

eternal perspectives

with author Randy Alcorn

Spring Issue • 2014

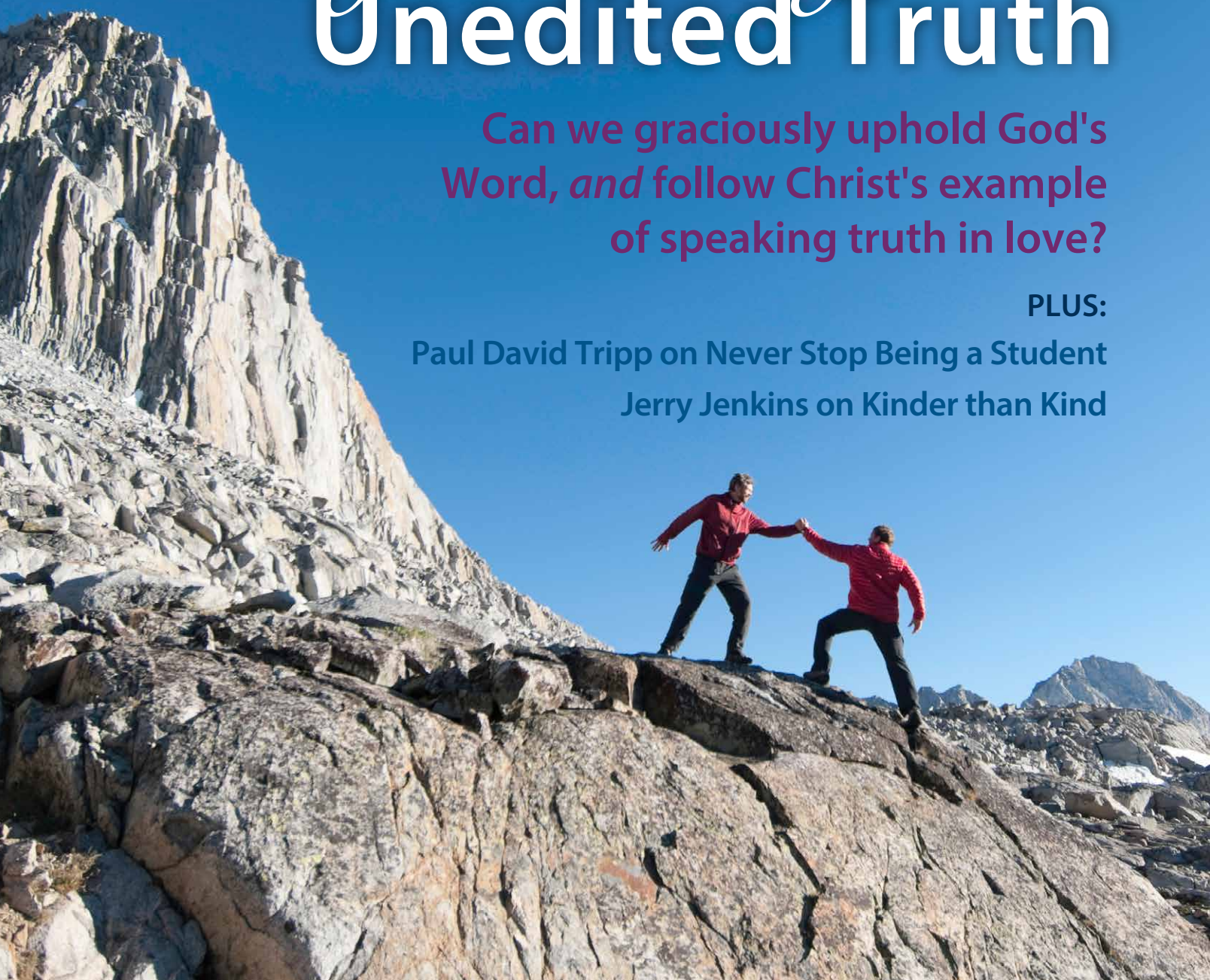
Genuine Grace, **Unedited Truth**

**Can we graciously uphold God's
Word, and follow Christ's example
of speaking truth in love?**

PLUS:

Paul David Tripp on Never Stop Being a Student

Jerry Jenkins on Kinder than Kind



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about

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A Prayer

FOR OUR NATION, OUR WORLD, AND OUR HEARTS



BY KRESS DREW



O Father, as I stop and think about our country today, all the hurt and pain and the way we so often break your heart, I quickly become overwhelmed by it all. And then in the stillness, I stop and I fix my hope and gaze upon you, the Lord and Lifter of my head.

Father, I come to you as you call me, just as I am; unable on my own, yet tender to your Spirit, and aware I am sitting at a table with the world who doesn't get it. Who doesn't know you; who's busy, distracted, angry, misled, and confused. Yet you care for them and by your kindness I do too. For these are real people— hearts made for relationship and joy with you.

Lord, they are not the enemy. They are no different than me: flesh and blood in constant need of you. I too was blind until by your grace you helped me see. So Lord, I pray the same for them. Father, as I live in prayer with you, please grant me your heart for the lost, one person at a time. Please open their eyes to see and mine to how I can help them to see you for who you really are, the One who knows them and who loves them best.

Please let your love flow through me, full and overflowing, spreading into the hearts of those I meet; "to know you, and to love you," this is my prayer and the cry of my heart. Thank you that although it is you alone who changes each heart, you allow me to be a part of the process and to find a place with you in your great work.

Lord, I am asking this in the simple faith of a child and with the joy that comes from years of intimacy with you. Please heal our nation, our world, and our hearts through relationship with each other and with you.

