

Eternal Perspectives

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Fall 2008

Giving and the Great Commission

by Randy Alcorn



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That bread which you keep belongs to the hungry; that coat which you preserve in your wardrobe, to the naked; those shoes which are rotting in your possession, to the shoeless; that gold which you have hidden in the ground, to the needy. Wherefore, as often as you are able to help others, and refuse, so often did you do them wrong.

— Augustine

Obedience to the Great Commission has more consistently been poisoned by affluence than by anything else.

— Ralph Winter

The apostle Paul gave us our top priority: “What I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3).

The gospel, and therefore the spread of the gospel, is of first importance.

Church budgets often designate less than 10 percent of their income to missions. And what’s called “missions” often includes ministries directed at reaching our own country or community. More than 90 percent of an average local church budget never leaves the country. According to the U.S. Center for World Missions, only 5.7 percent of giving to Christian causes goes to foreign missions. Of that, 87 percent goes for work among those who are already Christians, 12 percent for work among already evangelized non-Christians, and 1 percent for work among people groups who are unevangelized or unreached. Americans spend far more on pet food—and chewing gum!—than on the cause of world missions.

Ninety percent of the world’s Christian workers live in countries with 10 percent of the world’s population. Here’s a question corresponding to this

statistic: If you saw ten people trying to lift a huge log and wanted to help them, and nine of the people were lifting at one end and one on the other, which end would you go to?

Some would say, “We have plenty of needs in our own country. People here are just as important as people off in some jungle. A soul is a soul—God doesn’t care whether it comes from our country or another.” But the gravity of needs of those without access to the gospel is obviously greater than that of those with churches in every community, a Bible on the shelf, gospel programs on the radio, and Christians living next door. (Why should some hear the gospel many times over when others have never heard it at all?)

Furthermore, although it’s certainly true that we’re surrounded by needs, our nation has vast resources. And almost every church and organization pours its funds back into our country, resulting in still greater resources. Our family and ministry gladly joined in contributing to help after the events of September 11, 2001, and again because of Hurricane Katrina. But given our extreme wealth, the truth is that America on its worst day was far better off than most nations on their best day.



The opportunities for using our financial resources to spread the gospel and strengthen the church all over the world are stronger than they've ever been.

We must realize that God is interested in more than the total number of souls in Heaven. He also cares where they come from! The four living creatures will join the heavenly hosts in singing praise to the Lamb: "With your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:9-10). John was overwhelmed when he saw "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9).

Christ is glorified not simply by the total number who worship him, but also by the fact that this number includes representatives from every tribe, language, people, and nation. Therefore, we must be making concerted efforts to see that missionaries, whether from our country or another, reach the "hidden" people who have not yet heard the gospel.

Shortly before he and his four friends were killed by the Auca Indians in their attempts to bring them the gospel, missionary Nate Saint wrote:

As we weigh the future and seek the will of God, does it seem right that we should hazard our lives for just a few savages? As we ask ourselves this question, we realize it is the simple intimation of the prophetic Word that there shall be some from every tribe in His presence in the last day, and in our hearts we feel that it is pleasing to Him that we should interest ourselves in making an opening into the Auca prison for Christ.

As we have a high old time this Christmas, may we who know Christ hear the cry of the damned as they hurtle headlong into the Christless night without ever a

chance. May we be moved with compassion as our Lord was. May we shed tears of repentance for these we have failed to bring out of darkness. Beyond the smiling scenes of Bethlehem, may we see the crushing agony of Golgotha. May God give us a new vision of His will concerning the lost and our responsibility.

We are motivated first by the glory of God, but we're also moved by the eternal needs of people. Many of us decry the fact that religious liberals don't believe in hell. But there's a shame even greater—that we who do believe in hell make so little effort to keep others from going there.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? (Romans 10:13-15)

Some of Christ's disciples must leave behind their money and possessions to go reach the thousands of unreached people groups of the world. Some of his disciples must stay where they are, reaching out to those around them and living lifestyles that allow them not only to pray for the others but also to give generously to send and support them.



The opportunities for using our financial resources to spread the gospel and strengthen the church all over the world are stronger than

they've ever been. As God raised up Esther for just such a time as hers, I'm convinced he's raised us up, with all our wealth, to help fulfill the great commission. The question is, what are we doing with that money? Our job is to make sure it gets to his intended recipients.

Imagine Christ multiplying the five loaves and two fish, and the disciples accumulating the proceeds until they were buried underneath, while the masses went unfed. It's a bizarre scenario, yet how easily

we bury ourselves in the resources God has handed to us, while the needs of the world go unmet. We assume that God has multiplied our assets so we can keep them, when in fact he has multiplied them so we can distribute them (2 Corinthians 8:14; 9:11).

All the royalties from my books go to Christian ministries, and most go to missions, famine relief, and development work overseas. Our ministry makes available at no charge all my books to missionaries and international Bible colleges and seminaries that can use them to train and enrich those serving Christ. I don't believe God has called me (for now) to spend my life overseas, but it's our privilege here to earn money and give resources to help those who have been sent. Jesus says, "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8).

Think of what Christian publishers could do overseas (some of them are doing this now) by giving away great books in English, giving away translation rights to worthy recipients, and helping to train nationals to become fluent writers in their own languages. Think of what your company might be able to offer at no charge to missionaries and needy national churches. Such giving should not be done indiscriminately but could be administered through existing faithful agencies that know best how to utilize such resources. (We at Eternal Perspective Ministries would be happy to link you with qualified ministries who will gladly help you.)

