



Eternal Perspectives

We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen...

Summer 2006

The Cost of Discipleship by Randy Alcorn



Note from Randy: I wrote this to the men in a study group I led, based on Dallas Willard's book, Spirit of the Disciplines.

And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?" (Luke 9:23-25)

This is arguably the single greatest and hardest passage on self-denial in all of Scripture. We are told we should *lose* our lives for Christ's sake. We are told we must *deny* ourselves. If losing and denial aren't enough, we're to *carry a cross*, the most dreaded instrument of execution there is. Carrying a cross is walking the path not only to death, but excruciating death. The cross is suggestive of the very sacrifices of Jesus himself. In terms of costliness, how much more dreadful a picture could be painted?

And to top it off, we are to do this cross-carrying not just once, at some triumphant point of martyrdom, after which the terrible job will be done. Rather, we are to carry this cross *daily*—every day of our lives!

This seems *impossible*. (Yet it would be cruel for God to command us to do what is impossible, so clearly he offers the power and means to do whatever He commands.) It also sounds emphatically *undesirable*. Who but a masochist would *want* to do this? Who could get up in the morning looking forward to doing it, or go to bed at night looking back with pleasure at having done it?

Yet if we think this way, we are letting the words of self-sacrifice and self-denial—which are real, but only part of a larger picture—eclipse the central meaning of the text. Take a closer look.

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me." Self-denial and cross-bearing is a means to, or part of, coming after Jesus. But what does Jesus offer those who come to him, and follow after him?

Consider Matthew 10:28-30. "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart. You shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

So, once we actually follow Jesus, in this mode of self-denial, what do we find? *Rest* for our souls, not weariness. An *easy* yoke, not a hard one. And a *light* burden, not a heavy one. In other words, all this apparently heavy-duty self-denial is done with the promise of finding *rest, ease and lightness!* The very cross we bear daily is to be borne with rest, ease and lightness. As we abide in Jesus, as we enjoy his fellowship, as we find our joy in Him, we are empowered and fulfilled. It is not only God's glory that comes out ahead in this—we also come out ahead.

If it seems that I am imposing Matthew 10 on Luke 9 to lighten it, consider just what Luke 9 itself says in the next verse: "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it."

Here the end is in full view: our long-term goal should *not* be to lose our lives, but to *save* them. Losing our lives now, momentarily, is the divinely prescribed way to ultimately *save* them.

At first this sounds contradictory to the passage. But look at it closely. Jesus is appealing to our desire to save our lives, and our desire to not lose them. He points out that the *means* to save your life permanently (which we want to do) is to lose it temporarily by acting as Christ's disciple rather than doing what we may feel like. The way to lose your life permanently (which we *don't* want to do) is to save it temporarily by doing what we feel like, while failing to act as Christ's disciple.

In other words, this passage that seems saturated by the abandonment of self-interest is in fact an appeal to our *true* self-interest. It is saying "abandon what *looks* to be in your short-term self-interest and embrace what *is in fact* in your long-term self-interest." *Apparent* self-interest is not *true* self-interest. Things are *not* as they appear.

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Eternal Perspective Ministries

2229 E. Burnside #23
Gresham, OR 97030
503.663.6481
www.epm.org



God has built us in such a way that He is the greatest pleasure and desire of our heart.

The word “apparent” is key. When we act in self-preservation rather than obeying Christ’s command to love our neighbors, to speak his name before men, to abide in Him and His word, *do we actually bring to ourselves lasting satisfaction?* Yes, there are the “passing pleasures of sin” (Hebrews 11). Yes, there are the passing costs of righteousness (1 Peter 4). But long-term satisfaction eludes us, for it can never be found in acts (or failures to act) of non-discipleship.

God has built us in such a way that He is the greatest pleasure and desire of our heart. Therefore, any other pleasures found apart from Him can only satisfy us in very brief and shallow ways (followed by guilt and numbness and deeper dissatisfaction). But every command of

Scripture to rejoice in following Christ, even in the midst of sacrifice, affirms that obedience is not only in our eternal self-interest, but even our temporal self-interest. (The joy of Chinese believers in prison, in contrast to the angry misery of their jailors, is a case in point.)

What this passage offers us is not loss instead of gain, but gain instead of loss. It is not death instead of life, but life instead of death. We fail to see it because of the weight of cross-carrying and self-denial, which seem antithetical to gain and life. But in verse 25 Jesus asks, “For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?”

Note that *Jesus directly appeals to our human desire for profit*. He wants us to want gain, and he wants us not to want loss. In fact he has created us, designed us to want gain, not loss. He appeals here to the very way he has made us.

Jim Elliot’s words make this precise point, though they—just like Christ’s words—are typically misunderstood: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Elliot—and the four other men who died in the jungle—sacrificed, carried their cross, denied themselves, and lost their lives (figuratively and literally). *But why?*

Read it again: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep *to gain* what he cannot lose.”

This statement is *all about gain*. Jim Elliot was a profit-seeker. The men who died on that beach *did what they chose to do and what they wanted to do*. Even in the short-run, they would have been miserable and unfulfilled *not* doing it. And in addition to that, they would have forfeited incalculable gain. Using Willard’s terminology, *the cost of their non-discipleship would have been far greater than the cost of their discipleship*. It would have taken a terrible toll on their lives. They would have been fools not to follow Jesus, and they didn’t want to be fools. Neither should we.

We mistakenly associate Elliot’s famous statement, just as we do Christ’s, with self-sacrificial altruism, stripped of any thought of self-interest or gain. But in fact, gain was the whole point of his statement. Jim Elliot was an excellent wrestler at Wheaton. He knew about winning and losing. He didn’t want to lose. He wanted to win. And he was right to want gain rather than loss! The difference between him and so many other Christians is not that he didn’t want gain—all of us want gain—it was that *he realized what gain would last and what gain wouldn’t last, and he chose the one that would last!*

For Jim Elliot, as for all of us, discipleship wasn’t just the right choice. It was the smart choice. It was the choice that one would be a fool not to make.



