

eternal

perspectives

Fall/Winter 2016

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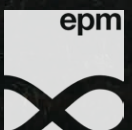
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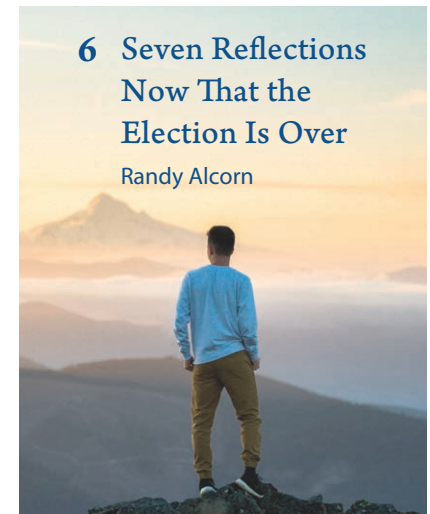
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39085 Pioneer Blvd., Suite 206, Sandy, OR 97055
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Randy and Nanci Alcorn's Ministry Trip to

Cuba

In September, Nanci and I experienced a two-week ministry trip to Cuba and Bermuda. While in Cuba we were able to travel with a team from ACTION Cuba (www.actioncuba.org), a great organization that Eternal Perspective Ministries has supported over the years. It's amazing what God is doing in this country. We met many wonderful Christ-followers.

I had the privilege of training Cuban pastors and seminary students, speaking to the staff of ACTION Cuba, and preaching at a large youth rally on sexual purity where I shared the wisdom of purity and the Good News of Jesus. We heard many encouraging responses, and gave away 700 copies of the Cuban edition of *The Purity Principle*. (They publish four of my books in Cuba. I was amazed how many said they had read and reread them because Christian books are still hard to get there.)

When I spoke at a training gathering for pastors, during a break I was taken upstairs to meet with the professors of the Bible college. We were in a room that was also their library, consisting perhaps of a few hundred books. I asked how we could help them get more books, and hopefully that will happen.

The international body of Christ is beautiful. I haven't been hugged and kissed by so many "strangers" for many years, most of them precious brothers and sisters in Jesus—and therefore *not* strangers, but family.

After I spoke in the church, the pastor asked me, on behalf of the churches of Cuba, to greet the body of Christ in the U.S.A. I do that now. The churches in Cuba have spiritual strength that has come through adversity. Their lives aren't easy, and the standard of living in the country isn't high. It's a land rich in resources and potential, but that potential hasn't been reached. Please pray for the people of Cuba, and especially for the churches. —Randy Alcorn



To read Randy's full blog post on the Alcorns' time in Cuba and Bermuda, go to www.epm.org/cuba-report



Divine Appointments

BY DENNIS RAINEY

Have you ever had a “divine appointment”? I have.

A divine appointment is a meeting with another person that has been specifically and unmistakably ordered by God. Yet I sometimes wonder how many of these supernaturally scheduled meetings I’ve missed because I didn’t have my spiritual radar turned on.

The Scriptures say, “The steps of a righteous man are ordered by the Lord.” After decades of walking (off and on, but mostly on) with God, I can tell you that seeing God set up these “appointments” is a thrill that is beyond comparison.

One of my friends in the ministry, Bill Howard, experienced such a heavenly appointment that I wanted to share an excerpt of his writing with you.

It all began with a routine trip to promote the Weekend to Remember conference in San Antonio, Texas:

As I was waiting for my plane, I noticed a man in his mid-20’s dressed in a red warm-up suit. He stood out because he was severely disfigured, an obvious victim of fire. I recall feeling compassion accompanied with a slight feeling of repulsiveness because of his grotesque appearance.

Little did I know that a friend was praying that I would have the opportunity to share Christ with someone on the plane that day. So, like the conductor of a symphony, God

began to orchestrate circumstances to accomplish His purposes.

As we boarded the plane it became apparent that it was going to be a packed flight. A little annoyed, I arrived at my seat only to find that another man with a similar name had taken my seat. As I stood in the aisle and waited for the attendant to assign me another seat, I noticed that the disfigured man in the red warm-up suit had the same lot as me. I felt uncomfortable for him, as I watched people stare at his abnormal appearance. After all the other passengers were seated there were only two seats left on the entire plane . . . together in row seven.

Here I was sitting next to the very man at whom everyone had stared.

