



# CHRISTIAN Odyssey

October-November 2011

Growing Together in Life & Faith

## A Portrait of a Woman and Jesus

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# One Step at a Time

Sometimes the scale of tragedy is so great that we can only identify with it by focusing on details.

Genocide, crimes against humanity, natural and manmade disasters that leave innocent people devastated leave you feeling angry, helpless and frustrated, don't they? I can't get my mind around why God allows this kind of thing. I have grappled with the various arguments (theologians call it *theodicy*) about why a good God permits evil. Some of them make sense—sort of—until you are confronted with the specifics. I know that in God's good time, off in the future, all suffering and death will be conquered, and there is some comfort in that.

Some, but not enough. I want to do something about it now.

Like when the earthquake levelled Port au Prince in Haiti two years ago. I have many Haitian friends, and my church sponsors a school there. We wanted to do something—anything—to help. So we began to take up a collection of small change to help the school keep going. Every other week, the little children in our congregation pass around mugs and we all toss in the week's small change. It adds up to thousands of dollars in the course of the year. Our little bit of support cannot make all the difference, but it makes some.

Taking even a small step leaves you feeling better. I don't mean it lets you forget about the larger problem. But it prevents the frustration from developing into hopelessness.

Just before Jesus Christ began his ministry, John the Baptist told all who would listen that a Savior was coming. "Every val-

ley shall be filled in" he prophesied. "Every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all people will see God's salvation" (Luke 3:4-6). In symbolic language he showed how Jesus Christ and his kingdom would one day overcome every obstacle that stands in the way of peace.

Many ordinary people asked John what they could do to be ready. "Be generous," he said to those who had more than enough. "Be honest," he advised potential white-collar crooks. "Don't misuse your power," he cautioned those who wielded a little authority (see verses 7-15). Just small steps that bucked the trends in what was becoming an increasingly greedy and corrupt society.

Do we get the point? "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of God is forcefully advancing," said Jesus in Matthew 11:12 (NIV, 1984 edition). It is certainly not yet here in its fullness, but for those with eyes to see and ears to hear, its presence can be felt.

Kind, generous and thoughtful acts are solid, positive and irreversible strides into the world of the kingdom of God. God, for reasons that one day we will understand, may sometimes seem to have a strange and frustrating "hands off" policy towards suffering, but he has never had a "hearts off" policy, and his unswerving plan of redemption, salvation and restoration is evident in every tiny step taken by every caring heart. As Jesus said: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). **co**

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*A popular verse doesn't mean  
what it seems to say*

# Whose Hope? What Future?

By John Halford

**T**hey call it “going viral.” Almost overnight a video, a news item, or perhaps a piece of music rockets from relative obscurity to universal recognition. It happened with Pachelbel’s *Canon in D Major*. He wrote it about 1680, but it lay forgotten for three centuries. Then, in about 1980, it began appearing everywhere—advertisements, background music to movies and TV series, and as an entrance march at weddings.

Scriptures can be like that, too. Like this one:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

You’ll find it buried in the writings of the Old Testament Prophet Jeremiah. In chapter 29, verse 11, to be precise.

I probably have read that verse many times since I began studying the Bible. But it never really stuck out. Then I began to see it everywhere. Christian ministries that focused on “health and wealth” loved it. It seemed to say exactly what they were offering—a gospel that promised the good life now. Never mind that it was from the Old Testament; it delivered the good news that God wanted to bless us and prosper us, and it was his plan to do so. No wonder the verse has become so popular.

The problem is, health and wealth now is not what this verse is about. To read that into it is to wrench it out of

context. I am not suggesting that it is not God’s ultimate will to prosper us and give us a bright future—that is a topic well worth exploring. But to use this verse to buttress that argument is to miss its real point, the one that really needs to be made today. Especially as our traditional Christianity is in decline, and many of our congregations are made up mainly of older people, clinging desperately to keep the faith alive.

So let’s let Jeremiah make his point. To do that, we first need to get the context.

## The context

This verse is part of a letter that Jeremiah wrote about 2,500 years ago. Jeremiah, you remember, was a prophet that God sent to the people of ancient Judah to urge them to mend their ways and turn back to him to avoid national ruin.

**The problem is, health and wealth now is not what this verse is about. To read that into it is to wrench it out of context.**

It was a thankless task. Jeremiah was ignored, ridiculed and put in prison. Then the wheels came off. The Babylonian Empire of Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah, executed most of the royal family and took the elite of the nation—its priests,

nobility, scholars and other leaders—into exile in Babylon. The nation was stripped of talent and leadership.

Jeremiah, because he had foretold the Babylonian victory, was well treated by the invaders and allowed to stay in Jerusalem. He continued to minister to his people—not by crowing, “I told you so,” but with messages of comfort and compassion.

Meanwhile, the exiles in Babylon were restless. After the initial shock of deportation, it seems they lived in relative freedom. But like all exiles, they yearned to return to their homeland. Some of the exiled priests took advantage of the situation and began preaching that the exile would soon be over and the captives would soon be repatriated.

However, a quick return to the homeland was not what God had in mind. He inspired Jeremiah to write to the exiles and explain to them the reality of their situation. That letter is preserved in the Bible:

“This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ‘Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find



## Even in captivity the Israelites had work to do. A foundation had to be laid on which the future generations of the Chosen people could rebuild.

wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.

