



# Eternal Perspectives

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

**Summer 2007**



## Should Giving Always Be Kept Secret?

by Randy Alcorn

Over the last ten years, I've been suggesting that we learn how to share testimonies about giving in order to help the body of Christ grow in the grace of giving.

I once objected to this type of disclosure—as many still do—because Jesus says, “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:3-4).

When one man received an automated tax receipt from his church indicating he'd given no money the previous year, he was outraged. He said he was obeying Scripture by not letting his left hand know what his right hand had given. *Giving was to be so secret*, he thought, *that even he shouldn't know how much he was giving*. (Apparently he didn't know he hadn't given anything.)

A closer look at this passage, and the rest of Scripture, demonstrates this is not a valid interpretation.

In Matthew 6, Jesus deals with motives, something the religious elite often failed to examine. He starts with the broad category of “acts of righteousness,” then moves to three such acts—giving, prayer, and fasting. This is not an exhaustive list. In their teaching, rabbis often spoke in groups of threes. Jesus could have added Bible reading, feeding the poor, or raising children. Today, we might include going on mission trips or attending a particular college or church. The idea is that any “act of righteousness” (or badge of spirituality) can accord us spiritual status in the eyes of others.

The most important verse, the one that sets up the entire passage, is the first: “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them” (Matthew 6:1). The operative phrase is “to

be seen by them.” This is *not* a prohibition against others becoming aware of our giving, prayers, fasting, Bible study, feeding the poor, missions work, or church attendance. Rather, it's a command not to do these things *in order to* receive the recognition of men. Jesus continues, “If you do [that is, if you do good things to win human approval], you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.” The problem isn't doing good things with reward in mind—it's *looking for the reward from men rather than from God*.

Then Jesus says, “When you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men” (Matthew 6:2). Trumpet blowing may seem silly. There's no record that this was actually done.

It seems to be satirical or humorous, a caricature of less obvious (to us anyway) things we do to get attention. But Christ's focus is the reason for which hypocrites draw attention to what they've done: “to be honored by men.” Again, Christ's argument is not that our giving should never be seen, but only that we should never divulge it *in order to get human recognition*. When that happens, “I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full” (Matthew 6:5).

If we give in order to get men's praises, we'll get what we seek—college wings named after us, dinner invitations from heads of ministries, our names inscribed on pews or bricks, appointment to boards, or seeing our names on a plaque and in the newspaper. But in getting what we seek, we will lose what we *should* have sought—God's approval.

Let's look at the verses we started with: “So when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret” (Matthew 6:3-4).



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This is a figure of speech. It's hyperbole, a deliberate overstatement, which would have been immediately clear to the hearers. That Christ's command cannot be literal is self-evident, because a hand lacks the ability to *know* anything, and besides the person's brain would know what both the right hand and the left hand were doing. There is no center of intelligence in one hand as opposed to the other, nor is there an ability for the brain to withhold information from one hand while disclosing it to the other. We aren't able to throw a switch so that we don't know we're giving or that we have given.

So what's Christ's point? Do your giving quietly, unobtrusively. Don't cough loudly just as you're giving. Don't slam-dunk your offering in the plate. Drop your check in the offering or send it in the mail without drawing attention to yourself. Fold the check. Keep the envelope sealed. Give in a spirit of humility and simplicity, as an act of worship. Don't give in order to get your name on a list. Don't give in a spirit of self-congratulation. Don't dwell on your gift, fixating on it, building a mental shrine to yourself. In other words, don't make a big production out of it, either in view of others or in the privacy of your own heart.

This verse cannot mean that we should—or even that we can—be unaware of our own giving, any more than we could be unaware of our praying, fasting, Bible reading, or evangelism. To suggest that it does would remove the discerning, thoughtful elements of giving, praying, fasting, and all other spiritual disciplines.

But can this verse mean it's always wrong for others to know that we've given? No. Acts 2:45 tells of Christians selling possessions and giving to the needy. Did other people know who had done this? In many cases, the answer would be obvious. These people knew each other. If you no longer had your prize camels, coat, or oxcart, and Caleb ben Judah did, people would figure it out. Acts 4:32-35 tells us about more people liquidating assets. Most names, which would mean nothing to us, aren't recorded, but they were surely known at the time.

But some givers were named even for our benefit. Acts 4:36-37 tells us that Barnabas sold a field and brought the money to the feet of the apostles. If Barnabas was looking for status and prestige, his motive was wrong. But it's certainly false to say that it was wrong for others to be made aware of his gift, because Scripture itself reveals it! Barnabas's act of generosity was commonly known among the believers and was publicly and permanently recorded in Acts. This was good and right, and did *not* violate Matthew 6's warning about bad motives.

Did public recognition tempt others to give for the wrong motives? Absolutely, as we see in the very next passage (Acts 5:1-11). Ananias and Sapphira gave for the wrong reasons. Then they lied to make their gift look better than it was. But the possible abuse of something doesn't nullify its legitimacy. The body of Christ can benefit from seeing open models of generous giving such as Barnabas's. The world can benefit from seeing the generosity of the Church as an attractive witness to the grace of Christ. The risks of disclosing a person's giving are sometimes outweighed by the benefits of disclosure.

Earlier in the same sermon in which he warns against flaunting your giving and prayers and fasting, Jesus says, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Here we are *commanded* to let men see our good deeds—and not to hide them. Giving is a good deed, isn't it? This passage and Matthew 6 balance each other. There's a time for giving to be seen, but only at the right time and for the right reasons.

We need to stop putting giving in a class by itself. If I give a message on evangelism, biblical interpretation, or parenting, I run the risk of pride. But it may still be God's will for me to share with the church what God has taught me in these areas.

