



Eternal Perspectives

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

Spring 2007

Good News: God Forgives by Randy Alcorn



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The parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:21-35) teaches us two things about sin. First, it is beyond our capacity to repay, and second, it is greater than any offense we have suffered—or could suffer—at the hands of others. Without really seeing ourselves as impoverished sinners, we cannot appreciate God’s grace and cannot truly forgive others as we should.

The forgiveness of God is a prominent theme throughout Scripture, one that should invoke from us expressions of wonder and praise. Here is a passage from the Old Testament, one of many throughout the Bible.

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust (Psalm 103:8-14).

What is the bottom line of God’s forgiveness? He has seen me at my worst and still loves me; because He knows everything I’ve ever thought or done, there are no skeletons in my closet; His love for me cannot be earned and therefore cannot be lost.

Christ not only removes my condemnation and considers me innocent, he declares me righteous. I am as acceptable—yes, commendable—to the Father as Christ himself (2 Corinthians 5:21). God is totally and irreversibly satisfied with me because He is totally and irreversibly satisfied with Christ’s work on my behalf (1 John 2:2, 4:10).

Paul gave the Corinthians this bad news:

Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual

offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

This is a matter of transformed identity—in Christ, we are no longer who we used to be. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17). I am Christ’s bride, clothed in “fine linen, bright and clean” (Revelation 19:7-8).

Forgiving Others

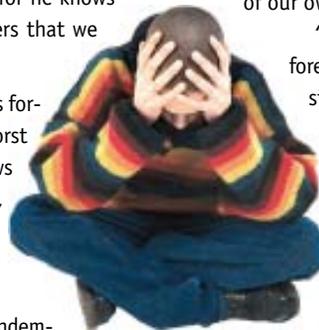
If we have admitted, confessed, and repented of our sin, we have been forgiven by God whether or not we feel like it. But there is yet another dimension and evidence of forgiveness. If we have experienced God’s forgiveness, it will be shown in our forgiveness of others. In the parable of the unmerciful servant, Jesus teaches that forgiving others is part of our own forgiveness (Matthew 18:21-35).

“You must forgive to be forgiven” is a foreign concept to many believers. Strange, since it is clearly assumed in the most often repeated passage in Scripture, the Lord’s Prayer: “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). In fact, this is apparently the central emphasis of the prayer for it is the only aspect Christ elaborates on in the following verses:

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins (Matthew 6:14-15).

“But how can I forgive my wife for committing adultery?”

Forgiveness is a matter of choice, not feelings. Yes, we may remember the facts, but we must not



allow ourselves to dwell on them. The offense must be buried in the past and not exhumed in the present. It is possible to “forgive and forget” if we truly do forgive. But we will never forget what we choose to brood over, and if we brood over it, we demonstrate we have not truly forgiven.

When I was a boy, I had a golden retriever named Champ. Whenever we gave him a bone, he’d chew it till it was bare, then take off to bury it. But once it was buried, he would never let it lie. Every day, sometimes several times a day, he would make his rounds, going to every buried bone—dozens of them—and digging them up to chew on some more. Then he’d bury them again, only to repeat the process till the day he died.

Unlike my dog, God buries our sins and lets them lie; He never digs them up. Like my dog,

however, sometimes we dig up old sins, chew on them, confess them again, and bury them—but in a shallow grave whose location we memorize for convenient access. We do this not only to ourselves but others. We piously say, “I forgive you,” but dig up old sins to chew on at our pity parties, wave in front of others as gossip, or use as weapons of revenge or tools to barter and manipulate. In doing so, we become obsessed with sin instead of the Savior. We give more credit to its power than to His.

Once confessed, sins should be forgotten. We should choose to dwell on them no longer.

Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13-14).

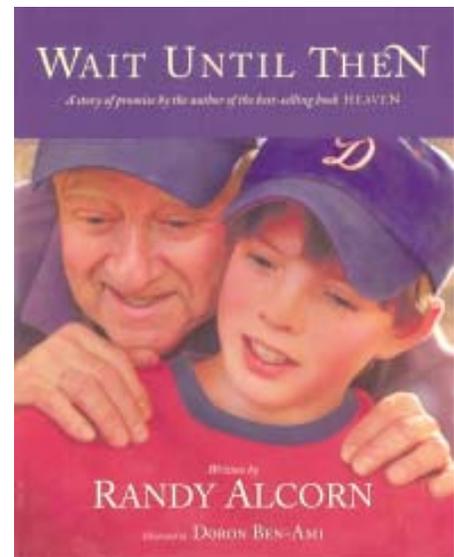


Now Available!

Nathan loved baseball. He watched it on TV...went to games...read books about it...collected baseball cards. And he talked and dreamed with his grandfather about running the bases. Gramps always told him, “I’m pretty sure our best baseball is still ahead of us.” Nathan loved that idea.

Let Randy Alcorn help your child understand what the Bible says about Heaven and the New Earth yet to come—and why they’re worth the wait.

(Wait Until Then may be purchased at your local bookstore or by contacting EPM at 503-668-5200 or www.epm.org.)



Amazing Grace in the Life of William Wilberforce

By John Piper

His Early Life

Wilberforce was born August 24, 1759, in Hull, England. His father died just before Wilberforce turned nine years old. He was sent to live with his uncle and aunt, William and Hannah, where he came under evangelical influences. His mother was more high church and was concerned her son was “turning Methodist.” So she took him out of the boarding school where they had sent him and put him in another. He had admired George Whitefield, John Wesley, and John Newton as a child. But soon he left all the influence of the evangelicals behind. At his new school, he said later, “I did nothing at all.” That lifestyle continued through his years in St. John’s College at Cambridge. He was able to live off his parents’ wealth and get by with little work. He lost any interest in biblical religion and loved circulating among the social elite.

He became friends with his contemporary William Pitt, who in just a few years, at the age of twenty-four in 1783, became the Prime Minister of England. On a lark, Wilberforce stood for the seat in the House of Commons for his hometown of Hull in 1780 when he was twenty-one. He spent £8,000 on the election. The money and his incredible gift for speaking triumphed over both his opponents. Pitt said Wilberforce possessed “the greatest natural eloquence of all the men I ever knew.”

Thus began a forty-five year investment in the politics of England. He began it as a late-night, party-loving, upper-class unbeliever. He was single and would stay that way happily until he was thirty-seven years old. Then he met Barbara on April 15, 1797. He fell immediately in love. Within eight days he proposed to her, and on May 30 they were married—about six weeks after they met—and stayed married until William died thirty-six years later. In the first eight years of their marriage they had four sons and two daughters. We will come back to William as a family man, because it sheds light on his character and how he endured the political battles of the day.

