

eternal
perspectives

SPRING/SUMMER 2024

Trusting Jesus
with What We Don't
Understand Now

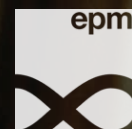


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This magazine is a publication of Eternal Perspective Ministries, a Christ-centered nonprofit organization founded and directed by author Randy Alcorn. It can be read online at epm.org/magazine.

All Scripture quoted in Randy's articles are from the English Standard Version (ESV), unless otherwise noted.

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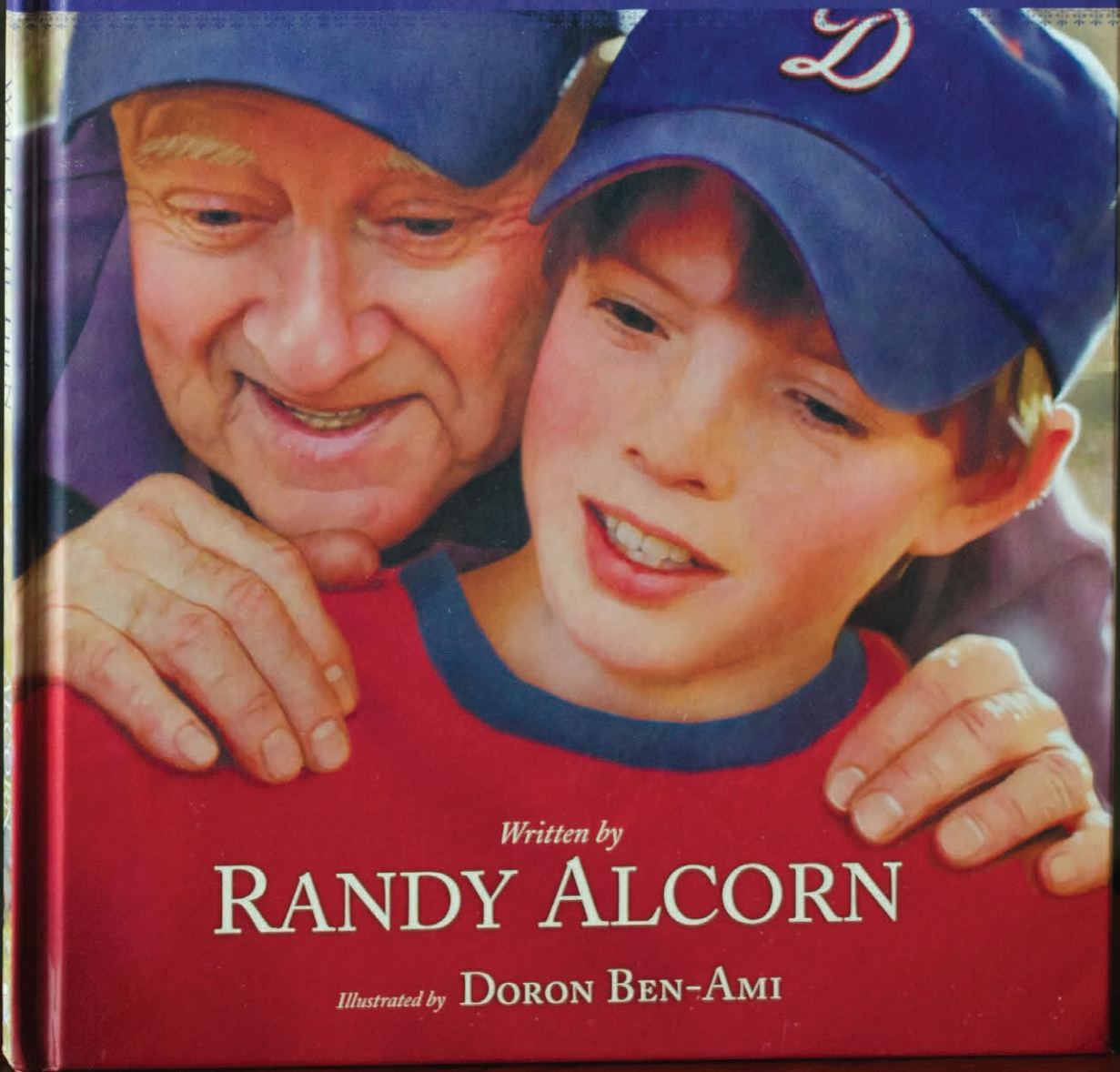
Now available from Eternal Perspective Ministries

Featuring beautiful illustrations by Doron Ben-Ami, this is a story of promise about Nathan and his grandfather and their shared love of baseball. Through story form, Randy teaches children about Heaven, following Jesus, and waiting until we see our loved ones again.

Out of print for a decade, this beautiful book is now available from EPM at epm.org/store

WAIT UNTIL THEN

A story of promise by the author of the best-selling book HEAVEN



Written by
RANDY ALCORN

Illustrated by **DORON BEN-AMI**

Right Now, We See the Underside of Life's Tapestry

BY RANDY ALCORN

Ever been to a football game at half time when the band forms words or pictures in the middle of the field? They look great from up in the stands. But have you ever thought about what they look like from the sidelines? Pointless, confusing, apparently meaningless. We see life from the sidelines. God sees it from the stands. As we gain perspective, we leave the sidelines and start working our way up.

God's Higher Perspective

Isaiah 55:8 says, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’” God cares about the pain and suffering of this world far more than we do. We must learn to trust Him while we wait for His completed work.

While speaking about evil and suffering, sometimes I’ve asked audiences: “How much do you know? Let’s say you’re the smartest person who’s ever lived, and that you know .1% of all there is to know in the universe. Is it possible that in the 99.9% of all that you don’t know, there is enough good in the universe to outweigh the evil? Is it possible that in the 99.9% you don’t know,



there exists a good God, and even a rational explanation—if you were smart enough to understand it—of why a good God would permit suffering? Is it possible that evil and suffering, bad as they are, have been used to accomplish good purposes?”

The Wrong Side of the Tapestry

In my novel *Edge of Eternity*, after seeing many events of this life that are terrible, something happens to the main character, Nick Seagrave:

A vast fabric stretched across the sky. Bending back my head, I saw on the fabric countless unsightly lumps and knots, like thick, rough yarn with frayed strings.