In Jesus' wonderful Name I live and pray, Amen.

I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people (1 Timothy 2:1).

Kress Drew is a high school math teacher and football coach, and also a board member of Eternal Perspective Ministries. He has been very blessed to travel overseas on different short-term mission teams reaching out to others and sharing God's love with them.

Many people—both young and old—dread aging.

What should our perspective be on growing older?

BY RANDY ALCORN

First, realize that fifty isn't old, neither is sixty. Seventy and eighty don't have to be old either. Your mindset is much more important than your age. But if God keeps you here long enough to really get old, then be grateful you've lived so long! And determine to enjoy every day, month, and year that God gives you. Remember, if He didn't have a purpose for you here, *you wouldn't be here.*

Most societies venerate the elderly. Think of the experience and wisdom the older person has gained in all his or her years of life. They have so much to offer others. I love to be around older people—that is, older people who have sweetened with age, not those who have soured. Choose which you'd rather be.

As you grow older, you can be one of those godly old saints people love to be around. The more you've walked with the Lord the more you'll have to offer your children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, friends, neighbors, and church family.

No matter your age, remember that who you are is rooted in Christ and who He has made you, not in your outward appearance or performance. Rehearse the fact that the most important part of your life is the part that only God sees. His deepest concern is about the inner you. True beauty is inner beauty, and it does not diminish but deepens as you grow older and your friendship with Him develops.

I won't pretend that growing old is easy. It isn't. But there is still something beautiful about it for the Christian. There are always people to share your life with—people to help and people to help you. And with you is your God, who knew you before birth and will take you through death to the glory of His presence. Robert Browning's words can be applied to our relationships with our loved ones and with God:

Grow old with me; The best is yet to be.

The last of life, For which the first was made.

And in fact, for believers, more accurate poetic lines would be,

The best is yet to be, The *next* of lives, For which the first was made.

The last of our life before we die is in fact not the last of our life! We'll go right on living in another place. And one day, in the resurrection, we'll live again on Earth, a life so rich and joyful that this life will seem impoverished in comparison. Millions of years from now we'll still be young.

In our society many people look to cosmetic surgeries, implants, and other methods to remodel and renovate their crumbling bodies. We hold to youthfulness with a white-knuckled grip. Ultimately it's all in vain. But the gospel promises us eternal youthfulness, health, beauty, and happiness in the presence of our God and our spiritual family. It's not ours now—but it will be, in the resurrection of the dead. ■

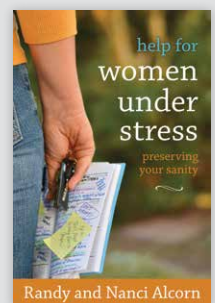


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more

Randy and Nanci's book *Help for Women Under Stress* offers encouragement and perspectives for women of all ages. www.epm.org/hfwus



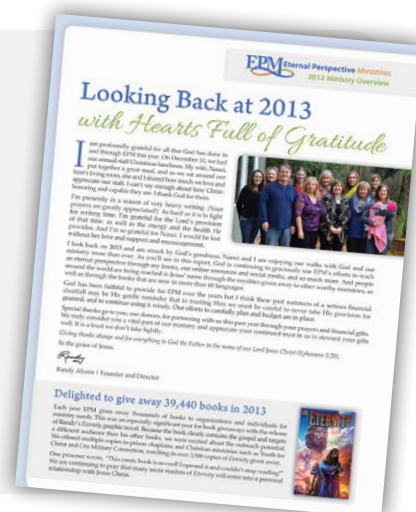
Listen to/read John Piper's sermon message "Getting Old for the Glory of God" at <http://bit.ly/oldglorygod>.

EPM's 2013 Ministry Overview

We're excited about the ways God faithfully used our ministry in the past year to impact eternity.

- EPM gave \$477,615 in book royalties to other worthy ministries, including a ministry rescuing victims of child sex trafficking in Indonesia
- Our ministry is impacting pastors through kits and resources
- EPM's website is making an impact: a woman chose life for her unborn child after reading one of Randy's articles

We invite you to read our overview letter at www.epm.org/2013overview



Register for Randy's seminar at The Cove

Randy will be speaking at The Cove (Billy Graham Training Center), in Asheville, North Carolina, October 22-24, 2014.

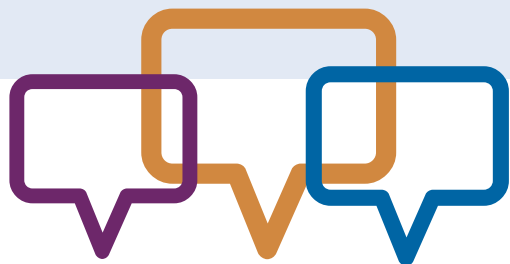
The seminar is titled "Our Future Hope: Thinking and Living Now in Light of Eternity." Randy hopes to inspire you to expand your view of God and His desire for you to experience His goodness, happiness, and provision, even in difficult times, this side of paradise. You'll be encouraged to deepen the hope of Heaven in your heart and draw closer to the One who made you for Himself.

To register, go to <http://bit.ly/randycove>.

We invite your feedback on this issue of *Eternal Perspectives*!

Thoughts on the articles and content in this magazine? Issues and topics you'd like us to focus on in upcoming magazines? We'd love to hear from you!

Send us your feedback and it might be included in the next issue. Email magazine@epm.org or send your letter to Eternal Perspectives Magazine, 39085 Pioneer Blvd., Suite 206, Sandy, OR 97055.



