

CHRISTIAN Odyssey

September-November 2012

Growing Together in Life & Faith



EDITORIAL By John Halford

Going Away, or Going Our Way?

As I explained in our previous issue, Christian Odyssey is going online. Was it the transition from a print magazine to an electronic one? This time there will be no more printed issues. I realize some readers may not be happy about that. They are probably people who do not feel at home in cyberspace, and they wish we could just leave things the way they are.

There are several reasons why we need to make this move, not the least of which is financial. To some might seem like a daunting task, but we are not alone. Many other organizations have to wear their hats as missionaries in a digital world. We are not alone in this. We are part of a larger movement. We are part of a larger mission. We are part of a larger vision. We are part of a larger hope. We are part of a larger love. We are part of a larger life. We are part of a larger faith. We are part of a larger grace. We are part of a larger communion. We are part of a larger international. We are part of a larger Christian Odyssey.

CONTENTS

2. Editorial: Going Away or Going Our Way?
3. Going Online
4. Tammy's Turn: A Lesson from Laundry
6. A Sign Forever
8. Speaking of Life: Combating Atheism
9. The Clumsy Dance Pose
10. Thinking Out Loud: Remembering God
11. An Unexpected Lesson
12. Introducing Grace Communion Seminary
14. For the Love of God: Beyond Technology
15. Bible Study: The Law Used Properly
16. Hmm...

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Going Online

Going Away, or Going Our Way?

As I explained in our previous issue, *Christian Odyssey* is going online. This is the transitional issue—it is also being published electronically. After this, there will be no more printed issues. I realize some readers may not be happy about that. They are probably people who do not feel at home in cyberspace, and they wish we could just leave things the way they are.

There are several reasons why we need to make this move, not the least of which is financial. In these tough economic times, nonprofit and charitable organizations have to use their resources carefully. It is becoming more and more expensive to publish, print and mail a traditional magazine. But even if finances were not an issue, there are other reasons to make this change. Electronic publishing is coming, whether we are ready or not. Amazon and Barnes and Noble already sell more electronic books than they do “hard copies,” and many people choose to subscribe to electronic newspapers.

Nevertheless, it is quite understandable for you to find yourself resisting, and even resenting, this change. Jesus himself reminds us, “No one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, ‘The old is better’” (Luke 5:39). I realize he wasn’t talking about electronic publishing, but the principle still holds. We are reluctant to abandon the familiar. The first automobiles were called—and looked like—horseless carriages. The first generations of cell phones and digital cameras still looked like traditional

telephones and cameras. Now they have both “morphed” into pocket-sized tablets that do the work of both telephones and cameras, plus a whole lot more.

When Johannes Gutenberg set up his printing press in Germany in the 1440s, he revolutionized publishing. Before then, if you wanted a Bible, it had to be copied out by hand, and that meant a three-year wait. Gutenberg’s presses were able to turn out hundreds every year. But those first books still looked as if they had been written by hand. Readers were slow to accept the new-fangled printed books at first, so printers deliberately designed the typeface to mimic the scribes’ style. It actually took about 50 years before books began to look like they had been printed.

When you go on line (www.christianodyssey.org), you will find much that is familiar. The electronic version looks similar to this print edition. But *Odyssey* online is the pioneer edition of what is becoming a totally new kind of communication—as different as books are from scrolls and printed documents are from manuscripts. Electronic publishing offers many opportunities that have never before been possible. It is the first ripple of the wave of the future.

So let’s catch that wave together. We have an article beginning across the page that will show you how to get access to *Christian Odyssey* online. Take a look. There is no need to go away. Come our way. I think you’ll be pleasantly surprised.

CONTENTS

2. **Editorial:**
Going Away or Going Our Way?
3. **Going Online**
5. **Tammy’s Turn**
A Lesson From Laundry
6. **A Sign Forever**
8. **Speaking of Life**
Combating Atheism
9. **The Clumsy Dance Pose**
10. **Thinking Out Loud**
Remembering God
11. **An Unexpected Lesson**
12. **Introducing Grace Communion Seminary**
14. **For the Love of God**
Beyond Technology
15. **Bible Study:**
The Law Used Properly
16. **Hmm...**

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Going Online

By John Halford

In the previous issue, we announced that *Christian Odyssey* will transition from a print magazine to an online magazine. Well, here it is—the transition issue. This will be the last edition of *Christian Odyssey* that we will produce as a print magazine. It is also the prototype of a brand new kind of publication.

Some readers will be excited, thinking, “And about time too!” This article is not for them because they already know what to do. But others of you are reading with a growing sense of dismay, thinking you may never master the technology to get *Christian Odyssey* magazine electronically.

We don’t want to lose any of our readers, so let’s see what we can do to help. In this article, we want to show you how to access and use the key features of the new Internet-based version of the magazine. Making the move to digital isn’t nearly as daunting as you might think. So don’t throw up your hands in surrender just yet.

What do you need?

Just as you need a mailbox to get the print edition, you will need something on which to view the magazine. You may already have a computer, or tablet such as the Kindle Fire or Nook Color, or even a smartphone. Since the website is “mobile friendly,” you can access it with a tablet or smartphone.

Your device, whatever it is, will need to be connected to

the Internet. So, just as you also need an address to have the print version delivered, it is helpful to have an email address to receive *Christian Odyssey* online. You may already have one. If not, you need to set one up. It is easy, and it doesn’t cost a thing. (A hint for older readers: grandchildren can be a big help here—they seem to be born knowing how to do all this.)

The easiest way to access *Christian Odyssey* is by opening any web browser (like Internet Explorer or Firefox) and going to www.christianodyssey.org. You will see the “homepage” come up on your screen. It looks like this (top of next page).

Feeling at home on the homepage

The first thing you should do is sign up for our email newsletter. All you have to do is type your email address in the box marked “Subscribe to *Christian Odyssey* via email” and then hit the subscribe button. We’ll do the rest. Every new issue will be sent to you automatically, with links to all the magazine’s content.

