



ETERNAL PERSPECTIVES

*We fix our eyes not on what is seen,
but on what is unseen...*

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER • SPRING 2001

Circumstances or Perspective?

by Randy Alcorn

One night a man heard a noise nearby and thought there was a burglar in his backyard. The stress was so great he died of a heart attack. Did the burglar cause his stress? No. *There was no burglar.* What caused his stress—and cost him his life—was not reality but his faulty perception of reality.

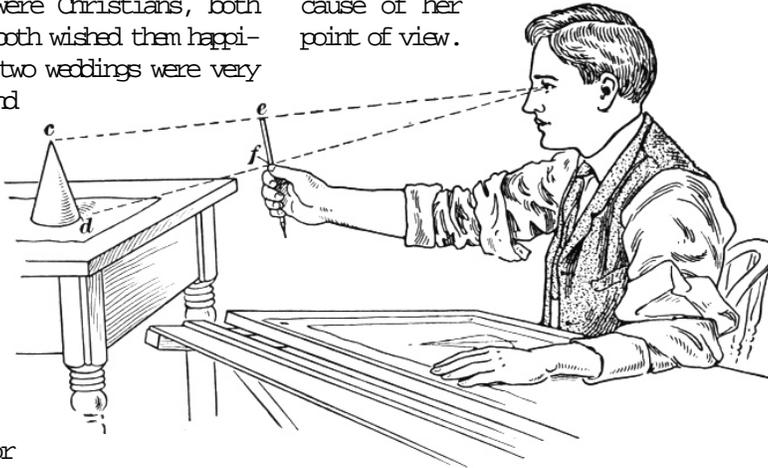
With two weddings in the Alcorn family planned for this summer, it's appropriate to tell this story:

Joyce and Bea (not their real names, of course) both had daughters get married in June. Both women were Christians, both loved their girls, both wished them happiness. In fact, the two weddings were very similar. But Joyce and Bea had two very different experiences.

Joyce was a little nervous, naturally, but she was excited, joyful, and festive. This wonderful day in her daughter's life was also wonderful for her. Not that everything went smoothly—the wedding coordinator was bossy, the photographer was late, the cake was different than she ordered, and the flowers didn't look quite fresh. When the ring bearer stood on the wrong side of the platform and the groom forgot a line of the vows, Joyce laughed to herself and enjoyed the wedding all the more.

Bea's daughter was married two weeks later in the same church. The wedding went just as well, perhaps a little

better. But Bea was uptight, strung out, and ready to string up the photographer, the florist, and the cake decorator for their inexcusable foul-ups. She cringed when the candlelighters didn't stay together; she trembled for fear that her husband would blow his one line ("Her mother and I"). Her stomach churned when the best man fumbled for the ring. It may have been the happiest day in someone's life, but Bea was miserable. Why? Because of her circumstances? No, *because of her perspective.* Because of her point of view.



Before you write off the difference between Joyce and Bea as "just a difference in personality," think about it. Bea will never be Joyce and shouldn't try to be her, but she too can learn to develop a positive perspective on life. Indeed, if she is ever to be content and at peace, Bea *must* change. Unless she does, the same short-sighted perspective that ruined the wedding for her will inevitably ruin her entire life (not to mention make it unpleasant for everyone around her).

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To overcome stress you must either change your circumstances or your perceptions. You can change some circumstances, of course, but many you cannot. The truth is that you have little or no control over the photographer, florist, cake decorator, flower girl, or best man. You can't make your children get straight As, lower taxes, stop the rain, or cause a cease-fire in the Middle East. You can't even get the Book of the Month Club to stop sending you books or get your husband to put his dirty clothes in the laundry basket.

So, if you are to have any peace at all, any relief from stress, you must adjust to human problems, errors, weaknesses, accidents, and any number of things that life is certain to bring and which if you don't learn to accept them are certain to drive you nuts.

Perspective

Our perceptions, much more than our circumstances, are the building blocks with which we construct our lives. There is a sense in which we literally create the world we live in. If it is empty, imitating, boring, hectic, or hurried, it is because we have perceived it that way, and at least in a sense made it that way. No matter what the circumstances, our view of life determines our level of joy and contentment.

Don't misunderstand. I am not promoting "positive thinking" for its own sake. I am advocating positive thinking when and only when it is biblical thinking.

I know some very ungodly people who are "positive thinkers." They have no time for the doctrine of sin and the reality of true moral guilt and human

accountability to God. These things are too "negative" for them. Unfortunately for them, unless they accept these basic biblical truths, negative as they might be, all the positive thinking in the universe won't deliver them from the ultimate negative-hell.

I am also not encouraging something mystical or magical, the way some people view positive thinking. If you wish real hard and real long and real sincerely..you may still not get what you wish for!



Neither am I talking about the philosophy behind many of the success books like Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich*. These books, and the innumerable seminars spun off from them, define success in terms of the accumulation of wealth (as do some "Christian" sales organizations). They quote freely from Christ and Aristotle and Buddha and "other positive thinkers" and refer to God only in the context of how he can make you wealthy (as if that's his purpose for existing).

All thinking should be rooted in biblical fact. The truth is that in light of Christ's victory over sin and death and

God's unalterable plan to rule this universe with righteousness, *the biblicist is ultimately an optimist*. He is not a positive thinker because pop psychology tells him he should be but because over and over again Scripture gives him reason to be.

If God is good and sits on the throne of the universe and everything that comes into your life is Father-filtered, how can you be anything less than optimistic?

The follower of Christ is not a pessimist, nor is he first an optimist. He is first a realist and then an optimist. In other words, *the Christian is not optimistic because it is the most advantageous way to think but because it is the accurate way to think*. The Christian's optimism is based squarely on realism: God is real, the atonement is real, the resurrection is real, the second coming is real, God's providence is real, and the gospel really is "good news."

Perspective is what Joshua and Caleb had, and the other ten spies didn't (Numbers 13-14). Joshua and Caleb entered Canaan and saw the land, the fruit, the potential for prosperity, and a place for their families to live and worship God. The other ten spies went to the same land and saw giants—great men of war, who made conquering the land seem impossible. Joshua and Caleb saw exactly the same giants. But somehow, to them, they just didn't seem so big. The two saw God as bigger than giants. The ten saw giants as bigger than God. Because they saw God on his throne, Joshua and Caleb could look at the same set of circumstances and see



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a completely different picture than the others saw—a picture both realistic and optimistic.

A Test of Perspective

Our perspective may not be tested in terms of lands and giants and battle strategy. But count on it—it *will* be tested.

Years ago Nanci and I went on a two-week vacation to California. We left the kids with friends, and took off on what was going to be our greatest vacation ever. We had everything planned, and we so deserved the time off (that's what we told ourselves). We just knew everything would go perfectly.

Everything did go perfectly—for the first forty miles. Then our radiator blew up. We ended up spending the whole day in a small Oregon town which I won't name for fear of offending someone, though I doubt anyone from this town would ever come across this story. Suffice it to say, it was *not* the Magic Kingdom.

We had left with a few hundred dollars in cash, and a little more in traveler's checks, with one major credit card to use as a back-up. Most of the cash was safely hidden, but I put it in my wallet just for a few minutes in order to pay for the radiator. Then I found out we didn't have enough cash for the radiator. They wouldn't take a credit card, so we had to use all but one of our traveler's checks. An hour or two after sunset, we were on the road again.

We drove all the next day and got in late to Santa Clara, California. We went out for pizza, finally ready to relax for the first time in two days. The next thing we knew my wallet had been stolen. That's right, the wallet that still had all the cash in it from the day before. It also had the credit card. And, to top it off, it was the Friday night of Memorial Day weekend. No bank would be open until Tuesday, when we had reservations in another part of the state. Meanwhile, we had a grand total of one \$20 traveler's check to get us through the next three and a half days.