“Yes, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,’ declares the LORD” (Jeremiah 29:4-9).

This was not what the exiles wanted to hear. God was telling them, through this prophet they had repudiated, but whose warnings had been validated, that they should not expect an early return home.

How long would this state of affairs last? “This is what the LORD says: ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place.’”

And then comes the oft-misapplied verse: “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you” (verses 10-12).

God was not abandoning his people. Everything he had promised would eventually happen.

“I will be found by you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile” (verse 14).

But not just yet. The generation that had been taken captive was not going home any time soon. It would not happen until their grandchildren were mature adults. So they needed to face facts, settle down, make Babylon their home, reestablish their families, start businesses and work for—not against—the best interests of their captors.

It seems as though the captives listened to Jeremiah this time. Some, such as Daniel and his three famous friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, rose to positions of great influence in the Babylonian government and became trusted advisors to Nebuchadnezzar. And when the 70 years were fulfilled, some leading Jews were allowed to return to reestablish their nation—the nation to which the Messiah would eventually come.

With that as a background, let’s look at this verse again.

### Hope deferred

God was not promising the exiles in Babylon immediate relief from their circumstances. He was telling them that he had not forgotten them. They were still the “chosen people,” and their nation did indeed have a hope and a future. And even though the vast majority of them would not see that hope fulfilled in their lifetimes, they had a responsibility toward it.

Many people reading this article are older. Perhaps we have been Christians for decades, working, praying and contributing to the life of the church. We have lived with the expectation that our work would be crowned with success. Our congregations would thrive and our influence would grow. Many of us have lived with the very real hope that we were the “end time” generation who would see the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. That expectation provided an impetus that motivated us to make extraordinary sacrifices. We wanted to be ready. But as the years have gone by and our understanding has grown, we have accepted the strong likelihood that we are not that generation. So what do we do now?

We are a people not used to delaying gratification. We buy now and pay later. Advertising tell us “we deserve” it and “owe it to ourselves” to get what we want, do what we want and be what we want, when we want it. So when we read that God wants us to have “hope and a future,” we want it now. And if it looks like that won’t happen, it is tempting to lose interest and let the world and its needs pass us by.

Yes, the economy is in trouble, the environment needs attention, the spiritual state of our nations is decaying, our congregations are dwindling and religion, as we have known it, is on the ropes. Well, all that will probably not change in your lifetime. Maybe you should just sit it out.

It is just as well the captives in Babylon did not think like that. They did as Jeremiah instructed. Those captives had no mandate to give up and drop out. The dream was not over—they had work to do. A foundation had to be laid on which the future generations of chosen people could be established. They listened, and out of what seemed like a hopeless situation, the nation was eventually restored. Then, “when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son” (Galatians 4:4).

Jeremiah’s letter, put in its proper context, should resonate with us. Things have not worked out quite as we expected, but God still has expectations of us, just as he did those ancient captives in Babylon. They were a part of the story—the epic saga of how God was redeeming the world in his Son, Jesus Christ.

We are a part of that same story. As Jesus explained to his disciples, “others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor” (John 4:38). There are times when the activity is intense and “the harvest is plentiful” (Matthew 9:37). At other times it may look as if not much is happening, and we must remember “how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains” (James 5:7).

“So let’s not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good. At the right time we will harvest a good crop if we don’t give up, or quit” (Galatians 6:9). **co**

## The Abundant Life



Christ came so we might have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10). Some modern preachers want us to believe this refers to wealth and prosperity, so they urge people to go boldly before God and claim this promised abundance. To them, faith is measured by how much God blesses us materially.

However, the God revealed in the Bible is not some big “sugar daddy” in the sky, ready to give us everything we want. We may prayerfully sing, “Oh Lord, won’t you give me a Mercedes Benz?” and we might get it, but that doesn’t mean God gave it to us.

Jesus said that a man’s life does not consist of the abundance of the things he might possess (Luke 12:15). He said we should we seek first the kingdom of God, and told us not to be greatly concerned about material possessions (Matthew 6:31-33)

Now don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying the abundant life Jesus calls us to precludes riches or worldly success, but it does not depend on them, either.

Paul knew this better than anyone. He knew how to be abased or exalted, have a full tummy or an empty one, to abound or suffer—and through it all be content and give thanks (see Philippians 4:11-13 and Ephesians 5:20). In other words, we can experience the abundant life even if we are poor as church mice and struggling through all the trials life can throw at us.

John 10:10 tells us the reason Jesus came was so we could have life, referring to “eternal” life, or the life of the age to come. The phrase “more abundantly” is the Greek word *perissos*, meaning “beyond, more, and above measure.” It refers back to the word “life.” Not only does Jesus promise a future abundant life, but he also gives it to us now—he lives his life within us right now. His very presence in us adds something immeasurable to our existence. He is what makes our life worth living in spite of how much money we have or don’t have in the bank.

If we read the whole passage of John 10, we see it’s about Jesus being our shepherd, we sheep hearing his voice, and Jesus being our open door. The context refers to having a positive relationship with God. And that, my friend, is what the more abundant life is all about. Not only do we get eternal life but as an added bonus we have the opportunity to build a relationship with Jesus Christ—the very one who makes it all possible.