Giving money to evangelism is no substitute for evangelizing, but it's an excellent supplement to it. There's no greater way to invest our money in eternity than in the cause of world missions. All of us should be giving regularly to our local churches, and we should encourage our leaders in turn to invest an even larger share of their church budgets in world missions. Beyond that, most of us can invest substantially in the cause of world evangelization through many fine mission organizations.

Is it more important that starving people are fed or that they be reached with the gospel? The two are simultaneously critical, which is why Jesus commanded both. The dead do not hear the gospel—so to allow people to die or suffer needlessly is unconscionable. On the other hand, people who don't hear the gospel can't go to Heaven (Romans 10:13-14), so to feed them is right but to neglect to share the gospel is wrong.

That's why our ministry only supports famine relief organizations that are explicitly Christian and are committed to sharing Christ with those they help. Some experts estimate that more than half the charitable giving done by Christians is to secular organizations. It's hard to understand why this is the case, when there are people doing almost every kind of charitable work in the name of Christ and who will bring people what they need more than anything: Jesus himself.



Churches and Missions

The church I attend has a policy of substantially supporting our missionary families. We prefer to be one of a few churches—preferably in the same area—that make up the bulk of a missionary's support. Among other things, this concentration of support allows the missionaries to avoid the exhausting process of spending their furloughs visiting dozens of supporting churches and individuals across the country. By spending their furloughs with us and perhaps a few other supporting churches in the same area, they develop close relationships. This helps them not to become just a picture on a refrigerator. Furthermore, this personal contact dramatically increases the commitment and prayer support of the members of our congregation. (This provides another argument for sending people from the church on short-term missions trips to visit and work alongside the missionaries who are supported by the church.)

If a missionary family is supported by one hundred individuals, they have no spiritual community or home base. Likewise, if a church supports one hundred missionaries at \$40 a month, it has no missionaries to call its own.

Short-Term Missions

I can think of nothing better than if some readers would feel their hearts being touched by God to spend the rest of their lives on the mission field. If there's anything I could do to encourage someone to that end, I would do it gladly. I'm a strong believer in missions, and in my travels I've

There's no greater way to invest our money in eternity than in the cause of world missions.



seen firsthand God's wonderful work through missions and national churches. But I also encourage those who do not feel God's leading into a lifetime of missions to take a few weeks and go out on a short-term mission. Nothing will touch and change your heart quite like seeing the work firsthand and getting involved in ministry. It will also motivate your prayer life and stimulate your giving to missions.

Some have asked me, wouldn't it be better just to take the money spent on short-term trips and send it to the mission field instead?

In some cases, yes. Americans sometimes believe that our seeing ministry firsthand validates it. If a missions trip costs tens of thousands of dollars and involves minimal ministry impact, it's really nothing more than a fun cross-cultural experience—which wouldn't be enough to justify it.

But many short-term missions trips are strategic and greatly help the national churches, missionaries, and indigenous people. They create "world Christians," who come back changed and who will pray for and fund missions the rest of their lives, thereby spreading their world vision and serving on missions task forces in ways they never would have if they'd stayed home. Also, many long-term missionaries have started with short-term experiences that have helped prepare them and move their hearts toward missions.

It might cost a church \$5,000, for instance, to send a pastor to Sudan to fellowship with believers, hear their stories, teach them the Bible, and above all learn from these persecuted Christians. But when that pastor comes back to his church, his visit might bear the fruit of hundreds of thousands of dollars given, many hours of prayer, and an ongoing relationship with fellow believers overseas that otherwise wouldn't have happened. Furthermore, if people don't go on short-term trips, the equivalent money will almost never be spent on missions but instead will go toward cars, vacations, or repaving the driveway. *Many missions and vision trips are not funded out of missions dollars but from money that would have been spent other ways.*

Our church sends out more than one hundred short-term missionaries a year.

Consequently, our congregation is filled with world Christians who know our missionaries personally, pray for them regularly, and give to missions more generously. The eternal dividends far outweigh the short-term costs.

All That Matters

One day years ago, my Nigerian friend Samuel Kunihip and I were talking in my living room. We discovered we were the same age. After he shared what a privilege it was to be visiting our country, I said, "It surprises me that you have such a great appreciation for America. So many countries, even those we've helped, are anti-American. But many Nigerians were bought or stolen and shipped to America and sold as slaves, weren't they? With all the countries that resent us without good reason, I'd think you of all people would despise us. Why don't you?"

I'll never forget the chills I felt hearing Samuel's measured response, spoken slowly with his rich accent: "No matter what else you did, you brought us the gospel...and that is all that matters." (Yes, I do believe that other things matter besides preaching the gospel—among them character, integrity, and social justice. But Samuel was saying the same thing the apostle Paul said—that the gospel is more important than anything else.) Two generations ago, a wave of missionaries sent by American churches had won this man's village, including his parents, to Christ. As a result, while I was growing up in a non-Christian home in America, he was being raised in a Christian home in Nigeria.

David Bryant asks, "Who wouldn't like to end each day, putting our heads on our pillows, confidently saying, 'I know this day my life has counted strategically for Christ's global cause, especially for those currently beyond the reach of the gospel?'"

The need is desperate. Isn't it time we emptied our pockets to help reach the world for Christ? Like those who pray, those who give are partners with those who go (Colossians 4:2-4; Philippians 1:4-5). Some can go. All can pray. All can give. Will you?