Paul speaks of himself as a model: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). I could write books and do public speaking for the wrong reasons. I could send e-mails with wrong motives, to seek man's approval, not God's. But I write books and speak and send e-mails anyway, partly because if we were to refrain from doing everything we could do with a wrong motive, we'd never do anything at all. (If your pastor only preached when there was no temptation to pride, he'd never preach.)

If Christ established a principle in Matthew 6:2-4 that other people should never know what someone gives, then the members of the early Church violated it in Acts 4:36-37. There's no way around it. Numbers 7 lists the names of donors to the tabernacle. First Chronicles 29 tells exactly how much the leaders of Israel gave to build the temple, then it says, "The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord" (1 Chronicles 29:9). Philemon 1:7 is likely a reference to Philemon's generous giving, and 2 Corinthians 8:2-3 is definitely a reference to the Macedonians' generous giving. As we seek to understand the meaning of Matthew 6:2-4, we must consider the full counsel of Scripture.

In Matthew 6, it's clear that whatever's true of giving is also true of praying and fasting. Jesus says in verse 6, "When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen." He's

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swinging the pendulum away from the self-conscious, self-serving, image-enhancing prayers for which the Pharisees were notorious. But did he mean that all prayer must be private? No. Scripture has many examples of public and corporate prayer. Every time a pastor or worship leader prays in church, every time parents pray with their children, or husbands pray with wives, or families pray before dinner, or someone prays with the person being led to Christ, it demonstrates the falseness of the notion that it's always wrong to be seen or heard by others when you pray.

Jesus tells us to pray in secret, and God will reward us (Matthew 6:6). Yet gathering for group prayer is certainly important (Matthew 18:19-20). God wants us to pray secretly sometimes but not others. And so it follows that he wants us to give secretly sometimes but not others. It all comes down to the motives of our hearts and the purpose of disclosure.

Just as Matthew 6:6 doesn't mean it's always wrong to let others hear you pray, Matthew 6:3-4 doesn't mean it's always wrong to let others be aware of your giving. Because Jesus groups giving, praying, and fasting as the three acts of righteousness in this passage, whatever applies to one applies to the others.

When the poor widow gave, she gave publicly—Jesus could actually see the two coins. He used her as a public illustration (Luke 21:1-4). So, it was right that she gave in public, and it was right that people were told the exact amount of her gift. Her motives were right. The public disclosure did nothing to nullify her good heart.

Though confidentiality in giving records makes sense, it creates another temptation. Many believers take advantage of the veil of privacy by using it as a cloak for their disobedience in not giving. With all of today's talk about accountability, what are we doing in churches to hold each other accountable

to generous giving? People may notice if you don't obey the command in Hebrews 10:25 to attend church, but how will they notice if you fail to give? How will they be able to help you grow in this vital area?

The body of Christ needs to let its light shine before men, and we need models of every spiritual discipline. We dare not let the risk of our pride keep us from faithfully disclosing God's work in this area of our lives. And if we must be silent to avoid our own pride, we should support others who can humbly testify to Christ's faithfulness in their giving.

God looks at the heart. He alone knows the real motives for our giving (1 Corinthians 4:5). Scripture never says that a giver receives no eternal reward simply because others know about his gift. Donors could be known yet still have given to please God not men.

Our motive for *not* talking about our giving is not always humility. Sometimes it's fear, doubt and, yes, even pride. To vulnerably express to others where we are on our pilgrimage to generous giving can be an act of humility. We must always check our motives, but it certainly doesn't have to be an act of pride.

We shouldn't brag about our Bible study, prayer, evangelism, parenting, or giving, but neither should we cover it up. It's easier for people to follow footprints (what we do) than commands (what we say). If we aren't willing to openly and humbly discuss our giving, how can we expect to raise up givers? The church has plenty of examples of consumers—we need to see examples of givers. Hebrews 10:24 tells us to "spur one another on toward love and good deeds." We can only be spurred on by what we can see.

R. G. LeTourneau was a great inspiration to me. He gave away 90% of his income, motivating me to raise the bar of my giving. I'm eternally grateful that he told his giving story.



## ***Two new resources from Randy Alcorn ...***

### **Randy Alcorn's Blog**

Check out Randy Alcorn's blog, featuring his thoughts about Jesus, Scripture, the Christian life, Heaven, discipleship, and books, both fiction and non-fiction. He'll share what he's learning, reading, and writing. He'll talk about his family. Although he is unable to respond to every comment placed, he *will* read them.

You can access Randy's blog directly ([randyalcorn.blogspot.com](http://randyalcorn.blogspot.com)) or by going to EPM's website ([www.epm.org](http://www.epm.org)).

### **Free Monthly EPM E-News Update**

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## Running Toward the Unshakeable Kingdom

by E. Stanley Jones

*I only testify  
that the more I  
belong to Jesus  
Christ and his  
kingdom, the  
more I belong  
to myself.  
Bound to him,  
I walk the  
earth free.*

Every age has thought itself an age of crisis. The oldest bit of writing in the world is found in a Constantinople museum: "Alas, times are not what they used to be. Children no longer obey their parents. And everyone wants to write a book."

But our age of crisis is the deepest that we've ever had. Everything that we hold dear is under question. Nothing is sacrosanct. Everything is being challenged.

I believe this is the greatest opportunity we've ever had as a Christian movement because men's minds are fluid. They want something to tie to, something that is unshakeable.

I was in Russia in 1934, and I saw people building a civilization without God. And doing it enthusiastically. It hit me pretty hard. I needed reassurance, and so I went to my Bible one morning in Moscow, and these words arose out of the Scriptures: "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken" (Hebrews 12:28-29 RSV) "Oh," I said, "We have a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Not only will it not be shaken but it cannot be shaken. Because it's ultimate reality."

The kingdom of communism is shakeable. They have to hold it together by force.

The kingdom of capitalism is shakeable. When President Dwight D. Eisenhower had a heart attack, the stock market plunged \$4 billion. But the kingdom of God is not shakeable. It's ultimate reality.

