excitement. Jan Taylor remembers, “I felt uncertainty; I thought we were headed down a trail away from orthodoxy. Thankfully it didn’t take long to recognize that just the opposite was true. It helped so much

The triune God created human kind to participate through the Holy Spirit in the incarnate Son’s communion with the Father.

to see we were following the teachings of the early church as well as the teachings of renowned contemporary theologians.”

Over the last five years our vision of the triune life of God and our understanding of grace has been broadened and deepened in ways we never expected.

Judy Pass says, “Five years ago I didn’t understand the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity and how it is the framework by which we understand who Jesus is and what he’s done for us.” Bert Caruthers agrees: “The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit finally make sense to me.”

Maria Olson looks at it from the perspective of someone who didn’t grow up in the church: “Five years ago I still had that mentality of ‘I have to do good in order for God

I am one hundred percent convinced that God loves me no matter what I do.

—Maria Olson



There is freedom in knowing that we are in Jesus no matter what we are doing.

—Jan Taylor

Be willing to be a learner and empower your people to learn by giving them the tools and resources to discover the truth of the trinity with you.

—Bert Caruthers

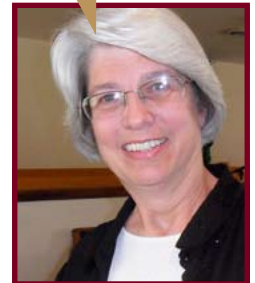


We should have an openness to God.

—Mike Gass

Now I understand that everyone is included whether they know it or not.

—Mary Jo Leaver



to love me.' Now I am one hundred percent convinced that God loves me no matter what I do, that I have been included and that there is nothing I or anyone can do that will ever change that."

For many of us, the change has been in how we view other people. Mary Jo Leaver says, "Now I understand everyone is included whether they know it or not. God's love in me overflows to everybody I meet: believer, nonbeliever, atheist, Buddhist, Muslim—everybody. I am free to love others without an agenda."

Based on what we have experienced, I would make three suggestions to any pastor or congregation embarking on this process:

- 1) Find a mentor in the gospel. Tim Brassell has been my mentor and he helps me, on a weekly basis, to shape my thinking, speaking, and doing in the light of the gospel.
- 2) Soak your mind in books, articles, and blogs that focus on the reality of who Jesus is for us and who we are in him, and you will find that the what of ministry begins to flow much more naturally.
- 3) Be bold. Those you are ministering to are the Father's adopted, forgiven children in Jesus whether they know it or not. In the Holy Spirit you can confidently, with wisdom and gentleness, proclaim this truth to them, and the Spirit will back you up.

Judy Pass says that "having a small group where you can discuss what you're learning, ask questions of others and listen to others helps a lot." Mike Gass recommends having an "openness to God." Bert Caruthers points out that it needs to be a journey we take together. She says, "Be willing to be a learner and empower your people to learn by giving them the tools and resources to discover the truth of the Trinity with you."

More than one person mentioned the helpfulness of such resources as *The Great Dance* by C. Baxter Kruger, www.theadoptedlife.org, *The Shack* by William P. Young, and the *You're Included* interview series at www.youreincluded.org.

This growth in our understanding of the gospel is changing the way we do ministry. Jan Taylor says, "Every ministry is done in a relational context, and we no longer view the world as separated into 'sacred' and 'secular.' There is freedom in knowing that we are in Jesus no matter what we are doing. We don't have to be doing something church related in order for it to be ministry."

And always remember, Lloyd Briggie says, "Keep an open mind—don't put limits on God's love!" ☪

According to the New Testament, that life of communion with the Father did not begin at Bethlehem. He who was the eternal Son of God by nature, enjoying eternal communion with the Father, became the Son of Man that we "sons and daughters of men" might become "sons and daughter of God" by grace and be drawn into the Son's communion with the Father, that through the Spirit we too might call God "Father." The eternal Word who was with God and who was God, the only begotten Son of the Father, who created all things, took our humanity and "tabernacled" among us, that we might see the glory of the Father, and ourselves become sons and daughters of God (Jn 1:11-14).

James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, IVP, 1996, p. 82.



Church: What's on the Menu?

By Brenda Steffen

Even though I am what some would consider a professional nomad, I realized after a recent trip overseas that I needed to plant a few roots somewhere. Anywhere.

When I returned home, I got involved in some local things. I joined the Knitter's Guild and a camera club, plus I started going to a church down the road.

