

eternal perspectives

with author Randy Alcorn

Fall/Winter Issue • 2012

Quality
Christian
Fiction:
an Oxymoron?

Post-Election Perspectives

**Lord, may we be
a thankful people**

**Seven People Lying at
the Side of the Road**

*Will you be a
good Samaritan?*

a publication of



Eternal Perspective Ministries

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Should a dad feel guilty for working hard to support his family?

It feels like cruel and unnecessary manipulation when you say that “One of the great ironies of our culture is that fathers spend more time making money and less time with their children.” I spend a lot of time with my kids, but am I to feel guilty for working hard to support my family?

Working hard and making money to care for your family is a great and biblical thing. I did it, and I’m glad you are too. I also spent a lot of time with my kids. But of course, that’s NOT what I’m talking about. I’m talking about when dads do NOT spend plenty of time with their kids (and many don’t) because they are always gone working—or golfing or watching TV or whatever (and of course the point isn’t that work, golf or TV in and of themselves are wrong).

I don’t think it’s cruel and manipulative to point out that dads, while fulfilling the biblical mandate to provide for their children, also should make sure they’re not away from home so much (or passively detached from them while at home) that they neglect a calling even higher than the workplace—being there to invest their lives in their children. Of course, there is not a guaranteed formula or outcome, and godly fathers can have rebellious children.

Fathering and vocation require a difficult balance, in which we must call upon the Lord for wisdom and strength, but we are commanded to

do it nonetheless. “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

We must be with them a substantial amount of time in order to “bring them up.” This helps them not to resent us, as they will if we’re with them only to correct them. To raise them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord it is not sufficient to spend considerable time away from work and present with the children, but it’s certainly necessary.

So dads, there’s a biblical mandate both to raise your kids and invest time in them to do so. AND there’s a biblical mandate to work hard to provide for your family. Just make sure that work commitments don’t overshadow your need to be there for your kids. And remember that making enough money to provide for your children’s needs is not the same as providing for all their wants. More than anything, what they need is the Lord, and to be drawn to their heavenly Father. It will help them immensely to see a loving, holy, and heavenly-minded earthly father, who is full of grace and truth. ■

More than anything, what your children need is the Lord, and to be drawn to their heavenly Father.



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Browse our store's resources for fathers, including Randy's novel *Courageous*, at www.epm.org/store/fatherhood



Read more thoughts from Randy on being a father at www.epm.org/privilege-fatherhood

What are your prayer life and habits? What books do you recommend on prayer?

It has always been difficult for me to spend great lengths of time in prayer, and sometimes it’s been a cause of discouragement. On the other hand, God has graciously taught me about prayer and dependence on him throughout the day. I often get on my knees for brief periods in my office throughout the day. I pray as I hear of needs. Nanci and I stop and pray together various times throughout the day. I ask God to help me see prayer as an adventure in which I come into his presence and behold Him, and become so absorbed with Him that I don’t want to do anything else. I’ve had tastes of that, but long for more.

I often think about how wonderful it will be on the New Earth, as resurrected beings, to see God’s face, to consciously delight in everything around me as a direct extension of God’s magnificence. I will never have to guard my eyes, restrain my thoughts, question my motives, or wonder what else I need to confess. In short, I’ll be free of my sin-tainted self, and fully free to be the Christ-empowered righteous self God designed me to be, in continual conscious recognition of Him. This is at the heart of prayer, I think, and I ask God to help me taste that not only in the short sessions throughout the day, but in longer prayer times as well. ■

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Recommended Books

A Call to Spiritual Reformation
by D.A. Carson

Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?
by Philip Yancey

The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions

Truth Trumps Experience

Thoughts on the Authority of God's Word by Julia Stager and Stephanie Anderson, EPM staff

A few months ago, our staff ran across this blog post written by a marketing manager for a Christian bookstore. Although he specifically mentions Randy's book *Heaven*, the issue his post brings up certainly isn't limited to Randy's books or even just the subject of eternity. Blogger Derek Ouellette writes:

A customer was browsing our store recently and as she was passing by an end cap displaying Randy Alcorn's book *Heaven* she said, "Ooh, another story of someone who went to Heaven?" as she took it off the shelf and began to read the back. "No," I said. "It's a book about Heaven, but Alcorn has not gone there himself." "Eww," she said as she promptly repositioned the book on the shelf. "Why would *anybody* want to read a book about Heaven written by someone who hasn't even been there?"

No joke. She actually did just say that.

Although her question was meant to be rhetorical, I decided to answer it anyways. "Well, because in those other books people will tell you that they went to Heaven, but in Alcorn's book you will find out what the Bible *actually* says on the subject."

"Oh," she snarled. "There's that." Conversation ended.

Ya, there's that. You know. This little thing we Protestants like to call *sola scriptura*. My concern—and desire—is not to pick on this one customer, but to observe a growing trend among conservative evangelicals. When books like *90 Minutes in Heaven* and *Heaven is For Real* rise to the top of bestseller charts in North America, and sustain their presence there, while those very same buyers avoid books like Wright's *Surprised by Hope* or Alcorn's *Heaven*, there's a problem. A serious problem.