As you consider your answer, imagine for a moment the warm voice of someone from a different culture—perhaps with a different color of skin—coming to you in Heaven, embracing you, and whispering, "Thank you—you brought us the gospel, and that is all that matters."

The need is desperate. Isn't it time we emptied our pockets to help reach the world for Christ?

By What Death Will You Glorify God? by John Piper

When John wrote his gospel, Peter had probably already been killed by the Roman emperor, Nero. So when he recorded the words of Jesus about Peter's coming death he was able to look back and interpret the symbolism Jesus had used. Here's what Jesus said to Peter, with John's interpretation.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!" (John 21:18-19)

It is a sobering thing to be told by your Master and friend that you will die in his service. It was oblique, but Peter probably got the message. And who knows what look was on Jesus' face when he said it. But such is the price of following Jesus Christ. This isn't so different from what he predicts for each of us. "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate...his own life, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26). "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal" (John 12:25). "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). "They will put some of you to death, and you will be hated by all because of My name" (Luke 21:16-17).

Tradition says that Peter was crucified upside down in Rome during one of Nero's persecutions in the mid-sixties. The early church historian Eusebius wrote, "Peter seems to have preached in Pontus and Galatia and Bithynia and Cappadocia and Asia, to the Jews of the Dispersion, and at last, having come to Rome, he was crucified head downward, for so he himself had asked to suffer" (Ecclesiastical History, III, I).

Jesus predicted the martyrdom of Peter. Jesus knew what sort of death it would be and he knew the time frame. This much

knowledge could discourage Peter. Or it could serve to remind him that, come what may, the Lord Jesus is never taken off guard. Not only that, but Jesus spoke these words to Peter after rising triumphant from the dead. This meant that "Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him" (Romans 6:9). Therefore Jesus will be alive and ruling when Peter comes to die. He will be there to help him. "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). And not only to help him die, but to raise him: "If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies" (Romans 8:11).

Jesus knew that there would be part of Peter's will that would not want this death. "Someone else...will bring you where you do not wish to go." Even Jesus cried, "If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me" (Matthew 26:39). So it is with all who follow in his steps. Pain is pain, not pleasure. Only a higher love brings you to embrace it when you could avoid it by denying Christ.

John said Peter's death was to glorify God, "This He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God." The way John said this seems to show that he considers all our deaths as appointed for the glory of God. The difference is: with what

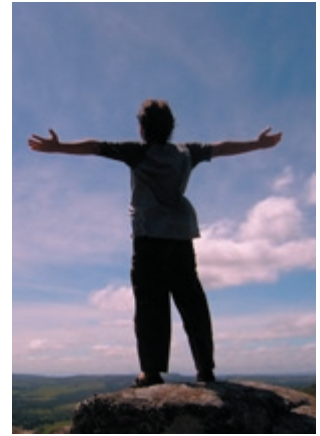
kind of death will we glorify God?

Are you ready for this? Will you show God great in the way you die? Will you say, "To live is Christ and to die is gain"? Will you call this ugly, defeated, torturing enemy sweet names? Will the loss of all your earthly family, friends, and possessions fade at the prospect of seeing and being with Christ?

After Jesus had predicted the horrible death of Peter, he said to him, "Follow me."

"Let us go with him outside the camp" (Hebrews 13:13).

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"I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

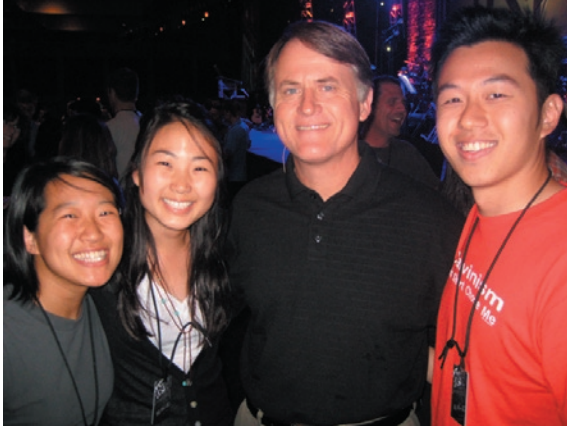
Matthew 28:20

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Randy with students at Resolved Conference

Reflections on the Resolved Conference 2008

by Randy Alcorn

In June, my wife Nanci and I attended the Resolved Conference in Palm Springs, sponsored by John MacArthur's church, Grace Community.

When I was invited and saw who the other speakers were, I blocked off the entire conference. Even though I spoke Saturday and Sunday mornings, Nanci and I stayed through the end on Monday night.

I had some great meetings with students, including several groups from The Master's College and Seminary. (Our daughters attended The Master's College and loved it, and we loved it too.) The speakers had meals together, and it was fun discussing theology with John Piper, John MacArthur, CJ Mahaney, Steve Lawson, and Rick Holland.

But to us, the best thing about the Resolved Conference was its conclusion on Monday night, when CJ Mahaney spoke on Christ's crucifixion, and then after the break, John Piper tied things together in the final session, drawing from Romans 8.

CJ spoke of our Savior's cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?" And though I have contemplated that amazing cry often, never did it hit me as hard as in CJ's message, when he referred to it as "the scream of the Damned." The place was full of tears and worship.

Then there was a break and music and announcements, and John Piper stood up to bring his message. Several of us had prayed in a back room that God would anoint John, and pick right up where He left off in the previous message. Wow, did He.