The rest of the trip was good news and bad news. The good news was that the sun shone the whole time. The bad news was that Nanci developed an extremely uncomfortable sun rash and

couldn't expose her skin to direct sunlight until we returned home to Oregon (where direct sunlight is rarely a problem). Long sleeves, high necklines, and floppy hats were the only thing that allowed Nanci to escape from the hotel room.

What's the point of this story? The point is, it turned out to be *potentially* the worst vacation we've ever had. But it turned out *actually* to be the best vacation we've ever had. Why? Perspective.

Circumstances do not cause stress. It's our interpretation of and response to circumstances that cause stress.

We cried, we prayed, we laughed, we grew. We counted our blessings and realized how much we had and how little we had lost. Once we let go of our ideal picture-perfect vacation and determined to enjoy whatever God had for us, he gave back to us a wonderful time and more. The circumstances didn't improve because our attitudes improved. But, by God's grace, our attitudes completely overwhelmed the circumstances.

As goes your perspective, so goes your vacation, your wedding, your job, your dishes, your ministry, your carpool...your whole life.

"Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails" (Proverbs 18:14). A right attitude carries you through bad circumstances and poor health. But no matter how strong the body, how positive the circumstances, a crushed spirit will never experience joy. Perspective is what makes the spirit soar like an eagle even when the body is ravaged by accident, disease, and age.

No stress can stand in the face of a right perspective.

What We Believe

Perspective is rooted in belief. We think and act based upon our beliefs. Our belief system is the blueprint around which we build our life and the lens through which we see our life.

This is why exposure to true Bible teaching is so important, and why it's essential to attend a church that teaches God's Word and to study it daily ourselves (Acts 17:11). The more our beliefs are established on God's truth, the better the foundation for our entire life, and the less likely we will collapse under life's stresses.

When I speak of beliefs, I don't mean merely what we *say* we believe but what we *really do* believe. Most of us *say* we believe in a sovereign God. Our doctrine is correct, but the true test of our beliefs is when we have a week of rain on our long-awaited camping trip, or the car breaks down on the way to the airport, or the washer—with all of your best delicate clothes in it—is filled with muddy water from a broken water main (this has happened to Nanci). Is God sovereign when he deals with the rise and fall of empires but not when my tent leaks or my favorite shirt is ruined? Is he sovereign just when I get my way, or is he always sovereign? The illustrations I'm using are small things. But the God who's sovereign in small things also controls the big ones.

Hopefully, your beliefs are rooted in truth. But whether they are or not, they will determine your perspective. Ironically, sometimes non-Christians view life positively when in fact they are hopelessly lost without Christ. On the other hand, Christians who have every reason to be joyous may have very negative attitudes. The person going to hell may be relatively happy, the one going to heaven may be miserable. Both have attitudes based on incorrect beliefs. But whether or not they are correct, beliefs do determine attitudes.

Rejoicing Despite Circumstances

Probably the biggest step in reducing and controlling stress is to realize once and for all that *circumstances do not cause stress*. It is our interpretation of and response to circumstances that cause stress.

Have you ever read the popular children's story *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*? Read the story and at first you think Alexander did have an unusual number of terrible things happen to him, so no wonder he had a terrible day. But then you realize that the things that happened to Alexander are the usual kinds of irritations that happen to us all daily. They are simply part of being alive in this far-from-perfect world. It is our loss of perspective that magnifies out of proportion every little thing that goes wrong.

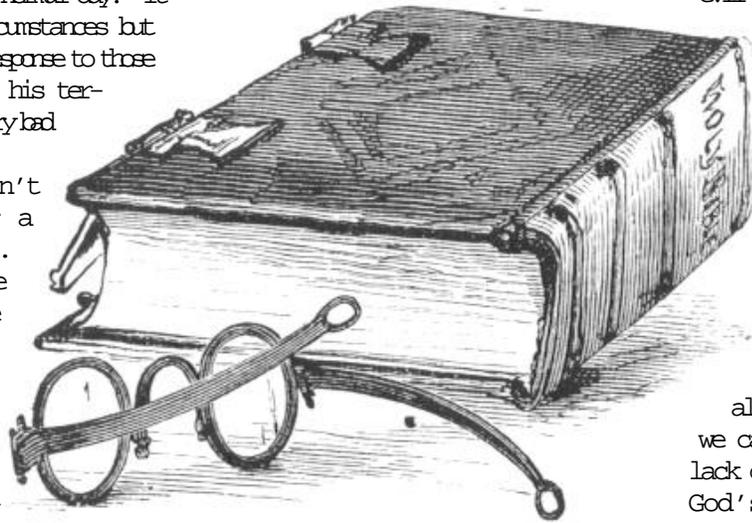
If today was difficult because "it wasn't a normal day," ask yourself, "When was the last time I had a normal day?" It was not Alexander's circumstances but his interpretation of and response to those circumstances that caused his terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. Same with yours.

Circumstances aren't what makes a day—or a lifetime—good or bad. What else can explain the fact that many people have beautiful homes, secure jobs, every material possession imaginable, financial security, perfect health, and yet are miserable, even suicidal? And that many others live in poverty, own nothing, have poor health, and yet are filled with the joy of life?

Most people rejoice when their circumstances are good and get depressed when their circumstances are bad. As Christians we are to "rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4-6). Do you know what the word translated "always" means in the original Greek? It means *always*. (That's why it's translated that way.) "Always" means we are to rejoice *regardless* of our circumstances—not because of them.

As Christians we always have reason to rejoice because of truths that are untouched and unchanged by outward circumstances. We are created by God, loved by God, cared for by God whether it rains or shines, whether there's war or peace. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" whether the church splits, the pastor leaves, or there's a terrible scandal.

Consider Paul and Silas when they were in prison at Philippi. Both men had been severely flogged and their feet were fastened in stocks in what in those days was a disease-ridden, rat-infested cell. How did they respond? "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:25). Keep in mind that though Paul and Silas later escaped through divine intervention, at the time they were rejoicing and singing *they had no idea they were going to escape*. In other words, their spirits were joyful even in the face of further beatings and death.



What would most of us have done in that prison cell? Some of us would mope and grouse and weep and kick the walls and cater our own little pity party. In other words, we would fit right in with the other prisoners. It's when there's something different about us, when we are filled with "the peace of God which transcends all understanding" that we draw the attention of discontent searching people in need of Christ.

Your baby is born with Down Syndrome, your family business is lost, your wife leaves, your house is burned to the

ground. Am I suggesting these circumstances will not *affect* you? Of course not. I'm only saying they need not *control* you. You can rise above them, as Paul and Silas and many others have done, and as people of God are doing right now all over the world. When these things happen to you, the world will watch. And if it sees calm in the midst of storm, it will be drawn to the Christ you love.

Let God be God

Some years ago Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote the bestseller *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. He concluded that since there is so much evil and tragedy and suffering, either God must not be all-good or he must not be all-powerful. Opting for God's goodness, he decided God is not all-powerful.

The rabbi's mistake was a familiar one—failure to believe Scripture when it teaches things we do not understand. The truth is that God is all-loving and all-powerful and that there are reasons he allows suffering. We cannot understand all those reasons, though sometimes we catch a glimpse of them. But our lack of understanding does not negate God's attributes. It only proves what the Bible said all along:

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9).

We need not and must not hedge on one attribute of God in order to preserve another. God cares about the pain and suffering of this world far more than we. One day he will make it all right. Till then we must learn to trust him.

Christian stewardship is more than the management of things; it is the refusal to let things manage us.

Jares A. Iollis

The Gift of Hope

by Randy Alcorn

There is a gift God has given his people in all ages that has enabled them not just to hold on, but to experience fulfillment even in times of great difficulty. This gift is hope.

Biblical hope is rooted in the fact that this life and its troubles are brief experiences relative to eternity. Paul said, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

The hope of the people of God is not merely a desire or wish. It is a confidence rooted in God's promise and God's faithfulness. It is a trust that is rooted in Christ's trustworthiness and the certainty of His wonderful plan for us:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house there are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I'm going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (John 14:1-3).