I lived on that verse, exultingly, that day. I came back the next day hungry for more. Another verse arose out of the Scriptures: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). We've got an unchanging Person. He's forcing change, modification upon us all. But he, himself, is unchanged and unchanging.

I came out of Russia with two things in my mind and heart: the unshakeable kingdom and the unchanging Person. Now they've come together. Coalesced.

He is the kingdom embodied. Absolute goodness and ultimate authority looked out of his eyes. God not only redeems through Christ—he also rules through Christ. In him I find absolute authority and absolute love.

One English bishop said, "Stanley Jones seems to be obsessed with the kingdom of God." And my reply inwardly was, Would God that I were! It would be a magnificent obsession. Jesus was obsessed with it.

Jesus went out preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. He used the phrase, the kingdom of God, a hundred times. And anything that he uses a hundred times is important. He was never misled by a subordinate issue; he never got on the unworthwhile or the marginal. He made the kingdom of God the center of his message. What did he mean by it? He taught them to pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-10) Here is a complete totalitarianism. Demanding total obedience in the total life of all the earth. But, you say, that would be bondage.

Strangely enough, no. Here is a totalitarianism in which (if you totally obey it) you find total freedom. I don't argue, I only testify that the more I belong to Jesus Christ and his kingdom, the more I belong to myself. Bound to him, I walk the earth free. Low at his feet, I stand straight before everything else.

This is one of the differences between man's earthborn totalitarianism and God's. Man's totalitarianism is fascism, Naziism, communism. If you totally obey them, you find total bondage. But when God's totalitarianism meets us, it offers us a complete freedom by complete obedience.

When I became excited about this question of the kingdom of God, it did two things for my faith. First of all, it made my faith very personal. I was not

following a system, nor a movement, an impersonality—I was following a Person. A divine Person. And so I had a personal relationship with a Person. It made my religion personal—but it also made my religion social. For I saw that embodied in this Person was an order. God's order. It had relationships with everything that concerned man, nature, life, and destiny.

I was no longer, therefore, interested in a personal gospel and/or a social gospel. An individual gospel is a soul without a body; a social gospel is a body without a soul. One's a ghost and the other's a corpse, you can take your choice. I don't want either one. I want both.

H. G. Wells, fumbling through history for the relevant, came across the conception of the kingdom of God. He was shocked. "Why," he said, "here is the most absolutely challenging thing that was ever presented to the mind of man!" And the most relevant!

What happened to this conception of the kingdom of God? When Jesus spent 40 days with his disciples, after his resurrection, he talked to them about the kingdom of God. Get this straight, he was saying, for if you get this straight, all the ages will go straight with you. But if you get this wrong, all the ages will go wrong with you. Did they get it? It was too great for their small hearts. At the close they said, "Lord, at this time wilt Thou restore the kingdom of Israel?" His heart must have sunk within him. Here he was offering a world order, a new order, God's order, the kingdom. And they said, "Do we get back our self-government?"

They didn't reject it, they reduced it. And that's what we've been doing ever since. We don't reject the kingdom, but we reduce it and make it innocuous.

By the time the creeds were written in the 3rd century, what had happened to the conception of the kingdom of God? The Nicene Creed mentions it once, beyond the borders of this life, in heaven: "Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom." The Apostle's Creed and the Athenasian Creed don't mention it. The three great historic creeds summing up Christian doctrine, mention once what Jesus mentioned a hundred times. Something had dropped out. A vital, vital thing had dropped out. A crippled Christianity went across Europe, leaving a crippled result. The kingdom of God was pressed into the inner recesses of the heart, as a mystical experience now, and then pushed out beyond the borders of this life, in heaven as a future kingdom. So there were vast areas of life left out, unredeemed: the economic, the social, the political. A vacuum was left in the soul of Western civilization.

Into that vacuum moved the earthborne totalitarianisms. And they said to us, "Alright, we'll give you your inner mystical experience now, and we'll give you your collective experience hereafter, in heaven.

But we'll take over the rest. And direct them to our ends and our means."

God's total answer for man's total need is his kingdom. It's God's plan, God's order, God's promise, and God's offer. I was speaking in a cathedral in Germany at the close of the second World War. The topic was the kingdom of God. On the front seat were very well-known Germans, Dr. Niemoller among them. As I spoke on the kingdom of God, they kept pounding on their benches with their fists. At the close they came up to me and said, "You seem to sense why we took to Naziism. Life for us was at loose ends. We needed something to bring all life into coherence and meaning and goal. And we turned to Naziism and it let us down in blood and ruin. But now we see that what we were looking for was the kingdom of God. And that's where we missed it. And that's why we were pounding the benches. We'd missed the way. We were looking for the kingdom of God and didn't know it."

Then my eyes were opened. I said, "Is that what men are thinking about? In this crisis? These revolts that are taking place? Are they really wanting the kingdom of God and don't know it?"

The answer came back, yes. We can see they are revolting against injustices in the social order. But we can't see what they're revolting for. It's hazy, undefined. But down deep, they are wanting the kingdom of God.

Jesus taught us there were two ways in which the kingdom would come. One, by gradualism. The kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed. The kingdom of God is like the leaven that permeates the whole loaf. These and other passages teach the kingdom coming by gradualism. Heart to heart, life to life, mind to mind.

But, he said, there's another way the kingdom is going to come. The kingdom of God is like a nobleman who went to a far country to receive a kingdom and return. Depicting Jesus going to the Father and getting the kingdom and returning to set it up. That's the apocalyptic coming.

