

Eternal Perspectives



with founder and author Randy Alcorn

Spring 2012



A Tenuous Hope Versus A Certain Truth

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

Long Distance Spirituality | Only the Wounded Can Serve

a publication of Eternal Perspective Ministries

Newly revised and updated edition of *Does the Birth Control Pill Cause Abortions?* now available

The question of whether the Pill causes abortions has direct bearing on untold millions of Christians, many of them prolife, who use and recommend it.

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Randy will teach a three-day intensive graduate course on Heaven at Corban University in Salem, Oregon, May 8-10, 2012. This two-credit course may be taken for graduate credit or audited.

Go to www.threedaysinheaven.com to watch a video of Randy talking about the class and to register. (As a friend of EPM, use the discount code **epm675** to receive \$67.50 off your registration.) Questions? Contact Corban University at www.corban.edu or 503-375-7173 for more information.



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The ultimate test of our spirituality is the measure of our amazement at the grace of God. —D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Whatever we lose today in humble service to Christ, we will regain a trillion times over in the long tomorrow. —Randy Alcorn



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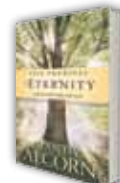


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Q: ARE WE TO BLAME FOR PEOPLE'S POVERTY?

Answered
by Randy Alcorn

Neither God's Word nor an accurate understanding of economics supports the notion that the prosperous are automatically responsible for making others poor. What Scripture does say is that even when we're not at fault, we are responsible to help the poor. "If you help the poor, you are lending to the Lord—and he will repay you!" (Proverbs 19:17 NLT).

Ignoring the poor is not an option for the godly. In the account of the final judgment, the sin held against the "goats" is not that they did something wrong to those in need but that they failed to do anything right for them. Theirs is a sin of omission with grave eternal consequences.

This means we cannot wash our hands of responsibility to the poor by saying, "I'm not doing anything to hurt them."

We must actively be doing something to help them.

We should ask, "If Christ were on the other side of the street, or the city, or even the world, and he were hungry, thirsty, helpless, or imprisoned for his faith, would we help him?" But we mustn't forget what Christ himself says in Matthew 25: He *is* in our neighborhood, community, city, country, and across the world in the form of poor and needy people—and especially in those who are persecuted for their faith.

We're not to feel guilty that God has entrusted us with abundance. But we are to feel responsible to compassionately and wisely use that abundance to help the less fortunate. John Wesley wrote, "Put yourself in the place of every poor man and deal with him as you would have God deal with you." *RA*

.....

You often quote from C. S. Lewis. Do you always agree with him?

"You often quote from C.S. Lewis in your books. I like Lewis too, but now I'm hearing that he's not biblical. I recently watched an online video that said he was a universalist. What do you think?"

There are any number of areas in which I disagree with C. S. Lewis, but the quotes from him I put in my books are very insightful observations in which I do agree with him. I respect and quote from Martin Luther even though he was anti-semitic, and I deeply disagree with his view of Jewish people.

To be influenced by someone does not require that we endorse him in all areas. However, there is also much inaccurate criticism of Lewis. For instance, the video you mentioned claims he was a universalist. Simply false. A universalist believes everyone will be saved and go to Heaven. But Lewis emphatically believed some people would go to Hell for eternity, not Heaven, and he said so clearly *RA*



41 EVIDENCES OF PRIDE

by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Note from Randy: I have the greatest appreciation for Nancy Leigh DeMoss and Revive Our Hearts. It is my joy to have known Nancy for many years. I deeply respect her and the way she lives out the grace and truth of Jesus. Our daughters and a number of our ministry staff are among the countless people who have been touched by Nancy's message and example.

