

GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL

# CHRISTIAN Odyssey

February-March 2012

Growing Together in Life & Faith

## Approaching the Light

Page 3

Vol. 9 No. 1

[ChristianOdyssey.org](http://ChristianOdyssey.org)

# On Turning 60

I celebrated my 60th birthday in late December. As one of four million American “Baby Boomers” who turned 60 in 2011, I have officially joined the ranks of the “oldies.” Not so long ago this would have meant the approach of the end of life—certainly the end of working life. But today, it is quite possible that people who are now 60 have one third of their lives ahead. Still, there is no denying that when you pass 60, you cannot pretend that you are still young. The jokes about old age suddenly seem not quite so funny!

Many of you reading this also are in your seventh decade. We do not feel “old” in our minds, and may even resent suggestions that we are past our prime. A 1995 study of Americans between 55 and 74 revealed that most felt 12 years younger than their actual age. Though this may be good in some ways, it is not good that our society fears and resents growing old. As those engaged in God’s work, we must not buy into the myth that we can keep going forever (we will, of course, but not as frail, temporary human beings). Instead, we should be thinking of and preparing for the future—not just our own, but the future of those who look to us for leadership and direction, and who will carry on



the work after us.

As the president of Grace Communion International, I think often about what lies ahead for our denomination after my contribution has been made. I believe that GCI has a future! I don’t know all the details, but I see encouraging signs. We truly are a worldwide church. In some places our congregations are growing rapidly—bursting with youth and energy. In others, numerical growth is harder to come by, but our members are growing in love and service. Many are reaching out in mission at home and around the world. Through these activities, grounded in our growing understanding of Trinitarian theology, I believe God is showing us that we have a role in bringing the good news of salvation to a world that needs it so desperately.

Looking back, especially over the last 15 years during which I have been privileged to serve as GCI’s president and Pastor General, I realize that I cannot claim credit for what has happened. I feel sometimes that I have been swept along by events that I did not plan and could not have anticipated. I pray that GCI will play a useful role in this exciting journey of discovery. **co**

# CONTENTS

2. **Editorial:**  
On Turning 60
3. **Approaching the Light**
5. **Interview: Why Collide Hadrons?**
7. **Thinking Out Loud**  
Listening
8. **Self Portrait**
9. **The Gloves Are Off**
10. **Time for New Methods**
11. **Tammy’s Turn**  
Enjoy the Ride
12. **92 Years and Still Going Strong**
13. **For the Love of God**  
The Joy of Communion
14. **Mission Post**  
Crossing Borders— Muchas Gracias
15. **Bible Study:**  
A Model for All Believers  
A Study of 1 Thessalonians 1
16. **Hmm...**

## CHRISTIAN Odyssey

March-April 2012. Vol. 9 No. 1.  
Circulation—9,000

*Christian Odyssey* (ISSN 1937-500X) is published six times per year by **Grace Communion International**, PO Box 5005, Glendora, CA, 91740. Copyright © 2012 Grace Communion International. All rights reserved. *Christian Odyssey* is

also available on the Internet at [www.christian-odyssey.org](http://www.christian-odyssey.org). For subscriber services in the U.S., phone 1-800-423-4444.

**Executive Editor:** Michael Feazell. **Editor:** John Halford. **Managing Editor:** Michael Morrison. **Proof Reader and Copy Editor:** Janet Shay. **Circulation:** Celestine Olive. **Media coordinator:** Nathan Smith. **Publisher:** Grace Communion International. **President:** Joseph Tkach.

**Notice:** *Christian Odyssey* cannot be responsible for the return of unsolicited articles and photographs. Subscriptions are sent automatically to contributing members of Grace Communion International.

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

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011, by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com).

**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.



# Approaching the Light

By John Halford

*God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords,  
who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has  
seen or can see.* 1 Timothy 6:15-16

**T**his is an exciting time to be a particle physicist. Especially if you are a particle physicist who believes in God, because we appear to be on the verge of exciting new discoveries that could force us to rethink how we look at the natural world.

Recently I visited the CERN Super Collider in Geneva, Switzerland, as the guest of Dr. Keith Baker—a particle physicist who is also a committed Christian. Keith is a Yale Professor who has also been involved with the cutting-edge experiments now being conducted using this amazing technological marvel carved into the rock beneath France and Switzerland.

We watched the operators in the control room, which reminded me of Mission Control for a space mission. Which, of course it is. Except that these men and women are supervising a journey into inner space. The actual experiment is going on deep in the ground under our feet in a circular tunnel 17 miles in circumference. Down there, protons (one of the smallest particles of matter) are accelerated to nearly the speed of light, and then redirected to smash into each other.

I have a vague understanding of what happens when these particles collide, but I think it would be better to leave the

explanation to someone who really knows what he is talking about. So we have included an interview with Keith Baker in this issue (see page 5). By the way, don't feel bad if you don't fully understand it. It seems that no one does. I take comfort from the words of the Nobel Prize-winning pioneer of quantum mechanics, Niels Bohr, who admitted, "If you are not completely confused by quantum mechanics, you do not understand it."

Nevertheless, what we are on the verge of learning from the collider is likely to turn our understanding of the universe on its head. As physicist Lisa Randall wrote, "We are poised on the edge of discovery. The biggest and most exciting experiments in particle physics and cosmology are under way and many of the world's most talented physicists and astronomers are focused on their implications. What scientists find within the next decade could provide clues that will ultimately change our view of the fundamental makeup of matter or even of space itself—and just might provide a more comprehensive picture of the nature of reality" (Lisa Randall, *Knocking on Heaven's Door: How Physics and Scientific Thinking Illuminate the Universe and the Modern World*).

At CERN that excitement is contagious. It can be an exciting time for the rest of us too, as we look over their shoulders. Because surely the more we understand about the creation, the more we will appreciate its Creator.