Willard speaks of the need to count not only the cost of discipleship, but *the cost of non-discipleship*. The alternative to following Christ wholeheartedly and abiding in Him and obeying him even when it’s uncomfortable is to *not* follow him, *not* abide in him and *not* obey him. There is no third alternative. In not doing these things, we will not only forfeit joy and fulfillment, *we will heap upon ourselves (and our families) incalculable negative consequences*.

Taking up our cross to follow Christ is truly in our best interest. Losing our lives in obedience to

Christ will result in finding our lives. This is smart—i.e., always in our ultimate, and often even in our immediate, self-interest.

Trying to find ourselves by disobeying God will mean losing our lives. This is therefore stupid—i.e., always in our ultimate and, often even in our immediate, self-destruction.

So the cost of discipleship is significant. But paying that cost purchases something: it purchases life, gain, profit, reward, rest, and fulfillment. By not paying the cost of discipleship—that is, by paying the cost of non-discipleship—we purchase death, loss, anxiety and lack of fulfillment.

Which is the better deal? What is to God's glory is also to our good.

What is right is also smart. What is wrong is also stupid.

So when we are tempted, let's be motivated not only by our love for God, and our desire to see God glorified. (Lofty as those are, sometimes they seem insufficient to motivate us.) Let's also be motivated by our desire for life rather than death, and gain rather than loss. Let's be motivated by our desire to live smart rather than to live stupid. Let's realize that the passing cost of discipleship, real though it be, pales in comparison to the lasting cost of non-discipleship.

So instead of watching TV or responding to email or writing my novel, I'm going to read Scripture and Willard now. I'm motivated by finding greater gain and greater joy—gain and joy that will last. And, Lord willing, that will surface in my interactions with my wife and those I spend time with today and in days to come.

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Update: Practical Ways to Help Our Persecuted Brothers and Sisters in Christ

After receiving many letters from readers requesting ways to help those being persecuted for their faith, we responded with an article in our last newsletter.

"Blankets of Love" is an opportunity to share a blanket with Sudanese Christians who have suffered for the cause of Christ. Many Christian families in Sudan have lost all earthly possessions as they have fled from Islamic persecution.

Recent Update: *To date, almost 277,000 blankets have been received at Voice of the Martyrs' warehouse in Oklahoma for distribution to*

our brothers and sisters in Sudan, thanks to many other believers, including at least one group of our readers. Enough blankets have been given to fill 46 ocean containers! Praise the Lord!

For more information on other projects to help our persecuted brothers and sisters, contact: Voice of the Martyrs, P.O. Box 443, Bartlesville, OK 74005, 918-337-8015 or 1-800-747-0085. Email: thevoice@vom-usa.org, Website: www.persecution.com

(You may also give a financial contribution through EPM. 100% of contributions go directly to the ministry designated.)



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How To Keep the Internet Safe, Educational and Fun

by Jim Burns, Ph.D.

The Internet is here to stay—and it will continue to gain an increasing role in your children's life experience. The following are some practical tips for parents on how to keep your family's interaction with the Internet a safe and positive experience.

- **Educate yourself and your kids about the Internet.**

Learn about the Internet, how to search for information, link to related sites and more. Share your knowledge with your children and develop common surfing interests with them.

- **Select an Internet Service Provider (ISP) that offers server-based filtering (*filtering at the ISP's location*).**

If that is not available in your area, select a commercial service with parental controls. Always keep the phone number of your ISP on hand in the event your connection goes down.

- **Purchase over-the-counter or downloadable blocking software.**

If your ISP does not automatically filter out selected content, many good programs can be purchased or downloaded directly to your computer.

- **Set ground rules with your family and post them near the computer.**

Before children surf, they should be given clear guidelines on what is acceptable Internet activity, i.e., what to visit, who they are allowed to contact and how long they are permitted to stay online. Parents and caretakers must set and enforce rules. The most effective way adults can shape a child's Internet behavior is to engage them in focused, research-driven projects and supervise their projects.

- **Avoid sites that ask for personal information.**

Many Internet sites ask for personal information that may be shared publicly without your knowledge. Don't allow your child to frequent chat rooms with adult-oriented discussions or give out his or her name, address, or other personal information on the Internet.



- **Report suggestive messages.**

Never respond to messages or bulletin board items that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, threatening, or make you feel uncomfortable. Encourage your children to tell you if they encounter such messages. If you or your child receives a message that is harassing or of a sexual nature, or threatening, identify the source of the message and notify your local police. It's also important to forward a copy of the message to your ISP and ask for its assistance in preventing future incidents.



- **Recognize that your home is not the only place your child is accessing the Internet.**

Internet use at friends' houses, at the library, in school and after-school care, or camp settings may not afford necessary and appropriate safeguards. Talk to the adults who supervise these settings and find out what filtering safeguards they employ. Many technologically savvy kids are setting up Websites, some with slanderous content, on school and library computers without the knowledge of the adults who supervise these settings.

- **Remind your children that not everything they read online need be true.**

Teach your kids to be discerning information seekers. Any offer that "sounds too good to be true" probably is. Children should be taught to differentiate between advertisements and other content. They must learn that just because information is posted on the Internet, does not make it valid, reliable or true.

- **Understand the dangers of entering chat rooms.**

Once a user enters a chat room, he or she can immediately start receiving correspondence, even if they don't initiate it. This is where cyberstalking begins, and it often ends in violent crimes against

unsuspecting or overly trusting victims. For example, someone indicating that “she” is a 12-year-old girl could in reality be a 40-year-old man. Notify the police of anyone you don’t know who attempts to set up visits or meetings with your child.

- **Child pornography is a crime.**

Any pornographic depiction of a child is a crime. Should you become aware of the transmission, use, or viewing of child pornography, immediately report it to your local police. You should also notify your ISP immediately.

- **Look for the “good stuff” on the Internet.**

There is a wealth of good, clean and educational information on the Internet.

