



ETERNAL PERSPECTIVES

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

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER • SUMMER 2002

Heaven: Our Certain Hope

by Randy Alcorn

Bertrand Russell has been called the greatest mind of the twentieth century. Anticipating his death he said, "There is darkness without, and when I die there will be darkness within. There is no splendor, no vastness anywhere; only triviality for a moment, and then nothing."

Other than Jesus Christ Himself, the greatest mind of the first century was the apostle Paul. Anticipating his death, this is what he said: "To me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.... I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far" (Philippians 1:21, 23).

Two famous men. One did not know God. The other did. When it came to their views of death, knowing God made all the difference. And so did contemplating what's on the other side of that doorway called death.

How do we know what heaven is like? Our only dependable authority is the Bible. Based on the glimpses it gives us, heaven will be beautiful and wonderful—a world that cannot be exhausted, yielding new treasures for our amazement and delight.

I've thought a lot about heaven. It has a prominent place in all my books, fiction and nonfiction. When I anticipate heaven, I think of the first time I went snorkeling. Etched in my memory is a certain sound: a



gasp of amazement going through the rubber snorkel when my eyes first took in the breathtaking underwater scene. There were countless fish of every shape, size, and color. And just when I thought I'd seen the most beautiful, along came something even more striking. In a far greater way, I imagine our first glimpse of heaven will cause us to gasp in amazement and delight. That first gasp will be followed by many more as we continually encounter new sights in that endlessly wonderful place.

How do we know heaven will be so beautiful and wonderful? Because the One who's prepared it for us is so creative and skillful.

Before our children were born, Nanci and I prepared a place for them. We chose the room, picked out the right wallpaper, decorated and set up the crib just so, and selected the perfect blankets. The quality of the place we prepared for our daughters was limited only by our skills, resources, and imaginations.

As He was about to leave this world, Jesus said to His disciples, "There are many rooms in my Father's home, and I am going to prepare a place for you.... When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am" (John 14:2-3).

**Does It Matter What
Others Think?**

6

AIDS Index

7

**Safely Home
Impacts Christian
Kids**

7

**17 Countries
Where Christians
are Persecuted**

8

Letters to EPM

11

**Questions & Answers:
Can We Really Earn
Eternal Rewards?**

12

(continued on page 2)

We were made for a person and a place. Jesus is the person. Heaven is the place. And Jesus is the one building that place for us.

A good carpenter envisions what he wants to build. He plans and designs. Then he does his work, carefully and skillfully fashioning it to exact specifications. He takes pride in the work he's done and loves to show it off. And Jesus isn't just any carpenter—He's the Creator of the world we already know; He built everything we see. Heaven will be His greatest building project.

For Christians, heaven is our home. Paul said, "As long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.... We...would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:6, 8). Home is the place of acceptance, security, rest, refuge, deep personal relationships, great memories.

God's people, aliens and strangers on earth, spend their lives "looking forward to a country they can call their own" and "looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland" (Hebrews 11:14, 16). The capital of this heavenly country will be a "city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God" (Hebrews 11:10). This city will have all the freshness, vitality, and openness of the country with all the vibrancy, interdependence, and relationships of a city. A city without crime, litter, smog, sirens, seaminess, or slums.

Heaven will have an endless supply of fresh water and delicious food. No famine or drought. Christ promised we would eat and drink with

Him—along with Abraham and the other patriarchs (Matthew 8:11). We will meet and converse with other inhabitants of heaven. Not only Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but Moses, David, Ruth, Esther, Mary, and Peter. I look forward to conversations with C. S. Lewis, A. W. Tozer, Jonathan Edwards, and Amy Carmichael.

We'll converse with angels. Because angels are "ministering spirits" who serve us (Hebrews 1:14), we'll get to know those who protected us during our years on earth.

In Revelation 5 we're told of a choir of angels numbering ten thousand times ten thousand—that's 100 million! And then we're told that the whole rest of creation joins these 100 million. The 100 million are merely a little ensemble on the stage. Can you imagine the power of the song?

Will we learn in heaven? Definitely. We're told that in the coming ages God will continuously reveal to us the "incomparable riches of his grace" (Ephesians 2:7). When we die, we'll know a lot more than we do now, but we'll keep learning about God and His creation and each other throughout eternity.

Will we remember our lives and relationships on earth? Of course. (We'll be smarter in heaven, not dumber!) Remembrance is important to God, which is why the heavenly city has memorials of people and events of earth (Revelation 21:12-

There are many rooms in my Father's home, and I am going to prepare a place for you.... When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.

John 14:2-3

For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down—when we die and leave these bodies—we will have a home in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands.

2 Corinthians 5:1

We'll enjoy and share with others the treasures we laid up for ourselves in heaven while we lived on earth (Matthew 6:19-21). We'll open our dwelling places to others (Luke 16:9).

God gave people creativity in their unfallen state, which remained but was twisted when we fell. He will surely not give us less creativity in heaven but more, unmarred by sin, unlimited by mortality. We will compose, write, paint, carve, build, plant, and grow.

There will be no temple, no church buildings. Christ will be the focus of all. Worship will be unaffected, without pretense or distraction. We'll be lost in our worship, overcome by God's magnificence and the privilege of being His children.

14). It's also why God keeps in heaven "a scroll of remembrance," written in God's presence, "concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name" (Malachi 3:16). The pain of the past will be gone. But memories of being together in the trenches, walking with Christ, and experiencing intimate times with family and friends will surely not be.

Will we know our loved ones in heaven? Certainly. We'll know even those we *didn't* know on earth, just as Peter, James, and John recognized Moses and Elijah when they joined Jesus (Luke 9:28-33), though they could not have known what they looked like. After entering heaven, the martyrs look down on earth and clearly remember their lives, fully aware of what's happening



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there (Revelation 6:9-11). Heaven isn't characterized by ignorance of events on earth but by perspective on them.

Heaven will offer much-needed rest to the weary (Revelation 14:13). What feels better than putting your head on the pillow after a hard day's work or kicking back to read a good book with a cold drink by your side?

But rest renews us, revitalizes us to be active again. Heaven will offer refreshing activity, productive and un thwarted—like Adam and Eve's work in Eden before sin brought the curse on the ground.

In heaven, we're told, "his servants will serve him" (Revelation 22:3). This means we'll be active, since to "serve" means to work, to expend effort, to do something. Service involves responsibilities, duties, effort, planning, and creativity to do work well.

We'll lead and exercise authority in heaven, making important decisions. We'll reign with Christ (2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 3:21), not temporarily but "for ever and ever" (Revelation 22:5). "Reigning" implies specific delegated responsibilities for those under our leadership (Luke 19:17-19). We'll rule over the world and even over angels (1 Corinthians 6:2-3).

When God brings heaven down to the new earth, He "will wipe every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 21:4). What an intimate picture—God's hands will touch the face of each individual child, removing every tear. The same verse says, "There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain." As Thomas

Moore put it, "Earth has no sorrow that Heaven cannot heal."

No hospitals. No cemeteries. No sin. No evil. No fear. No abuse, rape, murder, drugs, drunkenness, bombs, guns, or terrorism.

Heaven will be deeply appreciated by the disabled, who will be liberated from ravaged bodies and minds, and by the sick and elderly who will be free from their pains and restrictions. They will walk and run and see and hear, some for the first time. Hymn writer Fanny Crosby said, "Don't pity me for my blindness, for the first face I ever see will be the face of my Lord Jesus."

God is the creator and lover of diversity. People of every tribe and nation and tongue will worship the Lamb together (Revelation 7:9-10).

