

eternal

perspectives

Summer 2016



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about

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Knowing What God Is Like

BY RANDY ALCORN

"The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin." Exodus 34:6-7 (NIV)

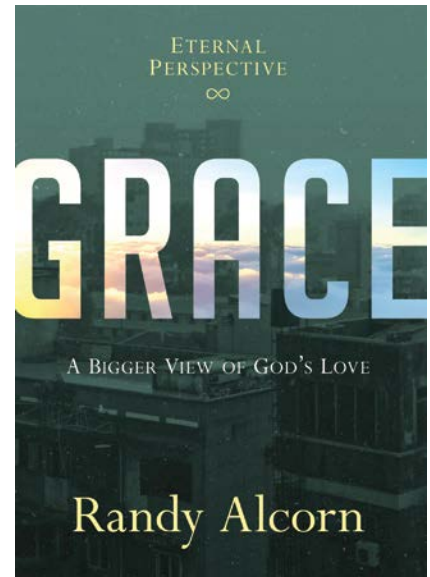
There's little consolation in knowing God is your Creator unless you know what He's like. A Creator could be miserable, unreasonable, unloving, and downright hateful. Likewise, there is little consolation in knowing God is your Ruler, but great consolation in knowing that God is your Savior: holy, happy, kind, and full of grace.

J. I. Packer writes, "Nothing can alter the character of God. In the course of a human life, tastes and outlook and temper may change radically: a kind, equable man may turn bitter and crotchety; a man of good-will may grow cynical and callous. But nothing of this sort happens to the Creator. He never becomes less truthful, or merciful, or just, or good, than He used to be."

Think of it this way: if your grumpy neighbor asks, "What are you up to?" you'll see it as a suspicious, condemning question. But if your cheerful neighbor asks the same thing, you'll smile and talk about your plans. We interpret people's words according to how we perceive their character and outlook. So it is with our view of God.

Given most people's opinion of God, no wonder they read the Bible negatively, selectively focusing on His anger and judgment while missing His mercy, grace, and happiness. God seems restrictive and condemning because they believe He's against us and our happiness.

The same Scriptures, when read by those who see God as loving and happy, emphatically show that He has our best interests at heart. For them, the Bible becomes a warm, living document instead of a set of harsh, arbitrary rules. If we believe that "God is for us" (Romans 8:31), then even when Scripture exposes our sin, we still trust Him, because He desires to address our sin with His forgiving and empowering grace. ■



Parts of this article were excerpted from Randy's new book *Grace*, which offers daily meditations, Scriptures, and inspirational quotes that will enable you to grasp more fully the grace God has lavished on us. Come explore the many facets of God's grace...and fall more in love than ever before with the One who is full of grace and truth.

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How You Can Share the Gospel

BY GREG LAURIE

Let's imagine you are out for a walk one night around your neighborhood when you suddenly hear people screaming. Startled, you look over your shoulder and see a house with flames leaping from the windows and roof. Someone out front of the house cries out, "There's someone in there!" Let me ask you, if you were to just keep on walking without giving a passing thought to those in such terrible danger, would that be wrong? At the very least, wouldn't you pull out your phone and dial 9-1-1? Even more, wouldn't you try to find a way into that burning house to rescue that person inside? To do nothing would be outright criminal.

In the same way, however, we walk by people—men and women we know or total strangers—who are without Christ and don't do a thing to help them. We don't even try to initiate a conversation about our faith. We just keep walking. And to be blunt, a fate even worse than a house fire awaits those who reject the offer of forgiveness through Jesus Christ. It is eternal fire. Eternal separation from God.

The last thing God wants is to send any man or woman—deeply loved by Him and made in His very image—to this place called Hell. That's why He sent Jesus to live a perfect life, to die a perfect death on the cross for our sins, and then to rise from the dead. You might protest, "God could never use someone like me!" Actually, He can and He will if you will let Him. It could even happen today—before this day is over. He won't force you to share your faith, but He may very well prompt you. And when you take that step of faith, He will empower and use you. Yes, you.



There is a happiness we are missing out on if we're not sharing our faith.

I want you to discover the adventure of being used by God, especially in this area of telling others about Jesus. God says that He is looking for people He can "show Himself strong on behalf of" (2 Chronicles 16:9, NKJV). He is searching for someone who will simply say, "Use me, Lord!" Would you be that person? If so, a wonderful adventure awaits you.