- **Encourage the safe use of e-mail.**

Encourage e-mail between your kids and their friends and family members, giving them less reason to communicate with someone they don’t know.

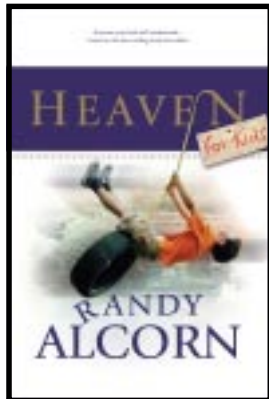
- **Make the use of the Internet a family activity.**

Keep the computer in a family room rather than in the child’s bedroom, and be an active observer as your child spends time on the ‘Net.

(Excerpted from the “Massachusetts Family Guide to Internet Safety,” a publication of the Massachusetts Family Institute. © Copyright HomeWord 2003)



New *Heaven* Resources Available This Fall . . .



Heaven for Kids

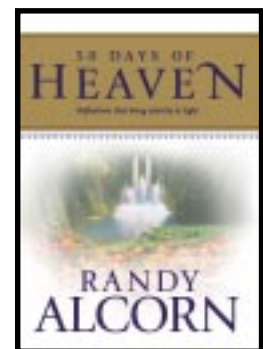
Enjoy exploring life in Heaven. After all, it’s a place where you can live forever someday—a place without fear, anger, sadness, or sickness. And it’s not just a place without bad stuff. It’s a place full of great stuff: beauty, joy, fun, lots of activity, and rest when you need it. We’ll have endless adventures together with Jesus and each other. It’s a place where you can live with the wonderful and fascinating God who created you. And it’s a place where you can hang out with all sorts of kind and interesting people who will be your friends forever.

This book has many questions and answers people have asked about life after death, and it’s especially geared to children ages 8-12.

50 Days of Heaven: Reflections that bring eternity to light

50 Days of Heaven contains stand-alone meditations to be read one at a time, including questions of self-examination as well as prayer. Many people who have read and appreciated *Heaven* will find this very helpful, not only as review, but as an opportunity to focus on bite-sized chunks. Though there is substantial overlap, it feels distinctly different and is more digestible.

For those who haven’t read the original *Heaven* book, and may never, *50 Days of Heaven* is an alternative that reflects the *Heaven* book’s heart and soul in a much smaller and more manageable form. It will also lend itself to group discussion, or a church or small group or morning study together spending 50 days/seven weeks on this. A couple or even a family could read this together at the dinner table or some other time.





True Thoughts About Heaven by Randy Alcorn

R. A. Torrey said, "True thoughts of the life that is to come clothe the life that now is with new beauty and strength."¹ The operative word is "true." Satan operates on the basis of an inverse corollary: "False thoughts of the life to come rob the life that now is of beauty and strength."

J. C. Ryle said, "I pity the man who never thinks about heaven."² We could also say, "I pity the man who never thinks *accurately* about heaven." (It's our inaccurate thinking, ironically, that motivates us to think so little.)

Two-thirds of Americans believe that they will not have bodies after the resurrection.³ This is self-contradictory—like believing that after a wall has been white-washed, it isn't white. Resurrection *means* that we will have bodies. If we didn't have bodies, we wouldn't be resurrected.

The creeds state, "I believe in the resurrection of the body." But many of us spiritualize the resurrection, denying its essential meaning: a permanent return to a physical existence in a physical universe. By envisioning ourselves as disembodied spirits, wraiths, we ignore what the resurrected Jesus said: "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have" (Luke 24:39).

As we'll see, the doctrine of the resurrection begins with the human body, but extends far beyond it. R. A. Torrey wrote, "We will not be disembodied spirits in the world to come, but redeemed spirits, in redeemed bodies, in a redeemed universe."⁴

Our view of heaven is comparable to standing out in a hallway and staring past an open door into a dark room. Getting a grasp of the resurrection and the New Earth is like stepping in and flipping on a light switch. Suddenly the shadowy images become recognizable...while our eyes have to adjust to the light, everything starts to make sense.



We'll reign over a resurrected universe, centered on a resurrected earth, with its capital city the resurrected Jerusalem.

What does "Heaven" mean?

When we hear the word "Heaven," there are different directions our minds can go. I've found they rarely go to where we'll actually spend eternity. What we usually think of when we hear "Heaven" is the intermediate state. That's where we go when we die. It's the place we'll live until the resurrection.

Where our minds rarely go is to the eternal state, where we'll spend eternity...where we'll live forever after the culminating event of human history that's linked to Christ's return—our resurrection. We'll reign over a resurrected universe, centered on a resurrected earth, with its capital city the resurrected Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1). We will eat, drink, work, play, worship, discover, invent, travel. Civilization will be resurrected, including human cultures with distinctive ethnic traits. There will be both resurrected nature and human culture. Together these elements combine to distinguish the eternal state, where God will come down and live with his people. (If you think these claims aren't biblically grounded, keep reading. You're in for a surprise.)

This is where we'll live for eternity—yet I've found that when they hear the word "Heaven" this is almost never what people think about. They think instead of the intermediate state prior to the resurrection, which is incomplete, awaiting the post-resurrection's ultimate Heaven. This book is not about the immediate Heaven we go to when we die, but the ultimate Heaven where we will live forever.





Earth's not our Home ...or is it?

I used to say "When we get to Heaven we'll be going home for the first time." I spoke of the paradox of how our true home is a place we've never been. I've since revised this statement because it's misleading. The Bible teaches that our eternal home will be a place we've already been—earth.

True, it will be a New Earth, a transformed earth. But just as I will be able to remember my friend Steve, who will be a resurrected Steve, so I will be able to remember my home, world, earth, which will be a resurrected earth. So, as Steve will be a person I already know, earth will be a place I already know. Then—and only then—does it make sense to think of Heaven as my true home, realizing that Heaven will ultimately be on the New Earth.

