

eternal perspectives

Fall/Winter 2015

SEEKING *Christ-honoring Happiness* THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

I'll [Not] Have a Blue
Christmas

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Is it normal to be afraid
to go to Heaven?

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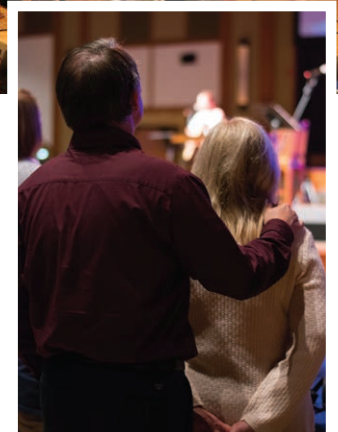
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Celebrating 25 years of God's kindnesses

On October 16, Nanci and I and the Eternal Perspective Ministries staff celebrated 25 years of God's faithfulness and kindness to EPM. It was a rich time together. We're grateful for each person who was able to join us that night. Also, we appreciated getting notes from many more of you from places around the country and around the world, saying you would have loved to have joined us if you'd been able. That meant a lot to us. (We were also moved by the video testimonials some dear friends kindly submitted.)

To every person who has supported this ministry through your prayers, your giving, your time or your interest in who we are and what we do, Nanci and I thank you from the bottom of our hearts. (Thanks also to those who make purchases in our bookstore, www.epm.org/store—all profits help fund EPM.)

Over the years at EPM God has faithfully provided a wonderful staff with giftings that perfectly fit with just what we've needed, and at just the right times. This has freed us up to do what God has called us to do: encourage others to live for Jesus, in light of eternity. Our founding verse is 2 Corinthians 4:18:

We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

God is the Great Provider. He's been faithful to us beyond measure. We give all the honor and praise to Him. "It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Colossians 3:24). We continue to trust in Him and His grace to provide for us, and are so grateful for your part in that—"And my God will fully supply your every need according to his glorious riches in the Messiah Jesus" (Philippians 4:19, ISV).

Thank you, sincerely, for joining with us in spreading what Isaiah 52:7 calls "the good news of happiness"!

Randy Alcorn



See a photo slideshow from the event as well as the video of Randy's interview with EPM board member Robin Green at www.epm.org/anniversary

Watch thirteen friends of Eternal Perspective Ministries, including John Piper, Joni Eareckson Tada, Joshua Harris, and Nancy Leigh DeMoss, share what Randy and his ministry have meant to them at www.epm.org/congrats

But What Does the Bible Say?

Reflections after the Supreme Court's Same-Sex Marriage Ruling

BY KEVIN DEYOUNG

Now that the Supreme Court has issued its sweeping ruling in favor of same-sex marriage, we can expect an avalanche of commentary, analysis, and punditry. I'm not a law professor, a politician, a talk show host, or a public intellectual (whatever that is). I'm a pastor. I study and teach the Bible for a living. Which means, among all the things I may not be an expert on, I may be able to say something meaningful from the Scriptures. So as we pour over legal opinions and internet commentary, let us not forget what the Bible says.

The Bible says the Lord alone is God and we should have no other gods before him (Ex. 20:2-3). Not the state, not the Supreme Court, not our families, not our friends, not our favorite authors, not our cultural cache. No gods but God.

The Bible says we should love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:39). And who is your neighbor deserving of such love? Wrong question, just worry about being the neighbor you'd want for yourself (Luke 10:25-37).

The Bible says love is not the same as unconditional affirmation (James 5:19-20). Love is patient and kind. It does not envy or boast. It does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

The Bible says that disciples of Jesus will be hated as Jesus was hated (John 15:18-25; 2 Tim. 3:12). If the world loves us, it is not a sign of our brilliance, but that we belong to the world.

The Bible says that when reviled we should not revile in return (1 Peter 2:21-25). We should love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matt. 5:44).

The Bible says Jesus came into the world to save

sinner, especially the worst of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). That means people like me, like you, and like the Apostle Paul who at one time opposed everyone and everything he later came to love and defend.

The Bible says marriage is between a man and a woman (Gen. 1:27-28; 2:18-25; Mal. 2:15; Matt. 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9) and that homosexual practice is sin (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10; Jude 7), but a sin from which we can be washed clean (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Any Christian who really believes the Bible must believe *all* of the Bible. You can't applaud what Jesus says about loving your neighbor from Leviticus 19, if Leviticus 18 and 20 are throwaway chapters. You can't unpack the good news of Romans 8, if Romans 1 is overstuffed with cultural baggage. You can't marvel at the goodness of God's creation, if there is no good design in how he created things. Either the Bible is God's Word or we are sufficiently godlike to determine which words stay and which words go.