Heaven will be the home of relentless joy. The greatest joy will be marrying our bridegroom, Jesus Christ. If we love Christ, we long to be with Him. The next greatest joy will be reuniting with our departed loved ones. I don't like to be away from my family, but what keeps me going is the anticipation of reunion. The longer the separation, the sweeter the reunion. I haven't seen my mom for twenty-one years, my childhood friend Jerry for ten years, my dad for six. Some will be reunited with parents they've not seen for fifty years and with children lost long ago. For Christians, death is never the end of a relationship but only an interruption to be followed by glorious reunion.

C. S. Lewis said, "I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same."

Heaven is the Christian's certain hope, a hope that can and should sustain us through life's darkest hours. But this doesn't happen automatically. We must choose to think about heaven and center our lives around it: "Set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits at God's right hand.... Let heaven fill your thoughts" (Colossians 3:1-2).

May God give us the grace to live today as citizens of heaven, ambassadors to this foreign soil called earth. May we live today with the perspective that will be ours one moment after we die.

Dear Lord,

Thank you for the certain hope of heaven. Thank you for the incredible gift you give to those who accept Jesus' sacrifice of death for our sins. Please help us to remember that this world is not our home. Help us to remember that no matter what happens to us here, we're headed home, where a greater reality awaits us. Amen.

This article appears as a chapter in Finding God's Peace in Perilous Times (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2001).

Randy Alcorn's Speaking Schedule...*(in response to those who've asked)*

June 3-7, 2002: Western Seminary, Portland, OR: Theology of Desire class (*Contact information: Steve at 503-517-1880*)

August 3, 4, 2002: Good Shepherd Community Church, Boring, OR (*Contact information: 503-663-5050*)

August 30-September 2, 2002: Cannon Beach Conference Center, Cannon Beach, OR: Labor Day Conference (*Contact information: 800-745-1546 or www.cbcc.net*)

October 12, 2002: Washington, DC area, The JESUS Film Executive Briefing (*Contact information: 949-361-4435*)

October 13, 2002: Covenant Fellowship, Philadelphia, PA, morning worship (*Contact information: 610-361-0606*)

November 2, 2002: Evangelical Christian Publishers Assoc., Tucson, AZ

November 24, 2002: Overlake Christian Church, Redmond, WA (*Contact information: 425-702-0303*)

January 23 & 24, 2003: Christian Stewardship Association Conference, Chicago, IL (*Contact information: 317-244-4272 or www.stewardship.org*)

April 11-13, 2003: Christian Writers Confer., Mt. Hermon Christian Conference Center, Mt. Hermon, CA (*Contact information: 831-335-4466 or www.gospelcom.net/mthermon/index.shtml*)



The True Hero of the *Titanic*

John Harper was born to a pair of solid Christian parents on May 29, 1872. It was on the last Sunday of March 1886, when he was thirteen years old that he received Jesus as the Lord of his life. He never knew what it was to "sow his wild oats." He began to preach about four years later at the ripe old age of 17 by going down to the streets of his village and pouring out his soul in earnest entreaty for men to be reconciled to God.

As John Harper's life unfolded, one thing was apparent...he was consumed by the Word of God. When asked by various ministers what his doctrine consisted of, he was known to reply, "The Word of God!"

After five or six years of toiling on street corners preaching the gospel and working in the mill during the day, Harper was taken in by Rev. E. A. Carter of Baptist Pioneer Mission in London, England. This set Harper free to devote his whole time and energy to the work so dear to his heart. Soon John Harper started his own church in September of 1896 (now known as Harper Memorial Church). This church, which John Harper had started with just 25 members, had grown to over 500 members when he left 13 years later. During this time he had gotten married but was shortly thereafter widowed. However brief the marriage, God did bless John Harper with a beautiful little girl named Annie Jessie "Nina" Harper.

Ironically, John Harper almost drowned several times during his life. When he was two and a half years of age, he almost drowned when he fell into a well but was resuscitated by his mother. At the age of twenty-six, he was swept out to sea by a reverse current and barely survived, and at thirty-two he faced death on a leaking ship in the Mediterranean. Perhaps God used these experiences to prepare this servant for what he faced next.

It was the night of April 14, 1912. The R.M.S. *Titanic* sailed swiftly on the bitterly cold ocean waters heading unknowingly into the pages of history. On board this luxurious ocean liner were many rich and famous people. At the time

of the ship's launch, it was the world's largest man-made moveable object. At 11:40 p.m. on that fateful night, an iceberg scraped the ship's starboard side, showering the deck with ice and ripping open five watertight compartments. The sea poured in.

On board the ship that night was John Harper and his much-beloved, six-year-old Nina. According to documented reports, as soon as it was apparent that the ship was going to sink, John Harper



immediately took his daughter to a lifeboat. It is reasonable to assume that this widowed preacher could have easily gotten on board this boat to safety; however, it never seems to have crossed his mind. He bent down and kissed his precious little girl. Looking into her eyes, he told her that she would see him again someday.

The flares going off in the dark sky above reflected the tears on his face as he turned and headed towards the crowd of desperate humanity on the sinking ocean liner. As the rear of the huge ship began to lurch upwards, it was reported that Harper was seen making his way up the deck yelling, "Women, children and unsaved into the lifeboats!" It was only minutes later that the *Titanic* began to rumble deep within. Most people

thought it was an explosion; actually the gargantuan ship was literally breaking in half. At this point, many people jumped off the decks and into the icy, dark waters below. John Harper was one of these people.

That night 1528 people went into the frigid waters. John Harper was seen swimming frantically to people in the water leading them to Jesus before the hypothermia became fatal. Mr. Harper swam up to one young man who had climbed up on a piece of debris. Rev. Harper asked him between breaths, "Are you saved?" The young man replied that he was not.

Harper then tried to lead him to Christ, only to have the young man who was near shock, reply, "No." John Harper then took off his life jacket and threw it to the man and said, "Here then, you need this more than I do..." and swam away to other people. A few minutes later Harper swam back to the young man and succeeded in leading him to salvation. Of the 1528 people that went into the water that night, six were rescued by the lifeboats. One of them was this young man on the debris.

Four years later, at a survivors' meeting, this young man stood up and in tears recounted how that after John Harper had led him to Christ, Mr. Harper had tried to swim back to help other people, yet because of the intense cold, had grown too weak to swim. His last words before going under in the frigid waters were "Believe on the name of the Lord Jesus and you will be saved."

Does Hollywood remember this man? No. Oh well, no matter. This servant of God did what he had to do. While other people were trying to buy their way onto the lifeboats and selfishly trying to save their own lives, John Harper gave up his life so that others could be saved.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." John Harper was truly the hero of the *Titanic*!

Compiled by John Climie, George Harper & Bill Guthrie from Jesus Our Jubilee Ministries, Dallas, Oregon. (Additional source for this article: The Titanic's Last Hero by Moody Adams [Midnight Call, 1997].)

Can You Name Them?

Take this quiz:

1. Besides Bill Gates, name the five wealthiest people in the world.
2. Name the last five Heisman (football) trophy winners.
3. Name ten people who have won the Nobel or Pulitzer prize.
4. Name the last half dozen Academy Award winners for best actor and actress.
5. Name the last five year's World Series winners.

How did you do?

The point is, none of us remember the headliners of yesterday even though these people are no second-rate achievers. They are the best in their fields.

But the applause dies. Awards tarnish. Achievements are forgotten.

Accolades and certificates are buried with their owners.

Here's another quiz. See how you do on this one:

1. List a few teachers who aided your journey through school.
2. Name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time.
3. Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile.
4. Think of five people you enjoy spending time with.
5. Name half a dozen heroes whose stories have inspired you.

Easier? Yes!

