

Eternal Perspectives



with founder and author Randy Alcorn

Winter 2010

The far reaches of Christ's redemptive work

by Randy Alcorn, photos by John MacMurray

Adoption: an interview
with Randy Alcorn

Faith and Football
by Randy Alcorn

a publication of Eternal Perspective Ministries

Audio Resources Available

Do you commute to work? Like to listen to audio books while you're walking or at the gym? Or maybe you still enjoy the childhood pleasure of being read a good story before bed. Many of Randy's books, both fiction and non-fiction, are available as audio books; and many are even read by Randy himself. CD sets can be purchased from Eternal Perspective Ministries at www.epm.org, or by calling 503-668-5200.

There are also many free audio resources available at epm.org, including clips of Randy answering questions on a variety of critical topics such as money and giving, sexual purity, abortion, and Heaven, as well as archived radio interviews with Randy. Just click on the "Audio, Video, and Visual Media" link under the Resources tab to access them.



You're Invited to a Facebook Party!!

What: Celebrating the release of *The Promise of Heaven*

When: Thursday, January 14, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. PST

Where: In the notes section of Randy's Facebook page

Bring: Your questions, trivia knowledge, and friends!

Important: If you're not already following Randy on Facebook, go to www.facebook.com/randyalcorn to become a fan so you'll be able to join the party.

Follow Randy Alcorn online



"Margaret asked about next book project. I'm doing some thinking on that right now, one book related to some of Spurgeon's writings, something related to fruit of the Spirit, a children's book and a few other things. Ultimately I want to do a book on health and wealth gospel. And return to fiction at some point, but not sure when. One thing for sure—next book has to be a short one, not a big one like *Money, Possessions and Eternity, Heaven, or If God is Good!*"

~Randy, at the *If God is Good* book release party on Facebook



www.facebook.com/randyalcorn



www.twitter.com/randyalcorn



www.randyalcorn.blogspot.com

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For your convenience, an envelope has been included for end of year giving. While we deeply appreciate your financial gift, we value your prayers above all.

Would you take a moment to pray for our ministry?

Q: Well-meaning Christians sometimes forward me emails that I find out later are not true. And I've done this unknowingly myself. What are your thoughts on this?

A: First, we need to make a distinction regarding emails we receive from reputable, reliable Christian sources alerting us to things going on related to moral/ethical issues which we need to consider. What we are talking about are emails that are forwarded by others without a substantial verification. Even if someone says, "An attorney says this is true," or "I checked it out and this is true," we should not trust an unsubstantiated report.

God holds us accountable for every word we say, including the careless ones. Jesus said, "But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken" (Matthew 12:36). This means we should think carefully before we pass on emails that may be false.

Unfortunately, gossip and misinformation flow unceasingly in the Christian community. One day, in Heaven, they will be burned to ashes by the consuming holiness of God. Despite the fact that we complain about media bias, Christians tend to believe whatever we hear—in newspapers, websites, blogs and emails, and in personal conversation.

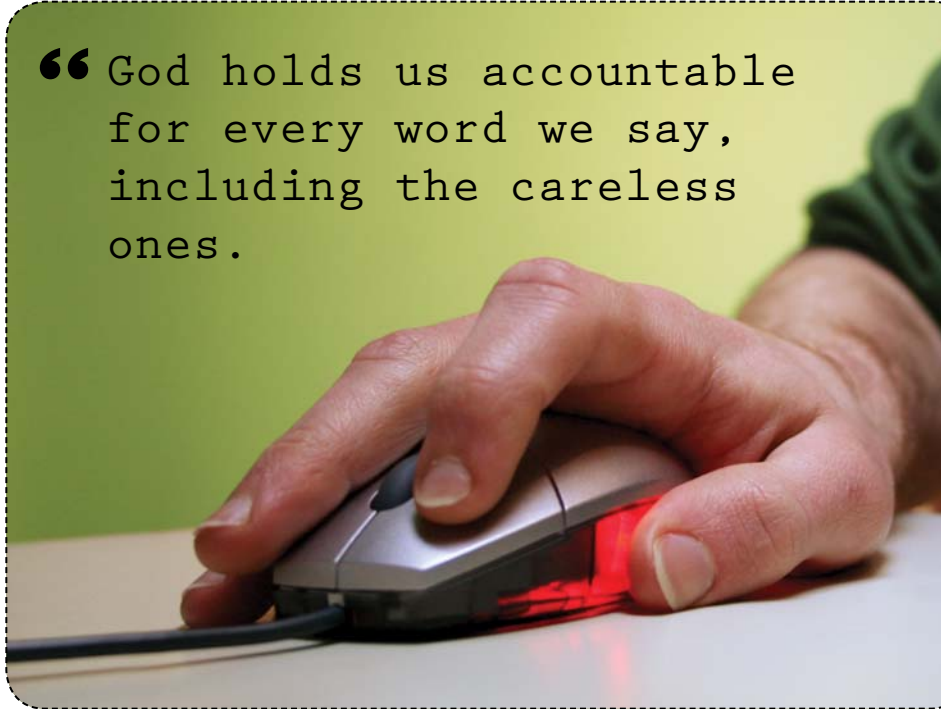
Here is one of the many erroneous emails floating around:

"Petition, Number 2493, would ultimately pave the way to stop the reading of the gospel of our Lord and Savior, on the airwaves of America. If this attempt is successful, all Sunday worship services being broadcast on the radio or by television will be stopped."