I want to let you in on a little surprise: Sharing your faith can be both exciting and—believe it or not—fun! As Psalm 126:6 reminds us, "Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them" (NIV). Jesus told us there is joy in Heaven over every sinner who comes to repentance (see Luke 15:7). So if there is joy in Heaven upon hearing the news of a conversion, there certainly should be joy in having a role in it.

Next to personally knowing Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord, the greatest joy I know of is leading others to Christ and watching them grow spiritually. And you can do that, too. It should be a joyful, happy thing to tell others about your relationship with God and explain how they can have one, too. I have found that the happiest Christians are the evangelistic ones.

Yes, there is a happiness we are missing out on if we're not sharing our faith. The apostle John wrote that his personal joy was made complete by sharing

the message of Christ (see 1 John 1:4). The believers I know who make a habit of sharing the Gospel are truly happy people.

There have been so many times when I have felt drained and exhausted, both physically and mentally. I have even felt like my spiritual gas tank was close to empty. But then, when I started to share the Gospel with someone, or stopped thinking about myself and focused on another's needs and shared some truth from God's Word, I was replenished in every way. I started on empty and ended on full. Proverbs 11:25 tells us that "those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed" (NLT).

So here's the bottom line: What's your excuse for not sharing? Clearly, God could reach people without us. He could send angels down every street in the world with megaphones, declaring the Gospel. Instead, however, He has chosen to work through us. In fact, He almost seems to go out of His way to find the most unlikely candidates to

accomplish His divine purposes.

You might say, "I'm not qualified. I'm not gifted or talented." Do you want to know a little secret? You are just the person God is looking for. He delights to use people who aren't necessarily self-confident. Why? Because when God does something amazing through them, He is the one who gets the glory, as He should. No, you may not feel qualified or "ready." But God isn't looking for ability as much as He is availability. God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called! ■

Greg Laurie is the senior pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship, with campuses in Riverside and Irvine, California. He and his wife Cathe have two sons, Christopher—who went to be with the Lord in 2008—and Jonathan; two daughters-in-law, Brittany and Brittni; and five grandchildren. He blogs at <http://blog.greglaurie.com>.



Shining *Christ's Light* in a Dark World

BY RANDY ALCORN

The light of Christ, shining through others, can bring us great joy and gladness. Jesus said of John the Baptist, "[He] was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light" (John 5:35, ESV). The NCV says, "...you were happy to enjoy his light for a while."

In a dark world, our hearts are cheered by seeing light wherever it appears. Often light is embodied in a Jesus-follower, in whom we see a secondary reflection of Jesus, who is the Primary, the Light of the world.

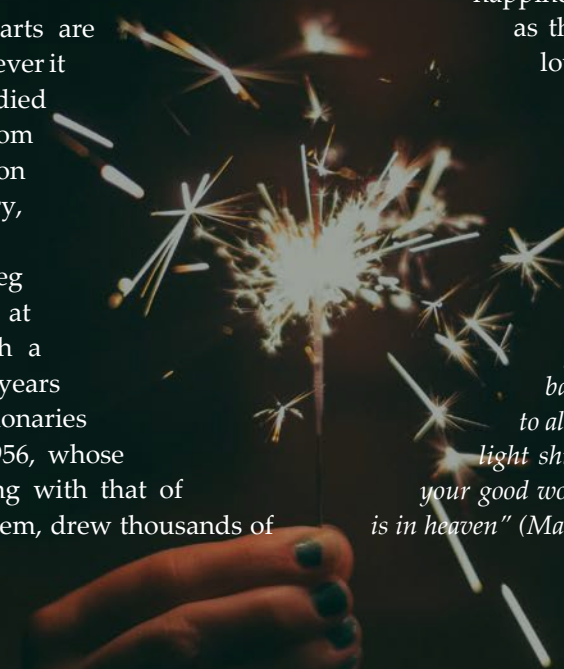
I think of my friend Greg Coffey who came to Christ at seventeen, and shined with a great light, then died two years later. I think of the five missionaries murdered in Ecuador in 1956, whose bright light for Christ, along with that of their wives who survived them, drew thousands of

young people into missions.

I think of Garland Gabbert, Daniel Brose and Tom Lytle, older men in our church who drew me and many others into their light. If the chair next to them was open that's where I would sit, just wanting to be touched by their Christlike wisdom, grace and happiness. Rather than shriveling in heart as they grew older, they became more loving and ministry-minded.