So, should we study Heaven (or any other subject) subjectively or objectively? The Princeton definition of *objectivity* is "judgment based on observable phenomena and uninfluenced by emotions or personal prejudices", whereas *subjectivity* is "judgment based on individual personal impressions and feelings and opinions rather than external facts."

A personal account of a vision of Heaven is, by nature, subjective. This is not to say that all things subjective are false, and all things objective are true; we know nothing without personal (subjective) experiences. However, our experiences must be filtered through the sieve of truth. Truth trumps experience.

Oswald Chambers wrote that "no individual experience is of the remotest value unless it is up to the standard of the Word of God. The Bible not only tests experience, it tests truth. The Bible tests all experience, all truth, all authority by our Lord Himself and our relationship to Him personally."

If our senses can be deceived (and we all know they can be) then our experiences must be weighed against the sole source of objective truth: the Bible. This means trusting the Word of God more than ourselves, and more than *any* other book. "Your word is truth," John 17:17 says.

Why spend time reading what *might* be true, when we can study that which *is* true? ■

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Read Randy's blogs related to books on near-death experiences at www.epm.org/blog/neardeath



Now in color—without higher cost!

When you pulled this issue of *Eternal Perspectives* out of your mailbox, you probably noticed something different: it's in color and has a fresh look! Since 1991, we've printed in black and white in order to save money on printing costs. But after we recently decided to revisit the possibility of printing in color, our printer was able to offer us a price that is actually saving us money. It's a win-win situation: you get our magazine in full color, and we better steward our resources and provide you with a more attractive (and shareable) magazine. We'd love to get your feedback about our new look. Email us at info@epm.org.



Two ways to help us save

Would you like to help us cover the cost of producing and printing this magazine? Here's how you can help:

- 1 Sign up to read our magazine online, which saves EPM postage. (However, we're more than happy to mail you a copy if this better serves your needs.) We'll send you an email when a new issue is available. Update your subscription preferences at www.epm.org/preferences.
- 2 Donate to our general fund at www.epm.org/donate or send a check designated "magazine printing" on the memo line to Eternal Perspective Ministries, 39085 Pioneer Blvd, Suite 206, Sandy, OR 97055.

Thank you for partnering with us in this ministry!

Do you receive our eNews?

We send out occasional emails with the latest info on our ministry, promotions, and Randy's speaking schedule and new products. Sign up at www.epm.org/subscribe.



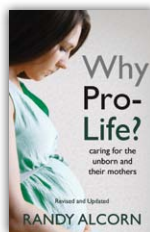
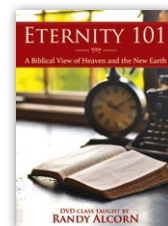
WOW-vember Wednesday Specials

Throughout November, we're offering WOW-worthy specials on our products each Wednesday at www.epm.org, as well as more promotions and specials during the holiday season.

To see the latest promotions, "like" our ministry on Facebook: www.facebook.com/EPMinistries.

New products available from EPM

The Eternity 101 DVD class contains 12 one-hour sessions, filmed at Randy's Heaven class at Corban University, that will help you gain a better understanding of our eternal home and change how you live today. Learn more at www.epm.org/eternity101.



Randy has completely revised and updated *Why Pro-Life?*. It has a new cover as well as substantial new content, but will still be available from EPM for the same low price. Learn more at www.epm.org/whyprolife.

Update on Randy's books and writing projects

"What book is Randy working on now?" is a question our EPM staff is frequently asked. Randy's main writing project is a nonfiction book dealing with happiness, and where we should be seeking it. There is no definite time frame for its release yet, but he would appreciate your prayers for clear thinking and direction from the Lord as well as for health and stamina for long writing days.

He has also agreed to write the notes for a Heaven Study Bible, which will feature throughout great comments on Heaven and the New Earth. Randy's *Eternity* graphic novel (long comic book style), which he finished last year, will be released in 2013. (It's available for preorder from EPM at www.epm.org/eternity.)

Also coming soon from EPM is a revised and updated version of *Women Under Stress* by Randy and Nanci Alcorn (originally published in 1987).

Many people ask us if there will be a sequel to *Deception*. Lord willing, there will be one, though not for several more years as there are other projects ahead of this one. But his assistant sees Ollie snippets come through from time to time, so we know he is lurking in the background.

Occasionally Randy sends out specific prayer requests by email related to his writing and speaking ministry. If you would like to sign up, go to www.epm.org/subscribe.



Randy and his Golden Retriever, Maggie



Lord, may we be a thankful people!

*G*ratITUDE is an offering precious in the sight of God, and it is one that the poorest of us can make and be not poorer but richer for having made it.

—A.W. Tozer

Thanksgiving is the enemy of discontent and dissatisfaction.

—Harry A. Ironside

Thanks are the highest form of thought, and gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.