This is actually a remake of a previous story that had been circulating since 1975 related to Madalyn Murray O'Hair. Over 20 years later, the FCC was still being contacted by Christians who were hearing for the first time the lie that atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair was petitioning the FCC to ban religious broadcasting from America's airwaves. This woman actually died in 1995 and was never involved in such a thing even while alive!

Before you forward any questionable email, you can check out its authenticity by going to www.snopes.com or www.truthorfiction.com. If you have forwarded an email that you later find out was false, you can help educate others by graciously letting them know it was false and directing them to the two websites mentioned above. *RA*

“God holds us accountable for every word we say, including the careless ones.”



www.truthorfiction.com

www.snopes.com

“Wisdom is found on the lips of the discerning...” Proverbs 10:13

Faith & Football

From the blog
of Randy Alcorn 



One of the reasons we enjoy fall and winter is football. Nanci is more football-crazy than I am, but we both really enjoy the game.

Last January the Florida Gators won the national college championship. Quarterback Tim Tebow was named Most Valuable Player.

If you would have told us four years ago that Nanci and I would become Gators fans, we'd have said "no way." Nothing against the Gators, but Florida and Oregon, land of Beavers and Ducks, are geographical opposites, and in the past we haven't followed closely what happens in Florida at the college level.

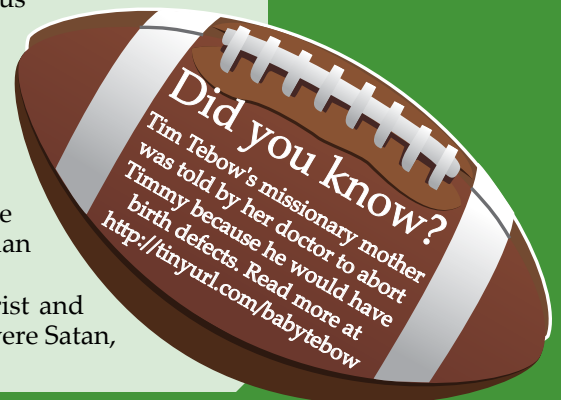
But last year Tim Tebow and his family changed all that. Tim's parents, Bob and Pam Tebow, invited us to spend a weekend with them and attend a Gator game last November. They lived in Oregon 36 years ago while Bob attended Western Seminary, where I went after Multnomah Bible College (now Multnomah University).

Bob graduated from Western with our old friend and pastor Stu Weber, who I served with in the first thirteen years of Good Shepherd Community Church, which Nanci and I are still part of. We went to the Tebow home for a fun weekend, with much talk of the past, the present, and God's faithfulness. The Tebows have a great family, and a great ministry in the Philippines.

Tim Tebow, in his first three years of college, has won the national championship twice, as well as the 2007 Heisman trophy for the best football player in the country, and was one of the three Heisman finalists in 2008. For this year, he's in the top five in the preliminary votes. But what's really remarkable is his outspoken devotion to the Lord, who he always publicly thanks as "my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (which is much more specific and controversial than thanking "God"). You may have seen Phil. 4:13 and John 3:16 repeatedly on camera, under his eyes.

Timmy, as his family calls him and as he signs his autographs (including on several jerseys for our grandsons), is utterly serious in his commitment to Christ. I have only been around one public figure who receives the amount of attention Timmy does, which is way more than most of us are built for. We were sitting with Timmy for an hour in a private post-game tailgate event, where we were able to talk and pray with him and watch him interact with others. Then he jumped in his parents' car with us to go hang out at his apartment with some of his friends. (Nanci and I posed with Timmy's Heisman trophy and a Heisman ball signed by winners of the trophy at the Tebow home; to clarify, I did not actually win a Heisman myself.)

Because Timmy has been so explicit in his faith in Christ and commitment to purity, he has a target on his chest. (If I were Satan,





I'd sure go after him.) Pray for this young man. Fortunately he has a truly wonderful Christ-centered, kingdom-minded family. His parents, brothers and sisters are the real deal. So is Tim Tebow.

Tim Tebow isn't the only great football player with faith in God. Speaking in NFL chapels over the years, we've had the opportunity to get to know a number of them. One of our friends, Jason Hanson, ranks number seven in total points scored in NFL history. He is still going strong. Jason kicked for Washington State, setting NCAA records that stand to this day. He was a teammate with retired quarterback Drew Bledsoe. He holds the all-time college record for most field goals from 50 yards and more (20), and 40 yards and more (39).