At my first knitting meeting, I nearly poked a bamboo needle in my eye when the president of the club barked at me for "casting on" the wrong way. She used terminology the more skilled grandmas in the room understood, but I was clueless. The ad in the paper said they welcomed knitters with no experience!

I had a similar experience at the camera club. I thought I was in the wrong room; the presenter seemed to be speaking Greek with all his talk about the latest software patch for some photo program I'd never heard of. The camera club's website hailed people of all skill levels, but I felt lost.

I hoped I would fare better when I stepped into church.

It was a non-presumptuous small inner-city church, with simple folding chairs and a food bank. People showed up in jeans and t-shirts. The sign on their door said: "a teaching church." I was drawn to its simplicity.

At my first service, the pastor dove right into a technical, Greek-word-filled background of a passage in Matthew. Eventually I figured out that he had been taking the church through the whole book verse by verse, but he lost me, a newcomer, somewhere in Jerusalem.

Now mind you, I have read that same passage multiple times. And yet, I had no idea what the pastor was driving at. Hoping it was a "once off," I went back to this church several

times, but it was always the same—more of an advanced history lesson than a sermon.

It finally dawned on me why all those people in jeans and t-shirts kept coming. It wasn't because the sermons were turning their hearts to Christ. It was because in order to take food from the food bank, they were required to attend the service. The only reason they were coming back was to get free food.

While I applaud the local church's food bank efforts, I wish the messages had had as much relevance for the people as the groceries did.

Sometimes I believe churches are working so hard to get more people in their door that they miss the simplicity of the gospel. We believe if only our ministers were more casual, or if we offered donuts and gourmet coffee before *and* after church, we could keep the numbers high. If only our children's program could have a trendy name and our teens could do an entire service on their own, then we will have "arrived" as a church.

Maybe if the pastor uses a wireless microphone and walks the aisle, or if we stop using songbooks and use projectors, or if we finally get a band instead of playing CDs for worship music, or if people could wear jeans to church, and the guys can lose their ties, or if we do the reverse of any of the above, we will draw in a bigger crowd.

I don't think it works like that. Gimmicks come and go, but the message has never changed. Sermons need to give people the good news. Save the technical stuff for studies or classes at other times. It's the good news that touches hearts and changes lives.

I was excited to see my favorite brand of rice cakes at the church's food bank, but I left feeling hungry for much more than free food. ☪

Our Bulgarian Connection

Interview with Nikolay Nikolov

During the Communist era, Bulgaria was one of the regimes hostile toward Christianity. In spite of constant harassment and persecution, some believers found ways to keep their light shining. Nikolay Nikolov, GCI's representative in Bulgaria, talked to *Christian Odyssey* about his life and work.

Christian Odyssey: How did you become a Christian?

Nikolay Nikolov: I was born into a Christian family. I am very thankful toward God and my parents. Every day they found time to read with us in the Bible. Jesus was the center of our family.

CO: What was it like to be a Christian during the Communist era?

NN: To the Communists, every Christian was an enemy. Christians were given the worst jobs and were continually watched by their neighbors and the secret police. If you didn't join the political demonstrations and party meetings, you were penalized. This could mean you would receive only half a salary. If your boss was in the leadership of the party, you could lose your job. We were forced to accept any kind of work—no matter what kind of job—to be able to feed our family and survive.

In school, the children of Christians were also seen as enemies of the state. The required identity cards had a special mark to indicate that you were a Christian. You couldn't climb the ladder of success or go to university. If a university did allow you study, they would put great pressure on you to be far better than all the others.

The police had the right to search through your house and they could take all your Christian literature and even fine or penalize you.

Our church building in Jambol was destroyed five times. The Communists would wait until the church was rebuilt, and then they would destroy it again. They kept telling us that they were going to build a Kindergarten or a school on what had been church grounds. The goal of the Communists was to weaken Christians financially, to humble them and to show them who was in charge.

Toward the end of the Communist era, things eased up just a little. The Adventist, Methodist, Protestant, and Pentecostal churches were consolidated into one group. All church services had to be held in a place designated by the government and the pastor was appointed by the state. The goal was to give the



appearance of freedom of religion, but to stay in control.

Christians who were active in spreading the good news at the workplace or among neighbors lost their jobs or were forced to leave the city. Most Christians were resettled in agricultural areas where there was no industry and very few jobs. The state often replaced the pastors or they were thrown into prison without a proper trial or conviction. Lots of families were destroyed in this way. But God always sent us pastors with the adequate character.

CO: Tell us about your clandestine printing press.