Human beings were made from earth, have always lived on earth, are geared to find pleasure in the things of earth. If we think of Heaven only as the realm where angels live, there's a real problem. We were not made from the angelic realm, nor for it. We haven't lived in that realm. It's unfamiliar and undesirable to us. It doesn't resonate as "home." There's one place that qualifies as the only home we've ever known—earth. It's the home God made for us.

But, you may object, Jesus said he was going to prepare a place for us, and he would take us there to live with him forever (John 14:2-3). Yes. But what is that place? Revelation 21 makes it clear—it's the New Earth. That's where the New Jerusalem will be taken down from Heaven to reside. Only then will we be truly home—in a sense, for the first time, but in another sense, home again. Our home will seem new and fresh and we'll feel like we're there for the first time, yet it will be familiar because our home will be a much-improved version of the world we grew up on.

As we'll see, the New Earth will be Heaven, for Heaven is God's dwelling place, and God will dwell with us on the New Earth. Heaven will include earth, and be centered on earth. What's made "new" is the place that was old and twisted. We'll be going back to the home we always knew, the home buried beneath the scars and sickness of sin and curse, but which we sometimes caught heart-stirring glimpses of.

We will know then that what we always longed for was not to live away from earth, but to live on earth as God created it, as he meant it to be—an earth without sin, suffering and death, an earth with the full beauty we now only catch glimpses and foretastes of.

A New Earth.

¹ R. A. Torrey, *Heaven or Hell* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1985), 68.

² J. C. Ryle, *Heaven* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 19.

³ *Time*, March 31, 1997, 55; cited by Paul Marshall with Lela Gilbert, *Heaven Is Not My Home: Living in the Now of God's Creation* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1998), 234.

⁴ Torrey, 68-69.

Without holiness on earth, we shall never be prepared to enjoy heaven. Heaven is a holy place, the Lord of heaven is a holy being, the angels are holy creatures. Holiness is written on everything in heaven.

...How shall we ever be at home and happy in heaven if we die unholy?

J. C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots*

Does Abortion Harm a Woman's Physical and Mental Health?

by Randy Alcorn



Please Note: In order to conserve space, footnotes are not included in this article but are marked with an asterisk and may be found in Why ProLife? by Randy Alcorn, Chapter 11, pages 129-132.

"Abortion has completely failed as a social policy designed to aid women," writes Serrin Foster, president of Feminists for Life. "It is a reflection that we have failed women."*

Joan Appleton was an abortion advocate with N.O.W. and head nurse at a Virginia abortion facility. She asked herself why abortion was "such a psychological trauma for a woman, and such a difficult decision for a woman to make, if it was a natural thing to do. If it was so right, why was it so difficult?"

Appleton said to herself, "I counseled these women so well; they were so sure of their decision. Why are they coming back now—months and years later—psychological wrecks?"*

Countless women who have been damaged by abortions have said, "I had no idea this could happen; no one warned me about the risks."

Common Complications

In her testimony before a Senate subcommittee in 2004, Dr. Elizabeth Shadigan testified that "abortion increases rates of breast cancer, placenta previa, pre-term births, and maternal suicide.... Statistically, all types of deaths are higher with women who have had induced abortions."*

At least forty-nine studies have demonstrated a statistically significant increase in premature births or low birth weight risk in women with prior induced abortions. "Low birth weight and premature birth are the most important risk factors for infant mortality or later disabilities as well as for lower cognitive abilities and greater behavioral problems."*

Malformations of later children are increased by abortion.* The frequency of early death for infants born after their mothers have had abortions is between two and four times the normal rate.* Induced abortion appears to be responsible for thousands of cases of cerebral palsy in North America.*

Ectopic pregnancies occur when gestation takes place outside the uterus, commonly in a fallopian tube. Such pregnancies are responsible

for 12 percent of all pregnancy-related maternal deaths.* The US Department of Health and Human Services conducted a twenty-year study on ectopic pregnancy rates, which indicated an increase in ectopic pregnancies of more than 500 percent since abortion was legalized.*

Studies show that the risk of an ectopic pregnancy is twice as high for women who have had one abortion, and up to four times as high for women with two or more previous abortions.* Of those who have an ectopic pregnancy, 40 percent become infertile, and the odds of having another ectopic pregnancy are one in three. Remarkably, "only 33% of women with ectopic pregnancy will have a subsequent live birth."*

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports, "pregnancy related complications, such as ectopic pregnancy...still affect 2,000 women each day."*

Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID) is an infection that leads to fever and infertility. Researchers state, "Pelvic infection is a common and serious complication of induced abortion and has been reported in up to 30% of all cases."* A study of women having first-trimester abortions demonstrated that "women with postabortal pelvic inflammatory disease had significantly higher rates of...spontaneous abortion, secondary infertility, dyspareunia, and chronic pelvic pain."*

Placenta previa, a misplacement of the placenta, is caused by "prior uterine insult or injury,"* including abortion. It's seven to fifteen times more common among women who've had abortions than among those who haven't.* "The reported immediate complication rate, alone, of abortion is no less than 10 percent. In addition, studies of long-range complications show rates no less than 17 percent and frequently report complication rates in the range of 25 to 40 percent."*

Women with one abortion double their risk of cervical cancer, compared to non-aborted women, while women with two or more abortions multiply their risk nearly five times. Similar elevated risks of ovarian and liver cancer have also been linked to single and multiple abortions.*

After extensive research, Dr. Joel Brind, Professor of Endocrinology at City University of New York, concluded, "the single most avoidable risk factor for breast cancer is induced abortion."* A woman who has an abortion increases her risk of breast cancer by a minimum of 50 percent and as much as 300 percent.*

"Statistically, all types of deaths are higher with women who have had induced abortions."