Below this you will see a list of articles in this issue. Click on any one of them, and the article will appear on your screen in an easy-to-read format. In the left column you will see a list of the other articles and features in this issue. Just click and read.

Yes—it really is that easy. You can even print the articles out for later reading, provided you have a printer. (Once again—grandchildren may be needed for this.)

Christian Odyssey homepage

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List of articles in this issue (click to view)

List of other articles on the GCI website

Cover of current issue

High quality print service \$3.20 per copy



Clicking **View Issue** brings up this full-screen graphical online reader

Thumbnail illustrations of all pages



Click **Download PDF** to print, read later and even zoom-in

Yes, but...

Would you rather read the magazine in a traditional magazine format? That's no problem. Look at the small illustration of the cover of this magazine to the right of the home page. Directly underneath, you will see a short list offering three options: View Issue, Download PDF and HP Magcloud.

Each of these allows you to access the magazine in a different format.

Clicking View Issue brings up a full-screen graphical online reader—letting you read the magazine cover-to-cover on your screen. The pages look exactly like the ones you are holding. What many of us like to do when we get a new issue of a favorite magazine is to do a quick survey of the contents. *Christian Odyssey* online makes this easy. Along the bottom of the screen are thumbnail illustrations of all the pages. Clicking on any one of them takes you to that page.

Perhaps you don't want to read it right away? Maybe you'd

rather wait until the grandchildren go home, but you're not sure you can find it again. Or you'd rather not stay connected to the Internet while you read. (That is called "reading offline.") Or maybe you even want to print out something that looks like a "real" magazine.

Once again, it's no problem. That is what the next option is for. If you click the Download PDF* option, the issue will be downloaded to your device as a PDF file. "PDF" is an acronym for Portable Document File, a format that allows you to print what you have downloaded or save it for later viewing offline on your computer or mobile device.

We should mention here that many older readers have told us they find the print magazine hard to read, as the typeface is too small. There is not much we can do about that in the print edition. But one of the advantages of a PDF document is its flexibility. It can be converted to a format that lets you increase the size of the type. It is not difficult, once you know how, but

you may need a grandchild to set it up for you.

*PDF files require extra software to be opened. This comes pre-installed on most computers and mobile devices. If a PDF will not open, we recommend installing Adobe's free PDF Reader, available at: get.adobe.com/reader.

Yeah, but... (again)

"OK. That all sounds good. But I really do just want to get *Christian Odyssey* in the format I am used to."

Don't worry—we haven't forgotten you. Notice the last option, labeled HP Magcloud. This links you to an on-demand print service. They will print a high quality copy of the magazine and mail it to you. This service is not free. It costs \$3.20 per issue, although Grace Communion International does not profit in any way.

Wait—there's more!

Those are the basics, and we hope they are enough to get you online. Please do try it, and compare *Christian Odyssey* with the printed version you are holding. You will get an up-close-and-personal preview of the future of publishing.

One of the great advantages of an online magazine is that it offers tremendous flexibility. A printed page allows us about 750 words and an illustration or two. But with an electronic version, we can add links that can take you to more information and photographs, and even audio and video.

In a print magazine, the "links" to more information must be made by sending a letter, filling out a coupon, making a phone call or looking up a reference in a book. In an electronic version, these links are already embedded. Additional photographs, audio and even video supplements to the text are just a click away. The printed page springs to life.

We've even set up an easy way for you to print individual articles you might want to pass on to someone else. That's what the Print and Share buttons at the bottom of the page are for.

Finally, when you are finished, the magazine is always available to you online, or you can save a copy on your computer. No more piles of old magazines.

We hope you are beginning to see the possibilities in this new way of publishing *Christian Odyssey*. The new format does take some getting used to. But, trust us, you *will* get used to it. Many people who were dubious about Kindles and Nooks now find they prefer them to "real" books.

We will continue to develop and improve *Christian Odyssey* as an online magazine, as we take advantage of the astonishing technological advances that are revolutionizing the publishing industry. We hope you will join us as we launch into these new and exciting waters.

We don't want to leave you on the shore, waving goodbye. So we hope this article will help you get online.

But if all else fails?

Then please give us a call at 1-800-423-4444. **co**

A Lesson From Laundry



Laundry is one of those things you know you have to do, unless you can get someone else to do it for you! The clothes must be sorted—dark colors separate from the whites and lighter colors. (Some of us learn this the hard way, like I did in college: I put my new red gym clothes in with my whites and everything came out pink.) Some items have to be washed on the gentle cycle with a different detergent. And we all know what happens when you forget and put a delicate item in the dryer!

We take special care of our clothes, but we sometimes forget people need the same consideration. We don't have too much trouble with the obvious, such as illnesses, disabilities or difficult circumstances, but we can't see inside and know what people are thinking. That's when trouble comes.

It's so easy to look at someone and make judgments. The story of Samuel going out to anoint a new king from all of Jesse's many sons is a classic. Who would have thought God had David in mind? Even Samuel had to learn this lesson: "The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7, New Living Translation throughout).

We have to be careful not to make assumptions with people we've just met, and even with ones we've known a long time. We don't know what they've experienced and have no idea how those experiences have affected them.

In Colossians 3:12-14, we are reminded of how we should treat one another: "Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony."

The New Testament has many "one another" statements, including Ephesians 4:31-32: "Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you."

How we treat others is important for many reasons. As believers, we are part of the body of Christ. No one hates his or her own body, but cares for it (Ephesians 5:29). We are made in the image of God, so when we mistreat or dishonor others, we are dishonoring God. The Golden Rule isn't a cliché. We need to treat others in the same way we would like to be treated, remembering we all have our personal struggles, some apparent to others, many hidden deep inside, known only to us and God.