As the plane pulled out of the gate and taxied down the runway, I noticed that my disfigured neighbor was silent—staring out the window, arms folded in such a way to cover his mutilated hands. I couldn’t help but notice how the features on his face had all been apparently reconstructed. Although he wore sunglasses, they couldn’t conceal his eyebrow, which was located on his left cheek. The skin on his nose only partially covered his nostrils. His ears were almost nonexistent.

But it was his hands that startled me most. The fingers on both were completely gone. The left one was just a stub from his knuckles down and the skin was so thin that it appeared transparent. It looked like the doctors simply stretched what little skin he had left to cover his exposed

hand. The right one was in the same condition, but even worse. It was bent back against his arm and looked as if he were trying to touch his elbow.

Sitting next to this man, I began to experience a number of emotions—thankfulness (that I was in one piece), compassion, and curiosity. I wondered what had happened to re-shape this young man's body. I wanted to talk with him, but what if he rejected me—I'd feel like a jerk for intruding in his life. But I felt that familiar nudge from the Lord to at least try.

So I began a conversation. He said his name was Johnny and he had just been to Tucson to visit his girlfriend (names and places have been changed). She must be quite a woman, I thought.

When I apologetically asked if he would mind sharing his tragedy, he quickly responded, "No, not at all. I'd much rather have you talk with me than stare at me." As I picked my pride up off the floor, he energetically began to tell me his story.

He and his father were taking a rest stop at a gas station in Eagle Pass, between Mexico and Texas. While they were waiting outside, a car pulled out in front of a gas-tanker truck. Avoiding the collision, the truck, full of fuel, jackknifed, rolled, and burst into flames, covering approximately 70 people with burning fuel. Johnny and his father were immediately covered and ignited. When I asked about Johnny's hands, I was in awe by his reply. While engulfed in the flames, Johnny saw an old man pinned on the ground by a steel rod across his chest. Johnny walked over to the man and lifted the rod off his chest, literally burning Johnny's hands off. I now had a genuine love and respect for this courageous man.

He went on to tell me that he spent over three years in the hospital. Upon getting out, he spent another four years in seclusion, due to the scars from his burns. A girl that he met during that time unconditionally loved him back into society.

Since that time he went on to explain that he has had over 130 operations—most to just keep him alive. Just that upcoming summer, Johnny was to receive a pair of artificial hands.

As he finished telling me his story, I couldn't help but wonder if Johnny had ever considered God during his trauma. When I asked, he said he had, but had never heard of having a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. He wanted to know the God who had spared his life. As I shared "The Four Spiritual Laws" with him he was very attentive. He was eager to know of God's forgiveness and love. As the plane landed in San Antonio, Johnny prayed with me, placing his faith in Christ as Savior and Lord.

Bill concludes his story: "And so for Johnny, there was a moment when he saw his physical body nearly

I wonder if the reason we see so little of the supernatural occurring in our lives is because we are unwilling to take the risks that come with walking and living by faith.

destroyed. All the medical technology in the world could not and will not make him a whole person. But there was another moment when Johnny trusted Christ, and instantaneously God renewed his soul and gave him the promise that his body shall be made new at the coming of Christ."

Maybe you're like me—I've been nudged by the Holy Spirit, but I rationalize away my responsibility to say anything. I wonder if the reason we see so little of the supernatural occurring in our lives is because we are unwilling to take the risks that come with walking and living by faith. We fear the rejection of man more than displeasing God.

Bill's story has nudged me to pray more for the salvation of my neighbor, to ask a waitress at Wendy's if she knew the man who made Christmas famous, and to talk more with my grandchildren about how they can be a missionary in their schools. In short, I've been more acutely aware that God is setting up divine appointments with me and people I get the privilege of talking to—and I don't want to miss a single one.

May you and I be aware of the living God's presence in our everyday lives. ■

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Dennis Rainey is the President, CEO and Co-founder of FamilyLife, a subsidiary of Cru. He can be heard daily as host of the nationally syndicated radio program FamilyLife Today®.



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"I'm a firm believer many of life's inconveniences involve divine appointments with people the Lord brings into our lives—if only we open our eyes to see them." —Randy Alcorn Watch Randy share stories about divine appointments in a video at www.epm.org/divine-appointments

7 Reflections

Now That the Election Is Over

BY RANDY ALCORN

This issue of *Eternal Perspectives* went to print just before the election. I think we can all agree that we are glad this election is behind us, regardless of how we feel about the outcome. No matter who won, I wanted to share these seven perspectives as we seek to think biblically and eternally about the upcoming four years:

1. God remains sovereign and in control.

The Lord “works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will” (Ephesians 1:11). There is great comfort in acknowledging and embracing Scripture’s teaching that God is sovereign over human events, including the outcome of elections. In Isaiah 46:10, God says, “I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is

still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.” Those who believe in a God who knows “the end from the beginning” can relax because even though *they* don’t know what lies ahead, their sovereign God does.