Now some people take the gradualism. Others take the apocalyptic. I can't do that because they're both integral parts of the account. And I need both. The gradualism gives me my immediate task. I can be the agent of the coming of that kingdom, now. And

*We have an unshakeable kingdom, the kingdom of God. We have an unchanging Person, Jesus Christ. Then we've got the gospel. And it's a total gospel, for man's total need.*



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the apocalyptic gives me hope that the last word is going to be spoken by God—perhaps suddenly, when we least expect it. And that last word is going to be victory.

The world's got a destiny. And that destiny is to be the scene of the coming of the kingdom of God. That gives me a total answer to man's total need.

I have a friend who's a management engineer. He takes sick businesses and puts them back on their feet again. He said, "You know, I found out that 95 percent of the difficulties in business are not in the business but in the people. They get snarled up with themselves, and others. And they project their snarls out into the situations and cooperation dies and the business turns sick. I can't straighten out that business until I straighten out these people."

So he sits till midnight talking to executives and heads of departments. And they say, "Yes, we're snarled up. But how do you get unsnarled?"

He talks to them about God. They say, "Yes, but how do you find God?" And he explains, "By new birth. Conversion." They sit till midnight talking about how to straighten out a business and run straight

into the laws of the kingdom of God. They're running straight into the Christian faith written into the nature of things, and inescapable.

I believe that Christianity is realism, not idealism. Something not imposed, but something exposed, out of the heart of reality. And I believe that the Christian way is the only way that will work.

We can go out no longer apologizing for an unworkable, idealistic way. But we can say to the world, Christ's way is the only workable way there is.

We have an unshakeable kingdom, the kingdom of God. We have an unchanging Person, Jesus Christ. Then we've got the gospel. And it's a total gospel, for man's total need.

Modern man is empty, and crying to high heaven for something to fill that emptiness. Nothing can fill that emptiness except the unshakeable kingdom, the unchanging Person, and the total gospel.

*E. Stanley Jones was a Methodist evangelist, missionary to India, and founder of the Christian Ashram Movement. He died in January 1973. This article first appeared in Good News magazine in 1970. It's condensed from an address he delivered at the Good News Convocation in Dallas that year.*



## Is Abortion Right When Pregnancy is Due to Rape or Incest? by Randy Alcorn

**Please Note:** *In order to conserve space, footnotes are not included in this article but are marked with an asterisk and may be found in Why ProLife? by Randy Alcorn, Chapter 13, pages 78-82.*

Studies conducted by the pro-choice Guttmacher Institute indicate that two consenting and fertile adults have only a 3 percent chance of pregnancy from an act of intercourse. They also indicate there are factors involved in a rape that further reduce these chances for rape victims.\* The Institute says fourteen thousand\* abortions per year are due to rape or incest, which amounts to 1 percent of all abortions.\* Other studies show that pregnancies due to rape are much rarer, as few as one in a thousand cases.\* Furthermore, since conception doesn't occur immediately after intercourse, pregnancy can be prevented in most rape cases by removing or washing away the semen before an ovum can be fertilized. (This is very different from using chemicals that can kill an already conceived child.)

### What's the Real Issue?

Where does the misconception come from that many pregnancies are due to rape? Fearful young

women sometimes attribute their pregnancies to rape, since doing so avoids condemnation. Norma McCorvey, the young woman called "Roe" in the *Roe v. Wade* case—who elicited sympathy in the court and media because she claimed to be a rape victim—years later admitted she'd lied and hadn't been raped.\* (McCorvey has since become an outspoken pro-life advocate and has asked the Supreme Court to review and reverse *Roe v. Wade*.)

Pro-choice advocates divert attention from the vast majority of abortions by focusing on rape because of its well-deserved sympathy factor. Their frequent references to it leave the false impression that pregnancy due to rape is common, rather than rare.

We have a dear friend who was raped and became pregnant. Because of her circumstances it wasn't best for her to raise the child. She released the baby for adoption into a Christian family. Our friend periodically has contact with the family and her child. It hasn't been easy, and her pain has been great—yet her overwhelming comfort is in knowing her child lives and is loved.

On a television program about abortion, I heard a man say of a child conceived by rape, "Anything of this nature has no rights because it's the product of

rape.” But how is the nature of this child different from that of any other child? Are some children more worthy to live because their fathers were better people? And why is it that pro-choice advocates are always saying the unborn child is really the mother’s, not the father’s, until she is raped—then suddenly the child is viewed as the father’s, not the mother’s?

The point is not *how* a child was conceived but *that* he was conceived. He is not a despicable “product of rape.” He is a unique and wonderful creation of God.

Having and holding an innocent child can do much more good for a victimized woman than the knowledge that an innocent child died in a fruitless attempt to reduce her trauma.

## Conceived by Incest

Incest is a horrible crime. Offenders should be punished, and decisive intervention should be taken to remove a girl from the presence of a relative who has sexually abused her. The abuser—not the girl or her child—is the problem. Intervention, protection, and ongoing personal help for the girl—not killing an innocent child—is the solution. Despite popular beliefs, fetal deformity is rare in such cases. If the child has handicaps, however, he still deserves to live.



Why should Person A be killed because Person B raped or sexually abused Person A’s mother? If your father committed a crime, should you go to jail for it? If you found out today that your biological father had raped your mother, would you feel you no longer had a right to live? A woman who heard me address this issue came up afterwards, sobbing. She said, “My mother was raped as a thirteen-year-old. She gave birth to me, then gave me up for adoption. Every

time I’ve heard people say abortion is okay in cases of rape, I’ve thought, “Then I guess I have no right to live.”

Let’s punish the rapist and the abuser, not their victims. The woman isn’t spoiled goods—she’s not “goods” at all but a precious human being with value and dignity that even the vilest act cannot take from her. Likewise, the child isn’t a cancer to be removed but a living human being.



## Abortion Compounds Rape Trauma

Feminists for Life says, “Some women have reported suffering from the trauma of abortion long after the rape trauma has faded.”\* It’s hard to imagine a worse therapy for a woman who’s been raped than to add the guilt and turmoil of having her child killed. One day she’ll understand—and those who advised abortion will not be there to help carry her pain and guilt.