Could it be that discoveries that revolutionize our ideas about creation could also revolutionize our understanding of its Creator? Sadly, many people will see a threat in the very idea. We like to think we have God figured out, and when science comes up with something that challenges established ideas, the first reaction is to resist. Copernicus, Galileo, Newton and Einstein proposed ideas that blew the conservative doors off their hinges and opened up startling new levels of understanding. That might be about to happen again.

Like theologians, scientists like to think they have got things figured out. But as they probe ever deeper into outer and inner space, they discover new levels of intricacy. There is still so much we do not know about our cosmos, even the small part that is available to experiments. Most of it is not. What scientists have labeled dark energy and dark matter make up 94 percent of the universe. They are beyond the reach of our senses and our instruments, but they have a massive impact on the small sliver of the cosmos we can investigate. What we do experience seems to be just a part of a greater reality. Are we just one of millions of other universes? Are there extra dimensions beyond those we experience? Is time linear, or do the past, present and future all “happen” at the same time? Could there be life—even

## There’s no threat to God in scientific discovery; he’s the one who made whatever is discovered. So why should believers feel threatened?

intelligent life—elsewhere in the universe? Einstein based his theories on the apparent fact that the ultimate possible speed is the speed of light, but recent experiments suggest this might not be so.

These are hard ideas to contemplate, let alone understand.

“Any human being will have difficulty,” writes Lisa Randall, “creating an accurate visual image of what’s going on at the minuscule scales that particle physicists study today. The elementary components that combine to form the stuff we recognize as matter are very different from what we access immediately through our senses. Those components operate according to unfamiliar physical laws. As scales decrease, matter seems to be governed by properties so different that they appear to be part of entirely different universes” (ibid.).

New discoveries are always hard to explain, and just to talk about them takes us, as theologian/physicist John



The author and Dr. Keith Baker

Polkinghorne observed, “to the frontiers of language.” In other words, we don’t have the words to express what we think we might be trying to say. The easy way out is to dismiss new understanding as nonsense, and that, sadly, is the road that religion has often chosen. When scientific advances are seen as threats, the natural reaction is to attack and ridicule them. It need not be so. New discoveries simply give us deeper insight into the reality of the creation as God actually made it, not as we have assumed that it should be. There is no threat to God in scientific discovery; he’s the one who made whatever is discovered. So why should believers feel threatened?

When scientific language becomes inadequate to describe new frontiers in understanding, scientists sometimes find themselves resorting to language that sounds vaguely theological. Lisa Randall based the title of her book, *Knocking on Heaven’s Door*, on the idea that as we now have instruments that can accelerate particles to approach the speed of light, we are metaphorically “knocking on heaven’s door.”

In metaphorical language of its own, the New Testament tells us, “God dwells in unapproachable light.” Whatever we discover about the intricacies and mysteries of the universe, we will never “discover” God in it. However long and hard we knock on heaven’s door.

That’s why God came knocking at our door, meeting us on our territory. God, in the person of Jesus, became one of us. For about thirty years he lived among us, showing us things and telling us things we could never discover for ourselves. He showed us that behind the curtain of “unapproachable light” there is indeed an awesome power, one that is not forever beyond reach. He showed us a Creator who knows us, loves us and, in Jesus, shares all that he is with us.

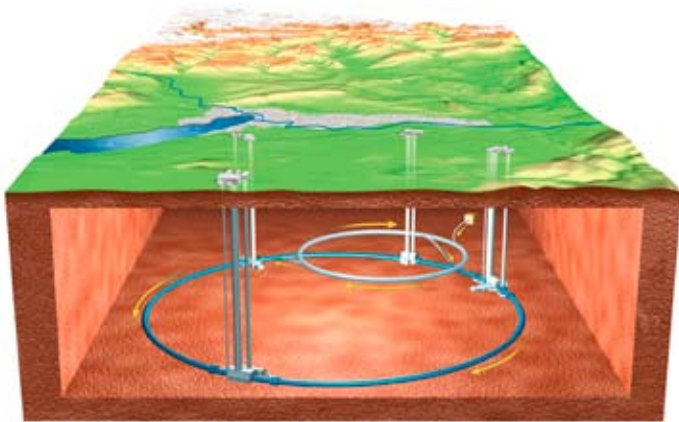
The people who believed this before the scientific age found it exciting. We, who have the blessing of knowing so much more about the creation, should find it even more so.

This is indeed an exciting time to be a scientist—and a Christian. **co**



# So Why Collide Hadrons?

## (And what are they, anyway?)



The Large Hadron Collider is the world's largest particle accelerator. The Collider lies in a tunnel 17 miles in circumference and over 500 feet below the ground, near Geneva on the border of France and Switzerland.

**Dr. Keith Baker is a professor at Yale University and an experimental particle and nuclear physicist. He is a member of the experimental team working at the CERN Collider in Geneva, Switzerland.**

**Christian Odyssey:** Would it be true to say that you are on the leading edge when it comes to experiments in this field?

**Keith Baker:** Yes. The most likely venue for new discoveries in all of science is at the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) at CERN. And that's where I am. I've been working at the LHC for just over 15 years.

**CO:** What does the Hadron Collider do?

**KB:** The Large Hadron Collider is a proton-proton collider, that is, it collides hadrons. Briefly, hadrons are particles that have internal structure whereas the other class of particles—

leptons—are structureless. For example, protons, neutrons, mesons are all examples of hadrons; they are made of quarks and gluons. Quarks and gluons are subject to the strong force and come together to form these hadrons. On the other hand, electrons, positrons, taus, and muons are examples of leptons. As far as we know, these have no structure and their interactions are not governed by the strong force, only the weak and electromagnetic forces. With circulating proton beams, higher energies can more easily be achieved than if leptons are collided. And the higher the collision energy, the deeper is our probe of space and time. That is, the greater our chance of discovery.