Jason also holds the all-time NFL record for field goals 50 yards and greater—42 of them—and we got to see record-setting number 42 on November 8, when he gave us four tickets (Rod and Diane Meyer came with us) to watch Seattle play the Lions. It was fun talking with Jason after the game, along with Lion punter Nick Harris, another committed Christ-follower; congratulations to Nick and Heather on the newborn twins!

Last year was a rough one for the Detroit Lions, but an incredible year for Jason, who missed only one field goal from any distance (it was blocked). Jason kicked eight field goals over fifty yards last year, tying the NFL single season record. He was a pro-bowl alternate. And at age 39, having played



“Isn't it fun to know that God has his people everywhere, in grocery stores and tire shops, in offices, at colleges and in professional sports?”

with the Lions seventeen years, he's been with the same team longer than any other active NFL player.

Most importantly, Jason is not only a great competitor, but a humble follower of Christ, who uses his gifts for God's glory. He loves his wonderful wife and children and is a real role model.

The way he's kicking, Jason may keep playing for years. When he finally retires, in my opinion Jason will have had a hall of fame career. Speaking of the Hall of Fame, Jason is already there, because the uniform he wore and the football he kicked to break that NFL career record for 50-yard-plus field goals were officially handed over to the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio.

Isn't it fun to know that God has his people everywhere, in grocery stores and tire shops, in offices, at colleges, and in professional sports?

And what about Kurt Warner? Nine years after he won the Super Bowl with the Rams, and about five years after everyone thought his career was over, last year he led the underdog Arizona Cardinals through the playoffs, all the way to the Super Bowl. For Warner, it's all about Christ.

If you'd like a resource on using sports to God's glory, my friend C.J. Mahaney preached a great message on sports called "Don't Waste Your Sports," which you can listen to on-

line at Sovereign Grace's website (www.sovereigngraceministries.org).

Whether we eat or drink or whatever we do—including playing sports and watching them—may we do it all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

The original of this updated article first appeared on Randy Alcorn's personal blog, January 15, 2009. Visit the blog at www.randyalcorn.blogspot.com



to read Randy's latest thoughts on the Christian life, discipleship, books, family, and more.

Other Christian sports-related resources

Books:

Game Day for the Glory of God: A Guide for Athletes, Fans, & Wannabes by Stephen Altrogge

Game Plan for Life by Joe Gibbs (and a team of authors, including Randy)

Organizations for young Christian athletes:

Athletes in Action (www.athletesinaction.org)

Fellowship of Christian Athletes (www.fca.org)

Media and Marketing Assistant Wendy Jeffries

My first contact with Eternal Perspective Ministries occurred in junior high when the teacher distributed an article on abstinence and sexual purity, photocopied from the Eternal Perspectives newsletter. The article impacted me so much that I started collecting each new issue from the resource center at church. A desire to be a part of something bigger than myself—to live in light of eternity—continued to grow as I absorbed sound doctrine from the publication, and read the accompanying Scriptures.

I started learning about important issues like abortion, and when I was a freshman in high school, a fellow student organized a prayer time in front of a local abortion clinic. No other students showed up that day besides me and the organizer. I felt the weight of the evil being done inside those walls, and the pain and sadness churned inside me. But God was with me, and through the Holy Spirit I was assured that he knew about all that was happening and loved these babies and their parents more than I ever could. I was so grateful that the Spirit intercedes for us, because I had no clue how to pray about such heavy issues (I still don't).

As I learned more about the plight of the unborn through reading *Eternal Perspectives* and researched about the procedures, the statistics, and all the ugly details of abortion, I found myself talking about it with whoever would listen. I began to write poetry and music, including a song written from the perspective of the unborn child.

This song was written when I was a young teenager, before I learned that my own parents had personally dealt with the secret pain of an abortion. When my mother conceived again, she said no to a second abortion. I'm grateful for that decision and the faith it took to make it, and so is my little sister. I have witnessed that there is healing, forgiveness, and hope for those touched by abortion.

In this newsletter and online (www.epm.org) there are resources for those who want to know more about prolife efforts and the help that is available.

When I started reading *Eternal Perspectives* and EPM's website, I had no idea that some day I would be working for the organization that opened my eyes to the responsibility of Christ followers. I joined the EPM staff in June 2009. My work consists of editing audio and video for the website and assisting Stephanie with promotions, networking, and marketing. I also facilitate the production of the newsletter.

I still love EPM for the same reasons I did when I learned of its existence: EPM makes a difference for eternity! I get to be a part of something that touches countless lives, meeting immediate physical needs as well as eternal ones. The best part: God does all the heavy lifting—I just get to watch!

Listen with your Heart

(from the perspective of the unborn)

If you listen with your heart,
you can hear her cry:
You don't have to love me
but please don't let me die
There's Someone who loves me.
There's a plan for my life;
to be someone's best friend,
or somebody's wife.

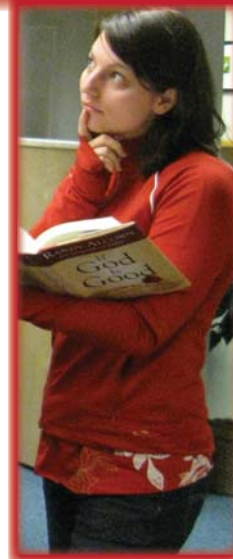
Friends to make,
The world to see,
experience life.
I have a heart and soul like you,
I can smile and I can cry.