The lesson: The people who make a difference in your life are not the ones with the most credentials, the most money, or the most awards. *They are the ones that care!*

So make sure you are one who cares for others, not just that you will be remembered, but that God will be glorified!

Adapted by Doug Nichols, Action International Ministries

Needed by EPM:

Used Laptop or Notebook Computer

When Randy travels, it would help to have a portable computer for writing, editing and accessing email. If you are upgrading and have a decent portable you can donate to EPM, we will give you a tax receipt for its full value. If you can help us in this way, please call Kathy Norquist, Randy's assistant, at 503-663-6481.

God's Answer

You say: "It's impossible."

God says: "All things are possible." (Luke 18:27)

You say: "I'm too tired."

God says: "I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28-30)

You say: "Nobody really loves me."

God says: "I love you." (John 3:16 & John 13:34)

You say: "I can't go on."

God says: "My grace is sufficient." (2 Corinthians 12:9 & Psalm 91:15)

You say: "I can't figure things out."

God says: "I will direct your steps." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

You say: "I can't do it."

God says: "You can do all things." (Philippians 4:13)

You say: "I'm not able."

God says: "I am able." (2 Corinthians 9:8)

You say: "It's not worth it."

God says: "It will be worth it." (Romans 8:28)

You say: "I can't forgive myself."

God says: I forgive you." (1 John 1:9 & Romans 8:1)

You say: "I can't manage."

God says: "I will supply all your needs." (Philippians 4:19)

You say: "I'm afraid."

God says: "I have not given you a spirit of fear." (2 Timothy 1:7)

You say: "I'm always worried and frustrated."

God says: "Cast all your cares on ME." (1 Peter 5:7)

You say: "I don't have enough faith."

God says: "I've given everyone a measure of faith." (Romans 12:3)

You say: "I'm not smart enough."

God says: "I give you wisdom." (1 Corinthians 1:30)

You say: "I feel all alone."

God says: "I will never leave you or forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)

Does It Matter What Others Think?

by John Piper

The answer is not simple. Some biblical texts seem to say no. Others, yes.

For example, Jesus warned us: "Woe to you when all men speak well of you" (Luke 6:26). And his own enemies saw in him an indifference to what others thought: "Teacher, we know that you are true, and care for no man; for you do not regard the position of men but truly teach the way of God" (Mark 12:14).

Paul said that if he tried to please men he would no longer be a servant of Christ: "Am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10). "As we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts" (1 Thessalonians 2:4).

On the other hand, Proverbs 22:1 says, "A good name is to be more desired than great wealth, favor is better than silver and gold." And Paul was vigilant that he not be discredited in his handling of money for the poor: "[We are] taking precaution so that no one will discredit us in our administration of this generous gift; for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men" (2 Corinthians 8:20-21). It mattered what men thought. He taught the Roman church, "Now we who are strong

ought...not to please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification" (Romans 15:1-2). And he taught that one of the qualifications for elders is that they must be "above reproach" (1 Timothy 3:2), including among unbelievers: "He must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (1 Timothy 3:7).

**Our aim in life is for
"Christ to be magnified in
our bodies whether by life
or by death."**

Similarly Peter charged us to care about what outsiders thought: "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:12).

Question: How is the tension between these two groups of passages to be resolved?

Answer: By realizing that our aim in life is for "Christ to be magnified in our bodies whether by life or by death" (Philippians 1:19-20). In other words, with Paul, we do care—really care—

Hudson Taylor was so feeble in the closing months of his life that he wrote a dear friend: "I am so weak I cannot write; I cannot read my Bible; I cannot even pray. I can only lie still in God's arms like a little child, and trust."

This wondrous man of God with all his spiritual power came to a place of physical suffering and weakness where he could only lie still and trust.

And that is all God asks of you, His dear child, when you grow faint in the fierce fires of affliction. Do not try to be strong. Just be *still* and know that *He is God*, and will sustain you, and bring you through.

God keeps His choicest cordials for our deepest faintings.

Stay firm and let thine heart take courage (Ps. 27:14).

Excerpted from *Streams in the Desert* by Mrs. Charles E. Cowman

about what others think of Christ. Their salvation hangs on what they think of Christ. And our lives are to display his truth and beauty. So we must care what others think of us as representative of Christ. Love demands it.

But notice where the accent falls: not on our value or our excellence or our virtue or our power and wisdom. It falls on whether Christ is honored by the way people think of us. Does Christ look great because of the way we live? It matters to us whether he does.

Again notice a crucial distinction: the litmus test of our faithfully displaying the truth and beauty of Christ in our lives is not the opinion of others. We want them to see Christ in us and love him (and thus incidentally approve of us). But we know they may be blind to Christ and resistant to Christ. So they may think of us just what they thought of him. "If they have called the head of the house Beelzebub, how much more will

they malign the members of his household!" (Matthew 10:25). Jesus wanted men to admire him and trust him. But he did not change who he was in order to win their approval. Nor can we.

Yes, we want people to see us with approval when we are displaying that Jesus is infinitely valuable to us, but we dare not make the opinion of others the measure of our faithfulness. They may be blind and resistant to truth. Then the reproach we bear is no sign of our faithfulness or lack of love.

May God give us wisdom and love and courage to please and not to please as we hold fast to Christ our treasure.

We who are frequently visited by the chastening rod have the consolation to read in the Scriptures that whomever He chasteneth He loveth, and does it for their good to make them mindful of their mortality and that this earth is not our abiding place. He afflicts us that we may prepare for a better world, a happy immortality.

Andrew Jackson
7th President

AIDS Index:

A brief collection of comparative AIDS statistics

Source: World Vision

► Number of people who have died of AIDS in the past 20 years:	19 million
► Number of people who died in World War I:	14 million
► Number of Kenyans who died of AIDS every day:	500
► Number of people killed in U.S. school shootings in the past six years:	51
► Loss of Silicon Valley high-tech jobs in March-May 2001, economic downturn:	50,000
► Number of people infected by the AIDS virus in that same time period:	1,380,000
► Odds that a person with HIV/AIDS lives in a developing country:	19 to 1
► Ratio of the number of people living with HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa to those in North America:	25 to 1
► Percentage of deaths caused by AIDS in Africa:	21
► Percentage of deaths caused by breast cancer in the United States:	0.16
► Average life expectancy for Botswanans before AIDS:	70
► Average life expectancy for Botswanans by the year 2010 because of AIDS:	29
► Percentage of teenage boys in Mozambique who could not name one way to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS:	62
► Percentage of Americans who said they are not willing to support AIDS prevention and education programs overseas:	61
► Percentage of Americans who believe that sex education should be a required school subject:	60
► Percentage of Malawi's teachers who are HIV-positive:	30
► Chance that a 15-year-old girl in South Africa will contract HIV/AIDS:	1 in 2
► Chance that a 15-19 year old girl in the US will give birth:	1 in 17
► Average amount Americans spend on tobacco products:	\$54 billion
► Annual cost of treating AIDS patients worldwide:	\$60 billion

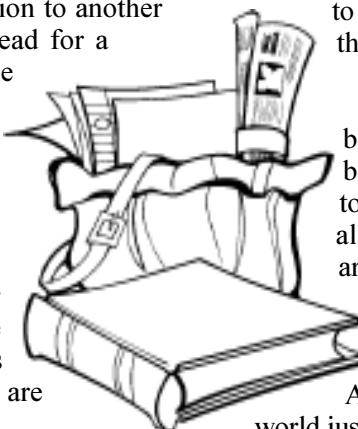
Safely Home Impacts Christian Kids

(The following is an email sent by an eighth grade literature teacher who received copies of the book from a parent. The identifying names have been changed.)