—G.K. Chesterton

A proud man is seldom a grateful man, for he never thinks he gets as much as he deserves.

—Henry Ward Beecher

Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!

—Psalm 107:1

Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

—2 Corinthians 9:15

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

—Colossians 4:2

Did you know?.....

One hundred percent of the royalties from Randy's books are given to worthy Christian organizations (to date, over \$6 million). We'd like to share with you just one of the ways the royalties have been used to make a difference in the world—and for eternity.

We'd also like to thank those of you who have supported us financially. Gifts to EPM not only allow us to operate, but also are an investment in every ministry we support.

impact: book royalties

Voice of the Martyrs: Families of Martyrs Fund

Often when a pastor or evangelist is imprisoned or killed, their families are left with little means of financial support. This fund, which royalties from EPM have contributed to, is used to help sustain these believers until they can find alternative means of support.

One such family that has received support is the Arbado family. MacArthur Arbado, an elder at Bible Baptist Church in the Philippines, was brutally killed by extremists as he returned to his farm. He left behind a wife, Lolita, and 13 children. Lolita (pictured here) was overcome with emotion when a VOM worker attended his funeral and later returned with financial assistance for the family. She said she saw God's faithfulness to her even during that difficult trial. (Learn more at www.persecution.com.)



Susan's Story by Open Doors USA

Locked in a dark room without food and water, 14-year-old Susan was left to die... by her father!

Susan and her younger brother, both Muslims, lived alone with their father after he divorced their mother. Life was routine... school, chores, a little time to play. But, on that fateful day in March 2010 Susan's life took a dramatic turn when an evangelist visited her school and she decided to trust Christ for her salvation. "After a month of keeping it secret, news reached my father that I had converted to Christianity," recalls Susan.

Enraged, her father confined her to a small room. Her brother Mbusa was warned to not to tell anyone that Susan was locked up and was instructed to not give her any food. Young Mbusa tried to help his sister by roasting bananas when their father was away. He also dug a hole under the door where he could pour water through. "My sister could drink water using her tongue. But most days she could only feed on mud," he said.

For six long months Susan never saw the sunlight.

A nearby neighbor became concerned after not seeing her. Finally, when Mbusa feared that his sister was dying, he told the neighbor that Susan was locked up in one of the

rooms in the house. Alerting authorities, the police rushed to the house and broke down the door. Rescuing Susan, they took her to a nearby hospital. During her ordeal Susan had lost the use of both of her legs.

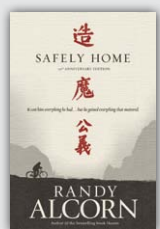
After spending the next 10 months confined to a hospital bed recovering, Susan was later transported to a home in Kenya. Living now with an Open Doors co-worker and his family her love for the Lord has grown. When asked how she is feeling, she confidently responds, "I am happy and not in pain. I would never leave my Jesus who died for me." Although the months of torture were horrific, Susan has forgiven her father and asks for just two things; the ability to walk again so that she can tell others about Jesus... and salvation for her father. ■



more

One With Them™ is an Open Doors initiative designed to bring awareness to the reality of Christian persecution to the Western Church. Learn more and find ways to get involved at www.onewiththem.com.

Learn more about *Safely Home*, Randy's novel on the persecuted church in China, and find related resources at www.epm.org/safelyhomebook.





Post-Election Perspectives

The election is over... but your opportunity to vote is still here.

by Randy Alcorn

By the time this issue of *Eternal Perspectives* arrives in your mailbox, the presidential election will be over. Followers of Christ, regardless of who they advocated and voted for, should now pray wholeheartedly for our president and his administration, as Scripture instructs us in 1 Timothy 2:1-4:

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Here are three thoughts I shared after the election four years ago, and which I'd like to share in the wake of this election, not even knowing the results as I write. I revised and added some material that I think will apply regardless of the election results.

1. Don't stop voting (you do it every day with the choices you make).

Voting isn't something you do every year or two. We cast multiple votes each day. We cast votes for Heaven or Hell, for grace or truth. For self-control or self-indulgence. For the Spirit or the flesh. For abiding in Christ, or independence from Christ. For wisdom or foolishness, and blessing or curse.

Every decision we make, every action we take—and the heart attitude with which we conduct our lives—casts a vote for one kingdom or another. Every vote counts. Eternity will be affected by them.

We can't solve all our nation's problems, but we can address the issues of our own hearts. "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

You can still talk to parents and kids in your neighborhood about the value of unborn children, and offer support and help as needed. You can go to city streets and homeless shelters and offer your service. Your ballot may or may not have made a difference, but your vote to love your neighbor will. God won't overlook it, as He won't overlook a single cup of water given to little ones in His name.

Our next chance to vote is right here and right now, whether we spend time with God, pray for His help, read His Word, serve our family, help the poor, dying and needy, entertain this thought, speak these words, watch this television program, or click on this Internet site. (You already vote often; vote wisely.) The key to change and influence in this world is not, and never has been, politics. It is faithfulness to Jesus. In the end (which will never end) acts of faithfulness—many of them quiet, some seen only by God—are the votes that will count, bringing the eternal results that will matter. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to

do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10).