The cultural breezes are blowing against us. The worldly winds are stiff in our faces. But the hard parts of the Bible are no less true for being less popular. The Bible says what it says, so let us be honest enough to say whether we think what the Bible says is right or wrong. Diarmaid MacCulloch, a decorated church historian and gay man who left the church over the issue of homosexuality, has stated the issue with refreshing candor:

This is an issue of biblical authority. Despite much well-intentioned theological fancy footwork to the contrary, it is difficult to see the Bible as expressing anything else but disapproval of homosexual activity, let alone having any conception of homosexual identity. The only alternatives are either to cleave to patterns of life and assumptions set out in the Bible, or say that in this, as in much else, the Bible is simply wrong.

As Christians living in the midst of controversy, we must keep three things open: our heads, our hearts, and our Bibles.

(*The Reformation: A History*, 705).

Yes, those are the only alternatives. I know books are right now being written by the dozens trying to make the case that the Bible is really keen on gay marriage, but it can't be done. Not with exegetical and historical integrity.

Not with gospel integrity either.

A holy God sends his holy Son to die as an atoning sacrifice for unholy people so that by the power of the Holy Spirit they can live holy lives and enjoy God forever in the holy place that is the new heaven and new earth. Is this the story celebrated and sermonized in open and affirming churches? What about twenty years from now? And what if we flesh out the gospel story and include the tough bits about the exclusivity of Christ and the reality of hell? What if the story centers on Calvary, not as a generic example that love (defined in whatever we choose) wins, but as beautifully scandalous picture of a love so costly that God sent his Son into the world to be the wrath-bearing propitiation for our sins? What if the story summons us to faith *and* repentance? What if the story calls us to lay down everything—our ease, our desires, our family, our preferences, our sexuality, our stuff, our very selves—for the sake of the Storyteller? What if part of the story is believing that every jot and tittle in the Storybook is completely true?

I'd rather not talk about homosexuality again. But the world hasn't stopped talking about it. And the Bible hasn't stopped saying what it has always said. So let's not be shrill and let's not be silent. If you already know what the Bible says about homosexuality, don't forget what the Bible says about all of life and godliness. We can be right about marriage and still wrong about everything else that matters. And if you like most everything else the Bible says, why would you on this matter

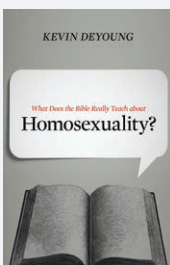
of homosexuality decide the Bible suddenly can't be trusted? If you won't count the cost here, what else will you be willing to sell?

The support for homosexual behavior almost always goes hand in hand with the diluting of robust, 100-proof orthodoxy, either as the cause or the effect. The spirits which cause one to go wobbly on biblical sexuality are the same spirits which befog the head and heart when it comes to the doctrine of creation, the historical accuracy of the Old Testament, the virgin birth, the miracles of Jesus, the resurrection, the second coming, the reality of hell, the plight of those who do not know Christ, the necessity of the new birth, the full inspiration and authority of the Bible, and the centrality of a bloody cross.

If Jesus is right and the Scriptures were spoken by God himself (Matt. 19:4-5) and utterly unbreakable (John 10:35), then the place to start when it comes to something as fundamental as marriage is also the place to end, and that's by asking the question, "But what does the *Bible* say?"

As Christians living in the midst of controversy, we must keep three things open: our heads, our hearts, and our Bibles. Don't settle for slogans and put-downs. Don't look to bumper stickers and Facebook avatars for ethical direction. And don't give up on the idea that God has a clear word and a good word on this issue. God has already spoken, and he specializes in gracious reminders, so long as we stay humble, honest, and hungry for the truth. After all, man does not live by bread alone (or sex alone), but by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4). ■

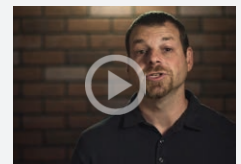
Kevin DeYoung is an author and the senior pastor of University Reformed Church (PCA) in East Lansing, Michigan. He blogs at blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/kevindeyoung.



Further Resources Recommended by Randy Alcorn

I highly recommend Kevin DeYoung's book *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* His book is really worth reading and discussing in our churches.

Much has been said presenting a Christian response to same-sex marriage. But I haven't heard anything better than five brief videos from Dan Franklin, Pastor of Teaching at Life Bible Fellowship Church in Upland, California. Dan is married to my oldest daughter Karina, which may explain why I saw and watched these—but I wouldn't be giving them this enthusiastic thumbs up unless I thought they were exceptionally helpful. Watch them at www.epm.org/gaymarriage.



