

Summer 2009



To Those Who Are Hurting and Confused

BY RANDY ALCORN

*Following is the introduction to Randy Alcorn's latest book, **If God Is Good ... Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil** (available September 15).*

I came to know my friend Jim Harrell after he read my book *Heaven*. We talked on the phone, exchanged e-mails, and quickly connected at a heart level. Jim, a successful businessman, strong and athletic for most of his life, told me he really looked forward to reading *If God Is Good*. He asked me for the first draft, which I happily sent him.

Jim contracted ALS, Lou Gehrig's disease, in 2003. Yet Jim

has called the last six years of his life the most significant. While his body deteriorated and he lost normal functions, one after another, Jim touched more people (and was touched more by God) than at any other time of his life.

While writing, I drew on Jim's wisdom, as well as that of many other sufferers.

During the two years it has taken me to research and write this book, many people have asked about the project. I expected that my answer, containing the words *evil* and *suffering*, would prompt a quick change of subject. Most, however, expressed keen interest and asked penetrating questions. Several launched into their own stories, as if having received permission

to uncork the bottle.

What, after all, is more universal to human experience than suffering? And what is more important than the perspective we bring to it?

How we answer the central question of *If God Is Good* will radically affect how we see God and the world around us.

We may want to turn away from world suffering and refuse to reflect on the significance of our own pain; we just want it to go away. But despite the superficiality of our culture, we remain God's image-bearers—thinking and caring people, wired to ask questions and seek answers.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

PAGE 6: Developing a Heart of Compassion

PAGE 7: A. W. Tozer on Worship

PAGE 8: A Pure Heart Before God

PAGE 13: Killing Is Killing ...

No Matter What We Call It

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No question looms larger than the central question of this book: If God is good...*why all this evil and suffering?* If God loves us, how can he justify allowing (or sending) the sometimes overwhelming difficulties we face?

Does this great question interest you? If so, I invite you to join me on a journey of discovery.

While traveling this long road, I found something surprising: the journey was not only rewarding, but fascinating, enlightening, and at times downright enjoyable. I know it sounds counterintuitive—shouldn't it *depress* someone to meditate on evil and suffering? In fact, I'd already seen enough evil and suffering to feel deeply troubled. What I needed was *perspective*. Instead of being disheartened, I'm encouraged.

In this process, I've taken the most pleasure in focusing on God, exploring his attributes of goodness, love, holiness, justice, patience, grace, and mercy. While my journey hasn't unearthed easy answers, I'm astonished at how much insight Scripture offers.

Seeking answers to this question should turn us toward Jesus in a fresh way.

In looking for answers, I've beheld a God who says, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering" (Exodus 3:7). I've found great comfort in hearing God speak of a time when he could bear his people's misery no longer (see Judges

10:16). I revel in God's emphatic promise that he will make a New Earth where he will come down to live with us, and on which "he will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain" (Revelation 21:4). Above all, in this process, I've seen Jesus.

The first physician to die of the AIDS virus in the United Kingdom was a young Christian. He contracted the disease while conducting medical research in Zimbabwe. In the last days of his life he struggled to express himself to his wife. Near the end, he couldn't talk, and had only enough strength to write the letter *J*. She ran through her mental dictionary, saying various words beginning with *J*. None was right. Finally she said, "Jesus?"

He nodded. Yes, Jesus.

Jesus filled his thoughts. That's all he wanted to say. That's all his wife needed to hear.

In my research and writing, my thoughts too kept coming back to Jesus. What better place?

Often God has wiped away my own tears as I've contemplated potentially faith-jarring situations. I've been left not in despair, but with great hope that defies description and a peace that transcends understanding (see Philippians 4:7).

This journey has stretched my trust in God and his purposes, and I have emerged better prepared to face suffering and help





others because of it. I feel I have much more to offer believers in Christ who may be questioning their faith, as well as unbelievers who consider the problem of evil and suffering their single greatest obstacle to faith.

If you stay with this book until the end, I feel certain you'll be better for it. I believe God will reward you, as he has me, not only with much-needed perspective, but with deep-rooted peace and joy, and renewed perseverance.

We each bring our own burdens on the journey.

If abuse, rape, desertion, paralysis, debilitating disease, or the loss of a loved one has devastated you, then this issue isn't theoretical, philosophical, or theological. It's deeply personal. Logical arguments won't satisfy you; in fact, they might offend you. You need help with the *emotional* problem of evil, not merely the *logical* problem of evil.

Though I write personally, from the heart, and tell stories of great courage and perspective, I must also present a case from

Scripture and appeal to logic. But remember this: you are a whole person, and the path to your heart travels through your mind. Truth matters. To touch us at the heart level—and to keep touching us over days, months, years, and decades—truth must work its way into our *minds*.

By all means, speak with a friend and perhaps a pastor or counselor.