NN: During the reign of the Communists, only the Orthodox Church was allowed to print Christian literature, and only a very limited amount. It was forbidden to own a private print-

Feelings of Failure



ing press. But my brother told me he had seen an old printing machine in a junkyard in a neighboring city. The machine—a Rotaprint Din A3—was in awful condition. Several of us decided we would each buy and repair one piece of the machine. Then we put it all together. We decided to print a magazine in the Bulgarian language with this old machine. We didn't have any printing paper. Only old packaging paper was available. So each of us bought packets of 20 sheets until we had enough to print the magazine.

We had to buy ink and printing plates from the state-owned printing companies. That meant we were always watched. The house where we had the printing machine was searched a few times and we were occasionally arrested. But we hadn't broken any laws, and we never printed any political or anti-government material, so they let us go. The worst thing was that the printed magazines were confiscated and destroyed.

CO: How did you come into contact with our denomination?

NN: On a visit to the city of Zwickau, in the former DDR (East Germany), I received a magazine that contained a card to order the church magazine *Klar & Wahr*. So I ordered the magazine. Later on I translated a few articles and published them. Some of these articles were used as German lessons in the secondary schools. Then the German teachers asked me if I would contact the church headquarters to see if we were allowed to translate the entire magazine.

That's how I got into contact with Santiago Lange (GCI's National Director in Germany). He and the churches in Germany and the Netherlands have been great supporters. They provided us with a printing machine, articles, paper and, later, with another folding and printing machine. I am very thankful to God, and to Santiago Lange, Frans Danenberg and our sisters and brothers in Germany and the Netherlands! They also continue to support some orphanages and other charitable projects in Bulgaria.

CO: Do you still publish your magazines and other literature in Russian and Bulgarian?

NN: Sadly, no. The last issues were printed and circulated in September 2010. The problem now is not persecution, but a shortage of finances. We are not currently able to buy the paper, ink and the necessary parts for our printing press. I am praying that we will be able to reach more people. There are a number of minority groups such as Turks, Gypsies, Jews, and Armenians who are also living in my country.

What we need most in Bulgaria is not bread, not health, not money, but Christ. One can have many things in life, but in the end one still feels empty. There is nothing that can replace God. Our mission is to bring to the people what we have personally experienced with Jesus—his truth, his righteousness, and his love. **co**

The first time I lost a job was when I was 16 years old. I thought I was a good worker, so I was surprised to be called into the manager's office and told I was being fired. He said I was talking too much to other employees and it was affecting everyone's work.

I felt like a complete failure. Even though my mom told me that things would work out, that it was a good lesson for me, and that I'd have lots of jobs during my lifetime, I couldn't stop feeling miserable. I didn't want to set foot in that McDonalds again or ever see that manager again.

My Dad had other ideas. A few weeks after I was fired, he took us to the same McDonalds to eat. When the manager saw me, he came over and asked me if I wanted my job back. The other managers and supervisors told him he had fired the wrong person.

Yes, I was talking a lot, but I worked while I talked, and many of them considered me one of their hardest workers. He said he realized it wasn't my fault others would stop working while we talked, and he wanted me to come back to work. I took the job and worked harder than ever to show my thanks for his faith in me. And I tried to not talk as much.

Looking back, I can chuckle over the experience. But I certainly wasn't chuckling at the time, and I'll never forget that feeling of failure and worthlessness.

God's love will never end, and in Christ, I will only grow into it ever more deeply.

I've had that same feeling in my spiritual life. For most of my life I tried to be a good Christian and not sin—knowing full well, deep down, that I was not a "good" Christian and that I was still sinning. I prayed in embarrassment, shame and frustration, believing I was a spiritual failure and likely to remain so. At times I was too depressed to pray. I believed I wasn't worthy to be called a child of God.

Much like my fear of facing my McDonald's manager, I feared facing God. Imagine my relief when I finally learned that God, in fact, loves me unconditionally and doesn't condemn me. I am in Christ and Christ is in me. And nothing can change that. God's love will never end, and in Christ, I will continue to grow into it more deeply forever.

Many are fearful of God because of their mistakes and failures. They've been taught that God is harsh and judgmental. But you and I can show them a different God—the true God, who loves them unconditionally and wants them to know they are wanted and included in Jesus Christ. **co**



Skyeler Lewkowicz

Hillary Irusta

Jason Frantz

THE Interns

Grace Communion International is looking for men and women, either married or single, who have a strong sense of calling to pastoral ministry and a willingness to be immersed into a “hands-on” learning experience that will last 12-24 months.

Interested? Go to www.wcg.org/mindev/internships.htm for more detailed information and an application. The application and selection process is carefully designed to help prospective candidates really know whether they are being called to serve in this way.