I'll [Not] Have a *Blue* Christmas

Reasons to Rejoice and Be Happy This Christmas

BY RANDY ALCORN

All of us, for better or for worse, experience the holidays each year. From mid-November to early January, our lives change, bringing many delightful things, but also stress and fatigue. Family tensions (whose house do we go to when?), never-ending to-do lists, financial difficulties, unrealistic expectations—reasons for unhappiness abound.

Is it possible to find genuine happiness during

the Christmas season, even in the midst of the pressures? Yes. *True happiness—the kind Jesus offers—is at the heart of what Christmas is all about!*

Consider the angel's message to the shepherds at Jesus' birth: "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (Luke 2:10). The Greek adjective translated "great" here is *me-gas*—this isn't just news, but good news of "mega-joy." It's the best news there has ever been or ever will be.



A Christmas without a deep, God-given happiness isn't reflecting the good news of Jesus.

What characterizes this good news is deep, everlasting joy for those who receive it. The Contemporary English Version renders the verse this way: "good news for you, which will make everyone happy."

Isaiah 52:7 says, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness" (ESV). Here God tells us directly that our mission is bringing everyone the "good news of happiness" about Jesus. .

If the message we share and model at Christmastime and all year long doesn't include happiness, then it contradicts God's direct words in Isaiah 52:7. The gospel offers an exchange of misery-generating sin for happiness-giving righteousness provided by Jesus himself—joy incarnate, happiness in human flesh. The gospel is happy-making!

Each stanza of "O Come All Ye faithful" contains sentiments of true happiness: "joyful and triumphant," "sing in exultation," "born this happy morning." Joy, exultation, and happiness are proper responses to Jesus. A gospel not characterized by overwhelming gladness isn't the gospel. *A Christmas without a deep, God-given happiness isn't reflecting the good news of Jesus.*

So how do we experience true happiness during this season? It starts with a godly perspective, a right way of looking at life.

An Eternal Perspective

A reconciled relationship with God, coupled with

an understanding of the biblical teaching of a resurrected Heaven and Earth, assures us utter happiness will be ours forever. This happiness will be fully realized in the promised culmination of God's redemptive plan, in the New Heaven and New Earth.

For various reasons, Christmas can be a difficult season for many people. Yet God comforts his people in suffering, saying, "Look, I am ready to create new heavens and a new earth!" (Isaiah 65:17, NET). What should be our response to this promise? God uses joy-drenched words to describe this New Earth, a place where his people will bring happiness not only to each other but also to him:

Be happy and rejoice forevermore over what I am about to create! For look, I am ready to create Jerusalem to be a source of joy, and her people to be a source of happiness. Jerusalem will bring me joy, and my people will bring me happiness. The sound of weeping or cries of sorrow will never be heard in her again. Isaiah 65:18-19, NET

The forever that awaits us should color our lives now. We should daily frontload eternity's joys into our present experience by focusing on Christ and anticipating the Heaven that awaits us.

Right Expectations about Life and Suffering

This same eternal perspective will help us adjust our



expectations about life under the Curse, especially during the holidays. A biblical worldview is supremely optimistic and joyful, but it also recognizes the present reality of a fallen world.

By lowering our expectations that all should go our way presently, and raising our expectations of eternal life, we can experience true happiness now. Considering the judgment we deserve, every happiness, small or large, is an undeserved gift—the grace of God. When we experience happiness now, we’re grateful; when we don’t, we know someday our happiness will be complete and never-ending.

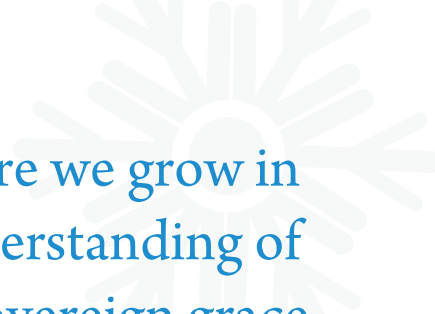
God doesn’t say we’ll never have hardship or suffering—he specifically promises we will (John 16:33). We’re not to be surprised when we face difficulties, even around Christmastime. Whether it’s something as insignificant as a burnt turkey or as overwhelming as the loss of a loved one, God tells us: “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you” (1 Peter 4:12). *If we expect God to make our lives easy, our expectations are unbiblical.*

As Christians, we’ll be delivered from *eternal* suffering. Even now, God will give us happy foretastes of living in his presence where there is fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:11). *That’s* his promise. And what better time to focus on living in his presence than Christmastime?

Our outlook is changed when we remember that our afflictions are Father-filtered by the God who knows all, governs all, and sovereignly weaves all together for our good: “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

The more we grow in our understanding of God’s sovereign grace *and* loyal love, the happier we become. We don’t have an all-powerful God who doesn’t care; neither do we have a caring God who is powerless to make good things happen. We serve a Creator who loves us and is sovereign over the universe, including all evil.