Man views abundance in terms of physical possessions. God has a different perspective. His abundant life is filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self-control, compassion, humility, character, wisdom, enthusiasm, dignity, optimism, confidence, honesty, and a relationship with him. In other words, the more abundant life is full of all the things money can’t buy. No matter how much money you have, you cannot buy more patience, wisdom, hope, self-control, or salvation!

Money cannot buy us a “more abundant” life, but God gives it to us if we let him. The more we open our hearts to God, the more abundant our lives will be. **co**





# Portrait of a Woman and Jesus

By Barbara Egbert

Detail from *Mary's Expression of Devotion*

**Christian Odyssey** interviews Barbara Quillen Egbert, who recently published *Portrait of a Woman and Jesus*.

**Christian Odyssey:** Why did you write *Portrait of a Woman and Jesus*?

**Barbara Egbert:** Over a decade ago, I had a vivid dream of a personal encounter with Jesus. During this period of my life, I was seeking a more intimate relationship with Jesus and began to explore the stories of his interaction with women. It occurred to me that the way my dream played out provided a unique structure for a book. I began to visualize the various encounters with Jesus by imagining how the scene was set up and what a painting that captured what the moment might look like when the eyes of the woman and Jesus met. Thus, the vision for the book was born and I began to write out of pure excitement.

**CO:** Many books have been written about women and Jesus. What's different about your work?

**BE:** It's the combination of artwork and text that draws readers into the stories of Jesus' encounters with women in an open, down-to-earth way. My goal was to present the reality of the lives of these biblical women as they dealt with the same issues that we deal with today—failing health, grief, shame, insignificance, loss, guilt and insecurity. By capturing visually what it might have looked like when “real” women with “real” issues met the “real” Son of God, I prayed that readers would relate to Scripture with a renewed perspective.

**CO:** You added what you call a “journeybook” to go with the main book. Tell us about that.

**BE:** My initial vision of the project was a book that highlights stories about women's encounters with Jesus. So *Portrait* demonstrates visually and through the text how “He looked through *her* eyes and into *her* heart.” But as I became acquainted with each biblical woman, there were many thoughts that surfaced in relation to how I personally identified with them. So I envisioned a companion book (a journeybook) that would help a reader deepen her relationship with Jesus by showing her that “He looks through *your* eyes and into *your* heart.”

Jesus desires restoration and wholeness in *all* areas of our lives, and the journeybook is a way of helping readers know him as their “all in all”—as Savior, Provider, Comforter, Redeemer, Forgiver and Friend.

**CO:** At \$29.95 retail, some might feel the book is a bit expensive. Most “Bible help” type books are paperback, while *Portrait of a Woman and Jesus* is a quality coffee-table book. Why did you choose that format?

**BE:** It has always been my vision for the book to be a hardbound, coffee-table book that showcases full-color, high-quality artwork on glossy paper. The visual impact of the beautiful scenes of Jesus interacting with women underscores the scriptural account and text, impacting the reader in a fresh way. It gives me great joy to watch a reader open the book, smell the print, feel the glossy paper and “ooh and ahh” while





Detail from *The Deliverance of a Crippled Woman*

leafing from page to page of artwork. “Wow! It’s so beautiful!” is the most common response I hear.

**CO:** The illustrations are outstanding. What is the story behind that art?

**BE:** I didn’t have a clue where to find an artist who could capture the visions in my head. But God knew! After the text was written, he led me to Wilson Ong, a gifted artist who identified with the life of Christ. It was important that the artwork convey the strength *and* kindness of Jesus, who was a Jewish carpenter and a teacher, and portray him as realistically as possible within the context of the time of the scriptural accounts.

It was so exciting to see the first round of pencil sketches of the scenes. My vision for the artwork was actually coming to life! After many months, the individual paintings were finally completed, surpassing my expectations. I love how the artist has captured Jesus present and engaged with each woman, looking at her with tenderness and compassion.

**CO:** How does one get a copy of *Portrait of a Woman and Jesus* and the journeybook?

**BE:** There are currently a couple ways to order the book and journeybook:

- 1) Amazon.com
- 2) through my publisher, New Voice Publications at [nvpub.net](http://nvpub.net)

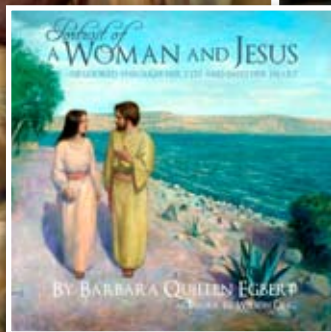
I would also like to invite *Odyssey* readers to visit my



Detail from *A Woman Fully Known*



Detail from *Encounter with the Risen Jesus*



website, [portraitofawoman.com](http://portraitofawoman.com), which provides contact information should they have any questions. **co**

**About the Artist:** Wilson Jay Ong grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area and received a BFA from Brigham Young University and afterward attended the Art Students’ League. In addition to being a professional artist and illustrator since 1983, Wilson has taught art, presented workshops and exhibited his work nationally. He and his family currently live in Corning, New York.