Suddenly, [my companion] Marcus beside me, I was yanked up into the sky and pulled through a hole in the center of the fabric. Now I was on the other side, the topside. I looked down and saw a beautiful work of art, like needlepoint or cross-stitching, a magnificent tapestry. The yarn and threads had been perfectly knitted together in elaborate design by the hands of a master craftsman.

I saw in the center of the tapestry the Woodsman on a tree. I saw how a senseless murder, history's worst act of betrayal, was the centerpiece of a glorious design. Surrounding it I saw other tragedies, absurd and incomprehensible events that now had clear meaning and purpose.

"It's stunning," I said to Marcus. "Before I saw only the underside, the ugly knots and frays. I never saw the design, the beauty."

"No wonder," Marcus said. "Until now, you have always lived on the wrong side of the tapestry."

Often we look at suffering from our perspective and forget that God sees from another vantage point.

G.K. Chesterton's character, Father Brown, said, "We are on the wrong side of the tapestry." How true. We see the knots, the snarls, and the frayed underside. But God is on the right side of the tapestry—the side He is weaving into a beautiful work of art.

Trusting the Master Weaver

Corrie Ten Boom, who survived a Nazi death camp, often quoted the poem "The Weaver" by Grant Colfax Tullar when she spoke to audiences:

My life is but a weaving
Between my God and me.
I cannot choose the colors
He weaveth steadily.

Oft' times He weaveth sorrow;
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper
And I the underside.

Not 'til the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Will God unroll the canvas
And reveal the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful
In the weaver's skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.

He knows, He loves, He cares;
Nothing this truth can dim.
He gives the very best to those
Who leave the choice to Him.

Corrie wrote, "Although the threads of my life have often seemed knotted, I know, by faith, that on the other side of the embroidery there is a crown." We may not always know what the Master Artist is doing in our lives. But the important thing is, He does. And we can trust Him. ■





His Way Was Through the Sea

BY GARRETT KELL

God's way is often not our way. His perfect path isn't the one we always foresee for ourselves. His way is higher and wiser and better.

After Israel's deliverance from Egypt, the Lord directed His people toward the Promised Land. A pillar of cloud led them by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21). He guided His people; they made their steps with ease and comfort. He was with them.

But then the Lord lovingly took His children on a detour to both test and teach. He called them to camp on the beach in front of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:1–2). He ordained this curious campout because He knew a hardened Pharaoh would see it as an opportunity to pounce on His people again (Exodus 14:3). God commanded Israel to camp there so they would be pressed by uncertain circumstances.

What strange love this is, that the Lord would put His people in a position of danger and distress—on purpose?

Unforeseen Path

Just as God predicted, Pharaoh rallied his army and pursued them as they camped in this precarious position. As the chariot wheels bore down on their resting place, Israel's backs were pressed against the shore of the Red Sea. What would God do? All the people could imagine was that God had brought them

out of Egypt to let them die on a barren beach like abandoned children (Exodus 14:10–12).

They had no way of escape. But the Lord did. He always does.

As Pharaoh and his bloodthirsty army were gaining ground, Moses shouted to the people: “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD” (Exodus 14:13). God was about to transform their campground of certain death into a stage on which He would display his faithful love.

He had a plan to deliver his people.

What was his way? Psalm 77:19 tells us: “Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters.”

God’s way was the unforeseen way. It was the unimaginable path. Israel could have never devised the plan He had known forever. Moses could have never included the shortcut through the sea on his itinerary for the Canaan-bound children of God.

God’s way was through the sea.

Faithful, Not Predictable

His ways are not our ways, are they? His ways are higher than ours. And they’re wiser than ours. And they’re better than ours (Isaiah 55:8–9).

Remember this, child of God: our Father often acts unconventionally. He likes to choose the unseen path for His people to walk. But He always has a way to save. Sometimes it’s through the sea. He’ll always provide, but often from sources we would never suspect (1 Kings 17:8–16; Matthew 6:25–34).

God is faithful, but He’s rarely predictable.

God is trustworthy, and He’s marvelously creative in the way He cares for us. He delights in bringing us home by way of the sea so that after we’ve set our feet on the dry land of our destination, the only thing we can say is “God did this.” In the end, He charts His way through the sea so that He will “get glory” and all will “know that [he is] the LORD” (Exodus 14:4).

Nothing exemplifies this truth more than God’s provision of salvation through Jesus Christ. Who

OUR FATHER OFTEN ACTS

UNCONVENTIONALLY. HE LIKES

TO CHOOSE THE UNSEEN PATH

FOR HIS PEOPLE TO WALK.

could’ve ever imagined God would save rebels by becoming like them, dying for them, and rising to save them?

As the apostle Paul exclaims, “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” (Romans 11:33).

To Strengthen, Not to Destroy

I’m not sure what provision, protection, or direction you need from God today, but remember this: God’s way is often through the sea.

He puts His children in precarious positions on purpose. He doesn’t do this to destroy our faith; He does it to strengthen it. And once He’s helped us step across the threshold of our straining circumstances, we will see Him as the wise and trustworthy Redeemer He is.

He designs His way through the sea so that His children will look back on their lives and forever see that His ways are good and His love is faithful.

Trust Him today, child of God. Follow His way—even when it leads you through the sea. ■

Garrett Kell is lead pastor of Del Ray Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia, and a Council member of The Gospel Coalition. He and his wife, Carrie, have six children.



Oh, That We May Know Our God More Deeply

BY RANDY ALCORN

In her journal she kept during her cancer years, Nanci quoted Charles Spurgeon:

Oh, that we may know our God—His power, His faithfulness, His immutable love. He is one whose character excites our enthusiasm. Oh, that we may know our God by familiar fellowship with Him. He who comes out fresh from beholding the face of God will never fear.

Later she wrote her own reflections:

My deepened relationship with God after experiencing difficulties in life—most recently, cancer—can be illustrated this way:

I have gone from reading and studying about a perfect day at a Maui beach, from seeing

pictures of that beach, from listening to other people's stories about visiting that beach—to actually sitting on that beach, in a beach chair, on a perfect day, with my feet in the sand and the breeze in my hair, hearing the sounds of the waves, with my favorite drink in my hand.