Our circumstances do matter. Broken relationships can be felt more deeply at Christmastime. Expectations about gifts received or given can bring anxiety. Comparing how others celebrate Christmas can bring sadness, especially if we feel left out. But all circumstances are opportunities for growth and our ultimate good. When they threaten to overwhelm us, these difficulties remind us to look to our Rock



The more we grow in our understanding of God's sovereign grace *and* loyal love, *the happier we become.*

and Redeemer (Psalm 19:14). Truly, “the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).

This is also an encouraging message for those who feel lonely around the holidays, and wish their lives weren’t less busy, but more. Even if not many friends and loved ones are nearby, Christ promises he will be with people always (Matthew 28:20), and will never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

Acting on the Right Perspective

We *can* control our thoughts and attitudes. They’re not foreign invaders against which we are helpless.

Paul said, “Fix your thoughts on what is true. . . . Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise” (Philippians 4:8, NLT). This doesn’t happen automatically. But once we develop the habit and experience its rewards, we instinctively turn our minds to what makes us happy in Christ.

Of course, we should never flippantly say, “Happiness is a choice.” It’s not always easy to choose happiness in Christ. Embracing happiness is not merely working harder to pull up our minds and moods, as we would our bootstraps. Rather, it’s gratefully receiving God’s grace and happiness.

God provides everything we need to be happy, and empowers us through his Spirit to believe in him and obey. At the same time, he leaves it to us to adopt a right perspective and make the choices that result in happiness. God empowers us through his Spirit to believe in him and obey him. He also calls upon us to genuinely cooperate with him, which requires our effort as we draw on his strength and grace (Philippians 2:12-13).

Happiness from Gratitude Coupled with Humble Service

When life is viewed with a spirit of thankfulness,



we'll see the reasons for happiness that surround us. God gives us hundreds of reasons to be grateful every hour—ask him to open your eyes to them, especially during what should be a joyful season of celebrating Christ's birth! Developing the discipline of gratitude brings greater praise to God and greater happiness for ourselves. When life's tough, we can still be grateful that God is with us and that he's using it for our good.

No matter your circumstances this Christmas, there's happiness to be found in being grateful for God's provision, and seeking to serve and help others. "In humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3-4).

Cultivating Christ-Centered Holiday Happiness

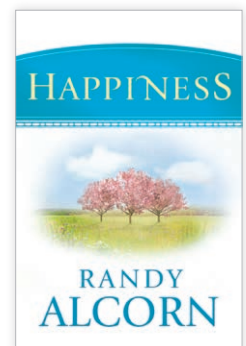
Happiness comes naturally in the same sense that fruit comes naturally from a tree. If the tree gets sufficient sunshine and water, if the ground is nutrient-rich, then yes, it "naturally" produces fruit. Yet the joy spoken of in Galatians 5:22 is also the

supernatural fruit of the Spirit who indwells God's children. We must plant ourselves in the rich soil of God's Word, soak in the living water of God and his people, and bask in the radiant sunlight of his grace. Then happiness will come (super)naturally—happiness made possible by our God who became a man, who suffered, died and rose again so we could experience substantial happiness now, as well as ultimate and unending happiness in our eternal home. ■

This article also appears in the November/December 2015 issue of More to Life magazine.

Many Christians labor under the false notion that God isn't happy, and that He doesn't value His followers' happiness. Nothing could be further from the truth!

Read more about cultivating God-honoring happiness in Randy's new book *Happiness*, available at www.epm.org/happiness.



Planned Parenthood *at the Cross*

BY RUSSELL MOORE

Many of us were horrified and repulsed as we saw Planned Parenthood Federation leaders in undercover videos negotiating the sale of body parts from aborted children. [EPM note: view the videos at www.youtube.com/user/centerformedprogress.] The cavalier conversations, over lunch, about such things ought to shock every conscience. For Christians, this atrocity ought to drive us to reflect on the literal crux of our faith, the cross of Jesus Christ.

The most ghoulish aspect of these videos is, after all, not simply that children are losing their lives. We knew that already. Beyond that is the way these children's bodies are being used, divided up for parts, in order to enable clinics to "do a little better than break even." And, of course, there is the callousness of the consciences involved. How could one talk about where to "crush" a baby or how "crunchy" the tearing mechanism ought to be in such breezy casual terms?