# Mom, I'm So Proud of You!

By Julie Frantz

**W**hen my mother, Mary, was 5, her mother told her to clean up her plate and not waste one bite because “there are children in Africa who are starving.” With the simple logic and honesty of a 5-year old, Mom instantly responded, “Well, let’s give this food to them!”

Time passed. Mom grew up, married and had a family of her own. It was not an easy life. She had years of struggle and hardship, personal pain and little financial security. In the midst of her trials, Mom discovered the love of Christ, and a new journey began.

For a time, her faith in what God had done for her was enough. She enjoyed her blessings and she was able to stay calm in the storms of life, confident in her Lord’s ever presence. But the time came when Mom felt the calling for more.

One day, when Mom was 46 years old, her husband, Cliff, asked her, “If time and money were of no importance, what would you do?” Without hesitation, Mom replied, “Go to Africa and adopt twelve children.” Her answer surprised her as much as it surprised those who heard it. Although she was living in the mountains of Colorado, Africa was on her heart, but she didn’t know why. She trusted that God would reveal that when it was time.

One day soon after, Cliff came across a book about the plight of AIDS orphans in Ethiopia and gave it to her. The story broke her heart. For two years, Mom and Cliff planned and saved for the trip of lifetime. They joined a trip organized by a small non-profit group that arranged for Ethiopian orphans to be adopted.

Their tour took them to orphanages in the capital, Addis Ababa, and several surrounding cities. One day they came to an orphanage that was not sponsored by American adoption agencies. Mom remembers, “My heart sank as the little children were herded into a large tent. I noticed that the teenagers were left around the edges of the compound. I could feel Jesus pushing me toward these older orphans, as if he were saying, “They are why you are here.”

Mom resisted for a moment, and then jumped in with both feet. She walked up to a young man, stuck out her hand and said, “My name is Mary, what is your name?”

“Assefa,” he replied.

“What are you going to study when you go to college?” she asked. Assefa’s head dropped as he replied “Lady, we don’t go to college. We are orphans.”

She asked again. “Assefa, what are you going to study in college?”

“Lady, you don’t understand, orphans don’t go to college,” he replied adamantly. Mom persisted, “Assefa, what are you going to study when you go to college?”

This time he raised his head, smiled and answered, “I want to be a doctor. My father and mother died of AIDS, and then I cared for my brother and sister while they died of AIDS. I want to be a doctor and cure AIDS.”

At that moment that Mom knew God had sent her to that orphanage for a specific reason, and that reason was standing in front of her. God was asking her to be his feet, his hands and his love for these older teens that no one wanted to adopt.

Today, six years later, Mom is co-founder of the nonprofit organization, HE4EO (Higher Education 4 Ethiopian’s Orphans). This organization provides financial scholarships for older orphans to attend college. Each year she travels to Ethiopia to enroll older students into college and provide clothing and other needs. When Mom said she wanted to adopt twelve kids, she greatly underestimated the number.

Mom and Cliff continue to visit Ethiopia, taking with them sewing machines, looms and woodworking tools, so they can offer vocational training for orphans not qualified to go to college. Even more important, they bring their love. These young people have a strong desire to give someone the great love they have in their hearts.

“I never knew love like that until I went to the orphanages,” Mom told me. “We spend countless hours just talking to the orphans and listening to their stories, their hope and their dreams, as well as praying with them. These young people crave time and attention. Twenty-three hours on a plane, sleeping in a not-so-clean guest house, eating food I really don’t like much, breathing polluted air, bathing in not-so-clean water, sometimes wearing your clothes for days and hardly ever getting a good night’s sleep is a small price to pay for the difference we make in each life that we are so blessed to touch.”

Mom’s life has taught me that the gospel is not just good news about salvation. It is an invitation to join God in what he is already doing, building his kingdom of love and doing his will “on earth as it is in heaven.”

Mary gives God the glory. But Mom, I am so very proud of you. **co**





▲ Mary with Melonen, one of the Art students she taught while in Addis Ababa



▲ Cliff presenting one of our college students, Eskedar, with a lap top to help her in her education



▶ Cliff and Mary with some of the children from Hanna's.

▼ Kalkidan loving on her Papa



▲ Cliff and Mary with Yonus who has HIV-AIDS



◀ Bethlehem learning to sew in the vocational Training Center at Hanna's

▼ Cliff with Fregenet and Tigist. Cliff and I sponsor Fregenet through Hanna's Orphan Home.

▼ Mary giving a quilt to Fregenet who shares her top bunk with Tigist. They only had one blanket to share until they were given this hand made quilt donated by Cliff and Mary's neighbor.



# The Wake We Leave Behind

By Hilary Buck

**R**uth came to our congregation late in life. She didn't like to give her age, but she must have been in her 80s. Her joy and love for God found expression in prayer and above all in song.

For a while her joy was dented as her sight began to fail and she was told that there was no solution. However, she never missed our weekly service, though she often came wearing odd shoes. We gave her the hymns in large print so she could still join in the singing. When she could no longer see well enough to read those, someone would sit beside her and quickly say the words of the next line of each hymn in her ear.