I'm reaching out, please take my hand.
Don't let me leave this way.
You don't have to love me,
but don't let me fade away.

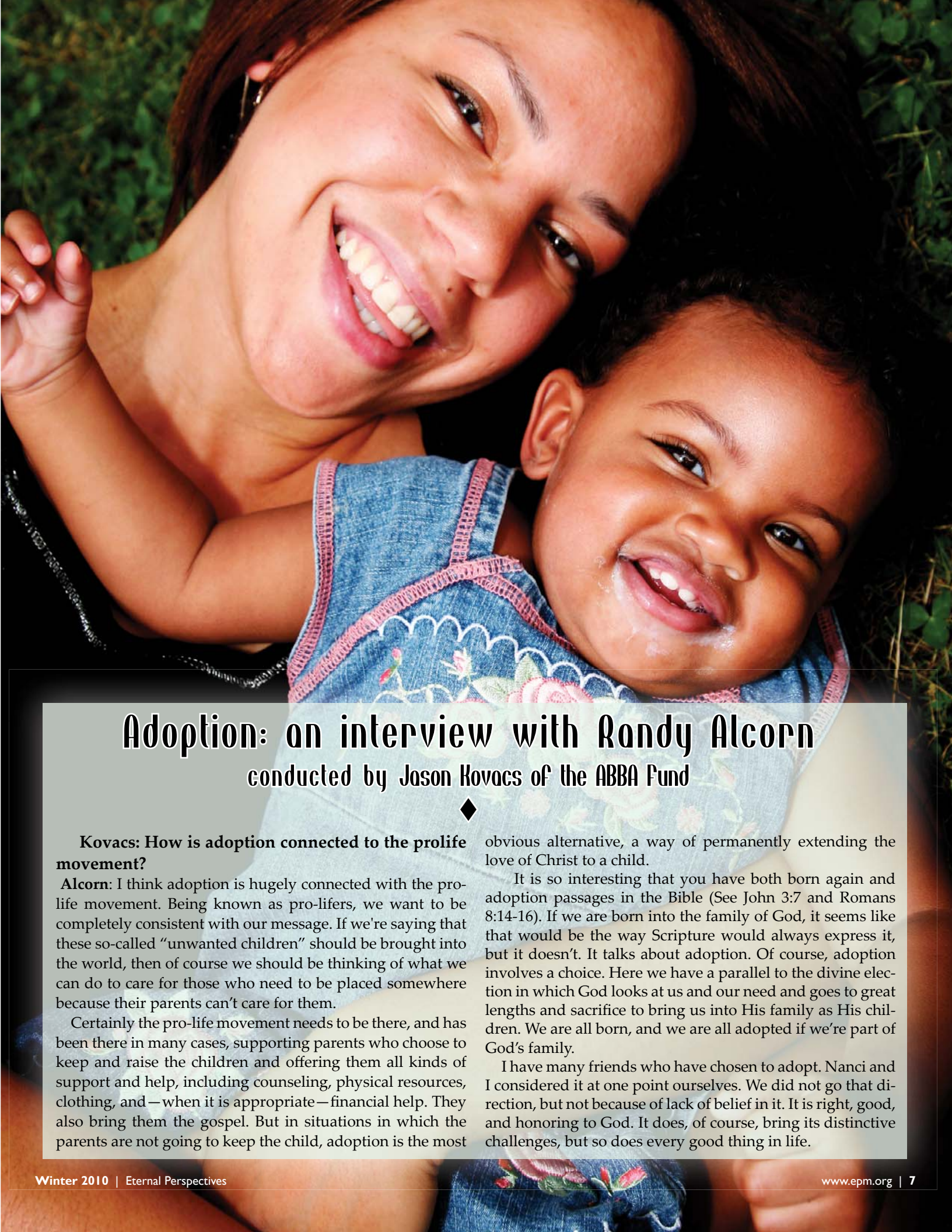
There's someone who'll want me,
crying for a child to love.
Someone believes that I
am a blessing from above.
Mom I know you're scared,
I can feel what you do.
We are both afraid,
but Hope will pull us through.

Wendy completed her Bachelor's degree in music and journalism at Warner Pacific College, where she fell in love with classical music. She enjoys teaching guitar and doing anything creative. What she loves most is discovery, especially about her Savior and the Scripture.

Wendy is married to her high school sweetheart, Adam, and is also the daughter-in-law of our office manager, Linda Jeffries.



Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Eph. 3:20-21)



Adoption: an interview with Randy Alcorn conducted by Jason Kovacs of the ABBA Fund



Kovacs: How is adoption connected to the pro-life movement?

Alcorn: I think adoption is hugely connected with the pro-life movement. Being known as pro-lifers, we want to be completely consistent with our message. If we're saying that these so-called "unwanted children" should be brought into the world, then of course we should be thinking of what we can do to care for those who need to be placed somewhere because their parents can't care for them.

