

eternal perspectives

with author Randy Alcorn

Spring Issue • 2015

What's on your post-bucket list?

PLUS

The Crowded Kindnesses of God
Singleness and the Church

POST-BUCKET LIST

...how the Bible itself, this may well
...ever read"

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about

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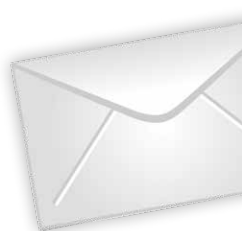
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The Crowded Kindnesses of God

BY RANDY ALCORN

God isn't just in life's monumental things. He's present in the little things: rain drops, the artistry of spider webs, and the sound of an acoustic guitar. A child's laugh, surfing songs, a swing set, sprinklers, and the smell of split cedar. Colorful birds and fish. Stars that declare God's glory. Little League, skiing, ping pong, hot showers, a slam dunk, Disneyland. Maple syrup, fresh green beans, buttermilk biscuits, and homemade strawberry jam. Aspirin, artificial limbs, wheel chairs, and synthetic insulin (I can't live without it). Ripe oranges straight off the tree. Pecan pie a la mode, chocolate chip cookies hot out of the oven and a tall glass of cold milk (in my case, this would require a lot more insulin). A good recliner, the smell of leather upholstery, and a dog's wagging tail.

If we disregard these and thousands of other gifts, we don't just fail to notice them, *we fail to notice God*. God's goodness is always evident if we look in the right place. "[H]e is actually not far from each one of us, for in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:27-28).

Alexander Maclaren advised, "Seek to cultivate a buoyant, joyous sense of the crowded kindnesses of God in your daily life."

One of my Bible college professors often used illustrations of Christ's presence in the small events of his day. I asked myself why those things didn't happen to me. God showed me they *did*—I just hadn't noticed!

If we fail to see God's "crowded kindnesses," it's not because they're lacking but because we're blind.

In a letter to his wife Elisabeth, Jim Elliot observed, "Amy Carmichael writes of little joys, like flowers springing up by the path unnoticed except by those who are looking for them. . . . Little things, like a quietly sinking sun, a friendly dog, a ready smile. We sang a little song in kindergarten which I've never forgotten: 'The world is so full of a number of things / I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.' Simple, but such a devastating rebuke to the complaining heart. I am impressed with the joy that is ours in Christ, so that heaven above and earth below become brighter and fairer." ■



On Manna and Personal Sabbaths



BY DOREEN BUTTON, EPM STAFF

The scattering of manna in the wilderness happened 6 days a week. On the 7th, just as in creation, God rested and so did the Israelites—at least the obedient ones. Those who went out to gather manna on the Sabbath disappointed themselves and God.

On any day of the week when more than the prescribed amount was gathered, the surplus turned to worms. But God prescribed a double portion to be gathered on Fridays. Sabbath manna was as fresh and tasty as it had been the day before.

When contemplating the 10 Commandments, it occurred to me that Christians don't balk at the commandments against adultery or theft. Nor do we disagree with a need for honesty when speaking of others or for honoring God and our parents. So why do we blithely ignore the commanded Sabbath?

True, we live in New Covenant relationship with God, no longer under the law. But if keeping a Sabbath is unimportant, why was it instituted eons before Moses carried stone tablets down the mountain? It existed even before the Fall, meaning it has nothing to do with keeping laws developed for people under the Curse.

If our need to rest one day in seven was indeed built into us in the Creation, might society's current lack of physical health have something to do with ignoring that need? I love an excuse to nap, so choosing to take it easy one day a week was simple.

I'm not under the Law, so in my opinion, it makes no difference what day it is. Sunday just happens to be the day most often available for rest, so that's what I do. Nothing. At least nothing that feels like work.

Church? Absolutely! Read a book or watch a football game? You bet! Nap while watching the game? Most likely. Make popcorn? Yup. Sometimes I'll putter in the yard because that feels like a break. But cook, or do dishes, or fold clothes? No way.

And when the "shoulds" threaten to disturb my peace, I simply kick them out of my brain and onto my to-do list for the upcoming week.

You're still wondering what this has to do with manna, right? Well, if I take this kind of break during my 6-day work week, I go to bed and lie awake for hours. It's like the folks that went out to gather more manna than they needed and the worms ate the rest. But no matter how lazy I am on that 7th day, I sleep like a baby. I start my new work week refreshed and with renewed purpose.