Dr. Elizabeth Shadigan, M.D., as stated in her testimony before a Senate subcommittee, March, 2004

Some women are unable to conceive after having abortions. Abortion increases the risk of malformations of later children.*

Common Psychological Complications

Dozens of studies tie abortion to a rise in sexual dysfunction, aversion to sex, loss of intimacy, unexpected guilt, extramarital affairs, traumatic stress syndrome, personality fragmentation, grief responses, child abuse and neglect, and increase in alcohol and drug abuse.* An Elliot Institute study indicates that women who abort are five times more likely to abuse drugs.*

Post-abortion specialist David Reardon writes, "In a study of post-abortion patients only 8 weeks after their abortion, researchers found that 44% complained of nervous disorders, 36% had experienced sleep disturbances, 31% had regrets about their decision, and 11% had been prescribed psychotropic medicine by their family doctor."* This is particularly significant since some women show no apparent effects from their abortions until years later.

Women Exploited by Abortion (WEBA) has had over thirty thousand members in more than two hundred chapters across the United States, with chapters in Canada, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and Africa.* Other post-abortion support and recovery groups include Victims of Choice, Post Abortion Counseling and Education (PACE), Helping and Educating in Abortion Related Trauma (HEART), Healing Visions Network, Counseling for Abortion-Related Experiences (CARE), Women of Ramah, Project Rachel, Open Arms, Abortion Trauma Services, American Victims of Abortion, and Former Women of Choice. The existence of such groups testifies to the mental and emotional trauma of countless women who have had abortions.

I read a newspaper editorial arguing that abortion is just another surgery, no different than a root canal or appendectomy. But why don't people remember the anniversary of their appendectomy twenty years later? Why don't they find themselves weeping uncontrollably, grieving the loss of their appendix? And where are all the support groups and counseling for those who've had root canals?

(Many men have also suffered trauma due to their involvement in abortion decisions, and the loss of their children.* Support groups exist for them as well.*)

Death from Legal Abortions

A study of pregnancy-associated deaths published in the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* demonstrates that the mortality rate associated with abortion is 2.95 times higher than that of pregnancies carried to term.*

The Centers for Disease Control reported ten abortion-related deaths in 1998,* but according to the same report, such statistics are of limited value because not all states require reporting. Indeed, abortion clinics have nothing to gain and much to lose by providing information.* What makes abortion-related deaths harder to trace is that the majority of the deaths do not occur during the surgery but afterward. Hence, many secondary reasons are routinely identified as the cause of death:

Consider the mother who hemorrhaged, was transfused, got hepatitis, and died months later. Official cause of death? Hepatitis. Actual cause? Abortion. A perforated uterus leads to pelvic abscess, sepsis (blood poisoning), and death. The official report of the cause of death may list pelvic abscess and septicemia. Abortion will not be listed. Abortion causes tubal pathology. She has an ectopic pregnancy years later and dies. The cause listed will be ectopic pregnancy. The actual cause? Abortion.*

A study published in the *Southern Medical Journal* indicated that "women who have abortions are at significantly higher risk of death than women who give birth."* This included a 154 percent higher

"I have got a child now that I wasn't planning to have, and I believe the hospital should take some responsibility for that....I still don't know if, or what, I am going to tell Jayde when the time comes."

Stacy Dow of Perth, Scotland, who is suing a hospital for £250,000 because her daughter, now 4, was not aborted along with her twin.



risk of death from suicide, as well as higher rates of death from accidents and homicides.

Women's Health after Abortion is an encyclopedic work citing over 500 medical journal articles, demonstrating the adverse affects of abortion on women.* Anyone still doubting that abortion causes serious long-term harm to women should examine this compelling evidence.

What Women Say

In surveys of women who experienced post-abortion complications:

Over 90% said they weren't given enough information to make an informed choice.

Over 80% said it was very unlikely they would have aborted if they had not been so strongly encouraged to abort by others, including their abortion counselors.

83% said they would have carried to term if they had received support from boyfriends, families or other important people in their lives.*

Every woman deserves better than abortion.

(Randy Alcorn, adapted from *Why ProLife?* [Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2004])



Is God Calling You to Give Your Life for His Sake and the Gospel in Missions? By John Piper

God's calling to missions is analogous to the gift of prophecy which we talked about on Sunday, October 10. The calling is not authoritative the way the Scriptures are. Your calling is never beyond question. You can't claim it to others the way you quote scripture to them.

Nevertheless our calling can be profoundly and durably sure in our own heart. It is the work of God to bring our heart to a point of conviction that, all things considered—including Scripture—this path is the path of obedience. The conviction is not infallible. But when it is of God, it brings peace.

How does God waken such a calling? I will suggest ten means that he uses. Only one of these is infallible—the Bible. All the others are relative. They are not absolutely decisive in your leading. They are important. But any of them can be overridden by the others. Various combinations of these are the fuel God uses to drive the engine of his calling in your life.

1. Above all, know your Bible and saturate your mind with it.

The Bible shapes our minds for mission durability (Psalm 1:1-3), and makes us burn for Christ (Luke 24:32).

2. Know your gifts and know yourself.

Every Christian has gifts (1 Peter 4:10-11). Knowing them shapes your convictions about your calling. And knowing yourself (as Paul exemplifies in Romans 7:15-24) deepens your sense of fitness for various ministries. (Keep in mind that this can be overridden by other facts!)

3. Ponder the need of the world.

The Christian heart of love is drawn by perceived needs, whether near or far. Therefore God uses what we know to awaken the measure of our desire that pushes us over the edge of commitment (Matthew 9:36-38).

4. Read missionary biography and missionary frontline stories.

Clearly the Bible treats heroes of the faith as divinely appointed inspirations for or the awakening of vision and ministry (Hebrews 13:7). "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" (Hebrews 12:1).

5. Inquire of your soul, "Where are you burdened for others?"

God sends and seeks the burden for lost people. Jesus carried such a burden: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! . . . How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings" (Luke 13:33-34). This burden was essential to his calling. What is your burden?

6. Know your circumstances.

Parents, health, houses, lands, children, age, etc. All of them matter in our calling, but none of them is decisive. They can all be overridden. "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30).