Just as nonchristians won't have a second chance to go back and this time accept Christ, so we as Christians won't have a second chance to go back and this time serve Him. Today may be our last opportunity to represent Christ to our neighbors and to the needy.

As missionary C.T. Studd put it, "Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last."

2. Look to God's Word for direction for the future.

Circumstances change: "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1).

Our Savior does not change: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

Only by trusting in Christ and His promise of the world to come can we find peace: "Trust God; don't worry; be at peace. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am... Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:1-3, 27).

No matter what direction our earthly country may be going, it is our never-ending heavenly country that we should represent: "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them" (Hebrews 11:13-16).

I love America. Yet if this was my only country, my true country, I would despair. God has set eternity in the hearts of men (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Just as no person in this world can satisfy us, only Christ, so no place in this world can satisfy us, only Heaven. We await not a new America but a New Earth. "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away" (Revelation 21:1).

America may or may not unravel in coming decades, but God's kingdom certainly won't. People of the world don't primarily need America; they need Jesus. While living in the wreckage of this sin-stained earth, let's realize the world's main problem is that it's inhabited by people like us, sinners in need of redemption. These thirsty people need us to reach out our hands and extend to them, as cold water, the love of Jesus.

As C. S. Lewis said in *Mere Christianity*, "I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same."

3. Don't give up intervening for God's unborn children.

First, let me say emphatically what I've often said: we should be concerned not only for the unborn, but for all the weak and needy, for orphans and widows, for the hungry, for abandoned and abused children. We should be concerned about and fighting against sex trafficking, and the abuse of the elderly. We should obey God and "speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves" (Proverbs 31:8).

To be prolife does not *end* with advocating for the protection of unborn children. But because they are the smallest and weakest and most vulnerable human beings, and because they are killed at the highest rates and greatest numbers, and because countless people and even the law of the land argue for the right to destroy them, to be prolife *begins* with defending the unborn. It was for the unborn children that the term "prolife" originated, and those—including Christians—who now call themselves "prolife" but defend the right to kill unborn children are prostituting the historical meaning of that term.

We should never be prolife *only* in regard to unborn children. But to say we are prolife about other human beings while defending the right to kill the unborn is to deceive ourselves and others. It is co-opting a term while abandoning its meaning. It would be like people in the mid-nineteenth century adopting the term "emancipation" to advocate for children working long hours in mines, while turning around and defending people's right to buy and sell slaves. If you are going to do that, find another term besides emancipation. If you are going to speak up for other needy people while ignoring the plight of unborn children, call yourself what you wish, but don't dare say you are "prolife." To be prolife means *more* than being concerned for unborn babies, but it can never mean *less* than that. (*continued on next page*)



Above photo credit: www.sxc.hu/profile/pmartike | Top left photo credit: www.sxc.hu/profile/fredjk

This election, like all those before it, did not end this discussion any more than American elections in the nineteenth century ended the discussion of whether Africans were fully human and deserving of civil rights. The real issue was hidden under the words, and it was far bigger than those who supported and opposed it.

The election is over. But the righteous cause of the unborn is not over. The indictment against people who shed innocent blood is not over. The command of God is not over: "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; defend the rights of the poor and needy" (Proverbs 31:8-9).

You and I can each defend ourselves in this national debate. The children can't. We are the only voice they have. Our ministry has given literally millions of dollars to help other needy people around the world in addition to the unborn. But who is more poor and needy, more incapable of speaking up for themselves than these unborn children, created in the image of God?

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January 20, 2013, is Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, marking the 40th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*. Consider encouraging your church to take part as a way to celebrate the intrinsic value of all human life.

Free resources for pastors and church leaders are available at www.epm.org/resources/prolifepastors.

See full-length audio and video of Randy's Sanctity of Life message on our site at www.epm.org/lifemessage.

Who in our country has been stripped of legal protection and is being killed at the rate of over one million per year? There are many other issues, of course, but what issue is more important and horrific than the killing of children? And who will speak up for them if not us?

Candidates and elections and presidents will come and go, but this issue will not leave us as long as we live. And we will surely face it, when all is said and done, at the judgment seat of Christ. May we not wait until then to discover how serious it really is.

I confess that for the last few weeks I could hardly wait for this election to be over. But I especially can't wait for our Lord to bring to us a New Earth, without war, racism, hatred, lies, suffering, evil, holocausts, the exploitation of women, and the killing of children. Justice and peace are surely coming. May we be on their side before they arrive:

Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" (Revelation 21:3-5)

Grateful to be His child and yearning for Him and the world He has promised,

Randy Alcorn

It's more than just a debate... when there's human lives at stake.