May it be true of me, and all of us...may we draw our light and joy always from Jesus, so that it is never extinguished any more than He can be. ■

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16).





LOOKING AHEAD

TO THE LIKELIHOOD OF
INCREASED PERSECUTION
IN AMERICA

BY RANDY ALCORN

Several months ago I was asked by *World Magazine* some questions about religious persecution. Here are my responses.

There's a lot of talk in evangelical circles about the likelihood of increased persecution of believers in the years ahead. Do you think that forecast is on target?

Yes. However, I don't believe we should live in fear and dread of persecution, but realize that God tells us to expect it (2 Timothy 3:12) and not to be surprised by it (1 Peter 4:12). He promises to use it to increase our perseverance and build our character (Romans 5:3-5), and increase our happiness in Christ (Luke 6:22-23). God will use persecution, as He always has, to thereby strengthen His church and extend the Gospel message, not destroy it. Persecution in America will probably never be as extreme as it has been in countless places throughout church history and as it is around the world today.

So, sure, let's hang on to what liberties we can, but not whine and complain like a disgruntled special interest group. Instead let's focus on sharing Jesus and the Gospel.

What form do you think such persecution is most likely to take?

Hate speech will be broadened to include any traditional or faithful teaching of Scripture dealing with homosexuality. Christians, pastors and biblical scholars who reinterpret the homosexuality passages to fit the modern worldview will be cited to argue that local church pastors are not really teaching the Bible but a particular primitive and hate-filled interpretation of the Bible, one that is fueling rage against gay citizens, resulting in disdain, discrimination and in some cases violence against them. It will be compared to the hateful oratory against Jews in some Christian congregations in Nazi Germany, which helped fuel the Holocaust.

Refusal to serve communion to, perform marriages of, or accept into membership legally married gay couples, and refusal to hire an otherwise qualified homosexual teacher in Christian schools and churches will result in lawsuits, the removal of tax-exempt status, and eventually perhaps the closure of some Christian schools and churches. Those who avoid teaching on the related biblical texts or reinterpret them in socially acceptable ways will thereby avoid persecution and gain praise and status. Countless churches across the

“God will use persecution, as He always has, to thereby strengthen His church and extend the Gospel message, not destroy it.”

country rent facilities from public schools on Sundays, which is good stewardship for the churches and provides needed income to the school districts. Many of these churches have wonderful relationships with school principals, and volunteer hundreds of hours annually to make improvements that benefit the schools. However, these churches and schools are on borrowed time. Eventually I believe schools renting their facilities to people whose worldview is considered discriminatory or hateful will not be permitted to do so.

The price paid by the silent churches will be subjecting themselves to God's judgment by failing to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27); the price paid by the compromised churches will be embracing false and self-serving people-pleasing doctrine by twisting Scripture and ultimately undermining the Gospel itself (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Of course they will do this in the name of the love of Jesus, quoting Jesus' words in John 8 "Neither do I condemn you," while ignoring His words a few verses later, "Go and sin no more."

Pastors and Bible teachers who reinterpret Scripture to make it popular will increasingly take the moral high ground as they portray real Bible-believers as bigots. Of course, some ARE bigots. But the kindest and most Christ-like and grace-centered believers will be marginalized and labeled hateful despite their loving actions. They are the ones whose hearts break for gay and transgender people, and every other broken person including themselves and their loved ones, and who believe that love doesn't mean refusal to tell the truth, but means acting in what God says are people's true and ultimate best interests.

So what should we do?

Let's not be surprised by this or talk about a "Christian America," which never existed in full flower in the first place, and is today further from reality than ever....but not as far as it will

be ten and twenty and thirty years from now. (Barring a sweeping transformation that seems highly unlikely.)

For the sake of the free proclamation of the Gospel and the continuance of the rights of belief and practice for churches and others, it's good that some Christian organizations will continue to defend these rights in courts and elsewhere. The rights believers have today were won at great cost in previous generations, and it is irresponsible and unloving to passively look the other way to the detriment of future generations of Christ-followers, including our children and grandchildren. They are in danger of losing their legal rights to live and

proclaim and assemble for the Gospel if we fail to speak up and do something to hold on to our rights that people shed blood to procure and defend.