Ruth lived in an apartment block near the sea. It overlooked a marina crowded with yachts and high-powered cruisers. When visiting Ruth, I noticed that when boats leave the marina too fast, their wake slams the nearby boats around on their moorings and sometimes throws them against the quay, damaging them. The marina puts up prominent warnings: "You are responsible for your wake."

The time came when Ruth could no longer manage living on her own. She had to move to a care home near to a relative, but too far from our church for her to attend. But we could not forget this dear lady. She never preached a sermon, led services, made the tea and coffee, arranged the flowers or any of the other tasks that we may think contribute to the life of a congregation.

**Ruth's calming wake served to inspire our collective worship. I wish there were a few more like her.**

But Ruth was a vital part of that life. From the second row where she always sat, her determination to join in with heartfelt worship was a visible weekly inspiration for all of us. Her worship lifted us. If we were feeling tired or dispirited or were distracted with the problems of the past week, we only had to look at Ruth. We could follow in her gentle, yet spiritually powerful wake.



As Paul explained to the Corinthian church, there are many ways to serve, each according to his or her spiritual gifts. These gifts are not given for personal benefit or individual aggrandizement. The Holy Spirit displays God's gracious power through each member as a means of helping the entire church (1 Corinthians 12:1-7).

So it was that Ruth's calming wake served to inspire our collective worship. I wish there were a few more like her, gently chugging into our lives, making her presence with humble and persistent dedication. Ruth is no longer with us, but what she gave to us lives on. She was one of those parts of the body that seem to be weaker, but which are indispensable (1 Corinthians 12:22). **co**





# Time for New Trees

By Greg Williams

**I**t is an interesting time in the life of the Williams family apple orchard. Our modest 35 acres of trees in the rolling hills of western North Carolina are going through two major transitions. The orchard has been leased to the Henderson family for the past 25 years. The arrangement has worked well, and it is now time for a younger generation to take over. The second major transition is the uprooting of old trees and the planting of new ones.

Transitioning to a new generation can be a nightmare. Whereas in the past a man's word and a handshake were good enough for an agreement, today it is often much more complicated. A younger generation is concerned about fair market prices, risk of liability and a multitude of other legalities. Thankfully, in our case, our two families had a heart-level discussion about all of the concerns, and the handshake won out over the multi-page document produced by a high-priced lawyer.

The younger Henderson caretaker has decided that the best long-range strategy is to re-invest in the orchard. There are nearly 2500 varieties of apples grown in the U.S., but for our North Carolina market, the Golden Delicious, Red Delicious, Rome Beauty, Gala, Mutsu, and Jonagold are the varieties that are consistently in demand. So the young Mr. Henderson is faced with a challenge on two fronts. There are some varieties in the orchard that are not profitable, and then there are also five acres of Golden Delicious trees that are too old to produce quality apples. So Mr. Henderson took drastic action. He brought in the backhoe, dug out the five acres of trees, pushed them together into a huge brush pile and ignited a major bonfire.

As I watch my friend work with the challenges of the family orchard, I find some interesting parallels with my other job.

I am employed by my denomination to help coordinate our plans to prepare for the future.

Like farming, this is a multi-layered process requiring wisdom, patience and faith. In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul likened the church to a field that had to be tended by workers through the stages of preparing the soil, planting, weeding and eventually harvesting. My apple-farming experience has taught me some useful lessons that I can apply to the ever-changing seasons of our church.

Like an orchard, a church goes through various seasons as it bears fruit. And like trees, individuals and congregations go through various phases in their lives. There are those that are newly planted, needing extra care and attention in the first stages of growth. Then there are the years when they are mature and bear much fruit. But, let's face it, there are also times when even the most vigorous tree or the most robust of

**Like an orchard, a church goes through various seasons as it bears fruit.**

people begin to get old and less productive. Pastors who could once pastor two or three congregations and seemed to be a never-failing source of energy and ideas begin to slow down. The spirit may still be willing, but the flesh becomes weak. This is part of the natural cycle of life.

However, my orchard and churches analogy can only go so far. Pastors and congregations are not trees and orchards, to be used until the time comes to dispose of them. We cannot administer a church with a backhoe and a bonfire. There are feelings and emotions to be considered. None of us likes to be

Continues on page 12

## Surviving the Wilderness



I have almost caught up to the 21st century. I say “almost” because I still don’t have a smart phone, and even on my non-smart phone it still takes me ten times longer than my daughter to send a text message. But I do have an iPod, and have learned to download music and podcasts. It took me all day (don’t laugh), but I was rather proud of myself. It didn’t help that the manual was written by a bunch of teenagers who can’t seem to understand that anyone older than 50 needs everything spelled out in simple terms. The manual seemed to assume I actually had prior knowledge of these high-tech things.

Now that I’ve mastered downloading, I’ve been listening to podcasts and recordings of conference presentations while I walk. One speech by Amy Warren Hilliker, Rick and Kay Warren’s daughter, gave helpful information about surviving time in the wilderness. She talked about the Israelites who weren’t allowed to bypass the wilderness but had to go through it, and how our lives are often like that. We have to go through the difficult times even though we wish and pray we could somehow go around, over or under them.