Our fates do not rest in the hands of fallen humankind: politicians, lawyers, military officers, employers, or even spouses and children. If we believe this, our reaction to many of the difficulties we face will be different. Problems will seem smaller, for although we can’t control them, we know God can—and everything will work out for His glory and our good.

“Dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations” (Psalm 22:28). Because God has absolute power, no one—including demons and humans who choose to violate His moral will—can



Ultimately our hope is in Christ, who is Sovereign over the nations.

thwart His ultimate purpose. “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will” (Proverbs 21:1).

Ultimately our hope is in Him, this Sovereign over the nations: “O LORD, the God of our fathers, are you not God in the heavens? And are you not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations?” (2 Chronicles 20:6).

2. While circumstances can sometimes change and become worse, our Savior never changes.

I’ve been asked whether I think God will judge America. I believe He has for some time been judging us for many things, including the killing of the unborn, immorality, materialism, and arrogance. In fact, I believe the two major party candidates of our recent election were themselves part of God’s judgment upon us.

However, even when God judges a nation for its sins, He freely offers grace, empowerment, and hope for His people, and for all who will turn to Him in repentance and trust. He is faithful. In Malachi 3:6, God says, “I the Lord do not change.” He’s a God “who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17). God doesn’t change in His essence, character, knowledge, plans, or purposes: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

Charles Spurgeon wrote, “A changeable God would be a terror to the righteous, they would have no sure anchorage, and amid a changing world they would be driven to and fro in perpetual fear of shipwreck... Our heart leaps for joy as we bow before One who has never broken His word or changed His purpose.”

3. Only by trusting in Christ and His promise of the world to come can we find peace.

Jesus told His followers, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27). It is now, not at some vague point in the future, that “the Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace” (Psalm 29:11, NIV). The fruit of the Spirit is not something we wait until Heaven to enjoy; it’s available to us in this life (see Galatians 5:22–23). “So my heart rejoices and I am happy” (Psalm 16:9, NET). Did you catch that the psalmist is speaking in the present tense? He isn’t just anticipating rejoicing—he’s doing it now.

Today’s supernatural peace and happiness in Christ is drawn from an infinite deposit of happiness that God has already placed in our account. It isn’t something we have to wait to experience after death, though only then will we experience it completely. We can find comfort and joy knowing “The Lord is near to all who call upon Him” (Psalm 145:18).

May we thank God for His sovereign grace, and entrust ourselves, our children and grandchildren, our churches and our country, to His care and mercy. “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God” (Psalm 20:7).

4. Remember that the Bible's commands to submit to ruling authorities were given at a time when Christians were facing hardship and oppression.

Romans 13:1-3 says, “Everyone must submit himself to governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong.”

Paul was writing to a Roman church feeling the heat of persecution. In coming to Christ the Roman Christians confessed “Jesus is Lord.” Simultaneously, they boldly refused to recite the words of unconditional loyalty to the state: “Caesar is Lord.” That’s why they were facing suspicion and increasing oppression from the government. Within only a few yards of the writing of Romans, Nero would launch a campaign of persecution against them, which would recur in waves over the next two and a half centuries.

The Roman Christians could easily have become resentful of and even rebellious against the often corrupt government of Rome. Paul saw that Caesar could be regarded as the enemy in such a context. But for the most part, Roman law was just and worthy of obedience. It was only in rare cases that Christians should disobey. For example, the law that commanded sacrifice to Caesar or the law that forbade intervention for the abandoned infants left to die outside the city gates. Paul did not have to mention those exceptions. All his readers knew them, and churches didn’t obey those laws. (Examples today would include if the government

We can't control the new president's choices. But by the Spirit's empowerment, we can make daily decisions that are honoring to Christ.

forbade churches from speaking against homosexual practices or abortion, which would be commanding Christ-followers to act inconsistently with Scripture.)

If Paul called his readers to submit to the ruling authorities of Rome, we too should obey Scripture's command to pray for and submit to our American leaders. Let's thank God for the freedoms we continue to enjoy, and use every opportunity to glorify Christ and testify concerning Him.

When and if the time comes that we must disobey the government, for instance if we're told we can't preach what the Bible says, let's do so not with rancor but in the straightforward way that we see in Scripture: "Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men'" (Act 5:29).