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Randy and Nanci at Mom to Mom group

The Alcorns will share in a Q&A on marriage at Mom to Mom (a ministry of their home church, Good Shepherd Community Church in Boring, Oregon) on Thursday, May 8 from 9 to 11:15 a.m. For more information, see www.goodshepherdcc.org/women. (Video will be posted on our website after the event.)

Genuine Grace, UNEDITED TRUTH

The Need for Christians
to Graciously Follow
Christ's Example and
Uphold His Word

BY RANDY ALCORN



THE NEED FOR GRACE AND TRUTH

The world is desperately hungry for two things—grace and truth. Jesus Christ is full of both: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). When Jesus stepped onto the world’s stage, people could not only hear the demands of truth but also see Truth Himself. No longer fleeting glimmers of grace, but Grace Himself.

To see Christ through us, the world must see grace and truth in His followers.

Paradoxically, the church is simultaneously too hostile to the world and too friendly to it. Sinners wanted to be around Jesus, but today many don’t want to be around Jesus’ followers. On the other hand, when the church tries to make itself a place where everyone is comfortable, its distinctives are often sacrificed. The church becomes one more social club that helps people feel good but fails to help them *be* good.

In the one case, Christians emphasize truth but neglect grace. In the other, they emphasize grace but neglect truth.

Some churches are strong on truth but weak on grace. Some are strong on grace but weak on truth. Truth is not complete without grace and grace is not complete without truth. Grace without truth deceives people. Truth without grace crushes people.

Sometimes I write mostly about grace. This time, I am writing mostly about truth.

REMAKING JESUS IN THE CULTURE’S IMAGE?

The only “church growth formula” the early church possessed was the body of truth flowing with the blood of grace. They drew thousands to Jesus by being like Jesus. Unfortunately, today many professing Christians agree with Jesus *only* when He speaks about love and says “Judge not.”

When He takes moral stands and says there’s an eternal hell to punish sins, that’s a different story. They take a “cut and paste” approach to the Bible—“when I like what it says I’ll quote it; when I don’t like it, I’ll ignore, reinterpret or deny it.” That means the Bible is not their authority. Rather, culture and themselves are their authority.

It concerns me when those who profess to be Christians simply redefine what it means to be a Christian to accommodate whatever the culture currently believes, supposing they are more loving, kind and relevant Christians.

Once we deny parts of God’s truth, we’re no longer under the authority of Scripture. If Christians try to be

relevant and accepted by making up truth on the fly, then the Jesus we speak of will not be the Scripture-believing Jesus of the Bible who was full of both grace and truth. He will just be the “loving Jesus” remade in our culture’s image, in which we redefine love as absolute tolerance and moral indifference.

Christ’s followers are to be both loving *and* holy. Our job is not to be God’s PR team or speechwriters, but to be His ambassadors, not making policy but humbly representing what God has declared to be true.

DISCOVERING WHAT TRUE, CHRISTLIKE LOVE LOOKS LIKE

If we hold to what God’s Word says is true, does that mean we can’t be empathetic and caring about those who are living lifestyles contrary to God’s intention, apart from Christ? Of course not. Yes, it would be easier and feel better to be able to say to everyone, “No problem, I love you and that means however you want to live is fine with God.” Rather, in compassion and kindness, we can point out that all sin—including ours—goes against God’s design. Ultimately, it is *always* deadly for any of

us to choose the path of sin. We too are sinners, and we still love people who choose sin. But that doesn’t mean we say sin isn’t sin.

Tim Keller writes, “Truth without love is harshness; it gives us information but in such a way that we cannot really hear it. Love without truth is sentimentality; it supports and affirms us but keeps us in denial about our flaws.”

Ephesians 4:15 tells us we need to “speak the truth in love.” We are not to choose between being loving and being truthful. We are to be both. Jesus loved the woman who committed adultery (John 8:3-11). He loved her the way she was, but loved her too much to let her stay that way. His love didn’t compel Him to say, “Adultery is okay, you don’t have to change,” but “Go and sin no more.” If I truly love someone, I will come to them as Jesus did, in grace *and* truth.

The important thing is not to *appear* to love our neighbors (by withholding the truth), but to *actually* love our neighbors by acting in their best interests—even when speaking the truth is hard for us and them.

A CALL TO GRACIOUSLY SPEAK THE TRUTH, INCLUDING FROM THE PULPIT

Trying to fly under the radar of our culture on moral issues is no better than the always-in-your-face method. The grace-only approach, in the end, is as deficient as the truth-only approach. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17). He is our perfect example.

**If I truly love
someone, I will
come to them as
Jesus did, in grace
and truth.**

For pastors and leaders, this means we should not hold back from speaking biblical truth in any area. To do so would be unloving. Paul says in Acts 20:27, “for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.” We’re not to preach just from our favorite portions of the Word, but all of it.

Addressing the pastor’s role, Martin Luther wrote:

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proven, and to be steady on all the battle fronts besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.

Garry Randall, director of Faith & Freedom writes, “The fact is that churches are generally not speaking to the issues that are destroying our culture, and many pastors don’t intend to do so in 2014—for a variety of reasons.” He cites a 2013 poll by George Barna that found while 97% of pastors believe what the Scriptures say about homosexual behavior is clear, only 31% plan to address the issue of same sex-marriage.¹

Yes, there are *many* more issues and sins that need to be addressed from the pulpit and in our own lives besides homosexual behavior! We need to be careful to search our hearts and speak against sin such as gluttony, gossip, lust, greed and self-righteousness. After all, the vast majority of sins addressed in Scripture have nothing to do with homosexuality. While we need to stand up against accepting homosexuality as moral, we also need to be more passionate about decrying what *we* do that offends God.