Next time you're sorting laundry, take a moment to think of the people in your life and the special consideration each one needs. God already does this for us, treating us as individuals deserving of his own special care. **co**



A Sign Forever

By Gary Deddo

Signs are important. We could hardly get along without them. We have signs for road safety, for identifying stores, indicating dangers like poison, radiation or high voltage wires, for finding geographic destinations, or merely navigating our way through an airport or sports stadium.

Signs were also important in the ancient world, including the ancient nation of Israel. The God of Israel gave signs to his people and used them for their benefit. One of the most notable was, of course, the rainbow after Noah's flood. Another was the Sabbath rest on the seventh day of the week. This sign was given to Israel "forever" (Exodus 31:17).

Some have thought the particular sign of the Sabbath rest given to Israel was so important that we are today under the same obligation. After all, some argue, it was given "forever." So why shouldn't this old covenant instruction hold for today?

The important thing to recognize here is that what is eternal is called a "sign." Christian pastors and teachers down through history have given great consideration to signs, as we find them referred to in both the Old and New Testaments. It is widely recognized and important to understand that the purpose of a sign is to point to something

else, something greater than itself. For example, when no cat is in sight, the word "cat" spoken or written refers our minds to a particular kind of animal. We think of it, even though it's not there in front of us. Much of our ordinary language involves the use of signs to point to something that exists but might not be currently available for viewing. It could be said that signs point to what they signify, to the things themselves.

We find in the Bible that the signs God first gave to Israel all pointed to something greater to come, often to God's invisible character or to his future actions. So the word of the Lord comes to Israel: "I will be your God and you shall be my people." "I am the Lord your God who took you out of Egypt."

Many theologians down through the ages have recognized a pattern. The signs God gives are often promises. And what is promised is the thing signified. Israel was given the promise of a land. The promise wasn't the land, but it pointed forward to and anticipated its fulfillment, when Israel would enter the Promised Land. The sign was the promise; entering the land was the fulfillment. Furthermore Christian teachers have recognized again and again that the signs given in the Old Testament (or under the old cov-

enant) were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus himself was the fulfillment of the sign of the promised Messiah, the fulfillment of God's promise of deliverance, of salvation.

Now how does this apply to the eternal sign of the Sabbath? Jesus himself helps us answer. Some of the religious teachers of Judaism in his day accused Jesus of violating the Sabbath. How did Jesus reply? Does he say to them, "Well, you have your interpretation of this sign, and I have mine. The people will have to choose between our two interpretations as best they can." No, that is not what he said. Rather, he pointed out that he is Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28; Matthew 12:8; Luke 6:5). He created the Sabbath. He was there to show them what the Sabbath was really all about. He is the source of our Sabbath rest. In fact, it turns out that Jesus himself fulfills the promise of Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4:1-11). He *is* our Sabbath rest as we are joined to our Eternal Great High Priest. The sign of the Sabbath pointed to its fulfillment in Jesus. He is the "thing" signified.

The entire Gospel of John is dedicated to help us see the radical difference between the signs God gave and the reality they point to, namely Jesus himself. John the Baptist is the sign, not the promised one himself. So he must "decrease" and Jesus must "increase" in significance. Jesus does not just tell us the truth, show us the way or give us life. Rather he is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is the light of the world, he is the bread of life, he is the water of life, he is the resurrection. He is "I am." All the signs given by God were meant to lead us to the Son of God incarnate. He is, in his own person, the fulfillment of God's promises. Jesus is both the Giver and the Gift.

We have already mentioned that the purpose of a sign in the working of God is to point us to the reality. Think of road signs pointing out the direction to a big city—say Chicago. Some of them are far away and pointing southward. Some are closer and pointing eastward. There's no limit to the number and position of signs directing you. But if accurate and clear, each one gives direction for locating the city of Chicago. No one confuses the signs with the reality, the city itself. But that does not make them of no importance. If you've never been to Chicago and don't know the way, accurate signs are helpful—for *finding the destination*, not loitering around the signposts.

Now think what happens when you reach the actual city, and perhaps even "city center." You're glad for the signs and that they were accurate enough to get you to the city. But once you're there, say at Millennium Park in Chicago, they are no longer important. The city itself, with its skyscrapers, parks, museums and lakefront, far exceeds anything those signs could possibly indicate about its true grandeur. And consider, of what further use are those signs? Not much, if any at all. Their job was to get you to the city. Once there, they have no further use—even though you remain grateful for them.

Now imagine someone standing smack-dab in city center and demanding that you show him a sign that pointed the way to Chicago. If he didn't recognize that he was already in the city, would the sign help? Or suppose he protested that he could not possibly be in Chicago, since he saw no signs on the way that were anything like what surrounded him now. Thinking the city would be much the same as the signs pointing the way, Chicago should be like a huge flat panel, perhaps with huge, fancy letters, and lights illuminating them, spelling out in glorious brilliance the name "CHICAGO." If that was what he was looking for, how would you answer? Might you be just a little exasperated?

If you actually produced something like he expected, pointing in some direction, would it be of any use? In fact, if he followed the direction of the arrow on even an impressive and imposing sign you produced for him, where would it take him? Toward Chicago? No. When you have arrived at the city center, an arrow pointing in any direction would lead you away from and eventually out of the city. That sign would actually be misleading! But those other signs still standing outside the city would be of useful service once again. They remain permanently helpful to those who have not yet arrived at City Hall. But they have relatively little meaning once you've reached your destination.

Perhaps this is why, when asked, Jesus sometimes refused to give another sign. He told them they already had plenty of signs!

The theological signs of the Bible, whether to ancient Israel or those recorded in the New Testament regarding Jesus and the early church, function much like this. The signs pointed to the reality, where the promises God made were fulfilled in person. Those signs stand as permanent, even eternal, pointers to the reality. But once you've followed their lead and have met the reality—Jesus himself—they have fulfilled their purpose and are no longer needed. They are superseded by the reality. You could never confuse the sign with the far greater reality of what they pointed to.