Jesus gives us no false hope. He guarantees that a day will come when He will reign and all things will be new:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God Himself will be with them to be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away' (Revelation 21:3-4).

(You've just read the end of the book. So now you know how the movie's going to turn out!)

The day is coming when all that is wrong will be made right. All that now hurts will be healed. All that causes stress, outside and inside us, will vanish.

Hope is the light at the end of life's tunnel. It not only makes the tunnel

endurable, it fills the heart with anticipation of the world into which we will one day emerge. Not just a better world, but a new and perfect world. A world alive, fresh, beautiful, devoid of pain and suffering and war, a world without disease, without accident, without tragedy. A world without dictators and madmen. A world ruled by the only one worthy of ruling. (See my book *In Light of Eternity: Perspectives on Heaven*)

The Difference Hope Makes

A study was done in which one group of Israeli soldiers was told they would go on a march, but were not told if or when the march would eventually stop. Another group was told the length of the march. They knew there was an end.

Both groups were tested for their stress response. Although they marched not one foot further than those in the other group, those who did not know whether or when the march would end registered a much

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

(2 Thessalonians 2:16,17)

higher level of stress. Why? Because they had no hope, no tangible assurance that the forced march would end. They felt helpless, hopeless, wondering if they would ever be allowed to rest.

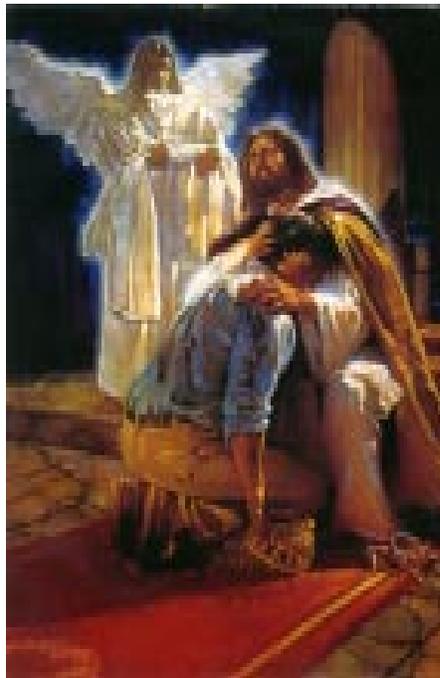
We do not know exactly how long we will be here, but we do know there will be an end. We will not march forever. We will rest. That is cause for certain hope. Even in times of greatest grief Christ leaves us with his hopeful assurance:

You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy..Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy..I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world (John 16:20,22,33).

Coming This Summer:

Safely Home

by Randy Alcorn



American business executive Ben Fielding has no idea what his brilliant former college roommate is facing in China. After 20 years, Li Quan expects to pick up where they left off. But when they're reunited in China, the men are shocked at what they discover about each other. The paths they've walked have shaped their lives and loyalties in radically different ways.

Thrown together in an hour of encroaching darkness, watched by unseen eyes, both must make choices that will determine not only the destinies of two men, but two families, two nations..and two worlds. (Tyndale House; cover painting by Ron DiCianni.)

Crisis & Tragedy

by Randy Alcorn

A crisis is an immediate problem with very high stakes that draws our total attention. It may be a terrible accident, the death of a loved one, a son in jail, a church scandal, a daughter who has run away.

Some crises turn out well. The loved one recovers from the accident, the son comes to Christ, the daughter comes home. We may clearly see God's hand in allowing the whole ordeal to happen.

Other times the crisis ends in apparent tragedy. I stress the word *apparent*. Joseph's brother sold him into slavery, and he became a prisoner in Egypt. But years later Joseph could say to his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God *intended it for good* to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20). The moral? If we spell God with a capital "G" we will always spell tragedy with a small "t."

The prophet Habakkuk understood that there is a joy that transcends all circumstances. Here is a man in a society heavily dependent upon livestock producing, trees bearing fruit, and crops yielding crops, yet in the midst of his nation's darkest hour he cried out:

Though the fig tree does not bud
And there are no grapes on the vines,
Though the olive crop fails
And the fields produce no food,
Though there are no sheep in the pen
And no cattle in the stalls,
Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.
The Sovereign LORD is my strength;
He makes my feet like the feet
of a deer,
He enables me to go on the heights.

(Habakkuk 3:17-19)

Few people in all of history have experienced the stress of Jeremiah. His book of Lamentations portrays a vivid and haunting picture of the destruction of Jerusalem and the suffering of her people. After sixty-four of the bleakest verses in God's word, describing the worst circumstances imaginable, Jeremiah states the obvious: "My soul is downcast within me" (Lamentations 3:20). But he follows with

an amazing response that pulls himself and his reader out of the very depths of hell:

Yet this I call to mind
And therefore I have hope:
Because of the LORD'S great love
we are not consumed,
For his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
Great is your faithfulness
(Lamentations 3:22-23)

Is this kind of perspective in the midst of tragedy restricted to men in Bible times? No! Many people today have exactly the same experience.

Joni Earekson Tada's swimming accident paralyzed her from the neck down. But if you've read her books, seen her drawings, heard her albums, then you know the beauty of Joni's life. I've talked with her briefly a few times and I've seen Christ in her. She has not just "made the best" of a bad situation. She has flourished in what God knew was for her the best situation.

Several years ago, Hilma called us: "I'm in a wheelchair now, but God has

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea-billows roll—
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

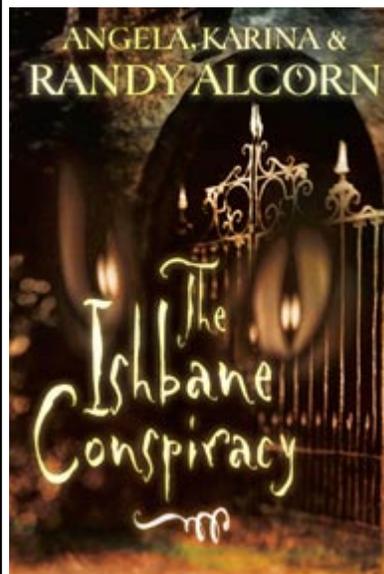
given me a greater ministry than ever I pray, I write letters of encouragement, I use the phone to share Christ's love."

You probably know a dozen other people in whose lives God has used tragedy to produce beauty. None of us seek tragedy or welcome it. But I encourage you to resolve now that should apparent tragedy strike—or if it has already—you will let go of your limited perspective and let God prove to you that His promises are true:

Never will I leave you;
Never will I forsake you
(Hebrews 13:5)

Perhaps you're familiar with the background of the great hymn, "It is Well with My Soul." The songwriter had just lost his wife and children at sea. The pain was great, but God's grace rose to the occasion. Despite tragedy, he could say without pretense, "It is well with my soul." Only God can perform such a miracle of grace. And only we can stand in the way of his doing so.

Coming This Summer:



The Ishbane Conspiracy

by Randy Alcorn & daughters,
Angela and Karina Alcorn

Four friends enter a new year with idealistic goals for the future, unaware the next 12 months will mark the biggest changes of their lives.

As they struggle through tragedy and rejoice in excitement, Jillian, Brittany, Ian, and Rob are not alone. There's a spiritual battle raging. Two armies are fighting— one seeks their victory, the other is devoted to their destruction.

Readers of all ages will be fascinated by a story that unveils the longings, confusions, and battles of the younger generation. They'll see how dark spiritual forces target young people for destruction... and how their Creator draws them to himself.

In Africa, A Scourge Beyond Imagining

by Kevin Whitelaw

The fresh mounds of earth stretch as far as the eye can see. Each grave in Zambia's Chunga cemetery is topped with a withered floral tribute and a makeshift cross. During the weekend, a new funeral procession arrives every 15 or 20 minutes. On one day, 52 people are buried; 43 of them were between the ages of 19 and 50. Most are Africa's latest victims of AIDS.