But in the process don't seek comfort by ignoring truth. When you try to soothe your feelings without bothering to think deeply about ideas, you are asking to be manipulated. Quick-fix feelings won't sustain you over the long haul. On the other hand, deeply rooted beliefs—specifically a worldview grounded in Scripture—will allow you to persevere and hold on to a faith built on the rock of God's truth.

In writing his magnificent story of redemption, God has revealed truths about himself, us, the world, goodness, evil,

suffering, Heaven, and Hell. Those truths God reveals to us teem with life. The blood of man and God flows through them. God speaks with passion, not indifference; he utters fascinating words, not dull ones. To come to grips with the problem of evil and suffering, you must do more than hear heart-wrenching stories about suffering people. You must hear God's truth to help you interpret those stories.

Maybe you're holding on to years of bitterness and depression. You blame someone for your suffering—and that someone may be God. You will not find relief unless you gain perspective.

Or perhaps you fear that any attempt to "gain perspective" will deny or minimize your suffering, or that of others. I promise you, the Bible doesn't minimize suffering or gloss over it, and neither will I.

At times, each of us must snuggle into our Father's arms, like children, and there receive the comfort we need. Joni Eareckson Tada and Steve Estes write,

The Bible doesn't minimize suffering or gloss over it.

God, like a father, doesn't just give advice. He gives himself. He becomes the husband to the grieving widow (Isaiah 54:5). He becomes the comforter to the barren woman (Isaiah 54:1). He becomes the father of the orphaned (Psalm 10:14). He becomes the bridegroom to the single person (Isaiah 62:5). He is the healer to the sick (Exodus 15:26). He is the wonderful counselor to the confused and depressed (Isaiah 9:6).

The faith that can't be shaken is the faith that has been shaken.

God tells us that trials in which evil and suffering come upon us “have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:7).

Alice Gray writes of sitting at a restaurant, talking with a friend about painful challenges in their lives. They frequently mentioned the Lord.

Alice noticed a young woman at the next table with a radiant, joyful face. The young woman smiled and said she'd overheard their conversation. Speaking softly, she encouraged Alice and Marlene that God understood and cared about their heartaches, and nothing could separate them from God's love.

Alice continued talking with Marlene but realized something was different. The young woman's words had refreshed them. When the smiling woman got up to leave, Alice noticed she wore bulky shoes, carried a walking stick, and moved with a severe limp.

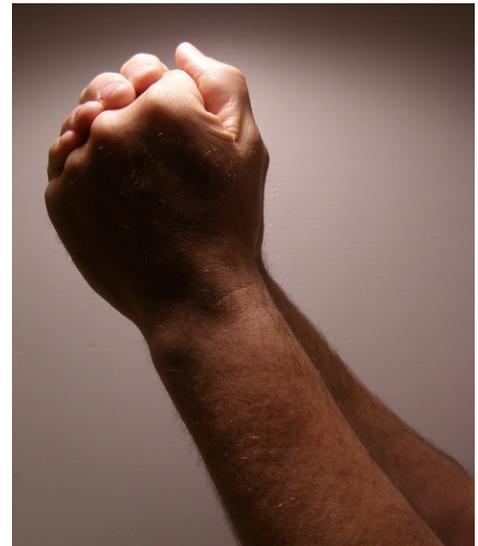
The waitress told Alice this woman had been in a near-fatal automobile accident the year before. She'd been in and out of the hospital and rehabilitation. Her husband divorced her, their home had been sold, and she'd just moved into her own apartment. She used public transportation because she couldn't drive. She'd been unable to find a job.

Alice sat stunned. She says, “This young woman's conversation had been filled with delights of the Lord. There had been no weariness about her. She had encouraged us with words of praise and promise. Meeting her that day, we never would have suspected that storms were raging in her life. Even as she stepped outside into the cold winter wind, she seemed to carry God's warm shelter of hope with her.”

God's Word is central to gaining an eternal perspective.

In times of crisis we try to make sense of life. We crave perspective for our minds and relief for our hearts. We need our worldview realigned by God's inspired Word: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

I quote Scripture frequently because God promises that his Word “will not return to me empty, but will accomplish



what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11). God never makes such a promise about my words or your words. I want this book to accomplish God's purpose—and that will happen only if it remains faithful to his words.

The book won't work magic or make your problems disappear. But I hope God will use it to help you, regardless of the difficulties you face. He offers us profound, moving, and surprising insights that can feed our minds, warm our hearts, and give us the strength to face a

world that is not what it once was, or what it one day will be. I pray that readers of *If God Is Good* will not only find help for themselves, but life-changing insights to share with others—believers and unbelievers, family and friends and neighbors and co-workers—in their time of greatest need.





“Dad, I know where I am”

A young girl's life and death inspire her family to share the hope of Heaven BY STEPHANIE ANDERSON

Three weeks before she died, eleven-year-old Ann Kumm told her younger sister exactly what she wanted for her funeral. And she had told others she wasn't afraid to die. She knew where she was going.

Late in the evening of July 5, 2008, her parents said goodbye to their daughter after a horse riding accident abruptly ended her young life.