Using a stream of magnets, we send one beam of these protons one way and you send another beam of these protons the other way. Then, as they approach the speed of light, you make them collide at different points around the approximately 17-mile in circumference ring. We want to get to the highest energies we can, and make enough of these collisions so that these rare events that you're looking for can take place in a reasonable amount of time. The magnets can focus these charged particles and we can make the collisions happen wherever we want. And of course, we can have millions of collisions every second. We then analyze the results. That's the collider in a nutshell.

**CO:** Popular journalism has suggested you are looking for the "god particle." However, scientists don't like that term, do they? Why not?

**KB:** It implies that what we're looking for will satisfy some deep religious question. But there's no connection there. We are looking for evidence that will explain some important gaps

in our *scientific* understanding—not theological.

We have a theory that's called the Standard Model of Particle Physics and it describes everything we know about all the particles we've discovered up until now. Some people describe this Standard Model of Particle Physics as the greatest theory ever developed.

But there are problems with this Standard Model. It doesn't explain the dark matter and dark energy, which are the most dominant constituents of our universe. We'll come back to that later.

In the Standard Model all the particles are mass-less. That's the only way the theorists who developed this Standard Model could make it work. But we know that particles do have mass. For example, a proton is heavier than an electron. A lambda hyperon is heavier than a proton. So we know that these things have mass, so what is it that gives them mass?

There could be any number of explanations, but the most likely one is what's called Higgs field. It was named after Peter Higgs, a Scotsman. He theorized that there's a field that interacts with particles that gives them mass. And so if there is a Higgs field, then there should be a particle—the Higgs boson. They called it the "god particle" because it's the only missing piece of this Standard Model. We have to discover it to explain how it is that particles have mass. It is a scientific question—not a religious one.

There are other ideas. For example, some have suggested there are extra dimensions. Our experience tells us that we live in a world that has three space dimensions plus time. But there could be other dimensions that exist. If they do, they're probably small, and we just pass through them.

**CO:** You mentioned dark matter and dark energy. Can we talk about the implications of that?

**KB:** As I said, the Standard Model is a wonderful theory, but it is incomplete. There are lots of things that it doesn't explain. About three quarters of the universe is made of what we call dark energy, but we have no idea what it is. We see the effect of it on stars and galaxies, but we haven't been able to create it in the laboratory.

Dark energy is somehow making the universe accelerate as it expands. In what some call the "Big Bang," 13.7 billion years ago there was a rapid expansion of space. Until recently we assumed that this expansion would eventually stop and then come back in on itself. But the data now indicates that the universe is not only expanding, but it's speeding up. It's accelerating as it expands. We don't know what gives rise to this accelerated expansion, so we just give it a name—dark energy. But this theory we have, the Standard Model,



**All the stuff that you can see—the planets, stars, the galaxies, the clusters of galaxies—everything you can see is only a tiny percent of what makes up the actual universe.**

completely fails to explain it. We're not even close.

And then there is dark matter. Cosmological and astrophysical data and data from astronomy indicate that nearly 30 percent of the universe is made of dark matter. We don't know what it is. The Standard Model completely fails to explain that too. So all the stuff that you see—the stars, the galaxies, the clusters of galaxies and if there are black holes—all that is only a tiny sliver of the universe. The Standard Model explains roughly just four percent of the universe. It has to be incomplete because it doesn't explain dark energy or dark matter, at least not as it is formulated right now.

**CO:** Do you have a problem reconciling this extraordinary experimental field that you work in with your belief in God?



**KB:** That has never been an issue. I see no incompatibility with being a scientist and being a Christian. I will say that there are times when I'll look at the universe and just say "wow!" It is so delicately balanced. Some people have compared it to balancing a pencil on its tip on the table and having it remain balanced for 13.7 billion years. It could not have been a chaotic process. Something made this universe be as delicately balanced as it is and allow us to exist. This is pretty amazing, even at our level of understanding, and our understanding will increase over time, obviously.

**CO:** There have been some reports recently that you are on the verge of a breakthrough. What does this mean?

**KB:** Some people say this is the most exciting period in the history of our field or in many generations. All our experiments up until now indicate that there has to be some new phenomenon that happens when we collide protons together as we're doing now. But we don't know if that new phenomenon is going to be this Higgs mechanism, or extra dimensions, or super symmetric particles that pop

out of the vacuum. And that's what makes it exciting.

The recent news from CERN should be clarified. What is seen is tantalizing evidence that there might be a Standard Model Higgs boson in the vicinity of 125 GeV or so, but it is certainly not a discovery. We particle physicists refer to searches for new phenomena (such as the Higgs) in terms of the probability that what we observe is truly physics phenomena (five-sigma or greater) versus whether it could be a statistical fluctuation or some instrumental anomaly (less than five-sigma). Our experience guides us to make a five-sigma observation the threshold for calling what we see a real discovery. We have seen three-sigma effects come and go in our analysis. So while my advice to you at this point is don't "bet the farm" on these latest results signaling a new discovery, they are in my opinion tantalizing evidence of something new—a breakthrough. That is the reason for the media hype about a Higgs discovery. With more data and more analysis, we can make a strong statement one way or another. In any case, 2012 will be an exciting year if the LHC runs as well as it has in 2011!

What we understand now just may be a small piece of something that's much bigger. And for me, being a part of this adventure is why I went into physics in the first place! **co**

## Listening



Years ago I helped escort a group of teens on an educational tour of Washington, D.C. Our hotel was on the outskirts of the city, so we rode a bus into a central location and walked to the various sites. This required a lot of walking. Some of the chaperones seemed to have more stamina than the kids.

One day I overheard a teen behind me complaining to one of the adults. He was enjoying the trip but the weather was hot, the days were long, he was tired, and his feet hurt. Mrs. Williams was at a loss on how to help the boy. Finally she said, "Well, Marty, what can I do about these things?"

The astute youngster replied, "I know you can't do anything, but could you please listen?"

Mrs. Williams smiled and said, "Yes, Marty. I can listen." Marty grinned and then gave her a hug.