A couple of days after the conference I wrote a letter to CJ and John:

CJ and John,

I wanted to send this to the two of you in gratitude (mostly to God, secondarily to

you) in particular for the final night of Resolved. I have been moved to tears and deep worship many times, but not in recent memory to the extent that I was Monday night.

Mark 15 and CJ's "scream of the damned...for us" touched me at a profound level. The Holy Spirit spoke. And though I prayed and knew that John's message would beautifully end the conference, I was not prepared for the way it happened.

I have never seen, orchestrated or unorchestrated (in this case orchestrated by the Holy Spirit), one single seamless message spoken by two men with nearly an hour between the end of one and the beginning of the other. I stood that night on sacred ground, as did you.

Yesterday early afternoon, in the Palm Springs airport, I opened to Mark 15 and wept again. I then did something I have done only twice before, once on the day my 85-year-old father, in a hospital bed, repented of his sin and surrendered to Christ. The other time when my best friend from childhood died next to me as I was reading to him Revelation 21-22, leaving this world precisely when I was reading 22:17: "The Spirit and the bride say 'Come!' And let him who hears say 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes let him take the free gift of the water of life."

What I did on those occasions was write a date in my Bible: Feb. 9, 1992, at my father's conversion, and October 8, 1992, at my friend Jerry's home-going between "Come!" and "take the free gift of the water of life." The date is still there beside the verse I was reading when he died.

Without thinking about this, yesterday at the airport I wrote next to Mark 15:34, "June 16, 2008." Then something else happened. I wrote after the date, "The Scream of the..." And I suddenly stopped, overwhelmed, breathless, pen frozen in hand. Why? Because I suddenly realized I needed to capitalize the word "Damned." It was physically hard for me to do it. It seemed almost blasphemous...and so it should.

The unrighteous damned have no right to ask God why He has forsaken them (the

I stood that night on sacred ground . . .



John Piper

reasons are self-evident to all who understand His holiness and our sin), but God's Son the Beloved One had the right to ask, even knowing the answer and having participated in eternity past in the damning decision. He is the Lamb damned before the foundation of the world. So while the (lower case) damned will scream forever, ultimately there is only one Scream of the (upper case) Damned. Unthinkable. Inconceivable. And yet it happened...for us.

A flood of tears came as God preached the message to me yet again. That Deity would be Damned. That the God who is called upon righteously by the saints and angels in heaven to damn people, and called upon habitually by unbelievers flip-pantly and unrighteously to damn people, would in fact damn his Son, would (from the Son's willingness to drink the cup) damn himself...for us. That it could be said of the Beloved One, "God damned Him," and that He screamed the scream of the Damned....it was too much for me. It is too much for me this moment. And in the ages to come it will continue to be too much for me.

The cup of His suffering has long seemed deep to me, but never deeper than Monday night and the two days since.

Thank you, brothers, for being cleansed vessels, usable for eternal purposes. It was not only 3300 students whose hearts were marked for eternity Monday night. It was mine. You are not celebrities to me, but you are my mentors, in more ways than I can express. Thank you.



CJ Mahaney

And thank you, Lord, for these two men, who you used as one on Monday night—guard their hearts and empower them to finish well, bowing their knees to you moment by moment, day by day.

And thanks forever to the One who screamed the scream of the Damned...and whose praises we will sing for all eternity.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

For more information on the 2008 Resolved Conference or for inquiries regarding the 2009 Conference, see their website: www.resolved.org.

Ministry to Elderly: Homebound by Linda Ann Fumea

Many who are confined to their house are desperate for some human interaction and assistance. Your church can help.

Imagine being stuck in your home day after day, unable to leave for even the simplest errand. Many of our elderly share this fate, but even worse, they no longer have any contact with their church family. No one calls; no one visits. They feel all their years of faithfulness in attendance and commitment have gone unnoticed.

Don't leave them feeling abandoned. There are many ways to reach out to the homebound. The simplest way is to ask your church office for a list of members who have not been attending and call or visit them. Another idea is to evaluate the financial needs of the homebound and develop an adopt-a-senior program.

Since the elderly often depend on their Social Security checks to cover their living expenses, they must prioritize their spending. For example, they may cancel Meals on Wheels to pay for prescriptions or go without air conditioning or heat. Church members can sign up individually

or as groups to pay for utilities or meals every month. Alternatively, a benevolence fund could be set up to help with these or other specific needs.

In addition to financial aid, help with household chores is always needed. Grass grows, roofs leak, weak eyes need better lighting, wheelchair ramps and bath rails must be installed, sheds need fresh paint—the list is endless. Spring and fall are the perfect time for the church's teens to work on these projects.

Don't forget pets. Pets often become best friends to the homebound, so caring for a dog or cat is caring for its master.

The elderly who are homebound live in our neighborhoods, having worked in our communities, educated their children in our schools, and worshiped with us in our churches. A phone call, a visit, a home-cooked meal, or pet care would bring joy and light into the lives of those who are desperately in need of human contact.



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Linda Jeffries: Keeping the EPM office running smoothly

by Wendy Jeffries

There's a lot to know about Linda Jeffries, office manager at Eternal Perspective Ministries, but by far the best way to understand her is to know the God she serves. Even a brief conversation with her will have you pointed in that direction, and He is the reason she has worked at EPM for the last four and a half years.

Originally, Linda was hired part time, mainly to assist Kathy Norquist, Randy's executive assistant. The ministry grew, and as the needs of the office expanded, her role changed to office manager. One major cause of growth was the release of Randy's *Heaven* book. "It just exploded," said Linda. "Phone calls, orders, questions."