“I can tell you the pain we felt was so intense that if I had the power of God, I would have shook the earth and blocked out the sun,” her father Mike wrote. “But in the midst of our sorrow is when God took action.”

As her mom, LaNell, held Ann's lifeless body in the hospital room, Mike suddenly had a brief vision of his daughter standing before the gate to Heaven. An hour later, when they began their final goodbyes, Mike saw Ann once again, standing at Heaven's gate and looking at him until she turned to go.

“It's important you know that she wasn't sad, crying, or upset,” Mike wrote. “She was excited about where she was, with a look on her face of, ‘Dad, I know where I am.’ She was home.”

Although God has used that last sight of their daughter to comfort them as parents, Mike also believes it was meant to encourage them to testify about the existence of God and Heaven. So it was no coincidence that the day of Ann's funeral, LaNell was given a *Heaven* booklet by Randy Alcorn.

“I really can't wait [for Heaven], but I will do the Lord's work while I am here,” LaNell said. “I just have to know all I can about Heaven, because that is where my precious daughter is.”

This hope of Heaven has inspired a fruitful ministry for Ann's family as they reach out to others who are experiencing loss. LaNell felt a special compassion for others who are grieving, and began reading obituaries so she could send a note and a *Heaven* booklet to those who have lost a child, or *Heaven for Kids* to children in families who have lost a sibling or a parent. LaNell and Mike also planned and hosted a

dinner for bereaved parents, with the goal of offering them a message of hope.

Randy Alcorn's books on Heaven have been a key part of sharing that message. LaNell, her sister Laurie, and her mother LaDonna have together passed out over 500 *Heaven* booklets and dozens of Randy's other Heaven-related books, such as *TouchPoints: Heaven*, *50 Days of Heaven*, and *Heaven for Kids*. Talking about Ann—the girl who loved horses, reading, and Jesus—is a way for her family to share with others who need the hope of Christ.

“I just pray God puts the people in our path He wants us to give the books to,” Laurie wrote.

It seems God is continuing to honor that prayer. One morning Laurie was at the DMV and thought she was out of *Heaven* booklets. But when she opened her purse, she found one and gave it to a man she had met and been talking with. Ten minutes later, she had the chance to share about her niece yet again and wished she had a booklet to give. Surprisingly, when she sat down, she found another booklet stashed inside her purse.

“I am convinced God will continue to do great things,” Laurie wrote. “It's amazing the people He puts in our paths to give them [the *Heaven* booklets] to.”

(You may purchase the Heaven booklets from our website, www.epm.org, for \$10/packet of 20.)



Photo by Priceless Portraits

Kristine, LaNell, Henry, Mike, Ann, and Brooke Kumm



Developing a Heart of Compassion

EPM STAFF SPOTLIGHT BY CATHERINE SIMONS

When I began volunteering at EPM in January of 2007 and joined the staff as a receptionist two months later, I didn't know then how God would use this ministry to teach me about developing a heart of compassion.

I love the contact with people my job gives me as I manage projects, provide support for the other employees, and offer encouragement and a smile to anyone God brings into my day. Each phone call and email brings new surprises, and the questions are interesting and challenging. One of my favorites came from a child who asked, "Will there be fat people in Heaven?" The tears and hurts expressed by others are real and provide many opportunities to give God's counsel from His word, share my faith and life experience, and pray with callers.

It's amazing to see how EPM's ministry touches believers around the world. A highlight for me was being introduced through an email to the first and only Pregnancy Resource Center in the country of Serbia. I have corresponded with their director and prayed for her, the country, and the prolife movement there. When the center was invited to teach about abstinence in public schools, EPM sent a gift to help

with printing materials for that ministry.

Since Randy believes it is essential for people to find Bible-believing, Christ-centered churches to help them in their spiritual growth, one of my jobs is maintaining a database of churches around the country and the world. (I've had requests for church referrals from as far away as Japan and Australia!) When I receive a request, I pray and trust God to give me insight and wisdom as I carefully choose a few churches I think might be a good match. The final results are in God's hands, and I know He helps many find good church homes.

Churches are a familiar subject to me because my husband Dennis and I were in pastoral ministry for 27 years, serving in two churches. While he was a pastor, Dennis got involved in Emergency Services Chaplaincy, and 15 years ago he decided to make it his main ministry. We are now missionaries in our own community: he is a full-time volunteer chaplain serving fire, police, EMT workers, and community members. Dennis feels he is a "pastor-at-large to the community," and he has a remarkable ministry meeting people at their moments of greatest need. I work with him behind the scenes and also keep the chaplain "on his feet"—no small job since with the blessing of ministering comes the challenge of managing our own stress levels.

Because of what we do in the chaplaincy, I wanted to be genuine in my empathy for others. I have always been an encourager and love to help people, but a few years ago I realized I was not letting myself "feel" the pain of others, so I asked God to make my heart tender. Boy, does He answer prayers like that.