Nanci truly lived this out. I saw up close her diligence in knowing God more by reading and meditating on His Word and reading great books about Him.

As Nanci found, suffering can bring us into deeper intimacy with God. It is often in the midst of our suffering that He makes some of His most profound and precious self-revelations.

"Let us know; let us press on to know Yahweh; his going out is sure as the dawn" (Hosea 6:3). ■

The *Constant*, Wonder-Working Jesus

BY A. W. TOZER

Because change is everywhere around us at all times on this earth and among human beings, it is difficult for us to grasp the eternal and unchanging nature and person of Jesus Christ.

Nothing about our Lord Jesus Christ has changed down to this very hour. His love has not changed. His compassionate understanding of us has not changed. His interest in us and His purposes for us have not changed.

He is Jesus Christ, our Lord. He is the very same Jesus. Even though He has been raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, and made Head over all things to the Church, His love for us remains unchanged.

It is hard for us to accept the majestic simplicity of this constant, wonder-working Jesus. We are used to getting things changed so that they are always bigger and better!

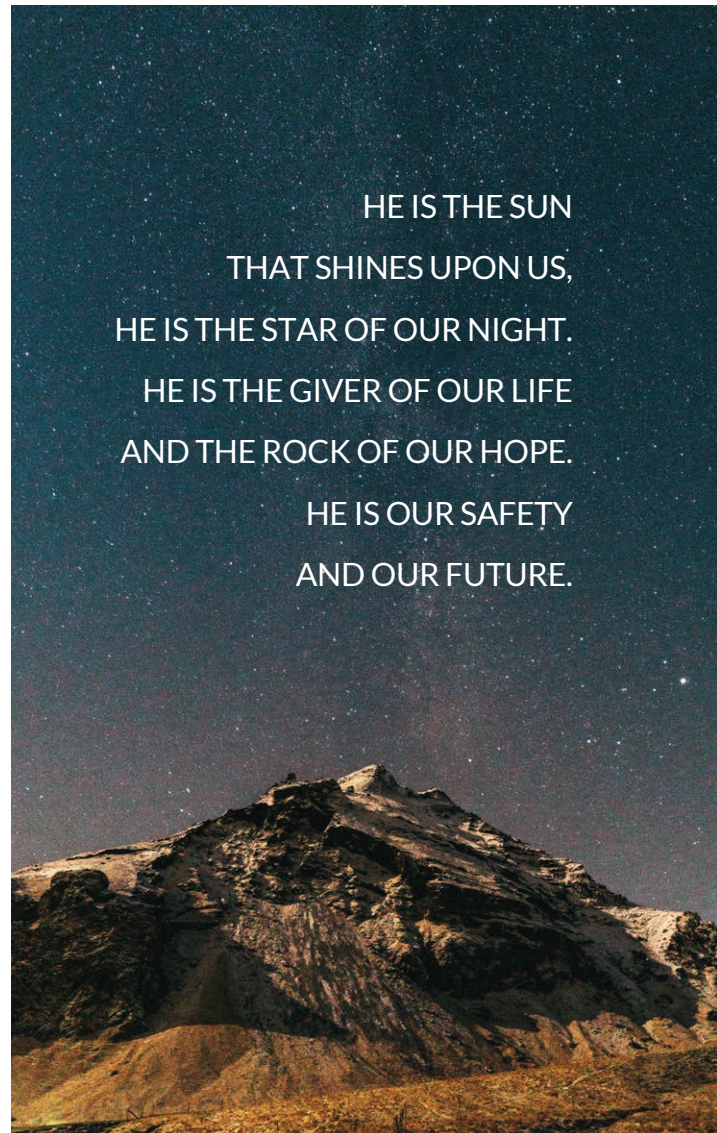
He is Jesus, easier to approach than the humblest friend you ever had! He is the sun that shines upon us, He is the star of our night. He is the giver of our life and the rock of our hope. He is our safety and our future. He is our righteousness, our sanctification, our inheritance.

You will find that He is all of this in that instant that you move your heart towards Him in faith! ■

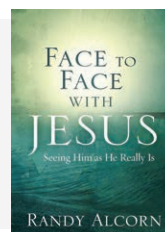
Excerpted from *Tozer on the Son of God: A 365-Day Devotional*.