But please, let's stop portraying ourselves, who have lived most of our lives in unheard of religious liberty, as a whiny special interest group throwing a tantrum. Let's happily draw attention to Jesus and the right to believe, teach, celebrate, and bring His Good News to all who will listen. ■

Watch Randy share more about religious liberty in a video at www.epm.org/liberty.

How to Talk to Your Kids About Gender

BY MARK SPANSEL

From the minute Michelle and I got married, we had godly people around us modeling marriage and family. By the time we were preparing for our first child to enter the world, we'd watched moms and dads around us closely, taken a few parenting classes, and drilled our close friends as to the "keys to successful parenting."

But nothing really prepared me for the conversation I recently had with my kids.

My sons and I were sitting in the corner of a Dunkin' Donuts when a young man I'd counseled in previous years came over and said hello. It took me about 30 seconds to realize whom I was speaking with. This young man was now identifying as a transgender woman. I'd heard he'd made this decision but hadn't yet bumped into him. We chatted briefly and shortly thereafter left to get the kids to school. Once we got in the car,



I hoped my kids wouldn't press in and ask too many questions about the encounter. But of course they did. This is 2016, and my kids go to public school. We have a TV in our home, and they are generally observant teenagers. Unfortunately I hadn't rehearsed this "lesson" in my parenting arsenal.

Talking to my kids about transgender issues wasn't in the parenting class Michelle and I took years ago. But here's what I said.

God Made Gender

I reminded my kids that way back in the early pages of Genesis it says that God created gender: "Male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). We don't get to choose our gender. Whether one is male or female is in the creative power and wisdom of God. Someone may struggle with "feeling" male or female, but that doesn't *make* him or her different than God intended.

In the beginning, God determined that two genders were the perfect expression of his image. In the man and in the woman, then, God's image is displayed—both in the individuals themselves and in the way they relate to each other as same (human) and as distinct (gender). One isn't better than the other, nor did God design a way for humanity to switch between the two.

We All Struggle with Identity

I want my kids to be able to adequately navigate the waters of sexual identity for themselves. This is a watershed issue in our day that isn't going away.

So I explained clearly to them how this young man I spoke with identified himself more as a woman. We then talked about how everyone struggles at some level to understand who they are and why God made them the way He did. I reassured them it's normal to wrestle with such issues of identity, but that gender identity in particular is determined by God, and that transgender expressions won't "fix"

what's going on within. I wanted them to know that any "gender transitioning" is a shortsighted attempt to fix a common human struggle, and will likely add to the confusion a person already feels.

Where Worth Is Found

Ultimately, though, I wanted my kids to have empathy for this young man. They could see from his demeanor and physical mannerisms that he wasn't doing well. In fact, he'd told me he recently had a mental breakdown and was getting some neurological tests to determine what was going on.

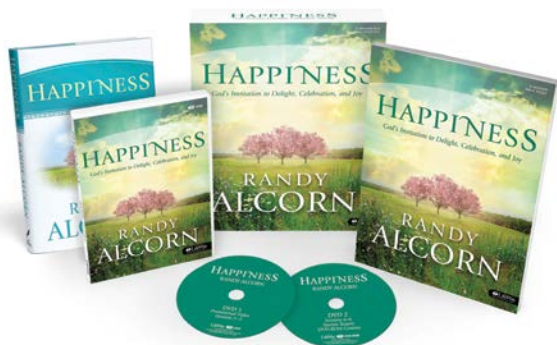
I want my kids to fight the natural bent of their hearts to judge and snicker. I want them to show the grace and compassion that arises from feeling the hurt someone else carries with them. I want them to deeply understand who they are before the Lord—and even if they don't get that far, that they at least understand who God made them to be. I want them to grasp that without careful answers, you can start down a path that only leads to greater confusion and heartache.

The gospel-less culture around us champions being who you are, but offers only tips and tools that lead you away from being who God created you to be. So absolutely, I want my kids to be themselves. I want them to look different from my wife and me. I want them to have their own adventures, to walk their own paths. But I also want them to be equipped to find their worth in Jesus, so they can help others navigate the tricky roads ahead. ■

Mark Spansel is the lead pastor of Leroy Community Chapel in Northeast Ohio. He loves to disciple the local church in both the public and private ministry of the Word. He and his wife, Michelle, have seven children.



You can follow him on his blog at <http://markspansel.wordpress.com>.