God has used EPM to teach me so much about compassion and being aware of others' needs. One of my assignments is maintaining a database of giving opportunities from ministries all over the world to help us disperse the royalties from Randy's books, 100% of which are donated to worthy ministries. It has made my heart so tender to others, and I wish everyone could be as aware of the many needs. I have a special passion for orphans and have cultivated a heart for them by praying, giving, and helping others hear of their needs. I'm sure at times I've been overzealous about how we as Americans have so much to give. Do you suppose I have been influenced by that great book *The Treasure Principle*?

I hope to continue being faithful to what I've learned as I get older—and possibly wiser. I like that EPM values those of us in our "retirement years," and I've teased our office manager by asking, "Can I work or volunteer at EPM as long as I can climb the stairs to our office?" Only God knows what my future holds, but I want to finish well.

A. W. Tozer on *Worship*

Worship Seven Days a Week

But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him.

—Habakkuk 2:20

So I've got to tell you that if you do not worship God seven days a week, you do not worship Him on one day a week. There is no such thing known in heaven as Sunday worship unless it is accompanied by Monday worship and Tuesday worship and so on....

We come into God's house and say, "The Lord is in His holy temple, let us all kneel before Him." Very nice. I think it's nice to start a service that way once in a while. But when any of you men enter your office Monday morning at 9 o'clock, if you can't walk into that office and say, "The Lord is in my office, let all the world be silent before Him," then you are not worshiping the Lord on Sunday. If you can't worship Him on Monday you didn't worship Him on Sunday. If you don't worship Him on Saturday you are not in very good shape to worship Him on Sunday.

Tozer on Worship and Entertainment, 9, 24

The Program

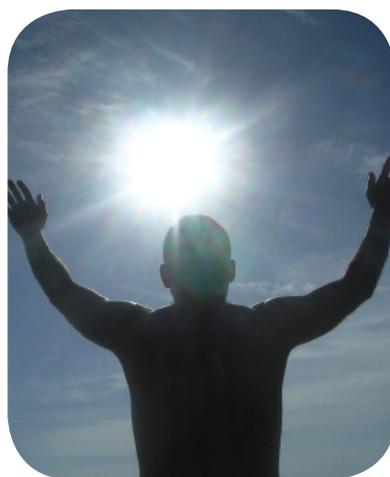
For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.

—Matthew 18:20

Now, I freely admit that it is impossible to hold a Christian service without an agenda. If order is to be maintained, an order of service must exist somewhere. If two songs are to be sung, someone must know which one is to be sung first, and whether this knowledge is only in someone's head or has been reduced to paper there is indeed a "program," however we may dislike to call it that. The point we make here is that in our times the program has been substituted for the Presence. The program rather than the Lord of glory is the center of attraction. So the most popular gospel church in any city is likely to be the one that offers the most interesting program; that is, the church that can present the most and best features for the enjoyment of the public....

We'll do our churches a lot of good if we each one seek to cultivate the blessed Presence in our services. If we make Christ the supreme and constant object of devotion the program will take its place as a gentle aid to order in the public worship of God. If we fail to do this the program will finally obscure the Light entirely, and no church can afford that.

The Root of the Righteous, 107-109



What Good Is It?

And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!"

—Isaiah 6:3

If you want to pray strategically, in a way which would please God, pray that God might raise up men who would see the beauty of the Lord our God and would begin to preach it and hold it out to people, instead of offering peace of mind, deliverance from cigarettes, a better job and nicer cottage....

What good is all our busy religion if God isn't in it? What good is it if we've lost majesty, reverence, worship—an awareness of the divine? What good is it if we've lost a sense of the Presence and the ability to retreat within our own hearts and meet God in the garden?

If we've lost that, why build another church? Why make more converts to an effete Christianity? Why bring people to follow after a Savior so far off that He doesn't own them?

We need to improve the quality of our Christianity, and we never will until we raise our concept of God back to that held by apostle, sage, prophet, saint and reformer. When we put God back where He belongs, we will instinctively and automatically move up again; the whole spiral of our religious direction will be upward.

The Attributes of God, 194-195



Joe Gibbs and *The Game Plan for Life*

From Randy Alcorn:

Joe drafted a team of men to specifically address each area, focusing primarily on what the Bible says about these issues. He asked if I would write about Heaven. Joe said the *Heaven* book had meant a lot to him, and I told him I was glad to contribute a chapter.

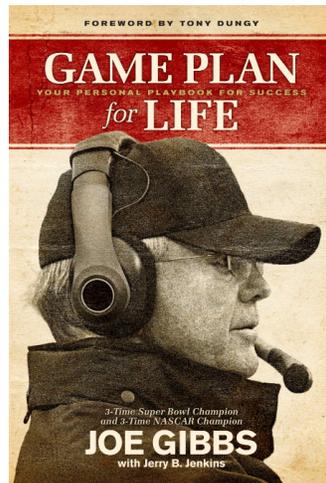
What is *The Game Plan for Life*?

What defines true success? How can you live a life of relevance? Do you want to win the most important game of your life? There are many “game plans” around; how is yours working?