“The Great Change”: The Story of His Conversion

I have skipped over the most important thing—his conversion to a deep, Christian, evangelical faith. It is a great story of the providence of God pursuing a person through seemingly casual choices. On the long holidays when Parliament was not in session,

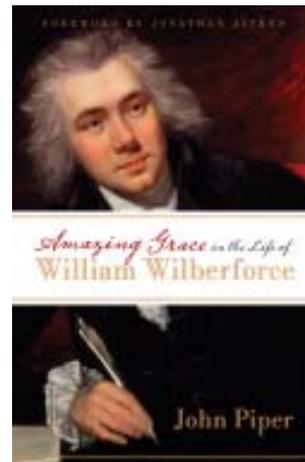
Wilberforce would sometimes travel with friends or family. In the winter of 1784 when he was twenty-five, on an impulse he invited Isaac Milner, his former schoolmaster and friend from grammar school, who was now a tutor in Queens College, Cambridge, to go with him and his mother and sister to the French Riviera. To his amazement Milner turned out to be a convinced Christian without any of the stereotypes that Wilberforce had built up against evangelicals. They talked for hours about the Christian faith.

In another seemingly accidental turn, Wilberforce saw lying in the house where they were staying a copy of Philip Doddridge’s *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* (1745). He asked Milner about it, and Milner said that it was “one of the best books ever written” and suggested they take it along and read it on the way home. Wilberforce later ascribes to this book a huge influence on his conversion. When he arrived home in February 1785 he “had reached intellectual assent to the biblical view of man, God and Christ.” But he would not yet have claimed what he later described as true Christianity. It was all intellectual. He pushed it to the back of his mind and went on with political and social life.

That summer Wilberforce traveled again with Milner, and they discussed the Greek New Testament for hours. Slowly his “intellectual assent became profound conviction.” One of the first manifestations of what he called “the great change”—the conversion—was the contempt he felt for his wealth and the luxury he lived in, especially on these trips between Parliamentary sessions. Seeds were sown almost immediately at the beginning of his Christian life, it seems, of the later passion to help the poor and to turn all his inherited wealth and his naturally high station into a means of blessing the oppressed.

“Highly Dangerous Possessions”

Simplicity and generosity were the mark of his life. Much later, after he was married, he wrote, “By careful management, I should be able to give at least one-quarter of my income to the poor.” His sons reported that before he married he was giving away well over a fourth of his income, one year actually giving away £3,000 more than he made. He wrote that riches were, “considering them as in themselves, acceptable, but, from the infirmity of [our] nature, as highly dangerous



Seeds were sown almost immediately... to help the poor and to turn all his inherited wealth and his naturally high station into a means of blessing the oppressed.



Ioan Gruffud portraying Wilberforce in *Amazing Grace*

March 2007 marks the 200th anniversary of the slave trade abolition in Britain.



possessions; and [we are to value] them chiefly not as instruments of luxury or splendor, but as affording the means of honoring [our] heavenly Benefactor, and lessening the miseries of mankind." This was the way his mind worked: Everything in politics was for the alleviation of misery and the spread of happiness.

The Regret That Leads to Life

By October he was bemoaning the "shapeless idleness" of his past. He was thinking particularly of his time at Cambridge—"the most valuable years of life wasted, and opportunities lost, which can never be recovered." He had squandered his early years in Parliament as well: "The first years I was in Parliament I did nothing—nothing that is to any purpose. My own distinction was my darling object." He was so ashamed of his prior life that he wrote with apparent overstatement, "I was filled with sorrow. I am sure that no human creature could suffer more than I did for some months. It seems indeed it quite affected my reason." He was tormented about what his new Christianity meant for his public life. William Pitt tried to talk him out of becoming an evangelical and argued that this change would "render your talents useless both to yourself and mankind."

Ten Thousand Doubts and Good Counsel

To resolve the anguish he felt over what to do with his life as a Christian, he resolved to risk seeing John Newton on December 7, 1785—a risk because Newton was an evangelical and not admired or esteemed by Wilberforce's colleagues in Parliament. He wrote to Newton on December 2:

I wish to have some serious conversation with you....I have had ten thousand doubts within myself, whether or not I should discover myself to you; but every argument against it has its foundation in pride. I am sure you will hold yourself bound to let no one living know of this application, or of my visit, till I release you from the obligation....PS: Remember that I must

be secret, and that the gallery of the House is now so universally attended, that the face of a member of parliament is pretty well known.

It was a historically significant visit. Not only did Newton give encouragement to Wilberforce's faith, but he also urged him not to cut himself off from public life. Wilberforce wrote about the visit:

After walking about the Square once or twice before I could persuade myself, I called upon old Newton—was much affected in conversing with him—something very pleasing and unaffected in him. He told me he always had hopes and confidence that God would sometime bring me to Him. . . . When I came away I found my mind in a calm, tranquil state, more humbled, and looking more devoutly up to God.

Wilberforce was relieved that the sixty-year-old Newton urged him not to cut himself off from public life. Newton wrote to Wilberforce two years later: "It is hoped and believed that the Lord has raised you up for the good of His church and for the good of the nation." When one thinks what hung in the balance in that moment of counsel, one marvels at the magnitude of some small occasions in view of what Wilberforce would accomplish for the cause of abolition. The battle and uncertainties lasted on into the



new year, but finally a more settled serenity came over him, and on Easter Day 1786, the politician for Yorkshire took to the fields to pray and give thanks, as he said in a letter to his sister Sally, "amidst the general chorus with which all nature seems on such a morning to be swelling the song of praise and thanksgiving." It was, he said almost ten years later, as if "to have awakened...from a dream, to have recovered, as it were, the use of my reason after a delirium." With this change came a whole new regimen for the use of his months of recess from Parliament. Beginning not long after his conversion and lasting until he was married eleven years later, he would now spend his days studying "about nine or ten hours a day," typically "breakfasting alone, taking walks alone, dining with the host family and other guests but not joining them in the evening until he came down about three-quarters of an hour before bedtime for what supper I wanted." "The Bible became his best-loved book and he learned stretches by heart." He was setting out to recover a lot of ground lost to laziness in college.

Taken from John Piper's book Amazing Grace in the Life of William Wilberforce (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books © 2007), pp. 27-33. Used by permission from Crossway Books.

Recommended Movies . . .

(These may no longer be showing in theaters, but are highly recommended as rentals.)

Amazing Grace:

Amazing Grace, based on the life of antislavery pioneer William Wilberforce, who, as a member of Parliament, navigated the world of 18th Century back room politics to end the slave trade in the British Empire. Albert Finney plays John Newton, a confidante of Wilberforce who inspires him to pursue a life of service to humanity. Benedict Cumberbatch is William Pitt the Younger, England's youngest ever Prime Minister at the age of 24, who encourages his friend Wilberforce to take up the fight to outlaw slavery and supports him in his struggles in Parliament.

Elected to the House of Commons at the age of 21, and on his way to a successful political career, Wilberforce, over the course of two decades, took on the English establishment and persuaded those in power to end the inhumane trade of slavery.

Romola Garai plays Barbara Spooner, a beautiful and headstrong young woman who shares Wilberforce's passion for reform, and who becomes his wife after a whirlwind courtship. Youssou N'Dour is Olaudah Equiano. Born in Africa and sent as a slave to the Colonies, Equiano bought his freedom and made his home in London, where he wrote a bestselling account of his life and became a leading figure in the fight to end the slavery of his fellow countrymen.