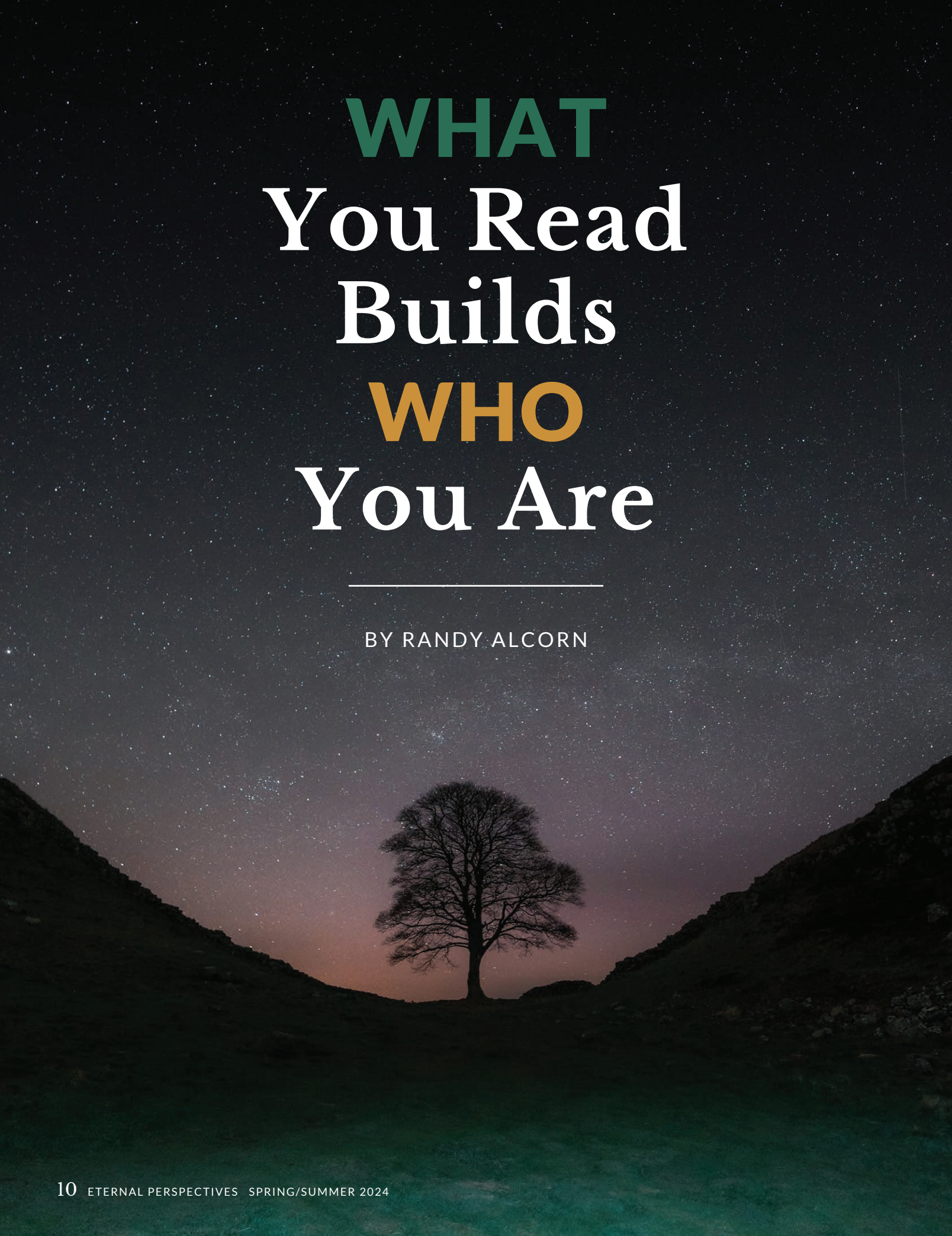
More reflections on Jesus

Randy's book *Face to Face with Jesus* has 200 brief meditations, Scripture readings, and inspirational quotes that help reveal the rich identity of God's Son: epm.org/facetoface



HE IS THE SUN
THAT SHINES UPON US,
HE IS THE STAR OF OUR NIGHT.
HE IS THE GIVER OF OUR LIFE
AND THE ROCK OF OUR HOPE.
HE IS OUR SAFETY
AND OUR FUTURE.



The background of the entire page is a night sky filled with stars. In the lower half, a silhouette of a large, leafless tree stands in the center of a valley, flanked by dark hills. The sky transitions from a deep purple at the horizon to a dark blue at the top.

WHAT You Read Builds WHO You Are

BY RANDY ALCORN

“ It is what you read when you don’t have to that determines what you will be when you can’t help it.

OSCAR WILDE



In God’s common grace, He shares insights even with those who don’t know or trust Him. For example, Oscar Wilde was not a good role model (to say the least). But he

spoke these amazingly true words that I have seen confirmed in my life, and Nanci’s, and in the lives of many others: “It is what you read when you don’t have to that determines what you will be when you can’t help it.”

Sending Our Roots Deep

Every morning during her cancer battle, Nanci read Scripture, Spurgeon, *The Valley of Vision* (a book of Puritan prayers), Paul Tripp’s *New Morning Mercies*, and books by J. I. Packer, A. W. Tozer, and John Piper. She placed herself by the stream of God’s Word and great books, and she sent her roots deep by contemplating His holiness, grace, justice, mercy, and every facet of His being revealed in Scripture. As we discussed what we were learning and prayed together, I saw in her a profound “peace of God, which surpasses all understanding” that “will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

Isn’t there room in life for movies and TV and kicking back and enjoying a lightweight novel? Sure, I enjoy these things myself, and Nanci and I certainly had fun watching movies together (while exercising wisdom about what to watch, and using VidAngel to filter out what’s objectionable). But I believe in an era dominated by superficial

popular culture, there’s real value in expanding our thinking to God’s glory, and not just going broad but going deep. Deep is where the roots are, and they’re what keeps the tree or vine standing during hard winds and water that would otherwise erode and topple it. Likewise, deeply rooted beliefs—specifically a worldview grounded in Scripture—will allow us to persevere and hold on to a faith built on the solid rock of God’s truth.

What We Read Matters

Jon Bloom writes, “What you read will shape you. It will shape not only what you think, but how you think. Your life is short. You can only read a relatively small amount in the time you have.”

Bad books are poor companions; good books are great friends. The fact is, we will inevitably adopt the morality of the books we read (as well as the magazines, music, Internet sites, and conversations we consume). GIGO—garbage in, garbage out; or godliness in, godliness out. We become what we choose to feed our minds on:

Sow a thought, reap an action;

Sow an action, reap a habit.

Sow a habit, reap a character.

Sow a character, reap a destiny.

“Above all else, guard your heart [mind, inner being], for it is the wellspring of life” (Proverbs 4:23). If someone wants to pollute water, he pollutes it at its source. If he wants to purify water, he purifies it at its source. Our thoughts are the source of our lives. All our lives flow from our mind, and through the choices we make every day we program our

“ Become a student of God’s Word. Don’t be content to be hand-fed by others. DARRELL SCOTT

minds, either for godliness or ungodliness. Suffering will come; we owe it to God, ourselves, and those around us to prepare well for it.

As part of my research for my book *If God Is Good*, I interviewed and exchanged correspondence with many people who shared their stories and perspectives. One of those people was Darrell Scott, whose daughter Rachel Joy Scott was the first person killed at Columbine High School in the 1999 shooting.

When Darrell looked back at his daughter’s murder, he said that years before, God had prepared him. He’d read Norman Grubb’s writings about the eye of faith that allows us to see through our worst circumstances to God’s purpose.

Because Darrell had learned to think this way, he could, despite his incredible pain, see through Rachel’s death to a sovereign, purposeful God. Darrell’s view of God already had a firm place in his heart when Rachel died. He trusted from the first that God had a purpose in her death. While this did not remove his pain, it did provide solid footing from which he could move forward, trusting God instead of resenting Him.