As a three-time Super Bowl winning Head Coach of the Washington Redskins, owner of a three-time NASCAR championship team, and CEO of a business with 450+ employees—with primary sponsors Home Depot, FedEx, Mars Candy, Coke and Interstate Batteries—men are interested in hearing Coach Joe Gibbs speak about success and winning.

The Game Plan for Life: Your Personal Playbook for Success is the fulfillment of a long-time vision of Joe’s. Given his unique rise to the top of two different sports, NFL football and NASCAR racing, Coach Gibbs is often asked to speak and share his personal testimony with crowds. Men especially want to know what it takes to be “successful” and “relevant.”

In the spring of '08 Coach Gibbs commissioned a national public opinion research firm to survey men. He wanted to know what areas men were most concerned about in their lives—if they could master these areas they’d live a truly successful and relevant life. He discovered there were eleven key issues that men age 20 and older struggle with: the Bible, God, creation, sin and addiction, salvation, relationships, finances, career, health, life of purpose, and Heaven.



Here is the complete list of contributors:

- **Randy Alcorn** on Heaven
- **Ron Blue** on managing your finances
- **Ken Boa** on God
- **Chuck Colson** on becoming a member of God's team
- **Tony Evans** on finding your purpose in life
- **Os Guinness** on choosing a successful career
- **Walt Larimore** on attaining peak physical and emotional health
- **John Lennox** on the origins of life
- **Josh McDowell** on the Bible
- **Don Meredith** on sex, marriage, and relationships
- **Ravi Zacharias** on overcoming sin and addiction

Joe also asked Tony Dungy to write the foreword and Jerry Jenkins to be the editor. (It's hard to say no to Joe; he's the real deal, a follower of Jesus who wants the world to know all about Him.)

Be sure to check out *The Game Plan for Life* website, www.gameplanforlife.com, for resources on all the topics the book will cover. You can see a video talk from Joe, and check out information on the subjects and writers.

Note: *The Game Plan for Life* will be released July 21, 2009.

A Pure Heart Before God

What God's Word has to say about sexual purity

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God. (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5)

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place. (Ephesians 5:3-4)

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! (1 Corinthians 10:12)

You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:20)

Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. (2 Timothy 2:22)

The grace of God teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. (Titus 2:12)

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. (2 Peter 1:3-4)

Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart. (Psalm 24:3-4)

Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure . . . think about such things. (Philippians 4:8)

I have hidden your Word in my heart that I might not sin against you. (Psalm 119:11)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. For what is man's lot from God above, his heritage from the Almighty on high? Is it not ruin for the wicked, disaster for those who do wrong? Does he not see my ways and count my every step? (Job 31:1-4)

Let the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve. (Jeremiah 17:10)



Related Resources

- *The Purity Principle* by Randy Alcorn
- *Sexual Temptation Booklet: How Christian Workers Can Win the Battle* by Randy Alcorn
- *The Look: Does God Really Care What I Wear?* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss
- *For Young Women Only: What You Need to Know About How Guys Think* by Shaunti Feldhahn and Lisa A. Rice

For more resources on sexual purity, including Randy's "Guidelines for Sexual Purity" handout and a video of young men speaking on sexual purity, visit www.epm.org/resources-sexual_purity.html

Ministering to Inmates in the U.S.

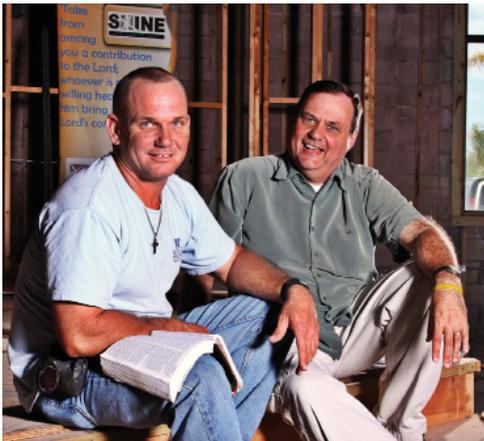
For 32 years, Prison Fellowship has been taking hope, forgiveness, and healing into the darkest corners of our society

- More than 121,000 prisoners monthly attend Prison Fellowship events and Bible studies
- 22,308 in-prison volunteers and over 10,000 partnering churches care for prisoners and their families throughout the year
- Over 700,000 prisoners have been reached with the message of Jesus Christ through Operation Starting Line (OSL), an evangelistic collaboration of ministries
- And 7.5 million prisoners' children have been given hope through Angel Tree through the years.

Operation Starting Line (OSL) is a network of national, regional and state ministries and organizations working together to support prisoners, their families and the prison community through evangelism, discipleship and collaboration.

OSL provides follow-up activities including special prisoner-sensitive curriculum of Bible studies, personal development courses and leadership instruction which includes evangelism workshops, Bible correspondence programs, materials to Chaplains, child/parent connections events, etc. Prisoners are given an immediate opportunity to sign up for correspondence Bible study courses through Crossroad Bible Institute in Michigan (www.crossroad-bible.org).