We live in a strange new world in which those who affirm what nearly all Christians everywhere have believed for two thousand years—that both homosexual *and* heterosexual relations outside marriage are prohibited Scripturally—are seen as bigots. Those who believe in an eternal hell are seen as unloving and narrow-minded. Those who believe abortion kills children, and that they don’t deserve to die, are seen as angry, judgmental and backwards.

Many pastors have grown weary of the abortion issue. Some who used to speak up for unborn children no longer do. In my own church there are people who say they stay home on the Sanctity of Life Sunday (which thankfully our church still observes) because they don’t want to be told that abortion kills children. And if anyone



It isn’t our job to simply make each other feel good, but to help each other *be* good.

in church dares to show a photo of an aborted child—even if they warn people and tell them they can close their eyes—that’s considered outrageous. (Interesting, since newspapers in the mid-forties were applauded for courageously showing the pictures of murdered people in concentration camps—and those pictures were what made the Holocaust finally seem real.)

The only way to redeem yourself as a Christian in the eyes of popular culture, and increasingly even in the church, is to deny what it means to be a Christian. The only way to be a credible pastor is to deny what it means to be a biblical pastor.

When we believe and teach the Bible, it’s guaranteed you and I will be seen as bigots. Unless, of course, we either outright deny the Scriptures or are so quiet about our beliefs that no one finds us out. (Imagine an ambassador who lives in fear of divulging his King’s policies.)

Of course we will be mocked and despised by some. Jesus said, “In the world you will have tribulation”

(John 16:33). Paul said, “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12).

But our call is clear: in the balance of grace and truth, to follow the example of Peter and the Apostles, who told the Sanhedrin: “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

THE FINAL APPRAISAL

As a young pastor I cared too much what people thought of me. The best cure for this was twenty-five years ago when I was repeatedly arrested and went to jail for peaceful nonviolent civil disobedience at abortion clinics.

During that time a pastor told me he believed Christians shouldn’t ever break the law and go to jail. But I said the day would likely come when he would go to jail, not for refusing to go along with abortion, but for



¹ <http://bit.ly/N9OaBw>

preaching against homosexual behavior, which would eventually be declared illegal "hate speech." What seemed far-fetched to many then becomes increasingly more likely as the years go by.

I participated in the civil disobedience because I believed God wanted me to stand up for unborn children. But it was extremely unpopular in Oregon, to say the least, and even many Christians, including some of our church folk, disapproved. I learned to accept that. The key is to understand that we live out our lives before the Audience of One. If our goal is to hear others say, "Well done," we won't do what we

God's opinion alone will matter.

should to hear Him say it.

We need to ask ourselves whether we are living for the culture's approval or for God's approval. By all means, let's reach out to people with love and grace—but in the end, other people's opinions of us won't matter. Our opinion of ourselves won't matter. God's opinion alone will matter, and His "opinion" is truth. *He* is the One we should seek to please.

There is only one true Judge—a Savior who is full of both grace and truth. ■

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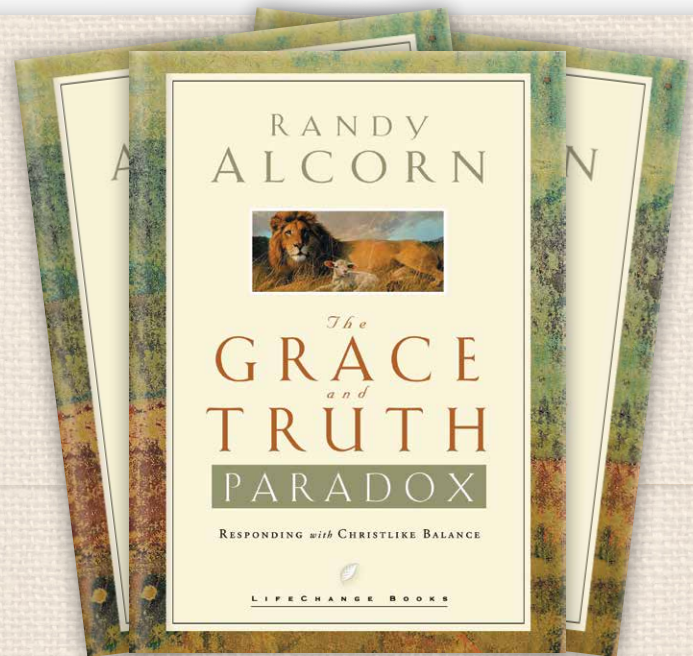
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"Scripture says Jesus came 'full of grace and truth.' So grace and truth are like a two-point checklist for being Christlike. I like that message; it's basic and simple for us to grasp. This was a very encouraging book for me to write."

—RANDY ALCORN

Free resources to encourage and equip pastors

Pastors and church leaders can order a free pastor's kit, which includes a copy of *The Grace and Truth Paradox* and a DVD of Randy speaking and answering questions on the subject of grace and truth.