It's almost as if God has blessed my Sabbaths...

I see a similarity to the tithe, too: When you know you only have 90% of your income to work with, you're more careful about how it's used and it seems to go farther than when you keep 100% for yourself.

Likewise, my 6 work days have felt so much more productive. Temptation to sleep in or slack off is easy to resist because I know the break is coming soon.

What would a Sabbath rest look or feel like in your world? ■

How might you use the doctrine of Heaven when sharing the gospel with someone?

ANSWER FROM RANDY ALCORN

Heaven is a terrific evangelistic subject when we portray it as the Bible does. Satan has vested interests in our misconceptions regarding Heaven. When he depicts it as a dull, drab, tedious, boring place where nobody would want to go, the gospel is undermined, and all motivation for evangelism is removed.

Why would we want our friends to spend eternity in an eternally dull place? And why would they want to go there? Nobody wants to be a ghost when they die—people will no sooner develop a taste for a disembodied life than for broken glass.

On the other hand, when Christians understand Heaven is an exciting physical place on a redeemed world with redeemed people in redeemed relationships without sin and death, where there is music, art, science, sports, literature and culture, it's a great source of encouragement and motivation!

"They all lived happily ever after" is not merely a fairy tale. It's the blood-bought promise of God!

The New Earth is where there'll be no more pain and sorrow and God will wipe away the tears from every eye (Revelation 21:4). That's the perfect promise to share with unbelievers. We should unapologetically tell them that the happiness they long for, the reconciliation to the God from whom happiness flows, is found in Jesus alone—*this* is what makes the gospel "good news of great joy"! ■



Heaven booklets are available in a 20-pack from www.epm.org/heavenbooklet. (EPM offers an additional discount when you purchase 5 or more packs. Single copies are also available from www.epm.org/singleheavenbooklet.)

Sharing the *Heaven* Booklet: Ideas from Readers

I work in a medical office and regularly order *Heaven* booklets to keep in the office for patients to read or take. Each morning I make sure there are three *Heaven* booklets in each exam room, along with the other reading materials. I purchased 200 four months ago, and they are almost all gone already and I'm ordering 200 more! —S.L.

My elderly mother has been in a nursing home for about a year. She has been sharing *Heaven* booklets with visitors and staff for almost as long. I had purchased 100 booklets to send with sympathy cards

and filled a wicker basket with *Heaven* booklets for her to keep on her night stand. Many people are curious about the books and most are delighted to take one home with them. Nursing homes are excellent mission fields! —A.B.

I have really enjoyed passing out the *Heaven* booklet and the tracts. It makes spreading God's love easier. I own a small landscaping business and have several aging customers whom I really care about. It has been very meaningful to give them the *Heaven* booklets, as I have been praying for them for years. —M.F.

Don't Give Up

BY JON BLOOM

"Here is a call for the endurance of the saints" (Revelation 14:12).

We all long for rest from the fatigue of living. God placed the desire for rest in our souls, and he promises to fulfill it: "I will satisfy the weary soul, and every languishing soul I will replenish" (Jeremiah 31:25).

The "Now" and "Not Yet" of Our Rest

In a very real way, Jesus gives rest to "all who labor and are heavy laden" and come to him (Matthew 11:28). But in this age, we cannot find complete rest.

In this age, Jesus grants us the gospel rest of ceasing the impossible labor of self-atonement for our sins (2 Corinthians 5:21). But in embracing the gospel, we find ourselves also drafted into a war — a war to *keep believing* the gospel and a war to *keep spreading* it to others. In this age we "strive to enter that [complete] rest" of the age to come (Hebrews 4:11).

Wars are exhausting — especially long ones. That's why you are often tired. Many soldiers, who experience the fierceness of combat, want to get out of it. That's why you're tempted to escape. That's why you're tempted to give up.

Don't Give Up

But don't give up. No, rather "take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded" (2 Chronicles 15:7).

Don't give up when that familiar sin, still crouching at your door after all these years, pounces again with temptation.

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Don't give up when you feel that deep soul weariness from long battles with persistent weaknesses.

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (2 Corinthians 12:8-9)

Don't give up when your long asked-and-sought-and-knocked-for prayers have not yet been answered.

And he told them [the parable of the persistent widow] to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. (Luke 18:1)

Don't give up when the devil's fiery darts of doubt find flesh and make you reel.



Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith...

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day...in all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.(Ephesians 6:13,16)

Don't give up when the fragmenting effect of multiple pressures seems relentless.

"But as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger . . . (2 Corinthians 6:4-5)

Don't give up when the field the Lord has assigned you to is hard and the harvest does not look promising.

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. (Galatians 6:9)

Don't give up when you labor in obscurity and you wonder how much it even matters.

Your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6:4)

Don't give up when your reputation is damaged because you are trying to be faithful to Jesus.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. (Matthew 5:11)

Don't give up when waiting on God seems endless.

Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:30-31)

Don't give up when you have failed in sin. Don't wallow. Repent (again), get your eyes off yourself (again), and fix your eyes on Jesus (again). Get up

and get back in the fight.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9); if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself. (2 Timothy 2:13)

Hope and Help in the Hard

Living by faith in "things not seen" is hard (Hebrews 11:1). Jesus reminds us: "the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Matthew 7:14). But the way has always been hard, and you are not alone in the difficulty. You are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who have passed this way ahead of you (Hebrews 12:1). Many have suffered far more and have remained faithful. Remember them and imitate their faith (Hebrews 13:7).

Above all, remember Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 2:8). Jesus knows your works (Revelation 2:2) and he understands your war (Hebrews 12:3). His grace will be given to you in your time of need (Hebrews 4:16) and it will be sufficient for you, even at the very worst times (2 Corinthians 12:9).

So, look to Jesus (Hebrews 12:2), "fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Timothy 6:12), and finish your race (2 Timothy 4:7). When you have done the will of God, you will receive what is promised: his great and eternal reward (Hebrews 10:35-36). Measured by eternity, the hardships of this life will not be long, and "by your endurance you will gain your lives" (Luke 21:19).

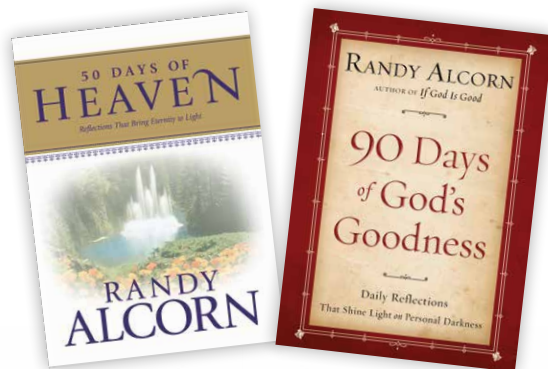
Don't give up. ■

Jon Bloom is the author of *Not by Sight: A Fresh Look at Old Stories of Walking by Faith* and serves as the President of Desiring God, which he and John Piper launched together in 1994. He lives in the Twin Cities with his wife, Pam, their five children, and one naughty dog.

Encouragement along the way

Randy invites you to join him at www.facebook.com/randyalcorn as well as on www.twitter.com/randyalcorn, where he regularly posts thoughts and Christ-centered quotes.

Randy also posts three times a week on his blog. You can subscribe to receive the posts directly in your inbox. Go to www.epm.org/blog and in the left-hand column under "Subscribe to receive posts by email", enter your email address.

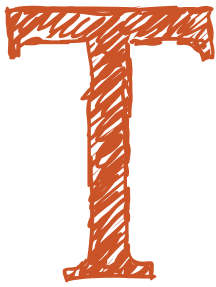


Looking for a devotional? Get a daily dose of encouragement with Randy's books *50 Days of Heaven* (www.epm.org/50days) and *90 Days of God's Goodness* (www.epm.org/90days).

Why the Reality of the
Resurrection Means
You Don't
Need a
“Bucket List”

BY RANDY ALCORN





he term “bucket list” was popularized by the 2007 movie of that name. It’s an inventory of things people want to do before they “kick the bucket.” The idea is, since our time on earth is limited, if something is important for us to do, we have to do it now, because this is our

only chance to do it.

This makes sense from a naturalistic worldview, one which doesn’t recognize any afterlife. It also makes sense from various religious worldviews that maintain there may be existence after death, but without resurrection and physical properties, and with no continuity between this life and the next. The one worldview in which the bucket list makes no sense is biblical Christianity.