James 1:19 tells us everyone should be quick to listen and slow to speak. On the surface, it appears the wisdom of this passage is protecting us from a faux pas like putting one's foot in one's mouth. But if we dig deeper we know that simply holding one's tongue is not listening. Listening requires not only restraint from speaking but also active, mental participation in what someone is saying. Listening connects us with others.

People have an innate need to be listened to. Swiss psychiatrist Paul Tournier wrote, "It is impossible to over-emphasize the immense need humans have to be really listened to, to be taken seriously, to be understood..."

**Listening requires active, mental participation in what someone is saying. Listening connects us with others.**

I must admit my listening skills are weak at best. Too often what people say drifts into a drone of "blah, blah, blah, blah, blah..." I look into their eyes, nod my head in compliance and whisper "uh-huh" a few times while I think about what I want for dinner. But that really isn't listening, is it? There is a difference in faking interest and taking interest. Listening is a conscious choice. It's a courtesy, yea verily, even an act of love we extend to others.

In its purest form, listening is a ministry. We minister to others by listening to them. We are giving them our time and our attention. We don't have to offer solutions. We don't have to fix people or their frustrations. In fact, many times people will come to conclusions about problems on their own, just by talking it through.

Listening is a way of saying, "You are important to me. I value your opinion. I empathize with what you are going through." Or in simpler terms, listening to others says, "I care about you!" **co**

**D**id you hear recently that what might be a Rembrandt self-portrait was discovered hidden under another of the Dutch master's paintings? Using advanced scanning techniques scientists investigated a Rembrandt painting titled *Old Man With a Beard*. Much to their surprise, the scan revealed that another painting was underneath—one that might well be an early, unfinished self-portrait of the artist himself. It seems that Rembrandt had begun a self-portrait, then later used the canvas to paint the *Old Man With a Beard*.

The story can help us understand a mistake we make when we try to understand what God is like. Most of us have grown up believing that God is like the first painting—an old man with a beard. That, after all, is how religious artists usually portray him. We think of God as not only old, but also as a distant, rather threatening figure—stern and quick to get angry if we fail to live up to his impossible standards.

But this way of thinking about God, kind of like the painting of the old man that hid the self-portrait underneath, actually obscures what God is really like.

To get a true idea of what God is really like we need to look beneath the layers of popular concepts about God and begin to see the God revealed in Jesus Christ. When we do that, a true and undistorted understanding of God emerges.

The Bible tells us that if we want to know what God is like, we need only look to Jesus Christ. Only then can we find out how God really feels about us.

“If you have seen me, you have seen the Father,” Jesus explained in John 14:9 (CEV). Only Jesus shows us what God is really like. Far from being a remote and distant figure, Jesus showed that God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—loves us unconditionally and will never let us go. God is not out there somewhere in the sky scowling at us, ready to pounce and punish. The Bible tells us that it is the Father’s “good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32 KJV) and that God is “not willing that any should perish” (2 Peter 3:9 KJV). It tells us that God sent Jesus into the world because he *loves* the world—not to condemn humanity but to save it.

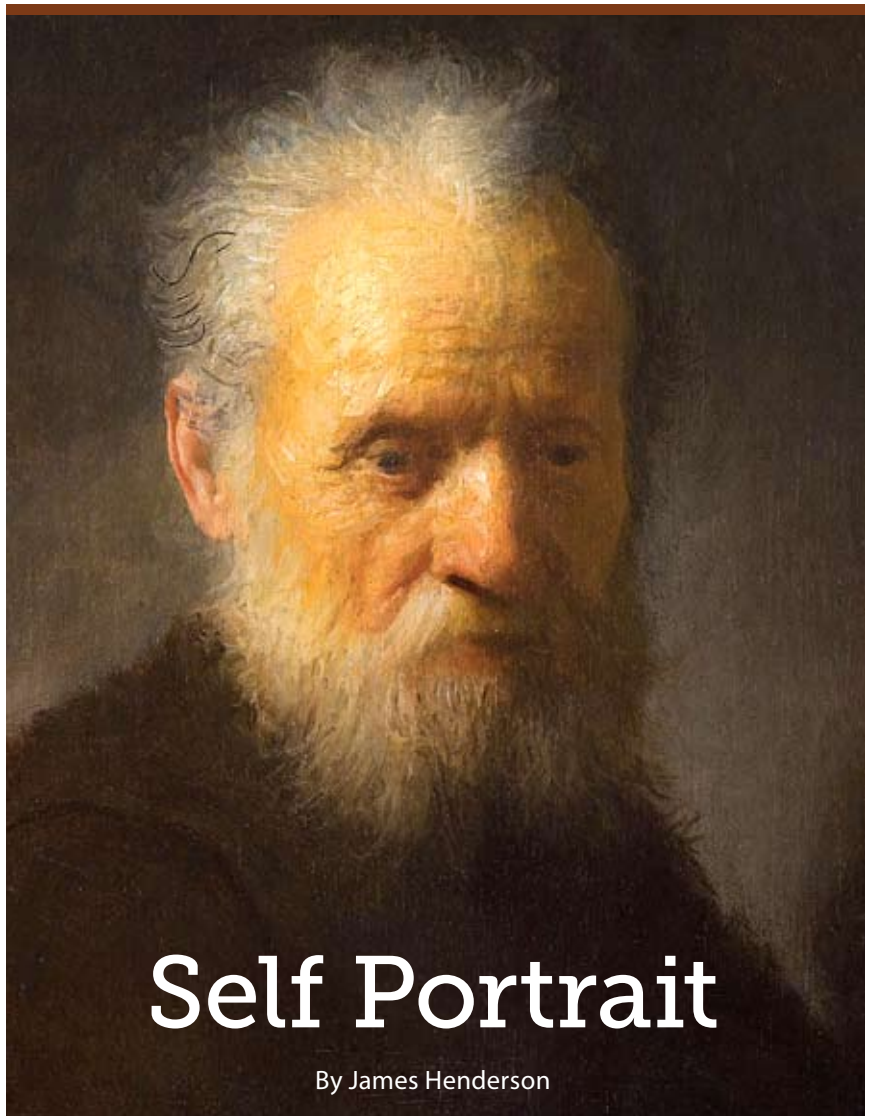
Once you get past the layers of misunderstanding, the picture of God that is revealed is one of a God who loves us

more than we can possibly imagine. “No one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand,” said Jesus (John 10:29).