The deadly epidemic is tearing through the continent, decimating Africans in their most productive years. In all, AIDS will kill some 2.4 million people in Africa this year, many of them teachers, doctors, civil servants, and soldiers. "So overwhelming has been the scale of the scourge that our medical, social, and traditional structures are unable to cope with the human cost exacted by the pandemic," Zambia's president, Frederick Chiluba, declared last month in a rare public statement about AIDS.

In some ways, AIDS has been the invisible killer. Victims frequently die of opportunistic infections or pneumonia. Many never learned they were infected with HIV. And with treatment prohibitively expensive, all 25 million Africans who are currently infected likely will die within 10 years. Life expectancy is plunging continent-wide, yet much of Africa is still in denial. Death notices rarely mention AIDS, and most governments have been painfully slow to embrace prevention campaigns.

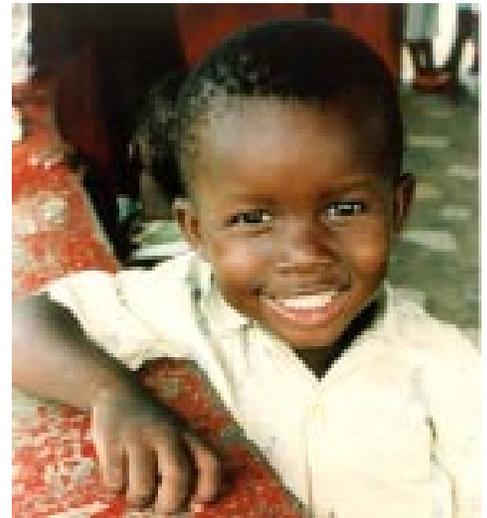
Death Count. The worst is yet to come. In South Africa, one of the worst-hit countries, AIDS already accounts for a quarter of all deaths. And deaths will only accelerate. The government-funded

Medical Research Council estimates that the disease could claim 5 million to 7 million lives in South Africa alone in the next decade. By means of comparison, roughly 6 million people died in the Holocaust.

For a continent that was just beginning to benefit from improving economies, the epidemic is another devastating blow. Health care costs, lost business, and the deaths of skilled workers will wipe \$22 billion off South Africa's economy by 2010. Today, in eight African nations, more than 15 percent of adults are infected with HIV. Africa's young people will bear the brunt. The United Nations estimates that one third of the 15-year-olds in those countries will die from AIDS. Millions of children have already been orphaned.



Some places, like Uganda, have successfully stemmed the tide of HIV infections with aggressive safe-sex campaigns. This limited success is reflected in the latest United Nations report on AIDS, which shows the number of people newly infected slipping slightly from 4 million last year to 3.8 million in 2000. Part of this is also because many of Africa's most vulnerable populations are already infected.



But even this stabilization could be only a temporary respite. Researchers are reporting signs that the massive nation of Nigeria, which has so far escaped the brunt of the epidemic, is detecting regions with disturbingly high levels of HIV infection. Country-wide, the rate is nearing 5 percent, which has often been the threshold from which infection rates soar. The disease could also move to countries like Angola and Congo, which have been isolated by chronic warfare.

Africa has been beset by a tragic mix of factors that have accelerated the spread of HIV. High rates of venereal disease and low rates of condom use have facilitated transmission. Making matters worse, Africa's leaders have, for the most part, tried to ignore the disease. That, however, is proving increasingly impossible. (*US News & World Report*, December 18, 2000, pages 34-37)

What can we do?

Pray along with Action International for 20 couples to serve with AIDS orphans, especially in Zambia and Malawi. You may contact them directly: Action International Ministries, P.O. Box 398, Mountlake Terrace, WA 98043-0398, (425) 775-4800, www.actionintl.org. You may also designate any gift to EEM "AIDS in Africa" and we will give 100% of it to worthy Christian ministries dealing with the AIDS crisis.

Communicating the ProLife Message

by Randy Alcorn

Note: "PLA" refers to the book ProLife Answers to ProChoice Arguments by Randy Alcorn. The number following "PLA" is the argument number of the 39 prochoice arguments dealt with in the book. This way, you know where to go in the book if you want to see further development and documentation of the response.

1. Tailor your presentation to your audience, so you're speaking to them, not yourself.

a) realize the vested interests, denial, and rationalization surrounding this issue.

b) realize the average person's saturation and indoctrination with media propaganda.

2. Do your homework. The other position can afford to be ignorant of the facts. You can't

3. Present the facts logically, clearly and succinctly, citing credible sources, secular whenever possible. (PLA contains hundreds of such sources.)

4. Use terms they're familiar with-not prolife buzzwords.

5. Appeal to their curiosity and "open-mindedness" to hear a suppressed and politically incorrect viewpoint. (Prochoice is the status quo, establishment position. Prolife is the radical, counter-culture position.)

6. Surprise your audience-don't fit the "anti-abortion" stereotype.

a. "Actually, I'm prochoice. And you're not." ("I'm prochoice about jobs, clothes, cars, schools, seat belts, smoking, etc. You're anti-choice about rape, kidnapping, assault, theft, and child molesting. Aren't you?")

b. "I don't believe in unwanted children." ("I just believe the solution is wanting them, not killing them.")

c. "I'm committed to women's rights." ("Like Susan B. Anthony and other pioneer feminists, I believe abortion is harmful and demeaning to women. In fact, abortion has become the primary method across the globe of eliminating unwanted females." PLA 14) "Abortion is a means for

irresponsible men to exploit women, using them sexually, then leaving them alone with the devastating physical and psychological consequences."

7. **Be rational and calm.** When you're right, there's no need to be defensive. Give the facts and let the listener develop her own emotions based on them. (Don't overwhelm people with your emotions. Don't go ballistic in a debate; nine out of ten times the other side will. People who are listening will see which side is angry and irrational and which is calm and logical.)

8. Be prepared for straw man and ad hominem arguments, but don't use them yourself.

When the facts aren't on their side, people have nothing left to do but distort issues and call names. The side with the truth need not and should not do this. When the facts are on your side, you draw attention to them. When they're not, you draw attention from them.

9. **Be sensitive to the spiritual needs of your audience.** (Look and pray for heart change, not just head change.)

10. Ask them questions that will make them think.

n "You say you want to be called prochoice, not proabortion. Why? What's wrong with abortion?" (The only good reason for feeling bad about abortion-that it kills an innocent child-should compel you to be against others doing it also. You should either say it's fine or oppose it, but you can't logically do both.)

n "See this live intrauterine picture of an unborn at eight weeks (at the time of an early abortion)? What does that look like? (Eye) That? (Fingers) That? (Mouth) That? (Nose)" Don't tell them. Let them answer. Then point out what they said.

n "This baby has a measurable heartbeat at 21 days, and brainwaves at 40 days, before the earliest abortions. What do you call it when there is no longer a heartbeat or brainwaves? (Death.) What do you call it when there is a heartbeat and brainwaves? (Life.) What does abortion do? (Kills a living baby.)" PLA 3

n "This unborn baby is to a born infant what a born infant is to a toddler (younger and smaller). Do you think it would be more legitimate to kill an unwanted infant than a toddler just because he's younger and smaller?"

n "If abortion isn't fundamentally different than other surgeries, like root canals and tonsillectomies, why are there so many post-abortion support groups, and hundreds of thousands of women getting psychological counseling and grief therapy related to their abortions? Do you know of any post root canal counseling and support groups?" PLA 27

n "Why do you think it bothers you to see pictures of an abortion more than pictures of root canals or open heart surgery? What's the difference?"