I asked Darrell what we should do to prepare for trials. Without hesitation he said, “Become a student of God’s Word.” He added, “Don’t be content to be hand-fed by others. Do your own reading and study, devour good books, talk about the things of God.”

When suffering comes our way, it’ll exert a force that either pushes us away from God or pulls us toward Him. The perspectives we’ve cultivated between now and then will determine our direction.

Sit at the Feet of the Wise

A great way to endure in the Christian life is to study and pattern your life after followers of

Jesus who have lived a long obedience in the same direction. To do this, we can read history and biographies and take our cues from dead people who still live rather than the living who are dead. Compare reading a biography of William Wilberforce or Amy Carmichael to watching a sitcom or spending half an hour on social media. Which will help you grow in Christlikeness?

You needn’t read just about pastors or theologians. Stanley Tam is a businessman who declared God to be the owner of his company, U.S. Plastic. R.G. Letourneau, the inventor of earth-moving machines, gave 90% of his salary to God. God has also placed in your church examples of a long obedience in the same direction. Find them and spend time with them. Sit at the feet of the wise, not fools.

And of course, no book is more important than the Bible, God’s own words. Richard Baxter advised, “Make careful choice of the books which you read: let the Holy Scriptures ever have the preeminence. Let Scripture be first and most in your hearts and hands and other books be used as subservient to it.” Likewise, Charles Spurgeon said, “Visit many good books, but live in the Bible.”

Let’s Choose Wisely

Over the years I’ve bought and read thousands of good books. I cannot divorce God’s works of grace in my life from great books. I love a good movie, but I find that for me television is incapable of having the deep and profound positive effect on my spiritual life that books do.

Joni Eareckson Tada, no stranger to suffering and pain, writes, “If a story does not convey moral virtue or truth that points to God, it will dull my

heart before the first commercial. Why yield the precious real estate of my brain to that which flattens my spirit? Instead, I busy my heart with good books and videos, art, memorizing Scripture and poetry, and pursuing uplifting friendships that nourish my soul.”

Television and reading both put us in someone’s company, and remove us from someone else’s company. You decide: will you be different because you put yourself in the company of Spurgeon rather than a sitcom? Over the long haul, will you grow closer to God and your family and your neighbor by watching television or scrolling your phone, or by limiting screentime and doing something that has lasting value, something that’s an investment in eternity?

As we read, and encourage others to do so, including our children, may God help us to renew our minds, set our minds on things above, and love God with all our hearts and minds. May we put our roots down deep, and experience the joy of discovery and the satisfaction of mental and spiritual growth that prepares us for times of suffering. ■

Resources to help you grow in your walk with Jesus

Scripture tells us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

The following list of online resources and books can help you go deeper in your relationship with Christ and learn more about Him: epm.org/resourcesgrow.

“ Make careful choice of the books which you read: let the Holy Scriptures ever have the preeminence. Let Scripture be first and most in your hearts and hands and other books be used as subservient to it.

RICHARD BAXTER

Q&A

Question from a reader:

My dog has cancer and is dying. My husband and I are devastated. We have prayed and pleaded with God to cure her. I am asking why and wondering, is there really a God? I hate Him right now if there is one!

Answer from Doreen Button, EPM staff:

Having lost a beloved dog to disease, I can empathize with the pain you are feeling over the impending death of your furry friend. Death is not a normal part of our life, at least not the life God wanted for us. I suppose that's why it hurts so much. We know there's something better, and we don't get to experience it here.

It also doesn't seem fair that the sins of two people thousands of years ago could be the cause of the suffering you are going through now. Perhaps if Adam and Eve hadn't rebelled against God, we wouldn't claim our independence from

Him either. Then there'd be no sickness or death to be angry at God about.

But that's not how things are here and now. This moment is all we have to face and our circumstances, which we have no control over, are what we are called to respond to.

Your heartfelt cries to God, to answer your prayers for your dog's healing, tell me two things: One, that you do believe there is a God to pray to. And two, that you are very angry because He has not yet answered—and perhaps won't answer—in the way you wanted. There are many examples in the Bible where godly people were not given the answers they prayed for. Job, who suffered horrible losses for no reason apparent to him, comes to mind.

And the most striking example of literally the godliest person ever, Jesus, not having His pleadings answered with a "yes" also tells me two things: God is faithful—He keeps all His promises—and He has a plan that's bigger and better than anything we can wrap our heads around.



Jesus Himself tells us, “Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, NLT). He knew what He was about to face, and what His followers were going to go through. And though His Father didn’t answer “yes” to His prayer to have that cup of suffering removed from Him, the Father did answer “yes” to having His will done. Through that, every sin was justly dealt with, and we have His promise that “He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever” (Revelation 21:4).

God could have removed that cup of suffering from Jesus. Where would that leave us? For that one Person to not suffer, every other person on the planet would be doomed to eternity separated from God with no recourse. Thankfully, He loves us too much to give us what we want so He can give us what we truly need. (And if you know anything about the wants of young children—think large quantities of sugary snacks before dinner—you’ll recognize that not everything we want is the best thing for us.)

God deeply loves us, but He isn’t our genie. He’s our all-knowing, all-powerful Sovereign.

“Dear friends, don’t be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you” (1 Peter 4:12, NLT). Our expectations say a lot about what we have our faith in. Are you angry with God because you thought your dog would never die? Or die in a different way? Or because He’s not giving you what you asked? Or because you believe He owes you a positive answer to your prayer?

Peter continues: “But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” (1 Peter 4:13, NIV). That’s the bigger picture. We don’t know all God’s reasons for anything, or how He can take any (let alone all) of the trials we endure and “work them together for the good of those who love Him and keep His commandments” (Romans 8:28).

In *If God Is Good*, Randy wrote, “Blaming God is a dead-end street, because in doing so we turn away from our greatest source of comfort.”

I like comfort. I’m tired of filling tissues with tears. But knowing that God has a purpose, and that He is my greatest source of comfort, leaves me telling people: I wouldn’t wish this on anyone, but I’d go through it a million times over now that I see how He’s used it to heal me of things I didn’t know I was “sick” with—knocking down idols and replacing my fear and pain with a deep love for Him—and how He’s used it to make me more like Him.