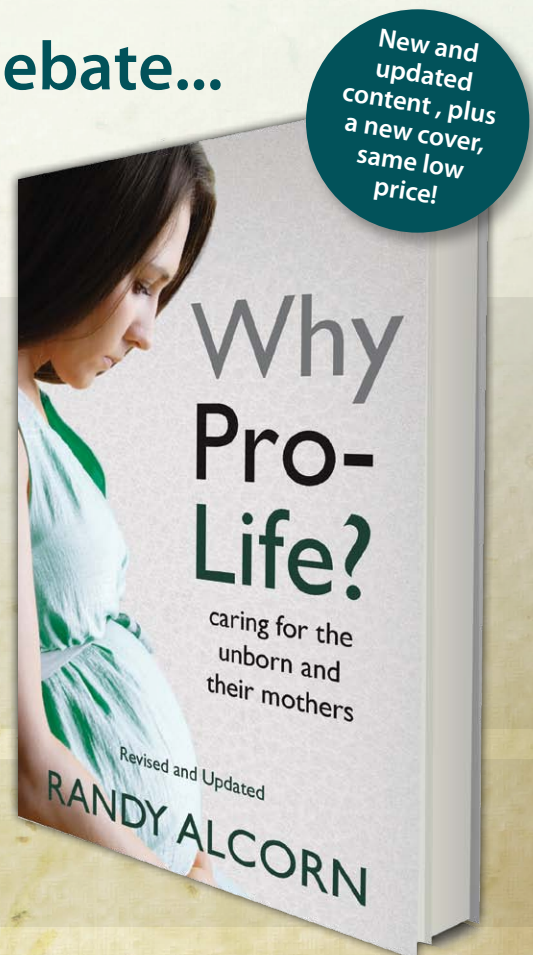


Randy has completely revised and updated *Why Pro-Life?*, as well as added substantial brand new content. The book offers factual answers to the central issues of the abortion debate in a concise, non-abrasive way. Infused with grace and compassion, and grounded in medical science and psychological studies, Randy presents a solid case for defending both unborn children and their mothers and helps readers look at the many sides of this polarizing issue.

For those on the fence in the midst of the abortion debate, this book will be a great resource as it clearly and thoroughly examines the prolife position. For those who are prolife already, this book is an encouragement to be intelligently and graciously informed.

Learn more at www.epm.org/whyprolife

Significant quantity discounts available.



Seven People Lying at the Side of the Road

Will you be a good Samaritan?

by George Verwer

I have been preaching a lot recently on the story of the Good Samaritan. I believe it's a fitting message because there are so many people lying at the side of the road today; there are so many who are suffering and need Jesus—both for salvation and for those practical, life-sustaining needs we all have. At the same time, it has been my great joy to see, within Operation Mobilization, a huge shift in recent years towards the marrying of Gospel proclamation with social action. I have put together a list of “seven people lying at the side of the road.” These Seven People (which I also list on the back of my business card) are:

1 Children at risk

AIDS orphans; children on the street; children in slums and garbage dumps; child victims of sex trafficking and domestic abuse; child soldiers: there are so many children in extreme need. If we don't help them, who will?

2 Abused women

I urge you to read *True Grit* by Deborah Meroff, the untold story of the suffering women face around the world and how powerfully God is using women to advance His Kingdom today.

3 The extreme poor

In the West we come across pan-handlers and others who need our help, and we need to continue to help these people with love

and wisdom. But I am talking here of whole families who are living on less than a dollar a day, people who are victims of rampant government corruption and famine. I am speaking of the 200 million Dalits of India who for 3,000 years have suffered severe discrimination and abject poverty; of the millions living in slums, the Tsunami victims of Southeast Asia, the earthquake victims of Pakistan, those starving and suffering under the oppressive regime of North Korea. There are so many in extreme poverty who need our help.

4 The HIV/AIDS patient

40 million have been infected and 20 million have died. Millions of children have been orphaned and whole societies are burgeoning under the weight of so many dying so young. Rather than standing by and judging, let us respond in love and action through in-person help, finance, support of AIDS ministries, prayer and being aware of AIDS in our own communities, churches and families. (Many have HIV and don't know it.)

Let us also take advantage of this opportunity to share the gospel. We have found that, because death is so imminent, AIDS patients are very open to the Gospel.

I want to strongly recommend four books: *AIDS and You* by Patrick Dixon, *AIDS is Real and It's in Our Church* by Jean Garland and Dr. Mike Blyth; *The Sceptics Guide to AIDS* by Dale Hanson Bourke; and *AIDS: I'm Not at Risk, Am I?* by Joy and Ray Thomas.

(continued on next page)



So let us be people of vision, action and especially grace.

5 People with impure water

Water is becoming increasingly scarce. 20% of the world has no access to clean water. Many must walk miles to get clean water, and so often the ones who do it are children whose bodies are not designed for such back-breaking work. Big cities are running out of water and are shipping it in at great cost, while in other parts of the world the dysfunctional water systems are breeding grounds for disease. May each of us be part of the effort to see more people getting clean water, as we seek to preserve what precious water we have stewardship over ourselves.