Hilliker gave five points to help us go through these times of wilderness wandering: 1) seek solitude, 2) practice contemplation, 3) create community, 4) pursue service and 5) surrender to Jesus. This is nothing new, but it’s nice to be reminded sometimes, isn’t it?

When we hear someone talk about silence and solitude, most of us nod our heads and think, “Yes, I need to do that.” But most of us, despite our good intentions, never seem to get around to spending quiet time with God. If we’re going to get it done, we need to put it on the calendar and give it priority. Just us and God, in real solitude and silence, taking time to contemplate God and his ways.

We need real friends, garbage friends, as speaker Kathleen Hart calls them. Maybe we should go back to simpler times, when women got together to wash their clothes in the river. Wait, not that far back! But when was the last time you and a friend solved the world’s problems over tea or coffee? Or even chatted online? Community and service keep us in touch with the people in our lives. Distance is no problem now. Why not get together with someone soon?

And then there’s surrender. Most of us like to be in control, even though we know we don’t have much control over most things in our lives. Surrendering to God means we learn—sometimes the hard way—to depend on him and not on our own power. We learn to choose joy instead of worry and let him take care of what we know deep down we can’t control.

Our difficulties and trials must be faced, head on, no going around them. Practicing these five things can help us enjoy the wonders of the wilderness and be thankful that God knows the way through. **co**

## New Trees

From page 11

reminded that we may be past our prime. So although the process of aging and renewal in church life is inevitable, it must be done with sensitivity, love and due caution.

This is not just my challenge. It concerns all of us who are joined in fellowship. None of us are plants that “flourish and are cast into the fire.” We are members one of another, and we owe each other a duty of care. The old must serve the young, and vice versa.

Let me then share the challenge with you, and ask for your prayers and concern. On the one hand, we are looking for young people who display leadership qualities, and most of all a desire to go deeper in ministry. This is why we have begun the Pastoral Internship program. It is gaining momentum with a slow, steady stream of applicants, and it holds great promise for developing a “young orchard” of future pastors. However, just as young trees require special attention in their early years of growth if they are to grow straight and strong, these young leaders require good care from skilled and patient mentors who can help them grow into the best pastors the Lord desires them to be. Part of my job is to assist in the process of matching approved intern applicants with the best-qualified mentoring pastors available.

Apple trees have to be strategically placed within an orchard, with self-pollinating trees close enough to non-pollinating trees so that apples will be produced by all varieties. And we need to place our interns with congregations who are alive and active, so that the intern can grow in a positive atmosphere among experienced and motivated Christians.

Another challenge we face is the growing number of veteran pastors who are nearing retirement age. This reality can easily sneak up on you. No one likes to admit they are getting old, and the transition to a less prominent role can be especially hard for men and women who have given many years in dedicated service and commitment. And, unlike old trees, elderly Christians are not “taking up valuable space.” Those years of experience are still useful, even though the physical frame may need a change of pace.

Several of our older pastors have already made this transition. We are learning from them, and one of our challenges is to harness their experience to help the rest of us as we reach retirement age.

Like an orchard, a church cannot just be left to itself if it is to continue to bear fruit. It looks like our family orchard is in safe hands for the next few years. I pray that we can work together so we can say the same about our church that we are all privileged to belong to.

For more information, contact Greg at [greg.williams@gci.org](mailto:greg.williams@gci.org) or see information about Pastoral Internships at our web site [wcg.org/mindev/internships.htm](http://wcg.org/mindev/internships.htm). **co**



# Planting a Seed for the Gospel

By Mathew Morgan

**I received some fruit in the mail recently that made my day. It made me pause and, with deep appreciation, give thanks. No, this wasn't one of those delicious-looking boxes from Harry and David. It was a check made payable to Grace Communion International (GCI) for \$51,000.**

In my role as Treasurer of our church, I have to make sure all our bills are paid on time. So I am grateful for all the donations we receive so regularly from the faithful and generous people who help make it possible for us to share the gospel with others.

Every gift, whether large or small, is a vital part of the gospel work God has entrusted to us. We know from Jesus' words about the widow's offering in Luke 21:1-3 that he looks not at the amount of the gift, but at the heart of the giver. The widow gave sacrificially from the heart, Jesus said, while many of the rich were giving for show.

## Mary

Let me explain why the donation I mentioned above was cause for special appreciation. You see, this check arrived in 2011 because someone, whom we will call Mary, decided to plant a financial seed for the gospel back in 1964.

Fruit from that seed, in the form of a check, has arrived almost every year since that time. It is inspiring how God has used them to bless others long into the future through their thoughtful seed planting so many years ago. How did they do



it?, you might wonder.

Mary wanted to be able to support the church after her death with the same generosity as she had when she was alive. So she and her husband set up what is known as an inter-vivos (living) trust in 1964. A financial institution was appointed as trustee. A trustee is responsible for carrying out the directives of the trust (investing the funds, making payments, proper reporting, etc.). In this case, the trust documents direct that GCI is to receive 4 percent of the value of the trust assets each year, after expenses. Because well-managed

funds typically produce more than a four percent annual return, the trust fund has grown steadily for the last 47 years, making the 4 percent the church receives more valuable each year. Mary's fund is now worth over \$4 million and growing, providing much fruit every year to support the mission of the church. Just think how many people have had the chance to experience the gospel as a result of that initial seed Mary had the foresight to plant!