n "Which side in the debate is cruel? The one that shows pictures of dead babies while opposing their killing, or the one that opposes showing the pictures but defends their killing?" PLA 32

n "You say the unborn is part of the mother's body? If that's true, then every pregnant woman has two hearts, two brains, two different genetic codes, two sets of fingers with different fingerprints, two heads, two noses, four eyes, two blood types, two circulatory systems, and two skeletal systems. And half the time she also has testicles and a penis." (Location isn't the issue. Are "test tube babies" part of the test tube?) PLA 2

n "We all know the 'fetus' is a child." PLA 8

n "You say abortion is legal, so we shouldn't oppose it? They said the same about slavery and the Holocaust." PLA 16c.

n "Abortion in the case of handicap? After they're born we say they're precious and the family learns so much from them. We cheer them on in the Special Olympics. Then before they're born do we say, 'we don't want these monsters; let's kill them while we can?'" PLA 30

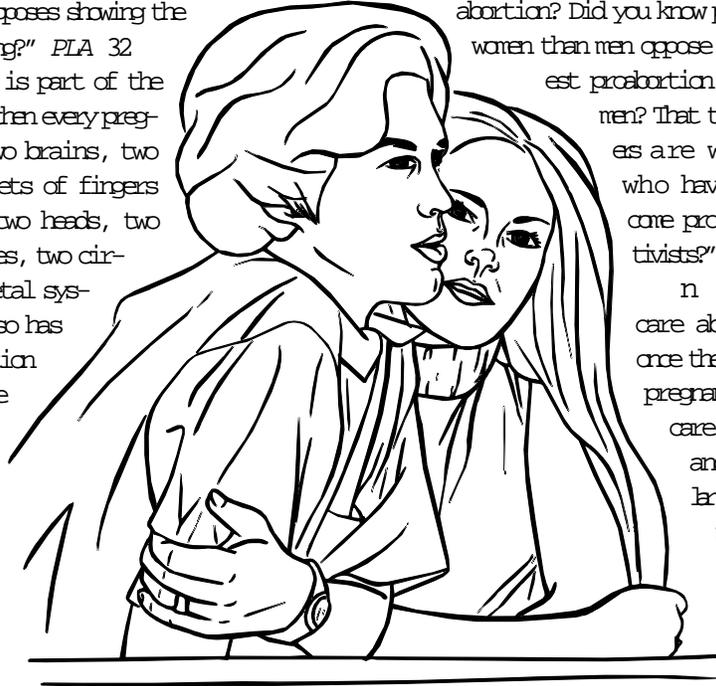
n "Abortion in the case of rape? Rape is never the fault of the child-why punish him? Don't you believe a child is a child, regardless of any bad thing his father did to someone?

Besides, abortion is not a therapy, it's a trauma on a woman who has already undergone the trauma of rape. (If you found out your best friend was the 'product of rape,' would you think she deserved to live?)" PLA 31

n "You say it's men who are primarily opposed to abortion? Did you know polls consistently show many more women than men oppose abortion? That the single greatest proabortion group in society is young single men? That the great majority of prolife workers are women, not men? That of women who have had abortions, many more become prolife activists than prochoice activists?" PLA 34

n "You say prolife don't really care about the women, or the children once they're born? The fact is that prolife pregnancy centers providing free tests, care, classes, counseling, materials, and housing comprise the single largest grassroots volunteer movement in history. Countless prolife workers adopt, open their homes, and volunteer to help children after they're born." (The other side gets rich by selling abortions-whose motives should be suspect?) PLA 33

n "Will you read this carefully researched book? No? I was hoping you were open-minded. Are you choosing to censor this side of the debate from your own consideration? Why? I'll be glad to read anything you have for me from the other side. I'm open-minded. Can you refute anything I've said? Show me. Let's lay out all the evidence, and let the best position win. I'm not afraid of the truth. You're not either, are you?"

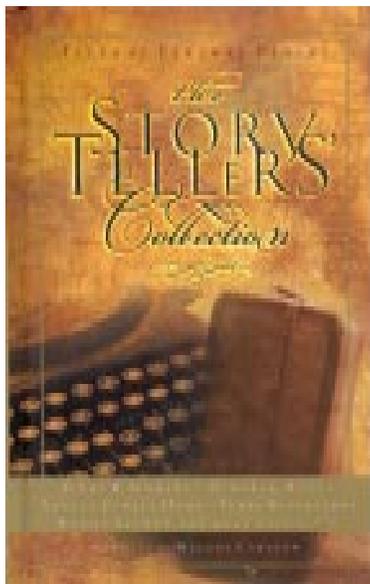


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He has blessed us and we want to be his hand of blessing to others.

Peculiar Perils of Leadership

by J. Oswald Sanders

(Taken from Spiritual Leadership by J. Oswald Sanders. 1967, 1980.

Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, Moody Press)

Although there are occupational hazards in all callings, the perils of the spiritual leader are especially subtle. He is by no means immune to the temptations of the flesh, but the dangers most to be guarded against lie in the realm of the spirit. He must remember that Satan, his relentless enemy, will take advantage of every inch of ground he concedes in any area of his life.

Pride

The very fact that a man has risen to a position of leadership and prominence tends to engender a secret self-congratulation and pride which, if not checked, will unfit him for further advancement in the service of the kingdom, for "everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 16:5). Strong and searching words, those! Nothing is more distasteful to God than self-conceit. That first and fundamental sin in essence aims at enthroning self at the expense of God. It was the sin that changed the anointed cherub, guardian of the throne of God, into the foul friend of hell, and caused his expulsion from heaven.

Of the myriad forms that sin assumes, none is more abhorrent than spiritual pride. To be proud of spiritual gifts that God has bestowed or of the position to which His love and grace have elevated us, is to forget that grace is a gift, and that all we have has been received.

Pride is a sin of whose presence its victim is least conscious. There are, however, three tests that will help us discover whether or not we have succumbed to it.

The test of precedence

How do we react when another is selected for the assignment we expected or for the office we coveted? When another is promoted and we are overlooked? When another outshines us in gifts and accomplishments?

The test of sincerity

In our moments of honest self-criticism we will say many things about ourselves and really mean them. But how do we feel when others, especially our rivals, say exactly the same things about us?

The test of criticism

Does criticism arouse hostility and resentment in our hearts and cause us to fly to immediate self-justification? Do we hasten to criticize the critic?

If we are honest, when we measure ourselves by the life of our Lord who humbled Himself even to death on a cross, we cannot but be overwhelmed with the shabbiness, and even the vileness, of our hearts.

Popularity

There will always be those unwise souls who grant undue deference to their spiritual leaders and advisers, and who tend to exalt one above another.

That practice was prevalent in Corinth and caused Paul to write: "When one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not mere men? What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing growth...We are God's fellow-workers" (1 Cor. 3:4-6,9).

An exaggerated deference to leaders in the church is a mark of spiritual immaturity and carnality. And an acceptance of such fawning deference by the leader is an evidence of the very same weakness. Paul was shocked by it and vigorously repudiated it. It is not wrong to be greatly loved by those whom one has endeavored to serve, but there is always the danger that devotion may be deflected from the Master to the servant. Spiritual leaders are to be "esteemed very highly in love for their work's sake," but that esteem should not degenerate into adulation.

That leader is most successful who attaches the affection of his followers more to Christ than to himself. He can rightly draw encouragement from the fact that his service has been fruitful and appreciated, but he must refuse to be idolized.

What leader or preacher does not desire to be popular with his constituency? Certainly there is no virtue in unpopularity, but popularity can be purchased at too high a price. Jesus made that crystal clear when He said, "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you." And He expressed the complementary truth when he said, "Blessed are ye when men revile you and persecute you, and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake."

Bishop Stephen Neill said, in an address to theological students, "Popularity is the most dangerous spiritual state imaginable, since it leads one so easily to the spiritual pride which drowns men in perdition. It is a symptom to be watched with anxiety since so often it has been purchased at the too heavy price of compromise with the world."

The dangers of popularity and success were constantly before Spurgeon in his unique ministry.