In their book, *Victims and Victors*, David Reardon and associates draw on the testimonies of 192 women who experienced pregnancy as the result of rape or incest, and 55 children who were conceived through sexual assault. It turns out that when victims of violence speak for themselves, their opinion of abortion is nearly unanimous—and the exact opposite of what most would predict:

Nearly all the women interviewed in this anecdotal survey said they regretted aborting the babies conceived via rape or incest. Of those giving an opinion, more than 90 percent said they would discourage other victims of sexual violence from having an abortion. On the other hand, among the women profiled in the book who conceived due to rape or incest and carried to term, not one expressed regret about her choice.\*

There’s a parallel between the violence of rape and abortion. Both are done by a more powerful person at the expense of the less powerful.

Abortion doesn’t bring healing to a rape victim. Imposing capital punishment on the innocent child of a sex offender does nothing bad to the rapist and nothing good to the woman.

Creating a second victim never undoes the damage to the first.

*Adapted from Randy Alcorn’s book Why ProLife? (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2004).*

*Let’s punish  
the rapist and  
the abuser,  
not their  
victims.*



## Novel Journey Interview with Randy Alcorn

posted by Gina Holmes

### Tell us about your latest novel.

*Deception* is a murder mystery. It isn't a strict sequel to my first two novels *Deadline* and *Dominion*, but a spin-off. It can be read before the others.

While writing other fiction and lots of nonfiction over the last decade, I've never lost sight of *Deadline* and *Dominion*. I've always hoped to go back and pick up where I left off. I've thought there needed to be a third book, a different story with a different viewpoint character.

Jake Woods was the main character in *Deadline*, with fellow-journalist Clarence Abernathy and homicide detective Ollie Chandler in support roles. Clarence, an African American, was the main character in *Dominion*, with Jake and Ollie supporting him. But in certain ways the most interesting character—and I do mean character—is Ollie Chandler, who can be funny and cynical and outrageous. Writing *Deception* fulfilled my desire to go back to Ollie and give him a shot at his own book, this time with Jake and Clarence in support roles.

### Tell us about your journey to publication.

While many people think they want to write a book, what they really want is to have written a book. It's sort of like wanting to be thin without exercising or eating right. It's fun to hold in your hand a book you wrote, but good writing, like good farming and good bricklaying, takes real work.

Since I wrote my first book 25 years ago, I've written 26 more. Each one is different.

*Deception* has been on my mind, off and on the back burner, for ten years. It was fun—but a lot of hard work—to finally write it. The many letters I got from those who'd read *Deadline* and *Dominion* served as a big encouragement to write this semi-sequel. It's really fun to have the end product now, and to feel good about it.

### You write best-selling and award-winning fiction and non-fiction. Which do you enjoy the most and why?

I enjoy most whichever I'm currently writing. But after I've finished a novel, I'm always ready to do some nonfiction, then after two or three nonfiction books I'm eager to do a novel again.

Not many writers go back and forth from fiction to non-fiction, and I've been told it muddies the waters in terms of how people perceive you as a writer.

Honestly, I'm not really concerned about the waters and the perceptions. I ask God each time to direct me toward what He wants me to do next. I think He has, and I'm grateful to be able to write both fiction and nonfiction, and I hope to do both as long as He gives me strength.

Fiction and nonfiction, of course, are very different. In nonfiction, you can directly say whatever you want to. You don't have to be subtle; in fact too much subtlety makes it obscure. You can tell, you don't have to just show.

But in fiction, the rule is "show, don't tell." Fiction allows the imagination to soar.

### If only one of your books could survive the next century, which would you choose?

Of my novels, though in some ways I think *Deception* is the most fun and maybe the best written, I'd have to say *Safely Home*. The number of lives I've been told about that have changed through reading that novel amazes me.

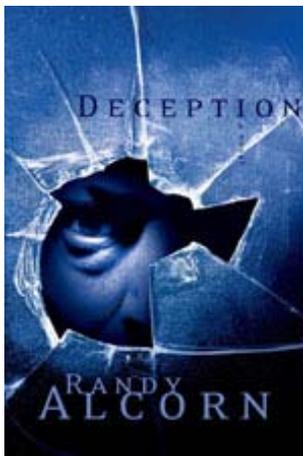
Of my nonfiction, it's a tough call, so I'll cheat and say *The Grace and Truth Paradox* and *Heaven*. The *Heaven* book has been a real surprise, with 400,000 in print just two and a half years after it was released. We get an amazing number of letters from people who say they now look forward to Heaven and are excited about the New Earth, and that they've received great joy and comfort from the book. Churches and small groups everywhere are studying it, which blows me away.

Okay, I'll also mention *The Treasure Principle*, which has now sold close to one million copies, and which God has graciously used to transform the way countless people give. It's another book that no one would have guessed would find eager readers. No publisher was saying a few years ago, "Hey, to sell a million copies we need somebody to write a book about the joy of becoming a radical giver."

### What do you say to the folks who think as Christians we shouldn't be writing or reading fiction?

First, that writing fiction is not synonymous with telling lies!

There's a great deal of untruth being passed off in the form of nonfiction. And some of the greatest truths are found in novels. When Jesus spoke in parables, he wasn't lying or misleading, but telling stories with great spiritual impact.



As long as people know that fiction is fiction, we shouldn't apologize for using our God-given imaginations to create worlds for characters to inhabit, and for readers to enjoy and learn from.

There are many non-believers and there are many nominal Christians who will read fiction who wouldn't read spiritually oriented non-fiction. Readers become open to certain truths and realities in a fiction form that they're not open to in a frontal, direct, non-fiction form. You hand your readers a story, and if it's engaging, you've earned access to their minds, and you can influence their worldview through it. It's a kind of "Trojan horse" effect. I mean, people open the gates of their minds and you come in, but they don't notice everything you're bringing with you.