Greg Williams, coordinator of the GCI Pastoral Internship Program, processes the applications and matches the interns with qualified pastors, and then assists the pastor and intern in creating a development plan specific to their needs. The goal for interns who successfully complete the training is to place them as GCI Associate Pastors, planters of new churches, or Senior Pastors.

The Paid Intern positions are handled as a partnership between the GCI home office and the host congregation. Paid intern positions are limited, but volunteer internships are readily available for qualified candidates, including college and seminary students needing internships for class credit.

GCI is keenly interested in welcoming more and more intern applicants, and encourages congregations and church districts to budget for this program.

As the GCI Pastoral Internship Program enters its second year, we asked three of the interns currently in the program to tell us about their experience.

Jason Frantz is assigned to the Cincinnati West, Ohio, congregation, working with Pastor Rick Shallenberger.

Hillary Irusta is assigned to the Greensboro, North Carolina, congregation, working with Pastor Joel Irusta (her dad, which makes cross-gender mentoring much easier).

Skyeler Lewkowicz is assigned to the Eugene, Oregon, congregation, working with Pastor Tim Sitterly.

Christian Odyssey: What made you decide to become a pastoral intern?

Hillary: I never, ever imagined I would be in pastoral ministry. In fact, when GCI decided to ordain women, I flat out told God not to even think about it. But I think a part of me knew then that I would end up right here.

I chose to study Bible and Religion in college. I planned on volunteering in church youth ministry while pursuing an education and career in counseling. However, professors and advisors began encouraging me towards further theological/pastoral education and pastoral ministry. Eventually I began to listen.

Skyeler: I was actually a pastoral intern three times prior to this. But I was frustrated. Many churches wanted me to work for free, or be a member of their congregation for a year or greater before providing me an

opportunity. I was at a point where I was burned out of trying, and another internship was not what I was looking for. Then an opportunity presented itself at Living Grace Fellowship Church [a GCI congregation] and I decided to give it another go.

CO: How did you get into the program?

Jason: My wife found out about the program on the GCI website and, knowing that our desire was to one day be in full time ministry as a pastoral family, we filled out the application and contacted the appropriate individuals to discuss the next step in the process. And now here we are.

Hillary: During the summer of 2010, my father, a senior pastor with GCI, asked me if I would like to apply. I spent some time in serious prayer about this, and sought spiritual direction with mentors and professors who knew me well. Then I turned in an application, spent a couple months discussing details, and officially began as a GCI intern in January 2011.

Skyeler: I transferred my job from Eugene to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and was laid off the day my wife Tracy and I arrived. So we moved to Reno, NV. My wife needed to be on campus to finish her Masters. I also wanted to be closer to my dad, who was dying of liver failure. I had reconnected with Tim Sitterley (Pastor of LGCF) and he made the commitment

meetings and conferences.

Jason: Life as an intern is exciting and difficult, challenging and rewarding. I spend my time working on my ACCM classes, organizing and facilitating the small group that I have started. I am the worship director for our congregation. I spend several hours a week working with the pastor in pastoral ministry. And I preach once a month.

Skyeler: I have started a small group and have oversight in another that recently started. Our community group ministry is growing, and it is my job to facilitate that growth. I develop videos and video content for our website and sermons. I speak on occasion and attend most church functions. I help plan activities for our camp, I get to shadow my pastor to various congregations, and I also get to help with the regional conference.

CO: What advice would you offer someone considering joining the program?

Jason: If God has placed it on your heart to “feed his sheep,” then jump on board. GCI is a wonderful denomination, with its grace-filled and humble servant leaders and its passion to participate in God’s work and a deep desire to share the life and love of Jesus Christ.

Hillary: Pray, pray, pray! Talk to fellow Christians and Christian leaders who know you well—parents, spouses, mentors, teachers, pastors, significant others, and friends. Listen to them, but also listen for the Holy Spirit speaking through them. Don’t worry if it takes a while to really be certain. Reflect on your passions, on what fulfills you, and on why you want to do this. Pastoral ministry is not glamorous, but if you are called to it, it will be one of the most fulfilling things you will ever commit to.

Skyeler: Be patient and realize you are needed. This denomination has good leadership, and those leaders want to mentor you and provide you an opportunity to succeed and make a difference for Jesus Christ.

To see this church reach the next generation for Christ, we need to invest in future leaders.

CO: How do you see the future?

Jason: I see myself as a future full-time pastor of an existing GCI congregation.