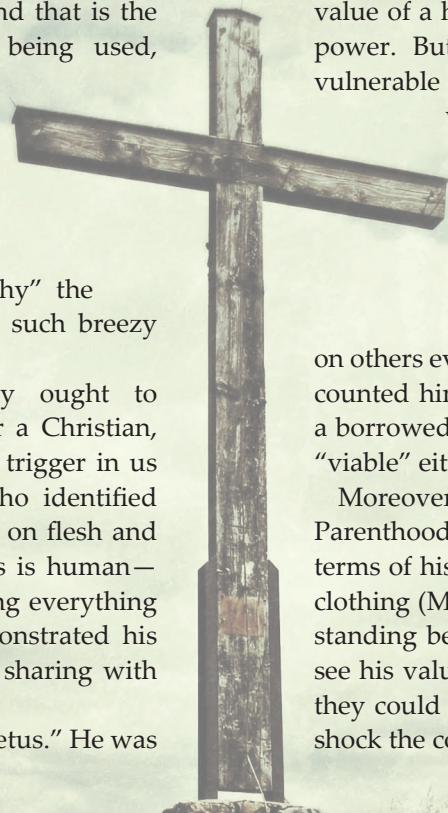
Every human person naturally ought to recoil from such language. But for a Christian, especially, such language ought to trigger in us thoughts of Jesus of Nazareth, who identified himself with human nature, taking on flesh and dwelling among us (Jn. 1:14). Jesus is human—not "was," mind you, "is"—meaning everything it means to be human. Jesus demonstrated his solidarity with the human race by sharing with us every stage of development.

He was an "embryo." He was a "fetus." He was

a nursing infant. He was a child. He is an adult. An attack on vulnerable humanity is an attack on the image of God. And that image is not abstract. The image of God has a name and a blood type. The image of God is Christ Jesus himself (Col. 1:15). Every human image-bearer is patterned after the Alpha and Omega image of the invisible God.

And at the Cross, Jesus stood with and for humanity in suffering. We are often told that abortion is ethical because the "products of conception" aren't "viable," that is, they cannot live outside the womb. This suggests that the value of a human life consists in its autonomous power. But Jesus was conceived in the most vulnerable situation possible in the ancient world—as a fatherless orphan. He lived as a migrant refugee outrunning with his family the Planned Parenthood of his day, the King Herod, into a land hostile to his own. He died helplessly convulsing on a cross, dependent on others even for hydration. Even in death, Jesus counted himself with thieves and was buried in a borrowed grave. In his humanity, Jesus wasn't "viable" either.

Moreover, like the dead orphans of Planned Parenthood, Jesus was seen as valuable only in terms of his "parts." The soldiers cast lots for his clothing (Mk. 15:24). With the very King of Israel standing before them, the Roman soldiers could see his value only in terms of how much money they could fetch from his garments. That should shock the conscience.



And yet, at the Cross, we do not simply see Jesus standing in solidarity with those suffering. He stands also in the place of sinners. He is counted with thieves, one executed on his left, and one on his right. One thief reflected the culture of death. He saw Jesus only in terms of what Jesus can do for him, temporally: "Save yourself and us!" (Luke 23:39).

But there were two thieves, remember. The other saw his own desperation, crying out for mercy. Who knows what this man had done? The word "thief" in this context doesn't connote a petty pickpocket. This man was more akin to a murderer, a pirate, or a terrorist, to use contemporary language. Jesus forgave him, not because his actions were excusable but because he was hidden by faith in the punishment Jesus bore for him.

The cross should remind us that Jesus hears the cries of the suffering, even those whose cries are unable to be heard. But the cross should also remind us that Jesus saves sinners. The actions of Planned Parenthood are horrendous, both in terms of social injustice and in terms of personal sin against God. What can wash away such sin? Nothing. Nothing but the blood of Jesus.



We should work for justice for the unborn, and for their victimized mothers. And, at the same time, we should speak to the consciences of those who see them as little more than pieces to be bartered. What Planned Parenthood is doing, let's be clear, is violent and murderous. But the gospel can convict consciences, even consciences darkened by violence. And, when God saves such sinners, he often uses these trophies of grace to speak up for justice for those persecuted and mercy for their persecutors, through faith in Christ and newness of life in him.

Planned Parenthood is a killing field. We should groan inwardly, and work outwardly, against such evil. But, as we do so, let's remember another killing field, a Place of the Skull, where peace came to the violent, through a cross of both justice and justification. ■

Russell Moore serves as the president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. Find him online at www.russellmoore.com.



Read Randy's blog posts related to the Planned Parenthood video exposés at www.epm.org/blog/pp.

A Prayer as We Intervene for the Unborn and Their Mothers

BY RANDY ALCORN

Our Father in Heaven, our hearts are grieved that abortion continues to remain legal in this country. But we thank you for the good news that we are free to educate and persuade and offer alternatives to anyone who will listen. Help us to find those people in our unique spheres of influence. And help us to be used as your servants to help save children and women from the horrors of abortion, one person at a time.