We may increasingly experience persecution in the years to come, as our belief in Scripture will continue to separate us from the culture around us. As Romans 8:28 indicates, God brings good things out of bad. If American churches face more adversity in the future, which I think we will, may we experience greater zeal for Christ, more fruitfulness, and increased joy in our Lord.

5. Deceit isn't confined to politicians—and as Christ's followers, we should be defined by gracious truth-telling.

As this election cycle dramatically illustrated, telling the truth is no longer normal among our civic leaders. (Sadly, this is true of people from every segment of society, not just politicians. Note the number of times characters routinely lie to each other in television shows and movies.) The spiritual implications of choosing a path of deception are considerable when you look at Revelation 22:15, which says that among those who have no place in Heaven is "everyone who loves and practices falsehood."

A society cannot function without trust. People should be able to trust their politicians, pastors, bankers, mechanics, shopkeepers, and police officers. Where there is no trust, families and churches and nations cannot operate properly. We're naive to think that our own social system can withstand the barrage of dishonesty it has been undergoing for these last decades. Without honesty there is no integrity, and without integrity, we as a nation are nothing. None of our past virtues or successes can compensate for our present lack of integrity.

But as followers of Christ, we're to live differently. We are to walk in the truth (3 John 3), love the truth, and believe the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10, 12). We're to speak the truth "in love" (Ephesians 4:15). We may not be able to fix the problem of deceit in our government, perhaps not even in our neighborhoods and workplaces, though we can be a positive influence there.

6. While we can't control the world around us, we can positively impact the lives we do have control over.

We *can't* control the new president's choices. But by the Spirit's empowerment, we *can* make daily decisions that are honoring to Christ: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 Peter 1:3).

"This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life." Deuteronomy 30:19–20

God has also given us opportunities to positively influence the other lives around us in our families, churches, and communities. If you're a parent or grandparent, or a mentor of young people, you can impact future generations for Christ. You can choose to be a truth teller, you can teach your children and grandchildren to be the same. We can help raise the bar of truthfulness in our churches.

When we fail to tell the truth, we fail to represent Jesus, who is the Truth personified. When we speak the truth in love, we cast our votes for Jesus. We become the kinds of people we wish there were more of in political office.

7. Our primary God-given job is not to promote conservatism or liberalism, but to represent Jesus, our true King, and Heaven, our true country.

Conservatism is not the Gospel. Liberalism is not the Gospel. Patriotism is not the Gospel. Only the Gospel is the Gospel.

I love my earthly country, and I want to hold on

to liberty, but America is not the answer. Christ is the answer. The church shouldn't merely be raising young conservatives, but sold-out followers of Jesus who just want to be like Him, regardless of whether in a given instance that looks liberal or conservative. (See www.epm.org/conservative-liberal.) We should teach our children to oppose abortion not because they're conservatives, and teach our children to oppose racism not because they're liberals, but because they love Jesus and believe in biblical justice for all people.

We should teach our children to set their hopes NOT on the Republican or Democratic parties or any other party, but upon the only One who can save them—their true President, their true Chief Justice, and their true Lawmaker. "For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; it is he who will save us" (Isaiah 33:22).

"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). No matter what direction our earthly country may be going, it's our never-ending heavenly country that we should represent. America may or may not unravel in coming decades, but God's kingdom certainly won't unravel. People of the world don't need America; they need Jesus. So, sure, do what you can for your earthly country, but realize it's not the source of your true identity.

The key to influence and change in this world is not, and never has been, politics. It is faithfulness to Jesus. In the end, which will never end, acts of faithfulness—many of them quiet, some seen only by God—are the votes that will count, bringing the eternal results that will matter. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10).

Whether it's coaching a team, mentoring young people, mowing a widow's lawn, standing up for

unborn children, working for racial unity, going on short-term missions trips, or giving a large portion of your income to missions or inner-city work—If we're doing it through Christ's power we're bringing a foretaste of the coming New Earth to this current, hurting Earth.

As Romans 8 tells us, this world under the curse groans as in the pains of childbirth, awaiting our Redeemer and our resurrection, on the coattails of which it too will rise. Meanwhile, nations will rise and fall, but through it all, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea" (Psalm 46:1-2). "The LORD foils the plans of the nations....But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations" (Psalm 33:10-11).

The knowledge that a New Earth is coming should reassure us and give us perspective. It means that though injustice, corruption, deception, and ungodliness may be widespread, they will not last. God will make all things right, rewarding His people for trusting Him. He'll turn this upside-down world right side up, placing it in the care of His beloved children. "To him be honor and eternal dominion" (1 Timothy 6:16).