Perhaps this is why, when asked, Jesus sometimes refused to give another sign. He told them they already had plenty of signs. No sign will help them recognize the reality when it's standing there in front of them face to face.

So when we read that God has given us certain signs forever, this is true. They eternally point to the promised reality. But when you've met the Lord of All Signs, all others, having done their work, can now only have relative value—value relative to the Reality of their Lord. **co**

Combating Atheism



In the last few years, we have seen the rising influence of writers and scientists who vigorously preach atheism. They not only express their personal doubts about God's existence, but they campaign with almost evangelical fervor against the very idea of God and religion.

These atheists are highly educated and their arguments are not easily dismissed by most people, even though their arguments have long ago been defeated. It is difficult to logically refute arguments that are unfamiliar to you. Many Christians see this move towards atheism as a threat. We who believe in God feel we must somehow win this argument, and prove that God does exist, otherwise the atheists will have won the argument.

But no, they haven't. You see, although I have absolutely no doubt about God's existence, I have also learned that it is impossible to prove it to someone who is determined not to believe. There is ample evidence in the world and the whole cosmos to show the existence of a Creator. As the Psalms say, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Psalm 19:1). And Paul wrote to the church at Rome, "God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made" (Romans 1:20).

"Only God knows God, and only God reveals God." The ultimate reason Christians have faith in God is Jesus Christ himself.

These scriptures are often used to prove God's existence, but that is not what they are saying. The wonders of creation provide impressive evidence for those who believe, but they do not give knockdown proof for those who do not. A determined atheist can always find a hole in an argument, or a loose brick in the proof. Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest thinkers of church history, put it well when he wrote, "To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible."

The problem is that you cannot prove God's existence from within naturalism—the philosophy held by those who assume that only nature exists. There is no amount of evidence that can be taken from nature and used as proof for the God of the Bible.

This is because God is not physically a part of nature, he is transcendent of its origin. You can only "prove" one aspect of nature on the basis of some other aspect of nature. So by studying nature, one can only yield further knowledge of nature. But, as the theologians of the early church put it: "Only God knows God, and only God reveals God." At best, nature can give us indirect evidences that confirm the existence of God, but the ultimate reason Christians have faith in God is Jesus Christ himself. Jesus is the Reason, or as the Gospel of John puts it, The Logos.

But, just because we cannot give clear material proof that God exists, it does not mean the atheist has won the argument. We don't need to be on the defensive. What we need is to turn the argument around. It is not our job to prove God exists – it is the atheist's task to prove he does not.

Atheists may cite some scientific discovery, the weakness of religious arguments, or the hypocrisy of some religious behavior to support their case. But, this should not divert attention away from the central fact they have to prove. They must still prove that God does not exist. And just as it is not possible to prove God exists through naturalism, you cannot prove God does not exist through naturalism. The study of nature can only negate claims about nature.

For this reason, many atheists eventually admit that they are actually agnostic. Even Richard Dawkins in his recent public conversation with the Archbishop Rowan Williams acknowledged that he could not say with 100% certainty that God does not exist – he stops short at 99%. If they are honest, they cannot dismiss the evidence that the physical, materialistic world is not all there is. They may not come

to the point where they accept and surrender their lives to their Creator, but they are no longer sure he does not exist. They simply don't know! They are agnostic, or "without knowledge."

Never forget that the strongest proof of God's existence is first, Jesus Christ and, second, the example of those who have surrendered to God, and live their lives in partnership with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Let us do that and let God take care of the atheists in his own good time. He will—because he loves them too.

Speaking of Life is a regular feature of the GCI web site. Watch it on www.speakingoflife.org 



The Clumsy Dance Pose

By Shiela Miller

My ballet teacher was the immensely talented Russian taskmaster, Ivan Novikoff. An amazing dancer, teacher, choreographer and artist extraordinaire, he knew how to bring out the best in his students. Classes were grueling, bodies ached and muscles cramped; we were taught the show must always go on, regardless of bruised limbs or bloody toes. He demanded perfection, and we did our utmost to live up to his expectations, jumping higher and spinning more times than we ever imagined possible. He knew our physical limitations better than we did ourselves, but he also understood our potential.

I began studying under him at age 4 and was privileged to continue for 13 more years, actually serving as his teaching assistant during my teen years. I graduated at 17 with a teaching certificate from his school, able to confidently perform and teach his signature style. Now, as an adult, I have become a passionate worship dancer and instructor.

My 5-year-old daughter Sydney is a “mini-me,” a little carbon copy of her mother, but with her own distinctive, spit-fire

personality.

When a friend asked me to give ballet lessons to her and her daughter, I agreed, and for the first time, I realized that I would be able to teach my *own* daughter ballet one day. It gave me deep satisfaction to realize I would be able to share a great love of mine with her.

Her poses are not always pretty, she might only get one leg or one arm into the correct ballet position, but I know her heart. It is sweet and pure.

Sweet Sydney was only two years old when I began giving ballet lessons to elementary school students. She came to class and would participate some, sit on my lap some, and then finally decide she’d had enough and simply watch the rest of the class. As she grew older, she grew in stamina, knowledge of dance movements and poise. I was a proud mother and teacher as I watched her first solo performance on stage at age 3 to “I

Love You, Lord.”

Now I teach worship dance classes to girls age 3-8, and Sydney is right there in the middle of it all. She loves having me as her teacher, and she mimics my movements. She recently saw a ballet photo of me as a teenager and said she wants to look just like me. She hasn't yet put in the years of sweat and toil to become an accomplished, graceful dancer, but it's obvious she's on her way.

Sydney loves to strike a ballet pose for the camera, but when she poses, she might only get one leg or one arm into the correct ballet position. Her poses are not always pretty, and sometimes her dancing isn't great, but I know her heart. It is sweet and pure and she's doing her best to dance for God because she loves him and she loves to dance to honor him. That's exactly what God wants from us, to do our utmost for him—it's the first great commandment given in Luke 10:27—“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.”

