



# Depth Perception™

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## Happy Birthday Ben 28 February 2006

Benjamin Franklin turns 300 in 2006. His adopted city of Philadelphia is poised to celebrate all year long. Those of us who work in the fields of philanthropy and stewardship education are wise to join them in revisiting his life and legacy.

We might focus on the fact he was one of the first entrepreneurs who built his fortune, then devoted the second half of his career to public service. We might remind ourselves he invented the matching gift scheme for fundraising, that he established endowments and made gifts of real estate. We might even observe that he networked as well as anyone in history.

What stands out to me, however, is an interesting aspect of his kite-flying that proved lightning was electricity and ultimately led to the invention of the lightning rod. Prior to that time people pretty much believed they were at God's mercy when a thunderstorm broke loose. Many even believed, as did King David of old, that thunder was the voice of God (Psalm 29:3).

Ben's risky actions place him in the hall of fame for myth busters. He demonstrated that "God's voice" was merely electrical discharge on a mighty scale.

When some people are confronted with change in their understanding of God, belief wilts. For Ben it was an invitation to deeper wonder and awe over what Providence had created. This man, whose beliefs were deist rather than Christian, continued to believe God was infinitely wise, good and powerful (Franklin, Benjamin, 2001, *The Autobiography and Other Writings*, New York: Signet, p.323).

Ben, who believed in a distant God, teaches me, who believes in God both sovereign and imminent, that there are more wonders to discover—each pointing to the profoundness of creation and the worship of the One who made all things, and my generous response to that God.

—mark I. vincent