Everlasting justice, peace, and righteousness are certainly coming, personally delivered by the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). Meanwhile, may we be on their side, and His side, before they arrive. ■

"...until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed [makarios, happy] and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen." (1 Timothy 6:14-16)



PARENTS: IT'S TIME TO WAKE UP ABOUT PORNOGRAPHY, SEXTING, AND YOUR CHILDREN

BY RANDY ALCORN



While speaking about sexual purity at my church several years ago, I told parents that if they're going to let their children have unrestricted Internet access in the privacy of their own rooms, through computers, tablets, phones, or any other device, they might as well buy thousands of pornographic magazines and stack them in their children's closets and say, "Don't ever look at those." It amounts to the same thing.

After my message, a sincere Christian mother came up to me. She was offended by my warning to parents not to allow their children to have unmonitored Internet access. "I can't believe you said that," she began. "My son has Internet access in his room, and I trust him! He's a good boy."

I told her, "I was once a seventh grade boy. I'll tell you right now, you think you're honoring your son by trusting him, but you are setting him up for a fall. You could hand him a gun, and his life might turn out better than if you just hand him over to the Internet."

If this strikes you as an overstatement, you simply do not understand the devastating effects of pornography. The great majority of children, especially boys but also girls, who are allowed access to pornography will view it, either inadvertently or purposefully, and many of those will become addicted to it, ruining their lives and in many cases ruining their future marriages.

That pornography is "harmless" is a lie from the pit of Hell. Scripture says that Satan goes around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, and sadly, we're losing our daughters and our sons.

For years, such warnings sounded like the overreactions of religious zealots. But recently an outpouring of information on the negative impact of pornography is available from mainstream researchers and secular sources. (Even *GQ Magazine* for men shared a piece in 2013 titled, "10 Reasons Why You Should Quit Watching Porn.") Many researchers recognize, even from their non-Christian worldview, that children's early exposure to addictive pornography and behavior such as sexting (taking and sharing provocative selfies) is harming them deeply.

The cover title for *Time Magazine's* April 2016 issue was "PORN: Why young men who grew up with Internet Porn are becoming advocates for turning it off." This article highlighted the real-life sexual problems that men who grew up with Internet porn are facing in relationships (like not being physically able to become aroused by a real encounter with a woman because of the way porn use has altered their brain's chemistry/functionality).

The New York Times tweeted this tag line to a recent



article: "The longer you wait to give your children a smartphone, the better." Brian X. Chen writes about how increasingly younger kids are being impacted by pornography and sexting:

Ms. Weinberger, who wrote the smartphone and Internet safety book "The Boogeyman Exists: And He's in Your Child's Back Pocket," said she had surveyed 70,000 children in the last 18 months and found that, on average, sexting began in the fifth grade, pornography consumption began when children turned 8, and pornography addiction began around age 11.

In an article for *The Atlantic*, Hanna Rosin cites research about the wide-spread practice of sexting:

A recent study of seven public high schools in East Texas, for example, found that 28 percent of sophomores and juniors had sent a naked picture of themselves by text or e-mail, and 31 percent had asked someone to send one. ...boys and girls were equally likely to have sent a sext, but girls were much more likely to have been asked to—68 percent had been.

A police officer friend told me that hardly a week goes by when he doesn't get a call from a distraught parent who's discovered that nude pictures of their daughter are being sent all over the school or across the country because she posed for a friend, or took the picture herself. Those images can never be fully recalled, nor the shame erased from memory.

Officer John Rasmussen, a school resource officer in my area, explained he often shares with families how the devastating effects of sexting and pornography knows no bounds. "I've frequently found the youth involved come from believing families who have raised 'good kids.'"

Christian parents would never have believed it if you had told them 25 years ago that one day most kids would be carrying around a little device that would allow them access to pornography and on which they could receive naked images sent by their classmates.

Hanna Rosin explains how Major Donald Lowe and his fellow officers at the Louisa County Sheriff's Office have talked to kids about the consequences of sexting:

Lowe's team explained to both the kids pictured on Instagram and the ones with photos on their phones the serious legal consequences of their actions. Possessing or sending a nude photo of a minor—even if it's a photo of yourself—can be prosecuted as a felony under state child-porn laws. He explained that 10 years down the road they might be looking for a job or trying to join the military, or sitting with their families at church, and the pictures could wash back up; someone who had the pictures might even try to blackmail them.