The Last Sin Eater:

In 1850's Appalachia, 10-year-old Cadi feels responsible for her little sister's death, so she searches out the one man she feels can take away her sin—The Sin Eater. But in her quest for redemption, Cadi uncovers a dark secret that threatens to divide her family and community. Ultimately, Cadi shows them the truth in Jesus, reminding us that the human condition is beyond human remedy: only Christ provides for the absolution of sin.

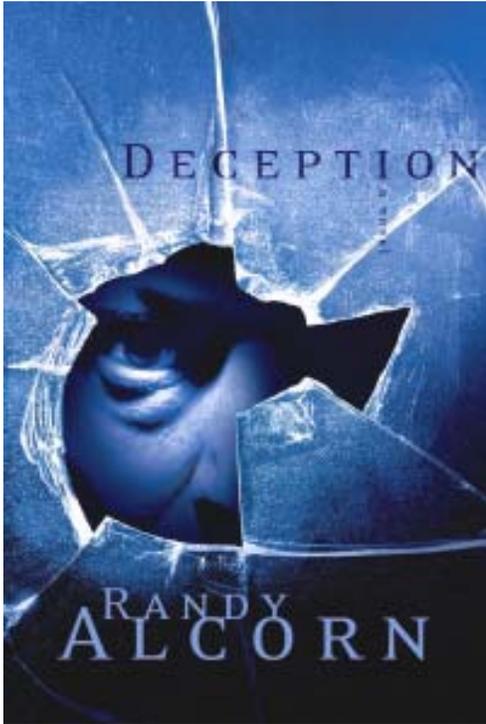
This movie is based on Francine River's book, The Last Sin Eater.

Quotable Quotes

I have little fear that any nation or combination of nations could bring down the United States and Canada by military action from without. But this I do fear—we sin and sin and do nothing about it. There is so little sense of the need of repentance—so little burden for the will of God to be wrought in our national life. I fear that the voice of blood will become so eloquent that God Almighty will have no choice but to speak the word that will bring us down.
— A. W. Tozer, *Echoes from Eden*, 44

“Holiness is the habit of being of one mind with God, according as we find His mind described in Scripture. It is the habit of agreeing in God's judgment—hating what He hates, loving what He loves—and measuring everything in this world by the standard of His Word.”
— J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*

Courage is not simply one of the virtues but the form of every virtue at the testing point, which means at the point of highest reality.
— C. S. Lewis



Deception
Available April 17

Deception: **What's the Reader's Take-Away?** by Randy Alcorn

Written in the first person detective story style, *Deception* is a murder mystery featuring Ollie Chandler, a cynical but lovable homicide detective.

While investigating the murder of a college professor, Ollie finds evidence pointing to a horrific conclusion: the murderer is a police detective. Ollie has nagging doubts not only about his colleagues, but himself, since he can't account for where he was the night of the murder.

Joined by journalists Jake Woods and Clarence Abernathy, central characters in my novels *Deadline* and *Dominion*, Ollie is determined to follow the evidence wherever it leads. In the process, he discovers a truth: "Things are not as they appear."

What will readers take away from *Deception*? I hope Christian readers will gain a better understanding of and compassion for the non-believer's mindset, including their skepticism toward us believers.

They'll gain compassion for the grieving and consider better ways to touch them. They'll sympathize more with the reasons that drive likeable people to addictions. And they'll find their faith strengthened as they see the story's events reinforce God's providence, justice and grace.

Non-believing readers may need to rethink their view of all Christians as hypocrites whose blind faith leaves them ignorant, insensitive and judgmental.

All readers will be confronted with the reality that there's an invisible world of realities that affect us every day. They'll see that life promises what it can't deliver, and delivers what most of us don't expect.

I hope readers will gain a new perspective on the causes of suffering and the hidden purposes of pain.

Some readers will find reasons to rethink their views on the existence of truth and moral absolutes.

Deception is a spin-off of the first two novels, *Deadline* and *Dominion*.

They'll also face a variety of prejudices and be encouraged to judge individuals on their own merits, not on the basis of their group label. (Examples: all journalists are unscrupulous liberals, all police officers are power-hungry)

In *Deception*, Heaven and Hell are portrayed as real places. Readers will see the vitality and richness of relationships in Heaven, and the stark loneliness of Hell, a place where those who want nothing to do with God in this life get what they thought they wanted...but find it terrifying.

Ollie Chandler's stuck in the middle of two overlapping mysteries. The first is why the professor was killed. The second is the mystery of God, and his hidden purposes, which overshadows all lesser mysteries. If God exists, why does He allow suffering and injustice? How can He deserve our faith and trust? And if God doesn't exist, why are people so angry at Him?

Perhaps the most memorable take-away of *Deception* is Ollie Chandler himself, and his closest friend, Mulch, his bull mastiff. Ollie's outwardly jovial and witty, but he struggles inwardly with weighty family losses. I hope readers will feel his pain, as he misses his deceased wife and two alienated daughters, and wrestles with ghosts from his past.

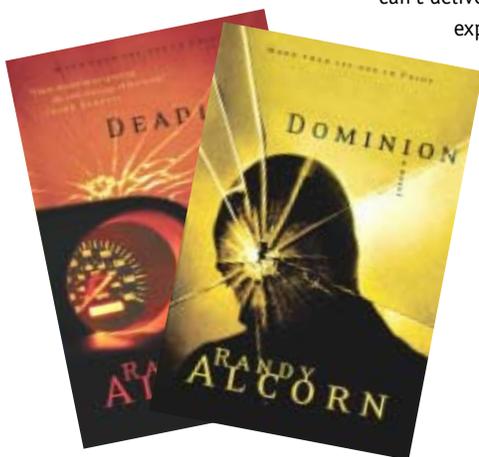
Deception is also a story of friendship, with Jake Woods and Clarence Abernathy, imperfect but loyal, standing beside Ollie.

I hope readers will see that Ollie's motto "Examine the evidence, and follow wherever it leads" should apply to much more than murder mysteries.

Deception was a fun novel to write, and I hope it's fun to read. On the one hand it's serious stuff, involving several murders, grief, loneliness, addiction, anger, and broken relationships. Ollie questions God, and shakes his fist at Him. On the other hand, the book is very light hearted. I hope readers will find themselves repeatedly smiling at Ollie's endearing qualities and smart-aleck comments.

Deception shows that "church people" sometimes paint a rosy picture of life, glossing over the hurts, and offering shallow sentiment to suffering people. Ollie Chandler won't buy it, and won't let the reader buy it either. The God of the Bible speaks to sickness, loss, and pain, and I hope readers will sense in the story the presence of a loving and patient God who offers help and hope to all who ask, seek, and knock.

Deception doesn't tie everything neatly together. But if in the end Ollie Chandler is left feeling hope, hurting readers might feel the same.