7. Pray for God to throw you where you can be best used for his glory.

I say "thrown" because in Matthew 9:38 that is the literal meaning: "Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to throw out laborers into his harvest." The point is pray! Ask God to use you to the fullest for his glory. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him" (James 1:5).

8. Do not neglect passionate, Christ-exalting, corporate worship.

The most important missionary calling that ever happened took place in corporate worship: "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:2).

9. Listen humbly to the spiritual people in your life.

They not only confirm your gifts. They are the instruments of God to awaken in you possibilities and joys of missionary service that you never dreamed (2 Timothy 1:5-7).

10. Cultivate absolute surrender of all you are and have to Christ.

This is the person that God leads to the greatest fruitfulness of life. Woe to the person who tries to be a half-Christian and never says from the heart: "I renounce everything for you, Lord Jesus. I am willing to go anywhere and do anything at any cost, if you will go with me and be my everlasting joy." This is why Jesus said, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. . . . Therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26-27, 33).

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Email: mail@desiringGod.org. Toll Free:
888.346.4700.)



Heaven Blesses Cannon Beach Conference Attendees

You can't imagine the reaction of people as I read certain passages from *Heaven* during our Sunday morning meeting at the Triad Handicapped Conference (see picture below). There were gurgles and squeals and hand clapping and arms flailing. The idea that someday they will have new bodies and be with the Lord almost caused some to wiggle out of their wheel chairs. And then to announce after the message that Randy Alcorn was actually giving each of them a copy of the book was frosting on the cake.

It was such a blessed weekend. What a thrill and privilege to share from God's word with these dear people. One message was from Ephesians 6 concerning the whole armor of God. For each piece of protection mentioned in the scripture I put on a piece of my mountain climbing gear (helmet, seat harness, boots, pack, rope, ice axe, etc.) and then talked about the concepts in the scriptures and how God had reinforced those concepts for me as I was mountaineering. I also showed slides from some of our mountain climbs to illustrate various points. They were so excited and kept telling me "When we get our new bodies and are on the New Earth we are going to go mountain climbing with you. Won't that be great?" I was in tears so many times. What amazing spirits these people have.

Ruthanna Metzgar
(The wedding singer whose story is mentioned in Heaven)



Attendees at Triad Handicapped Conference, Cannon Beach, OR

Questions and Answers

by Randy Alcorn

Is it possible to hear God speak? How can we know when He is really speaking to us?

We are not always great at talking to God, at least I'm not. But I think we are even worse at listening to God. Of course, if we think we can't hear God's voice, at

least in the figurative sense, why *would* we listen?

Some Christians "hear God" when He is not speaking, and many of us fail to hear Him when He is—and sometimes we manage to do both at the same time.

For instance, I know people who "hear God's voice" leading them to withdraw from fellowship and accountability of the local church, when God's Word clearly shows the need for assembly with the church (Hebrews 10:24-25). Since their action violates Scripture, no matter how confident they are that God has led them to dissociate from any and all local churches, I believe they are wrong.

The voice they heard was the voice of their own hurt, pain, upbringing, bad experiences with churches, impatience with others' faults, independence, desire to do everything their way, etc. But because they feel it so strongly they interpret it as "God's voice." This is different in degree but not in kind from people who sincerely believe God was leading them to murder someone. Sincerity and intensity and specificity of feeling does not equal God's voice.

As a lesser example, consider the people who are always saying "God gave me this song" and "God gave me this poem" or "God gave me this book" or "God gave me the words of this message." Well, I think God actually does all these things sometimes, but not *always* and certainly not just because we think so or want others to think so! As a result, the Holy Spirit has gotten credit—the better word is blame—for numerous things He would not want credit for, including lousy songs, bad poems, poorly written books and misguided messages.

In fact, the assumption that these things have come from God perpetuates their poor quality and our undiscerning nature. Why? Because the belief is propagated that God speaks to us easily and automatically, without study, meditation, counsel, long periods of contemplation and interaction. The person who believes God "gave me a message" on a Saturday night or as he preaches Sunday has no motivation to study Scripture and prepare his message next time. In fact, study and preparation and dialogue with others about a text and a message can now be seen as working against the Holy Spirit rather than

cooperating with Him. I've seen this, and the results are scary. Lack of discipline, poor planning and poor stewardship of time suddenly become virtues as we "trust the Lord to give us the words."

Certainly God does many things by Himself, without the need for our cooperation (e.g., the sun rises without our help). But in many cases He does His work while requiring that we do ours (e.g., He makes flowers grow, but we plant, weed, water and fertilize them, and make sure God's sun can shine on them). So when we think we are hearing a word from the Lord, for instance, He may well be speaking to us or leading us. But then He expects us to test it by Scripture and wise counsel, and plumb the depths of it and understand it better and more accurately, before proclaiming from the housetops "God told me an earthquake is going to destroy Portland next year."

Some years ago a brother in Portland actually prophesied that, and a number of Christians made sure they vacated the city that day. *The Oregonian* newspaper, of course, was quick to mock this when there was no earthquake. The man, who I think was sincere, apologized saying, "I really believed God had spoken to me."

Fortunately we aren't under the Old Covenant or he would be put to death—that's how serious it was to say you were speaking God's words when in fact they were simply your own. Usually, however, we have no objective confirmation that this was *not* a word from the Lord, and as a result we fail to learn our lessons—e.g., some people have unwisely gone into debt, believing God told them to, and ended up in bondage and bankruptcy. Some learn their lessons, while others say, "Well, it's what God wanted so I just have to accept what happened." They may be just as prone to make similar mistakes in the

*Some Christians
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future, again attributing it to God's leading rather than their misguided impulses.

So, I believe that sometimes we think God has spoken when He has not. And other times we don't think God has spoken when He has (through Scripture, counsel, providential circumstances—including divine appointments—and His still small voice in which He lays people and actions and words on our hearts).