It's natural for my daughter to want to model her mother, and since we were made in God's image, we should naturally want to look, act and think like our heavenly Father does. Sydney didn't get to study with a great ballet master like I did, but I'm her example to follow, as Jesus is our example of the Father. We must emulate Jesus, who said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Wow! Jesus led a perfect life with compassion galore. I don't know about you, but for me, that's a hard act to follow. But that is where our standard has been set—absolute perfection. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:48 to “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” We can't possibly measure up, but he wants to see that we are trying our best to follow him and let him be the Lord and Master of our lives.

Striving for perfection is hard work day after day. My daughter gets utterly exhausted from dancing and wants to collapse before class has even finished. That's when I encourage her to continue until the end, because the only way to improve is not to give up. Being human, we will always fall short of the perfection we seek, but luckily our creator God knows we're human, so we shouldn't be too frustrated with our shortcomings. He sees our hearts and knows our strengths and weaknesses. Our omniscient God is fully aware of our physical limitations, but also of our unlimited potential.

If we let Jesus be our guide and model him as we pose in our dance of life, then we're allowing him to direct our steps, choreograph our dance and fashion us in his likeness so there will be no mistaking that we're children of God. Even though we may be clumsy, just like Sydney sometimes is, God is proud of our heartfelt efforts to emulate him. Let's keep working on the clumsy dance pose! **co**

Remembering God



There are many positive things about aging. Unfortunately I can't remember what they are. That's my problem. I can't remember much of anything. And what I do remember can be inaccurately influenced by time, bias and suggestion. I am not alone.

Police officers experience this all the time. When eyewitnesses are questioned about whom they saw do the robbery, the descriptions indicate the crime was committed by a short, tall, black, Caucasian with short, long, brown, blond hair wearing blue sweatpants or a brown suit.

Most of us do not intend to shade the truth, but it happens sometimes. For example, if we tell an embellished story long enough, we may actually think it is true. If we are having difficulty with people, our minds magnify their imperfections. We even believe our fantasized ideas about how much better things were in years gone by.

Such was the case when the Israelites came out of Egypt. They groaned for deliverance for years because of their unbearable hardships (Exodus 1:8-22, 2:23, 5:7). Then, when God delivered them, they grumbled about how much better off they had been in Egypt.

When they didn't like how God provided for them, they'd recall their distorted view of the good old days. “We remember the fish we ate in Egypt” (Numbers 11:5 Easy to Read Version) and “It would have been better if the Lord had just killed us there! At least there we had plenty to eat” (Exodus 16:3). Yes, they may have had fish, but they also had oppressive slavery under cruel taskmasters. They were oppressed to the point that even their baby boys were killed at birth.

Later God would tell them to remember when they were slaves in Egypt. Remember that God delivered them to freedom (Deuteronomy 5:15). Remember what God did to Pharaoh and to Egypt (Deuteronomy 7:18). Remember how God led them through the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8:2).

This was more than exhorting them just to remember these things; it was telling them to remember accurately. “Be very careful never to forget what you yourself have seen. Do not let these memories escape from your mind as long as you live!” (Deuteronomy 4:9 New Living Translation)

Human memory is flawed. Life, even the Christian life, is not easy. When times get rough we might imagine it was better before God revealed himself to us. Not true. We forget how lonely, depressed, angry, hopeless or void of purpose we felt without God. We forget all God has done for us.

When my father had Alzheimer's disease, sometimes he couldn't remember much. When coherent he'd say, “I know you are my daughter, but I can't remember your name.” Miraculously, however, he remembered God! He found comfort praying, reading the Bible and singing old gospel songs. We'd sing those songs together and he'd look at me and say, “You know, everything that song says is true. God is good!”

Sadly, I know I forget many of the wonderful things God has done for me. Fortunately my salvation is not tied to my faulty memory. God remembers me even when I forget him (Isaiah 49:15-16). But I want to remember. So I continually ask, “God, please help me remember your love, mercy, kindness and faithfulness to me and my loved ones, plus all those little prayers you answered immediately and the ones where you wisely did not give me what I wanted because you had a better plan.”

God remembers me—and I want to remember God. **co**

An Unexpected Lesson

By Lee Berger

My wife, Sue, and I recently attended a different kind of church service, and we learned an unexpected lesson from an unexpected source.

Sue and I are happily ensconced in our local GCI congregation, but we like to visit other churches whenever we can. For many months, we had been seeing plastic temporary signs placed on street corners all over our side of town. The signs said, “Church For the Rest of Us” and pointed to a website for further information. We were intrigued.

We looked over their website and found out the church is designed for people struggling with addictions: drugs, anger, bad sex, depression, eating disorders, alcohol, you name it. This is a church founded by, pastored by and mainly attended by addicts and homeless people. I guess these societal outcasts could be called “the rest of us.”

They met for services on Saturday evening, and we decided to check it out. We parked our car and began walking toward the meeting place—a somewhat rundown former movie theater. We didn’t see any smiling, energetic parking lot attendants nor any neat-and-tidy greeters outside the doors. Instead, there was an assortment of much-tattooed, rough-looking men and women with unkempt hair and ill-fitting clothes sitting on the curb, leaning against posts and smoking cigarettes. Eyes with dark bags stared at us “normal people,” wondering why we were there. We began to wonder the same thing.

Stepping around the bodies and through the thick haze of cigarette smoke, we entered the building and were greeted by two smiling women. We found out later one of them was the pastor’s wife. They asked our names, told us theirs, and handed us a printed bulletin for the upcoming church service. As we made our way down the hall to the sanctuary, several other people greeted us cheerfully. It wasn’t difficult to find a place to sit. It was ten minutes before services were to begin and we were the only congregants in the room. Most of the rest were still outside smoking.

On the simple stage, Levi, the worship leader/guitarist was practicing his songs. There was no multi-piece band, no choir, no backup singers, no piano, no organ—just Levi, his guitar and lyrics projected onto a screen. Simple, minimal, real. Kind of peaceful.