It's the beginning that sets the tone. It needs to touch the heart. It can't be just another introduction to another class book that students are required to read for a grade. As a teacher, I want it to penetrate the heart of each of my students. It's the beginning that sets the tone.

Each student is handed a copy of *Safely Home* by Randy Alcorn and asked to look at the dust jacket of the book. They are to write what they see. It amazes me what they pick up from a simple activity as this. Minor details are discovered. Predictions are made about the content of the book. Their insights are creative and accurate. Once again, they are teaching me.

I ask the students to remove the dust jacket of the book. My kids now are exposed to an incredible drawing by Ron DiCianni, that screams of meaning and emotion. I ask them to write down what they see in the picture. They are given three minutes to write down everything. Every detail. We discuss their observations. I thought I had studied



that picture well. I didn't have a clue. The students found every ounce of every detail in that picture. They then, once again, predicted the book's content.

There is an excitement in the air. An expectation. A genuine interest in this foreign book that looks kind of fat with no pictures in the middle. My 8th graders go through the same ritual whenever we start a book that we will read together. How many pages? Any pictures? How small is the font? They often check out or in based on the answer to these questions. I felt like I might have hooked them on this one with this introduction. Maybe.

And then came the dedication...

I ask them to read the dedication of the book. You see, I read the dedication months before and my heart beat faster. Tears began to run down my cheeks when I read it. It really nailed me. But these are 8th graders. They are tough you see. Image is everything. "Cool" is the operative word. And then I began to see the faces of my students. Tears appear in those beautiful eyes. Mouths are opened.

A loud hush falls over the classroom. A new world just opened to them. A girl interrupts the holy silence and quietly asks, "Can we start it today, Mr. Thomas?"

I smile for I now know they are ready. Page numbers won't matter anymore. God is about to do a marvelous work in their lives through this new classic at this Christian school.

And I smile again...

17 Countries Where Christians Are Persecuted

I've edited this based on excerpts from My Grace is Sufficient, *The Bible League*, 2001, with additions from Operation World and other sources. I presented it at Missions Fest Northwest in a seminar called "Praying for the Persecuted Church." It's intended to help us pray more intelligently for our brothers and sisters. (Christians are persecuted in a number of other countries, and my not including them doesn't suggest they're not important, just that I didn't have enough space to deal with them.) Randy Alcorn

Cambodia: Persecution in Cambodia reached its most terrifying pitch in the 1970s, at the hand of Pol Pot's brutal Khmer Rouge. People of all faiths tempted fate and invited elimination. Cambodian Christians learned to make themselves invisible.

Today, still, Christians are afraid to take leadership positions or to share their faith publicly. Pol Pot is dead, but the fear he incited lives on. Cambodia's government espouses religious freedom, but Christians still face persecution.

China: According to a Reuters report from Hong Kong, Li Guangqiang in April and May 2000 took 33,000 Bibles in two lots into China's Fujian Province to supply an underground Christian group. He was arrested on his second trip. Li, 38, is a long-term resident of Hong Kong. He was responding to a request in October 2000 by a leader of the sect, Yu Zhudi, who traveled to Hong Kong and said the group needed Bibles. On December 30, a Chinese court in Hubei's Jingmen City gave the founders of the underground South China Church, Gong Shengliang and Li Ying, a death sentence, calling their group an evil cult. Because Li's indictment mentioned an "evil cult," he may be sentenced to death.

A house church member died after being beaten in prison. Xu Yongze, a 58-year-old Christian, was tortured during interrogation throughout a three-year labor sentence.

Stories like this are common in China, where persecution has increased church growth rather than discouraged it.

Christians in China share the Gospel despite the great cost. "Our church planter training seminars teach, in addition to basic church planting skills, these three things: (1) Never turn down an invitation to preach; (2) Look for a place to run when you are finished preaching; (3) Be ready to die that day."



Christian women whose home was burned by Vietnamese police

An Amnesty International report confirms the use of torture in China is "widespread and systematic" (*Chicago Tribune*, February 13, 2001). China officials continue to deny these findings. Many Westerners, including Christians, have been taken in by the government's persistent propaganda efforts, including using registered churches and legal Bibles to prove (i.e., give the illusion of) overall religious liberties.



Egyptian girl who lost her father due to persecution

Colombia: Congregations are kidnapped, pastors are killed, the church is not allowed to do its work. These are everyday occurrences in Colombia. The ongoing war between the government, the para-military groups, and the guerrillas makes ministry very difficult and very dangerous. Christians, who offer assistance to all, are often in conflict with all.

Cuba: While a Christian pastor and his wife were traveling, the police broke into their home and threw their belongings out into the street. The family was not allowed to re-enter their home. It was confiscated, apparently because it had been used for Christian gatherings.

In spite of the repercussions, it is increasingly common for Cuban Christians to gather as house churches. (Petroleum is no longer available in the country, so they cannot drive to traditional churches.) The government does not fully accept these new house churches.

The church is exploding in growth, and Protestant Christians could number in the millions in a few years. Without Scriptures, though, Christians will not have the comfort they need to face persecution, or confidence to stand strong in the faith. Various missions groups are now making unprecedented inroads into Cuba.

Egypt: Known as the most open Muslim country because it has legal churches. Persecution comes in social and economic forms, but is sometimes more dramatic. Muslims in Al-Kosheh accused Christians of poisoning the water supply and planning to attack Muslim neighborhoods. A small group of believers responded vocally, and a heated argument erupted. At the end of three days of rioting and violence, 21 Christians were dead.

India: The mutilated body of 52-year-old Yesu Dasu was found in a pool of blood in a cattle shed near Kothakunta. His hands had been tied, and his head had been chopped off with an axe.

Villagers said that Yesu Dasu was popular as a Christian preacher. He also worked among the lepers as a non-medical assistant.

His family—wife, three daughters, and son—said that two people on a motorcycle rode up to their house one evening and took Yesu Dasu away. When he had not returned home by 10:00 p.m., the family began searching for him in the village. The next morning his body was found on the outskirts of the village.

The government of India does not officially persecute Christians, but it has created an environment in which attacks like this can happen with impunity. Radical Hindus have been emboldened to beat believers, destroy church buildings, burn Bibles, and carry out other atrocities (including the 1999 murder of missionary Graham Staines and his sons). Even so, courageous Indian Christians continue to lead Bible studies and disciple seekers.

Indonesia: The largest Muslim population in the world. There is great openness to the Gospel in spite of persecution—the church is growing at a rate of 5% per year.

There are more than 25 million Christians in Indonesia, and more than 13 million of them are without a Bible. As more and more seekers convert, the church grows, and the Bible gap widens.

Christians are threatened and their churches are bombed. Throughout many parts of the country, thousands of Christians have been forced to undergo Muslim conversion rituals.

Those who refuse to embrace Islam are often beheaded, and their heads are paraded through the village to strike fear into the hearts of other Christians.

Laos: The government of Laos set a goal of completely eradicating Christianity from the country by the end of 2000. In a September interview, a Laotian Christian said, “They’ve drawn up plans to eliminate the Christians: first by forcing them to sign a document rescinding their faith, then to close meeting places, and finally to check that they make offerings to the Buddhist priests.”



Indonesian Christian village wiped out by Muslim warriors

in San Nicolas, most of whom are poor, must pay to transport their dead to other towns with cemeteries that do not discriminate.

Throughout Mexico, but especially in small villages, Catholic churches tend to mix Catholicism and Mayan pagan beliefs. They oppose Christianity’s attempts to undermine their “traditional culture.” In the past 30 years, at least 30,000 Christians have been expelled from their homes in San Juan Chamula, Chiapas. Others have been fined, jailed, or beaten.