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11 Ways to Become A GLOBAL CHRISTIAN

DEVELOPING YOUR HEART FOR THE LOST

BY KAREN COLEMAN, EPM STAFF

It might come as a surprise to some, but if you do a Bible search for the words “mission” or “missionary”, you aren’t going to find much. To understand the role of believers in reaching the world, we have to dig a little deeper.

The heart of missions, when we get down to it, is God’s heart for lost people. It’s the Gospel, the Good News of Christ’s completed work for us through His death on the cross and His resurrection. And it’s not just for people who look like us, speak like us, or live near us. *It’s for everyone.*

So how can you become a more “Global Christian,” that is, someone who thinks and loves like God, who has God’s heart for the world and the lost? (Obviously, by that definition, every Christian should strive to be a Global Christian!)

1. As you read the Bible, mark any passage that relates to world ministry. I have “WM” marked *all* through my Bible. For example, The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 and the “Be my witnesses” passage in Acts 1:7-8 come to mind quickly. But world ministry goes all the way back to Genesis 3:15, the prophesy of crushing the serpent’s head, and Genesis 12 in the Abrahamic Covenant, where God promises to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham’s line. With hindsight, we now know both of those passages are references to Christ Himself—the seeds of the Gospel in Genesis!

Proverbs 24:11-12 speaks of rescuing those who

are being taken away to death. Isaiah 9 tells us of the Child who comes to bring light and joy, as well as justice and righteousness. With an eye for this, you will start to see the ministry of God to the world everywhere in His Word.

2. Meditate on and memorize passages that have to do with God’s heart for the world. Here are some of my favorites to get you started:

- Jesus was arguably the first missionary. Read His own words in John 4:31-38 (“The fields are white for harvest...”) and Matthew 9:37-38 (“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field”).
- Paul—another pretty famous missionary— said in 1 Corinthians 9:16-23 that he became all things to all people, that by all means he might save some.
- Revelation 5:9-10 tells us there will be people in Heaven from “every tribe and language and people and nation...”

3. Pray for God’s wisdom and guidance. It’s worth noting that after Jesus told His disciples to ask the Lord of the Harvest to send out workers, He sent them. He intends for us to have a heart that cares for the world around us, and instructed His followers to pray to that end.

4. Sign up with the Joshua Project to discover who that “world” is. So you can learn more about Unreached People groups, the Joshua Project will

send you (daily or less often if you choose) a little information about one group with progress to date, obstacles to the Gospel, prayer requests, and one photo of a person in that group that helps you realize these are *real people* headed for a Christless eternity. See www.joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday.

They also have a section on hot spots (www.joshuaproject.net/hotspots). I've heard it said that most of the "easy" groups have been reached with the Gospel. There are many obstacles to reaching those that remain: their languages may be more difficult to learn; they may live in some of the most inhospitable places on the planet; they are mostly in closed countries where missionaries aren't welcome (that's putting it nicely). Therefore, extreme commitment is required, as well as extraordinary sensitivity and innovative strategies. But no obstacle decreases the need for those people to hear the Gospel!

5. Read good missionary biographies. They can be just as exciting as any fiction! Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

1. Anything about or by the band of men who launched Operation Auca in 1956 in Ecuador—Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, Ed McCully, Roger Youderian, and Pete Fleming. I recommend *Through Gates of Splendor*, *Shadow of the Almighty*, *Jungle Pilot*, and *The Journals of Jim Elliot*, as well as the movie "End of the Spear." The dedication of these men and their families to Christ's cause has had a profound effect on thousands of people.
2. *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret* by Dr. Howard Taylor (a classic)
3. *Peace Child* by Don Richardson (about an incredible analogy to the Gospel that existed among an isolated people group)
4. *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya* by Ruth Tucker (an encyclopedia of missionaries, but it reads more like a novel)
5. *Eternity in Their Hearts* by Don Richardson (how God prepares entire people groups for the Gospel—fascinating)
6. *Bruchko* by Bruce Olson (a 19-year-old captured and tortured by Columbian guerillas—better than what Hollywood could dream up!)

6. Meet with your pastor, or the missions person at your church, to let them know of your interest. Ask them for ideas on how to learn more, and ask them to pray for you.

7. Take a course such as "Perspectives on the World Christian Movement." This life-changing 15-week class (www.perspectives.org) is being

**A WARNING: IF YOU PURSUE THESE GOALS,
YOU'LL START TO THINK DIFFERENTLY!**

offered in Portland, Oregon starting this August. It can also be taken online, but the regular classes are recommended.