We confess we are sometimes weary of living in a world where right is called wrong and wrong is called right. Where the evil one, the murderer and liar from the beginning, has rearranged the price tags. We tire of living in that one remote corner of the universe where foolish men dare to live in rebellion against the Sovereign Lord of the Cosmos, and against His Anointed One, Jesus Christ. We long for the New Earth, the world for which we were made, where righteousness will dwell.

While we remain pilgrims and strangers and aliens in this world, Lord, we thank you for your Word's assurance that your kingdom is coming, and all wrongs will be made right. You will wipe away the tears from every eye, and there will be no more death, nor crying, nor pain, for the old order will have passed away, and all things will become new. Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

Meanwhile, give us your perspective. Remind us that our time here is short. That this is a brief window of opportunity to serve you. Help us to know how we and our families can better share the gospel of Christ. And better intervene for the least of your brethren. And more effectively speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.

We ask these things in the powerful and eternal name of the One before whom every knee shall bow and every tongue confess—the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. ■

What does *blessed* have to do with being happy?

Growing up in an unbelieving home, I never heard the word *blessed*. After coming to Christ and beginning to attend church, I heard it countless times. I didn't know its meaning; it just sounded holy and spiritual.

Years later, studying Greek in college, I heard someone say that *blessed* in the English Bible often really means "happy." My response was, "Huh?" Everyone knows it's good to be blessed, but it certainly didn't sound like happy to me!

The Hebrew word *asher* is used twenty-six times in the Psalms alone. When the Jewish people heard Psalm 1 read, they heard "*Happy* is the one who . . ."

Jesus used the Greek word *makarios* nine times in the Beatitudes, which meant to the original listeners, "*Happy* are the poor in spirit. . . . *Happy* are the meek. . . . *Happy* are the merciful. . . . *Happy* are the peacemakers," and so on (Matthew 5:3-12).

Young's Literal Translation, the Common English Bible, the Jerusalem Bible, the Phillips New Testament, and the Good News Translation all translate *makarios* as "happy" the great majority of the time. My extensive research and dialogue with Hebrew and Greek scholars and translators left me perplexed over why many translators continue to use the word *blessed* as a translation of *asher* and *makarios*. Four hundred years ago, when the King James Version was translated, *blessed* still meant "happy." But to most people today, it means something quite different.

The fact is, some modern versions remain reluctant to change the translation of particularly familiar verses in the King James Version, and few are more familiar than the Beatitudes. Had the Bible never before been translated into English, would modern scholars even consider rendering *asher* or *makarios* as "blessed"? It's hard to imagine they would. ■

Is it selfish to want happiness?

Many Christians believe that desiring happiness is selfish and therefore immoral. Why? Partly because we fail to balance biblical statements with one another.

The Bible warns against those who are "lovers of self," identifying them as boastful, proud, and unholy (see 2 Timothy 3:2). The self-love spoken of in this passage is obviously wrong. However, when Jesus tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves, he isn't arguing that we shouldn't love ourselves but that we should instead extend our instincts for self-care to taking care of others.

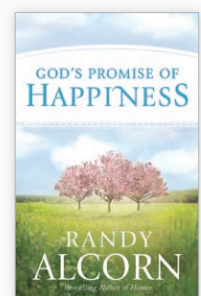
Flight crews routinely announce, "If you're traveling with a child or someone who requires assistance, in the case of an emergency, secure your own oxygen mask first before helping the other person." It may sound selfish to put on our own masks, just as it sounds selfish to say that one of our main duties in life is to find happiness in God. But only then are we in a position to offer others what they most need. ■

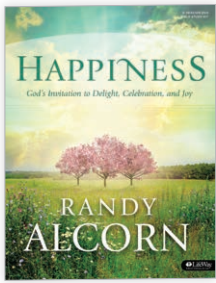


The questions and answers here are from my new little book *God's Promise of Happiness*, which is a simplified and differently presented version of the big *Happiness* book. It's designed for believers who want an introduction to the topic, but don't have the time or inclination to engage the larger work.

God's Promise of Happiness is also written for unbelievers who are interested in the subject and will be drawn to the Gospel as "good news of happiness" (Isaiah 52:7, ESV). I believe its pocket size and the question and answer format will make it a helpful tool in sharing the Gospel of Christ. In that sense, it's sort of the happiness equivalent of my *Heaven* booklet. —Randy Alcorn

EPM price \$1.99 (retail \$2.99). Order at www.epm.org/promisehappiness.





Coming January 2016: a study kit from Lifeway for Randy's Happiness book

The kit will include a Bible study book, a copy of *Happiness* which the study is based on, social-media content, and a DVD with a promotional video and six 15- to 20-minute teaching sessions from Randy introducing each session. Available from www.epm.org/store after its release in January 2016.