1. Do you look down on those who are less educated, less affluent, less refined, or less successful than yourself?
2. Do you think of yourself as more spiritual than your mate, others in your church?
3. Do you have a judgmental spirit toward those who don't make the same lifestyle choices you do . . . dress standards, how you school your kids, entertainment standards, etc.?
4. Are you quick to find fault with others and to verbalize those thoughts to others? Do you have a sharp, critical tongue?
5. Do you frequently correct or criticize your mate, your pastor, or other people in positions of leadership (teachers, youth director, etc.)?
6. Do you give undue time, attention, and effort to your physical appearance—hair, make-up, clothing, weight, body shape, avoiding appearance of aging?
7. Are you proud of the schedule you keep, how disciplined you are, how much you are able to accomplish?
8. Are you driven to receive approval, praise, or acceptance from others?
9. Are you argumentative?
10. Do you generally think your way is the right way, the only way, or the best way?
11. Do you have a touchy, sensitive spirit? Easily offended? Get your feelings hurt easily?
12. Are you guilty of pretense? Trying to leave a better impression of yourself than is really true? (Would the people at church be shocked if they knew what you were like at home?)
13. Do you have a hard time admitting when you are wrong?
14. Do you have a hard time confessing your sin to God or others? (not just in generalities but specifics)
15. Do you have a hard time sharing your real spiritual needs/struggles with others?
16. Do you have a hard time praying aloud with others?
17. Are you excessively shy?
18. Do you have a hard time reaching out and being friendly to people you don't know at church?
19. Do you resent being asked or expected to serve your family, your parents, or others?
20. Do you become defensive when you are criticized or corrected?
21. Are you a perfectionist? Do you get irked or impatient with people who aren't?
22. Do you tend to be controlling—of your mate, your children, friends, those in your workplace?
23. Do you frequently interrupt people when they are speaking?
24. Does your spouse feel intimidated by your "spirituality"?
25. Does your spouse feel like he or she can never measure up to your expectations?
26. Do you often complain—about the weather, your health, your circumstances, your job, your church?
27. Do you talk about yourself too much?
28. Are you more concerned about your problems, needs, burdens than about others' concerns?
29. Do you worry about what others think of you? Too concerned about your reputation or your family's reputation?
30. Do you neglect to express gratitude for "little things"? To God? To others?
31. Do you neglect prayer and intake of the Word?
32. Do you get hurt if your accomplishments/or acts of service are not recognized or rewarded?
33. Do you get hurt if your feelings or opinions are not considered when your mate or your boss is making a decision or if you are not informed when a change or decision is made?
34. Do you react to rules? Do you have a hard time being told what to do?
35. Are you self-conscious because of your lack of education or natural beauty, or your socio-economic status?
36. Do you avoid participating in certain events, for fear of being embarrassed or looking foolish?
37. Do you avoid being around certain people because you feel inferior compared to them/don't feel you measure up?
38. Are you uncomfortable inviting people to your home because you don't think it's nice enough or you can't afford to do lavish entertaining?
39. Is it hard for you to let others know when you need help (practical or spiritual)?
40. When is the last time you said these words to a family member, friend, or co-worker: "I was wrong; would you please forgive me?" (If it's been more than a month, mark it down!)
41. Are you sitting here thinking how many of these questions apply to someone you know? Feeling pretty good that none of these things really apply to you?

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ONLY DO WHAT YOUR HEART TELLS YOU

by Jon Bloom

Princess Diana once said, "Only do what your heart tells you."

This is a creed believed by millions. It's a statement of faith in one of the great pop cultural myths of the Western world. It's a gospel proclaimed in many of our stories, movies, and songs.

It states that your heart is a compass inside of you that will point you to your own true north if you can just see it clearly. Your heart is a true guide that will lead you to happiness if you can just tune into it. We are lost, and our heart will save us.

This sounds so simple and liberating. It's tempting to believe.

Until you consider that your heart has sociopathic tendencies.

Think about it for a moment. What does your heart tell you?

No need to answer. Your heart has likely said things today that you would not wish to repeat. As Jesus said, "out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander" (Matthew 15:19).

No one lies to you more than your own heart. It's true. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9)

Our hearts are not benevolent, they are pathologically selfish. If we only do what our hearts tell us we will pervert and impoverish every desire, every beauty, every person, every wonder and joy. We will try to consume them for self-glory and self-indulgence.

Our hearts will not save us. We need to be saved from our hearts.

That's why Jesus did not say, "Let not your hearts be troubled, just believe your hearts." He said, "Let not your hearts be troubled, believe in God; believe also in me" (John 14:1).

Our hearts were not designed to be gods, they were designed to believe in God. And we are never happier than when we do. The fallen human heart rejects God, believing it can "be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). Jesus came to pay for that horrific, treacherous sin in full and to give us new hearts (Ezekiel 36:26).

That means, in this age, Christians have the strange experience of living with two hearts. And both speak to us. One we must reject and the other we must trust. We must be discerning. We know the corrupt heart is speaking when it says, "Believe what I promise you and you will be happy." We know the new heart is speaking when it says, "Believe what Jesus promises and he will make you happy forever."