Volunteers are needed by participating collaborators for every project, both to participate in the in-prison events, and also to provide on-going support. To find out how you can get involved, contact Prison Fellowship Ministries.



Twain Rodgers was in jail again, sitting across from Pastor Roger Ball of Immanuel Church in Vero Beach, Florida—which Twain had been visiting since his last time behind bars. Twain had stood up at a recent Sunday service, confidently announcing that he had surrendered his life to Christ and was ready to turn his life around. Almost immediately, he went back to drugs—and then back to jail. But while visiting Twain, Pastor Ball grabbed his hands and promised, “Twain Rodgers, I will never give up on you.” And neither did his church. After Twain received probation, he returned to his church family, where he found committed mentors and accountability partners to help him finally break his 23-year crack addiction and become a man of integrity. “He’s been drug-free nearly two years now,” says one of Twain’s mentors, “and I’m so proud of him!”

Terrance Williams-Bey committed murder at the age of 19, earning a 25-year sentence. The Tennessee native came to know Christ in prison, but needed help from an able mentor to see him through two crises that could have derailed his journey to restoration. James Ackerman, a Prison Fellowship volunteer, entered his life at a time when Muslim prisoners were clouding his conclusions about the identity of Christ. James provided a steady example of God’s truth. He would do it again when James was eventually released. Forced to choose between tolerating open racism in his workplace or lose a hard-to-find job, Terrence chose to risk financial hardship. James provided valuable assistance to bridge the gap. Then, surprisingly, Terrence’s employer apologized and asked him to return. Today, Terrence is a model employee, volunteering in his community, and leading his extended family in Bible study.



**Prison Fellowship
Ministry**

Donations Only:

P.O. Box 1550
Merrifield, VA 22116

All General

Correspondence:
44180 Riverside Parkway
Lansdowne, VA 20176

(877) 478-0100

Angel Tree inquiries:

(800) 552-6435

*Local volunteer
opportunities:*

(800) 251-7411

Website: www.pfm.org

*Prisoner responses to EPM's
book ministry to inmates:*

"In my 18 years of knowing Jesus as my Lord and Savior, my favorite author is Randy Alcorn and my favorite book is Safely Home. In the 43 months in prison, I have read 132 books."

✎

"No other author that I have read has ever gotten my mind on the things of God as you do."

✎

"I would like to say thank you for your books and glory be to God. I have read Deadline and it was a very large seed that got planted and was responsible for my coming to the Lord and giving my life to Jesus Christ."



Be an Advocate for Imprisoned Christians Around the World and Send Letters of Encouragement

By becoming an 'advocate' you are entering into the vital and important ministry of intercession and solidarity with those who suffer for their faith in Christ.

PrisonerAlert.com, a ministry of The Voice of the Martyrs, provides an opportunity for you to be an advocate for our brothers and sisters in chains. You will be encouraging them when you write to them in prison and supporting them when you write to government officials on their behalf.

The support and involvement of other Christians is evidence to these persecuted believers that they are not forgotten, since often their op-

pressors try to brainwash them into believing they are not loved and no one knows about them. When a prisoner learns others are protesting on their behalf or when they receive a letter, they know someone cares.

Your involvement can also result in better treatment for a prisoner. The authorities in many nations are very sensitive about their image abroad; when they realize outsiders are monitoring a prisoner's situation, conditions may be improved.

To learn more and see the profiles of Christians you can be an advocate for, visit www.PrisonerAlert.com

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What advice would you give to young people related to their friendships?

ANSWER BY RANDY ALCORN

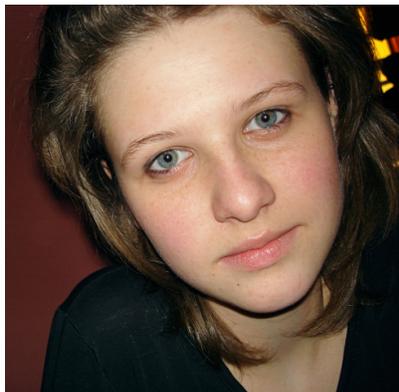
Choose your friends wisely. Don't just let friendships happen by circumstance. Make them happen by choice—careful, thoughtful choice.

There are many areas of life where you can make wise choices that will be rewarded, and poor choices that will result in destruction—perhaps none so dramatically as who you choose as friends. Some poor choices (like choosing dinner on a menu that doesn't turn out that good) are secondary, and you might get away with them. You will never get away with an unwise choice of friends. It will hurt you and haunt you. Don't let it happen.

Your friends will greatly influence your values, attitudes, and behaviors. I know young people who love Jesus and have chosen their friends wisely. Their friends have raised the bar for each other, challenging them to jump higher in the areas of following Christ and maintaining purity. I also know young people who have made poor choices and have experienced terrible consequences, some that will affect them the rest of their lives.