My purpose as a writer is the same in fiction or nonfiction. I want to communicate in such a way as to challenge the thinking of readers and touch their hearts. I want to draw them into the story (fiction) or the subject matter (nonfiction) in a way that influences their perspective and worldview. I want to entertain, but also educate.

While telling an entertaining story, I hope to shift readers to a more biblical worldview, partly by showing the positive consequences of right thinking and choices, and the negative consequences of wrong thinking and choices.

Everything I write is intended to further an eternal perspective: "We look not at the things which are seen, but the things which are unseen; for the things that are seen are temporary, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18).

### **Do you think Christians have a moral obligation to present the gospel in the novels we write or can we relax and just pen a good yarn?**

I'm all for a good yarn. But a good yarn doesn't have to be just a good yarn.

I don't think the gospel always has to be fully presented in our novels, and certainly it will emerge in a variety of ways in different stories, but I think each novelist needs to ask God for direction. I suspect that if we listen to God, and if our lives are sufficiently captivated by the good news of Jesus, then that good news will inevitably inhabit our writing and make itself evident to readers.

Christian novelists are often warned against writing fiction that's thinly veiled propaganda. Of course, I'm opposed to propaganda. But I'm convinced it's possible to artfully present a story that contains significant spiritual themes.

I try to earn the right to integrate eternal themes into my stories by writing them well. I hope I've done that in *Deception*. If a story is poorly written or comes

across as a sermon, then obviously it won't reach people. They'll be aware that you're using your novel as a means to an end, or forcing something on them. But in a good story, the spiritual component is so woven into it, so inseparable from it, that it has credibility and lasting impact.

I think the fear of being perceived as preachy and heavy-handed has become so heightened now that some Christian novelists have become gun-shy about including any spiritual content. Experience has shown them that even Christian reviewers are quick to call a story "preachy" if it has substantial spiritual content, even when it's an integral part of the story and true-to-life.

The result is that "Christian fiction" is now for many people just "clean fiction," defined by the absence of profanity, explicit sex, and gratuitous violence.

I think a Christian novel is better understood not by the absence of the unspiritual, but by the presence of the spiritual. Of course, that does not mean a novel is a lengthy gospel tract! But it does mean it offers more than the mere lack of offensiveness. In fact, a truly Christian novel may be spiritually offensive to some readers, both believers and unbelievers.

Walking with God, praying, church, and discussions about the Bible and spiritual longing are in fact a real part of life. So it's not being "unreal" to integrate these things into a story. It just needs to be done thoughtfully and skillfully, making sure it comes from inside the story, not outside it. Fiction should be art, but art is certainly not devoid of spiritual meaning.

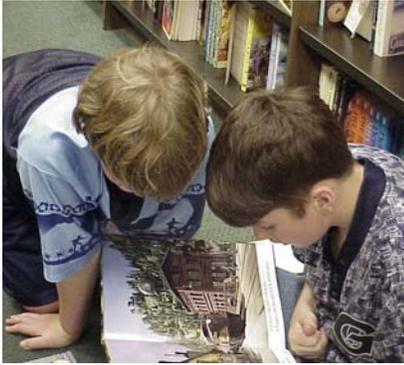
Every author—whether atheist, agnostic, Hindu, New Age, or Christian—has a worldview. And every author's worldview is evident in a storyline, with varying degrees of explicitness. While not every writer is called to include the same degree of spiritual content, I find it ironic that some Christians are pulling back from letting their worldview emerge in the course of a storyline. The result may appease some critics. But it will leave many readers—who in real life long for meaning and eternal perspective—feeling mildly entertained but ultimately unchallenged and unchanged.

### **Describe what you believe is the role of writing and reading in the Christian life.**

God is an author. The universe itself is His book. Each person is a chapter. History really is His story. Christ is the Word, the very essence of God, and expression of God. We are created in God's image, and made to be sub-creators, authors who create and weave together both non-fiction and marvelous stories on



*"My purpose as a writer is the same in fiction or non-fiction. I want to communicate in such a way as to challenge the thinking of readers and touch their hearts."*



which our imaginations can soar. When we write and read such works, He is pleased.

As an author, I'm very aware that I'm a steward of words, and I labor to get them right.

Books and bookstores have had an enormous influence on my own life. My first youth pastor did me a huge favor—he gave me a key to his office, so I could go in any time and read his books, hundreds of them. I read everything I could get my hands on. There was an elderly couple in our church, named Bill and Martha Kuntz. They had a Christian

bookstore in their house in Gresham, Oregon, my hometown. I would go there several days a week, for hours at a time. They would point out books for me to read. They introduced me to Lewis, Schaeffer, and Tozer, and books such as *Tortured for Christ*, *God's Smuggler*, *Through Gates of Splendor*, and *The Cross and the Switchblade*.

Over the years I've bought and read thousands of good books, many of which are now in our church library. I can't divorce God's works of grace in my life from good books. In my book *Heaven*, I talk about books the Bible says are now in Heaven, and I present reasons for believing that other books will be written and read on the New Earth.

### **What's something you wish you'd known earlier that might have saved you some time/frustration in the publishing business?**

The most valuable lesson I've learned about writing is that it's hard work. Writing is both energizing and draining, something I love to do and sometimes hate to do. Sometimes it's a joy. Sometimes it's like the tenth hour of chopping wood: you just want to be done. It's never done, but eventually it has to be turned in.

I've learned that what's easy to read is hard to write, and what's easy to write is hard to read. I'm a steward of words, and I'm accountable to God for how I arrange them. That's the best reason for working hard at rewriting: "work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" (Colossians 3:23).