Certainly the pro-life movement needs to be there, and has been there in many cases, supporting parents who choose to keep and raise the children and offering them all kinds of support and help, including counseling, physical resources, clothing, and—when it is appropriate—financial help. They also bring them the gospel. But in situations in which the parents are not going to keep the child, adoption is the most

obvious alternative, a way of permanently extending the love of Christ to a child.

It is so interesting that you have both born again and adoption passages in the Bible (See John 3:7 and Romans 8:14-16). If we are born into the family of God, it seems like that would be the way Scripture would always express it, but it doesn't. It talks about adoption. Of course, adoption involves a choice. Here we have a parallel to the divine election in which God looks at us and our need and goes to great lengths and sacrifice to bring us into His family as His children. We are all born, and we are all adopted if we're part of God's family.

I have many friends who have chosen to adopt. Nanci and I considered it at one point ourselves. We did not go that direction, but not because of lack of belief in it. It is right, good, and honoring to God. It does, of course, bring its distinctive challenges, but so does every good thing in life.

K: How do you think being pro-adoption can strengthen the pro-life movement?



A: Every time you see people who are pro-adoption, it conveys the value of human life and the importance of meeting the needs of the truly needy. Scripture emphasizes helping widows and orphans, and adoption is all about opening your home to the neediest of those. James 1:27 says, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress..." For an orphan to be physically without a father and

ultimately without a mother is an unthinkable place for a child to be.

If you want to see what a world without adoption would look like, go to the streets and see the homeless children—abandoned and surviving on their own, with gangs, theft, child prostitution, and exploitation at every level. What happens when adoption isn't there is a horror movie.

K: What is the church's role in adoption? How would you encourage a church that wants to have God's heart for adoption?

A: There are many different things churches can do. Visibility is huge. Adoption can't simply be spoken about from the platform; people have to see with their eyes the difference it makes in people's lives. In our church, the way adoption was highly valued was through four of our pastors who chose over the years to adopt. In one case, we had a pastor who, along with his wife, adopted three children. Because the pastor and the children were visible, they would talk about the reasons for adoption. Our children's pastor and his wife ended up adopting nineteen children, including a number of special needs children from around the world. They now run an orphanage in Mexico, and recently adopted a Down syndrome child from the orphanage.

Certainly the church can have adoption support groups, speakers, classes, and conferences. Our children's pastor lined up numbers of people in our church with children to

adopt. There are dozens of children who were ultimately adopted. In order for adoption to have a significant part of a church life, models and examples need to be visible.

K: Are there distinctive problems and issues with adoption?

A: Of course. One of my closest friends, after having four natural-born children, took in and adopted two foster care children who were born with their mother's drug addiction. That addiction has had a significant influence on their lives. These are not storybook lives.

I've often asked families when they've been discouraged about what their adopted kids have experienced, "What would have happened to them if you hadn't intervened?" One boy, a schizophrenic, brought great grief to his family and went through a period of extreme violence. Now it's under control and he's doing reasonably well. I believe with all my heart that same little boy, given his tendencies, raised in a foster care situation—or perhaps abandoned on the streets—would have killed others, and possibly himself, or almost certainly would be in prison, perhaps for a lifetime. Yet that boy did come to faith in Christ and after years of grief, is now experiencing some level of stability. Is that redemptive? I believe it is.



K: What advice do you have for those who are considering adoption but don't know how to handle the financial challenges? Should other Christians financially support those who

want to adopt?

A: The money issue is a big obstacle. I think those who believe God has called them to adopt should be willing to make personal sacrifices. The average person—and most Christians in our culture—have adopted lifestyles in which they are spending much more money than they need to.

Often we can find in our lifestyle a great deal of money that we think we don't have. I have talked with families wanting to adopt who say, "We just don't think we can afford it." I say, "How much do you want to adopt?" If God has called you to this, He has called you to make sacrifices to make this happen. I would say, "Look at what God has already provided for you and what assets you could liquidate."



Purchase *Why Pro-Life? Caring for the Unborn and Their Mothers* at a case quantity discount!

(\$1.00 per book, 50 books per case)



Should the people of God as a whole be challenged to get involved and support other people in the body of Christ? I would say they absolutely should support not only those in their own church who wish to adopt, but also those in other churches and other places.

In *The Treasure Principle* I talk about the idea that you can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead. Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust corrupt, or thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven that aren't going to be destroyed. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:19-21).

Nanci and I have helped people adopt even though God did not lead us to adopt. We still have ownership in adoption because we have helped others in that process. How do you get a heart for something? Jesus says you give to it. If I give toward adoption, I am gaining vested interest in it.

K: How would you counsel a couple who feels called to adopt but simply does not have the financial resources?

A: What I would say to that couple is even though they live on very little, they are still among the wealthiest people who have ever lived. How were people throughout history able to do the things they believed God was leading them to do? I believe they took their needs before God and asked Him to provide.