6 The unborn

Some estimates put the number of children who have been aborted at 500 million. The numbers are staggering, and in many ways I would rather ignore them. But I know that I cannot. I confess, when my close friend Dr. Francis Schaeffer decided to put so much effort into the prolife movement towards the end of his life, I thought he had gone a little extreme. I no longer feel this way, and repent of my own inaction. In some countries there are more abortions than births, and the laws in some nations allow abortion until the day before birth. How can this be?

With so much abortion taking place, let us not consider it a lost cause and give up. No, many

battles have been won, and every battle is a victory; every saved life a real person. I believe that there are thousands alive today who otherwise would not have been without pro-life action. Are not these saved lives worth the effort? Yes, they are!

So let us be people of vision, action and especially grace—grace for the mothers, for those in the pro-choice camp, and for fellow Christians who disagree. Recommended reading: *Why Pro-Life?* by Randy Alcorn.

7 The environment

It is a shame that so many evangelical Christians not only have little concern for the environment, but are sometimes known as anti-environmental. How can this be when our Creator God has asked us to care for his creation? Not only is our pollution of the earth totally unacceptable, but this is an issue that our young people care about; and if we don't connect with them on valid issues such as preservation of the environment, how can we expect them to listen to us at all?

Will you be a Good Samaritan? ■

George Verwer is the founder of Operation Mobilization (www.om.org) and an advocate for worldwide missions. Learn more about his ministry at www.georgeverwer.com.



more

Join Randy on his blog in exploring how we as Christians can reach out to each of the "seven people" George shares in this article: www.epm.org/blog/least

No Hypocrites!

You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

—Matthew 7:5

One of my goals in life is exactly the same as yours. I don't want to be a hypocrite. Every day I want to shorten the distance between that which I profess and that which I actually live. I want no gaps between my "talk" and my "walk."

It's why I'd like to repeat every day for the next month, this "Test for Self-Evaluation," proposed by John Wesley. The questions reflect that heart of Scripture, so every morning we should ask ourselves:

Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I'm a better person than I really am? Do I laugh at the mistakes of others, reveling in their errors and misfortunes? Do I insist on having my own way? Is there a tendency for me to put others down so that I'll be thought of more highly? Do I pass on to others what is told to me in confidence? Am I thoughtful in expressing 'thanks' to people for what they've done for me, no matter how insignificant it seems? Am I a slave to dress, a slave to friends and their opinions, a slave

by Joni Eareckson Tada

to work or habits? Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying? Did the Bible live in me yesterday? Did I disobey God in anything yesterday? Did I insist on doing something about which my conscience was uneasy? Did I handle discouragement well or did I have to be coddled? Am I enjoying prayer? When did I last speak to someone about Christ? Is there anyone whom I fear, dislike, disown, criticize or hold resentment toward? If so, what am I doing about it?

Is Christ real to me?

Copy this page, tuck it in your daily journal, and refer to John Wesley's questions often. Purpose to shorten the gap between what you say and what you live.

Lord Jesus, I don't want to be a hypocrite. I pray that what I say about my walk with you matches the way I live. ■

Learn more about Joni Eareckson Tada at www.joniandfriends.org.

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Quality Christian Novels: an Oxymoron?

by Randy Alcorn

Recently, I overheard a Christian leader rave about various novels he'd read. When asked if he'd read a particular Christian novelist, he replied, "I never read Christian fiction."

"Why not?"

"It's predictable and sugar-coated; preachy, and poorly written!"

"Can you give some examples?" I asked.

He couldn't. Not one. He'd read his last Christian novel over twenty years ago. I politely suggested that he may not be in the best position to say what it's currently like.

I've heard the same stereotypes about Christian fiction repeated countless times. Yes, I read secular fiction. But I like novels with a Christian worldview. I enjoy the absence of explicit sex and extreme profanity, but it's not just what Christian fiction lacks that I appreciate—it's what it offers.

The variety of today's Christian novels is vast: contemporary, historical, suspense, murder mysteries, adventure, young adult,

romance, science fiction.

I'm part of an online group of 263 Christian novelists that started in 1999 with fifteen of us. I've witnessed firsthand these writers' dedication to improving their craft. Many current Christian novels are not only well-crafted, but artfully integrate spiritual themes.

Sure, you run into cookie-cutter stories with limp language, just as with secular novels. No more, no less. Every writer has a worldview, and preachiness isn't unique to Christians—consider the novels of Carl Sagan and Dan Brown. Even Stephen King, a master wordsmith, periodically gets on a soapbox. But does anyone claim all secular fiction is "predictable, preachy and poorly written" just because some of it is?

Many Christian novels develop gritty themes. Rene Gutteridge's *Listen* depicts the consequences of verbal bullying, opening with a teenager's suicide. Terri Blackstock's *Predator* portrays a high-tech abductor stalking a girl online. Karen Ball's *The Breaking Point* is strikingly honest, offering hope for struggling marriages. *The*

God Hater, an imaginative story by Bill Myers, gets inside an ardent atheist's head.