Therefore, only do what your heart tells you if it is telling you to believe in Jesus.

*Jon Bloom is president of Desiring God in Minneapolis, Minnesota.
www.desiringGod.org*

GREED

PRIDE

FEAR

JEALOUSY

ANGER

DOUBT

LUST

ENVY

SELFISHNESS

BITTERNESS

BOASTING

RANDY'S BOOKS FOR PRISONERS

Throughout the 21 years of EPM's existence, we've received countless encouraging letters from readers, sharing how God has used Randy's books to inspire them to live in light of eternity. But some of the most touching letters we've received are from a specific group of people: prisoners.

It's our privilege to have given away literally thousands of Randy's books to prisoners and chapel libraries over the years. These materials minister to a wide range of inmates, from those who are serving sentences for drug-related crimes to those who are on death row. In 2011 alone, we sent out 4,090 books to 168 different correctional institutions. (That's double the number sent out in 2010!) The books are often shared with other inmates, so one book may be read by several people. Books are also requested for the chapel libraries and are often so popular that they're always checked out.

"God is working powerfully in the lives of prisoners through Randy's books," says Sharon Misenhimer, EPM support staff, who oversees this ministry. "I do nothing to promote the distribution of the books, other than pray for spiritual growth and salvation for the inmates. It's God's amazing work and I'm just so very grateful to be a part of it!"

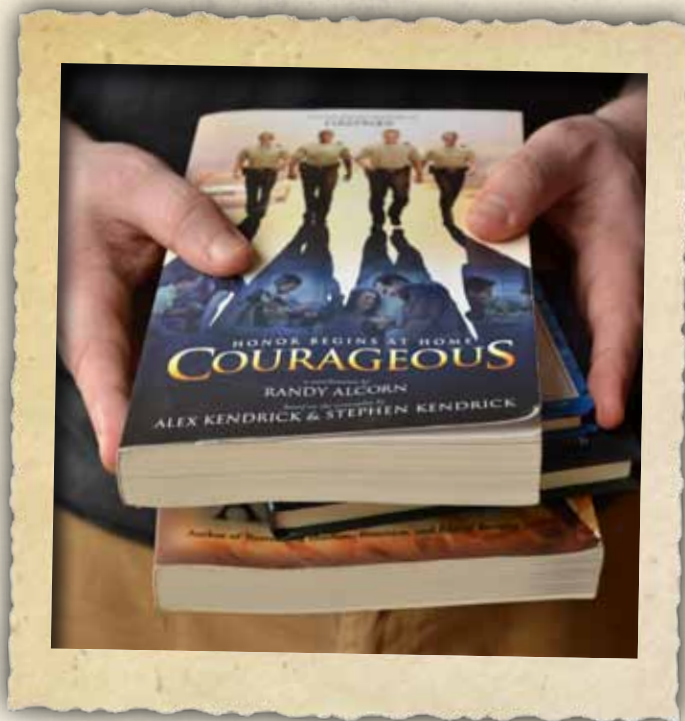
Here's a few of the many letters we've received from prisoners in the past year:

"Thanks to your books and the people that God put in my path, I can say that I made the right choice in following my rock and my salvation, the Lord Almighty." —H. from Washington

"Please know how much the book (*The Resolution for Men*) has encouraged me to make a resolution for my wife and children when I am released. I have dedicated every moment of my incarceration to becoming the follower, daddy, and husband God created me to be. I used to be a staff pastor at a mega church for several years and sadly my entire focus was on ministry and not at all on my own walk and my family. Sadly it has taken prison to get my priorities straight. Thankfully God has given me another chance." —S. from Florida

"Each one of your books have forever affected and changed my life. I have learned some things I would have never even thought about if not for you. Thank you, sir, for being such a good and faithful servant of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Throughout these books, I have had to stop reading in order to cry and pray for and about things that touched me so deeply. Things you have brought to light for me. I cannot say thank you enough." —C. from Pennsylvania

"I just wanted to thank EPM for all the books you mailed to me while I was in prison. I have been out a year now. I'm doing good, and trying to continue to grow in Christ. The books you mailed to me helped change and redirect not only my character, but my life. What you are doing does make a difference!" —J. from Oregon



HELP FUND BOOKS FOR PRISONERS

If you would like to help us underwrite the cost of providing and sending Randy's books to prisoners, you may donate online at www.epm.org/donate (choose the option "Books for Prisoners Fund" under Special Funds) or send a check to EPM designated "books for prisoners" on the memo line. 100% of the donations to this fund will be used to finance the cost of the books and materials, as well as the shipping charges.