Living in Burundi, Africa by Dan Brose

Burundi is a country in central Africa with good land, sufficient rain, hard-working people, and many advantages over other African countries. However, war and conflict have pushed this country back by decades. We are thankful that the war is nearly at an end, but the work required to rebuild the country is monumental. The table below shows the tragic results of war in this small country the size of Maryland. The poverty rate has **doubled**, military expenditures increased **7-fold** as compared to spending on health and education, and the number of refugees and displaced people increased **10-fold**. Many people are returning to their homes as peace spreads throughout the country, but it will take years to rebuild the country to where it used to be. Join us in praying for continued peace and security in this beautiful part of Africa.

Indicator	Early 1990s	Circa 2001
GDP per capita	\$200	\$100
Poverty rate headcount	34%	68%
Health & Education	5.7% of GDP	4.6% of GDP
Military expenditure as percentage of health & education	33%	211%
Exports	\$79 m.	\$31 m.
Annual aid	\$300 m.	\$100 m.
Refugees/IDPs	<100,000	> one million
Primary school enrollment rate	54%	48%

Selected Economic and Social Indicators – Burundi before and after the war

Living in Africa, we are often struck by the contrast between the modern and the traditional ways of doing things. Many times we who come from wealthy nations assume that it is best for our African brothers and sisters to adopt the modern ways of doing things. But how easy would it be for this woman to purchase an animal or wheeled vehicle to carry her log? It might require that she save two years of her earnings. She would likely rather pay for her children to go to school, for seeds and tools to use in her field, or for a small stand in the market to earn a living. We choose to encourage her in her choices of feeding and educating her children and family, and hopefully her children will be able to purchase a mule or wheeled cart for her to use in her old age.

It is interesting how many different things we see women carrying on their heads here in central Africa—e.g., banana stalk, log, basket, pot, hoe, umbrella, books, firewood, beans. And often the



woman is also carrying a child on her back and maybe something in her hands. I am often reminded of the description of a Godly woman in Proverbs 31, especially this part:

- ¹⁷ She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks.*
- ¹⁸ She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night.*
- ¹⁹ In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers.*
- ²⁰ She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy.*
- ²⁵ She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come.*
- ²⁶ She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue.*



World Relief's Mission in Burundi

Thirteen years of civil war has uprooted and scattered 530,000 Burundians. Burundi ranks 169th on the Human Development Index of 177 ranked countries. One in five of Burundi's children die before they reach the age of 5. And adult life expectancy is just 51 years.

Yet against this backdrop of despair, Christians and indigenous churches equipped by World Relief are playing a pivotal role in Burundi's recovery.

Launched in 2004, World Relief Burundi's community rehabilitation program focuses on rebuilding lives and strengthening communities in the war-torn Nyanza Lac region. This project has built more than 1,100 homes, distributed food and seeds to 4,400 vulnerable households, and distributed farming equipment to 4,000 families. Since 2004, we have helped 21,000 people.

Our microfinance program, Turame, extends business loans to 3,500 individuals in Gitega and Bujumbura provinces. It was judged by the United Nations to be the best microfinance operation in the country. We are working to integrate peace-building initiatives and AIDS education into the program.

World Relief's train-the-trainer approach has empowered nearly 2,000 pastors, women and youth leaders to educate their congregations about HIV/AIDS, while fostering the biblical values of premarital abstinence, marital fidelity, and compassionate care.

Dan Brose is the World Relief Regional Director, Great Lakes Region of Central Africa.



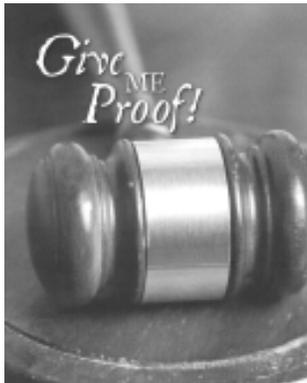
Please Note: Since this article was written, Burundi is now experiencing a famine due to plant disease and flooding of vital crops, causing two million people to be in need of immediate food assistance.

World Relief

7 East Baltimore St.
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443-451-1900 or
800-535-5433

Website: www.wr.org
Email: worldrelief@wr.org

If you wish to donate to World Relief through EPM, 100% of designated contributions go directly to the ministry noted.



“I challenge anyone,” he said, “to present tangible proof supporting any of the claims of the Bible!”

Faith and Evidence by Daniel R. Lockwood

Late one autumn, I drove through Seattle, Washington, on my way to a men’s retreat. I happened to pick up a local radio talk show host who pontificated on organized religion, ridiculing the narrow-minded and uneducated bigots that would dare to embrace Christianity.

“Christianity is just a collection of ancient pagan myths that the early church pilfered,” he exclaimed. “There is no evidence any of these miracles really happened. It’s just wishful thinking by people who need a psychological crutch to get through their painful, meaningless lives.”

Then he threw down the gauntlet. “I challenge anyone,” he said, “to present tangible proof supporting any of the claims of the Bible!”

Within minutes, a sincere young man came on the line. Nervously, he began to present some of the traditional evidences evangelicals offer for the reliability of Scripture, the empty tomb, and the deity of Christ. These were evidences I had read in college, been taught in seminary, and used myself with my students at Multnomah Bible College.

Soon the radio host interrupted him. “This isn’t evidence,” he said with a sneer in his voice. “These are just regurgitated old tales from a dead tradition that should have been buried long ago. What I want,” he almost screamed over the air waves, “is proof. Give me proof!”

Levels of Proof

As I drove out of radio range, I reflected that the chasm between the prickly host and the brave caller was precisely over what constitutes proof. Many do not understand that we all use at least three levels of proof.

Scientific proof. One important level of proof involves evidence that is verified through repeatable testing in the controlled conditions of a laboratory. It is absolutely essential for verification of scientific theorems, because natural phenomena should, if correctly observed and interpreted, always operate according to predictable laws. It is only through controlled testing that the theorems and laws explaining these phenomena can be confirmed.

Legal proof. A second valid level of proof is the kind of proof demanded in the courtroom. Evidence must be “beyond a reasonable doubt” (in criminal cases) or based on a “preponderance of evidence” (in civil cases). Attaining scientific levels of proof is often impossible in legal situations where eyewitness testimony, circumstantial evidence, and determination of motive usually are impossible to repeat and verify with laboratory precision.

Historical proof. Historians must use an “authenticity of the witnesses” approach, seeking to reconstruct historical events by evaluating available materials. They cannot re-enact the battle of Waterloo, for example, in a laboratory. Nor can they personally interview Attila the Hun! Rather, they are limited by the kinds of evidences available in ancient documents, stone inscriptions, and archeological artifacts. While scientific techniques can often be used to date and authenticate these artifacts, it is the reliability of ancient writings and their authors that anchor the historiographical enterprise.

This clarifies the radio host’s, “Give me proof!” demand, doesn’t it? He required evidence for the claims of Christianity at a scientific level of precision, rejecting anything less as unacceptable. But this unrealistic standard fails on both philosophic and practical grounds.