One of my favorite passages now is “God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4, NLT). I have seen the truth of this and of Romans 8:28 over and over (including responding to your letter!).

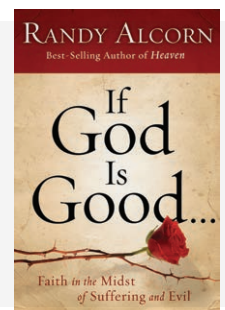
God exists, whether we believe in Him or not, and is not afraid of your anger or annoyed by your questions. If He didn’t exist, you’d be left to face this alone and with no hope for anything better. Ever. That sounds like a terrible trade-off.

He loves you and wants a deep relationship with you. Sometimes He uses tough circumstances in order to turn your focus onto Him, the Best.

Keep praying, and when you are able, thank Him for all the good years you have had with your beautiful dog. Neither of you were ever going to live here forever, so I encourage you to express your gratitude for the joy you’ve been given. It’s a tiny sampler of the joy Jesus offers in the uninterrupted ages to come. ■

Hope in suffering

Randy's book *If God Is Good* provides perspectives on the big picture of what God is doing in the world—now and forever. epm.org/igig



news

Grieving with Hope

Are you facing a great loss? Perhaps a loved one or close friend has died. Great love brings great sorrow, and healthy sorrow recognizes the immensity of loss. But when death and loss come close, the temptation toward despair and hopelessness is often not far behind.

Author Randy Alcorn encourages you to go to God with all your sorrows and to remember that Jesus, your Good Shepherd, walks with you—a suffering Savior who is well acquainted with sorrow. No one can bypass grief, but you don't walk this dark valley alone. Jesus will lead you, and He guarantees that death is not the end and Heaven awaits. In *Grieving with Hope*, Randy gives perspective and practical advice to help readers on the grieving journey, so that in time, your grief will be accompanied by joy and hope.

Available from epm.org/store after its release date of August 26.



New booklet
available this
August

Visit our updated website

We launched an updated version of our website earlier this year, with improvements in how our resources are displayed and searched.

We hope you'll spend some time on epm.org and let us know what you think!



Randy's speaking events

Randy will speak at Richland Baptist Church in Richland, Washington on September 29, 2024. For more information on the service and location, visit richlandbaptistchurch.org.

He will also speak at Discovery Church in Orlando, Florida on the subject of the Treasure Principle on October 19-20, 2024. Learn more about their church at discoverychurch.org.

EPM welcomes Angela (Alcorn) Stump to our board

Angela is the youngest of Randy and Nanci's two wonderful daughters. She has been married to her high school sweetheart Dan since 2001 and has two young adult sons. She has been a part-time critical care nurse for over 20 years, but the roles she is most proud of are those of wife and mom. Angela (along with her sister Karina Alcorn Franklin) witnessed the start of EPM as a child and has had the privilege of watching both her parents remain faithful to the Lord and His calling on their lives. She is thrilled to join the EPM board and is thankful to continue having a front-row seat in the plan God has for her dad and this ministry.



Can Feasts and Celebrations Please God?

BY RANDY ALCORN

Cecil Rhodes, for whom Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) was named, was a famous and wealthy businessman, politician, and power broker in South Africa.

One evening he sat on a train with Bramwell Booth. Booth could see how depressed Rhodes was and asked him, “Are you a happy man?”

Rhodes responded, “Happy? No!”

Booth then told the influential world figure there was only one place to find real happiness: “That is at the feet of the crucified Savior, because it is only there we can be freed from our sins.” Rhodes responded, pointing toward where Booth’s father, General William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, was sitting: “I would give all I possess to believe what that old man in the next carriage believes!” He saw in a Christ-follower the happiness he lacked.

Unfortunately, laughter, fun, happiness, and partying are rarely associated with the Bible and Christ-followers today . . . but they should be!

The Bible’s many references to singing, dancing, celebrations, feasts, and festivities depict not only worship but delight and pleasure.

Part of what blinds us to God’s emphasis on happiness is our knowledge that pagans worshiped pleasure deities and their celebrations centered on drunkenness and immorality. For many of us,



celebrating suffers from guilt by association.

The logic goes like this:

Since immorality is bad, sex is bad.

Since drunkenness is bad, alcohol is bad.

Since laziness is bad, rest is bad.

Since greed is bad, money is bad.

We might as well say that since gluttony is bad, food is bad; and since drowning is bad, water is bad. Because sin often happens at parties, some conclude that parties must be sinful. (Of course, sin happens at work and church, too, but people seldom conclude work and church are sinful.)

Proverbs 15:15 says, “The cheerful of heart has a continual feast.” A feast is the ultimate picture of happiness—and in the Old Testament, the Sabbath meant there was at least one feast per week. In addition, there were a number of weeklong festivals that involved eating together daily.

Words describing eating, meals, and food appear more than a thousand times in Scripture, with the English translation “feast” occurring an additional 187 times. Feasting is profoundly relational,

All life is a festival since the Son of God has redeemed you from death.

CHRYSOSTOM

marked by conversation, storytelling, and laughter. Biblical feasts were spiritual gatherings that drew attention to God, His greatness, and His redemptive purposes.

Of course, God forbids drunkenness and gluttony (two things that ultimately make us not only unholy but unhappy), but the partying described in Scripture reveals the happiness of the God who invented feasts and festivals.

In times of celebration, the people of Israel publicly indulged in the good gifts God had blessed them with. Those gifts included food, wine, music, dance, and fun—all with the understanding that God is the source of everything good and that the enjoyment of His blessings is a happy privilege.

Festivals such as the Feast of Tabernacles included sacrifices for sin (see Leviticus 23:37-41). Sorrow over sin and its redemptive price was real but momentary. Once the sacrifices were complete, the festival became all about being happy in God and one another.

“Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!” (Psalm 32:1, NRSV). In light of such good news, who wouldn’t want to celebrate?