PRAYER POINTS

- Pray that many men and women in our prison system come to faith in Christ.
- Pray that every book EPM sends out would be used by the Lord to touch and change lives.



A TENUOUS HOPE VERSUS A CERTAIN TRUTH

by Randy Alcorn

The vague and tenuous hope that God is too kind to punish the ungodly has become a deadly opiate for the consciences of millions. It hushes their fears and allows them to practice all pleasant forms of iniquity while death draws every day nearer and the command to repent goes unheeded.

A. W. Tozer

In *The Knowledge of the Holy*, a book that profoundly impacted me when I came to Christ as a teenager, Tozer speaks of the attributes of God, including those we're tempted to minimize. Whether we affirm the holiness and justice of God—and the doctrine of Hell, which is inseparable from them—may be the biggest test of whether the Bible or our culture is our true authority.

Without Hell, perpetrators of evil throughout the ages would get away with every contemptible deed. But even if we acknowledge Hell as a necessary punishment for evildoers, we rarely see ourselves as deserving it. After all, we are not Hitler, Stalin or Mao. (Are we?)

God responds, "There is no one righteous, not even one. . . . All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Romans 3:10-12, NIV).

We consider ourselves good people.

We are dead wrong. To see the face of evil, we need only look in the mirror.

When most people speak of what a terrible notion Hell is, they act as if it involves the suffering of innocent people. But nowhere does the Bible suggest that the innocent will spend even a moment in Hell!

Tozer wrote, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." Many modern Christians have reduced Him to a single-attribute God. Never mind that the angels in God's presence do not cry out, day and night, "Love, love, love," but "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty" (Isaiah 6:3, NIV).

By all means, we should rejoice in God's mercy and love. But we must also recognize that our Lord is relentlessly holy, righteous and just. "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong" (Habakkuk 1:13, NIV).

I have spoken at length with a few Christian writers who have reinvented the "good news." They see it not as an offer to be saved from everlasting punishment, but as an assurance that every person, regardless of whether they trust Christ in this life, will spend eternity in heaven.

(continued)

They rob the gospel of its stakes and urgency. They imagine they're paying God a compliment for being so tolerant, but it's not our job to airbrush Him or give Him a facelift.

Ironically, an exclusive emphasis on love strips God's love of its wonder. Without an understanding of the reality and consequences of sin, people aren't surprised by the idea that God loves them—why shouldn't He? But Scripture regards His love for us as remarkable, precisely because of our sin: "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

When John Newton wrote the hymn "Amazing Grace," he understood what made God's grace amazing—he was a Hell-deserving "wretch." When we minimize our sinfulness, we minimize the power and wonder of God's grace. We undermine what God redeemed us for: "in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7, NIV).

What Tozer said 50 years ago could have been written last week:

A lot of people have talked about the goodness of God and then gotten sentimental about it and said, "God is too good to punish anybody," and so they have ruled out Hell. But the man who has an adequate conception of God will not only believe in the love of God, but also in the holiness of God. . . . So let's not write dreamy poetry about the goodness of our heavenly Father who is love—"love is God and God is love and love is all in all and all is God and everything will be OK." That's the summation of a lot of teaching these days. But it's false teaching.¹

Tozer saw clearly what we need to see. God has already composed his message—it's called the Bible. He doesn't need speechwriters, editors and PR people. He needs faithful messengers.

Though Hell is dreadful, it is not evil. Hell is moral, because a good God must punish evil.

Some say, "Maybe Hell exists, but surely it's not eternal."

Jesus said, "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life" (Matthew 25:46, NIV). Christ uses the same Greek

When John Newton wrote the hymn "Amazing Grace," he understood what made God's grace amazing—he was a hell-deserving "wretch."



word for “eternal” (*aionos*) to describe the duration of both heaven and Hell.

The increasingly popular doctrine of annihilation merely confirms what most unbelievers already think—that their lives end at death, and therefore no judgment awaits them. We can certainly understand the appeal of such an expectation, but the fact is that Jesus spoke repeatedly of an eternal Hell, describing unquenchable fires and the worm that never dies (see Mark 9:48).

In Luke 16:19-31, Jesus taught that an unbridgeable chasm separates Hell from paradise. The wicked remain conscious, retain their memories, long for relief, cannot leave their torment, and are offered no hope. Our Savior couldn't have painted a bleaker picture.