Get ideas for everyone on your list when you check out our Christmas gift guide (which includes Randy's graphic novels *The Apostle* and *Eternity*, great gifts for readers of any age)! View the guide at www.epm.org/christmasguide.



Don't miss our upcoming specials!

EPM frequently offers discounts and sales on Randy's books and products at www.epm.org/store. We'll be offering several specials during the Christmas season. The best way to be notified of these sales is to sign up for our weekly email newsletter at www.epm.org/connect. You can also follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/EPMinistries.

Randy shares biblical insights on happiness

What is happiness? Is God happy? Randy answers these questions and more in a video at www.epm.org/insights.



Did you know? Each month the EPM staff has, on average, over 200 meaningful interactions with those who contact our ministry. We're thankful for these opportunities to represent Christ!

Year end giving to EPM

If you'd like to make a year-end, tax-deductible donation to Eternal Perspective Ministries, you can give at www.epm.org/donate or call us at 1.877.376.4567. If God lays it on your heart to give to our ministry, or to pray for us (the greatest gift you can offer), please know that we deeply appreciate it! Thank you!

This year's "Giving Tuesday" is December 1

"Giving Tuesday" is the philanthropic community's response to the consumerism of Black Friday and Cyber Monday and is designed to provide people with a charitable day to consider giving as they go into the holiday season. This year's day is December 1, 2015. Learn more at www.givingtuesday.org.

You can give to any ministry you choose. (In fact, we don't turn down gifts to EPM!) One of our favorite ministries participating in Giving Tuesday is the JESUS Film Project (www.jesusfilm.org). If you wish, you can give through EPM and we'll pass on 100% of the designated donations. Select the special fund "JESUS Film" at www.epm.org/donate.



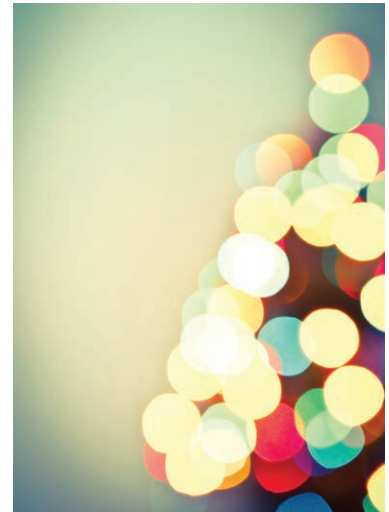
His Sovereign Work in Sending the Light

The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." (Luke 2:10-11 NIV)

Read Luke 1 and 2, and marvel at the sovereign work of our Father, sending His Son, our Savior, into this world. He did it for us, to be our Redeemer. Weep at the sheer power of God's amazing grace and the greatness of His eternity-shaping plan. When you celebrate Christmas this year, may you enjoy His sovereign grace, and clearly sense His steadfast love for you. —Randy Alcorn

"...there's nothing like creating the real Christmas spirit by focusing on just why you need a Savior—why you desperately need Jesus. Oh, thank you Jesus for coming and bringing your light into our dark world." —Joni Eareckson Tada

Randy and the EPM staff wish you and your family a Christ-centered, joy-filled Christmas season!



Selections on Happiness from Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) is perhaps best known for his sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." But many readers might not know that he wrote and preached frequently on the subject of happiness. In the compiled works of Jonathan Edwards, the words happiness or happy appear in 309 sermons or articles—a total of 3,722 times.

Jesus knew that all mankind were in the pursuit of happiness. He has directed them in the true way to it, and He tells them what they must become in order to be blessed and happy. ...What could the most merciful being have done more for our encouragement? All that he desires of us is that we would not be miserable, that we would not follow those courses which of themselves would end in misery, and that we would be happy.

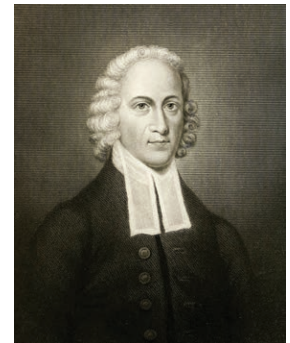
"The Pure in Heart Blessed," Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 2.

A life of holiness is the pleasantest life in this world, because in such a life we have the imperfect beginnings of a blessed [happy] and endless sight of God; and so they have somewhat of true happiness while here. . . . Those who do not live a holy life, they have nothing at all of true happiness, because they have nothing of the knowledge of God.

"The Pure in Heart Blessed," Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 2.

Persons need not and ought not to set any bounds to their spiritual and gracious appetites. Rather, they ought to be endeavoring by all possible ways to inflame their desires and to obtain more spiritual pleasures.