Don’t misunderstand. My wife Nanci and I enjoy life—going new places and doing new things. I don’t believe this is wrong, nor is it wrong to list things you’d like to do if God gives you the resources and strength. But the “bucket list” mentality, that this life is our only chance to ever enjoy adventure and fun, is profoundly unbiblical. It disregards the teaching of the resurrection:

- But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. . . . The earth will give birth to her dead. (Isaiah 26:19)
- Many of those whose bodies lie dead and buried will rise up, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting disgrace. (Daniel 12:2 NLT)
- We will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. (1 Corinthians 15:52-53)
- The Lord Jesus Christ . . . will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. (Philippians 3:20-21)

Despite the centrality of the resurrection in

Scripture and church history, many Christians have never been clearly taught its meaning, so they imagine they will live forever in a disembodied state. A sincere believer once told me, “I hate to admit this, but I don’t look forward to Heaven. I wish I could live with Jesus on this earth. I want all sin and suffering and death to be gone, but I still want to enjoy the beauty of God’s earth.”

This man loved Jesus, but did not want leave this world and become a ghost or an angel.

As much as he loved Jesus, the Heaven he’d heard about seemed terribly boring and tedious. He’d heard that he should live now in light of eternity, but he thought eternity would mean the end of his opportunity to enjoy music and literature and adventure and travel and learning and discovery. So God would understand, he hoped, if he spent his time and money on his bucket list. After all, now was his only chance to experience happiness.

Ironically, what he wished for is exactly what the Bible promises! We will live with Jesus in these bodies made new, and on this earth made new, without sin and suffering. Once he knew the true biblical story, the unfolding drama of redemption culminating in the resurrection of our bodies and our universe, he could at last realize there was no need for the bucket list.

For the Christian, death is not the end of adventure, but our exit from a world where dreams and adventures shrink, and entrance into a world where dreams and adventures forever expand.

That’s why Nanci and I like to talk about our post-bucket lists, consisting of all the things we look forward to doing *after* we die, and in particular, after the resurrection. We’re told there will be not only a New Earth, but a New Heavens (Revelation 21:1), the celestial heavens made new, presumably with new galaxies and stars and planets scattered across the New Universe. Remembering the Andromeda Galaxy I first marveled at through my telescope before coming to faith in Christ, I would love to journey there, to the New Andromeda Galaxy, to the praise and glory of King Jesus.

**For the Christian, death is not the end of adventure,
but our exit from a world where dreams and
adventures shrink, and entrance into a world
where dreams and adventures forever expand.**

Anything on the New Earth will be far *more* than we imagine, not less.

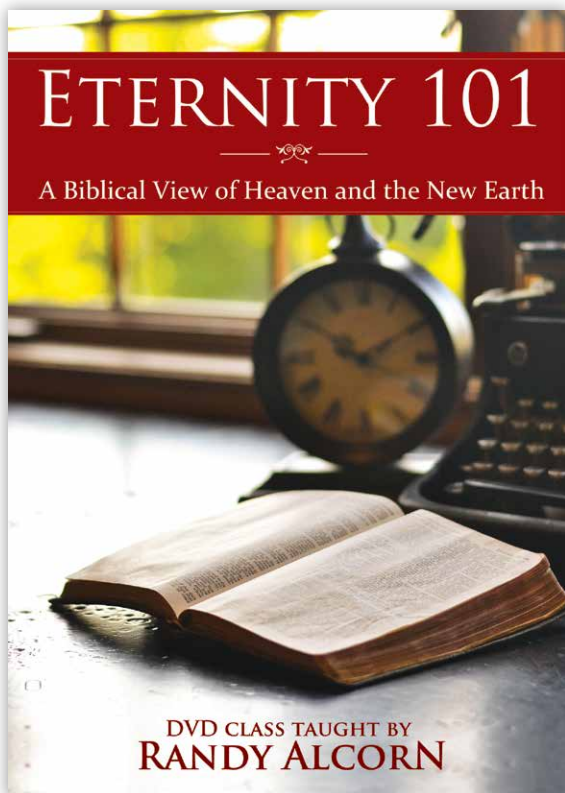
Nanci's post-bucket list includes her dream to spend a lot of time by a lake, playing with dogs. Joni Eareckson Tada, once freed from her wheelchair, says she wants to run through flowered meadows on the New Earth. Since we're told we will have physical resurrection bodies and we'll be living on a physical earth, why not?