Atheist Bertrand Russell wrote, “There is one very serious defect to my mind in Christ's moral character, and that is that He believed in Hell. I do not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment.”²

Shall we trust Jesus or Bertrand Russell? For me, this is not a difficult choice.

If there isn't an eternal Hell, or no one will end up there, Jesus made a huge mistake. If we cannot trust Jesus' teaching about Hell, why should we trust anything else He said, including His offer of salvation?

We may pride ourselves in thinking we're too loving to believe in Hell. But it's not loving to be silent when people are told the lie that they don't need to turn to Christ in this lifetime to be saved. Are we claiming to be more loving than Jesus, who with outrageous love bore the horrific penalty for our sin?

The Bible speaks of an eternal Hell as something that should motivate unbelievers to turn to God, and believers to share the gospel with urgency.

By denying Hell, we deny the extent of God's holiness. Worse yet, we deny the magnificence of God's grace. If the evils He died for aren't big enough to warrant eternal punishment, then perhaps the grace He showed us on the cross isn't big enough to warrant eternal praise.

The more we believe in all of God's attributes, including not only love and grace but also holiness and justice, the more Hell will make sense to us.

Tozer wrote, “Death fixes the status of the man who loved his sins and he is sent to the place of the rejected where there is for him no further hope. That is Hell, and it may be well we know so little about it. What we do know is sufficiently terrifying.”³

If we are as loving as we claim, we'd better learn to speak Christ's truth in love—telling people that if they reject the best gift of a holy and gracious God, purchased with His own blood, what remains, in the end, will be nothing but Hell.

Notes

¹ A. W. Tozer and David E. Fessenden, *The Attributes of God, Volume 1: A Journey into the Father's Heart* (Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread, 2003), pp. 107–108.

² Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*, edited by Paul Edwards (New York: Touchstone, 1967), p. 17.

³ A. W. Tozer, *God Tells the Man Who Cares* (Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread, 1992), p. 39.

CONTEMPLATING THE CROSS THIS EASTER

"For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." 1 Corinthians 1:18

Oh, what we miss out on when we rush past the cross of Christ. Oh, the richness and reward when we stop to linger before it, when we take the time to "consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself" (Heb. 12:3). In a culture where crosses have become commonplace as architecture and jewelry, how we need to truly gaze upon the cross of Christ in all of its ugliness and beauty, in its death and in its healing, in the painful price paid there, and in its free gift of grace. Jesus, keep us near the cross.

—Nancy Guthrie, from *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross*



WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM BY RANDY ALCORN

We have an example in Scripture of what a resurrection body is like. We're told a great deal about Christ's resurrected body, and we're told that our bodies will be like his. The empty tomb is the ultimate proof that Christ's resurrection body was the same body that died on the cross. If resurrection meant the creation of a new body, Christ's original body would have remained in the tomb.

When Jesus said to his disciples after his resurrection, "It is I myself," he was emphasizing to them that he was the same person—in spirit and body—who had gone to the cross (Luke 24:39). His disciples saw the marks of his crucifixion, unmistakable evidence that this was the same body.

Jesus walked the earth in his resurrection body for forty days, showing us how we would live as resurrected human beings. In effect, he also demonstrated where we would live as resurrected human beings—on Earth. Christ's resurrection body was suited for life on Earth, not primarily life in the intermediate Heaven. As Jesus was raised to come back to live on Earth, so we will be raised to come back to live on Earth (1 Thessalonians 4:14; Revelation 21:1-3).

ETERNAL PROMISES

The two told what had happened . . . and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread. While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them. . . . He said to them, "Why are you troubled . . . ? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself!" Luke 24:35-36, 38-39

Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." John 20:26-27

Excerpted from *Life Promises for Eternity* (www.epm.org/lifepromises)

REJOICE, O CHRISTIAN—HE IS RISEN

"Come, see the place where the Lord lay," with joy and gladness. He does not lie there now. Weep, when ye see the tomb of Christ, but rejoice because it is empty. Thy sin slew him, but his divinity raised him up. Thy guilt hath murdered him, but his righteousness hath restored him. Oh! he hath burst the bonds of death, he hath ...come out more than conqueror, crushing death beneath his feet. Rejoice, O Christian, for he is not there—he is risen.

—Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Our Lord has written the promise of the resurrection not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime.
—MARTIN LUTHER

YOUR PERSPECTIVE: LETTERS TO EPM

I am a fifteen years old girl called Tabea.