8. Attend a conference like Mission Connexion (www.missionconnexion.com) or Urbana (www.urbana.org). There are excellent speakers and workshops, and representatives from various organizations you could interact with. You can listen to past messages at Urbana (www.urbana.org/past-urbanas). Multnomah University has a similar conference for their students, and you can listen to messages from past conferences (www.multnomah.edu/globalministriesconference). (A connection I made there is how I ended up in Africa for 23 years!)

9. Find out about the missionaries your church supports. Sign up to receive their regular updates and pray for them. Write them an email and tell them you're praying for them. See if there are any currently on home assignment and living in the area. Have them over for a meal and ask lots of questions.

10. Browse through this inspiring list of missionary quotes: <http://bit.ly/missionaryquotes>.

11. Look around locally for opportunities to interact with and learn about people of other cultures. It could be something easy like having dinner at an authentic Ethiopian restaurant, or something more stretching like finding international students or refugees in your area to connect with and serve in some way. God is literally bringing the world to our doorstep—what a great chance to be Global Christians in our own communities.

A warning: If you pursue these goals, you'll start to think differently! A Christian who thinks globally will begin to change his or her views on many things like possessions, relationships, compassion, success, what is Biblical versus what is merely cultural, choosing a major in college, wealth, security, vocation, refugees, use of time, retirement, ethnocentricity, and so much more. It becomes a grid through which you view our very big God and the entire world He loves. I believe it's a very God-honoring grid. ■

Read the full version of Karen's article, which includes an additional list of five long-term goals for those sensing God's call to serve overseas, at www.epm.org/blog/globalchristian.

How Do I Fight the Pull of Materialism in My Life?

Even though I've read what God's Word teaches about giving and the dangers of a life centered on materialism, I still struggle with wanting better and nicer things rather than having a heartfelt desire to use my resources for God's glory. How do I fight the pull of materialism in my life?

ANSWERED BY RANDY ALCORN

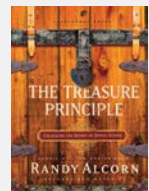
I believe the only way to break the power of materialism is first, to see ourselves as stewards that God has entrusted these money and possessions to, and second, to give. Jesus says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). As long as I still have something, I believe I own it. But when I give it away, I relinquish the control, power, and prestige that come with wealth. At the moment of release, the light turns on. The magic spell is broken. My mind clears, and I recognize God as owner, myself as servant, and other people as intended beneficiaries of what God has entrusted to me.

The New Testament offers guidelines for giving that can help us fight the pull of materialism:

- 1. Give.** Giving affirms Christ's lordship. It dethrones me and exalts Him. It breaks the chains of mammon that would enslave me and transfers my center of gravity to Heaven.
- 2. Give generously.** How much is generous? There's no one-size-fits-all answer. If you've never tithed, start there—then begin to stretch your generosity. If God provides more wealth, keep giving a higher percentage (2 Corinthians 8:12).
- 3. Give regularly.** Stewardship is not a once-a-year consideration, but a week-to-week, month-to-month commitment requiring discipline and consistency.
- 4. Give sacrificially.** We don't like risky faith. We like to have our safety net below us. But we miss the adventure of seeing God provide when we've really stretched ourselves in giving. (2 Corinthians 8:2)
- 5. Give voluntarily.** When we catch a vision of God's grace, we will give *beyond* our duty. (2 Corinthians 8:3)
- 6. Give deliberately.** Giving is at its best when it's a conscious effort that's repeatedly made. (2 Corinthians 8:4-5)
- 7. Give excellently.** Paul says, "See that you also excel in this grace of giving" (2 Corinthians 8:7).
- 8. Give cheerfully.** "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). If we're not cheerful, the problem is our heart, and the solution is redirecting our heart, not withholding our giving.
- 9. Give worshipfully.** Our giving is a reflexive response to God's grace (2 Corinthians 8:1). It doesn't come out of our altruism—it comes out of the transforming work of Christ in us.
- 10. Give increasingly.** Remember that God prospers us not to raise our standard of living, but to raise our standard of giving. (2 Corinthians 9:11)
- 11. Give quietly.** Showiness in giving is always inappropriate (Matthew 6:1-4). (But sometimes our righteous acts *will* be seen by men and even *should* be, see Matthew 5:14-16.) ■

Watch Randy Alcorn share about stewardship in a two-part series at www.epm.org/biola-stewardship.