To request a kit, email info@epm.org.

impact: book royalties



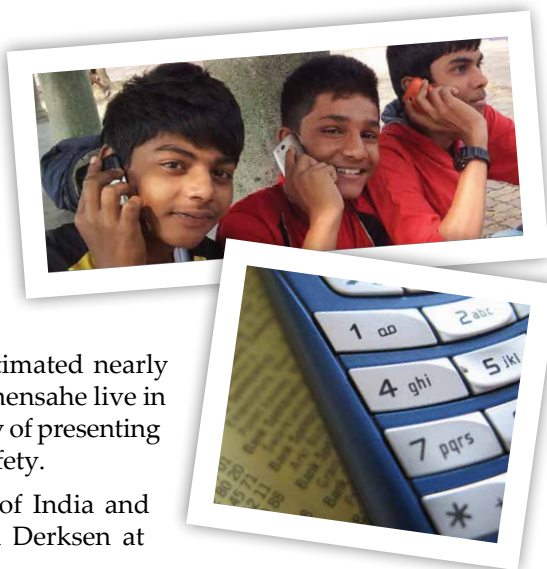
100% of the royalties from Randy's books are given away: 90% to other worthy Christian organizations and 10% to EPM (to help offset the costs related to the writing/researching/editing of Randy's books, as well as to facilitate the giving away of our books to people all over the world). To date, that's over \$6 million. By His grace, God is using Randy's books to make a difference in the world—and for eternity. We'd like to share with you just one of the ministries EPM supports with the book royalties.

Telemensahe Ministry Expansion into India and Nepal

Telemensahe is a telephone ministry which was started in the Philippines in 1992, and is now running in Africa, Central Asia, and the Indian Subcontinent. The ministry consists of a series of messages recorded on digital "voice announcers" which play the messages to callers 24 hours a day, seven days a week. One of the messages is an 8-minute explanation of how to receive Christ as Savior and Lord. (In the Philippines, over two million people have called inquiring about salvation!)

The ministry now receives thousands of calls each day, including an estimated nearly 3,000 calls per day in India and Ethiopia. Many of those impacted by Telemensahe live in difficult-to-penetrate areas resistant to the Gospel. It is a non-threatening way of presenting the good news of Christ to them because it offers anonymity and relative safety.

EPM contributed to the expansion of the Telemensahe in the countries of India and Nepal. Would you like to learn more about this ministry? Email Allen Derksen at allen_d@shaw.ca



Some Donors Share Why They Support EPM

When our donors support EPM's general fund, they greatly bless our ministry. But we're encouraged to hear how supporting EPM has been a blessing to them, too.

I read *Heaven* and it transformed my faith. I didn't understand God until I understood Heaven. What you guys do is extremely important! —W.C.

We appreciate Randy's ministry and philosophy of giving. So different than other ministries. —S. & C. S.

Randy's writings have really helped our family. —T.K.

I first heard about EPM through Randy's books. I think I've read them all now. I have supported EPM in the past but not at this level. Why? The leading and provision of the God is the only way I can answer. The Lord has blessed my investments and trading even in these difficult financial times. I can't promise that our giving level will continue at this rate, but I can tell you that EPM has blessed me and contributed to my spiritual maturity. We will continue to give as God provides and leads. —R.H.

To do the work God has called us to do, EPM is in need of regular monthly supporters. We invite you to ask God if He would have you join us as partners in this ministry. Learn more at www.epm.org/donate.



NEVER STOP BEING A STUDENT

BY PAUL DAVID TRIPP

Do you think that you've arrived? Do you tend to think that you've learned what you need to learn and now know what you need to know? Or do you want to understand more deeply and more fully? Do you have a humble, open, and seeking heart?

There was once a time in the early years of our faith when we couldn't get enough. We had a voracious hunger for truth. We lived with the humbling realization that there was so much we didn't know. We loved to study the Word of God. We loved listening to peers and mentors who were further along. We were students.

But something happened along the way. Perhaps we got distracted by the world and began to live more like tourists than students. Perhaps we got discouraged and felt our study wasn't helping. Or perhaps our hunger was blunted by a feeling of arrival.

Whatever your story, I say to you—never stop being a student. There are two reasons. First—the depth of God's wisdom. It has no boundary. It has no bottom. It has no ceiling. If for ten million years you sat for 24 hours a day at His feet to listen, you would scratch only the surface of His wisdom.

Here's the second reason—the danger of the world. Falsehood echoes more loudly and repeatedly than the sounds of wisdom. Every day a thousand voices

speak into your life, and the majority of those voices have not gotten the flowers of their insight from the wisdom garden of the Lord.

You see, we live in the middle of a raging wisdom war. It's so easy to be taken captive. It's so easy to have divine wisdom corrupted by human wisdom. It's so easy to breathe in the polluted air of a culture that no longer actually thinks that God is, let alone that He is wise.

I'll say it again, never stop being a student. Morning after morning, bow your head and humbly pray—"Lord, please teach me your way."

In what ways have you stopped living as a student?

To become more of a student, what changes would you need to make in your approach to daily life?

What, in your knowledge of God's truth, do you need to investigate further and understand more fully?

How can you encourage others to live like students? ■

Paul David Tripp is a pastor, author, and international conference speaker. He is the president of Paul Tripp Ministries and works to connect the transforming power of Jesus Christ to everyday life.