Hillary: I’ll be attending Wake Forest University School of Divinity beginning in the fall of 2011. I hope this internship will last two years. After that, I would like to serve as an associate or assistant pastor for another year or two—I’m a firm believer in pastors needing thorough training, education, and experience before becoming a senior pastor. After that, I will consider pastoral openings in GCI, but at this point I feel more apt to pursue planting a daughter church with the support of GCI and the congregation I am interning in.



to me that if I returned to Oregon, he would make an internship program happen.

CO: Describe your life as an intern. What do you do?

Hillary: My two main “projects” right now are to develop and lead a youth ministry and to help the congregation become more active in outreach in the community. I also preach every five weeks. I read a lot! I attend adult discipleship classes and a mid-week small group so that I can learn from the pastor. I attend staff meetings, not only to participate, but to learn how to lead them. I am mentored in ministry by the pastor (which is made easier since he’s my father). I attend district pastoral

Skyeler: I don't know exactly. I know I will be involved, but where and in what role is still up in the air. I want to get a doctorate in philosophy and help transform people's minds. I will probably sit tight at LGCF, as there are some loose ends to tie up, and my Youth for Christ job and schooling require some time beyond October. I look forward to what opportunities God puts in my way, and will gladly follow where he leads.

CO: How do you support yourself while training? Are you paid?

Jason: It has been a blessing that the congregation and the denomination have been able to pay me as a part-time intern. To supplement the difference, my wife works as a part-time police and fire dispatcher for the city we live in, and I am a licensed massage therapist and give several massages a month to help out.

Hillary: I am paid a part-time, hourly salary as a GCI Pastoral Intern. I tried to find a second part-time job to help cover some expenses, but that was pretty impossible in my area. I am a recent college graduate, so I am blessed to be able to live at home with my family for now. Financial aid is helping me attend divinity school. Besides that... it's a step of faith.

Skyeler: The internship provides me with some money for rent, food, and some basic needs. I am also bi-vocational with another ministry. My wife works as a teacher and for my other job, I work at raising funds.

CO: Anything else you would like to say?

Jason: I am very excited for what this program holds for the future of GCI and for the kingdom of God. God is preparing the hearts of the younger generations to step up and be strong, committed and humble servants who will partner with all generations to participate in the work he is doing. If I can help you know more, please email me at jfrantz4jesus@gmail.com.

Hillary: Yes! For any young women out there considering pastoral ministry with GCI, God knows you and accepts you; if he has called you to this, he knows what he's doing. Don't be intimidated by what is still very much a male-dominated field. If God is sending you, go!

We need young men and women with passion, who are not considering pastoral ministry to fulfill their own needs. If you are considering pastoral ministry and if I can be a listening ear, question answerer, prayer partner, or friend to you, please don't hesitate to send me an email —hdirusta@gmail.com.

Skyeler: Not everyone can be an intern, but everyone can have a part. If we want to see this denomination reach the next generation for Christ, we need to invest in future leaders. One way to do this is to donate to the internship fund. If you have questions, and you think I can help, please email me SkyelerQL@Gmail.com.

We are very thankful for this wave of new pastoral leaders in our fellowship. We pray for their growth and eventual placement in ministry, and we ask the Lord of the harvest to bring more laborers to join in this movement! ☪

Responding to God



When I began taking medication for a minor skin condition, I was told that three out of 10 people don't see results. It hadn't occurred to me that a medication might not work, and I left hoping I'd be one of the lucky seven. I kind of wished the doctor hadn't told me, because it bothered me that I might be wasting my time and money, besides risking unpleasant side effects.

At the end of my second month of treatment, the doctor said with a smile, "You're a responder!" It was working and I was relieved and happy. I kept thinking about how she called me a responder. In this case, my body responded to the medication, but my thoughts soon turned to how I am doing as another kind of responder.

To respond is to do one or more things as a result of an event or action of another. We first notice or hear, then we act. In the case of God's interaction with humanity, he revealed himself in the Old Testament in various ways and the people responded, sometimes with fear and sometimes with obedience—or lack of it. In the New Testament, God revealed himself in the person of Jesus and the response of the religious leaders was to have him killed, because he was a threat to the status quo.

How does he want us to respond? God formed his plan of salvation before the foundation of the world. He loved us while we were still his enemies. He reaches out to us even when we don't want to be reached. He never gives up; his love is never-ending.

How does he want us to respond? "Follow God's example, therefore," the apostle Paul wrote, "as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:1-2).

Jesus said, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

How does he want us to respond? He wants us to respond in kind, to love him and to love others.