Success exposes a man to the pressure of people and thus tempts him to hold on to his gains by means of fleshly methods and practices, and to let himself be ruled wholly by the dictatorial demands of incessant expansion. Success can go to my head, and will unless I remember that it is God who accomplishes the work, that He can continue to do so without my help, and that He will be able to make out with other means whenever He cuts me down to size.

Elation and Depression

In every work for God there are inevitably times of discouragement and frustration as well as days of uplift and achievement. The leader is in peril of being unduly depressed by the one and unduly elated by the other. The seventy disciples returned from their mission, highly elated with their success. Jesus quickly checked this natural but soulish reaction. "Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you," He admonished them, "but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven" (Luke 10:20). He directed their attention to the fate of the exalted being who let high privilege go to his head. "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning."

After the drama on Carmel, Elijah experienced such acute depression that he wished to die. The Lord did not approach his overwrought, self-pitying prophet with a spiritual probe or scalpel. Instead, He made him take two long sleeps and eat two square meals. Only then did He begin to deal with the deeper spiritual problem. He was able to show Elijah that no real basis for his discouragement existed. There were still seven thousand of his compatriots who had never bowed the knee to Baal. By fleeing, he had deprived the nation of the leadership of which it was in desperate need.

It is realistic to face the fact that not all our ideals for God's work will be realized. Cherished idols prove to have feet of clay. People on whom we lean will prove broken reeds. Even leadership that has been deeply sacrificial will sometimes be challenged. But the spiritually mature leader will know how to discern the true origin of depression and discouragement and will deal with it accordingly.

Then there are seasons when everything goes well. Goals are reached, planned endeavors are crowned with success, the Spirit moves, souls are saved, and saints blessed. In those times the mature leader knows on whose brow to place the crown of achievement. When Robert Murray McCheyne experienced times of blessing in his ministry, on returning home from the service, he would kneel down and symbolically place the crown of success on the brow of the Lord, to whom he knew it rightly belonged. That practice helped to save him from the peril of taking to himself the glory that belonged to God alone.

Samuel Chadwick summed up the wise attitude to that peril in these words: "If successful, don't crow; if defeated, don't creak."

Prophet or Leader

A preacher who possesses marked gifts of leadership may reach a place in his church or organization that compels him to choose whether his role is to be one of popular leader or unpopular prophet. Such a dilemma was pictured by Dr. A. C. Dixon, who was pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago, and later of Spurgeon's Tabernacle in London: "Every preacher ought to be primarily a prophet of God who preaches as God bids him, without regard to results. When he becomes conscious of the fact that he is a leader in his own church or denomination, he has reached a crisis in his ministry. He must now choose one of two courses, that of prophet of God or a leader of men. If he seeks to be a prophet and a leader, he is apt to make a failure of both. If he decides to be a prophet only insofar as he can do so without losing his leadership, he becomes a diplomat and ceases to be a prophet at all. If he decides to maintain leadership at all costs, he may easily fall to the level of a politician who pulls the wires in order to gain or hold a position."

Of course, there is not such a clear-cut dichotomy between the two roles as Dr. Dixon suggests, and the one does not necessarily exclude the other. But a situation can very easily develop in which one has to choose between a spiritual ministry and a leadership that would prevent its highest exercise. Herein lies the peril.

Dr. Reuben A. Torrey, whom God used at the turn of the century to bring revival to half of the world, was faced with such a choice. Dr. Dixon wrote of him: "The thousands who have heard Dr. Torrey know the man and his message. He loves the Bible, and believing it to be the infallible Word of God, preaches it with the fervor of red-hot conviction. He never compromises. He has chosen to be a prophet of God rather than a mere leader of men, and that is the secret of his power with God and men."

Samuel Logan Brengle was one of the truly great leaders of the Salvation Army. A man of scholarship as well as of unusual spiritual power, he outlined the road to spiritual authority and leadership in challenging words: "It is not won by promotion, but by many prayers and tears. It is attained by confessions of sin, and much heart searching and humbling before God; by self-surrender, a courageous sacrifice of every idol, a bold, deathless, uncompromising, and uncomplaining embracing of the cross, and by an eternal, unfaltering looking unto Jesus crucified. It is not gained by seeking great things for ourselves, but rather, like Paul, by counting those things that are gain to us as loss for Christ. That is a great price, but it must be unflinchingly paid by him who would be not merely a nominal but a real spiritual leader of men, a leader whose power is recognized and felt in heaven, on earth, and in hell."

Jealousy

Jealousy is a near relative of pride. The jealous person is apprehensive and suspicious of rivals. The temptation came to Moses through the touching loyalty of his own colleagues. "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp," said the outraged Joshua to his master. "Moses, my lord, restrain them" (Num. 11:28). Those two assistants had broken into prophecy, and Moses' loyal followers were jealous on his behalf at the usurping of his prophetic prerogatives and challenge to his prestige.

But envy and jealousy found no resting place in the generous nature of the man who used to speak with God face to face. Such matters could safely be left with the God who had called him.

"Are you jealous for my sake?" was his untroubled response. "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets." The leader who is jealous for God's glory need have no concerns for his own prestige and prerogatives. They are safe in His hands.

Infallibility

Spirituality does not equal infallibility. The fact that a person is indwelt by the Spirit and seeks to be led by the Spirit will doubtless mean that he is less liable to make mistakes than those who do not; but since he is still in the flesh, he is not infallible. Even the divinely called and Spirit-filled apostles made mistakes that required divine overruling.

The leader who know God, and probably knows Him better than his colleagues, is in danger of falling unconsciously into this subtle peril. Because his judgment has usually proved more accurate than theirs, because he has prayed and thought and wrestled with the problem more earnestly than they, it is difficult for him to concede the possibility of mistake and to yield to the judgment of his brethren. He must be a man of conviction and be prepared to stand for what he believes, but that is different from assuming virtual infallibility. Willingness to concede the possibility of an error of judgment of one's brethren enhances rather than diminishes influence.

Questions and Answers
by Randy Alcorn

Randy,
I'm in desperate need of deliverance from, well now it's pornography, but in a nutshell sexual immorality.

I have tried various, if not all, options available to stop this. Why do I feel like there's no answer? Didn't Jesus come for a person such as me? It's almost like I'm taken in a trance to satisfy these urges. No sooner do I get my pleasure out of it, than I do battle with the Lord. I'm in the music ministry. I've read your booklet on how leaders can win the battle with sexual temptation. There's that moment when I seem to be under the devil's influence. I try to guard the mind by doing this and that, but I don't know.

I have tried (at times have succeeded) in overcoming the wicked one by trying to fill my mind with good things. I guess I was looking for miracles of deliverance from God. I ask, "Why me, Lord, why me? How come the guys and girls in my church don't have this problem?"

And I keep saying to him, "I was an utter failure in the world, but now an I a failure with you as well?"

The thing I hate about all of this is surely the Lord must be aware that I would commit such a sin on such a day. How come he doesn't put any sort of barriers to stop me from continuing in this pathetic and appalling lifestyle?

How can I do better?

Thanks, Steve

Steve,
Satan wants you in bondage; Christ wants you free to live in obedience. Romans 6 is key here. The flesh has no power to obey. By focusing on the power to obey granted us in Christ and his grace, we need to establish new nuts in the ground, so to speak, into which the wheels of our life can fall. Disobedience is contagious, and so is obedience. The more we do it, the more it becomes the pattern of our life. Make the right choice to stay away from sexual temptation. You can do it. Then make another right choice and another and another, one day at a time, one hour at a time, one minute at a time.

Call upon the resources of Christ granted to you. Depend upon him, while decisively making the choices to remove temptation from you. Do you have internet access? Is this one of the sources of temptation before you? Then cut it off. Nowhere in the Bible does it say you need internet access. To a person who goes to those sites, having them just a double-click away is utterly foolish. It's

like having *Playboy* and *Hustler* and ten pornographic magazines on your shelf, waiting for you to come to them in a moment of weakness.