I've learned I need honest critics and careful editors. But above all I need Christ, who said, "Apart from Me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5). When I work this hard at something, I don't want it to amount to nothing. I want it to last forever. I want to hear the Audience of One say, "Well done." No payoff could be bigger than that!

### **What are a few of your favorite books? (Not written by you)**

**Nonfiction:** *The Knowledge of the Holy* by A. W. Tozer, *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis, *Knowing God*

by J. I. Packer, *Desiring God* and *The Pleasures of God* by John Piper, *He Is There And He Is Not Silent* by Francis Schaeffer.

**Fiction:** *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis; *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy by J. R. R. Tolkien; C. S. Lewis's Space trilogy, especially *Perelandra*; The Singer trilogy (including *The Song* and *The Finale*) by Calvin Miller.

Those who read my new novel *Deception* will see that I have a special love for Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories—every chapter begins with a Holmes quote. In *Deception*, I also pay tribute to the Nero Wolfe mysteries by Rex Stout. I've read or listened to most of the forty-seven Nero Wolfe books.

### **Do you have a pet peeve having to do with this biz?**

I hate ghostwriting. That's where the names of the actual writers of books aren't put on the cover, and instead a celebrity name is put on it, even though the celebrity invested almost nothing in the book. This is done to sell more books, but I fail to see how it differs from lying. (I'm not talking about books where the celebrity's name is accompanied by the name of the real author, but when the real author's name isn't included.)

If you set back the odometer on a car it will sell for more money, but it's still dishonest. Years ago the secular world condemned Milli Vanilli for lip-synching, pretending someone else's voices were their own. How can Christians and Christian agents and publishers tolerate misleading the public by pretending well-known pastors or public figures wrote books they didn't write? How can they give interviews pretending to have actually written the books? How can they receive awards for books they didn't write?

This problem is being dealt with as more authors and publishers are standing up against it. But it still happens, and when it does I think it brings disgrace to the name of Christ.

My single biggest concern is the way that successful authors tend to lose perspective and become demanding and prideful. This dishonors Christ, ruins character, and undermines ministries. Materialism and the celebrity culture have poisoned the church, and we have put ourselves under God's judgment.

I Peter 5 says, "All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time."

The same rules apply to Christian authors and musicians as apply to Christian shopkeepers and mill workers and farmers. Every day, every hour, we choose either to humble ourselves, in which case God

*"I've learned that what's easy to read is hard to write, and what's easy to write is hard to read. I'm a steward of words, and I'm accountable to God for how I arrange them."*

promises to give us grace, or to be proud, in which case God promises to oppose us.

Acting pridefully is like wearing a sign that says “kick me” or “strike me down.”

Most writers won't sell a lot of books. I encourage those who do to give away most or all of the royalties to God's kingdom. Recognize they belong to Him, not to you. Because all the royalties from my books go to missions work and other kingdom causes, I'm not tempted to spend on myself the couple million dollars God has graciously entrusted to me so far. Instead, my wife and I get to give them away and to rejoice as we make eternal investments in God's powerful work around the world.

### Do you feel writing is a calling?

My calling is first to find my purpose and joy in Christ, and second to transfer that purpose and joy to others. I want my life and writing to be full of what Jesus came full of—grace and truth. My desire is that He would so permeate my life as to flow over to others and draw them toward Him.

My life calling and my calling as a writer are the same. I want my imagination to be baptized by and grounded in God's Word, which has a power and authority my own words don't have. (He says His Word won't return to Him without accomplishing its intended purpose—if my words are to make an eternal impact, they must conform to His.)

My writing is a ministry, because ministry is service, and every aspect of our lives is to be a service that glorifies our Lord: “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3:17).

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men...It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Col. 3:23-24).

Is writing included in the “whatever” I do? Yes. And I do it with all my heart, to the glory of God, as a service to the Lord first and to others second, aware that I must seek to please the Audience of One. His judgment seat is the only one I'll stand before, and His opinion of my life is the only one that matters.



### Do you have a dream for the future of your writing, something you would love to accomplish?

In Heaven, I want to meet people whose lives were touched by my books, and hear their stories. And I want to thank all the people whose writing touched my life. On Earth, I want to be remembered as one of God's grateful errand boys. I want my life and my writing to have said, “It's all about Jesus, not about me.” I won't leave behind much of an inheritance to my children and grandchildren, but I hope to leave that kind of heritage.

## Question and Answer

By Randy Alcorn

### Some people look death in the face and refuse to think about it. I think the way we die can sometimes be a bigger testimony than the way we live. Is there a right way for a believer to approach death?

Five months before Bill Bright died, when his illness left him hooked up to oxygen and physically weak, I had breakfast with him in a Florida hotel. We talked for nearly two hours. He was so animated, so passionate, so in love with Jesus that he struck me as incredibly young. He told me how God had given him a great ministry of prayer, and that he felt through prayer he was able to do more for God than ever before. (When you consider what he'd done before, that was a weighty statement.)

When we discussed Heaven, Bill leaned forward and almost came out of his chair, pulling up the oxygen tubes. Then when a young man brought breakfast into the hotel room, Bill asked him about his family. When the man said his father in Haiti was sick, Bill promptly began praying for him. We both shared the gospel with him (tag-team witnessing with Bill Bright...that was unforgettable).

But what really struck me was that Bill was as ready to die as any man I've ever met. When you know God as well as he did, the adjustment to going to Heaven is a very natural one. You go from

loving and being with Christ here, to loving and being with Christ there. I look forward not only to death, but even more to the resurrection, and walking the New Earth with Bill and C. S. Lewis and Charles Spurgeon, Amy Carmichael, John Wesley, Mary, Joseph, and a host of others...but above all Jesus. What could possibly be better?