Then people began to come into the sanctuary. First, workers checking on the status of various aspects of preparation for

church services. They all made it a point to come over to where Sue and I were sitting, in the middle of a row in the middle of the hall, introduce themselves and welcome us. As the rest of the members came in, several more went out of their way to say hello, shake our hands and share a smile. I’ve visited many “normal” churches of various denominations over the decades, and I’ve never been greeted by as many friendly people as at this church for “misfits.”

The service began. The music was meaningful, the sermon was biblical and helpful, and I knew God was present. I spent time looking around and imagining what powerful and discouraging addictions pulled at these men and women made in God’s image. It wasn’t hard to see they have gone through some rough times in their lives. Some are in various stages of “recovery,” and some are probably still high or drunk or mired in immoral behavior—even as they gather for church services. But there was a refreshing openness and authenticity among the group, and I can imagine Jesus would feel comfortable hanging out with them.

These needy people were being taught from the Bible about the heart of God, and God’s heart leads us to give and share.

The people I worshiped with that night have little in the way of material goods; some live on the streets or under bridges and carry all their possessions in backpacks or sacks. I guess that’s why I was so shocked by an announcement made near the close of services. “Remember to bring your canned or boxed goods next week for the food drive. In a month, we’ll take our donated food and present it to those in the community who are in need.”

What kind of crazy talk was this? Homeless people and addicts donating food to others “in need?!” Who could have more “needs” than these people sitting in this church? Surely they should keep what little they had, not give it away to others. But they were being taught from the Bible about the heart of God, and God’s heart leads us to give and share—not always from our abundance, but even from our scarcity.

I learned an unexpected lesson that evening—a humbling and inspiring lesson—surrounded by a group of social outcasts excited to be on mission with God. What an amazing picture of the heart of God in outreach toward others! **co**



Now Nationally Accredited

Grace Communion Seminary (GCS) is pleased to announce that our seminary has been officially accredited by the Distance Education and Training Council (DETC), whose headquarters are located in Washington, DC. We asked GCS President Russell Duke what this means for the future of the Seminary and for the GCI denomination.

Christian Odyssey: What is the Distance Education and Training Council?

Russell Duke: DETC is listed with the United States Department of Education as a nationally recognized accrediting agency and is a member of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. DETC requires programs in its accredited institutions to be at a minimum of 51% online education.

Accreditation is seen as third-party approval of our curriculum and administration. It makes it much more likely that coursework completed at GCS can be transferred to other institutions. Accreditation may also enable graduates to enter other academic programs or gain advancement in employment based on completing a master's degree. In a few cases, it may enable students to qualify for tuition assistance or matching donations from their employers.

Our goal is to provide quality online graduate-level education in pastoral ministry. The seminary began online programs in 2004. The online delivery of our curriculum serves busy pastors who cannot leave pastorates for the residential seminary. Lay persons and ministers can take courses of interest in order to enhance their ministry through better understanding the nature of God, participation in the ministry of Jesus, and revelation through the Bible. Our perspective focuses on Trinitarian Incarnational theology and pastoral ministry. Our programs are entirely online and easily accessible.

CO: What degree program do you offer?

RD: Our degree program is the Master of Pastoral Studies, which requires completion of 14 courses, including a Theology of Ministry thesis. Courses are offered in biblical studies, theology, church history, and ministerial and pastoral leadership. All courses must be finished within

seven years, so students can earn a degree by taking only two courses per year.

All students initially enroll in Master's Level Continuing Education courses in the area of their interest. Upon completing four courses, students receive the Certificate of Theological Studies, and upon completing three more courses (two in Christian ministry) they receive the Advanced Diploma of Christian Ministry.

Our strategic plan calls for the development of additional graduate degrees in theology and ministry.

CO: How is the seminary administered?

RD: GCS is governed by its own board of directors. Dr. Joseph Tkach is chairman; directors include Dr. Dan Rogers, Dr. John McKenna, Ronald Kelly, Patricia Shaw, and me. Dr. Bernard Schnippert provides legal counsel, and Mat Morgan is treasurer.

As president, I direct operations of the seminary; I also serve as accreditation official. Dr. Michael Morrison serves as dean of faculty to guide curriculum development and delivery. Susan Earle is our registrar and coordinator of student services.

CO: How much does it cost?

RD: Our tuition costs are competitive. Starting in 2013, each three-unit course will cost \$300, which is much less expensive than most seminaries. Our tuition is kept low because 87 percent of our expenses are covered by endowment funds. The Master of Pastoral Studies requires taking 14 courses, so the total expense is approximately \$4,200, plus about \$500 for books. Some financial assistance is available from our scholarship funds; see our website for application details. These scholarships come through donations given by individuals who value education as essential to growth in the denomination.

Some congregations may expect pastors to spend all their time visiting members and to produce meaningful sermons without adequate time for education and preparation. But a wise congregation gives leaders time to study, time to reflect and time to develop depth. A wise congregation will support its pastoral team in seeking more education—and this means giving them both time and tuition.

The apostle Paul asks, “Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink the milk?” (1 Corinthians 9:7). We understand that some congregations cannot provide salaries, but almost all congregations can help the pastor pay for books and education—especially when that training is undertaken not for the pastor’s own benefit, but in order to serve the congregation!

CO: You mentioned endowment funds?

RD: Grace Communion Seminary is affiliated with Grace Communion International, and we have the same statement of beliefs. Our major source of funding at the present comes from



Meet the Staff. Susan Earle, Registrar; Michael Morrison, Dean of Faculty; and Russell Duke, President

endowment gained over the years from donations from church members who have given gifts and trusts dedicated to education. We appreciate what those contributions are able to accomplish today, and we welcome additional support for tomorrow.

CO: Why does GCI need its own seminary?