When you ask God to provide, you are saying, "God, we need you in this" —and that is a great way to approach adoption. You're far better off doing that than if you had a lot of money sitting in the bank and said, "Money is no obstacle, so we're already 90% of the way there." The decision to adopt should not be ultimately made on a purely financial basis. God owns everything and is fully capable of providing for His children whatever they need. I think it's appropriate to ask Him, "Lord, we just don't have this money. How might we get it?"

Ask Him to provide through whatever means He sees fit to do and simultaneously work on developing a plan to set money aside. That demonstrates the sincerity and priority of this desire. Meanwhile, God may lay it on the hearts of other people to give or provide supernaturally through any number of different means.

K: Do you think if Christians understood what the Bible says about their own adoption into God's family, they would become more involved in caring for the

orphans of the world?

A: The Biblical significance of adoption and the fact that God is presented as an adoptive parent should capture the imagination of the Body of Christ. What does it mean to be born into the family of God? What does it mean to bear a likeness to our Father so that we come to resemble Him more and more as God's children?

In adoption He chooses us who are not naturally His to be declared His at an immense price. Let's tie that in by illustration to the great cost of somebody adopting a child, and ask ourselves, what was the cost for God to adopt us as His children? Astronomical. The cost was the life of His only begotten Son. He gave His Son so that He might be able to adopt into His family those who had been severed from any natural relationship with God through their sin and were destined to an eternity apart from the presence of the Father. He didn't just sort of make room for us in His family. He brought us in.

Does God have any more trouble loving His adopted children than His natural-born children? The answer of course is no, because there literally is no difference. Every person who knows Jesus is born again —and every person who knows Jesus is adopted. *R*



The Abba Fund provides interest-free covenant loans to Christian couples who are called by God to expand their families through adoption. (www.abbafund.com)

Perfect for churches, individuals, and organizations observing Sanctity of Human Life Sunday on January 24, 2010

Why Pro-life? encourages readers to reevaluate their positions and base their beliefs on factual evidence.

We recommend ordering by December 31, 2009, to be ready for Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. To place an order, contact Eternal Perspective Ministries at (503) 668-5200 or info@epm.org.



ministry to the abortion vulnerable
CHOOSING LIFE

January 24th, 2010, is Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. Here is some information about two of the many prolife organizations that reach out to unborn children and their mothers, and some ways you can respond.

Care Net reaches out in the United States

Care Net is an umbrella organization that promotes, prepares, and plants pregnancy centers throughout North America. It has become the largest network of pregnancy centers in North America, with 1,100 centers serving over 350,000 women each year.

Care Net also plays a key role in reaching women in crisis through their 24/7 Option Line call center and website featuring America Online's (AOL) Instant Messaging service. Option Line has over 30 trained phone consultants who provide immediate support and connect people to the help of a local pregnancy center. The Option Line website is currently garnering more than 1,000,000 visits each year.

The ultimate aim of Care Net and its

network of pregnancy centers is to share the love and truth of Jesus Christ in both word and deed. As a result, the hearts of women and men are being changed by Christ's love to desire positive and healthy choices. In addition, those struggling with past abortions are finding God's healing and forgiveness.

Read more at care-net.org

Pray:

There are currently four key areas that need your prayers: Care Net, the Urban Initiative, the Option Line call center, and their affiliate pregnancy centers. Visit their website for details about these ministries and to sign up for their prayer updates. (care-net.org)

Volunteer:

Some ways to serve your local Pregnancy Resource Center:

- Organize fundraising events
- Help develop or update a pregnancy center's website
- Provide administrative assistance
- Serve as a phone consultant or peer counselor
- Coordinate clothing and diaper drives
- Distribute promotional items and brochures to local churches, schools, and businesses
- Join a committee or advisory board

(To find a center, visit optionline.org)

Read a list of 50 ways you can help unborn babies and their mothers at <http://tinyurl.com/50waystohelp>

Life International works globally to stop abortion

46-50 million children lose their lives to abortion each year. Abortions in the U.S. and Canada (1.4 million) amount to 3% of abortions worldwide. And while the U.S. and Canada have 2,500 pregnancy centers to counteract 3% of abortions, the rest of the world has 600 centers for 97% of abortions.

While agencies promoting abortion exist in more than 180 countries, for a woman living outside of North America, there may not be a single pregnancy center in her entire country, let alone her city.

LIFE International's mission is to help nationals establish LIFE ministries wherever

Pray

If you would like to become a LIFE Prayer Partner, email bill@lifeinternational.com

abortion exists in the world. The purpose of this work is to reach the men and women impacted by abortion with the gospel of Jesus Christ and the truth about abortion.

The staff and volunteers of a LIFE ministry purpose to share the Gospel with those they serve as they provide the following:

- Pregnancy testing and counseling services
- Abortion recovery services for women and men
- Abstinence education services
- Medical services, such as ultrasound services
- Support services, such as basic childcare necessities.

Read more at lifeinternational.com

Volunteer

There are several ways to support Life International, including volunteering. Read more at their website under the Get Involved tab.