Myanmar: The government of Myanmar (Burma) does not allow churches to be built and has declared house churches illegal. It’s not uncommon for Christians to be “recruited” by local officials to do hard labor, particularly on Sundays because it’s the Christian day of worship. But God’s Church is growing!

Malaysia: Today Malaysia is 51% Muslim and extremely resistant to any other religions. In fact, a new law is being proposed that would make converting from Islam an offense punishable by three years in prison.

The few hundred Malay who believe in Jesus Christ have suffered social ostracism and the loss of legal rights, jobs, and sometimes home and country.

Sadly, due to the economic and political injustices they have suffered, most Malay Christians do not have a heart for sharing the Gospel in their country. Evangelism, discipleship, and church planting are very difficult to encourage.

Mexico: There is a small evangelical church in Ixmiquilpan’s San Nicolas suburb. The town cemetery, though, is open only to Catholics. Mexican law requires burial within 24 hours of death. This means evangelical Christians

Nigeria: Two Christians in northern Nigeria were publicly “caned” by Muslim extremists who said they were enforcing Islamic legal code. The flogging didn’t stop until “they thought we were dead,” a victim said.

Nigerian Christians are not safe in the northern half of the country, where Muslims dominate government affairs. Many Christians have fled to the south, where the Muslim presence is active, but less aggressive.

During a recent riot in Gombe city, in the north, four people died, and two churches were vandalized and robbed. Fifteen pews were torn out of Bishara Baptist Church and burned as thousands of Muslim youths looked on.

In spite of (or perhaps because of?) the rising tide of aggression, the Christian Church is growing. People are curious about a Book whose beliefs some are willing to die defending.

North Korea: Despite brutal oppression, around half a million of North Korea’s 23 million inhabitants are Christians. More than 1 million North Korean Christians are imprisoned in concentration camps, sometimes without food, shelter, or medical aid.

Anyone discovered with a Bible is considered to be a “South Korean spy” and is executed, said a South Korean pastor speaking at a missions conference.

Philippines: In the remote village of Bumbaran, Christians were rounded up by a group of Muslim terrorists. They were shot at point-blank range. Twenty-one people died, and eight were seriously injured.

On Basilan Island, a group of teachers and schoolchildren were held hostage by the Abu Sayyaf extremist group. For their release, the extremists demanded that crosses be removed from public places, that Christian values not be taught in schools, and that Mindanao be declared a Muslim state. Twenty-four Muslim hostages were released within three weeks, but twenty-nine Christians remained in captivity. Several weeks later, four were killed when they attempted escape.

Although the Philippines has no official religion, pockets of the country are dominated by Muslims, and life for Christians in those areas is dangerous.

Russia: The world’s largest country, spanning 11 time zones. The government is working on reform and eradication of corruption. The Russian Mafia continues to be a strong force.

“I have suffered terribly over 32 years for my faith in the Lord Jesus,” says Alexei Rogovoy, a citizen of Russia. As recently as February 2000, says Alexei, he was “so badly beaten about the head by the police that now I cannot walk properly. They left me lying in the street, bleeding.” Alexei’s crime? He had written to a judge about the way Christians were being treated by the authorities. Alexei lives in Volgograd, where the government authorities make life hard for Christians. Elsewhere in Russia Christians are also persecuted by Muslims, the Orthodox Church, and Buddhists.



Sudanese boys affected by the war and hunger

Sudan: Sudan’s government is trying to force the conversion of millions of Christians to Islam. Thirty years of civil war have resulted in famine and large numbers of refugees. Slave raids, massacres, rapes, and torture continue unabated throughout the south.

“Sudan is one of the world’s worst religious persecutors,” says Paul Marshall in *Religious Freedom in the World*. “It practices forced conversion, represses those who do not subscribe to its version of Islam, has applied *shari’ā* law to the entire population, enslaves its opponents, and is engaged in a war that...observers have explicitly labeled ‘genocidal.’”

The Bible League’s National Director says, “The positive thing of the war is that many, many people are coming to Christ. We try to show the love of God through the Word of God. They are very thankful people.”

Vietnam: In 1975 Vietnam became a communist nation with a total population of over 77 million. Religion was seen as a threat to national security, and massive “re-education” campaigns were set in motion. The government is finding it more effective to fine Christians than to imprison them.

A pastor in Vietnam recently reported that Christians there are “always under persecution.” Pastors and believers are being imprisoned regularly. In November 2000, on the very day that President Clinton met with officials to discuss freedom of religion, police raided a worship service across the city, arrested the pastor, confiscated Bibles, and threatened the worshippers.

“The oppressive and anti-religion policies have been carried out ruthlessly and persistently by the Vietnamese government for almost 50 years.” Rev. John Tran Cong Nghi testified before the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. “Many clergy and faithful suffer for years in concentration camps for just living out their faith.”

Vietnamese law does grant religious freedom, but the list of punishable offenses can be interpreted broadly, and punishments are applied according to the whim of local authorities. This uncertain and restrictive atmosphere makes ministry difficult.



CHANGE OF ADDRESS

You can help EPM cut down on costs by notifying us of your new address as soon as possible. Thanks!

Also, please let us know if you no longer wish to receive the newsletter. We want to send it to anyone interested, but want to be good stewards as well.

Letters to EPM

Thank you for being obedient to God and writing the book *Safely Home*. I really enjoyed this book. You captured the typical North American in the person of Ben Fielding, and the suffering persecuted believer in the person of Li Quan. It's like you gave flesh and blood to the persecuted believers.

So often we are caught up in our own comfortable worlds—just like Ben. I found myself getting frustrated with Ben. I was like, "Just listen to Li Quan, would ya?" But you know all too well that there are so many Ben Fieldings and if I don't check my own heart on a regular basis, I will be just like him.

Talking about the persecuted believers isn't a very nice subject here in North America, and having the eternal perspective doesn't exactly endear you to the world, if you know what I mean.

Thank you for the great reminder of our dear suffering brothers and sisters in other countries. Keep writing for His glory.

L.R.

I recently read *The Ishbane Conspiracy* and found it very thought provoking. I have recommended it to my mother and to some of my family who are entering their teenage years.

I found many similarities between the character Rob and myself. I also pondered suicide in my late teens when one of the gang members I ran with was killed in a gang related fight. Looking back now almost ten years to that part of my life, I am now very aware of the unseen influence of a demonic presence that was influencing my thoughts.

I give thanks to God daily for the saving knowledge in Christ Jesus that I have now found.

J.P. (prison inmate)

I have been a fan of the work that Jesus has done through you for many years. I just read *The Treasure Principle* and loved it so much I am giving it to everyone. I also have a large eternal focus and feel that God is using me to invest each day in eternity. I gained this perspective when I was 14. God healed me of a terminal cancer.

May God continue to richly bless your obedience to His instructions!

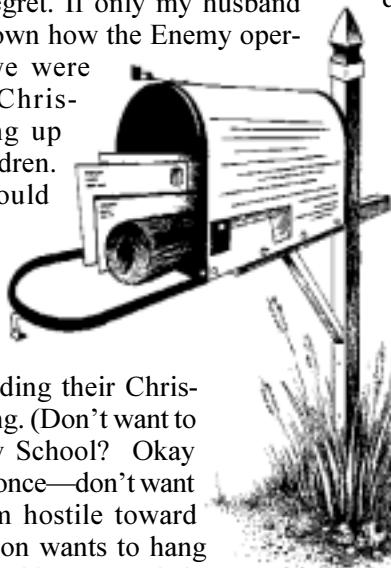
J.P., Fresno, CA

Thank you so much for sending me *Lord Foulgrin's Letters* and *Edge of Eternity*. I just had emergency surgery and they were sent directly from the hand of God through you! *Lord Foulgrin's Letters* has touched my heart and mind in a way that no book has done in quite some time. My husband is starting it now (much prayer required by me as he is not a reader!) because the message has caused us to once again look at our life and the choices we are making both for ourselves and our 4 kids and the way we have slipped in both our personal and family devotions as well as allowing TV to infiltrate our time again.