Right now, in your moment of strength, make choices that will serve you well in your moment of weakness. If you don't radically cut off the sources of the temptations that pursue you (yes, some of them you can't cut off without being a hermit, but many of them you can), then you are just playing games, and have no intention to obey Christ. Take decisive actions. Get rid of anything in your room, your house, and your workplace that draws you to sin—including books, magazines, pictures, posters, movies, TV, and internet access. Don't expect God to call the cable company and cut off your service. That's your job.

I pray God will do a work of grace in you and cut through the blindness and the old habits and patterns that enslave you. God wants what's best for you; the evil one wants what's worst. Choose what's best; choose life for yourself, not death (Deut. 30:19). Through the power of his Spirit you can do this. You need a stronger believer, a godly man to be open and honest with who will hold you accountable (Heb. 10:24-25). If you don't have one, start looking. Go to your pastor or whomever you can trust. Today.

Randy

Letters to EPM



Dear Randy,

Just finished reading *Deadline* and loved it. This is good fiction. It was entertaining and yet challenged me to examine my own life in light of eternity. For the past year our family has been enduring trials that would probably lead your average person to cardiac arrest. We however, have grown closer to God and totally learned to trust in knowing that He knows what our future holds. Your book was a fresh resource that has encouraged me to keep an eternal perspective.

Thanks, D.

Dear Mr. Alcorn,

I just now finished reading your book, *Dominion*. I just had to tell you what an enormous effect it has had on my life.

As a Christian, I never realized that I still harbored racial hatred and now thank God for inspiring you to write such a heart-wrenching testimony...

Once again, thanks so much, God bless and keep up the AWESOME work in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

God bless, S.M., Philadelphia, PA

Dear Randy,

I am completing tape #4 of *Lord Faulgrin's Letters*. What a clear eternal perspective it provides for us who are travelers in time, but who are meant for eternity. Mr. Miller does an extraordinary job delivering your text. Thank you so much for being sensitive to the Holy Spirit. It is a masterpiece that should bring much glory to God as people's eyes are opened to the truth and they are transferred out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

In Christ, T.T., Lufkin, TX

Dear Randy,

I have just finished your novel, *Deadline*, and I must say I was blessed. After reading "Notes from the Author," I decided that even though it was a fiction novel, truth permeated the entire story.

We who are incarcerated relate to "Doc"—finding ourselves in a place where all of our actions and ways of thinking were all wrong. Like Doc, jail

is a place where an individual can take spiritual inventory. No more denial, finger-pointing, or political or familial scapegoats to blame. Unlike Doc, we have a chance to really wake up!

May God continue to touch your heart, mind and word processing system—may He also bless your family and ministry.

Liberated because of Calvary,
C.R., Marcy, NY

Dear Mr. Alcorn,

I came across your booklet (*Does the Birth Control Pill Cause Abortions?*) last week. I must admit I was devastated to discover the information you so eloquently presented. My husband and I are Christians, just celebrating our first anniversary last week. We both immediately decided that the only course of action open to us was to immediately stop taking the pill.

I am also a writer. I contacted the editor for one of the college webzines I write for, and she has agreed to post an article I am in the process of writing regarding the abortive effects of the pill and my personal reaction to the discovery. I plan to incorporate a great deal of your research.

Although this was not at all the information I ever wanted to find, I am grateful that you took the time to make the truth known. I hope I can do the same.

Blessings, D.E.

It's hard for me to know where to begin to tell you how much *Edge of Eternity*

has meant to me!!! I have read it twice and wish everyone I know would read it. I long for Jesus' return and now I have a better vision of what I'm yearning for! This present-day world is very difficult to live in, but your book helps me to understand that a very lost and dying world needs to hear the incredibly wonderful news we

can't sit on—but I still can't wait for that trumpet to sound!!! Again, thank you for your work and God bless you!!!

M.D.

Dear Mr. Alcorn,

I just finished reading your book, *Dominion*. I thought it wasn't possible that you could exceed *Deadline*. Boy, was I wrong. I've never written to anyone to express my feelings in any area. I am still processing the impact *Dominion* had on me, the last of which is astounding. As an African-American I still can't believe the insight you had into our culture. Truly unbelievable! I found myself saying throughout the book, "But this guy is white. How was he able to capture so accurately the thoughts, emotions, vernacular and deeply-rooted scars of my people?" Never has a book, aside from the Bible, moved me as much as this book did. I found myself crying so much throughout this book. Oftentimes, for me as an African-American I've been ashamed to express a lot of the emotions expressed by the character "Clarence." You begin to feel as if you're using your ethnicity as a crutch. Or you'll be viewed as one of those that's always blaming injustices incurred as racism.

I don't believe we'll ever see an end to racism until Jesus returns. I do appreciate the candor and openness in which you approached this often uncomfortable topic. I applaud your efforts. And I look forward to the day as described in your book that we can humble ourselves first to Elyon, and then submit ourselves one to another as depicted in the footwashing ceremony. I praise God for you. Even as I'm writing, the tears are beginning to form, because I recognize the enemy doesn't want this message of yours to go out. Please stay faithful to the Lord.

Sincerely, Z.S., Canoga Park, CA



A W . Tozer on Trials & Pain . . .

The Sharp Blade of the Plow

Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness on you.—Hosea 10:12

The fallow field is snug, contented, protected from the shock of the plow and the agitation of the harrow. But it is paying a terrible price for its tranquility: Never does it see the miracle of growth; never does it feel the motions of mounting life nor see the wonders of bursting seed nor the beauty of ripening grain. Fruit it can never know because it is afraid of the plow and the harrow.

In direct opposite to this, the cultivated field has yielded itself to the adventure of living. The protecting fence has opened to admit the plow, and the plow has come as plows always come, practical, cruel, business-like and in a hurry. Peace has been shattered by the shouting farmer and the rattle of machinery. The field has felt the travail of change; it has been upset, turned over, bruised and broken, but its rewards come hard upon its labors. The seed shoots up into the daylight its miracle of life, curious, exploring the new world above it. All over the field the hand of God is at work in the age-old and ever renewed service of creation. New things are born, to grow, mature, and consummate the grand prophecy latent in the seed when it entered the ground. Nature's wonders follow the plow.

Paths to Power, A. W. Tozer, 31-32



We Forget

And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.—Hebrews 11:39-40

Then there is the matter of constant consolation and peace—the promise of always feeling relaxed and at rest and enjoying ourselves inwardly.

This, I say, has been held up as being quite the proper goal to be sought in the evil hour in which we live. We forget that our Lord was a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief. We forget the arrows of grief and pain which went through the

“Lord, make me a cultivated field. I suspect the price will be high, but I long to bear fruit for Your glory. Do the hard work of the farmer in my life today. Amen.”

heart of Jesus' mother, Mary. We forget that all of the apostles except John died a martyr's death. We forget that there were 13 million Christians slain during the first two generations of the Christian era. We forget that they languished in prison, that they were starved, were thrown over cliffs, were fed to the lions, were drowned, that they were sewn in sacks and thrown into the ocean..

There was much distress, many heartaches, painful bruises, flowing tears, much loss and many deaths.

But there is something better than being comfortable, and the followers of Christ ought to find it out—the poor, soft, overstuffed Christians of our time ought to find it out! There is something better than being comfortable!

We Protestants have forgotten altogether that there is such a thing as discipline and suffering.

Who Put Jesus on the Cross?, A. W. Tozer, 17-19

Ordered By the Lord

The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand.—Psalm 37:23-24

To the child of God, there is no such thing as accident. He travels an appointed way. The path he treads was chosen for him when as yet he was not, when as yet he had existence only in the mind of God.

Accidents may indeed appear to befall him and misfortune stalk his way; but these evils will be so in appearance only and will seem evils only because we cannot read the secret script of God's hidden providence and so cannot discover the ends at which He aims..