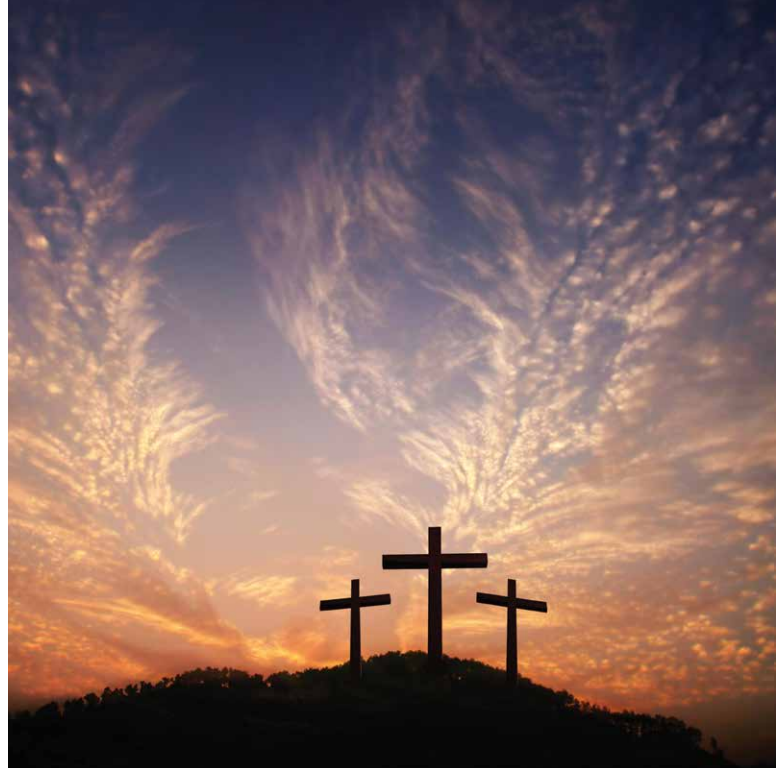
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LEAD ME IN YOUR TRUTH AND TEACH ME, FOR YOU ARE THE GOD OF MY SALVATION (PSALM 25:5)

The Cross of Christ

A Symbol Not of Our Worthiness, But Our Unworthiness

BY RANDY ALCORN



Years ago I spoke at a Christian event where the vocalist got up to sing one of my favorite songs, “Amazing Grace.” But I was taken aback when I heard the first line:

“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a soul like me.”

Notice the revision? The word “soul” was substituted for the writer’s word “wretch.” Why? “Soul” was more psychologically correct. To use the word “wretch” is considered by some to be demeaning to human beings. I couldn’t help but think of John Newton, writer of the song. He was an immoral slave-trader and blasphemer, a man who knew he was a wretch, who had wept over the depth of his sins. Only because he understood that fact so profoundly, could he then understand why God’s grace to him was so utterly amazing.

If we were just morally neutral “souls,” or lovely worthy souls (which is the theology of self-esteem), then there was nothing amazing about God’s grace. And that’s the problem. When we elevate ourselves and our worthiness, we denigrate and undermine the wonder of God’s grace toward us. An example of our easily skewed thinking is the way that Christ’s death on our behalf is now routinely used as a proof of our worthiness. How do we reassure ourselves that we are really worthwhile people? “Christ died for us, and look at the price he paid!” We were worth dying for, right?

But the worst thing we can teach people is that they’re good without Jesus. The fact is, God doesn’t offer grace

to good people any more than doctors offer lifesaving surgery to healthy people. Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31–32).

The amazing truth is that Christ died for utterly unworthy people (Romans 5:7–8). To minimize our unworthiness by emphasizing our value is to minimize the redemptive work of Christ on our behalf. The fact that Christ died for us is never given in Scripture as a proof of our value as wonderful people, but a demonstration of his unfathomable love. So unfathomable that He would

die for rotten people, “wretches” like you and me.

The cross of Christ is a demonstration of God’s utter goodness and grace, and our utter depravity and unworthiness. Indeed, the idea that God died for morally good or morally neutral “souls” is a heresy of the worst kind. It is “psychologically correct” (that is, popularly believed in psychological circles) but it is theologically as incorrect as it could possibly be.

Suppose a man murdered five children and his bail was set at ten million dollars. (Hopefully no bail would be set, but go with me for the illustration’s sake.) Would you look at the enormity of the price of his freedom and conclude, “Wow, this man must really be worthy! I mean, his value is set at ten million dollars!”? I doubt his lawyer or anyone else would point to the cost of his bail as an indication of his worth or a basis for his self-esteem.

Yet that’s exactly what we do when we say “we must be worthy—look at the price that had to be paid

To minimize our unworthiness by emphasizing our value is to minimize the redemptive work of Christ on our behalf.

for our redemption.” No, the astronomical price of our redemption—the shed blood of God—is a testimony not to how good we are, but to how bad we really are! If we hadn’t been so bad, a lower price would have been sufficient. The higher the price, the greater testimony to our depravity, and the wondrous love of God. The cross of Christ should make us feel worse about ourselves, and better about God!

Now, of course, because of God’s grace, there is much for us to be happy about! We can feel good about what God has done for us and to us and in us. We can be delivered from sin and guilt and shame. And in that sense, we can and should feel better about our redeemed, blood-covered and Heaven-bound selves.

We need not worry about ceasing to deserve God’s grace because we never deserved it in the first place! We

don’t have to fear becoming unworthy of Him precisely because we were never worthy of Him. We are forever secure in the love of Christ, as we could never be if our relationship with Him depended upon our worth. Yes, He loves and cherishes us, but in a way that fully credits Him, not us.

It’s not only for God’s glory but for our good that we understand the cross of Christ doesn’t show our worth, but God’s. ■

“For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation” (Romans 5:10-11).

Kinder Than Kind

BY JERRY B. JENKINS

Once I saw the late Dr. Francis Schaeffer—in front of a large crowd—take a lengthy question from a fan with cerebral palsy. Dr. Schaeffer closed his eyes in concentration as the question went on and on and on. I understood maybe a fourth of the words.

Dr. Schaeffer made sure he understood every syllable before answering. It struck me that he had been kinder than the incident called for. He could have asked someone else to interpret. He could have asked to speak to the young man later. But everything he had expounded in his book and film, *How Shall We Then Live?* was tested by this seemingly insignificant incident.

He had been kinder than kind.

Several years ago at a writers conference, my wife and I were in the cafeteria, eating with a local pastor and his wife, when a woman with cerebral palsy was wheeled to the table and her tray of food set before her. The pastor greeted the woman as if her joining us was the highlight of his day. He introduced her all around and joked with her. Somehow it emerged that they had met just two days before.