Philosophically, scientific proof excludes out of hand certain events—like miracles—because they cannot, by their very nature, be repeated at will. But to arbitrarily eliminate occurrences *a priori* that have historical or eyewitness support just because a scientist cannot duplicate them is unfair.

Practically, each day millions of people (including the talk-show host!) make thousands of choices based on evidence that would never pass scientific

Scientific Proof

Evidence that is verified through repeatable testing in the controlled conditions of a laboratory

muster. All of us accept the preponderance of evidence and the authenticity of witnesses in living our lives. To demand scientific scrutiny for all decisions of life would lead to national neurosis!

I can understand why religious skeptics demand such a level of proof from Christians. Few struggle with history’s reconstruction of Julius Caesar because Caesar makes no demand on your life. Jesus Christ, however, is another matter! If the historical records about Jesus’ deeds and claims are true, namely that He is indeed God the Son, God’s only means for redemption, then the unbeliever has a choice to make. Either accept Jesus as God’s Messiah and Savior, or reject Him with the dire, eternal consequences of a Christless eternity. If someone does not wish to accept Christ’s Lordship, one must not only reject the validity of Jesus’ claims but also the preponderance of the reliable, historical evidence that more than

validate the claims of Jesus. A popular strategy for this is the one implied by the talk-show host: insist that the claims of Christ must meet a scientific standard of proof, despite the inconsistency of such an approach.

Many years ago, the British evangelical scholar, F. F. Bruce, observed these efforts by critics. "It is not the historians who question the reliability of the Scriptures' record about Jesus," he wrote in an article in *Christianity Today*, "it's the theologians!"

Faith and Evidence

A discussion of "the evidences of faith" strikes some—even some evangelicals—as strange. "The eye of faith," it is said, "neither sees nor seeks tangible evidence." Jesus' rebuke of Thomas—the doubting disciple demanding to touch Jesus' wounds—is sometimes raised as proof that believers should not seek confirming evidence. "Because you have seen Me, have you believed," Jesus asks Thomas. "Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" (John 10:28). These words, some claim, are proof positive that faith rejects tangible proof.

Historical Proof

Historians must use an "authenticity of the witnesses" approach, seeking to reconstruct historical events by evaluating available materials.

Nothing could be further from the truth. First, Jesus Himself offers tangible, physical evidence to the disciples when the Doubting Didymus is absent. In inviting them to see, to touch, and to watch Him eat, Jesus offers three tangible proofs of His physical, bodily resurrection (Luke 24:39-43).

Second, the Apostle Paul gives resurrection evidence in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. There, he enumerates

the number of appearances (at least six) and the vast number of eye-witnesses (at least 527!) that looked upon that face of the resurrected Jesus.

Finally, John's entire Gospel deals in evidence. John writes to persuade that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:31). He presents the case for Christ's divine Sonship through all kinds of evidence: His seven miraculous "signs," the eyewitness testimony of contemporaries, the testimony of Scripture, Jesus' own word and works, and, ultimately, the audible voice of God Himself (12:28). Why would Jesus discredit a belief grounded in evidence when His entire ministry is a presentation of compelling evidence?

Why, then, does Jesus rebuke Thomas? Not because Thomas wanted evidence, but because *he refused to believe the evidence that was already there!* Thomas had rejected the testimony of Mary, the women, Peter, and the rest of the apostles. Like the Seattle talk-show host, he insisted on laboratory proof, demanding a level of scientific evidence, when legal or historical testimony was abundant.

And why would Jesus be concerned about this? Because, friends, He is concerned about you and me. In this moving beatitude, Jesus directly blesses us—people who cannot physically examine the resurrected Jesus. He loves each one of us who believes in Him on the available evidence that God so generously provides.

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Legal Proof

Evidence must be "beyond a reasonable doubt" or based on a "preponderance of evidence."

Few struggle with history's reconstruction of Julius Caesar because Caesar makes no demand on your life. Jesus Christ, however, is another matter!

What Kind of Fool Are You? By Richard Mayhue

Scripture defines five kinds of fools and asserts that every person is a fool of some kind.

First Fool (Ps. 14:1; 53:1). This fool announces, "There is no God," and blatantly denies the existence of God.

Second Fool (1 Cor. 1:18). This fool rejects the cross of Christ.

Third Fool (Matt. 7:24-27). This fool glibly affirms the existence of God and the reality of the cross, but bases his salvation on something other than Christ's substitutionary death.

Fourth Fool (Lk. 24:25). This fool fails to believe all of God's Word.

Fifth Fool (1 Cor. 4:10). This fool lives life wholeheartedly for Christ's sake. Be a fool for Christ's sake and God's wisdom will manifest itself in your life. This kind of fool honors and glorifies God.

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Question and Answer

By Randy Alcorn

What are some criteria to use for choosing a Christian college or a secular university? Answer by Randy Alcorn

Judge everything you hear by the Word of God, like the Bereans in Acts 17:11.

When our daughters were considering a college, we told them, “Judge everything you hear by the Word of God, like the Bereans in Acts 17:11.” There will be disagreements with faculty and students, of course, but that’s healthy as long as people are appealing to a common authority, God’s Word. But when they aren’t, that’s where the trouble begins. I would far rather send my kids—or go myself—to a school that has certain doctrines I don’t embrace but that believes God’s Word, than to one I cannot trust.

I have spoken at a fair number of Christian liberal arts colleges and have been concerned with the drift away from belief in God’s Word, particularly in the biology, psychology and sociology departments, but often even in the Bible departments. Unbelief spreads and expands like yeast. What really strikes me is the false advertising—the doctrinal statements are still very good, but they don’t reflect the actual beliefs and teachings of many of the professors. As one academic vice-president of a Christian liberal arts college told me (when I was speaking there for the week), “If Christian parents really knew what their kids are being taught here, they’d pull them out of school tomorrow.” Now, you’ll never see that quote in a brochure!

Why do Christian schools hire such teachers? Because they are slavishly committed to maintaining accreditation, no matter what. A faculty opening in the sociology department? Five people apply and only one with a Ph.D. and published papers or books? Hire him. Not a Christian? Well, that’s okay, he’s a good educator. Cumulatively, over decades, you can see where this will lead.

I’m not a hard-core separatist fundamentalist (though I certainly believe in the fundamentals). I’m comfortable with a broad range of evangelicals, Calvinist and Arminian, charismatic, non-charismatic and anti-charismatic. What alarms me is not a

healthy diversity of viewpoints—I’m all for that. What alarms me is the abandonment of the doctrines and standards of Scripture and the conformity to the current drift of society. This applies to homosexuality, feminism, and a host of other things.

I’d recommend asking some questions of former and present students. Unless you find an unusually forthright person, I wouldn’t trust the answers you get from the schools PR department—their job is to make the school sound wonderful, and if they pick up your concerns about doctrine, they’ll often reassure you the school is rock solid, even though it’s not. Ask juniors and seniors who are committed to the authority of the scriptures and are mature believers what they have seen in the classrooms. Ask around and find a committed biblically solid Christian prof and ask him what’s really believed and taught.