The Bible doesn't specifically tell us about dogs on the New Earth, but it tells us about other animals (Isaiah 65:17, 25) so why shouldn't we expect dogs? It tells us we will eat and drink (requiring food and liquid), and walk and talk, so why not run through meadows? Or are you expecting an earth without grass and flowers?

Perhaps an alarm is going off—"but that's unspiritual—we should only want to be with Jesus." Well, Jesus is right at the top of both of our post-bucket lists! Would the same God who says we should eat and drink to His glory (1 Corinthians 10:31) be offended if we want to play with His animals for His glory and travel to the stars for His glory?

Of course, some of what's on our post-bucket list may not be exactly as we envision it, but we know this for sure: God has revealed that we will be real people with real bodies living on a real earth with other real people and the real King of Kings—so anything there will be far *more* than we imagine, not less.

I think God is honored when we let the imaginations He gave us soar as we move our eyes beyond this present fallen world, to anticipate the risen one—holy and happy beyond all comprehension—that the Carpenter from Nazareth has gone ahead to build for us (John 14:1-2). ■



learn about eternity *with a DVD study on* **Heaven**

I have to tell you... I just finished this DVD class with five friends and we absolutely loved it! We were so impressed with the amount of research and how well Randy knows this topic. He is such a natural teacher, and we all feel that we will never forget most of what we learned and that we will be able to talk about Heaven with so much more confidence, knowing what we now know. I highly recommend it! —C.M.

Eternity 101, Randy's Heaven course filmed at Corban University, contains 12 one-hour sessions on 6 DVDs that will help you gain a better understanding of our eternal dwelling place. EPM price \$16.99 (retail \$19.99). To purchase the set and download our free study guide, go to www.epm.org/eternity101.



Hear Randy and many others at The Gospel Coalition 2015 National Conference

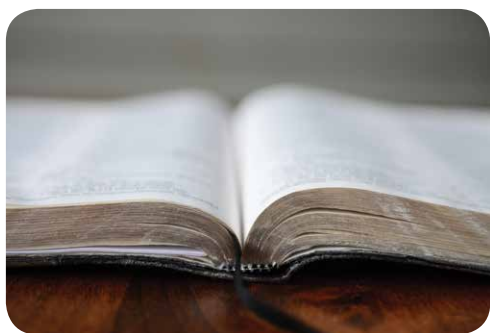
Randy will be a workshop speaker at The Gospel Coalition 2015 National Conference in Orlando, Florida, April 13-15, 2015. The conference is on a theme close to his heart: "Coming Home: The New Heaven and New Earth." His breakout session will be on the topic "Continuity and Discontinuity: How similar or different might life on the New Earth be to our present lives?" You can register online at www.tgc.org/2015.

Not able to attend? The plenary sessions (with John Piper, Tim Keller, and others) will be available as a live stream on the conference site.

Coming in 2015: Randy's new graphic novel *The Apostle*

Watch for a preview of *The Apostle* in a future issue of our magazine! The book is illustrated by Javier Saltares, a gifted artist who also did the artwork for Randy's *Eternity* graphic novel (available at www.epm.org/eternity).

If you'd like to be the first to receive news about Randy's new and upcoming books and products, as well as get special offers for our online store, be sure to sign up for our email newsletter at www.epm.org/subscribe.



A Theology of Happiness

See this magazine's back cover for more details about Randy's upcoming Happiness class at the Portland Campus of Western Seminary, June 3-5, 2015. (His book on happiness is expected to release October 2015.)

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**We invite you
 to join our
 prayer team**

Occasionally EPM sends out specific prayer requests related to my writing and speaking ministry. Nanci and I deeply appreciate those who pray for us and for EPM, and often I am profoundly aware of the difference prayer makes in my life and writing and speaking.

If you would like to join our prayer team, you can sign up at www.epm.org/subscribe. If you are led to do so, we thank God and you for participating in our lives and ministry.

—Randy Alcorn

Studying the Bible

with S.O.A.P.

Someone wrote EPM: I am a correspondent for older children sponsored by a Christian organization. I want to send them Bible study techniques, but most likely the vast majority of my kids have NO access to anything but their Bible—no concordances, dictionaries, etc. Do you have some tips to give the kids on studying the Bible during their own quiet time?