I came to Jesus in high school, and I had close friends who studied the Bible together, prayed together, read great books together.

We stayed away from the things that tempted us toward evil. We asked each other how we were doing in our walk with God. Find friends like that. They might not just naturally come your way. Look for them. Seek them. Hang on to them. My friend Steve Keels is like that for me, and I have others as well. Sure, I have friends that aren't as strong in their walk with Jesus, but my closest friends are strong in Him...and we help each other.



Back away from so-called "friends" who compromise your faith, who encourage you to experiment with what's wrong, and who take you away from church and from following Christ. Stay away from "friends" who deceive and disrespect their parents, and tempt you to do the same.

These are not true friends,

because what they are doing will not help you, but hurt you. True friends don't do what's bad for each other. They do what's good for each other. Be an example to your friends in glorifying God. That's the best gift you can give to your friends...or get from them.

I would encourage you to meditate on and memorize these verses. Write them down on cards. Think about them. Put them in your heart, and God will remind you of them. They will encourage you toward strong Christian friendships and save you from the unwise choices of friends that destroy so many young people who once loved Jesus:

"He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm" (Proverbs 13:20).

"Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way" (Proverbs 4:14-15).

"Stay away from the foolish man, because you will not find knowledge on his lips" (Proverbs 14:7).

"...rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God...Have nothing to do with them" (2 Timothy 3:4-5).



“Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers” (Psalm 1:1).

“A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24).

“Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Stay close to godly people, surround yourself with people who love you enough to tell you the truth...even when it hurts. One of the things I say in several of my books is that what is right is always smart, and what is wrong is always stupid. That which is for God’s glory is also always for our good.

May you follow Jesus with all your heart.

Recommended Websites

Boundless Webzine

www.boundless.org

The Rebelution

www.therebelution.com

Kor Ministries

www.korministries.com

Recommended Books

Do Hard Things

by Alex and Brett Harris

How to Stay Christian in College

by J. Budziszewski

Killing Is Killing . . . No Matter What We Call It

BY JOHN PIPER

It’s a magnificent thing: The only newly-originating life in the universe that comes in the image of God is Man. The only newly-originating life in the universe that lasts forever is Man.

This is an awesome thing.

And, as everyone knows, that reverence is not shared by our new President, over whom we have rejoiced.

He is trapped and blind in a culture of deceit. On the 36th anniversary of Roe v. Wade, he released this statement,

We are reminded that this decision not only protects women’s health and reproductive freedom, but stands for a broader principle: that government should not intrude on our most private family matters.

To which I say:

- No, Mr. President, you are not protecting women; you are authorizing the destruction of 500,000 little women every year.



- No, Mr. President, you are not protecting reproductive freedom; you are authorizing the destruction of freedom for one million little human beings every year.

- No, Mr. President, killing our children is killing our children no matter how many times you call it a private family matter. You may say it is a private family matter over and over and over, and still they are dead. And we killed them. And you would have it remain legal.

Mr. President, some of us wept for joy at your inauguration. And we pledge that we will pray for you.

We have hope in our sovereign God.

(© John Piper, *Desiring God*. Website: www.desiringGod.org. Email: mail@desiringGod.org. Toll Free: 888.346-4700. Excerpted from the sermon: “The Baby in My Arms Leaped for Joy.”)



Cultivating Joy in Our Giving

BY RANDY ALCORN

Giving infuses life with joy. It interjects an eternal dimension into even the most ordinary day. That's just one reason you couldn't pay me enough not to give. The joy Nanci and I experience comes in envisioning what God is doing in people's lives for eternity through what we've given to Him.

One way to cultivate joy in our giving is to meditate on various Scriptures, including Matthew 13 where the man finds the treasure hidden in the field and then "in his joy, he sold all that he had" to obtain the treasure. The key is "in his joy." If we fail to see this, we could feel sorry for the man, saying, "It cost him everything." But we aren't to pity this man; we're to envy him, and follow his example!

His sacrifice pales in comparison to his reward—which is the key to his joyful attitude. Likewise, realizing we are storing up treasures in heaven by giving is the key to our joyful attitude. Giving is a duty, yes, but it is far more. It is an incomparable source of joy.

Like the man finding the treasure, we should consider the costs-to-benefits ratio—the benefits far outweigh the costs. The

traveler made short-term sacrifices to obtain a long-term reward. "It cost him everything he owned." Sure, but it gained him everything that mattered.

The man wasn't exchanging lesser treasures for greater treasures out of dutiful drudgery, but out of joyful exhilaration. He would have been a fool not to do exactly what he did.

Likewise, in Matthew 6 Jesus tells us that our giving is in our own best interests: "store up for yourselves treasures in Heaven." He's talking about deferred gratification. The man who finds the treasure in the field pays a high price now by giving up all he has—but soon he'll gain a fabulous treasure. As long as his eyes are on that treasure, he makes his short-term sacrifices with joy. The joy is present, so the gratification isn't entirely deferred. Present joy comes from anticipating future joy.