Through Jesus we are shown God’s true heart toward us—we see him as he really is, not way off somewhere, and neither angry at us nor unconcerned about us. He is right here with us, ready for us to turn to him and receive his loving embrace, just as Rembrandt portrays in another of his paintings, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*.

Paul told Christians that they are “being transformed into his likeness,” meaning Jesus’ likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18, NIV 1984).-Our problem is that we get in the way at times. We use our own colors and prefer our own strokes to God’s. Sometimes we can airbrush him out of the picture completely. But, underneath it all, the Holy Spirit is making us into the image of Jesus, who is the self-portrait of the Father. As we grow spiritually, that image should become more apparent.

Don’t let other images get in the way of your view of who God is or how God feels about you. Look to Jesus, who alone is the self-portrait of God. **co**



# Self Portrait

By James Henderson



# The Gloves Are Off

By Sue Berger



**I**t was a beautiful, sparkling day outside as I walked into the clinic. One of the technicians quickly greeted me and gave me a hug. We've gotten to know one another over the years and enjoy catching up on each other's lives during my regular visits. We chat and laugh easily while doing my weigh-in and checking vitals. She jots figures in my chart then pulls a couple of latex gloves from a box on the wall, tugs them onto her hands and gives the top edges a satisfying snap.

Suddenly I feel as if my chair has slid across the room to the opposite wall. I'm untouchable. For some invisible reason, precautions must be taken and barriers have been erected. Neither of us speaks while she pricks my finger, creating the small bead of blood required for the test. After a quick daub with gauze and a little bandage taped in place, my friend peels off the gloves and shoots them into the trash can like rubber bands. We joke that she's had a lot of practice on that shot. Our pre-glove chatter resumes as I follow her into the next room.

Later in the day, I'm still haunted by that momentary feeling of alienation. The simple act of pulling on gloves made me feel rejected, distanced and isolated, even though I understood why my friend had to take precautions. She had taken preventative measures before touching me, even though she had hugged me in the lobby. The mixed message causes me to feel suspicious and distrustful, emotions I have to squelch by reminding myself of the professional reasons involved.

But the feeling is undeniable and as I muse on it, I begin to think of Jesus. (Okay, you knew it was coming...) What an amazing thing it was to have Jesus walking this earth among us. Born as a human infant. Does it get any messier or more personal than that? He was an unsteady toddler, an exploring child, and a gangly teen. All stages with their quota of bumps, bruises and scrapes, undoubtedly treated, bandaged and kissed by his mother. That reassuring care and human touch is evident in his ministry as he reached

out to heal those around him. Nobody was untouchable. Even those, who for all rational purposes, should have been.

I admit to having great admiration for missionaries who live with quarantined populations and eventually succumb to the same disease. I can think of no greater demonstration of love than to be willing to die alongside our brothers and sisters. And isn't that exactly what Jesus did? Emmanuel. God with us. Here on this earth, mucking it up with the average Joe, experiencing our frailties, touching our diseases, mingling his blood, sweat and tears with ours. No precautions. No alienation. No gloves.

Is it any wonder that the masses were attracted to him? Nothing repelled him. Nothing caused him to draw back from them or avoid them. On the contrary, he was moved by their pain and reached out to touch, hold and heal. He embodied God's desire and will to gather us into his heart, regardless of our human condition.

The gloves are still off today and always will be. And that is very good news for you and me. **co**



# Time for New Methods

By Greg Williams

**N**o sooner had I written the article “Time for New Trees” (*Christian Odyssey*—October/November 2011) than it seemed the Lord had another series of lessons for me to learn from my family orchard.

You may have noticed that McDonald’s recently added sliced apples to its menu for side items. This has helped increase the demand for apples, which is good news for those who grow them, including the Williams orchard.

In the earlier article you will recall that our current tenant, whose family had managed the orchard for 26 years, had agreed to continue the arrangement. That arrangement was based on trust and a handshake. So now I had the challenging task of meeting with him, to discuss some new terms related to the orchard. What I was afraid would be a difficult conversation with our longstanding renters turned into a pleasant conversation. Our tenant realized that he was overextended in his present operation, and it made sense to release our orchard. So I was free to explore a new direction for the orchard.

There were several growers interested, and several ideas were offered. One grower wanted us to consider planting berries instead of apples. Another proposed turning the orchard into a completely organic operation—an interesting concept, but impossible due to neighboring farms. A third candidate, Mr. Nix, wanted to grow packing apples instead of the current strategy of growing processing apples. (Packing apples are the shiny, perfectly shaped apples you buy at the supermarket; processing apples are turned into juice, applesauce and baby food.)

The Williams family met to consider all of the possibilities and unanimously agreed that we wanted to return the orchard

to the days when our father and grandfather grew packing apples. Arrangements were made to meet with Mr. Nix and his orchard manager.

I, along with my two brothers, walked the orchard with the new potential renter. Together we examined the varieties of trees and their present condition. Mr. Nix pointed out that many of the trees had become misshapen, due to faulty pruning. He demonstrated how they would repair the trees by making some major cuts high up in the trees to allow much needed sunlight to get in. He showed how they would redirect limbs by cutting out a small slice of wood at the base of the limb, stretching them out, and tautly tying them to the trunk of the tree. These better practices may have seemed drastic, but they would lead to a more productive orchard that would grow a better quality fruit.

As our new tenant talked, I began to see parallels with my other job—a minister of the gospel, asked by my denomination to coordinate plans for our future. I remembered the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:11-13:

“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work.”