Amidst this growth, Linda coordinates and supervises staff and volunteers. "I like people. I like to be able to help people find and work within their gifting."

Part of her responsibility is to facilitate smooth operations and flowing communication. Key in office communication are the weekly staff meetings Linda coordinates. Her job is to see the big picture. "I know I can't do it. It has to be the Holy Spirit working through me. Each day I ask God to help me and give me the skills to be the person He needs me to be with the staff."

The staff is mainly made up of women, all intelligent and creative. According to Linda, some see this as a recipe for conflict, but things are actually quite the opposite. "We genuinely care and love each other, and that makes my job easy," said Linda, who has found minimal need for conflict resolution. "That's a gift from the Lord."

Since the first day of her employment, one constant that remains is answering emails. Randy cannot answer the vast majority of them personally, so Linda does her best to respond, often finding answers to people's questions in something Randy has already written. "When we get questions in emails, sometimes I think it's beyond me, so I pray about it."

The emails really picked up when *Heaven* came out. "Some are just heart-wrenching," she said, recalling emails from people who lost loved ones. "I feel connected to them

because they are sharing of themselves." Linda looks forward to lots of introductions and "tea times" with these people one day in Heaven.

Because Randy has written on so many topics of eternal value, Linda finds it difficult to claim any particular one as her favorite. "The areas he touches on are so huge. They hit you in a big way. At least they do for me."

Still, prolife and adoption are subjects close to Linda's heart because her daughter, Erin, was adopted from Korea. "Someone was strong enough to carry her to full term for me," she said.

Linda had already given birth to two sons, Adam and Christopher, when she and husband, Kerry, felt the Lord's calling to adopt. "There was a child out in the world that belonged in our family," said Linda. "But we didn't have the money." So we prayed, 'If this is what you want us to do, you'll have to supply the funds.' And He did." Linda recalled a time Kerry was asked to help transport a car and was compensated the exact amount needed for the adoption application fee.

The boys were very involved in the adoption process, picking out toys for their sister, helping get her room ready, and taking part in the home-study discussions. "I remember them praying for her," said Linda.

When the time came to welcome Erin at the Seattle airport, the boys were excited to meet her. They plopped down on a blanket and played with her right there at the airport. "She was their sister from the very beginning," said Linda. The family stayed in a hotel in Seattle as it was a time of celebration and bonding. "God just had His hand in the whole thing. God does give us the desires of our heart, and our desire was to adopt this child."

Linda has heard people ask, "Could I love a child I didn't give birth to?" The truth is, "They're your kid. That's not even an issue. It's like asking, 'How could God love me?' He just does. You're His child."

Linda has been married to her high school sweetheart, Kerry, for almost 27 years, and a perfect day for her is spending time with her husband and kids at home.



"I like people. I like to be able to help people find and work within their gifting."

Note: While more than one-third of Americans have considered adoption, no more than 2% have adopted. See an article on adoption from Focus on the Family at www.focusonthefamily.com/focusmagazine/parentfamily/A000001210.cfm



Teaching Children About Heaven: Answering Your Child's Questions

by Randy Alcorn

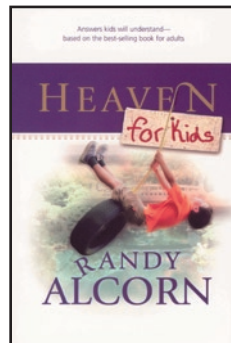
Life here is brief. However, death is not a wall but a doorway.

David said, "Lord, reveal to me the end of my life and the number of my days. Let me know how transitory I am ... every mortal man is only a vapor" (Psalm 39:4-5).

Picture a single breath escaping your mouth on a cold day and disappearing into the air. Life here is brief. It is like a dot, which begins and ends and is brief. But from that dot proceeds a line that will go on forever. Death is not a wall but a doorway.

Wise parents help prepare their children for the deaths of loved ones and the assurance of Heaven for those who know Jesus. But there is no Heaven without Jesus. To come to Jesus, you must repent of your sins and place your faith in Him and His work on the cross. You must trust Him to save you (John 1:12). He is the only way to come to the Father and have eternal life (John 14:6). (If you would like to trust Jesus as your Savior, see "Place Your Faith in Jesus" on the following page.)

For the Christian, Scripture says it is better by far to die and be with Christ (Philippians 1:21). Yet many labor under the fear of death, largely because they fail to understand what Scripture says is on the other side. If you do not know Jesus, you will be terrified by death. But much of the fear is relieved if you and your child love Jesus and understand that you will spend eternity in a wonderful place He prepared just for you.



Questions About Heaven

Scripture says, "We wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness will dwell" (2 Peter 3:13). Unfortunately, many children are not looking forward to this

because they have not been taught what the Bible says about Heaven. Hopefully, the answers to the following frequently asked questions will help you teach your child about Heaven.

1. Will we have bodies in Heaven, or will we be ghosts, floating in the clouds?

Many children are put at ease about Heaven when you explain that we will not be ghosts. No child wants to become a ghost. The Bible says, "We know that when He appears we will be like Him, because we will see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). Jesus in His resurrected body proclaimed that he was not a ghost but that He had actual "flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39).

Christ's resurrection body was suited for life on earth. As Jesus was raised to come back to live on earth, we, too, will be raised



to come back to live on earth (1 Thessalonians 4:14; Revelation 21:1-3). Teach your child the doctrines of the resurrection and the New Earth, and he will be excited about life after death!