I live in Bavaria (Germany) near Munich. I've got the translation of your book with the title "The Ishbane Conspiracy", in German "Die Akte Jillian". I'm really very thrilled by this book. And I thank you for it very much.

As our teacher wanted us to present a book, I immediately chose this book. I'm the only one in this class who loves Jesus and wants to follow him. With the help of the book I want to tell them something about Jesus.

- Yours, Tabea

*I am a prisoner, serving a sentence for second degree robbery. Your book, *Deadline*, has impacted me in a way nothing else has ever done, ever! My life will never be the same. For this, I will be grateful to you and Jesus Christ forever.*

Even though I was raised in a Conservative Baptist household, it was very dysfunctional. I rebelled against my family and the church (including Jesus). I spent nearly 25 years searching...for a purpose, a sort of, "Why am I here?" attitude. This was a very destructive path.

A friend gave me your book, saying he received it from a family member, but it was not his kind of book. After I read it, I met with him to give the book back. He asked me why my face looked so different. I said, "I found the purpose to my life, thanks to this book." He then told me this was the first time he had ever seen me smile! He's reading your book now.

Will you please send me any other books you've written? I will devour them, and then pass them on.

Thank you,
-J. W.

Just wanted to let you know that in our Sunday school class we've been studying your book, *Heaven*. The teacher mentioned today that your book saved his life. You see, his son committed suicide several years ago, and after his loss, he read around a hundred books looking for solace, but found none until your book. Until your book, our teacher wasn't sure he wanted to live the rest of his life either. Your study has saved a life to live and teach for the kingdom.

Thanks and to God be the glory !!!

-P. H.

I am a probation and parole officer and deal with convicted felons, and a lot of them are addicts. On Randy's Facebook page, a lady was at wits end with her son and she made a comment that she didn't know what to do. I sent her a message on Facebook to see if he would come to my town to do a rehab. He agreed. I got him into a rehab and during the first few days he accepted Christ as his personal savior. So, if Randy ever wonders if his Facebook page is useful, believe me it is. One more for Jesus, and hopefully a fully recovered addict.

-D. B.

*I just finished reading *The Chasm*... it brought me to tears the way you reminded me of exactly what it meant for Christ to give up what He did. I need the reminder of the depth of His love everyday!*

-L. D.



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Long-Distance Spirituality

by Tim Keller

Years ago, on the advice of an older and wiser Christian, I began trying to pray through the Psalms once every month. Don't be too impressed—I seldom make it through all 150 of the psalms every 30 days. However, by making that the goal I am able to eventually ponder each one at least several times a year.

One psalm especially has always caught my attention—Psalm 71. It might be entitled a 'Psalm for Old Age.' In verse 5 the psalmist says, "For you have been my hope, O Sovereign LORD, my confidence since my youth," and in verse 9, "Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone." This text has been of more interest to me as I have grown older, but I usually think, "no use preaching on this psalm to a young congregation like mine." And yet, I've come to see there is a lesson here for all of us, and especially for the young.

The psalmist says that from his youth he has relentlessly worked at three things. He has "always" taken refuge in God during times of distress (verse 3), "always" praised God as an act of personal discipline (verse 7), and "always" put his hope in God for his future. The first practice has to do with how he has processed his suffering and disappointments, and the second practice has to do with daily prayer. He recounts that he has never let anything turn him aside from these disciplines:

Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up. I will praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God; my lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you—I, whom you have redeemed. (Psalm 71:20,22-23)

The third is the most foundational of all. He does rigorous self-examination regarding the fundamental trusts of his heart. He is careful to know what he actually rests in and lives for, and he continually re-focuses his soul's deepest hopes on God. Over the decades, the psalmist has simply not let up on these commitments. As a result, he is literally bursting with desire to let people know what he has found in God.