The rest of us sat there trying to avoid embarrassing her, averting our eyes as she pushed the food around on her plate, spilled most of it on its way to her mouth, and left most of that on her face. But her new friend, the pastor, took it in stride.

He didn’t look away. Without fanfare he casually put



his own spoon at the edge of her plate so she could scoop her mashed potatoes without losing them. He looked at her when he talked to her, and when too much food accumulated on her face, he casually wiped it away with his own napkin.

He would have been kind to have simply included her, talked to her, and treated her as a peer. But he had nurtured her, protected her, helped her without making a show of it.

He had been kinder than kind.

Another time I watched as Rosey Grier, the massive former pro football player who became a minister, met a young boy with Down syndrome. The child and his mother hoped for a handshake and an autograph. Instead the big man dropped to one knee, putting him at eye level with the boy.

Rosey put his arm around him, pulled him close, and asked if he could pray with him.

The boy’s mother wept. When she tried to thank Rosey, he simply winked at her and whispered to the boy, “You take care of your Mama now, you hear?”

Oh, that we might all be caught being kinder than kind. ■

Author of more than 180 books with sales of more than 70 million copies, Jerry B. Jenkins is former vice president for publishing and currently chairman of the board of trustees for the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago. He and his wife Dianna live in Colorado and have three grown sons and eight grandchildren.

Dialogue with a Reader

A Glimpse into EPM's Ministry to Those Who Contact Us

Email from a reader

I just finished reading Randy's book *50 Days of Heaven*. After reading it I'm more convinced that I will go to Hell. Over 20 years ago I publicly stated my belief in Jesus, repented of my sins and was baptized. Since then I've tried to live the Christian life but failed. I have always been one to keep people at a distance, including my family. I really don't like being around people and crowds and don't care to have friends. I've tried and tried but I dislike participating and becoming involved in church.

Thank you for confirming that my life does not jive with God's plan. The only thing I can hope is for Him to be merciful and forgive this sinner.

Response from EPM Staffer Julia Stager

I appreciate you contacting us with your response to Randy's book. From what you wrote, it sounds to me like you're a Christian! Our salvation isn't based on how much we like going to church or whether it's easy or hard to form relationships. It's solely based on the blood and resurrection of Jesus, and our relationship with Him. It's true that the more we love Jesus the more we'll want to be like Him and love people like He did, but life is a long road and we can only go one step at a time.

Everyone who tries to live the Christian life fails. I've failed. Randy has failed. But God doesn't reject us when we fail; He helps us grow. You expressed there are many things keeping you from the life God wants for you. God wants your life to be full of hope, love, peace, grace and forgiveness and so much more. If there's persistent sin in your life I encourage you to do the difficult and painful thing of confessing it to a Christian brother and also the Lord. Seek His forgiveness, life and truth so that you may be healed and your life be abundant (James 5:16; John 10:10).

God created humans to exist in community, but building relationships is hard work. If you don't know where to start, I'd encourage you to set up a meeting with a local pastor. He'll be able to understand where you're coming from and have ideas about helping you become a part of true Christian fellowship. Ultimately it is God who heals, but believers really do need each other. "Bear

one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

Enjoying being alone isn't a sin, but we are called to love people and to be part of the local body of Christ. Extroverts love being around people as much as possible. Introverts don't. I'm an introvert and function so much better as a person when I'm able to spend time by myself each day. Everyone has to find their own balance when it comes to these things.

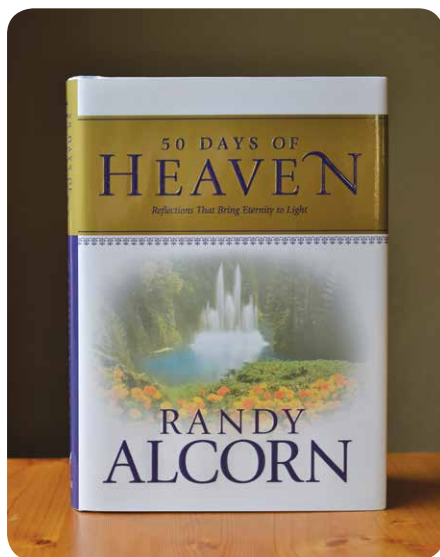
I sincerely appreciate your honesty and truly believe that if more people were honest about their struggles we would realize that we're not alone when we feel such things. God longs to heal you and bring you closer to Him. Scripture says, "Draw near to

God, and he will draw near to you" (James 4:8) and "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

I'll leave you with Numbers 6:24-26, one of my favorite prayers of the Old Testament: "The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace."

Follow up from reader

Julia, thank you. You have no idea what your words meant to me. I never cry, but I couldn't hold back the tears as I read your response. I have no doubt whatsoever that it was God speaking to me through your kind and encouraging message. ■



One of the major things we do at EPM is connect with the people who contact us through email, phone calls, and mail. They may want to order books, tell us how God has used a book in their life, or ask a question related to an issue Randy writes and speaks about. We're grateful for the opportunity to respond in Jesus' name to those who contact us, as well as connect them with a local church and resources to help them in their walk with the Lord.

What is your advice on how believers should deal with a culture that is increasingly hostile to Christianity?



Jesus said, “No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (John 15:20). Followers of Jesus should expect injustice and misrepresentation. I’m grateful there are organizations working to protect the rights of Christians. But I’m concerned if we view ourselves as one more special interest group, clinging to entitlements and whining when people don’t like us. God’s people have a long history of not being liked.