I suggest you visit the campus, go to some different classes and ask of yourself or others:

- What is the atmosphere in the classrooms?
- Are the professors committed to the infallible Word of God?
- Is there a vibrant spiritual life among students and faculty? Are students and faculty involved in local churches?

Many students at Christian colleges drift from church while in school, and many of those never regain a solid commitment to the church. It’s vital for a school to be committed to the importance of faculty and student involvement in the local church and to make it a requirement.

If your child is going to a secular college or a Christian college that doesn’t adhere to the authority of the Scriptures, is he/she mature enough to face the worldly temptations as well as the intellectual challenges to his faith?

We would never send out missionaries who are insufficiently trained and prepared to deal with the false religions and temptations of another culture. OK, I’m going to say it: I think no young person should be sent to a secular college—or for that matter many “Christian” colleges—unless he is exceptionally knowledgeable of the Scriptures, is leading a strong Christian life, knows how to resist peer pressure and resist temptation to sex and drugs. (Many Christian



kids go off to college and by the second term lose their virginity. Premarital sex is normal on most campuses, even some Christian campuses.)

If he is not prepared to question his professors and if he may give in to their skepticism and attacks on the Christian faith, he does not belong there. If we want our children to lose their faith, there are less expensive ways to help them do that! (I'm being deliberately sarcastic to make an important point.)

A friend whose son attended a secular university said, "In college you're either a Christian or you're not. It's very black and white, no middle ground. The Christian group on campus was my family away from home." If your child goes to a secular college, I would first

check into the campus ministry (Campus Crusade, Navigators, InterVarsity, DiscipleMakers, etc.) and the strength of local churches. Unless they get hooked up in a discipleship and accountability context, they will almost certainly have their Christian beliefs undermined.

I highly recommend every parent read, and then discuss with their kids, J. Budziszewski's book *How to Stay Christian in College* and *University of Destruction: Your Game Plan for Spiritual Victory on Campus* by David Wheaton.



The secret of the easy yoke, then, is to learn from Christ how to live our total lives...

What Would Jesus Do...Or What DID Jesus Do?

By Dallas Willard

No one ever says, "If you want to be a great athlete, go vault eighteen feet, run the mile under four minutes," or "If you want to be a great musician, play the Beethoven violin concerto." Instead, we advise the young artist or athlete to enter a certain kind of overall life, one involving deep associations with qualified people as well as rigorously scheduled time, diet, and activity for the mind and body.

But what would we tell someone who aspired to live well in general? If we are wise, we would tell them to approach life with this same general strategy. So, if we wish to follow Christ—and to walk in the easy yoke with him—we will have to accept his overall way of life as our way of life totally. Then, and only then we may reasonably expect to know by experience how easy is the yoke and how light the burden.

Some decades ago there appeared a very successful Christian novel called *In His Steps*. The plot tells of a chain of tragic events that brings the minister of a prosperous church to realize how unlike Christ's life his own life had become. The minister then leads his congregation in a vow not to do anything without first asking themselves the question, "What would Jesus do in this case?" As the content of the book makes clear, the author took this vow to be the same thing as intending to follow Jesus—to walk precisely "in his steps." It is, of course, a novel, but even in real life we would count on significant changes in the lives of earnest Christians who took such a vow—just as it happens in that book.

But there is a flaw in this thinking. The book is entirely focused upon trying to do what Jesus supposedly would do in response to *specific choices*. In the book, there's no suggestion that

he ever did anything but make right choices from moment to moment. And more interestingly, there is no suggestion that his power to choose rightly was rooted in the kind of overall life he had adopted in order to maintain his inner balance and his connection with his Father. The book does not state that to follow in his steps is to adopt the total manner of life he did. So the idea conveyed is an absolutely fatal one—that to follow him simply means to try to behave as he did when he was "on the spot," under pressure or persecution or in the spotlight. There is no realization that what he did in such cases was, in a large and essential measure, the natural outflow of the life he lived when not on the spot.

Asking ourselves "What would Jesus do?" when suddenly in the face of an important situation simply is not an adequate discipline or preparation to enable one to live as he lived. It no doubt will do some good and is certainly better than nothing at all, but that act alone is not sufficient to see us boldly and confidently through a crisis, and we could easily find ourselves driven to despair over the powerless tension it will put us through.

The secret of the easy yoke, then, is to learn from Christ how to live our total lives, how to invest all our time and our energies of mind and body as he did. We must learn how to follow his preparations, the disciplines for life in God's rule that enabled him to receive his Father's constant and effective support while doing his will. We have to discover how to enter into his disciplines from where we stand today—and no doubt, how to extend and amplify them to suit our needy cases.

Excerpt from *The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard, HarperCollins, 1990, p. 8-9.



Waiting to Get Married? by Randy Alcorn

Note from Randy: *This article was written in 1981 and appeared in Moody Magazine. Some things have changed since then, but most of the principles still pertain.*

Those who say, "It's always wise to wait" may be surprised to learn it isn't.

"Should we get married?" Few questions deserve more careful attention. When dreamy-eyed recklessness yanks people into marriage, the end is often conflict, disillusionment, separation, and divorce, or at best, a second-rate marriage.

But suppose the decision to marry has been made, and it's the right one. Suppose both people are growing Christians, with compatible personality and goals, committed to God and each other. The question is, "When should we marry?"

Sadly, most young people, even Christians, tackle this decision by themselves. Contrary to many cultures and times, they don't consult their parents. Many parents feel obligated to keep their hands off and mouths shut. Distracted by their own busyness or afraid they'll be interfering with their children's lives, they reason, "The kids are old enough to decide for themselves." This applies to both who and when to marry.

Other parents don't hesitate to offer advice. Giving careful and thoughtful counsel, they support, encourage, and caution whenever necessary. Good for them!

But some Christian parents try to dominate their grown children's lives, unwilling to surrender their claim to them. Well-meaning, they have only one word in their vocabulary of marital advice: "Wait!"

I believe that once it's agreed the couple should marry—a choice that should be made with much thought and prayer and counsel—normally the wedding should take place as soon as possible. Only enough time should be allowed for scheduling and completing practical arrangements.

My experience in premarital counseling has reinforced this conviction. In helping couples answer the "when" question, I present seven factors they and their parents should weigh. Every one of these was part of my original article, and my observations the last twenty years have only confirmed them.

1. Maturity.

The decision to marry rests on the assumption that both partners have reached a certain level of maturity. Engagement should never be an experiment. A couple too immature to get engaged is too immature to get married.

Occasionally, however, a younger couple and the parents may discern it is God's will for them to be married, yet may see wisdom in waiting. This constructive interim can allow each person to develop further his/her own personality, social experiences, occupational skills, education, etc. Parental involvement and quality premarital counseling can be a helpful part of this process.

But a long wait is sometimes as disastrous as a blind plunge forward. Parents who want their children to postpone marriage until the couple is fully mature may find they'll never be ready.

2. Independence.

A married couple must be capable of establishing an independent family unit. Scripture requires that their identity be distinct from the families they grew up in (Gen. 2:24).