"Locally we see a blackmail tactic used time and again. It usually starts with 'send me just one pic'," says Officer Rasmussen. "That first picture may not be considered too provocative by most, but the kid is manipulated with shame and fear that someone will find out. Coercive requests follow, like, 'Send me more or I'll send this one out to your friends and family.' This can very quickly progress to, 'Now meet me for " _____ " (sex act) or I'll share all the photos.'"

I'm a grandparent to five boys, the oldest of them 12. Like many of you, I find this information, and the related statistics, chilling. (And remember, it's not just boys who are looking at pornography; young girls are too. Nor are girls the only ones participating in sending inappropriate pictures.) The reality is, if you have children in grade school and older, even if they themselves aren't exposed to or involved in these practices, some of their classmates certainly are, and as the years go on, more will be.

So what can concerned parents do?

1. Realize your responsibility to protect your children.

If your child has a smartphone or has access to a phone, a tablet, online gaming console, or a computer, they are vulnerable. As a parent you might wonder, "Do I have the right to interfere? Isn't that being nosy?" *Your job is to interfere*, and to know what is going on in your children's lives, as well as what happens when they're at friends' houses and at school.

You and your spouse need to decide what age is appropriate for your children to have their own phone, as well as the capabilities their phone has when do they do get one. (Some parents concerned about being able to safely reach their children have provided a phone that can only make calls and text certain numbers.)

2. Start the conversations about the dangers of pornography now. Given the ever-younger ages of kids affected, there's a great advantage in talking to your kids early—probably much earlier than you might think. Several parents I respect have used and

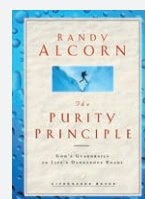
recommended the book *Good Pictures, Bad Pictures* by Kristen A. Jenson to talk with their children about the dangers of pornography in an age-appropriate format. (The book also provides positive, practical steps for kids when they are inadvertently exposed to inappropriate images.) Older teens could benefit from the many purity-related resources available from ministries. (For instance, see my article "Guidelines for Sexual Purity" at www.epm.org/guidelines and Dannah Gresh's "Seven Secrets to Purity for Every Teen Girl" at www.purefreedom.org/7-secrets-to-purity-for-every-teen-girl.)

Realize too that the conversations shouldn't be one time, but ongoing. One mom of boys writes, "What I am coming to see is that my boys and I just have to have conversation after conversation after conversation about the topic and about how most of their friends are going to struggle with this."

3. Establish clear guidelines in your family. Install a pornography-filtering and accountability-reporting program on computers, tablets, and smartphones (realizing it can't screen out everything). See www.epm.org/filters for various options. Establish, and enforce, rules in your home about keeping electronic devices, including phones, out of private rooms. (Some families have a "drop basket" where everyone, including parents, deposits their phones when they come through the door.) Require that computers and televisions stay in high-traffic areas.

4. Talk to your children about the great rewards and happiness of purity, and the destruction and unhappiness of impurity. Talk about how *good* sex can be inside marriage. Explain how sex is one of the best things God has made, but it becomes the very worst—the most devastating—when it is taken out of its God-given context. Scripture, especially in Proverbs 5-7, provides a great basis to talk to kids about the dangers of impurity and lust. (Some parents have gone through my book *The Purity Principle* with their teens.)

This is a battle for our children, with their lives and futures at stake. May Christian parents answer the Lord's call to protect their children, and train them in the joys of purity. ■



See www.epm.org/parents-purity for the sources used in this article, and for additional recommended resources.

Learn more about *The Purity Principle* at www.epm.org/purity.

Do You Have the Christmas Spirit?

BY J.I. PACKER

We talk glibly of the “Christmas spirit,” rarely meaning more by this than sentimental jollity on a family basis. But... it ought to mean the reproducing in human lives of the temper of him who for our sakes became poor at the first Christmas. And the Christmas spirit itself ought to be the mark of every Christian all the year round.

It is our shame and disgrace today that so many Christians—I will be more specific: so many of the soundest and most orthodox Christians—go through this world in the spirit of the priest and the Levite in our Lord’s parable, seeing human needs all around them, but (after a pious wish, and perhaps a prayer, that God might meet those needs) averting their eyes and passing by on the other side. That is not the Christmas spirit. Nor is it the spirit of those Christians—alas, they are many—whose ambition in life seems limited to building a nice middle-class Christian home, and making nice middle-class Christian friends, and bringing up their children in nice middle-class Christian ways, and who leave the submiddle-class sections of the



community, Christian and non-Christian, to get on by themselves.