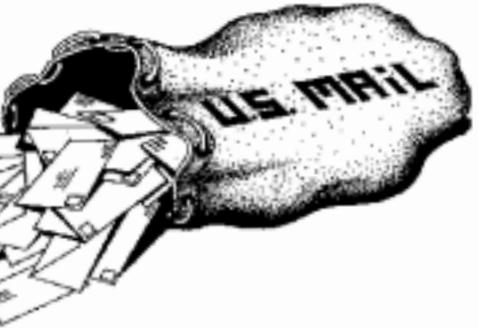
Thank you for another life-changing book. Please continue to direct our sights both heavenward and introspectively to take inventory and account of where our walk with Christ is going.

J.B.

I just finished reading *The Ishbane Conspiracy* and couldn't just close the book and forget about it...there is too much to remember! I read much of this wonderful book with tears running down my face, and have spent much time in prayer and regret. If only my husband and I had known how the Enemy operates when we were brand-new Christians bringing up our four children. We never would have caved under pressure to let them make their own



choices regarding their Christian upbringing. (Don't want to go to Sunday School? Okay then, just this once—don't want to make them hostile toward church. My son wants to hang KISS posters in his room and play



their music? Okay, as long as he goes to Wednesday night youth group...and on and on.)

Now that we have lost our oldest son to a drug-related killing and another about to follow, and a daughter who lives her life taking advantage of men, I live with guilt every day of my life because we didn't take a stand. The one bright spot in all this is our youngest son, who lives in Portland, who is the most decent and honorable person I know—but isn't walking with Jesus Christ. How glad I am that God forgives, because I'm having a hard time forgiving myself.

Your book has been a real wake-up call. I am praying it will be read by multitudes of parents who desperately need to read it. I have started a campaign at my church to place this book in the hands of everyone, and am urging them to tell others about it everywhere they go. This book should come with a "MUST READ" label on the cover!

Thank you and your daughters so much for writing this book, and reminding us, once again, of the spiritual battle being waged for the souls of our children.

A.B.

A brief note to say "well done" on *Edge of Eternity*. It reaches close to the heart and inspires me to consider whom we serve, what the conflict is about and the consequences of our choices for better or worse. I believe every person who serves Him—Our Lord and Savior—would be encouraged and blessed by this fine book.

Thank you and may Jesus richly bless you in your ministry.

J.R.—a "fellow traveler"

Questions and Answers

by Randy Alcorn

Randy,

I enjoy your books, but I'm put off by the notion that we as Christians should work to earn eternal rewards. How can we who are unworthy of anything possibly do something to earn rewards? The whole concept of earning implies "putting an employer in our debt by virtue of the value of our service." How can God be in our debt when in fact we are absolutely in His? God is not our employer, He's our Creator and Savior! Yes, to rewards, but NO to earning. All my good deeds are done by the grace of God which is with me.

Steve

Steve,

I say this in one of my recent books, *The Treasure Principle*:

We obtain rewards for doing good works (Ephesians 6:8; Romans 2:6, 10), persevering under persecution (Luke 6:22–23), caring for the needy (Matthew 25:20–21), and treating our enemies kindly (Luke 6:35). God also graciously gives us eternal rewards for generous giving: "Go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven" (Matthew 19:21).

I did use the word "earn" in a few places in my books *Money, Possessions and Eternity* and *In Light of Eternity*. But in its context in both books I used "earn" in the sense of a Christ-empowered obedience resulting in God graciously granting us the rewards He promises. Note this excerpt from *In Light of Eternity*:

It's critical to understand that the judgment of believers by Christ is a judgment of our works, not our sins. In 1 Corinthians 3:13–14, Paul says of each believer, "His work will be shown for what it is," and God's judgment fire "will test the quality of each man's work."

Our sins are totally forgiven when we come to Christ, and we stand justified in

Him. There's no condemnation for the Christian (Romans 8:1). Nevertheless, our laying up of precious stones on the foundation of Christ can apparently be replaced or prevented by sins we've committed as well as by righteous acts we have failed to do. Therefore a believer's sins contribute directly to his "suffering loss" (1 Corinthians 3:15).

Through this loss of reward the believer is considered to be receiving his "due" for his bad works (2 Corinthians 5:10). This is not a punishment for sins, but the withholding of rewards for works not done that should have been.

Let's be sure this is perfectly clear: salvation and rewards are different.

Salvation is about God's work for us. It's a free gift, to which we can contribute absolutely nothing (Ephesians 2:8–9; Titus 3:5).

Can we really earn eternal rewards?

Rewards are about our work for God.

Salvation is dependent on God's faithfulness to His promises, and on His mercy.

Rewards are conditional, dependent on our faithfulness (2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 2:26–28; 3:21).

Belief determines our eternal destination...where we'll be.

Behavior determines our eternal rewards...what we'll have.

Works do not affect our redemption. Works do affect our reward. Just as there are eternal consequences to our faith, so there are eternal consequences to our works.

Because we speak of rewards so rarely, when we do speak of them it's easy to confuse God's work and man's. We may, for example, mistakenly believe that heaven is a person's reward for doing good things. This is absolutely not the case. Eternal life is entirely "the gift of God" (Romans 6:23). In going to heaven we don't get what we deserve. What we all deserve is hell. Heaven is a gift, not a reward.

In regard to salvation, our work for God is no substitute for God's work for

us. In regard to rewards, God's work for us is no substitute for our work for God. Of course, this doesn't mean we work in our own strength to earn rewards. Ultimately even our reward-earning works are empowered by the Holy Spirit (Colossians 1:29).

I appreciate your concern, Steve, and given people's proneness to mistake salvation and rewards, I must always be careful to make the clarification. But I do have some questions for you to consider. In your post, you objected to the idea of God being portrayed as our employer. But doesn't Christ Himself use this analogy in the stewardship parables? Yes, He is the master, but these are not merely slaves as we often think of them, but trusted employees, as they are specifically given financial assets which they are called upon to invest, and the Money-owner then repays them according to how well they have done their job in investing His assets, putting them in charge of many things if they've proven faithful.

Certainly Jesus uses the employer analogy in Matthew 20. He hired men to work in the vineyard. He agreed to pay them a certain wage. He then hired others and said he'd pay them what was right. Some expected more, and grumbled and he said, "I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

Now if we *only* portrayed God as an employer, or even mainly did so, it would be unbalanced. He is also my King, father, owner, shepherd, etc. Christ is my bridegroom and my friend and my brother. If I camp on any of these without the others, that is imbalance. But if I nix any of the analogies that Scripture uses—including the employer analogy—that too is imbalance, isn't it? To say that Christ pays His servants for our labors is not the whole picture. But it is certainly part of the picture, isn't it? When dealing with stewardship, as I often do, using the language of the stewardship parables, as Christ did, seems appropriate.

You say, "The concept of earning implies 'putting an employer in our debt by virtue of the value of our service.'" I

don't view it that way, Steve, because it is He—not us—who puts the value on our service, and it is He, not us, who commits Himself to repay our service to Him. We make no demands on Him here, and it would be blasphemy to do so. But He tells us that He keeps account and will repay.