We have a choice as to how we'll respond—or not—to the Holy Spirit each day. The trouble is, sometimes we respond well, and sometimes we don't. But when it comes to our relationship with God, there's something we should never forget—Jesus is the perfect Responder. He responds for us even when our responses are weak. That's why Paul wrote, "For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'" (Romans 1:17).

We can trust Jesus to be our all in all, and knowing that he is, we don't have to wonder if we're one of the three out of seven who don't respond. In him, we're all responders. ☪

Understanding Genesis for All It's Worth

Interview with Christian Minister and Marine Biologist Dr. Dennis Gordon



I've always, ever since a child, been interested in nature. There's something about the living environment that is beautiful and interesting and attractive, and it just draws you in. So I went to university and I eventually majored in zoology, and then I focused narrowly again into marine zoology. I did my doctorate looking at the anatomy and aging process in a marine fouling invertebrate.

Faith and evolution

You can't study fossils for very long without having to consider the very hard questions. We don't have the luxury of ignoring the difficult questions. So I had to confront the issue, what is the fossil record telling me? I began gradually to see that the evidence for evolution was really quite compelling and indisputable. It didn't affect my faith at all. My faith has grown over the years because in the end my faith is in Jesus Christ, and one's faith and commitment to Jesus is a consequence of the action of the Holy Spirit in one's life.

Genesis 1

In approaching Genesis, one has to ask the question, is there more than one way of reading the book? There's nothing new about that concept—it's at least as old as Augustine, who said that we should be careful how we read the Bible lest we read into it, in fact, what is not there.

The Bible is a remarkable book written over more than a period of 1000 years by 40 different authors, and it constitutes many different forms of literature as well. We tend to read Genesis 1 superficially, unaware of the structure that's actually in the chapter. It really comes down to the whole issue of

exegesis—the art of biblical interpretation.

Exegesis asks certain questions concerning the Bible. We want to know, for example, why a particular passage was written. What was the historical or cultural context? What was the city? What were the issues? Who was the writer? Who was the audience? Why was it written?

Right context

If we really want to understand Genesis 1 or indeed the whole book of Genesis, we have to read it in the light of the Exodus. That's the context. We take Moses as the traditional author of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible.... He's writing this at the time when a people who were formally in bondage to slavery are now in the process of being redeemed and on their way to salvation and the promised land.

God, through Moses, is giving them a future in relation to their present. *He's also giving them a past.* How do they come to be where they are? Moses is connecting Israel with a past as well as giving them a future. So what is the context of Genesis in relation to their past?

Genesis is divided into two major parts. The first 11 chapters deal with what we might call primeval history, largely based on oral traditions and things that Moses may have learned when he was taught in Egypt in an academic way, traditions that may have been communicated through the patriarchs.

So Moses connects Israel with the ultimate origins—that the God whom they worship, the God of the Hebrews, is the God who is the Creator.

In Egypt, there were gods of the sun and gods of darkness and gods for animals and vegetation and rivers and so on.

Well, the God of the Hebrews is the God who created all the things that the pagans worship. The chief point of Genesis 1 is to show that there is one God, not many.

Carefully crafted

Genesis 1 is a superb piece of literature. It is very carefully crafted. The pagan creation stories are very complex and convoluted. Genesis 1 uses some of the language of the pagan cosmogonies, drawing upon a common tale that people were familiar with, but recasting it to tell a proper theology about the God of Israel.

What was created on days one through six is the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1:2 is very interesting, because it says, “And the earth was without form and void,” and this is in the old King James Version of the Bible. Formless and empty—that’s the starting condition. It says, “And darkness was on the face of the deep.” Even before you have the creation of the six days, you have something that already exists, maybe a watery surface, and the Spirit of God is brooding over that. That’s your starting point.

It says specifically that it was “formless and empty.” Why is Moses writing that? He’s writing that because Moses wants to show that the God of the Hebrews, God of Israel, is able to structure [to solve the problem of being formless] the cosmos and then populate [to solve the problem of being empty] the cosmos. The first three days have to do with structuring.

On day one, God separates the light from the dark. On day two, he separates the waters above from the waters below, and on day three he separates the land from the waters. So we have the structuring. So what was formless (in Hebrew, *tohu vav bohu*, void and empty) is now formed.

What God does in the second set of three days is solve the second problem, of emptiness—God populates each of the realms that he structured on the first three days. So on the first day we have the separation of day from night, and what do we populate that realm with, if not the sun and the moon and the stars? Then on day two we separate the waters above from the waters below, and what do we see populating those realms, but the birds in the upper atmosphere and the fish in the sea? Then on day six, the land animals and human beings populating the realm that was formed on day three, and that solves the problem of emptiness.