Of course, this does *not* mean being hateful or seeking to be hated. It’s important that we represent the Gospel well, and I am all for graciousness, kindness and servant-hearted love as we speak the truth. Romans 12:18 says, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

But the fact is, while the gospel is good news, it is also insulting. Many people don’t like being called sinners and told they deserve to go to hell. Peter said, “Don’t be surprised at the fiery ordeal you are suffering as though something strange were happening to you” (1 Peter 4:12).

If our eyes are on anyone but Jesus, we’re not going to have the stamina to put up with criticism or outright hostility. Paul said, “If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10).

Jesus is the Audience of One. We will stand before His judgment seat, no one else’s. We should long to hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” What other people think won’t matter. ■

If our eyes are on anyone but Jesus, we’re not going to have the stamina to put up with criticism or outright hostility.

What should I do if I fear my spouse and I have become unequally yoked?

Someone wrote to EPM: *During the time of our marriage my wife and I were equally yoked. Today I have been striving and working harder to build a closer relationship with Christ, but my wife has chosen to do otherwise and I fear we are no longer equally yoked. I want our marriage to work and pray about it every day. What should I do in this situation?*

Answer from Kathy Norquist, Randy’s assistant

If you are truly living for Christ, your light will shine before your wife and she will more likely be drawn to that light. The important thing for you is to live in the power of the Holy Spirit and walk in the Spirit, displaying the fruits of the Spirit to your wife. She will see the difference in you. She won’t be drawn to your words as much as to your actions and attitudes.

This, of course, doesn’t guarantee a response from your wife. But whatever you do, you should do it for Christ (Colossians 3:17, 23–24) and leave the results to Him. Concentrate on what God wants to change in your life, not what you wish were different with your wife. Strive to live out your convictions before her, in the balance of grace and truth. Prayer, of course, is vital. I Thessalonians 5:16–18 is a wonderful admonition to follow Christ and do His will. And you can’t go wrong with doing His will!



Additional note from Randy

There is only one life we can “control”—and that in a limited sense—and that’s our own. Whenever we try to figure out how to make someone respond differently—whether our spouse, children, parents, boss, anyone—we run the risk of manipulation and attempting to change someone else’s heart that only God can change. So, as Kathy said, we should do what we can in our own life, drawing on the power of the Holy Spirit, to draw near to Christ for HIS sake, not as a mere means to an end to get what we want, including something as good as a restored marriage. We pray, we work on our own spiritual growth, and we trust God to do in His time what He knows to be best. ■



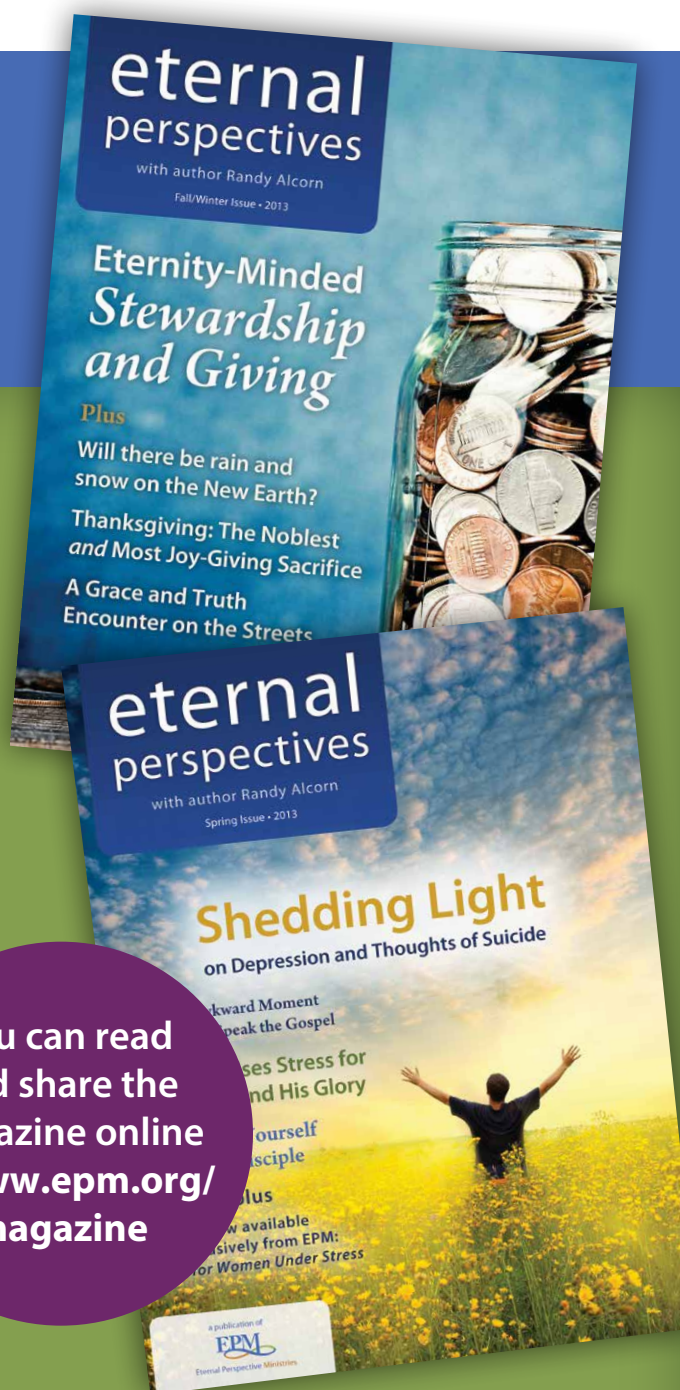
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