Christ said, "But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." God says He Himself will repay us. Doesn't the word "repay" mean that He chooses to put we, who are unworthy, in a position to be paid back, as if He has *chosen* to owe us for our Christ-centered acts of obedience? If this puts God "in our debt" (a phrase that makes me cringe), it is by His decree not ours!

To me, it's all a matter of who came up with this notion. If it was us, it would be a heresy and presumption from the pit of hell. But it wasn't us. It was God. It is one thing for me to say "God, if I give a cup of cold water in your name, you are in my debt to repay me." That would be damnable. But when God Himself, by His own gracious decree promises He will "repay" us, then by embracing that, instead of presuming upon Him aren't we simply believing Him (with wonder at how He could stoop so low as to regard our works as worthy of His reward)?

So if I give a cup of cold water do I earn or deserve a reward? In one sense no. In another sense yes. God is not only gracious, but just. He does not let us into heaven simply out of grace, but also because—clothed in His righteousness—there is an objective reason (Christ's atonement) that fulfills His righteous demands of us. Likewise He rewards us by grace, but also in justice—a just God does not give rewards unless it is not only gracious but right for Him to do so. When Christ says "Well done my good and faithful servant" I don't think He will be kidding—I think He will really mean "you've done a good job and in doing so you have, by my grace, earned the reward which it pleases me to give you."

If I had come up with the notion "God will repay those who serve Him," that would give me the willies too. Yet

He Himself says it. Reward is not just a general notion—it is highly specific, given to us for measurable works we did that please him (1 Cor. 3). One could certainly abuse that notion, and people have, but that it can be abused does not invalidate the truth of it (e.g., Rom. 6:1). Somehow all this relates to that great paradox of Paul's statement, "To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me."

You say in your post, "Yes, to rewards, but NO to earning. All my good deeds are done by the grace of God which is with me." Well, yes, but God rewards us, not Himself, right? So He sees us somehow as players in this thing, doesn't He? "Yes, to rewards but NO to earning" sounds spiritual, but what does it really mean? That there is nothing that can be done to gain or lose rewards? If one takes action to gain a

Honestly, Steve, can you read 1 Cor. 9:24-27 without the sense that by God's grace Paul is striving to earn eternal rewards, and is concerned lest he be disqualified from doing so? Isn't the notion of winning the race for the crown the same as earning the crown through one's Christ-empowered efforts?

So, my agreement about the wisdom of not using the term "earn" is precisely on the level of wisdom—largely because of the dangers of what it could suggest to those who don't understand God's grace and our utter unworthiness apart from His righteousness and empowerment. As I said, however, I don't agree about the inappropriateness of viewing God as an employer who calls upon His servants to work for their pay, since Christ Himself used the analogy.

One other thought, as it relates to the riskiness of how God phrases things.

Suppose we had never heard these words before and one day a preacher said:

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." Then suppose he added, "Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints."

I would cringe, wouldn't you? To use your term, it would give me the willies.

"His bride has made herself ready"? No, we'd say, it should be "He has made His bride ready."

"Fine linen stands for the righteous..." Complete the sentence. There's only one correct answer, isn't there? "Fine linen stands for the righteous work of Christ on our behalf."

If it wasn't in Scripture and we heard someone say "Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints" we'd conclude (I would anyway) that they were heretics, giving men credit where it is only due to God. Yet God Himself, who could have said the bride's wedding dress is the righteousness of Christ in which we're covered, said in Revelation 19:8 the bride is covered in her own righteous acts. (Of course, we know these are empowered by God Himself, but He chooses to say the other anyway, apparently wishing to

Belief determines our eternal destination... where we'll be. Behavior determines our eternal rewards... what we'll have.

reward is he not in some sense earning it? Would you say to someone going off to college, "Yes to getting a degree but NO to earning it"? He doesn't have to work to be your son—he's that no matter what. But he does need to work to earn a degree.

Obviously we can't earn our salvation—nothing could be more clear. But is it possible that you are disqualifying "earn" in the context of reward, presupposing it as a dirty term, guilt by association with its damnable meaning in relation to salvation? I think it has legitimacy in this very different context, the context of being rewarded for serving Him, a context which He Himself has implemented and commanded.

focus on His children's faithful acts of obedience.)

Again Rev. 22:14 says "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city." The next verse talks about those who are outside because they are unworthy. Doesn't that mean those who go in are worthy? They actually "have the right to the tree of life." By their merit? Absolutely not. Only by Christ's merit. But nonetheless it is said that they "wash their robes." I

would have expected it to say "God washed their robes." For some reason, it doesn't. God seems often to use risky language that is subject to misunderstanding and abuse. Yet apparently He considers the point He's trying to emphasize as worth the risk. The question is whether we think it's worth the risk to put the emphasis where God chose to in the particular passage in front of us. Or do we try to protect people from a possible abuse by staying away from or altering the meaning of passages which present risky truth?

So, I agree with your belief that "earned" isn't the best term in light of possible misunderstanding, yet disagree that it has no biblical teaching that lends support to it (as long as one stays clearly within the confines of Christ-empowered service based on His worthiness, not ours). We are His sons, but not only His sons; His bride, but not only His bride; His servants and stewards who are repaid for our service—by no means only that, but that nonetheless.

Randy Alcorn

Post-Abortion Trauma in Men: Finding Healing for a Hidden Problem

by Victor Lee

It's like the tip of an iceberg, a sharp, damaging, external protrusion that, no matter how much pain it inflicts, only represents the much bigger problem beneath the surface. What is so fierce that it can sink the seemingly hardest of men, or at least flood a chamber of his heart and debilitate him for life? Abortion.

Abortion's Impact on Men

"I tried to cover up the pain," says Steve Van Hoff, who fathered a child at age 16 with a 15-year-old neighbor. The girl's father demanded that the baby be aborted. The combination of Van Hoff's actions and the father's "solution" set the spiritual, mental, and emotional stage for decades of anguish.

"I lost respect for authority," Van Hoff says. "I had a very quick temper, and anger turned to rage. I drank, and my life was a series of broken relationships with women. It led to a life of sexual, sinful exploits without finding intimacy. I was totally self-centered."

There have been an estimated 35 million abortions since Roe v. Wade made abortion legal 30 years ago. One participant, the father, is often ignored.

"There are a lot of people walking around on drugs or alcohol, or living sexually immoral lifestyles, because the level of trust is broken," Van Hoff says. "When you diminish a life to nothing, it wipes out all the other areas of trust and intimacy."

Van Hoff could be the poster boy for post-abortion stress in men. But it's hard to represent an issue few people acknowledge exists. "Post-abortion stress in men is mostly a hidden problem," says Mike Reid, president of Care Net, a non-profit organization that helps resource about 650 pregnancy centers across the United States.



"One reason it is hidden is that our society has been very slow to recognize the problem in women," Reid says. "And certainly it affects [women] more. But if you put women in the caboose, men aren't even on the train. Another reason it is hidden is that men are separate from the process physically."

But this is not a case of out of sight, out of mind and heart, even though most men would like to think so. "Men are much better at compartmentalizing and ignoring issues," Reid says.

Post-abortion stress can affect men regardless of the circumstances of the abortion. "A lot of men know their baby was aborted," Reid says. "They either passively let it happen, or they may have pressured the woman to do it. Perhaps they paid for it, or drove her there. Or they may not have wanted her to have the abortion, and she did it anyway. Whether complicit or not, a man is tempted to put away the related emotions because they are too hard to deal with."

Recognizing Post-Abortion Trauma

David Hazard and the late Guy Condon wrote in *Fatherhood Aborted* that the symptoms of post-abortion trauma in men could include difficulty with commitment, dodging authority, no solid sense of identity, working to impress moral leaders, keeping women at bay, having trouble bonding, fear of impending tragedy, failure to own mistakes, and feelings of inadequacy as a leader.