Ideally, both partners should develop a degree of independence prior to the wedding date. I normally recommend that both be out of high school at least one year before marrying. Often, it's helpful if at least part of that year is spent away from home.

Nevertheless, independence can and should be developing, even while young people are living with their parents. Establishing a new family is then a far more natural transition.

Crash courses in independence are hard to swallow, especially with all the other adjustments marriage demands. Stretching the apron strings over a period of time, before and during engagement, is usually easier than cutting them abruptly.

Of course, I'm not suggesting that couples cut off relationships with their parents. Dad and Mom should still be an important part of their lives, as long as everyone remembers the couple is no longer under parental authority. (Don't forget though, that until the moment she's married, a girl is under her parents' authority, not her husband-to-be's. However, there's a natural transition that direction that's part of the process.)

Both individuals must leave father and mother to be united to each other (Gen. 2:24). "Leaving" is a psychological transition as much as a geographical one. Too much dependence on parents spells trouble, even if they live 1,000 miles away.

Unfortunately, many parents dread this role change. Mistakenly, they fear losing their son or

Engagement should never be an experiment. A couple too immature to get engaged is too immature to get married.



daughter. Having gone through this process, I can honestly say passing my protecting and providing responsibility to the “Dans” (Dan Franklin and Dan Stump) was a pleasure. The key was that both my daughters and both their fiancés were committed to Christ and to purity. They responded to parents and that made it easy to make this transition. It could have been different. By God’s grace, it wasn’t.

While the patterns will change, the relationship need not suffer. Over the years, many parents and children have told me their relationship to one another was enriched as a result of the new marriage. Nanci and I have already experienced this.

It can be refreshing to enjoy more of a peer relationship with parents or grown children. With the built-in pressures of parent/child roles largely eliminated, the relationship can become more satisfying than ever.

3. Parental support.

It’s wise for young people pursuing marriage to seek their parents’ counsel. This includes asking their input regarding the time of the wedding.

Parental advice may not always be what the couple expects or wants. Still, it should be carefully weighed and normally followed. Nothing, however, prevents the couple from “bringing their case” to their parents if they feel strongly that they should get married at an earlier date than advised. We parents should be sensitive to this common situation. One of our daughters and her Dan asked to move up the time of their wedding. We agreed.

If we desire that our children wait longer than they wish to, we should be able to give specific and significant reasons for the delay. We must also shoulder some of the responsibility for the dangers involved in postponing a wedding.

It’s unfair for parents, just because they don’t feel ready to “let go,” to expect their children to delay marriage. By putting the future on hold, parents sometimes punish their children for their own unreadiness to let them go.

Parents may see benefits in waiting. By all means, then, they should express their opinions and explain them clearly. Children should appreciate and respect their parents’ honest input. It may save them from a mistake in timing that could hurt their relationship.

But we parents must remember that we don’t own our children—God does. He graciously loaned them to us for a reason. And in most cases, He’ll eventually entrust them to another. We shouldn’t frustrate our children’s



desire to be married at a certain time, unless we have good reasons.

Most parents I know are genuinely seeking their children’s best interests. Nevertheless, it’s easy to assume that their best interests are synonymous with our personal, and sometimes selfish, preferences. Input from wise adult friends and church leaders can help us evaluate our reasons more objectively.

In theory, Nanci and I might have preferred having more than seven weeks between our daughters’ weddings. But in fact, we agreed that both were getting married at the right time and asked God to provide the money and time required. Looking back, we’re convinced He did just that.

4. Sexual desire.

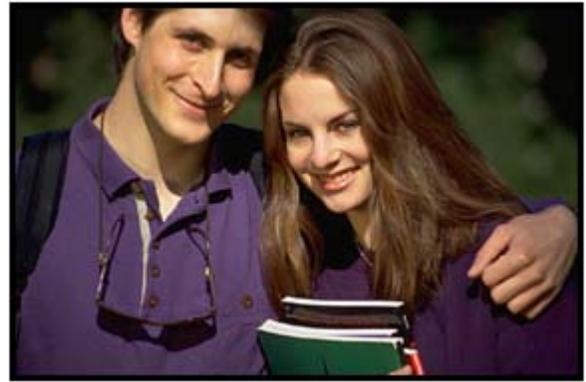
The Bible clearly indicates that a couple planning to be married and struggling with strong sexual temptation should not delay their wedding date (1 Cor. 7:9). This is a weighty argument against long engagements.

If a couple cannot or should not be married soon, I recommend they back off from the relationship before they succumb to immorality.

In our society, the time gap between puberty and marriage is longer than any other in history. Add to this the extreme freedom of today’s young culture. This makes for unparalleled temptation and opportunity for sexual sin. Obviously, parents should be involved in their young people’s lives, acting as chaperones and guides and providing moral accountability. They and their young people should stay away from the wrong movies and television programs. But it will still be difficult, because society challenges Christian morality at every turn.

By needlessly postponing a wedding date, Christian parents can increase their children’s sexual tension and frustration, possibly leading to immorality. God Himself dispels the theory “it is always best to wait” (1 Cor. 7:9).

From experience, I know that the supposed discipline of putting off marriage brings serious temptations. My wife and I dated for six and a half years before we married. We avoided premarital sex, but not without a struggle, even though we were committed Christians.



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My counseling with many young couples has confirmed the intensity of this battle and the frequent surrender to immorality. Christian couples are not immune to natural, God-given drives. That's why Scripture faces this dilemma realistically. Christian couples and their parents should do likewise.

the partner's studies by assisting, supporting and encouraging the mate.

I experienced three and a half years of college while single and another three and a half while married. Each period had its own advantages and disadvantages. But overall, Nanci and I found the marriage and education combination highly compatible. One of my daughters was in nursing school and married a man still in college. We believe they were right where they should have been.

In some cases, finishing school may be important. But, I don't believe it's a sacred cow to which marriage plans must always defer. A brief delay of the wedding to finish a semester or school year may be good. But putting off marriage for a number of years just to finish school often proves unwise. It may be better to get married sooner and resume the education later.

When two people know they should and will be married, thoughts and feelings naturally focus upon each other and their approaching marriage.

5. Emotional longing.

This is the psychological counterpart to sexual desire. They are two sides of the same coin.

When two people know they should and will be married, thoughts and feelings naturally focus upon each other and their approaching marriage. This is healthy, provided the waiting period is reasonably brief. But if it is lengthy, that emotional yearning hits an early peak. It then becomes a source of internal frustration and discouragement, often resulting in personal stagnation. One or both partners may end up just "biding his time" until marriage.

In such cases, they may become emotionally stagnant, not moving forward in life because they won't feel fulfilled until married.

Platitudes about the virtues of waiting ring hollow to couples overcome with the need to be married. In a long courtship or engagement, they see no light at the tunnel's end. They become discouraged, unmotivated, and irritable.

If the couple believes their parents have needlessly delayed their marriage, they may develop bitterness toward them. On the other hand, if parents are right in having them wait, their children will later thank them. Parental discernment, therefore, is critical.