Lifeinternational.com



The
far reaches
of
Christ's
redemptive
work

by Randy Alcorn,
photos by John MacMurray

Eugene Peterson captures the universal implications of Christ's redemption when he paraphrases Colossians 1:18-20 in *The Message*: "He was supreme in the beginning and—leading the resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he's there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the Cross."

The power of Christ's resurrection is enough not only to remake us, but also to remake every inch of the universe—mountains, rivers, plants, animals, stars, nebulae, quasars, and galaxies. Christ's redemptive work extends resurrection to the far reaches of the universe. This is a stunning affirmation of God's greatness. It should move our hearts to wonder and praise.

Do you ever sense creation's restlessness? Do you hear groaning in the cold night wind? Do you feel the forest's loneliness, the ocean's agitation? Do you hear longing in the cries of whales? Do you see blood and pain in the eyes of wild animals, or the mixture of pleasure and pain in the eyes of your pets? Despite vestiges of beauty and joy, something on this earth is terribly wrong. Not only God's creatures but even inanimate objects seem to feel it. But there's also hope, visible in springtime after a hard winter. As Martin Luther put it, "Our Lord has written the promise of the resurrection not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime." The creation hopes for, even anticipates, resurrection. That's exactly what Scripture tells us:

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:19-23)

The "redemption of our bodies" refers to the resurrection of the dead. Paul says that not only we but "the whole creation" awaits the earthwide deliverance that will come with our bodily resurrection. Not only mankind in general but believers in particular (those with God's Spirit within) are aligned with the rest of creation, which intuitively reaches out to God for deliverance. We know what God intended for mankind and



the earth, and therefore we have an object for our longing. We groan for what creation groans for—redemption.

God subjected the whole creation to frustration by putting the Curse not only on mankind but also on the earth (Genesis 3:17). Why? Because human beings and the earth are inseparably linked. And as together we fell, together we shall rise. God will transform the fallen human race into a renewed human race and the present Earth into the New Earth.

What does it mean that creation waits for God's children to be revealed? Our Creator, the Master Artist, will put us on display to a wide-eyed universe. Our revelation will be an unveiling, and we will be seen as what we are, as what we were intended to be—God's image-bearers. We will glorify him by ruling over the physical universe with creativity and camaraderie, showing respect and benevolence for all we rule. We will be revealed at our resurrection, when our adoption will be finalized and our bodies redeemed. We will be fully human, with righteous spirits and incorruptible bodies.

John Calvin writes in his commentary on Romans 8:19, "I understand the passage to have this meaning—That there is no element and no part of the world which is being touched, as it were, with a sense of its present misery, that does not intensely hope for a resurrection."

What is "the whole creation" that groans for our resurrection? The phrase appears to be completely inclusive of "the heavens and the earth" that God created in the beginning (Genesis 1:1). So it is the heavens and the earth that eagerly await our resurrection. This includes Earth and everything on it, as well as the planets of our solar system and the far reaches of our galaxy and beyond. If it was created, Paul includes it in "the whole creation."

Why does the creation wait eagerly for our resurrection? For one simple but critically important reason: As mankind goes,

so goes all of creation. Thus, just as all creation was spoiled through our rebellion, the deliverance of all creation hinges on our deliverance. The glorification of the universe hinges on the glorification of a redeemed human race. The destiny of all creation rides on our coattails.

The Pains and Promise of Childbirth

It's fair to say that most Christians believe there will be no carryover into Heaven of our present culture, art, technology, or the products of human creativity. Indeed, it's common to doubt if we will even remember our lives on Earth or the people whom God used to influence and shape us, including our families and closest friends.

If our assumptions about the end of the world were correct, what analogy would we expect Paul to use for what will happen to creation? An old man dying? A mortally wounded soldier gasping his final breaths? Those images would fit well



with a belief that the universe will come to a violent, final end. But Paul doesn't use analogies of death and destruction. He uses the analogy of childbirth: "The whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up until the present time" (Romans 8:22).

There are pains in childbirth for mother and child, but the result is a continuation, a fulfillment of a process that has long been underway. The pains of childbirth are analogous to the present sufferings of mankind, animals, and the entire universe. But those sufferings are temporary because of the imminent miracle of birth. A far better world will be born out of this one, and a far better humanity will be born out of what we now are.

The fallen but redeemed children of God will be transformed into something new: sinless, wise stewards of the earth. Today the earth is dying; but before it dies—or in its death—it will give birth to the New Earth. The New Earth will be the

child of the old Earth, just as the new human race will be the children of the old race. Yet it is still us, the same human beings, and it will also be the same Earth.

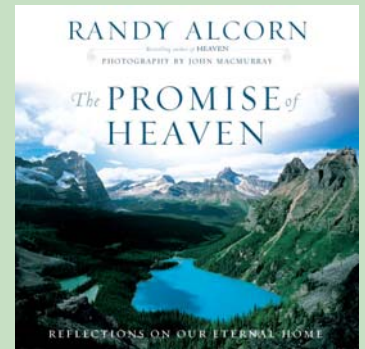
Romans 8 contains a powerful theology of suffering. There's the groaning of those dying without hope, and in contrast, the groaning of those in childbirth. Both processes are painful, yet they are very different. The one is the pain of hopeless dread, the other the pain of hopeful anticipation. The Christian's pain is very real, but it's the pain of a mother anticipating the joy of holding her child.