Sugar-coated? Murder, adultery, addiction, Alzheimer's, infertility, homosexuality—I doubt if there's any thorny issue that hasn't been explored in Christian fiction with honesty, authenticity and a redemptive touch.

I read Francine River's *Atonement Child* fifteen years ago and have never forgotten its story of rape and a child conceived. Karen Kingsbury's *One Tuesday Morning*, set in the weeks surrounding September 11, 2001, pulled me in, then totally surprised me with a credible twist.

Contrary to common belief, Christian fiction did not begin with Janette Oke or Frank Peretti. John Bunyan wrote the influential *Pilgrim's Progress* in 1678. The most potent work challenging American slavery was Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, (1852), an overtly Christian novel. Lew Wallace's *Ben-Hur* (1880) and Charles Sheldon's *In His Steps* (1897) reached huge audiences.

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As a brand new Christian in the 1970's I consumed C.S. Lewis's *Narnia* novels as well as the novels of J. R. R. Tolkien and Madeleine L'Engle. Later I discovered G.K. Chesterton and Dorothy Sayers. I read and reread Calvin Miller's *The Singer Trilogy*.

As for novels written within the last twenty years, *Byzantium* by Stephen Lawhead is a hauntingly beautiful epic. Lisa Bergren's medieval mystery *The Begotten* transported me to another time and place. One of the most unforgettable characters I've encountered is Sema, a gorilla in Angela Hunt's *Unspoken*.

Enjoy courtroom dramas and legal thrillers? I loved T. Davis Bunn's *The Great Divide* and Randy Singer's *Directed Verdict*.

Suspense? Read *Over the Edge* by Brandilyn Collins, with an opening that grabs you by the throat.

If you like literary fiction, get Athol Dickson's *The Opposite of Art*. If you read *The Shack*, try James Rubart's *Rooms*, equally creative but with better theology.

Does a pulp fiction short story about a 1955 Los Angeles boxer with a quick jab sound interesting? Download James Scott Bell's "Iron Hands."

Graphic novels? Read *Babylon*, the story of Daniel strikingly captured by Kingstone Comics. *The Action Bible* is a colorful story book I often read.

Fantasy? I started Jill Williamson's *By Darkness Hid*, and before I knew it hours had flown by. (The publisher, Marcher Lord Press, produces nothing but Christian speculative fiction.)

Biblical fiction? Try Walter Wangerin's *Jesus* or *Paul*. Wangerin is a student of Bible lands and customs, so the setting and characters pulsate.

Can't imagine Amish fiction being interesting? That's what I thought before reading Beverly Lewis's *The Shunning*.

I listened to the enthralling audio versions of Wendell Berry's *Jayber Crow* and *Hannah Coulter*. There's nothing like a great novel read by a skilled voice actor—and you can listen while driving, exercising or sitting in the dark.

Though I don't read much romance, I enjoyed Robin Lee Hatcher's *Ribbon of Years*, Tamera Alexander's *A Lasting Impression*, and Colleen Coble's *Blue Moon Promise*. Liz Curtis Higgs writes captivating Scottish novels, including *Mine is the Night*. (While I'm told secular romances often degenerate into erotica, Christian romance novels encourage purity and committed marriages.)

Some believe Christian novels shouldn't depict anything openly spiritual. Certainly conversions aren't obligatory, but God's life-changing work is real and can be powerfully depicted (think *Les Miserables*). By spinning an engaging story, novelists earn the right to develop themes that sway readers' heads and hearts.

If you've stayed away from Christian novels because you've heard them disparaged by others, why not find out for yourself? Read a variety of genres and writers. Likely you'll discover compelling stories and new favorite authors.

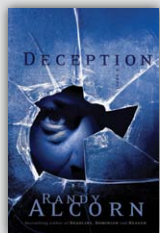
And whatever your opinion, it will be current, firsthand and informed. ■

A version of this article appeared in the June 29, 2012 World Magazine, www.worldmag.com/topic/2012_books_issue/.

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Randy shares his favorite fiction and nonfiction reads at www.epm.org/favorite-books.

Explore the fiction books available from our online store at www.epm.org/fiction.



Escaping the Rut

by Hayley Newsom

Growing up, I loved family fun nights. Occasionally, the four of us played a game, watched a movie, or went out together in lieu of the normal evening at home. These nights had a way of bringing us closer by experiencing something different together. We discovered more about why we loved each other. Stories came up that might not have over just a weekday dinner table.

Just as relationships within a family can grow, thanks

to a break in the routine, my relationship with God can grow deeper if I learn to avoid letting it become just a well-rehearsed habit. However, the daily dinner table is good, and if we played every evening, homework and the housework would never get done.

Similarly, nothing can replace regular prayer and Bible study. But spending time with God in a different way once in a while can refresh my relationship with God and draw me closer to Him.

Remember Who God Is

When quiet times become just a ritual, my awe of God may fade. Or if I'm in a dry time, focusing on God's character can sustain my faith. Read passages like Isaiah 40-66 or books like A. W. Tozer's *Knowledge of the Holy*, or meditate on the names of God, praising Him as you remember His attributes.