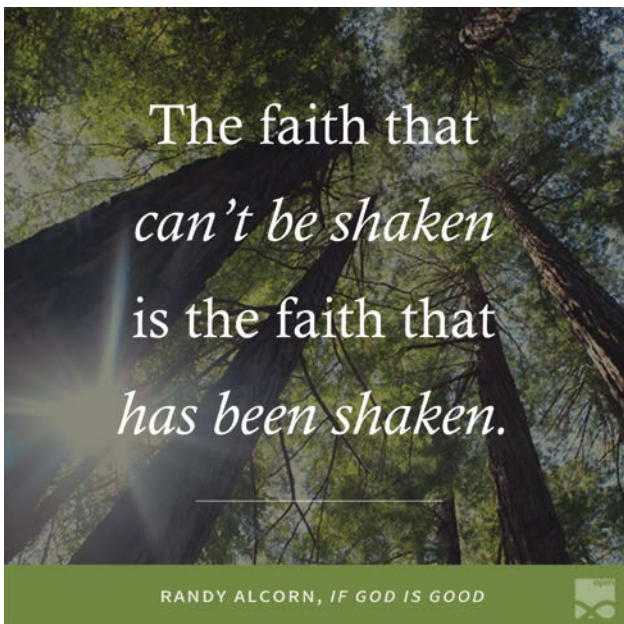
His book *The Treasure Principle* is available from our ministry at an everyday discounted price. To see our competitive quantity pricing, great for churches and organizations, go to www.epm.org/treasure.





Watch the full sessions from Randy's recent Happiness conference

This spring, Randy spoke on the topic of happiness at his home church, Good Shepherd Community Church, in a three-session conference. Our hope is that individuals, pastors, and small groups would consider utilizing these videos for study and discussion, as they contain a large amount of Scripture related to happiness. (Randy's PowerPoint slides are included in the video.) The full video sessions are available at www.epm.org/happiness-conference.



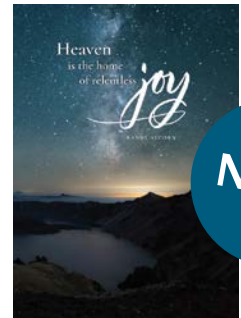
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New products available exclusively from EPM

"Heaven, Home of Joy" Greeting Card

This individually packaged 5x7 card is printed on quality paper and includes a blank white envelope. As a general purpose card, it can be used for a variety of occasions. The front says: *Heaven is the home of relentless joy.* —Randy Alcorn; the interior includes Psalm 16:11. EPM price \$2.15 (retail value \$3.00). Buy 3 or more for \$1.99 each. Order at www.epm.org/heavencard.



Happiness Wallet Cards

EPM now offers a pack of 20 glossy, card stock, wallet-sized cards on the topic of happiness, featuring quotes from Randy and Scripture. **EPM price \$1.00.** Order the wallet cards at www.epm.org/happiness-wallet.



View all products available exclusively from EPM, including wallet cards, DVDs, bookmarks, and greeting cards, at www.epm.org/exclusives.



Hear Randy at the Portland Canvas Conference

Randy will be doing a Q&A on writing at the Canvas Conference in Portland, Oregon, August 12-13, 2016. The goal of the conference is to inform all acts of human creativity and beauty with biblical, gospel-centered theology for the worship of the triune God. Register at www.thecanvasconference.com.

Facing

FEAR with faith

BY RANDY ALCORN

Fear comes in many forms. We can fear making the wrong decision or disappointing our friends. We can also fear that our children will be snatched, the car brakes will fail, or the plane will crash. We may experience fear about our country's future and the direction of the world around us.

Our immediate response to a threatening situation like a loud noise or a scream is usually a reflexive or involuntary fear. This initial fear is uncontrollable. What we allow to settle into our minds and emotions after our initial response, however, is controllable. If we do not exercise control over it, if we leave the initial fear untamed, it turns into long-term dread or even paranoia.

Unhealthy fear can be a symptom of a lack of eternal perspective. Ed Welch writes, "Fears see only in part. They see that we might lose something dear to us, such as our money, our health or the health of someone we love. They see the potential for loss with microscopic acuity. But they don't see God's presence, they don't see His faithfulness to His promises, they don't fixate on unseen realities but are dominated by what is merely seen with the naked eye (2 Cor. 4:18)."