ANSWER BY CHELSEA WEBER, EPM STAFF

What an amazing ministry you have to these children. I know God is using you in their lives in profound ways that you may never know about until Heaven. I've worked with middle school and high school students for the last seven years and can testify to the impact one loving person can make in a student's life. Thank you for faithfully serving our Lord and these precious children. There are several good ways a person can approach studying the Bible. One method I've taught many high school students is SOAP. It's an easy to remember acronym and helps you organize your time with the Lord:

S - Scripture

Take time to read the text. Pray and allow God to speak to you. And reread the text. Highlight, underline or place a mark in the margin of your Bible next to the Scriptures that stand out. When you are done, reread the verses you marked, look for one that particularly spoke to you that day, and write it in your journal.

O - Observation

What is God showing you in this passage? Jot down in your journal any words or events that stand out. Are there any truths God wants you to learn? Warnings? Commands? Guiding principles? Record those in your journal. Now what is the overall message God has for you in this passage?

A - Application

Now it's time to get personal. How does this affect your life? Does God have instruction for you today? Encouragement? Correction? Write how this Scripture can apply to you today.

P - Prayer

This can be as simple as asking God to help you use this Scripture, or it may be a greater insight on what He may be revealing to you. Remember, prayer is a two-way conversation, so be sure to listen to what God has to say! Then, write it down.

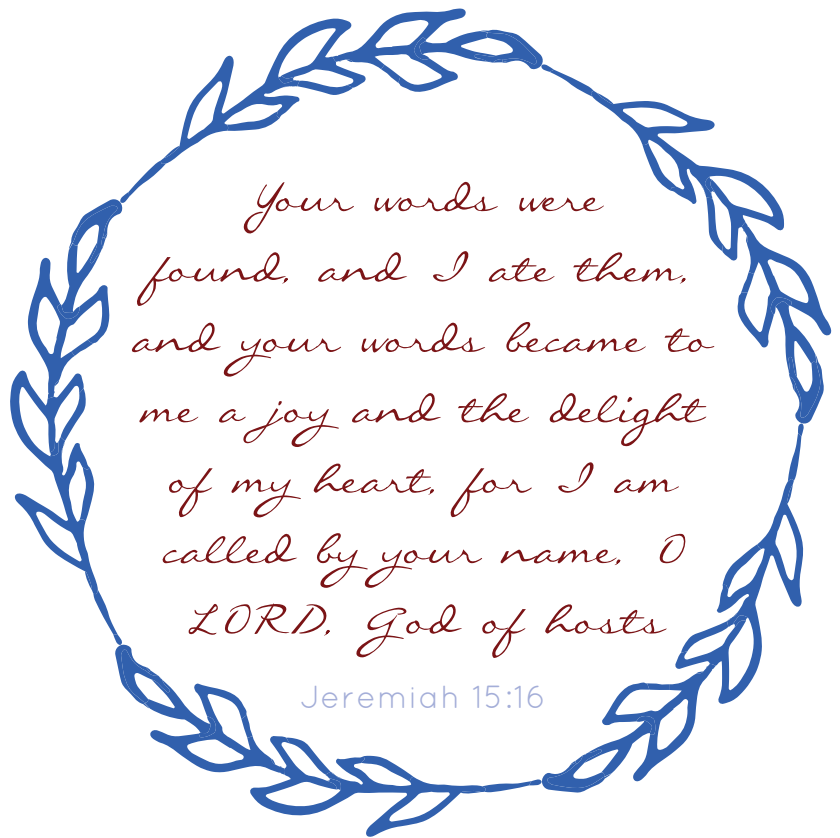
Here are a few other things I think are helpful in studying Scripture:

- Develop a good sense of biblical theology. The Bible is telling a story, God's story, from creation to redemption to His return. Where does the passage you're studying fit into the story of God? How does knowing this story help you understand this passage better?
- Context is important. What does it say before and after the passage you're studying? Often the context can help with a more accurate interpretation of the passage.

- Are there other passages that talk about the same subject as the passage you're studying?
- How does the passage you're studying relate to Jesus and His gospel?
- Ask lots of good questions: who, what, when, where why, etc. Never stop asking questions of the text. The more questions you ask, the more you'll understand.

Randy shares this about studying Scripture: "To meditate on God's Word is to read it and to mull it over, asking God for insight and direction and letting it point out your sins so you may repent and experience God's forgiveness. Bible meditation is reflecting on God's attributes—including his love and holiness, grace and justice, happiness and wrath.