It is no coincidence that the first two chapters of the Bible (Genesis 1-2) begin with the creation of the heavens and the earth and the last two chapters (Revelation 21-22) begin with the re-creation of the heavens and the earth.

All that was lost at the beginning will be restored at the end. And far more will be added besides. *RA*



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All photos supplied by John MacMurray. See more images, including those accompanying this article in their original form in *The Promise of Heaven*.

Redeemed experiences:

(excerpt from *If God is Good*)

When we consider the best and the worst things that have happened to us, we often see a startling overlap.

Nancy Guthrie writes of a speaker asking people to **fold a paper in half**. She then instructed them to **write on the top half the worst things that had happened to them, and on the bottom half the best things.**¹

Invariably, people find things at the top of the page that they also include at the bottom. Experiences they'd labeled as the worst things that ever happened to them had, over time, become some of the best things that ever happened. That's because God uses the painful, difficult experiences of life for our ultimate good.

In making my own list, I find exactly the same thing—a number of the worst things have turned out to be the best. Try making your own list. If you've lived long enough, if enough time has passed since some of those "worst things" happened to you, then you will almost certainly find an overlap.

How is this possible? Because God is both loving and sovereign. Our lists provide persuasive proof that while evil and suffering are not good, God can use them to accomplish immeasurable good. Knowing this should give us great confidence that even when we don't see any redemptive meaning in our suffering, God can see it—and one day we will too. Therefore, we need not run from suffering or lose hope if God doesn't remove it. We can trust that God has a purpose for whatever he permits.

[1] Nancy Guthrie, *Holding On to Hope* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2002), 39.

The Zimbabwe Covenant

I am part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I have Holy Spirit Power. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I am a disciple of His. I will not look back, let up, slow down, back away or be still.

My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, my future is secure. I am finished and done with low living, sight-walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, worldly talking, cheap giving, and dwarfed goals.

I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotion, or popularity. I do not have to be right, first, tops, recognized, regarded or rewarded. I now live by faith, lean on His presence, walk by patience, am uplifted by prayer, and labor by power.

My face is set, my gate is fast, my goal is Heaven. My road is narrow, my way is rough, my Guide reliable, my mission clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded, or delayed. I will not give up, shut up, or let go. I will go on until He comes, and work until He stops me.

I am a disciple of Jesus.

Original source unknown. (http://www.allsoulsjax.org/covenant/zimbabwe_covenant.htm)



Joy to the World

Joy to the world! the Lord is come! Let earth re - ceive her
Joy to the world! the Sa - vior reigns; let men their songs em -
 No more let sins and sor - rows grow, nor thorns in - fest the
 He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the na - tions

King; Let ev - ery heart pre - pare him room,
play, while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains,
 ground; He comes to make his bless - ings flow
prove the glo - ries of his right - eous - ness,

and heaven and na - ture sing, and heaven and na - ture
re - peat the sound - ing joy, re - peat the sound - ing
 far as the curse is found, far as the curse is
 and won - ders of his love, and won - ders of his

When I was a kid I liked “Silent Night,” even though I didn’t understand the meaning. Now my favorite is “Joy to the World,” because as my wife pointed out to me years ago, it’s the Christmas song that looks forward to Christ’s return and the New Earth. “He rules the world with truth and grace.” That’s what my heart longs for. “No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground; he comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found.” Christ’s redemptive work will restore the earth to what God originally intended. Everything touched by the curse will be renewed and transformed into something great. “Joy to the World”—by the power of the risen Christ, the old world will be transformed into the new!

—Randy Alcorn



Sing Christmas carols with your family and friends. Free Christmas music can be found at Christmassongbook.net, licensed under the Creative Commons license.

Joy *to the World* originated as a poem by Isaac Watts. As his health declined, so did Watts’ ability to preach, turning his focus to a different project—modernizing the Psalms for the Christian church, interpreting them through an understanding of the New Testament. Watts penned the words to *Joy to the World* in response to Psalm 98:4, “Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises.” It was originally published under the title *The Messiah’s Coming and Kingdom*.

Later, after Isaac Watts died, the words were set to music

by Lowell Mason, who drew on several musical themes from George Frederick Handel’s *Messiah*. Mason, a banker in Savannah, Georgia, published his first book of music when he was 30 years old. He published it anonymously, because at the time he did not think music would be a viable career and did not want to jeopardize his reputation as a banker. Eventually, Mason became the first music teacher in an American public school and then co-founded the Boston Academy of Music. He published over 1600 hymns, including *Nearer My God to Thee*, and is today known as the “father of American church music.”

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- ♦ Adoption: An interview with Randy Alcorn
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