Paul indicates that there are different qualities of work even as it relates to ministry. As I reflect and look inward, I ask myself if I am building with straw or precious stones. Or, using my orchard as an analogy, does my ministry produce processing apples or packing apples? The good news is that the

foundation of my ministry, like my trees, is strong and will endure anything. But what am I building on that structure? Quality and attention to good practices matter.

My brothers and I were impressed with Mr. Nix's knowledge and experience. He explained what varieties of apples he would plant in the open spaces. He pointed out the need to plant a cover crop that would properly prepare the soil for the future planting of trees. He said he would plant the new trees in the opposite direction from where we had them in the past. His logic was to allow better air circulation to lessen the effect of frost forming on the blooms and young fruit. I'd never thought of that.

This new caretaker is a highly educated apple grower who continues to discover better methods. He doesn't settle for the status quo. He has traveled to the other apple-growing areas of the country to observe how other successful growers operate. Mr. Nix is a life-long learner in the art and science of growing quality apples.

This positive step forward gives me great hope for an improved orchard that will become one of the top apple-growing operations in Western North Carolina. I see a close parallel with our denomination and our desire to move past the status quo. I have taken many educational trips outside, which allowed me to work with a huge cross-section of evangelical churches, and see various ways of doing effective ministry as believers serve under the leadership of the Spirit. I have also been challenged to learn how to relate to various groups in the community where I serve and move well beyond the confines of the land-locked church world.

Most recently my journey back into seminary has helped me to see how other Christian leaders are at work to grow spiritual fruit within the people they serve. I am part of a group of 11 students studying the specific area of Congregational Growth and Development. Out of 11 students, five different denominations with their particular styles and distinctives are represented. We are a mixed group—including four women, seven African-Americans, four Caucasians, and one man who is a pastor from Haiti. Our discussions go deep into the difficulties of doing ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and we thoroughly evaluate the material from our stack of textbooks. We are all seeking better methods and practices for making more followers of Jesus.

We in GCI can learn from and with our brothers and sisters within the Body of Christ as we prepare for the future. It is vital that we are open to learning from others and being courageous enough to try new things.

I am deeply thankful for my heritage and ongoing involvement in the life of the apple orchard. I thank God for Mr. Nix and the future work he will do for my family's farm. And I thank him also for the rich lesson he has shown me as it relates to my call to ministry. Jesus often used the natural world to teach his servants what they needed to know as his disciples. Seems like he still does. **co**

## Enjoy the Ride



"I am glad it is over," my friend told me two days after Christmas.

Her reasons included all the hectic activities from potlucks to shopping to being with relatives. I just nodded. However, I thought it's too bad she didn't enjoy Christmas. I'm sure she enjoyed some of it, but her expression seemed to say it was one big hassle from beginning to end. She's happy to get back to her normal routine.

I thought December went far too quickly. I enjoyed looking at the lights and decorations, pondering the mystery of Christ's birth and the meaning of the Incarnation. It is a wonderful time of the year and I'd like to have slowed down time so I could savor it longer.

Most of us go through periods in our lives we wish could just be over. Sickness, mourning, financial difficulties, even less serious things, like exercise, all cause us to want the pain to end. At the end of one of my workouts, one enjoyable stretch position puts me on the floor, on my knees with my arms extended. The workout leader says: "You can pray now—thank God it's over!" I always come back with, "Thank God I can still do this!"

I'm learning not to wish away even the difficult parts of life. I don't enjoy pain or problems, it's just that coming out on the other side feels so good. We can look back to see lessons learned and how it has worked for our good. Granted, some problems don't go away. Remember the song that says: "If that's all there is, my friend, then let's keep dancing?" "Let's break out the booze and have a ball, if that's all there is." Certain difficulties and hurts won't be solved in this life, so it's good to remember this isn't all there is. A time is coming when God will wipe away the tears and make everything right.

Gratitude and hope can help us get through life without wishing the bad parts away. Being thankful, even in and through the hard parts, makes life richer and stronger. Remembering the hope we have in Christ gives us a reason to keep going, to get through the pain and not let it break us. One of my favorite movie lines is from *Steel Magnolias*: "That which doesn't kill us makes us stronger." We grow in and through the trials. Our faith and trust in God are strengthened. We look forward even more to the new heaven and new earth.

As a child, when I wanted something to be over, my mom always told me not to wish my life away. Now I'm at the age I'd love to have back some of the time I so ungratefully wished away.

How often do you wish for things to end? Are you wishing your life away or enjoying the ride? Perhaps we should wait to say, "Thank God it's over!" until the very end, when we cross the finish line and win the race. **co**



# 92 Years and Still Going Strong!

By Donna Jones

**M**ickie (Mildred) Akins, my Mom, is an inspiration to everyone who has the good fortune to meet her. At 92 years of age, she still lives alone, drives the four miles into town at least once a day and the 20 miles to the nearest city several times a week. It was only a few years ago that we, her children, had to insist that she no longer drive alone the 500 miles to visit family in Arkansas.

Although she has now slowed down some, and usually walks with a cane to keep her balance, she's spry and healthy and happy, and totally devoted to God. And she is quick to point out that, although she has sufficient income, she is still able to work a little at home to earn extra income.

She married my father, Garvis Akins, at 18 years of age and was totally happy as a wife and mother. From our earliest childhood she and Daddy taught the five of us children to love God. They didn't "preach" to us, but taught us by example and in our general conversation: "...when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up..." as the scripture instructs in Deuteronomy 6, verse 7. They taught love for God as a way

of life; not as demanded by God, but as our offering freely given to God. I don't remember a time when I didn't know and love Jesus. And we always had unconditional love.

I've never had to think much about unconditional love because I've always had it. That's just how it was. "We may not always like what you do, but we ALWAYS love you—no matter what." We weren't shackled with guilt when we did something we shouldn't. Oh, there were consequences for wrong-doing, of course, but afterward we were assured that we were still loved.