"Copying Scripture and carrying it with us throughout the day, reading it and memorizing it, makes God's Word a part of us. As Paul writes, 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly' (Colossians 3:16)." ■



C. S. Lewis on God as the Source of Our Happiness



What Satan put into the heads of our remote ancestors was the idea that they could "be like gods"—could set up on their own as if they had created themselves—be their own masters—invent some sort of happiness for themselves outside God, apart from God. And out of that hopeless attempt has come nearly all that we call human history—money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empires, slavery—the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy.

The reason why it cannot succeed is this. God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on gasoline, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing. ■

—C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Randy is one of the contributors to *The Romantic Rationalist: God, Life, and Imagination in the Work of C. S. Lewis*, available from www.epm.org/romanticrationalist.

Singleness and the church

BY JULIA STAGER, EPM STAFF

One thing I love about the church today is how highly we value marriage—as we should. Marriage is designed by God and can be amazing and beautiful. But sometimes, when we highly value marriage, it can make those of us who are single feel somewhat marginalized (which I can only imagine is the last thing a pastor or church leaders would want to do!).

I've always felt encouraged by how singleness is addressed from the pulpit. I hear how, being single, I have the opportunity to love and serve God in a way that's undivided and different from how I can do it when I'm married.

But things get a little more challenging in the foyer. It's there I hear things like, "So, have you started dating anyone?" Or, "Whatever happened with you and that guy?" Or, "You're so great. I can't believe you're not married!" These questions, though well-meaning, can come across as invalidating my singleness or as insinuating that the only goal of singleness is to *end* it.

I love coming to church and serving and worshipping and fellowshiping. Part of the reason why I love it is because it is an emotionally safe and encouraging place. But when I get asked those questions, church is no longer that place of emotional safety for me. It's not that those are bad questions; it's just that Sundays may not be the best time and place to be asking those sorts of things.

So how can others in the church body minister to those who are single?

Simply get to know us. One of the hard things about being single is that although we have a lot of freedom, we often struggle with feeling lonely. I would encourage you to ask a single person out to dinner or coffee. I know we can be hard to get to know sometimes, and we're notorious for coming

to church and then immediately leaving. But that's probably in part because it is uncomfortable to stay when we feel out of place.

It is so appreciated when someone takes the initiative to spend time with us. I'm sorry that we can be hard to get to know. That's definitely something we as single people need to work on—we need to be engaging in conversations and getting to know *you*, just as we'd like you to get to know us.

Encourage us. When you see me serving in ways you appreciate, please let me know. I can't overstate the importance of encouragement in a single person's life, because often we don't have other people telling us those things.

Help us remember that God is at work in our lives. One thing that greatly encourages me is when people I know and respect assure me that they are also trusting God for my future. It can be hard enough for me to reconcile myself to my singleness. But when I feel like you're not reconciled to it, it makes me feel bad that I've made you feel bad (about my singleness).

It really goes a long way when you help me remember—as I also try to remind myself—that God is working through this season in my life for His glory, just as He's working through *you* in your season of life for His glory.

It's not about whether we're single or married, but about whether we're serving and loving God, and serving and loving other people, and trusting in Christ for our reconciliation.

And so, until the day when we're wholly satisfied in the ultimate marriage between Christ and His bride, let us strive together to serve, honor, and love one another in whatever season God has us. ■

Julia shares more of her personal, biblical and theological perspectives in "Crossover," a series of video blogs appearing twice a month on www.epm.org/blog. This article is also available on video at www.epm.org/single.



Charles Simeon's Example of Starting by Finding Common Ground

BY RANDY ALCORN

Charles Simeon (1758–1836) reinvigorated the English church with his emphasis on the primacy of Scripture and the necessity of practical application.

Simeon was a Calvinist but disliked the label. In a sermon on Romans 9:16, he said,

Many there are who cannot see these truths [the doctrines of God's sovereignty], who yet are in a state truly pleasing to God; yea many, at whose feet the best of us may be glad to be found in heaven. It is a great evil, when these doctrines are made a ground of separation one from another, and when the advocates of different systems anathematize each other.... Mutual kindness and concession are far better than vehement argumentation and uncharitable discussion.

Simeon practiced what he preached. We get a glimpse of this through a conversation he had with John Wesley, reported by Simeon himself.