The man of true faith may live in the absolute assurance that his steps are ordered by the Lord. For him, misfortune is outside the bounds of possibility. He cannot be torn from this earth one hour ahead of the time which God has appointed, and he cannot be detained on earth one moment after God is done with him here. He is not a waif of the wide world, a foundling of time and space, but a saint of the Lord and the darling of His particular care.

We Travel an Appointed Way, A. W. Tozer, 3-4

Alcorn Family Update: Good News!

Nanci and I want to share with you some good news: both of our delightful daughters are planning to get married this summer! Best of all, both are getting married to wonderful Christian guys, who asked our permission to propose to them.

Our daughter Karina will graduate from The Master 's College May 12. Then on June 2 she'll marry Dan Franklin, a youth pastor in Oxnard, California, near Los Angeles. Dan graduated from Master 's last spring, and might be taking some seminary classes while doing pastoral work. Karina looks forward to being a homemaker, and may do some part-time teaching once they're married.

Our daughter Angela is studying to be a nurse. On July 20 she'll be marrying Dan Stump, a student at Oregon State University, who this fall will transfer to Multnomah Bible College in Portland. (Nanci and I are both Multnomah grads, as are Dan's folks.) Dan's goal is to be a school teacher and coach. Both will work part-time, and while Dan's at Multnomah, Angie will continue at Mount Hood Community College.

Both weddings will be at Good Shepherd Community Church, our home church, where I pastored for thirteen years. The church is located in beautiful Boring, Oregon. (That's not a joke—there's even a local ministerial group known as the Boring Pastors' Fellowship.)

You're probably wondering, what will we do in that seven-week lull between the two weddings? Actually, Nanci and the girls (me, too) are enjoying going through this experience together, helping each other find good deals and talking and laughing a lot.

You may have noticed both sons-in-law-to-be are named Dan. This will be convenient for Nanci and me when our minds start to fail, as it's only one name to remember, and a single syllable! (And both their fathers are named John.)

So, Lord willing, this summer Karina Alcorn will become Karina Franklin and Angela Alcorn will become Angela Stump. One of the last things that will bear their old names is the book *Angela, Karina and I* wrote together last summer, and just finished revising (*The Ishbane Conspiracy*, from Multnomah Publishers, which will be out in June).

Both of "the Dans," as we call them, are from strong Christian families. We've long known and appreciated John and Ann Stump, special people who are part of our church. Re-

cently we went to Newbury Park, California, to meet and get to know John and Patti Franklin. We immediately connected with them. They're wonderful folks, and we know they will be great in-laws for Karina. The Stumps and Franklins love God. It's truly a joy for us to share with them what matters most, and we're grateful for the spiritual heritage they've passed on to the men who will love and lead our daughters.

We love both Dans and are eager to welcome them to our family. Both guys made it through, long ago, the initial "talk" with the girls' dad, and were presented with my sixteen-page handout (no joke—if you want a copy we'll send you one) of guidelines for purity. We talk with the guys openly and honestly, laugh together and discuss marriage, finances, God's Word, theology, sports, you name it. As I remind the guys, things would be very different if they weren't walking with God or treating my daughters right.

Some of you know that Nanci's mother Adele recently passed away. We appreciate the flowers and notes sent to us, and the people in our church who brought over meals. Adele had lost her vision and her strength, and was ready to meet the Lord. We will always treasure the godly heritage she left her family. Nanci loves her mom dearly, and has been greatly encouraged by realizing she's experiencing heaven's joy. Some of you knew my



Angela, Nanci, Randy and Karina Alcorn

mother Lucille, who the Lord took home nineteen years ago. She and Adele became dear friends after Nanci and I got married. We envision our mothers in heaven together seeing our girls get married this summer. (If you wonder at the theology behind this, see my book *In Light of Eternity*, pages 96-101.)

This is a time of transition for our family. Nanci and I are closer than ever. We thank God for two daughters who love Him with all their hearts. And we thank Him too that He's answered our prayer about guys who are spiritual leaders and committed to purity, humility and service. We do not take this for granted. We know it's entirely to God's credit and for His glory.

It's fun for the family to gear up for the weddings and, more importantly, the marriages. I can't express the depth of our gratitude to Him.

If any of you are in this area June 2 or July 20, we'd welcome you to join us in the wedding celebrations. Feel free to call for the details.

"Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good, and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations." (Psalm 100:4-5)

The Power of Books and How to Use Them

Thoughts on Reading to Each Other Out Loud

by John Piper

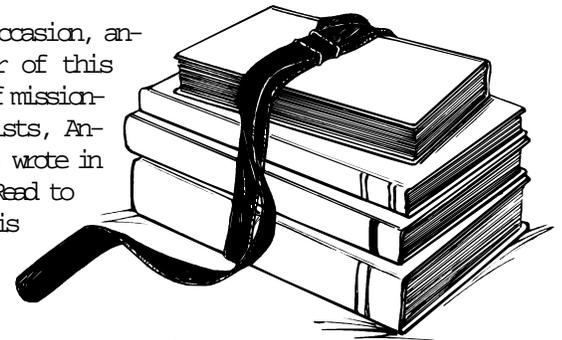
The Bible is a book. It has changed the world. Some uninspired books have also done tremendous good for the cause of God and truth. Some classic biographies, for example, have fueled the fire of missions for hundreds of years, like Jonathan Edward's *Life of David Brainerd*.

Let me suggest something to do with books and friends that you may never have done before. Evidently it was the custom of the pastors of the Northamptonshire Baptist Association in England in the late 1700s to meet periodically for prayer, fasting, and reading to each other.

For example, John Ryland's diary from January 21, 1788, says, "Brethren Fuller, Sutcliffe, Carey and I, kept this day as a private fast, in my study; read the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, Booth's *Charge to Hopkins*, Blackerby's *Life in Gillies' Historical Collections* and Rogers of Dedham's *Sixty Memorials for a Godly Life*, and each prayed twice. Carey with singular enlargement and pungency. Our chief design was to implore a revival in the power of godliness in our own souls, in the Churches, and in the Church at large."

Their aim was not recreation, but spiritual warfare and strategy. Reading to each other was part of the tactics.

On one occasion, another member of this fellowship of mission-minded Baptists, Andrew Fuller, wrote in his diary, "Read to our friends this evening a part of Mr. Edwards' *Attempt to Promote Prayer for the Revival of Religion* to excite them to the like practice. Felt my heart profited, and much solemnized by what I read."



We have done this as a pastoral staff at our church. I photocopied a chapter from David Brainerd's diary and a chapter from a biography of Ann Judson (Adoniram's wife). We went on an overnight retreat and for two hours together that evening we read these to each other, one page each, around the circle until we were done.

It was a powerful experience. Brainerd's chapter led us into one of the most intense times of prayer we have ever had together. We heartily recommend the practice to other groups.

It is crucial that you read rich, God-centered material, not just anything under the name Christian. Let me mention some examples. Matthew Henry, who died in 1714, wrote a commentary on the whole Bible in six large volumes. George Whitefield used to read from this commentary on his knees along with the Greek New Testament. It is a rich and perceptive devotional commentary, as good for your heart as for your head.

I'm tempted to start listing my favorite books, but that would be too lopsided and narrow. It is not my point to promote a particular group of books, but to commend public reading in groups. If you have a small group and you are trying to read a good book together and discuss it, but you are all having trouble finding the time to read the chapter for the week, why not plan to spend the first hour just reading to each other?

Really good writing is a benefit to hear as well as read. God gave us his Word in a book, the Bible, but he also appointed preaching and teaching. There is something about the living voice that quickens the truth and brings it home to us. You may find more power in your mouth than you dreamed, and your ears may open in ways that will change your life.

(Excerpted from A Godward Life by John Piper, Multnomah Publishers, 1997, 310, 311)

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