We parents need to be sensitive to our children, putting ourselves in their shoes. When you're forty-five years old and married to the one you love, a few years go by quickly. But at age twenty, those few years seem an eternity.

6. School.

It may be unwise for a couple to enter marriage when one or both are beginning college or a demanding occupation. The new pressures and adjustments each requires are better faced at different junctures. Once someone is well-adjusted to school or occupation, marriage will be easier to adjust to.

However, school and marriage are not always incompatible. In fact, a spouse can be an asset to

7. Finances.

One final reason many couples prolong their engagement is lack of money. This factor merits special attention.

The financial issue focuses on two questions: How much money do you have now, and how well do you handle the money you have? *The second question is much more significant than the first.*

Some couples with low-paying jobs or who are still going to college get married with only enough to pay the first month's rent and groceries. They live simply, shop for bargains, and they do just fine.

Other couples get married with high incomes, yet face financial crisis within a few months. The problem is discipline, not dollars.

If a couple cannot live on their income, it's usually not because it's too low, but because their standard of living is too high.

Too many young couples try to maintain a lifestyle equal to the one they've grown up with in their parents' homes. If someone's a careless or compulsive spender, a credit card addict, he's not ready to get married, no matter how much money he has. (Because soon it will be gone.)



Watch the pennies, cut corners, shop for bargains, buy beans instead of bacon. Perform plastic surgery—take the scissors to your credit cards. Resist buying the “necessities” that are actually luxuries in disguise, pushed by the profit motives of a materialistic society.

While saving money is wise, a couple entering marriage financially set—comfortable and ready to live a middle-class lifestyle—will miss a great deal of the beauty and blessing built into those early years of marriage.

Looking back, many couples believe that living on less taught them to be thankful, appreciative, creative, disciplined, and content. They discovered how to enjoy each other and how to trust God.

Parents should realize nothing is wrong if the kids have to struggle a bit with finances. It will do them good. Parents should be generous, but should help only with needs, not subsidizing a young couple’s ability to live beyond their means.

The best help parents can offer is something that should have happened long ago—cultivating their children’s self-discipline and controlled spending habits. Albert Schweitzer said, “Children learn three ways. The first is by example, the second example and the third example.” Parents who model financial irresponsibility, however, can expect the same from their children.

Parents must remember that what seems to them like too little money to live on is probably more than adequate for a young couple. We shouldn’t super-impose our present material values and habits upon them. The truth is, we’d probably be better off adopting their lifestyle than they would be adopting ours.

So what if they occupy a cheap studio apartment, take their clothes to a laundromat, drive a nearly extinct automobile, ride the bus, or turn the heat down to 50° every night? They’ll be better off for it.

We shouldn’t insist they wait to marry until they can build their own financial kingdom to “fall back on.” Let’s let them learn to fall back on God. We may need to learn with them.

What if financial pressures require someone to drop out of school to work full time for a term or a year? In our goal-oriented society, some act like this is a tragedy. It isn’t. If our young people are walking with God, He will use such experiences in their best interests (Rom. 8:28).

The parental temptation to bail our young adult children out of every financial struggle can hinder God’s greater blessing. In fact, it can work against both parties by making the couple overly dependent on the parents.

When it comes to finances, the overriding questions seem to be:

Young people, are you willing to entrust yourselves to God? Parents, are you willing to give them back to the One who loaned them to you?

Once the decision to marry is made, assuming it’s the correct one (and that’s a huge assumption requiring a lot of attention), the fundamental question should be, “Why wait longer?”



Marriage tips from couples married over 50 years

- ❖ Solve a big problem a little at a time.
- ❖ Consider each other’s opinions before making decisions.
- ❖ Remember, you are not the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ Always be truthful with one another.
- ❖ Forgive one another as Christ forgave you.
- ❖ Don’t dwell on past failures; count your blessings and look forward to the future.
- ❖ Have fun together.
- ❖ Marriage is a life-long commitment.
- ❖ Keep courting and encouraging one another.
- ❖ Trust each other and trust the Lord.
- ❖ Say, “I love you” every day.
- ❖ Look for ways to help and encourage one another.
- ❖ Pray together.
- ❖ Live the Bible—don’t just know it.
- ❖ You can’t speak everything you think.

Excerpt from Marriage Secrets from the Real Experts by Dave Boehi http://www.familylife.com/articles/article_detail.asp?id=1263



Loving God and Trusting in His Promises

by Joni Eareckson Tada

“Do you want more and more of God’s kindness and peace? Then learn to know him better and better. For as you know him better, he will give you, through his great power, everything you need for living a truly good life: he even shares his own glory and his own goodness with us! And by that same mighty power he has given us all the other rich and wonderful blessings he promised...But to obtain these gifts, you need more than faith; you must also work hard to be good, and even that is not enough. For then you must learn to know God better and discover what he wants you to do.”

— 2 Peter 1:2-5, TLB

If you’re like me, you’re looking for ways to love God more. Not just to obey him—although that’s what proves we love him—but to love God with a passion. With spirited affection. Intense desire. I’m talking about longing to know God better and better with fire in your eyes and a furnace in your heart. The passage for today explains exactly how.

If you want to increase your desire for God, then get to know him in a deeper way. And there is no better way to know him than through his Word. Get into God’s Word, and you will get a heart for Jesus. Get passionate about Scripture, and your passion for him will increase. Feelings follow faith...and faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

Take a look back over the past week. How much time did you spend in the Word? What does that say about the direction your relationship with Him is going? Mark down specific times in your calendar to be in the Word this upcoming week. Be realistic but stretch yourself a bit. After all, you want to know God better, don’t you?

Lord God, help me to remember how amazing it is that You have revealed Yourself through the Word. Teach me to treasure Scripture more and to love You more through it.

“...You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed.”

— Joshua 23:14

He stood out in a crowd—a tall, handsome, black man from Jamaica with a big smile. I saw him shaking people’s hands and heard each person tell him how encouraging his testimony was. As the crowd thinned, I wheeled up to him, leaned forward, and lifted my arm, a hint to let him know I wanted to shake hands. He smiled and leaned forward to extend his hand. Then a wonderful thing happened: I realized he had no hands. This joyful Christian wore black fiberglass hands. We commented that even though we couldn’t feel it, our “handshake” sure looked good!

He smiled broadly and said, “Sister, aren’t you glad we have Jesus?! We have his promises!” Jesus and his promises. They are virtually one and the same.

This disabled man from a poor country has staked his life on God’s promises. His promise to lead. To sustain. To protect and provide. To meet every need. How can I be so sure this Jamaican thrives on God’s promises? Because he loves Jesus; and as 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ.” To believe in Christ is to believe in God’s promises.

What promises anchor your faith? Can you say that not one of them has failed? You can if your anchor is Jesus. He and His promises have been there all along—consistent, faithful, tested, and true. If you ever bump into a tall, black Jamaican guy with no hands, just ask him.

Father, help me to sink my anchor deep in your promises. As life’s waves broadside my boat, enable me to remember that every promise has its beginning and ending in Jesus.

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