"Sir," Simeon said to Wesley, "I understand that you are called an Arminian; and I have been sometimes called a Calvinist; and therefore I suppose we are to draw daggers. But before I consent to begin the combat, with your permission I will ask you a few questions.... Pray, Sir, do you feel yourself a depraved creature, so depraved that you would never have thought of turning unto God, if God had not first put it into your heart?"

"Yes," answered Wesley, "I do indeed."

"And do you utterly despair of recommending yourself to God by anything that you can do," Simeon continued, "and look for salvation solely through the blood and righteousness of Christ?"

"Yes, solely through Christ," Wesley replied.

"But, Sir, supposing you were at first saved by Christ, are you not somehow or other to save yourself

afterwards by your own works?"

"No; I must be saved by Christ from first to last."

"Allowing, then, that you were first turned by the grace of God, are you not in some way or other to keep yourself by your own power?"

"No."

"What then, are you to be upheld every hour and every moment by God, as much as an infant in its mother's arms?"

"Yes; altogether."

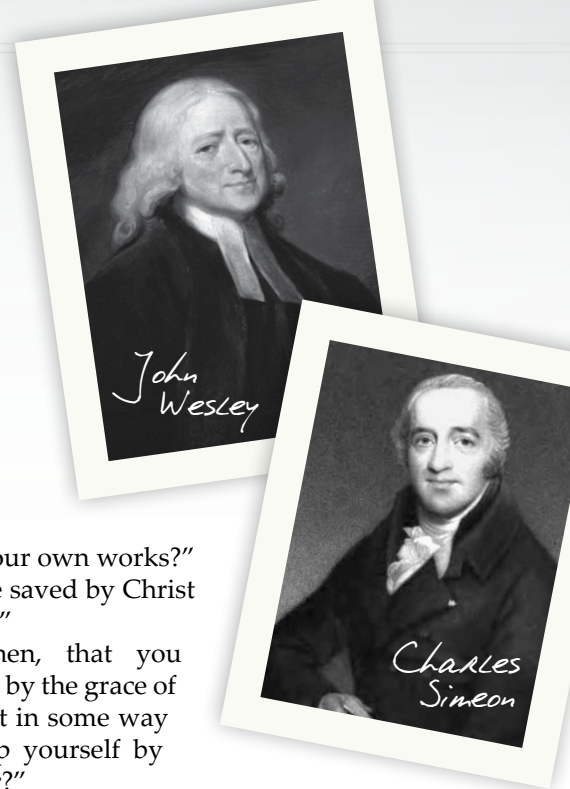
"And is all your hope in the grace and mercy of God to preserve you unto his heavenly kingdom?"

"Yes; I have no hope, but in him."

"Then, Sir, with your leave, I will put up my dagger again; for this is all my Calvinism; this is my election, my justification by faith, my final perseverance: it is, in substance, all that I hold, and as I hold it: and therefore, if you please, instead of searching out terms and phrases to be a ground of contention between us, we will cordially unite in those things wherein we agree."

Of course, the Wesley and Simeon story doesn't mean Calvinism and Arminianism are the same. They aren't. Some Arminians would give different answers than Wesley did, and some Calvinists would ask different questions than Simeon. But I admire the spirit of anyone who starts by looking for common ground; sometimes you'll find a great deal more than you expect. ■

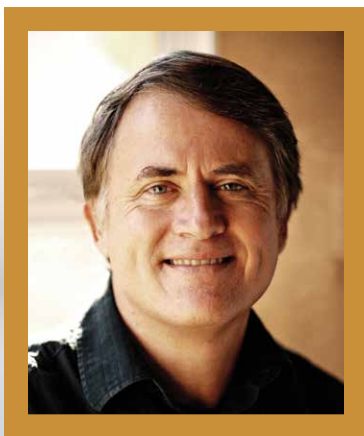
Learn more about Randy's book *hand in Hand: The Beauty of God's Sovereignty and Meaningful Human Choice* at www.epm.org/handinhand.





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Randy Alcorn will teach a 3-day class on happiness at the Portland, Oregon campus of Western Seminary, June 3-5, 2015. It will be a great opportunity to be the first to hear Randy's research on the life-changing truths from Scripture about happiness, as a prelude to his book on happiness that will be available for purchase in October 2015, Lord willing. (The class is available for graduate-level credit or can be audited.)

Registration begins March 1. For more information, contact Western Seminary at www.westernseminary.edu, 1.877.517.1800.