That is why I paused in thankful reflection when I saw the check from Mary's special fund, and why I began thinking about what kind of financial seeds I could plant today in order that others may learn of the love of God after I am gone.

Perhaps you too are in a position to join Mary in thoughtfully planting financial seeds for the gospel. On behalf of those who will one day learn about the good news because of seeds you plant today, thank you. ☪

There are several ways of planting seeds that produce long-term financial fruit for the gospel.

Some people choose to name Grace Communion International directly in their will as a full or partial beneficiary. Others choose to name GCI as a beneficiary of a life insurance policy once their children are grown or after a spouse dies, reducing the original need for the policy.

Some options provide substantial tax benefits either now or to your estate. But they all provide the satisfaction of control-

ling how the fruit of your life's work will be used as opposed to relinquishing that right to the state or to others who may not care as much as you do about your wishes and priorities.

The legal department of Grace Communion International can offer some basic information on how to name the church as a beneficiary in *simple* wills and trusts. We provide this service without cost or obligation. However, for legal reasons we cannot write your will for you. For more information, write to:

**Legal Office, GCI**  
**PO Box 5005**  
**Glendora, CA 91740**

You can also email the Legal Office at: [bequestinfo@gci.org](mailto:bequestinfo@gci.org)

For legal reasons, you should contact the Legal Department personally, and not have someone else do this for you.

Some estate situations can become very complicated, and it has become a very specialized field. For this reason, if your situation is complicated, you should contact an estate lawyer.

## “In Jesus’ Name” Reflections on Why Our Prayers Matter



I’ve spent most of my life ending my prayers with, “In Jesus’ name, Amen.” It was what I was taught, and truth be told, I almost looked at it as a sort of magic formula. If I wanted God to hear me, I prayed “In Jesus’ name.” If I didn’t pray in his name, I couldn’t be sure God would honor my request.

After all, Jesus said, “Whatever you ask in my name I will do . . .” (John 14:13). Somehow, though, I don’t think this is about merely saying the right words to end our prayers. I think it’s more about being in positive fellowship with Jesus.

Jesus told us when two or more are gathered in his name, he is present (Matthew 18:19-20); and “Whoever welcomes a child in my name, welcomes me.” I think that praying in Jesus’ name is praying in the same spirit and heart as Jesus would pray, that is, a heart of love, of kindness, forgiveness, mercy and hope.

I think it’s also acknowledging that we come to the throne of the Father because Jesus is the one who takes us there. It’s also acknowledging that we want God’s will to be done and not merely our own.

It’s never wrong to end a prayer, “In Jesus’ name,” of course. It’s a reminder that our lives, our worship and our requests are all centered on him. At the same time, it’s not essential to end a prayer by saying these exact words. What is essential is that our heart is oriented toward and centered on Jesus—on who he is for us and who we are to him.

**Ending a prayer with “in Jesus’ name,” is a lot more than just a set of magic words.**



Jesus is focused on us, even on all those who don’t even yet know him as the one who loves them, forgives them and reconciles them to the Father.

So now when I end my prayers with “in Jesus’ name,” I mean a whole lot more than just some little set of magic words. I’m reminding myself that Jesus is right there with me, taking up my feeble little prayers as his own, redeeming them and presenting them to the Father.

What peace, what rest, what certain hope! Jesus is my all in all, even in my prayers. **co**

## Crossing Borders mission trip to Mexico

December 9-11, 2011



We are planning to deliver several hundred shoeboxes full of school supplies, toys and toiletries to children of poor villages across the border in Mexico. We visit these same villages during our week-long summer mission trip, so this winter-time event allows us to reconnect and share gifts and the gospel with these people.

We would love to have you join us, to meet the people, share the gospel and distribute the gifts.

If you can’t come yourself, we gladly accept donations of packaged shoeboxes of gifts (from individuals, churches, clubs and other organizations). If you prefer, you can send a donation and we will purchase the supplies and pack boxes for you.



For more info on what to pack into the boxes or other details about the trip, go to [www.cbmission.org](http://www.cbmission.org) and click on the “Shoebox Ministry” link. Or call Lee Berger at 903-746-4463.



# One at a Time, Please

A Study of 1 Corinthians 14:26–39



What did first-century believers do in their worship meetings? The Bible gives us only a few glimpses into the details. Paul gives a description in 1 Corinthians 14:26: “When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation.” Every believer had a part to play, each according to the way that God had gifted them.

## Speaking in turn

However, it seems that all the believers in Corinth wanted to use their gifts at the same time, and their meetings had become chaotic. One person was singing, another speaking in tongues, a third trying to deliver a message—but no one was listening to anyone else.

So Paul gives them a basic principle: “Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.” Spiritual gifts are given for the common good (1 Cor. 12:7), and they should strengthen the church. People should be taught, and a sense of community should grow.

Based on this foundational principle, Paul gives instructions: “If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God” (vv. 27-28).

When God inspires people to speak, he does not cause everyone to speak at once. Rather, he expects them to restrain themselves so that their gift is used at time when it can be effective. It may mean waiting for someone else to finish, or until an interpreter is present.