Daddy died of cancer in late 1978 and Mom was alone for the first time in her life. She had never worked outside the home and, since they had spent all their savings on his treatment, Daddy was concerned that she would not be taken care of. But what Daddy did not realize is that Mom is a talented crochet and craft designer. She soon went to work right here in our little town for an international crochet pattern publishing company, and worked full time until she was 83 years of age. She is always quick to explain that with God's help, she has provided quite well for herself, and she's anxious to someday be able to tell Daddy just how



## The Joy of Communion



The lights dimmed and somber music filled the hall as the ushers solemnly carried the bread and wine forward for communion. The pastor emphasized the broken body and spilled blood of Christ as he talked about Jesus' command to remember him. We sat in silence and prayed as the bread and wine were distributed. It was a time of quiet reflection. And on this occasion it stood in stark contrast to an inspiring sermon the pastor had just given about the joy of being in union with Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I wanted to stand up and shout Hallelujah at the end of the sermon, not sit in quiet reflection over the broken body. I wanted to celebrate our union with Christ by sharing the joy with others. It was at that point I determined to examine the way I offer communion to my congregation.

I shared with my congregation that communion is not about the crucifixion—it is about our unity with God. The word means “sharing in common.” Jesus, the bread of life, shared his life with us. Breaking bread is a symbol of that shared life. Jesus, our redeemer, shared his love for us by laying down his life—this is called the greatest love. The cup represents Jesus sharing his love.

When we take communion, we are actually sharing in Jesus' life and his love. This love and life didn't begin at the Lord's Supper. Communion actually started before the foundation of the earth when you and I were chosen to be in him (Ephesians 1). We were chosen to share in the love and the life shared by



istockphoto

the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Communion is about God's desire to share himself with us by determining to adopt us as his sons and daughters. It's about being one

with each other and with the Father as Jesus was one with the Father and is one with us (John 17).

It is certainly appropriate at times to remember the sacrifice Jesus made for us when we participate in communion. But it's also appropriate and right to remember that communion is a reminder that God has invited us to participate in what he is doing in the world. I believe one of the reasons Paul called communion a blessing is because it is about our participation with Christ's sharing his life and his love with all.

When Jesus told us to remember him, he wasn't asking us to focus on his suffering, but to focus on his love for us and for the world. I look forward to the time when all of us share in the joy of communion while shouting praises to the One who brought us together. **co**

well she was taken care of—by God.

Mom has never been one to sit idle, but always needs to be accomplishing something. Since she can no longer garden and do yard work, she has set her goal to crochet afghans for every family at church and for each new baby that comes along, as well as wedding gifts and birthday gifts. She also makes winter scarves for everyone, which we proudly wear all winter, and whatever else anyone asks for.

Mom has become a sort of “fixture” at church. She always sits in the second row because, at less than five feet tall, she's so short that she can't see if someone is in front of her. And she wants to be at church any time there is anything going on. We go to church together at least three times a week—for Sunday morning worship services, Wednesday night Bible study, Thursday morning Seniors' Bible study, and any other time anything is happening there.

So yes, I'm proud of my Mom. She's such an inspiration to everyone, and she has always set such a pace that we have to “run” to keep up with her, so to speak. Even now at age 92, she is still productive and independent and useful and totally devoted to the Lord. She is truly an amazing woman, and we are all blessed by God to know her. **co**

# Crossing Borders— Muchas Gracias

By Lee Berger

**I**n December 2011, Crossing Borders mission team had an eventful trip to Mexico to deliver shoebox gifts to our partner churches. This turned out to be the most challenging of the 13 mission trips we have made since 2005.

Many congregations and individuals from all over the USA joined in our effort this year. We ended up with almost 600 shoeboxes full of gifts as well as handmade baby blankets and pillows, boxes of infant supplies, custom-carved wooden cars, several boxes of nice shoes, bags of good clothing and other items. Finding space in the vehicles to transport the items across the border was a real problem—the kind of problem we like to have.

The crossing into Mexico from Laredo, Texas on Saturday started out well with visits to two churches. However, it was raining hard and our vans got stuck axle deep in mud at the second church. A tow truck was called but it got stuck too. Then the host pastor's van and another vehicle became stuck.

While some worked outside to free the vehicles, the rest of the Crossing Borders group and local church members prayed and visited inside the unheated church. After four hours of struggling in the cold rain and slippery mud (and a lot of prayer), a truck from the fire department arrived to free the final vehicles.

Then on to the final stop of the day. What was supposed to be lunch served at the children's home turned out to be supper. Soaking wet and cold in our muddy clothes, we visited with the kids for an hour and a half, distributed shoeboxes and provided the meal for them. Now well past dark, we headed back across the border to warm showers and our own dinner, thankful for the day's experiences and inspired by the patient and willing spirit exhibited by all.

With the shoeboxes delivered, most of the participants headed back home. But I, my mother Jean Berger, and Steve and Barbara Solari had planned to fly to Ciudad Victoria to take gifts to Karen Salinas and her 17 foster children. This was the first time we had ventured into interior Mexico, and once again, things didn't go quite as planned.

The flight was cancelled on Sunday due to bad weather, and then cancelled again on Monday. On Tuesday the weather was bad again, so the group took the commercial bus to Victoria. We were grateful that it was a comfortable, modern bus. We arrived in Victoria at about midnight. Karen and several of the older children had waited up for us. They visited with the



Crossing Borders team into the wee hours of the morning.

We woke up to clear and warm weather. We spent the day visiting and playing with the children, and had a gift-giving party to deliver the gifts donated by people in the USA. Each child also received a bilingual Bible with their name engraved on the cover. There were also some moving testimonials from several of these lovely children being brought up in the nurture of the Lord. Thursday was filled with playing with the kids, picking them up at school, having a boys-vs.-girls cookie bake-off, and other special events. Again, because of cash donations from supporters, we were able to purchase several hundred dollars worth of supplies to restock the needs of the foster home.