2. Will we still be ourselves, or will we be angels?

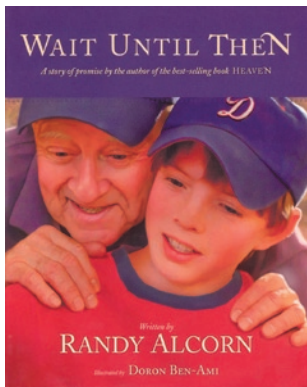
Angels and human beings are entirely different creatures (Hebrews 2:5-9). Angels will always be angels and people will always be people. Relocation to Heaven includes becoming better humans (Romans 8:23), not nonhumans.

You will be you in Heaven, and I will be me. Think about it. The resurrected Jesus did not become someone else; He remained who He was before His resurrection. When John was fishing with some of the other disciples, he saw Jesus on the seashore and said, "It is the Lord!" (John 21:7). So you will still recognize friends and family, and they will recognize you, too.

3. Won't Heaven be boring? Everything good, enjoyable, refreshing, and exciting comes from God. Jesus is creative, fascinating, and anything but boring. Heaven is going to be full of surprises and adventures as we learn more about God and explore His new universe.

God says that on the New Earth "His servants will serve Him" and "they will reign forever and ever" (Revelation 22:3,5). Servants are always active with things to do, places to go, and people to see. Rulers of the earth will have plenty to keep them busy!

4. Will we eat and drink? Think about the food you most enjoy. Maybe your idea of Heaven is eating that food for thousands



of years. After His resurrection, Jesus asked His disciples for some food and ate a piece of fish in front of them (Luke 24:41-43). He proved that resurrected people

can and do eat real food. Other Bible verses say that we will eat at feasts with Jesus in an earthly kingdom.

5. Will we laugh in Heaven? Jesus promised we will. "Blessed are you who weep now, because you will laugh... Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! Take note—your reward is great in heaven" (Luke 6:21,23). The Bible promises God will wipe away all of our tears (Revelation 21:4). Heaven will be full of joy. Do you think God ever laughs? In the Bible, God is said to enjoy, love, laugh, take delight, and rejoice.

We were made in God's image, so we have feelings and express them just as God does. We are sometimes sad now, but in Heaven there will not be anything to be sad about. We will all be happy. We will play, because God put into us a love for play.

6. Will there be animals in Heaven? Romans 8 says the whole creation groans with a longing for the redemption

that will be experienced with the resurrection of God's children. What else in the creation suffers besides people? Animals. The passage shows that redemption is not limited to people, but that the whole earth will be made new. This suggests that some of the animals that lived, suffered, and died on this old earth will be the same ones restored to life in God's earthly kingdom that is to come. They suffered because of our sin, so their bodies will be freed when we receive our new bodies.



Only God knows for sure what He plans to do. But we know God loves to give good gifts to his children (Matthew 7:9-11). So if it would please you to have animals with you on the New Earth, God will likely do it.

Place Your Faith in Jesus

If you have never trusted Jesus as your Savior and would like to, pray the following prayer:

Dear God, I know that I am a sinner and need You. I believe Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead so that I can know You and have eternal life. Please forgive me of my sins. I accept Your gift of eternal life and choose to follow You as Lord. Thank You for giving me a new life in Christ. Amen.



Heaven Resources by Randy Alcorn

- *Heaven*
- *50 Days of Heaven*
- *Heaven for Kids*
- *Tell Me About Heaven*
- *TouchPoints: Heaven*
- *Wait Until Then*

(These and other resources by Randy Alcorn are available at www.epm.org)





A Life of Endurance by Randy Alcorn

Paul prayed that Christians might be “strengthened with all power according to [God’s] glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father” (Col. 1:11–12).

We’re called to a life of endurance empowered by Christ, and accompanied by joyful thanksgiving. Endurance requires patience, because reward for today’s right choices will come, but it may be months or years from now, or not until we leave this world. Those who drum their fingers waiting for the microwave to finish demonstrate that patient endurance doesn’t come naturally.

Paul challenged his disciple, “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:3). Soldiers expect hardship and are trained to face it. As comrades locking arms in the service of our Commander, Christ’s humble warriors are to live out, on enemy-occupied territory, what Eugene Peterson called “a long obedience in the same direction.”

Today’s roadblocks and distractions make endurance in the Christian life seem unattainable. Our temptations aren’t worse than those in first-century Corinth. But televisions, computers, and even cell phones bring into our homes what used to be found only in back alleys. In our technological Corinth, temptations are only a keypad or mouse click away.

Failure to endure—in marriage, jobs, church, or any part of life—has become normal. A consistent long-term obedience, without periodic diversions into sin and unfruitfulness, seems an impossible dream. Sin has become so common, so expected, that holy believers are either elevated as heroes or dismissed as legalists.

In our disposable society, we use something up, then toss it (whether a paper plate, a spouse, a church, or a career). The stick-to-it philosophy is a relic of another age—something monks once did, but we can’t. And why should we? Who wants to work hard or become bored by staying a course when endless alternatives call to us?

But the essence of the Christian life cannot change with culture. Paul’s words to the Colossians and Timothy are words to us. We should not shrink from hardship. We should endure it with patience and thanksgiving. We are to follow Christ from start to finish, repenting quickly of our sins and moving forward in deeper devotion. Yes, there will be dry times, but overall, the arc of spiritual growth will steadily rise higher, not trail off so our lives end in a wasted whimper.