The church father Chrysostom (347–407) said, “All life is a festival since the Son of God has redeemed you from death.” Historically, God’s people always celebrated more than the surrounding nations, never less! Why shouldn’t we do the same, since the gospel gives us even more reason to celebrate? Jesus repeatedly mentioned to His disciples that after we’re resurrected, we’ll eat together, enjoying the company of familiar biblical figures. He said, “Many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 8:11). This must have delighted His listeners.

By building multiple festivities into Israel’s calendar, God integrated joy into the lives of His people. These feast days served to link happiness with holiness—two concepts that have become tragically separated from each other in not only the

world’s thinking but also the church’s.

In today’s worship settings, “fellowship” has been scaled back dramatically. It may involve moderate laughter, but rarely does it reflect the great happiness described in the Bible.

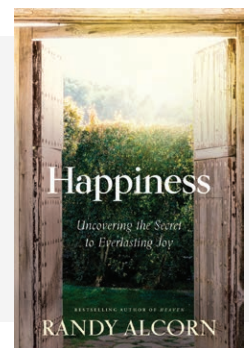
Spurgeon said this about the most sacred rituals of the church, particularly Communion: “Gospel ordinances are choice enjoyments, enjoined upon us by the loving rule of Him whom we call Master and Lord. We accept them with joy and delight. . . . The Lord’s own Supper is a joyful festival, a feast.” Wouldn’t it be great if children growing up in Christian homes looked forward to additional God-centered holidays—ones they could invite their unbelieving friends to join? Wouldn’t it be fitting if church was known as the place that celebrates more than the world, rather than less? Worship, camaraderie, and unity would be hallmarks of such events. But one of the greatest payoffs would be reestablishing followers of Jesus as people of profound happiness who are quick to celebrate the greatness, goodness, love, grace, and happiness of our God.

God’s people ought to say, “Let us eat, drink, and be merry today to celebrate the time when we’ll eat, drink, and be merry in a world without suffering and without end!”

Were we to do more of this kind of celebrating, and do it better, surely fewer of our children, and generations to come, would fall for what may be the enemy’s deadliest lie—that the gospel of Jesus doesn’t offer happiness and that people must go elsewhere to find it. ■

Finding everlasting joy

Randy’s book *Happiness* is being released as a paperback with a brand new cover. It will be available after June 4 from epm.org/store.



What If the Church Had a “Looking Forward Day”?

We received this thought-provoking letter from a reader. As you read, consider what it might look like for your family and church to implement his idea of a day celebrating and looking forward to Christ's return and the coming New Earth.

Dear Mr. Randy Alcorn,

This letter has long been in my heart and mind as my wife and I have been deeply touched by your books and teachings regarding the events surrounding the second coming of Christ, Revelation, and Heaven. We have read most of your books and watched many of your teachings/sermons on YouTube. Your thoughts, words, and passion to share the powerful, life-changing truths of God's Word and Kingdom with God's people has greatly encouraged us, as I'm sure is true of countless others.

My wife and I were raised in Christian homes, Christian churches, and schools. We're now 76, empty nesters with my precious wife of almost 56 years.

My career began in the engineering field, and in 2000 I became a Care Pastor in a local church. For the past 23 years I've been doing that—and loving it! Making a difference is what I live for. I have been privileged to teach many times on the very things I have heard you teach and write about.

The reason I'm writing is to share the burden I have for instilling a greater eternal perspective within the Body of Christ, which you mention regularly.



“Is the Church looking forward to Christ’s return as Peter encourages us?”

In your book *We Shall See God*, based on Charles Spurgeon’s devotional thoughts on Heaven, you write:

Every taste of joy is but a foretaste of a greater and more vibrant joy than can be found on Earth now. That’s why we need to spend our lives cultivating our love for Heaven. That’s why we need to meditate on what Scripture says about Heaven and to read books, have Bible studies, teach classes and preach sermons on it. We need to talk to our children about Heaven. When we’re camping, hiking, or driving or when we’re at a museum, a sporting event, or a theme park, we need to talk about whatever we see around us as signposts of the New Earth.

As you so well state, having an eternal perspective changes everything! So here are my thoughts:

Every year the Christian church spends the month of December to remember and celebrate the birth of Christ—Advent...and we should do this.

Every year the Christian church spends 40 days or so to remember and celebrate Good Friday and Resurrection Day...and we should do this.

Many Christian churches remember and celebrate Ascension Day; we should do this.

As far as I can see—and I believe you would agree—the only event yet to come in this “church age” is the second coming of Christ.

My heart for raising eternal perspective awareness

within the Christian church is to create an annual “Looking Forward Sunday” (Or any other name that fits well) into the Christian calendar whereby we take seriously Peter’s words:

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. (2 Peter 3:11-14)

Mr. Alcorn, is the Church looking forward to Christ’s return as Peter encourages us? The Church might have been looking forward to it back then, but is this happening today?

Having an eternal perspective wipes away most of the stuff we find ourselves drawn to and on which we fix our eyes...this is our “blessed hope”!

I am not a man who is “so heavenly minded that I’m no earthly good”; nor am I a man who is “so earthly minded that I’m no heavenly good,” but I DO look forward to Christ’s return and encourage others also. —Richard Higby (*name and letter used with permission*) ■

Don't miss our latest video resources

Randy visited Shepherd’s House Bible Church in Arizona and spoke at their college/young adult ministry, The Fold. He answered questions about many topics including Heaven, the love of money, dating and how to be a young Christ follower. Watch the video at epm.org/fold.

Browse many more videos of Randy speaking and answering questions at epm.org/videos.



Letter from a Young Reader

Dear Randy Alcorn, Hello! How are you? My name is Toby, and I'm an elementary school student. I love reading, soccer, football, and church on Wednesday nights. I am reading your book *Heaven*. I am loving it! I have learned so much. There are so many things I didn't know about. Heaven will be great and awesome! Will you write any other books about Heaven or any other children's books? I hope you do! Thank you so much for this book! Have a great day!

Randy: Toby, I am so glad you're reading my book *Heaven*. I have written a number of books related to Heaven. In fact, I am writing another Heaven-related book right now, and I'm really loving the research and early stages of writing. It has to do with God's love for animals and our love for them, and animals on the New Earth. I have two chapters related to animals and pets in the *Heaven* book. I don't know if you have gotten to that part yet, but you could skip ahead to it if you haven't, and that subject interests you.