RD: Our denomination needs a formal program for educating new and existing pastors and pastoral teams. Many of our pastors are already well trained and have decades of experience in pastoral work. But even highly competent leaders benefit from a lifelong commitment to further education—and in our online discussions, younger students who are taking the same classes benefit from those years of experience. A formal program, conducted according to high educational standards, helps ensure that leaders are not just studying the topics they happen to like, but are getting a well-rounded exposure to other topics that are useful in pastoral work.

As our denomination looks forward into the next ten years, we anticipate that many of our present pastors will retire, and we need to train a new cadre of men and women who can take their place. These new leaders need training not so much in the doctrinal changes we have made, but in how we go forward from where we are now: the basics of pastoral practice and how they are based on biblical teachings and theological foundations. We believe that our Trinitarian, Christ-centered theology provides the best possible anchor for ministry in the 21st century.

Our cohesion as a denomination will be improved if our churches work with a shared theological vision and our leaders have received similar training. We further see the seminary

Courses of study

Grace Communion Seminary offers courses in four major disciplines: biblical studies, theology, church history, and ministerial and pastoral leadership. The course titles identify the main theme developed in the course; additional information can be found in the short course syllabi on the GCS website:

Biblical studies

- Pentateuch—John McKenna
- Prophets—Tim Finlay
- New Testament Background—Michael Morrison
- Gospels—Michael Morrison
- Acts of the Apostles—Russell Duke
- Epistles of Paul—Michael Morrison

Christian Ministry

- Ministerial Leadership—Russell Duke
- Pastoral Leadership—Russell Duke
- Biblical Counseling—Ted Johnston
- Practice of Ministry—Jonathan Stepp
- Women in Leadership—Pat Shaw
- Trinitarian Youth Ministry—Ted Johnston

Church History

- The First Millennium—Jonathan Stepp
- The Second Millennium—Neil Earle

Theology

- Nature of God and Jesus Christ—Russell Duke
- Nature of Humans and Salvation—Eric Wilding
- T.F. Torrance’s Scientific Theology—John McKenna
- Doctrine of the Trinity—Gary Deddo
- Pauline Theology—Michael Morrison

Theology of Ministry

- Thesis—instructor assigned based on topic.
- For syllabi and more details on each course, see www.gcs.edu/course.

as an additional way to share the gospel with people who are outside of our denomination. Many people want to dig deeper into their Christian faith with academically respectable study that is simultaneously based in the Bible and in grace. They are eager to see how theological ideas have practical significance in daily life.

CO: So it is not just for pastors.

RD: Right. Seminary study is not just for pastors—it is for many others who would like to learn more about the faith. Although our program is designed primarily with pastors in mind, we welcome anyone with a bachelor's degree who wants to learn more. There are two basic reasons why many Christians want to learn more:

1. Love for God. What God has done for us in Christ has so profoundly changed us, so thrilled us, that we would like to learn as much as we can about who God is.
2. We would like to tell others about it, but we want to do it right. We have seen how well-meaning but self-taught

people can lead others astray. So in humility, we look for instruction from people who have gone before us. Paul told Timothy to set up a pattern of one generation teaching the next (2 Timothy 2:2), and we see ourselves in that chain of instruction.

A seminary helps students cover the full spectrum of subject matter that may be useful for leaders in the church. Every person has blind spots, and if left on our own, we would have holes in our understanding. But by pooling our expertise, by people with different gifts working together, we create a more rounded program of study.

We believe that Grace Communion Seminary is a blessing for our denomination, for our students and for our congregations. We are pleased that we have received accreditation, because we believe that this will help us serve even more effectively. We give thanks to the Father, Son, and Spirit for all grace and goodness.

For more information about Grace Communion Seminary, please visit our website at www.gcs.edu. **co**

FOR THE LOVE OF GOD By Rick Shallenberger

Beyond Technology



When I first began preparing sermons, I usually started with a doctrine, a question or a topic and looked up all the scriptures I could find to prove the point I was trying to make. The more scriptures, the better the “authority” of the message. A good sermon had at least 15-20 scriptural references. Of course, my sermons lasted more than an hour back then, so there was plenty of time.

After a while, I started providing handouts so the members could take notes around the scriptures I quoted. That way, they wouldn't miss the important points I was making. Providing handouts, as my thoughts went, would allow listeners to pay closer attention and not worry about taking so many notes. This would benefit them greatly and they would get more out of my important messages. (Notice the humility here.)

Technology isn't the answer: God's story is. Whether you read it on paper or online, it is still Good News.

After handouts, I moved on to PowerPoint. Now I could have the scriptures on the big screen along with pertinent information that they could copy. What a time-saver for them! Rather than trying to determine the important points of the message, the PowerPoint slides made it clear what I wanted them to learn.

Over time PowerPoint became fancier with colorful backgrounds, inserted music and video clips. The sermon turned into a professional presentation. Wow! The members must be impressed with all this amazing technology that obviously helped them in their understanding of God, theology, salvation and—let's not forget—sin.

Eventually I realized I was spending more time on preparing the production, than I was on the message itself. You can get by without a lot of substance if the show is flashy and entertaining. Now, when I look back at some of my “best” productions, I'm a bit embarrassed at the actual content of the messages.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with PowerPoint, video clips, music clips and sound bites. There's nothing wrong with catchy backgrounds, colored text and flashing sentences. But if the message isn't good, you simply have a production, an audio-visual extravaganza, not a sharing of the gospel.

What I've learned over my years as a pastor is I don't need all the latest and greatest gimmicks to give a sermon; what I need is to keep telling the story. In fact, story-telling is still the most effective means of getting a point across to a group of people. And isn't that what the Bible is, God telling us his story and how we are part of that story? Absolutely.

Technology isn't the answer: God's story—the gospel—is the answer. Whether you read it on paper or online, it is still Good News.

This is the last issue of *Christian Odyssey* on paper, but I assure you, we will continue to tell the story. See you online. **co**

The Law Used Properly

A Study of 1 Timothy 1:3–11



The early church had doctrinal disagreements and behavioral problems. Paul asked Timothy to take care of several problems in Ephesus.