The one true God

Moses is taking elements that the pagans *worship* and showing that things that the pagans worship were, in fact, *creations* of the one true God. There’s a definite structure in there. A scientific description is not at all the point of it. The issue is polytheism, many gods, versus monotheism or one God. ☐

To view or listen to all three interviews with Dennis Gordon, visit Dimensions in Ministry at www.gci.org/media. The interviews can be streamed or downloaded in video or audio format. A downloadable transcript is also available.

Keeping Perspective



Neat and tidy! That’s how I like it! A place for everything and everything in its place! I like routine, order, organization. I like life to run smoothly and at an even keel. Don’t rock my boat. Don’t rattle my cage. Don’t shake my tambourine. Don’t upset my apple cart. And don’t keep me from marking off a number on my “to-do” list.

Unfortunately, life is not neat and tidy. It’s messy. Life is just one inconvenience after another.

Recently one of my best friends died—my computer. Although I’m not a techie, I love writing, researching, e-mailing and doing computer stuff. Picking out a new “best friend” is a daunting task when you aren’t computer savvy. Techie friends aren’t very helpful because they use terms like CPU, gigabyte, PC, megabyte, and RAM assuming I know what they mean.

When the technician said he might not be able to retrieve my material, I was sad, but not disheartened. After all, being the organized person I am, I had two backups. However, through some fluke, neither of my backups worked. Then I became disheartened. As I write this on a borrowed computer, we still aren’t sure if my material can be saved.

Dealing with life’s inconveniences can be stressful, time consuming, and overwhelming. Sometimes it’s difficult to keep perspective and discern the difference between an inconvenience and a tragedy.

This really came home to me about seven years ago when I got a phone call informing me that my stepsister and her whole family had been killed instantly in a car crash. My “to-do” list fell by the wayside as I flew back to the Midwest for the funeral, trying to comfort my folks though I was heartsick myself.

Suddenly my whole perspective had changed. A flat tire, a snoring spouse, a missed appointment, a late airplane, a lost game, the guy who cut me off in traffic, the gossipy co-worker, the slow Internet connection, the stock market being down, my weight being up or my computer crashing didn’t seem like quite as big a deal as it all did before.

Fortunately, God is with us whether our crisis is large or small. His perspective is the one that really counts, because he loves us and knows what is best for us in any given situation. What happens to us is not as important as who we are in Jesus, who lives in us and is our all in all.

Life is not neat and tidy; it’s unpredictable. Major tragedies and minor inconveniences will always abound. I think it’s helpful to discern the difference between the two, but if the trial is big or small, God is with us through it all (Matthew 28:20b).

More and more, I’m realizing that Jesus is not as concerned about my routine, my boat, my cage, my tambourine, my apple cart, or my “to do” list as I am. He doesn’t always shield me from life’s woes, but he will never leave or forsake me (Hebrews 13:5). After all, he is a much better friend than my computer, and his backup never fails (John 15:14-15)! ☐

The Gift of Prophecy

A Study of I Corinthians 14:1–12



The early Christians in Corinth were fascinated with spiritual gifts. After telling them to “desire the greater gifts” (12:31), Paul described to them “the most excellent way”—love (13:1-13). Paul

then weighed the relative merits of two spiritual gifts—one the Corinthians had over-valued, and one that they did not value enough. This problem warranted considerable space in Paul’s letter.

Prophecy better than tongues (14:1-5)

“Follow the way of love, he writes, “and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy.” What is this gift of prophecy? We will see more when Paul describes its benefits. The point is that the Corinthians should value it more highly.

Tongues is a valid gift. So why should anyone want a different gift? Paul explains: “Anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit. But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort.”

When people speak in tongues, they cannot be understood. What good does that do? Paul answers: “Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves.” There is a private benefit.

“But the one who prophesies edifies the church.” This is the contrast Paul is making: prophecy helps other people, but tongues do not. If believers love others and want to help others, they should value prophecy over tongues.

Prophecy strengthens, encourages and comforts people. It builds them up in the faith and teaches them. Many scholars conclude that it is what we now call preaching.

Tongues are good, but prophesying is much better. “I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would *rather* have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the

one who speaks in tongues...so that the church may be edified.” The entire worship service should focus on edification: “Everything must be done so that the church may be built up” (14:26).

A clear message (verses 6-12)

“If I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction?” Tongues would not be understood, but prophecy is given in language that people understand.