Tongues are not appropriate in church, he says, unless someone is there to interpret the words. And do not expect everyone to speak in tongues—no more than three should speak at each meeting. If more people feel inspired to speak in tongues, then they can wait until the next week.

## Not a God of disorder

Paul gives similar guidelines for the gift of prophecy: “Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh

carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged” (vv. 29-31).

How do people “weigh carefully” what is said? The Greek word means to discern, to make a decision. People are to decide whether these are words of God, or not. Was this done by each person silently, or did it involve discussion? We do not know.

The first speaker must be willing to cut the message short if someone else is inspired to give an additional message. The meeting is not an oratory contest or an endurance contest, but a time for instruction and encouragement, a time to serve others rather than to seek attention for one’s self.

Paul gives another basic principle when he writes, “The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets” (v. 32). He has already implied that tongues-speakers should control their own gift; each person should use wisdom when using their gifts. Being “inspired” does not mean that everyone blurts out whatever they want, whenever they want. God gives gifts, but he also wants us to think about how and when we use those gifts.

“For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people” (v. 33). Paul’s other congregations were orderly, and he wanted Corinth to be orderly as well. He did not tell people to stop using their gifts, but his guidelines would make their gifts more effective.<sup>1</sup>

Paul concludes the chapter: “Be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (vv. 39-40). We might summarize it this way:

1. Be eager to speak words that instruct, encourage, and build people up.
2. Tongues are not wrong in themselves, but they can be used wrongly.
3. Meetings should be orderly, so they can strengthen the church. **co**

<sup>1</sup> Paul also calls for orderly worship among the women. For a detailed study of these controversial verses, see our article posted at: [gci.org/church/ministry/women9](http://gci.org/church/ministry/women9).

## THE GREEKS HAD A WORD FOR IT

### τάξις

*Taxis* comes from *tassō*, which means “to arrange.” *Taxis* usually conveys the idea of a sequence. We get the English word *taxonomy* from this word.

In Luke 1:8, *taxis* is used to say that Zechariah’s division was “on duty.” It was

the turn for his group to serve. *Taxis* is used more often in Hebrews, to say that Jesus is a priest in the “order” of Melchizedek.

Paul uses *taxis* in 1 Cor. 14:40 to say that worship meetings should be orderly. The context shows that Paul is concerned with

sequence—that people speak one after another, each in their own turn. **co**

**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](http://gcs.ambassador.edu).

**H m m ...**

Anyone who doesn't take truth seriously in small matters cannot be trusted in large ones either.

**Albert Einstein**

A person's mind stretched to a new idea never goes back to its original dimensions.

**Oliver Wendell Holmes**

I may not agree with his theory, however, that Darwin chap is still a capital fellow!

**Archbishop Sam Wilberforce**

An idea is not responsible for the people who believe in it.

**Don Marquis**

Before we can begin to see the cross as something done for us, we have to see it as something done by us.

**John Stott**

We should all start with the affirmation that the world is the product of a transcendent intelligence and then inspect that world to see what we can find out. Along the way we must content ourselves with partial insights, constantly reminding ourselves that we—BioLogos, intelligent design, old earth creationism and young earth creationism—see "through a glass darkly."

**Karl W. Giberson and Francis S. Collins, *Language of Science and Faith: Straight Answers to Genuine Questions***

The greatest tragedy of science is that you often slay a beautiful hypothesis with an ugly fact.

**Thomas Huxley**

All language about the future, as any economist or politician will tell you, is simply a set of signposts pointing into a fog.

**N.T. Wright**

To sustain the belief that there is no God,

atheism has to demonstrate infinite knowledge, which is tantamount to saying, "I have infinite knowledge that there is no being in existence with infinite knowledge."

**Ravi Zacharias**

In teaching the study of political science, you rarely come across persons who believe that they know what political science is. Students generally understand that when they walk into the political science classroom, they are going to study a subject about which they know very little. The same is true for many other academic disciplines. However, when it comes to religion, part of the process of learning means unlearning those things that are either misguided or wrong.... When you are forced to look at your faith seriously, you begin to know who you really are. In more academic terms, challenges to your faith help you form identity.

**Michael Joseph Brown,**

***What They Don't Tell You: A Survivor's Guide to Biblical Studies***



Sociologists have a theory of the looking-glass self: you become what the most important person in your life (wife, father, boss, etc.) thinks you are. How would my life change if I truly believed the Bible's astounding words about God's love for me, if I looked in the mirror and saw what God sees?

**Philip Yancey**

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## 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?

**GCI Reflections**  
[www.gci.org/gcifr](http://www.gci.org/gcifr)  
GCI members sharing personal stories, lessons and ideas on a wide variety of topics related to the Christian life and experience.

**One Quick Thought**  
[www.gci.org/oqt](http://www.gci.org/oqt)  
Brief, interesting excerpts from *You're Included*, featuring prominent theologians and Christian leaders.

**Speaking of Life**  
[www.gci.org/spol](http://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](http://www.gci.org)

When God is male, the male is God.

**Mary Daly**

For every complex problem, there is a solution that is simple, neat, and wrong.

**H.L. Mencken**

Love does not dominate; it cultivates.

**Johan Wolfgang von Goethe**