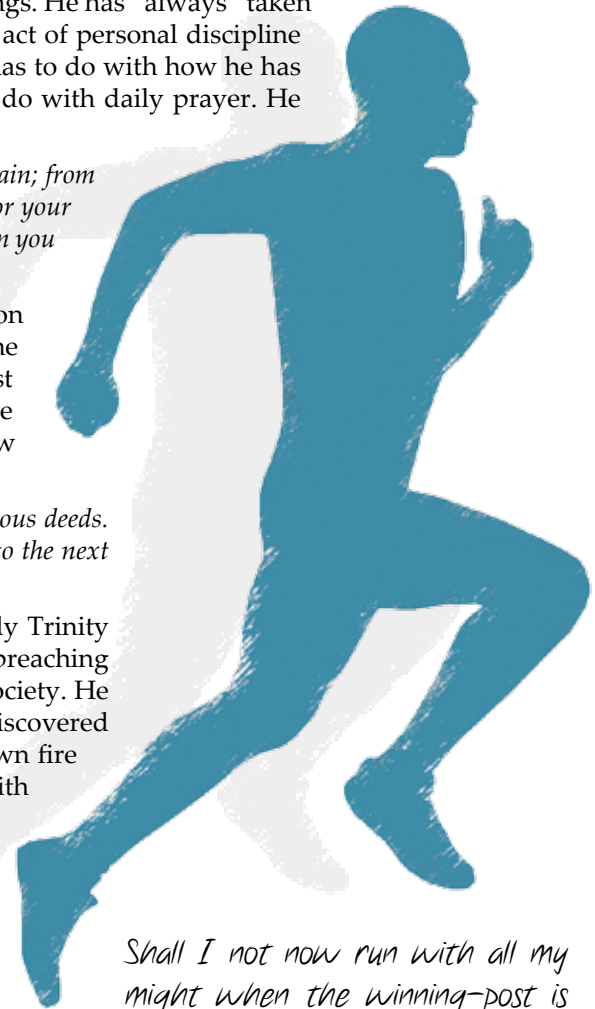
Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come. (Psalm 71:17-18)

In 1836, Charles Simeon retired after fifty-four years of ministry at the Holy Trinity Church, Cambridge, UK. There he had been engaged in a ministry of expository preaching that had sent several generations of young Christian leaders out into British society. He had accomplished far more than 99.99% of ministers ever do. Yet a friend discovered that this elderly man was still rising at 4:00 a.m. every morning to light his own fire and to spend time reading the Bible, praying, repenting, and spending time with God. His friend thought this was over-kill. "Mr. Simeon," he pleaded, "Do you not think that, now that you are retired, you might take things more easily?" "What?!" replied the old Charles Simeon. "Shall I not now run with all my might when the winning-post is in sight?"

I am neither of advanced age nor a young man, but I know why Simeon could not imagine taking things "more easily." It was because the praising, the hoping, and the resting becomes better and better if you are willing to give it daily attention for years and years. The one hundredth time through the Psalms or the Proverbs will yield astonishingly sweet, comforting, and convicting insights, because the more you know the Bible as a whole the more sense its particular parts make. And the more you know your own heart the more you know how to work on it, how to move past your discouragement, your peevishness, and your self-pity. But it takes years of relentless discipline. It is similar to how it takes years of practice to enjoy the power of playing the piano beautifully, but what we are talking about goes beyond even that in complexity and depth.

When it comes to the spiritual disciplines, don't be a sprinter. Be a long-distance runner. •

Timothy Keller is the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and the president of Redeemer City to City. His books, including the New York Times bestselling The Reason for God and The Prodigal God, have sold over 1 million copies. This article originally appeared in Redeemer Presbyterian Church's Redeemer Report: <http://bit.ly/longdistancespirituality>.



Shall I not now run with all my might when the winning-post is in sight? — Charles Simeon

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well.

1 John 5:1

JESUS: THE CENTER OF OUR FAITH

Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father living in me, who is doing his work.

John 14:10

For there is one God and one mediator between God and Men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men. -1 Timothy 2:5

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

"He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him." John 5:23b

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16-17

JESUS

said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me." -John 8:42

Do not let your hearts

be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me." John 14:1

For in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. Colossians 2:9

"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven." Matthew 10:32-33

John 1:18

John 5:23

John 13:20

2 Corinthians 4:4

Hebrews 1:2-3

Hebrews 7:25-26

Only the Wounded

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.
—2 Timothy 4:6-8, ESV

Paul's letter to Timothy wasn't the first he wrote from prison in Rome, it was his last. Final letter, final prison. The time of his departure had come. It was to be an exodus not from life to death but from death to life. He looked back at his life of service for Christ, knowing he had fought hard and finished well. He'd been far from perfect, yet he kept the faith. He knew a crown of righteousness awaited him. Instead of leaving treasures behind, he was headed toward treasures in Heaven.