Take a Walk

"When I literally walk with the Lord, it helps me see things from a different perspective," says Campus Crusade staff member Kim Hiemstra. "It takes away the distractions of the computer or other people in my apartment, and opens me up to the world around me. Also the physical exercise of walking helps to burn excess fidgety energy so I can focus on the Lord."

Read Aloud or Listen to the Bible and Sermons

Reading aloud or listening to the Bible brings the stories to life in a different way. This can be especially helpful if you're an auditory learner. Plus, you can listen while you exercise, drive to work or clean the house. The Bible and sermons are available online. Since I moved out of state, I've enjoyed downloading my home-church pastor's sermons and listening to them while I walk in the mornings. Not only do I get good teaching, but I also feel connected to friends back home.

Do Something Else

Garden, paint, crochet, cook, turn wood, cast a line, iron shirts, throw the ball for the dog—pick something. While you're working on a project, you're less likely to be distracted until the project comes to a good stopping point. In the meantime, instead of tuning out, take that time to tune in to what God brings to heart.

Pray Through a Psalm

The Psalms are prayers and songs of praise. Read through one verse at a time and pray to God in response. Charlotte Driver, staff member with FamilyLife, says, "It meets me right where my heart is, and it's amazing to pray the praises back to God that I would struggle to convey myself."

Reminisce

Look back through old photos, scrapbooks, or journals and remember times when God's faithfulness was especially evident to you. When the Psalmist in 77:11,12 is feeling distant from God, he does what God so often commands—he remembers: "I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember Your miracles of long

ago. I will meditate on all Your works and consider all Your mighty deeds" (NIV). By remembering, he is reminded of God's faithfulness.

Be Still

The world urges me to stay busy and bombards me with noise. I often forget how to be still in silence. Donald Whitney, in *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, writes, "The worship of God does not always require words, sounds or actions. Sometimes worship consists of a God-focused stillness and hush." If you're someone who's not usually comfortable with silence, ask God to help you seek it and apply verses about being still (Lamentations 3:25-28; Isaiah 30:15; Psalm 62; Mark 6:31). Keep a notepad handy so you can jot down things and quiet your mind.

Copy out Scripture

Write it out and reflect on it. I might copy anywhere between a verse and an entire chapter, depending on the flow and depth of the passage. I notice things I might not if I were just reading the words. Themes become more obvious, and I remember better what I read.

Sing

Get a hymnal from a used bookstore and read through the songs or sing them, meditating on the words. You might find yourself singing them throughout the day.

Pray in a Different Posture

Pray on your knees, maybe beside your bed or with your head bowed to the floor. To get a sense of how humbled people like Daniel felt in God's presence, flatten yourself out on the floor completely prostrate before God. Imagine Him as He is on His throne in Revelation 4 and 5.

My effectiveness as a Spirit-filled believer in this world depends on my close fellowship with God, so my time with Him needs His protection. Satan and my own sinful nature war against my time with God by letting it grow stale and throwing countless distractions at it. But God can protect it and keep it alive as I learn to enjoy Him, balancing consistency and variety. ■

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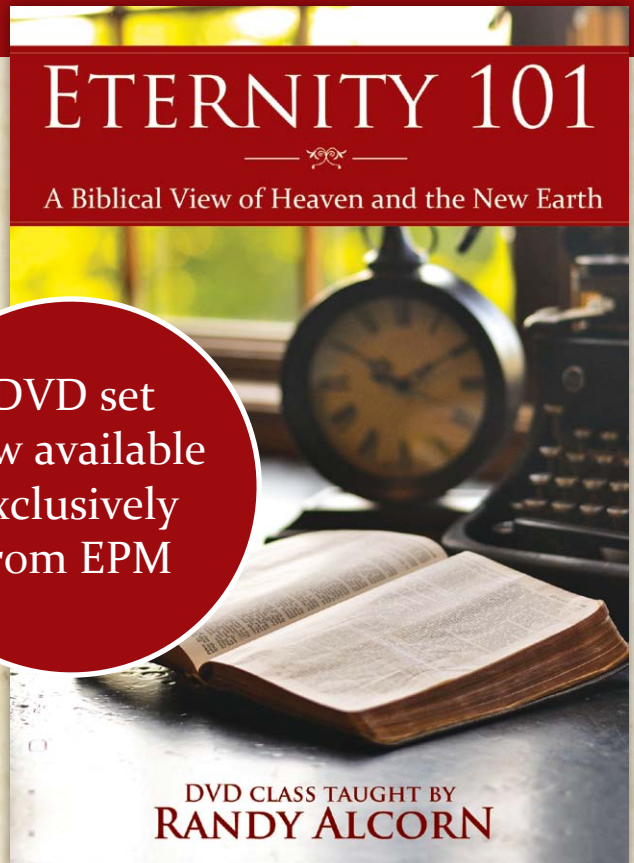
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