Just as Roman emperors sometimes used “open letters” to publicly proclaim the instructions that a new governor was given, so also Paul used a letter to explain to the congregation what Timothy was authorized to do.

Confident speculations (verses 3-7)

After a brief introduction, Paul explains Timothy’s commission: **“As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer.”** Some people had added new teachings to the gospel. Paul’s letter does not tell us exactly what the false teachings were, but it does give us some clues. Some of the same ideas were in second-century Gnosticism, which taught salvation by learning various mysteries (the Greek word *gnosis* means “knowledge”).

Paul gives hints about heresy when he adds, **“or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God’s work—which is by faith.”** Gnostics said that there were numerous layers of authority in the heavens, and we must learn the names of those spiritual powers in order to ascend toward God. Paul may be referring to similar ideas with the word “genealogies.”

People were spending their time on speculations for which there was no proof. The modern equivalent might be prophecy, which at first may seem to attract people to the gospel, but ends up distracting people from what’s most important. The real focus of God’s message is faith—trusting in God, not in trying to learn things that everyone else has missed.

Apparently, some people liked these speculations, so why did Paul tell Timothy to put a stop to them? **“The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”** Paul wanted people to focus their faith on Christ.

But some people no longer had good motives and were trying to get followers for themselves. **“Some have departed from these and have turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.”** Some people like to be known as teachers who bring new facts and new conclusions, and they can attract a following by speaking with confidence. They state (or imply), “You need what I am teaching and you can’t get it anywhere else.”

Laws made for sinners (verses 8-11)

In Ephesus, the false teachers had their own slant on the law. Paul begins to address that issue with a truism: **“We know that the law is good if one uses it properly.”** But what is the proper use of the law? Paul explains that in the next few verses: **“We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers...”**

As some Greek philosophers noted, good people do not need laws to tell them not to steal and kill. Virtuous people don’t want to do those things anyway. But bad people are tempted to do such things, and so the law gives them a minimum standard of conduct. In contrast, the Christian standard is the maximum—we want to let Christ live in us, bear the fruit of the Spirit and do the will of the Father.

Paul continues his list of ungodly behavior: **“...for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers.”** Greek society had few sexual restrictions, but the New Testament has many. Paul’s first word, *pornos*, covers a wide range of sexual practices, and is given the appropriately general translation “sexual immorality.”

Paul’s second word, *arsenokoitēs*, comes from roots meaning “male” and “bed.” These words were in the Greek version of Leviticus 18:22, which prohibits all male-with-male sexual activity. Paul apparently agreed with the traditional Jewish restrictions on sexual activities.

Paul summarizes that the law is made **“for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.”** Paul’s doctrines, always given in conformity with the gospel of grace, include some demands on our behavior. If an activity does not conform to the gospel, then it is right to prohibit it. **co**

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

Questions for discussion

- What confident speculations affect Christianity today? Why do people follow them? How can we avoid being misled by them?
- If the law is not made for righteous people, is it possible for them to use it properly? Did Paul use it?

H m m ...

With hurricanes, tornados, fires out of control, mud slides, flooding, severe thunderstorms tearing up the country from one end to another, and with the threat of bird flu and terrorist attacks, are we sure this is a good time to take God out of the Pledge of Allegiance?

Jay Leno

There are a lot of issues that face our community, but the majority of them could be drastically reduced if we would just become a community of good neighbors.

Bob Frie

There is no easy walk to freedom anywhere, and many of us will have to pass through the shadow of the valley of death again and again before we reach the mountain-top of our desires.

Nelson Mandela

If you think you are too small to make a difference, you haven't spent a night with a mosquito.

African Proverb

Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power.

Abraham Lincoln

All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident.

Arthur Schopenhauer

Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak. Courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.

Winston Churchill

The pursuit of truth and beauty is a sphere of activity in which we are permitted to remain children all our lives.

Albert Einstein

When we believe that God is Father, we also believe that such a father's hand will never cause his child a needless tear. We may not understand life any better, but we will not resent life any longer.

William Barclay

If there is one stitch in the celestial garment of our righteousness that we must



insert ourselves, we are lost; but this is our confidence—what the Lord begins, He completes...Our confidence must not be in what we have done, nor in what we have resolved to do, but entirely in what the Lord will do.

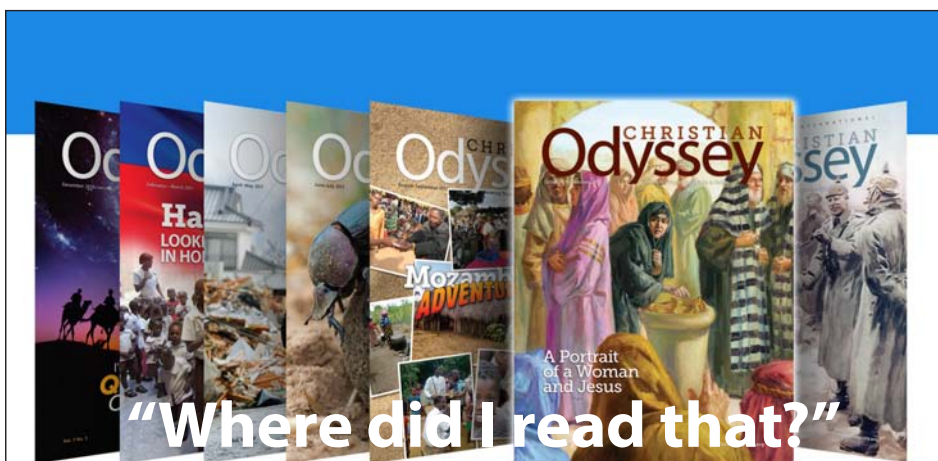
Charles Spurgeon

Never believe that a few caring people can't change the world. For, indeed, that's all who ever have.

Margaret Mead

If we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity.

John F. Kennedy



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