The Christmas spirit does not shine out in the Christian snob. For the Christmas spirit is the spirit of those who, like their Master, live their whole lives on the principle of making themselves poor—spending and being spent—to enrich their fellow humans, giving time, trouble, care and concern, to do good to others—and not just their own friends—in whatever way there seems need.

There are not as many who show this spirit as there should be. If God in mercy revives us, one of the things He will do will be to work more of this spirit in our hearts and lives. If we desire spiritual quickening for ourselves individually, one step we should take is to seek to cultivate this spirit. “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, than though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). “I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart” (Psalm 119:32 KJV). ■



From Knowing God by J.I. Packer. Copyright © InterVarsity Press.

J.I. Packer is one of the most important evangelical theologians of our time. His writings include books such as Knowing God, A Quest for Godliness, Growing in Christ, and Rediscovering Holiness. I love this man and his writings, and highly recommend them. —Randy Alcorn

Does Jeremiah 29:11, about God's desire to give His people a future and hope, apply to believers today?

ANSWERED BY RANDY ALCORN

A few times I've shared Jeremiah 29:11 on my Facebook page. The verse says, "I know the plans I have in mind for you, declares the Lord; they are plans for peace, not disaster, to give you a future filled with hope" (CEB). Recently a thoughtful reader asked, "*But for whom and when does this apply? Is the context meant to include me/us?*"

The "you" in Jeremiah 29:11 is plural. It's spoken not to an individual but to a nation—God's people Israel, in exile in Babylon. God is promising to bring Israel back from the seventy year exile, and that will fulfill His plans for peace and a future of hope.

But the promise of God for all His people is revealed in this passage: that regardless of what judgment and suffering might happen first, God's *ultimate* plans for His children (as much for us as for Old Testament Israel) are for good and not evil, for welfare and hope.

Yes, Jeremiah was writing to his fellow Israelites. But so were Moses, Samuel, and David, and nearly all the prophets. That's true of virtually the entire Old Testament, which in hundreds of cases the New Testament freely applies to the church, followers of Christ, Jews and Gentiles alike. Israel was God's people, and today's believers, the church, are also God's people. So verses that were written *to* Israel are also written *for* the church.

Of course, many promises in Scripture are narrow, to particular people such as David: "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16). Certainly it would be a mistake to imagine that God is promising each of us will have eternal thrones. Yet there is truth in that verse for our benefit too, because we know Jesus our Lord and Savior is the descendant of David who will reign forever, and His people with Him.

It's really true that while not all of God's Word is written *to* us, it is all written *for* us. God spoke all His words in Scripture to certain people in certain times, but in the larger sense, the principles—which



are timeless truths—apply to all His children. In the case of Jeremiah 29:11, just because it was spoken to Israel about coming back from exile doesn't mean it has no connection to our lives.

Other passages reveal that our future in God's presence will never end. What could be a better future and a hope than our joyful expectation of resurrected eternal life with Christ who has gone to prepare a place for us and invited us to enter into His eternal happiness? Don't many passages reinforce this idea that God our Father, who loves us, promises us ultimate peace, not disaster, and an incredibly bright future filled with hope, a place we will live happily ever after?

We are not in exile in Babylon, but Jesus, King of Kings will deliver us all from our captivity in this world under the Curse, where we are called "foreigners and exiles" (1 Peter 2:11). He will rescue us, taking us to our true and eternal home, the New Earth, where He will reign forever, and we will reign with Him. Dozens of verses support each of these truths, which suggest clearly that we are part of God's broader audience of Jeremiah 29:11.

God's nature hasn't changed, so everything Jeremiah 29:11 says about God's plans remains true. So I think that while the specific promise to return Israel to the land after seventy years of exile is clearly not made to us, nonetheless the underlying principles of Jeremiah 29:11 pertain to all God's children in every place and time as they face the hardships of life.

We should always first understand the passage as God actually spoke it and Jeremiah understood it: not a promise of *immediate* prosperity. Indeed, times were tough for these Israelites and would remain tough for seventy years of exile, where most of the individuals would die. But this was a reminder that corporately their *ultimate* welfare as a nation was in the hands of a sovereign and loving God.

While I agree people sometimes take specific passages out of context, this is how I understand Jeremiah 29:11, and why I love it. ■

One Million Prayers for America

Tara Hackney, a friend of Eternal Perspective Ministries, has created a website that allows Christians around the world to lift up requests for America. When you send in your anonymous prayer, your city location will be lit up on a map. The hope is that others who are visiting the site can be encouraged by seeing we're truly not alone in this time of need in our nation.

Visit www.onemillionprayers.org to share your request today and be encouraged.