After an event-filled and challenging week, we returned to Laredo on Friday—by bus again, as the flights were still affected by bad weather. By Saturday everyone was back home in the United States, safe and sound—thankful to God for an amazing trip full of unexpected obstacles that led to many wonderful opportunities to serve others on mission with God. We are already looking forward to our next trip to Mexico in June. [Check for details on our Crossing Borders website: [www.cbmission.org](http://www.cbmission.org).]

When we present the gifts to our Mexican friends, we always tell them that these gifts were given by people who don't even know them, but who love them nonetheless—with the love that God shares with all of his beloved children. To all the individuals, churches and other groups who sent support this year, we pass along to you the *Muchas Gracias* (many thanks) from the children, families and ministry servants you supported. **co**

# A Model for All Believers

## A Study of 1 Thessalonians 1



After a short ministry in Thessalonica, Paul was forced to leave (Acts 17:1-10). Probably less than a year later, Paul heard that the believers there were being persecuted. Paul wrote to reassure them that their faith and sufferings were not in vain.

### Salutation

Verse 1 presents the authors and the audience: **Paul, Silas and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.**

This letter does not follow some of the literary patterns Paul used in other letters. He says nothing about who he is, either as an apostle or servant of Christ. He names the church as being of the people (rather than “church of God”) and says that they are “in God” (rather than “in Christ”).

He begins the letter with grace, and ends it with grace (5:28), but never uses the word grace anywhere else. Apparently the Thessalonians were not worried about the way in which Christ saved them; they had other pastoral needs.

### Received with joy (verses 2-6)

Greek letters often began with a brief prayer. Paul says that he has been praying about the believers in Thessalonica: **We always thank God for all of you, and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Paul begins with faith, love and hope, observing that each of these virtues has results in a person’s behavior. He will later say more about how hope helps us endure difficulties, and the kind of life that flows from faith.

Paul assures the readers that they did not make a mistake in accepting the message: **For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.**

Was the power in the preaching, or seen in the people who believed? What did the Holy Spirit do? Was conviction in the preachers, or in the audience? Paul does not write enough for us to be sure.

Paul notes how the people responded: **You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord; for you welcomed the message**

**in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.** Paul does not say what he did, other than living “for your sake.” He does not say what aspect of Jesus’ life they imitated, but his comment does imply that he told people something about the way Jesus lived.

### An exemplary faith (verses 7-10)

Paul’s focus is not so much the example *he* set, but the example that the Thessalonians set—an example that had begun to teach other people: **And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.** Paul praises them for what they did, indirectly encouraging them to continue in it despite the troubles they faced. Unbelievers in Thessalonica may despise them, but people from other places admire them.

Their example spread like ripples in a pond: **The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere.** Paul really doesn’t mean “everywhere”—this exaggeration is an example of motivational rhetoric, not an objective description of facts.

Paul follows that with another figure of speech: **Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us.** Paul could go into other cities and people would say, “I hear that people in Thessalonica believed your message. What were you preaching?”

Paul repeats major elements of the message: **They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.** This was Paul’s message for pagans: repent of idolatry, serve God, and believe in Jesus, who died and was resurrected and will return, and through him we are saved from the judgment.

Paul does not say what the “wrath” is, nor the way in which Jesus rescues us. This letter does not even mention the cross; it is designed more for motivation than for instruction.

### Questions for discussion

- How often do I thank God for other believers? (v. 2)
- In my experience, what kind of power and conviction came with the gospel? (v. 5)
- Am I a model for other believers to see and imitate? (v. 7)

**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 ...

Like an unchecked cancer, hate corrodes the personality and eats away its vital unity. Hate destroys a man's sense of values and his objectivity. It causes him to describe the beautiful as ugly and the ugly as beautiful, and to confuse the true with the false and the false with the true.

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.

**Martin Luther King Jr. (1929 - 1968)**

There is a fountain of youth: it is your mind, your talents, the creativity you bring to your life and the lives of the people you love. When you learn to tap this source, you will have truly defeated age.

**Sophia Loren**

**Jesus must not be read as having baited us with grace only to clobber us in the end with law.**

**Robert Farrar Capon,  
Kingdom, Grace, Judgment**

When we are out of sympathy with the young, then I think our work in this world is over.

**George MacDonald**

**People tend to forget their duties but remember their rights.**

**Indira Gandhi**

Kindness has converted more sinners than zeal, eloquence or learning.

**Frederick William Faber**

A baby is God's opinion that the world should go on.

**Carl Sandburg**

**Anyone who takes himself too seriously always runs the risk of looking ridiculous; anyone who can consistently laugh at himself does not.**

**Vaclav Havel**



I could not be true to my own faith if I did not share its truth and its urgency. At the same time, I recognize that my role is that of witness. Only the Holy Spirit converts people. And thus, when dealing with people of other faiths, I tell them that I will not try to convert them, but that it is important for me to witness to them and let the Spirit do its work.

**David Neff,  
Editor in Chief of Christianity Today**

**There have always been those who say: "It can't be done!"**

Man will never reach the moon regardless of all future scientific advances.

**Dr. Lee DeForest, "Father of Radio and Grandfather of Television"**

The bomb will never go off. I speak as an expert in explosives.

**Admiral William Leahy,  
U.S. Atomic Bomb Project**

There is no likelihood man can ever tap the power of the atom.

**Robert Millikan,  
Nobel Prize in Physics, 1923**

Computers in the future may weigh no more than 1.5 tons.

**Popular Mechanics, forecasting the relentless march of science, 1949**

**I think there is a world market for maybe five computers.**

**Thomas Watson,  
Chairman and CEO of IBM, 1914-1956**

**"Where did I read that?"**

Did you know that previous issues of Odysseus are available on our website?

- All articles are listed issue by issue at [www.gci.org/CO/issues](http://www.gci.org/CO/issues).
- Printable PDF files of all issues are available at [www.gci.org/CO/pdfs](http://www.gci.org/CO/pdfs).
- All articles are listed alphabetically at [www.gci.org/index](http://www.gci.org/index).
- You can search for words inside of an article at [www.gci.org/search](http://www.gci.org/search).