What grade are you in, Toby? And what is your favorite subject? I love football also.

Hello! How are you doing? Thank you for the reply. I am in 5th grade. My favorite subject is reading.

How old were you when you wrote your first book? What first got you interested in writing about Heaven? My grandpa died right before I was born, so we talk about Heaven a lot. I will be praying for you as you write your new book.

Randy: Toby, I wrote my first book in 1985, when I was 31.

I'm sorry to hear you didn't get to know your grandpa yet, but it's wonderful that your family talks about Heaven a lot!

You asked why I started writing about Heaven. A close friend of mine, Greg, died when I was in high school.

I was a brand-new Christian, and it affected me profoundly. Then after I'd been a pastor five years, my mother died in 1981.

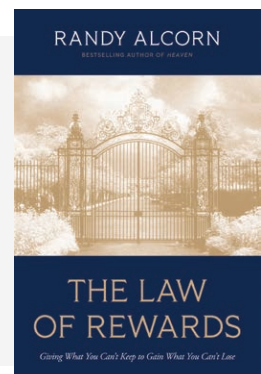
My mother was also my dear friend, and I'd had the joy of leading her to Christ when I was a teenager, a year after I came to the Lord. I knew she was in Heaven, with the Lord, but I wondered what it was like there. The last month before she died, nearly every day I read to her from the final two chapters of the Bible, Revelation 21 and 22, which portray the eternal Heaven as centered on the New Earth. Though we had never discussed it in Bible college or seminary, I found compelling this picture of a resurrected world where people with real bodies will live in a redeemed culture forever centered on Christ the King of Kings.

As the years went on, as a pastor I was at the bedsides of many dying people, and spoke at their gravesides and memorial services. Eleven years to the day after my mother died, my best friend from childhood died, and I had the privilege of being there with Jerry when he left this world for a far better one.

After writing my novel *Safely Home* in 2001, I decided to write a big book on Heaven, emphasizing not just the present Heaven where we go when we die, but the eternal Heaven where God promises to put His throne on the New Earth and dwell with us. ■

Gaining what you can't lose

Randy's book *The Law of Rewards* has been revised and updated and is being released as a paperback with a refreshed cover. It will be available after July 9 from epm.org/store.



God's Heart for the Elderly and Infirm Reminds Us of the Sanctity of Senior Life

BY RANDY ALCORN

One of the many problems facing Western society is that we worship youth and make the elderly disposable. Euthanasia, which is legal in my home state of Oregon, is simply abortion of the elderly, disabled, and terminally ill. The same logic and arguments and appeals to “compassion” and quality of life and financial concerns are used for both.

God's perspective on the elderly is vastly different. He told the Israelites, “You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am Yahweh” (Leviticus 19:32). God has a purpose for the elderly, up to their last moment of life. He describes gray hair as “a crown of glory” (Proverbs 16:31). That's why God's command to care for the weak and needy includes both the unborn, at the very beginning of life, and the elderly, at the very end: “Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked” (Psalm 82:3-4).

Happily, there are societies around the world that do venerate the elderly, and they are examples to us. Think of the experience and wisdom the older person has gained in all his or her years of life. They have so much to offer others. “Honor your father and mother” (Exodus 20:12) is a command we should take seriously! And even those elderly people who seemingly don't have much, or even anything, to offer are still to be honored because they are human beings made in God's image, precious to Him.



The Best Is Still Ahead

There is deep comfort in knowing that our believing loved ones, as they age and weaken, have not passed their peak, as the world imagines. They have yet to reach their peak. And if a peak is ever reached in the next world (I doubt it will be), there will never be a subsequent decline. The thrill of being in the presence of Christ will never wear off, and the adventures ahead of us will always be better than the ones behind. Our God offers not the end of longing, but the continual fulfillment of it— infinite joy and gratitude to the One who did it all for us. Our believing loved ones, whether parents or children or spouses or friends, will be there to greet us, likely eager to show us some favorite places. For those who know the grace of Jesus, the ultimate reunion awaits us.

In the meantime, often God uses waning health and vitality not only to increase impact on others who benefit by caring for the elderly (my father and I gained a much closer relationship in his final years, when he needed my help), but by preparing the sick and elderly for Heaven. It is easier to let go of this world when there is no realistic hope that our health will improve, but only get worse. Now the whispers of Heaven become glad shouts of invitation: “Come here, where all will be right—not again, but for the first time!” As the blind relish the promise of sight, and the lame the promise of full mobility, the sick long for health, and the old long for the fresh vitality of youth.

What about When the Elderly Is...Us?

After playing tennis at an athletic club, I overheard two retired men saying, “We’re not much use anymore, are we?” They were joking, but only sort of. They seemed to feel it was mostly true.

Our physical and mental abilities can and will decrease over time, but may we as God’s children never feel useless. We can always pray, and we can usually speak and mentor and reach out in the name of Jesus, and show the love of Christ and the wisdom of having invested our lives in Him.

**“Even to your old age
and gray hairs I am he, I
am he who will sustain
you. I have made you
and I will carry you; I
will sustain you and I
will rescue you.”**

ISAIAH 46:4

Psalms 92 says of the elderly, “They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green” (v. 14). God describes His people as those “who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you” (Isaiah 46:3-4).

Susan Hunt writes in *Aging with Grace: Flourishing in an Anti-Aging Culture*:

Old age, when life becomes quieter and slower, is prime time to reflect on the power of the gospel to change us. It is also a time when we are tempted to think small—to think about our aches and pains, our disappointments and unrealized expectations. Will we be good stewards of our old age? Even as physical strength diminishes, will we pursue our destiny—knowing God?

As we grow older, let’s not sit in the rocking chair looking back at those days when we served God. On the contrary, let’s serve God with greater zeal. Let’s pour ourselves into serving others for the glory of God. None of us knows how much time we have left in this world, but in terms of eternity, the time for all of us is very short. No matter what our age, we can all benefit from this perspective. As missionary C. T. Studd put it, “Only one life, ‘twill soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last.” ■



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