Soon the apostle's head would be cut off, by order of Emperor Nero, the madman. Nero was the envy of the Earth; Paul the scum of the Earth. Yet no one in his right mind would choose Nero's place over Paul's now because of what awaited them both in the afterlife. Paul was a wounded servant, but his wounds would be forever healed by the wounded Savior.

Paul's final words to Timothy reflect both his resolve and his tenderness. Suffering makes hearts tender and gives us greater love for others. Many physicians and nurses testify to this phenomenon when they return to their vocations after long periods of personal suffering. When they've been the patient, they grow far more sensitive to patients' needs.

My friend John Kohlenberger, a gifted scholar, has written many biblical language reference works. Seven years ago doctors diagnosed John with an advanced cancer; he wasn't expected to live more than a few years. He told me that he'd kept himself away from people in the past, but suddenly he found himself constantly in doctors' offices, hospitals, experimental treatment programs, and support groups, and gathering with people at his church.

John tells me all this has transformed his relationships. He enjoys church in a way he never did. He's developed deep relationships instead of superficial ones. "My only regret," he said, "is that it took me fifty years to get here, and that it took cancer to open my eyes."

By dealing with his cancer, John told me he's learned to be authentic and honest. "It's much easier for me now to touch someone I don't know and pray for them," he said. When I walked with him for hours at a cancer-cure fundraising event, I saw repeatedly his warm interactions with many people he's come to know through his disease. John has reached out to others in need and found it rewarding. And though years earlier he could never have imagined such a thing, this lifelong scholar said to me, "You know, I'd really enjoy becoming a chaplain, helping people deal with cancer."

I've witnessed how God has touched John and used him powerfully. That doesn't minimize or glorify my friend's pain, or his family's, but it does show some of God's purpose in it (see 2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

A Thornton Wilder play called *The Angel That Troubled the Waters* is based loosely on John 5:1-4. A physician comes periodically to the pool of Bethesda, hoping to be the first in the moving water and so be healed of his depression.

One day the angel blocks the doctor from stepping into the water. "Draw back, physician," he commands, "this moment is not for you."

Lord, help me see that my wounds are necessary

For a daily devotional that brings perspective and hope during suffering, see Randy's book *90 Days of God's Goodness*: www.epm.org

Can Serve

by Randy Alcorn

The man responds, "I pray thee, listen to my prayer."

"Healing is not for you," the angel insists.

The physician argues. "Surely, O Prince, you are not deceived by my apparent wholeness." He points out the terrible burden of his depression.

The angel assures him he knows of his affliction, then says to him, "Without your wound where would your power be? It is your very remorse that makes your low voice tremble into the hearts of men. The very angels themselves cannot persuade the wretched and blundering children on earth as can one human being broken on the wheels of living. In love's service only the wounded soldiers can serve. Draw back."

Later, the person who enters the pool first is healed and rejoices. He then turns to the physician and begs him to come to his home: "My son is lost in dark thoughts. I—I do not understand him, and only you have ever lifted his mood.... My daughter, since her child has died, sits in the shadow. She will not listen to us but she will listen to you."

Paul wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Corinthians 1:3–4, ESV).

Though a young woman exhibited joy in Christ despite her suffering, one particularly difficult day she asked her pastor why God hadn't let her die. He had no answer until a few days later when he met an unfamiliar couple at church. They told him about their visit with this woman in the hospital earlier that week, saying she had touched them on the deepest level. The young man said, "We went home and decided that we want to become Christians."

So there came an answer to this dying woman's question: God had kept her alive to bring these people to Christ.

You don't have to see your child die or endure a divorce to offer comfort to someone who's suffered in those ways. You must have suffered, however. The résumé of every encourager and every counselor contains suffering.

Only the wounded can serve.

Lord, what a picture of Paul, sitting in that dark, damp, stinking prison cell while his soon-to-be assassin Nero lives in unequaled opulence and luxury. Paul's conscience is clear, his life well-lived, while Nero's conscience is seared, his life corrupted. The pleasures of Heaven await the servant; the horrors of Hell await the tyrant. Thank you for this reminder not to waste our lives but invest them in what will count for eternity. Lord, while you pour out your comfort to us directly by a ministry of your Holy Spirit, you are also fond of using people to comfort us. Thank you for the pleasure of both giving and receiving comfort in your family. Make me a servant, Lord. Help me see that my wounds are necessary because you use them to bring healing to others. Help me understand that you, my Servant King, will one day reward my humble service.



because you use them to bring healing to others.



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