“In the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the pipe or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying?”

If no one understands the words, they might as well all be the same syllable: “da-da-da-da-da-da.” It might inspire the speaker, but it doesn’t do anything for anyone else. Paul wants them to speak words that can be understood.

“There are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker is a foreigner to me. So it is with you.”

The much-vaunted gift of tongues wasn’t doing the Corinthian church any good. It had become a point of rivalry, pride and division. It was not helping the people join together as the family of God, the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

It’s good to desire spiritual gifts, Paul concludes, but for the good of the church, believers need to focus on a different gift: “Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church.” Seek to be a person who helps others understand the words of God.

THE GREEKS HAD A WORD FOR IT

προφητεῖο

The word *prophēteuo* is a combination of the prefix *pro-*, meaning “before” and the root *phe-*, referring to speech. *Prophēteuo* means to speak publicly, or to speak of something before it happens. Moses was a prophet (Deut. 34:10), and although he made some predictions, his greater role was to tell people about their current responsibilities.

The later Israelite prophets spoke about the future not as mere predictions, but as words of judgment about the behavior of

the people in their own day. When Jonah warned Nineveh of impending destruction, the people repented, and the city survived (Jonah 3:10). As a prediction, the prophecy failed, but as a warning about the present, it achieved its purpose.

When soldiers asked Jesus to prophesy about who hit him (Luke 22:64), they were not asking for a prediction, but for evidence that showed he had supernatural knowledge. When Paul wrote about prophecy in Corinth,

he referred to speech that was divinely inspired to instruct and strengthen others.

Spiros Zodhiates defines a prophet: “not primarily one who foretells things to come, but who (having been taught of God) speaks out of His will” (*The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, page 1244).

Dr. Michael Morrison teaches classes in the New Testament at Grace Communion Seminary. More information about the seminary can be found at: gcs.ambassador.edu.

H m m ...

It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood...who spends himself in a worthy cause...and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory or defeat.

Theodore Roosevelt

Behind and within all the different images and symbols Christians may use for God—Creator, Father, Redeemer, Word, Spirit—the most fundamental, the deepest truth Christians can speak of God is that God is the source and power of relationships.

Paul F. Knitter

Millions of evangelicals, thinking they are honoring the Scriptures, are interpreting the Scriptures on questions of science and world affairs in ways that fundamentally contradict the deeper, broader, and historically well-established meanings of the Bible itself.

Mark A. Noll,

The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind

The Evangelical Protestant mind has never relished complexity. Indeed its crusading genius, whether in religion or politics, has always tended toward an over-simplification of issues and the substitution of inspiration and zeal for critical analysis and serious reflection; this was good for a rural frontier society, not good for today.

N.K. Clifford

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon

you as worthy of nothing else but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours.

Jonathan Edwards, 1741,
“Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”

I know what I know, but I also know what I don't know, whereas very many ignorant men are sure. Their certainty is simply organized ignorance, and for that, the world suffers.

Anonymous

While the boots of the soldiers of the most powerful army in the world resounded in the streets of occupied Jerusalem, an uneducated fisherman from the north of Palestine declared, “God has made this Jesus, whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). The man Jesus of Nazareth has been taken to heaven in glory, where he is now exalted as the Son of the Most High God. The meaning of a continuing incarnation is revealed in all its splendor: in the person of the eternal Son, the Triune God has taken up humanity into his being for ever. Jesus is God, and God is nothing apart from or contrary to who he is revealed to be in Jesus.

Gerrit Scott Dawson,
Jesus Ascended

The Church will gain true courage and genuine significance whenever and wherever it is firmly resolved to resign the false courage and counterfeit significance—the courage of large numbers, of moral qualities, of activist programs, of effect on and appreciation from those without—with the intent of putting its sole confidence in what founds and preserves it as it unites in lending an open ear to what God has spoken.

Karl Barth, *God in Action*

Do you have a moment?

In addition to our full-length interviews, we feature several short, one-to-three-minute programs of special interest. Why not take a moment and check them out?

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Brief, interesting excerpts from *You're Included*, featuring prominent theologians and Christian leaders.

Speaking of Life
www.gci.org/spol
Dr. Joseph Tkach, President of Grace Communion International, offers a three-minute commentary on issues of interest from a Christian perspective.

www.gci.org

If we look for the happy ending in this world and according to the standards of this world, we'll never find it. We can't earn it; we don't deserve it; there's no way we can acquire it, no matter how many merit badges we manage to pile up.

Madeleine L'Engle,
The Rock That Is Higher