We're told that "For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (2 Timothy 1:7).

Whether you suffer from specific phobias, a chronic fear of harm or death to yourself or loved ones, or any other fear, here are some suggestions for handling them.

Three Strategies for Fighting Fear

Face your fears by sharing them. Fear thrives most when it lurks in the shadows. Tell someone else and you'll find that fears are more common than you think. Many people suffer from what could be

called "fear phobia." They're afraid their fear means they are abnormal.

Sharing your fears with someone you trust, and finding out others struggle with similar issues, may bring you relief and help make them easier to handle.

Starve your fears—don't feed them. Once a fear is shared, it should not be dwelt on. Talking too much about fears tends to feed or reinforce them, making it more difficult to shake them.

Another area to check is your viewing habits. What are you taking in through television, movies, the internet, and social media? We can't fill our mind with what is evil and dreadful and expect to be at peace!

If you fear violence to yourself and your family, it's better that you don't watch violent movies and television programs that feed your fears. For that matter, you'd do better not to read the newspaper or watch the news on television since they major in violent crimes and catastrophes. Studies show that chronic television watchers see the world as being far more dangerous than it really is.

Shift your focus away from your fear and toward God. Read Scripture, memorize it, and pray about your fear. There are hundreds of "fear nots" in the Bible. The most common statement is, "Fear not, for I am with you" (Genesis 26:24). God knows our frailties and fears, and He is quick to reassure us:

Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go (Joshua 1:9, AMP).

God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5-6, NIV)

I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he

delivered me from all my fears. (Psalm 34:4, NIV)

Charles Spurgeon said, “The fear of God is the death of every other fear; like a mighty lion, it chases all other fears before it.” Scripture is full of commands to fear God and it is also full of commands not to be afraid. **If you fear God, you need fear no one and nothing else, even the devil.** If you do not fear God, you will ultimately fear many things besides Him. We’re told that “In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence” (Proverbs 14:26).

What If?

But what if your fears *do* happen or have already happened? Ed Welch put it this way: “Our worst fears may come upon us, but we cannot imagine the immense grace that God will pour out on us for them.”

It can help to remind yourself that even if one of your fears becomes reality, God has promised He will use it for your eternal good (Romans 8:28). *Everything* that comes into your life—yes, even evil and suffering—is Father-filtered. There is great comfort in meditating on your true, eternal circumstances: your Savior has come to deliver you, has secured your resurrection and eternal life, is *for* you and not against you, and never under any circumstances allows anything to separate you from His love.

We’re told that Christ intercedes for us (Romans 8:34). Since the prayers of a righteous man are effective (James 5:16), what could be more effective than Christ’s prayers for you? What an encouragement to know that even if no one else knows your needs, worries, and fears, and is praying for us, Christ does and is. Robert Murray M’Cheyne wrote, “If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies. Yet distance makes no difference. He is praying for me.”

God’s promise of His presence is a source of both comfort and courage: “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10). Jesus has promised us that no matter what, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20, NLT).

An Opportunity for Greater Dependence

In a time of dark suffering and dread, David affirmed, “The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?... Though an army besiege



If you fear God, you need fear no one and nothing else, even the devil.

me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.... Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.... I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD” (Psalm 27:1, 3, 10, 13–14).

My wife Nanci suffered through what she calls her “year of fear and free-floating anxiety that made me fall in love with God.” Nanci knew God from childhood and trusted Him all through my lawsuits, arrests, and job loss, then through her mother’s death and other losses (and threatened ones). But that inexplicable year of her life, unrelated to any outside traumatic event, changed her. She coped by telling God, morning and night, how much she loved Him.

She has continued her habit of praise and intimacy with God that developed when daily fear and dread fell upon her. The crushing emotions of that time have departed; the sense of intimacy with her Savior remains. To this day Nanci rejoices in God’s love for her and her love for Him in ways she never would have known without that year she otherwise could describe as hellish.

Your struggle with fear can be an opportunity for greater dependence on your Savior, and an opportunity to fix your eyes on what is unseen. John Newton penned it well: “If the Lord be with us, we have no cause of fear. His eye is upon us, His arm over us, His ear open to our prayer—His grace sufficient, His promise unchangeable.” ■



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