By analogy, have you ever saved money for a future vacation, and taken present joy in anticipating what's ahead, even though for the moment you're cutting back on things you enjoy, such as going to the coffee shop or out to eat? The future joy looms larger than the present one you forgo. Athletes do this when training for a race. What they hope to win outweighs the momentary sacrifice.

I use this example in *The*

Treasure Principle: suppose I offer you one thousand dollars today to spend however you want. Not a bad deal. But suppose I give you a choice—you can either have that one thousand dollars today or you can have ten million dollars one year from now, then ten million more every year after that. Only a fool would take the thousand dollars today. Yet that's what we do whenever we grab onto something that will last for only a moment, forgoing something far more valuable that we could enjoy later for much longer.

Now, let's consider the present pleasure we would take in anticipating what will be ours one year from now, and every year thereafter. And if this seems like a far-fetched example, on the contrary it understates the case. When we give to God's work today, we invest in his kingdom—and needy people and Bible translation, ministry to prisoners, the disabled, hungry children, diseased people—all in Christ's name. That investment will yield dividends for all eternity. When we decide whether to keep something or to give it, we should ask how the decision will pay off not just ten days or ten months from now, but ten thousand years from now.

God says "in your presence is fullness of joy, at your right hand are pleasures for ever more" (Psalm 16:11). By forgoing short-term pleasures and giving instead, we secure long-term

pleasures in God’s presence. When we contemplate that reality, when it becomes real to us (and it certainly can and has for countless people), we are infused with joy in giving.

The more we give, the more we delight in our giving—and the more God delights in us. Our giving pleases us. But more importantly, it pleases God.

Some would say, “You shouldn’t give if you aren’t giving cheerfully.” They cite, “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). But God also loves a cheerful parent, which doesn’t mean that if you can’t take pleasure in changing your child’s diaper you shouldn’t! So it doesn’t mean we should give only when we’re feeling cheerful. The cheerfulness often comes during and after the act of obedience, not before it. As in parenting, the sacrifices we make for the ones we love ultimately bring satisfaction.

So we shouldn’t wait until we feel like giving—it could be a long wait! Just give and watch the joy follow. And if it’s not following, we need to envision sitting next to people in banquets on the New Earth, people who will say, “Thanks for giving so my child could live and so we could hear the gospel!”

God delights in our cheerfulness in giving. He wants us to find joy. He even commands us to rejoice (Philippians 4:4). What command could be a greater pleasure to obey than that one? But if we don’t give, we’re robbed of the source of joy God wants for us. The Macedonian Christians understood the joy of giving: “Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity” (2 Corinthians 8:2).

Eric Liddell said, “When I run, I feel God’s pleasure.” When I give, I feel God’s pleasure. There’s no better feeling. God’s grace to us is the lightning, our giving to Him is the thunder. We give, because He first gave to us.



Let me quote again from *The Treasure Principle* where I speak of Ebenezer Scrooge, the miser (miserable) who became the giver (joyful). Dickens writes of his transformation:

He went to church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and

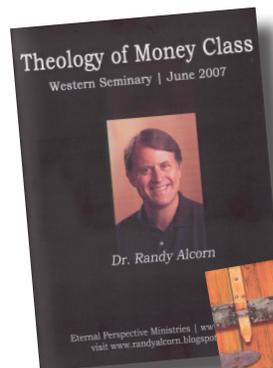
fro, and patted children on the head, and questioned beggars, and looked down into the kitchens of houses, and up to the windows; and found that everything could yield him pleasure. He had never dreamed that any walk—that anything—could give him so much happiness.

After his transformation, Scrooge walks through the streets of London, freely distributing his wealth to the needy. He’s giddy with delight. He, who only yesterday had scoffed at the idea of charity, now takes his greatest pleasure in giving. On the story’s final page, Dickens says of Scrooge:

Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them.... His own heart laughed, and that was quite enough for him. And it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge.

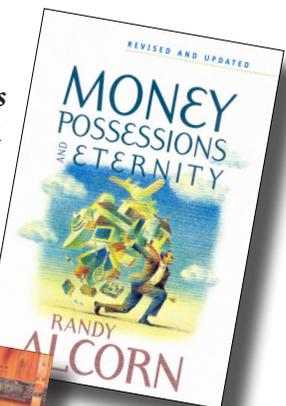
For more on giving, check out these resources, available for purchase on our website

www.epm.org

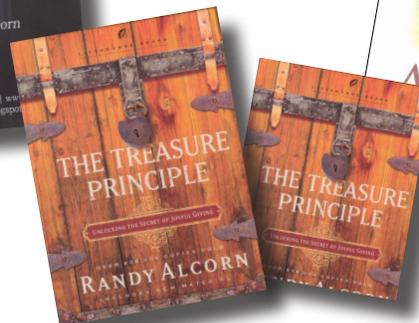


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To Those Who Are Hurting
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Advice to Young People
Regarding Friendships

Joe Gibbs and

The Game Plan for Life

Cultivating Joy in Our Giving

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