Men may even consciously or subconsciously try to "make up" for their mistake, as Van Hoff did. "I'd been trying to find a way to work my way right with God," he said. He got involved in the pro-life movement, working as a sidewalk counselor and even blocking the entrances to abortion clinics. Sidewalk counseling was particularly effective. "I saw success in that, people turned away, and lives were saved," he said.

Though God used something terrible (the abortion) to bring about something good (Van Hoff's work in the pro-life movement), it still didn't deal with the problem. He thought, "This will help me. I can work my way into right living. I can somehow make up for the life of this child."

Awareness of the problem usually doesn't come for several years, even as long as 12 to 15 years. "It is generally later because the initial rationalization led them to 'fix' the problem, and it initially feels pretty good," Reid says.

Van Hoff's awareness of the root of his problem came gradually, beginning when he married and extending through his relationship with their four children, now ages 20 to 6. Recognition of post-abortion stress is easier in women than men, because there are more natural markers.

"For women, it often happens when they get pregnant later," Reid says, "or when they are around their nieces or nephews and begin to think, 'My baby would be X years old.'"

The same type of recognition can come in men, but it is less certain. "Men tend to act out more with substance abuse or by hurting themselves," Reid says. "They might also be physically aggressive toward their current partner, or they might be in depression. Hopefully, reading an article or some other mechanism will help them say, 'Maybe this behavior is connected with the abortion.'"

Finding Help for the Real Problem

How do friends and family encourage men to face the real issue? Here are some ideas:

⇒ First, pray. Pray for recognition of the root problem by the man involved. Pray for an opening to discuss it with him. Pray for the Holy Spirit to draw him to repentance, and thus to healing.

⇒ Read Condon and Hazard's book, *Fatherhood Aborted* (Tyndale House, July 2001). This book will enlighten and equip a friend or family member to help. Buy a copy of the book for a friend who has fathered an aborted child. Understand that he may not read it now, but may later. To read it is a major step toward recognition.

⇒ Refer him to a Pregnancy Resource Center (PRC), and explain that an increasing number of them have resources for men. Call a PRC and discuss the specific case confidentially with a counselor, gleaning advice from them. Encourage the PRC to begin support groups for men, if it has not already.

⇒ PRCs have long offered Bible-study-based, weekly support for post-abortive women. "About five years ago, a few started providing groups for men," Reid says. "It's pretty new." He estimates that of approximately 2,500 PRCs in the United States, only about 50 have a formal program for men.

"More centers now are saying, 'We haven't done that in the past, but there's a valid need and we're trying to figure out how to get the resources and start,'" Reid says. "Still some are saying, 'There may be a need, but we've got our hands full with women.'"

The results are worth the effort to seek out hurting men and provide help. Van Hoff is proof. He leads a small group called HEART (Healing and Encouragement Through Abortion-Related Trauma) through the PRCs in Portland, Oregon.

"I believe I had asked God's forgiveness, but I had never forgiven myself," says Van Hoff, who is willing to travel across the country in support of HEART groups. "What I found through this ministry was a way to safely transition from the consequences of the abortion to the peace of Christ. I began to understand the Father's heart, how He loved me so deeply and intently, and it enabled me to open up in relationships with my children and family in a way that I was having a hard time doing."

Part of Van Hoff's healing process involved writing a letter of apology and forgiveness to the woman who carried

his baby, and giving the baby a name and memorial place. Upon making the decision to do those things, God spoke with clarity and power as only He can. "Almost 30 years [after the abortion], she called me on the phone, the same night I was writing her a letter, to ask if it would be OK with my wife if she sent me a similar letter," Van Hoff says, wonder and amazement still evident in his voice. "I told her I'd like to give the baby a name and asked her if she had thought about that. She said she had. She said she knew it was a boy and that she had been thinking of 'Joshua.'"

"That's the same name I wanted," says Van Hoff.

"What happened says to me that God is so personal, that He cares about every detail of my life, that He's a God of details and relationships. He answers the prayer to heal relationships," Van Hoff says.

"It's almost inexpressible to be able to bring some finality to it. For so long there was so much rejection that it had actually happened. But now I see how God forgave David for his relationship with Bathsheba, and if He can love and forgive them and change their lives, He can love and forgive and change mine."

If you would like more information on the HEART program in the Portland, OR area, call the confidential phone line, 22-HEART. For other programs nationwide, contact your local PRC or CareNet at 703-478-5661.

(Victor Lee is a Christian journalist and Minister of Single Adults at First Baptist Concord in Knoxville, TN. This article is from the June 2002 issue of HomeLife Magazine, ©Copyright 2002, LifeWay Press. Used by permission. For information about HomeLife Magazine, visit www.lifewayonline.com/mags/.)



A. W. Tozer on Godward Living . . .

Longing for God

As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?—Psalm 42:1-2

O God, I have tasted Thy goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need of further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. O God, the Triune God, I want to want Thee; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made more thirsty still. Show me Thy glory, I pray Thee, that so I may know Thee indeed. Begin in mercy a new work of love within me. Say to my soul, “Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.” Then give me grace to rise and follow Thee up from this misty lowland where I have wandered so long. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

The Pursuit of God, 20.

The Habit of Holy Thought

What we think about when we are free to think about what we will—that is what we are or will soon become....

Anyone who wishes to check on his true spiritual condition may do so by noting what his voluntary thoughts have been over the last hours or days. What has he thought about when free to think of what he pleased? Toward what has his inner heart turned when it was free to turn where it would? When the bird of thought was let go did it fly out like the raven to settle upon floating carcasses or did it like the dove circle and return again to the ark of God? Such a test is easy to run, and if we are honest with ourselves we can discover not only what we are but what we are going to become. We’ll soon be the sum of our voluntary thoughts....

The best way to control our thoughts is to offer the mind to God in complete surrender. The Holy Spirit will accept it and take control of it immediately. Then it will be relatively easy to think on spiritual things, especially if we train our thought by long periods of daily prayer. Long practice in the art of mental prayer (that is, talking to God inwardly as we work or travel) will help to form the habit of holy thought.

Born After Midnight, 44, 46-47.

The Need for Solitude

Modern civilization is so complex as to make the devotional life all but impossible. It wears us out by multiplying distractions and beats us down by destroying our solitude, where otherwise we might drink and renew our strength before going out to face the world again.

“The thoughtful soul to solitude retires,” said the poet of other and quieter times; but where is the solitude to which we can retire today? Science, which has provided men with certain material comforts, has robbed them of their souls by surrounding them with a world hostile to their existence. “Commune with your own heart upon your bed and be still” is a wise and healing counsel, but how can it be followed in this day of the newspaper, the telephone, the radio and the television? These modern playthings, like pet tiger cubs, have grown so large and dangerous that they threaten to devour us all. What was intended to be a blessing has become a positive curse. No spot is now safe from the world’s intrusion.

Of God and Men, 125.

Seeking Approval

I cannot believe in the spirituality of any Christian man who keeps an eye open for the approval of others, whoever they may be. The man after God’s own heart must be dead to the opinion of his friends as well as his enemies. He must be as willing to cross important persons as obscure ones. He must be ready to rebuke his superior as quickly as those who may be beneath him on the ecclesiastical ladder. To reprove one man in order to gain the favor of another is no evidence of moral courage. It is done in the world all the time.

We’ll never be where we should be in our spiritual lives until we are so devoted to Christ that we ask no other approbation than His smile. When we are wholly lost in Him the frantic effort to please men will come to an end. The circle of persons we struggle to please will be narrowed to One. Then we will know true freedom, but not a moment before.

The Price of Neglect, 141.

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