I think those who are always saying "God told me to..." and finishing the sentences with "buy this car" or "visit this chat room" or "ask you to marry me" (not mentioning this is the third woman in the past year God has told them to ask) need to come to grips with the fact that just because they feel or want something, even very intensely, does *not* mean that's what God feels or wants. This is the danger of believing God has given you a prophetic gift or word of wisdom, and you start thinking that everything that comes into your mind is a word from the Lord. Hence, you begin to run your own life under the guise of God's direction, doing what you want and saying He was behind it.

On the other hand, many of us have exactly the opposite problem. We fail to hear God's voice in Scripture and through others and through the direct impressions put upon us by His Holy Spirit. We don't see His hand of providence in dozens of things that come our way throughout the day, and thousands throughout our lives (including, often, things such as diseases and death). So we need to become more alert to seeking and hearing God's voice.

If we think that nearly everything that enters our minds is God's voice, then we don't really believe in God's voice, since it is not special and distinct from ourselves. But if we believe that God doesn't speak and lead and guide except directly through Scripture, we fail to see the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the vital life-changing, life-directing role He is to have in our lives which often begins with Scripture, but does not stop there.

Consider 1 John 2:27, "As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him." Now, this is stated in the context of people being led astray by false teachers. I believe the anointing from God is the Holy Spirit. However, I believe the ministry of the Holy Spirit is also connected to the authority of Scripture as the

Holy Spirit's instrument. So He teaches us, and the foundation of that teaching is Scripture, which must be rightly interpreted. In doing so, we ward off the heresy and false teaching he's warning against in the context. But the anointing is more than Scripture, it's the Holy Spirit who uses Scripture *and* other people and things.

However, if we let the passage stand and took "you do not need anyone to teach you" out of context as some do, then we would conclude, as many have, that there is no need to submit ourselves to study and teaching and meditation guided by church leaders, since the Holy Spirit Himself teaches us directly, without the means of Scripture or the means of teachers of Scripture. The result of this misunderstanding is that every heresy becomes defensible by "I heard God's voice..." and people can take the spiritual high ground in embracing what is unspiritual.

Hebrews 10:24 speaks of the church spurring one another on to love and good deeds, as they meet together and encourage each other. One could say "It is the Holy Spirit who spurs us to love and good deeds and encourages us." Yes it is, but one critical *means* or *instrument* of the Holy Spirit's ministry is God's Word, and another is God's people, in the context of a local church. This is where authority and spiritual leadership, guidance, modeling and mentoring take place. (Yes, it may be hard to find such a church, and it is our calling from God to do what we can to help make our church that kind.)

The same apostle John who said the Holy Spirit was their teacher said the Holy Spirit was to bring all things to their remembrance (John 14:26) and to bear witness concerning Christ (John 15:26; 16:12–15). Yet they need to be taught and reminded of the truth by men, by human teachers who are hopefully filled by the Spirit, but whose words are not infallible and must be tested by Scripture (Acts 17:11). In fact, John was doing such teaching through his writings (His were inspired writings, of course, but any good teaching ministry—done by non-apostles and non-writers-of-Scripture is one of trying to be true to the inspired writings.)



If we think that nearly everything that enters our minds is God's voice, then we don't really believe in God's voice, since it is not special and distinct from ourselves.



God is always providentially present, and often lays on our heart certain things from his heart.

I think it's the old saying of Martin Luther, that the devil doesn't care which side of the horse we fall off of as long as we don't stay in the saddle. The saddle is the Spirit-directed life in which God is always providentially present (orchestrating details), and often lays on our heart certain things from his heart. He sometimes gives very direct and immediate promptings that could be accurately called His voice, even though it is not audible.

(Of course, God *can* speak audibly. He has never done so to me, though as a young Christian I often begged him to do so; but on the other hand, at times it couldn't have been more clear if His voice had been audible. The rest of the time I must figure it out based on wisdom and Scripture and counsel.)

The one side we can fall off the saddle is essentially to be Christian anti-supernaturalists (an inherently self-contradictory term) who theoretically believe in the Holy Spirit but practically speaking do not see him as actively working throughout the day in any ways that are tangibly manifested (when in fact both the fruit of the Spirit and the promptings of the Spirit are his work that should be "normal" in our lives).

The other side we can fall off the saddle is being Christian pan-supernaturalists who believe that everything we think and feel is charged with special significance and is a revelation from God. This sort of thinking mistakes a teacher's unbiblical statements and a young woman's flirtations and the offering of a job from a man you sat next to on a bus as the automatic and definite promptings of the Holy Spirit. By lack of biblically-based wisdom considered in light of the wise counsel of others, we can end up nullifying the true ministry of the Holy Spirit by seeing everything that happens and is said as the ministry of the Spirit. Thus we fail to distinguish between the Holy Spirit, on the one hand, and the world, the flesh and the devil on the other hand. Indeed, we can take the temptations of the world, flesh and devil, and attribute them to the promptings of the Spirit. We can thus "sense God's leading" directly into sin. We can do this sincerely, but of course we are dead wrong.

Both sides of the saddle are dangerous and deadly to our spiritual lives. God calls us to see the Holy Spirit as personal and real and present and guiding, as prompting and giving us insights and ideas. Yet He also calls upon us to act with biblically-based wisdom and discernment to be sure we are not attributing to the Holy Spirit what is nothing more than our desires or circumstances.

More Than Sufficient

by C. H. Spurgeon

*"My grace is sufficient for thee."
(2 Corinthians 12:9)*

The other evening I was riding home after a heavy day's work. I felt very wearied, and sore depressed, when swiftly, and suddenly as a lightning flash, that text came to me, "My grace is sufficient for thee." I reached home and looked it up in the original, and at last it came to me in this way, "MY grace is sufficient for thee"; and I said, "I should think it is, Lord," and burst out laughing. I never fully understood what the holy laughter of Abraham was until then. It seemed to make unbelief so absurd. It was as though some little fish, being very thirsty, was troubled about drinking the river dry, and Father Thames said, "Drink away, little fish, my stream is sufficient for thee." Or, it seemed after the seven years of plenty, a mouse feared it might die of famine; and Joseph might say, "Cheer up, little mouse,

my granaries are sufficient for thee." Again, I imagined a man away up yonder, in a lofty mountain, saying to himself, "I breathe so many cubic feet of air every year, I fear I shall exhaust the oxygen in the atmosphere," but the earth might say, "Breathe away, O man, and fill the lungs ever, my atmosphere is sufficient for thee." Oh, brethren, be great believers! Little faith will bring your souls to heaven, but great faith will bring heaven to your souls.