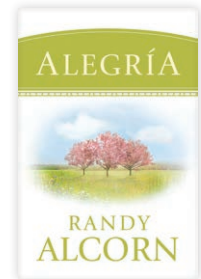


Hear Randy at the 2017 Linger Conference

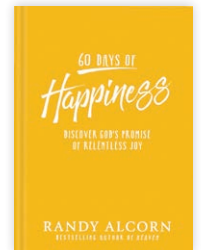
Randy Alcorn will be a featured speaker at the Linger Conference, to be held February 10-11, 2017 at Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, TX. Linger is about connecting and communing with Jesus Christ through the Word and experiencing the spiritual renewal that we all desperately need. Through unhurried times of worship in song and through biblical teaching, Linger provides two days to retreat, rest, and reset; cultivating a rhythm of worship that will carry over to our daily lives. Learn more and register at www.lingerconference.com.

New Products Coming Soon

The Spanish version of Randy Alcorn's *Happiness* book, *Alegría*, has an estimated release date of December 2016. It will be available for purchase from EPM after its release. You can browse our Spanish books for sale at www.epm.org/spanishbooks.



Randy's new devotional *60 Days of Happiness*, releasing January 2017, contains sixty timeless devotions demonstrating that God not only wants us to be happy in Him, He commands and empowers us to do so. It is available for preorder from EPM at www.epm.org/60days for the introductory preorder price of \$12.99 (retail \$17.99).



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.

End of Year Gifts to EPM

We're deeply grateful for the generous partnership of our donors, which allows us to continue our ministry. What does EPM's outreach look like? It includes providing quality, Christ-centered content online, which is accessible throughout the world; sending books to inmates in facilities across the U.S.; supporting Randy's book writing; reaching out in Jesus' name to all those we come in contact with; and so much more.

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 toll-free at 1.877.376.4567 during office hours (Monday - Thursday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. PT and Fridays 8:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. PT). 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 we sincerely appreciate it!





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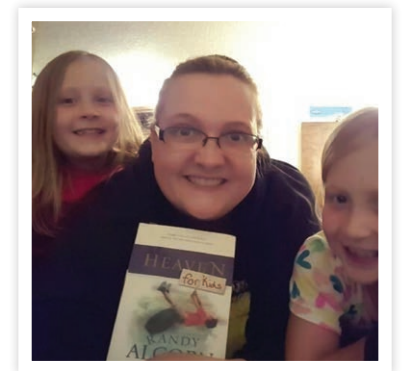
BOOKS HAVE ETERNAL impact

We love the fact that God uses Randy's books to change people's lives in two ways: through the reading of the words and through the giving away of the royalties. Here's just a few of the many book responses we've received over the past few months.

From Instagram

"Been reading *Heaven for Kids* to my younger two and they asked Jesus in their hearts tonight. Best mom moment ever. My father gave me a copy of *Heaven* and I've been slowly reading it. He passed away from cancer 11 months ago today. Different meaning for him when he was reading your book after he knew his diagnosis. You helped a lot. Thank you for what you do! My dad wanted me to make sure my girls (I have five) are not scared of Heaven and death and we will be together again. God bless!" —S.P.

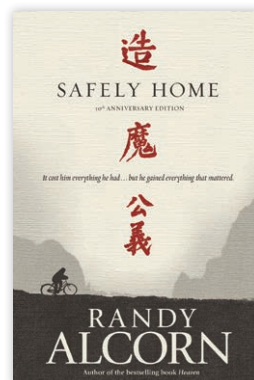
On Instagram? Follow EPM: @randyalcorn_epm. Learn more about *Heaven for Kids* at www.epm.org/heavenforkids.



From Facebook

"Thank you for writing the book *Safely Home*. I am an English teacher in a Christian school, and I have your book on the required reading list for all my students. This is the fourth time I've read *Safely Home*. Although I know it is a book about the persecuted church presented in a fictional narrative, it expresses such profound truths and always causes me to rethink my love for God and whether I'm playing an active part in bringing his kingdom news to the world " —L.R.

On Facebook? Follow Randy at www.facebook.com/randyalcorn. Learn more about the novel *Safely Home* at www.epm.org/safelyhome.



From a letter

"As a Christian for 40 years, who walked away and ended up in prison, your prison outreach along with God's grace, His Word, Christ's sacrifice, and your ministry, saved me. Thank you." —J.

Support EPM's efforts to send thousands of Randy's books annually to inmates nationwide by donating to "Books for Prisoners Fund" at www.epm.org/donate.