Endurance is Christ’s call to follow him, to finish strong for God’s glory. There is no higher calling, no bigger privilege, no greater joy.

Reunion with Those Who Endure

My wife Nanci and I attended a thirty-year reunion of our church college group. Forty came. Five from our original group had died. Most of those present had lost a parent or two; some had lost spouses, siblings, or children. A few marriages had died; two people had suffered mental breakdowns, others financial meltdowns. Some had children on drugs and in jail; several had cancer and other illnesses.

Yet it was a beautiful evening. Person after person kept saying, “God has been faithful.” We lingered late, tears wondrously mixed with laughter.

We sang our old Scripture songs from the early 1970s. Instead of being disillusioned because they hadn’t panned out, we were encouraged because they’d proven truer than we’d realized back then. God had indeed been “our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1). We had learned—some from great hardship—that God alone can bear the full weight of our trust. Admitting our imperfections, we experienced together the sweet fragrance of perseverance and spoke of anticipating a better world.

Understandably, some old friends couldn’t come, due to distance, health, and schedule conflicts. But some didn’t come because their love for Christ had grown cold. They had not



Failure to endure—in marriage, jobs, church, or any part of life—has become normal.

endured. Why? The question could be answered different ways. My answer for our purposes is this: *their hour-to-hour and day-to-day choices set them up for spiritual distraction and failure.*

Nanci and I walked away that night with a renewed commitment to finish our lives well. I pray that you will live the years ahead so that when you receive an invitation to your reunion, you'll want to come and hear—and share—what God has done. Don't make a series of choices that will make you into the person who wants to stay away.

Endurance Takes More Than Sincere Desire

In the final analysis, endurance will be a measure of the kind of character and integrity we develop.

I asked a gathering of thousands, "How many of you, in five or ten or thirty years from now, want to be sold out to Jesus Christ, a disciple of the King, empowered by the Holy Spirit, saturated in his Word, and yielded to his will?"

Ninety percent of the hands shot up. They meant it. Then I told them the bad news: many who raised their hands would never become that person. They would not finish well. It's easier to raise a hand today than to make the kinds of choices day after day after day after day that result in a long obedience in the same direction.

Every day we are becoming someone—the question is, who? Author Jerry Bridges, hearing me address this, told me that Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators, used to say, "You are going to be what you are now becoming."

Scripture speaks of this process of character development: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor. 3:18).

You become like what you choose to behold. Behold Christ, you become Christlike. Gaze upon superficiality and immorality, and it's equally predictable what you'll become.

Who you become will be the cumulative result of the daily choices you make. "The path of the righteous is like the first light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until day" (Prov. 4:18). This is why Scripture continually warns us against wrong choices: "Do not enter the path of the wicked and do not walk in the way of the evil. Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on your way" (Prov. 4:14–15).

Our choices flow out of our hearts, and therefore we must take care to guard them from contamination: "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Prov. 4:23). What's the most effective way to contaminate a water supply? Poison it at its source. If you don't guard your heart from the world's values, you will be conformed to the world (Rom. 12:1–2). It takes no more effort to be conformed to the world than it does to float downstream. To be transformed by the renewing of our minds is to swim upstream against the current. Renewing our minds requires conscious, deliberate effort.

You will become the product of what you choose to delight in and meditate upon. Psalm 1 is a powerful formula for endurance: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night."

We all meditate, and we're all shaped by the object of our meditation. We take our attitudinal and behavioral cues from it. This week, will I be shaped by situation comedies, soap operas, and newspapers, or will I be shaped by Isaiah, Luke, A. W. Tozer, and Charles Haddon Spurgeon? It depends on how I choose to spend my time.

Psalm 1 says the one who continually meditates on God's Word "is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither." Trees don't choose where to place themselves, but we do. We determine what our sources of nourishment will be, which in turn determine whether we bear fruit or wither.

Endurance Is Never Automatic

Following Christ isn't magic. It requires repeated actions on our part, which develop into habits and life disciplines.

Christ-centered endurance doesn't just happen, any more than running a marathon or climbing a mountain just happens or having a good marriage just happens.

Endurance requires a good plan, with clear and tangible steps that are taken one after the other. The farmer tills the soil. The



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weeds have to be removed. He doesn't say, "Lord, please remove the weeds." He prays, "Lord, give me your strength as I pull these weeds today."

The athlete doesn't say, "Lord, go out there and win that race." He says, "God, empower me to run hard and do my best, and if you so desire it, to win."

The key to spirituality is the development of little habits, such as Bible reading and memorization and prayer. In

putting one foot in front of the other day after day, we become the kind of person who grows and endures rather than withers and dies.

Ten years from now, would you like to look back at your life, after you've made consistently good decisions about eating right and exercising regularly? Sure. But there's a huge gap between wishes and reality. The bridge over the gap is self-control, a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). The key to self-control is discipline, which produces a long-term track record of small choices in which we yield to God's Spirit, resulting in new habits and lifestyles. Spirit-control and self-control are interrelated in Scripture, because godly self-control is a yielding of self to God's Spirit.

Most of us know the difference between eating cottage cheese and Krispy Kremes. Or the difference between a daily workout and spending life on a couch. Likewise, there's a difference between whether you read the Bible or you don't, whether you spend the

evening watching *American Idol* or *Survivor* or reading the Bible or a great Christian book. While the difference today may seem small, the cumulative difference will be great.