C. H. Spurgeon

*His grace is great enough to meet the great things—
The crashing waves that overwhelm the soul,
The roaring winds that leave us stunned and breathless,
The sudden storms beyond our life's control.
His grace is great enough to meet the small things—
The little pin-prick troubles that annoy,
The insect worries, buzzing and persistent,
The squeaking wheels that grate upon our joy.*

Annie Johnson Flint, February 27, 2005, Streams in the Desert

Letters to EPM

My husband and I have been so blessed by Randy's book *Money, Possessions and Eternity*. God used it to help change the course and focus of our lives. We in turn have shared these principles with many others. A. F.

I just wanted to thank you for your ministry and tell you how it affected my son this week. I had kept your last newsletter out on my desk intending to show my 18-year-old son who is a football quarterback being recruited by colleges. This has turned into "crunch week" between official visits and pressure from coaches to go on and commit to their school.

He read your "Letter to a Young Athlete" yesterday. He told me tonight he thought he had decided on a college and part of the reason is because of that article. He said after reading it, he realized if he went to a school that wasn't noted as being a conservative Christian or Baptist, etc. school, he would have more of a chance to really impact and change that school. He is graduating from a conservative Christian high school and feels like he could really stand out and make a difference for Christ if he went to a different kind of (secular) college. Thank you for your letter and for the impact it is making in my home. K. H.

PS. I first found your ministry after my 61-year-old mom was killed in a car wreck (2 years ago) and someone gave me one of your fiction books. Needless to say, your *Heaven* book means the world to me and sits on my bedside table permanently. It makes me excited for the day when I will join my mom there!!

I just finished reading my copy of *Edge of Eternity*.

To say that this book has had an influence on my views of my walk with Christ, and my prayer life, would be putting it mildly. D. M.

Offerings had been running under budget for several months here. Like many pastors I had been a bit reluctant to preach much on tithing, resulting from not thinking through the issue clearly enough.

I purchased *The Treasure Principle* and *Money, Possessions and Eternity*. I used these books along with some other material I had as a basis for four messages on the issue of giving and finance for believers. Since giving the first of these messages we have seen a marked increase in giving to the church and to missions supported by this church. We have definitely added some tithers from people who previously did not tithe. B. L.

I just finished reading *The Ishbane Conspiracy* for the third time. This time, I had my highlighter in hand! This book has made the rounds through many of our youth leaders as well as youth group members. It should be required reading for all parents. K. R.

I am a first-year family medicine resident. I have made the difficult decision to not prescribe any contraceptives (pills, patches, IUD's, etc) in my practice. The main motivation for this has been Randy's article *Does the Birth Control Pill Cause Abortion?* These possibilities were not taught to me in medical school and I really believed that the Pill completely suppressed ovulation.

Now I know differently and it has changed the way I approach women's health care. I encourage Natural Family Planning and I am trying to put together some resources to give patients. I wanted to let you know that as a ministry, you are changing hearts and my wife and I are all the more committed to Life. We had been on the pill for our first 3 years of marriage. After we both read the article, we felt that the Spirit was telling us to trust God and not use contraception except NFP. It has been the best year of marriage yet! We are even expecting our first child in April! Thank you for preaching the truth fearlessly even in the face of so much confusion in the Christian medical world. D. H.

Thanks for writing your novel *Dominion*. I was really struggling with and doubting my faith in God and the storyline helped me to take heart and think spiritual issues through more—that my trials are for a reason to conform me to Jesus' example more and help me in turn give that same compassion to others after I myself have received it from God. It has given me the courage to be more open about visiting other churches (I have come out of being in a church that taught that they were the only saved ones, no one else.) I am grateful to God to finally 'know' that I don't know who's saved and who's not. That's a burden I can do without.

Keep on ministering to others to help others fall in love with God, either for the first time or again and again. J. M.

I've just finished reading *Deadline* and, because of it, many important things are now clearer. I trust that my eternal future will be different too. I thank God. W. R.



"God used Money, Possessions and Eternity to help change the course and focus of our lives."



Quotable C. S. Lewis . . .

On Heaven and Hell:

☞ Aim at heaven, and you will get earth thrown in; aim at earth, and you will get neither.

☞ Has this world been so kind to you that you should leave with regret? There are better things ahead than any we leave behind.

☞ The safest road to hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.

☞ If we really think that home is elsewhere and that this life is a “wandering to find home,” why should we not look forward to the arrival?

☞ It is hard to have patience with people who say “There is no death” or “Death doesn’t matter.” There is death. And whatever is, matters. And whatever happens has consequences, and it and they are irrevocable and irreversible. You might as well say that birth doesn’t matter.

☞ If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.

☞ All that is not eternal is eternally out of date.

On our life here on Earth:

☞ I sometimes wonder whether all pleasures are not substitutes for joy.

☞ A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you’re looking down, you can’t see something that’s above you.

☞ There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, “All right, then, have it your way.”

☞ Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art. It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things that gives value to survival.

☞ Much of the modern resistance to chastity comes from men’s belief that they “own” their bodies— those vast and perilous estates, pulsating with the energy that made the worlds, in which they find themselves without their consent and from which they are ejected at the pleasure of Another!

☞ God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.

☞ The real problem is not why some pious, humble, believing people suffer, but why some do not.

☞ Courage is not simply one of the virtues but the form of every virtue at the testing point, which means at the point of highest reality.

God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.

Eternal Perspective Ministries

2229 East Burnside #23
Gresham, OR 97030

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