"The Spiritual Blessings of the Gospel Represented by a Feast," The Works of Jonathan Edwards: Sermons and Discourses



Is it normal to be afraid to go to Heaven?

Someone wrote EPM: *Is it normal to be afraid to go to Heaven? I've been wrestling with this the last couple of years. I'm 16 now but I would like to deal with the issue before I pass away.*

ANSWER FROM KAREN COLEMAN, EPM MINISTRY ASSISTANT

It's very understandable and normal to have some fears, since we usually fear the unknown. Have you tried to figure out *why* you are afraid to go to Heaven? I can think of three possible reasons.

If it's because you're uncertain you will be in Heaven, you can settle that question once and for all. If you know Christ as your Savior, you don't have to wonder about this ever again (see John 1:12-13). If you're not sure you've ever done that, you can do it today! (See www.epm.org/knowheaven.)

If it's because you're concerned about how you will die, whether it might be painful, etc. that is something we simply need to trust God with. He is sovereign and knows everything and loves us SO much. Everything in our lives is "Father-filtered"—He knows how much we can handle and will be there to walk with us through any suffering He allows into our lives. He has promised to never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

If it's because you're uncertain of what Heaven will be like, the Bible has a lot to say about that, and it's all good news! Heaven will be far from boring. Instead it will be happy and amazing and full of delight and friends and laughter and feasting and joy! Read Revelation 21 and 22 for the coolest picture of the joy we will experience there.

I am *so* excited about Heaven—seeing Jesus face to face, reconnecting with my family who have gone on to Heaven before me, meeting intriguing people I've read about, like Queen Esther and Deborah, and missionaries like Amy Carmichael and Helen Roseveare and Elisabeth Elliot... I could go on and on. You'll have eternity to praise Jesus, enjoy and explore the New Earth, and maybe meet your new closest friend ever!

The Bible tells us to fear and reverence *God*, and associates that with gaining wisdom, like in Proverbs 2:1-5. But other fears may mean I have an inadequate or distorted picture of God's love and care for me. First John 4:18 tells us, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love." So if you're scared to die, it will require turning your fear over to God and asking Him to help you trust Him more and more.

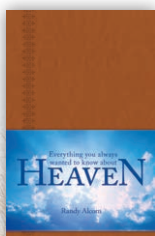
I hope you have an older Christian friend or family member you can talk this over with, or maybe your youth pastor. Ask them to pray with you for God to give you peace to guard your heart and mind (Philippians 4:7).

It's encouraging that you want to face your fear and deal with it so it doesn't become debilitating. Lord willing, you have many more years to serve the Lord and represent Him to those around you. Your confidence to face the future can help others as well.

On his deathbed, Adoniram Judson, who served as a missionary in Burma in the early 1800s for almost 40 years, said, "When Christ calls me Home I shall go with the gladness of a boy bounding away from school." What a picture of happiness!

I hope I've given you some helpful things to think about. I'm praying for you to trust God and His love for you and to have a new perspective on Heaven. ■

Randy's book *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Heaven* is a beautiful leather-like gift book that provides solid, biblically based answers to more than 100 questions about eternity. It would make a great gift this Christmas season. Order at www.epm.org/everythingheaven.

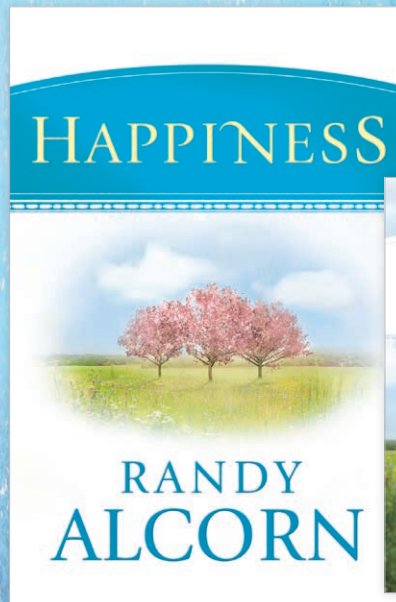




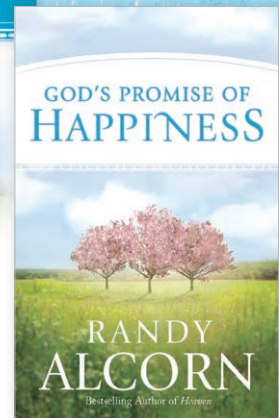
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Think God doesn't
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Think again.

Explore God's call for us to experience Christ-honoring, Spirit-empowered happiness and joy in Randy's book *Happiness* (www.epm.org/happiness) and small book *God's Promise of Happiness* (www.epm.org/promisehappiness).



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