Many people say they want to write a book. What they really want is to have written a book. Talking about writing a book is very easy. Writing a book is very difficult. That's why there are more talk-ers than writers. And that's why more people talk about the Christian life than live it.

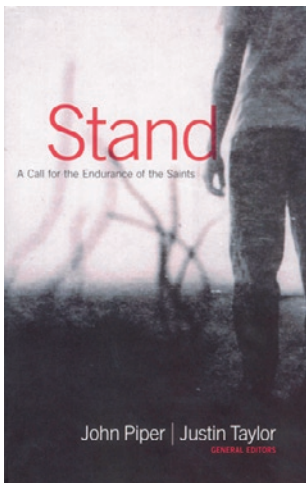
We want the fruit of the spiritual disciplines, but often we're unwilling to do the work they actually require. We want the rewards without the sacrifices.

One of my favorite websites for young people is www.TheRebelution.com, directed by Alex and Brett Harris. They challenge young people to "Do Hard Things" (the title of their first book). They're saying, "Let's not be a generation of self-centered materialists; let's discipline ourselves to follow Jesus and do hard things to his glory."

The life of endurance requires us doing many hard things. But these hard things are the very ones that bring purpose, joy, and satisfaction to our lives.

Excerpted from Stand: A Call for Endurance of the Saints, edited by John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books), 2008.

To listen or watch Randy's message from the 2007 Desiring God National Conference, or the messages from John Piper, John MacArthur, Jerry Bridges and Helen Roseveare, visit the Desiring God website at www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/ConferenceMessages/ByConference/37



Stand: A Call for the Endurance of the Saints

This thoughtful series, taken from the Desiring God 2007 National Conference, not only elevates the virtue of godly endurance but bears witness to its power in the Christian life through the exhortations of John Piper, John MacArthur, Jerry Bridges, Randy Alcorn and Helen Roseveare.

Stand will awaken and solidify rugged, Christ-exalting endurance in people who are weary in their faith journey or who simply long to remain firm to the end.

Available from www.Christianbook.com and www.DesiringGod.org

Abortion Is About God

by Joe Rigney

They say that nothing is certain except death and taxes. In America, at least, we can add one more thing to the list: Every four years politicians and pundits will wax eloquent about the “difficult” and “controversial” issue of abortion.

Debates about “a woman’s right to choose” and “a baby’s right to life” will quickly degenerate into shouting matches that obscure rather than clarify the issues.

As Christians, we don’t have the luxury of speaking with vagueness, ambiguity, and cliché. When we open our mouths, we must speak clearly (Ephesians 6:19-20; Colossians 4:3-4).

But if we are to speak clearly, we must first think and feel clearly about difficult and controversial moral issues.

So we need to realize that abortion is not mainly about a woman’s right to choose.

And it isn’t mainly about a baby’s right to life.

Abortion is about God, the Creator of the universe, the Giver and Sustainer of all life, the Judge of the living and the dead, the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the Redeemer and Forgiver of all who trust him.

Abortion is about God.

To leave God out of the picture of abortion is to trivialize it. All things are trivial without God.

God is the ultimate reality over the universe. All other reality is derivative and dependent and has no ultimate meaning at all without reference to God the ultimate reality. In him we live and move and have our being. If we leave him out of account, we know nothing of any lasting significance about ourselves or the world. (John Piper, “Where Does Child Killing Come From?” sermon)

During this election season, as politicians court the evangelical vote, it is vital that Christians remind themselves why abortion is the transcendent moral issue of our time.

To that end, The Bethlehem Institute (www.TheBethlehemInstitute.org) has designed a unique, six-week Sunday School curriculum advancing the truth that the deepest evil of abortion is that it defies God’s supremacy over life in the womb.

Entitled *Abortion Is About God: Reframing a Moral Issue*, the course provides a biblical

and theological foundation for the pro-life cause from a God-centered perspective.

At a time when being pro-life is marginalized in some evangelical circles, we want to lift up the cause of the unborn and urge our fellow Christians to not grow weary in doing good.

We will reap a harvest if we do not give up. And the strength to persevere comes from realizing that God’s supremacy over all things includes his work in the womb.

Abortion is an assault on the person-forming work of God. Children are a gift from God. To reject them through abortion is to reject him.

But we do not merely preach against sin. We also preach Christ crucified—crucified for women who have had abortions; for family members who have pushed for abortions; for doctors who have performed abortions; and for Christians who have failed to love both mother and baby as we ought to.

In that spirit, we commend this new curriculum to you. Our prayer is that God would use it in churches around the country to reawaken people to the centrality and supremacy of God in the cause of the unborn so that one day soon abortion will not only be illegal, but unthinkable.



Additional Information

For more information or to place an order, please visit www.TheBethlehemInstitute.org and click on “Curriculum.” For questions, comments, or other requests, you can email The Bethlehem Institute at info@TheBethlehemInstitute.org or call 612.455.3455.

Other Related Resources

- **“One Issue Politics” by John Piper**
www.epm.org/oneissue.html
- **“Conservative, Liberal or Christian?” by Randy Alcorn**
www.epm.org/christian.html
- **“Casting Multiple Votes Every Day” by Randy Alcorn**
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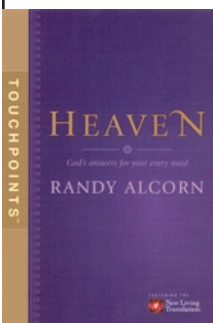


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