I preached on Heaven at my church, and shared this, one of my favorites, from Calvin Miller:

I once scorned ev'ry fearful thought of death,  
When it was but the end of pulse and breath,  
But now my eyes have seen that past the pain  
There is a world that's waiting to be claimed.  
Earthmaker, Holy, let me now depart,  
For living's such a temporary art.  
And dying is but getting dressed for God,  
Our graves are merely doorways cut in sod.\*

\*Calvin Miller, *The Divine Symphony* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2000), 139.



# From Sexual Slavery to Restoration and Rebirth

by Linda Smith, Founder & President of Shared Hope International

Shared Hope International began its ministry of rescuing and restoring women and children who have been victims of sex trafficking by opening the first Home of Hope in India in 1998. Asha Graham, or Village of Hope, has since grown into a 72-acre development two hours north of Mumbai. It's through this facility that a young lady named Ganga was given the opportunity to escape sexual slavery and begin a new life nearly eight years ago.

Ganga, a young teenager, had been visiting Mumbai with friends when she was separated from her companions. Ganga was able to retrace her steps to a bus station that she remembered from her travels earlier that day. However, after several hours of sitting and waiting, night had begun to fall. She lowered her head and began to cry. Hearing Ganga cry, an elderly man approached her and asked what was wrong.

He said that the last bus of the night had run, and he offered to take her home to his family for the night and then bring her back to the bus station in the morning so she could return home. He seemed nice, so Ganga trusted him; she had no other options. But instead of taking her to his home, the man took her to a brothel where he sold her for \$1,500. At first Ganga was confused. "What are we doing here?" she would ask the other girls. But they refused to answer her.

Despairing and frightened, Ganga began to cry so loudly that the brothel owner came and responded to her question. His answer was terrifying: her freedom had been sold and she was now owned by this man. For an entire year, Ganga was kept in a room within the brothel. She never saw the sun; she was never allowed to go outside. Then, at the age of 14, the brothel owner decided that she was "ready" and forced Ganga into prostitution. After several months, Ganga finally managed to run away and escape back to her village. She thought that she could find shelter and comfort with her family...but they rejected her and ordered her to return to the brothel.

Tragically, since she had no other place to go, she did return to the brothel. Most of the women forced into prostitution believe that's their fate, and they are told that if they are "good" prostitutes then maybe their next life will be better. It's a message of utter devastation and hopelessness. However, Devaraj, executive director of the Village of Hope in India,

has a very different message. His is one of love and forgiveness, life and hope.

Shortly after her return to the brothel, a local associate doing outreach in partnership with Shared Hope International was able to intervene on her behalf. Part of Shared Hope's intervention strategy is outreach through church services led by the Village of Hope team. "They accepted me, even though my own family would not," Ganga says. This message of love is how Ganga found freedom from sexual slavery and eventually a relationship with the Lord.

Now, eight years later, Ganga is aggressively leading the efforts to combat sex slavery in Mumbai. She leads a team back to the red-light area where her childhood was so unjustly taken away from her to help women escape from the bondage—sometimes carrying them out in her arms when they're too sick or tired to walk on their own. "I know what these girls are going through, and I know what will happen to them if they do not obey or cooperate," she says. "They will be beaten, starved, and locked away until they are weak and agree to work or die." Recently, Linda Smith, founder and director of Shared Hope International, was invited to join Ganga as she married a wonderful man at the Village of Hope.

"My heart was full of emotion as I watched this glorious woman in a beautiful white bridal gown agree to cherish a wonderful young man in the God-ordained covenant of marriage," Smith recalls. "To see her standing there as a young woman, radiantly beautiful with the joy of Christ on her face, in a tremendous transformation of her mind and spirit through God's love...the memory is almost overwhelming."

It's a trophy of God's grace. The Village of Hope provides shelter and security for more than 200 women and children rescued from brothels. The complex includes an educational facility, vocational school, and spiritual counseling. In Mumbai, India, Shared Hope has established several transitional safe houses for women on their journey to the Village of Hope or back to their native country. Shared Hope has also launched a mobile medical clinic and mobile food van, serving more than 2,000 people annually in and near the red-light district.

*This article first appeared in the newsletter of Everyday Woman, [www.everydaywoman.tv](http://www.everydaywoman.tv).*

*For more information on **Shared Hope International**: P.O. Box 65337, Vancouver, WA 98665, 1-866-HER-LIFE [www.sharedhope.org](http://www.sharedhope.org)*

*Other organizations that are ministering in this area:*

**Faith Alliance Against Slavery and Trafficking (FAAST)**  
625 Slaters Lane  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
(888) 466-4673 (toll free)  
[www.faastinternational.org](http://www.faastinternational.org)

**International Justice Mission**  
P.O. Box 58147  
Washington, DC 20037-8147  
(703) 465-5495  
[www.ijm.org](http://www.ijm.org)

**Make Way Partners**  
P.O. Box 26367  
Birmingham, AL 35260  
(205) 240-8597  
[www.makewaypartners.org](http://www.makewaypartners.org)

**World Relief**  
7 East Baltimore St.  
Baltimore, MD 21202  
(443) 451-1900 or  
(800) 535-5433  
[www.wr.org](http://www.wr.org)



# Letters to EPM

Halfway through your book *Deadline*, I saw a light which led me to cross the line towards the Lord. I've been on that thin line between God and hell my whole life.

If I had known *Deadline* was a spiritual book, I never would have read it! Friends in the past have tried to teach me Christianity, but never taught me for what! The lessons in your book show me the reason why I need to open my eyes and heart to God's plan...for my soul's sake.

I feel so stupid for letting the Devil manipulate me for so long. I know to use now this brief window of opportunity to make a difference for eternity. Thank God for Jesus to give me that chance.

Even though I'm in jail awaiting transfer to the penitentiary, no matter where I'm at, or what sins I've done, it is never too late to praise our Savior and live in the Lord's righteous light.

E. V., Alexandria, VA

Working at our church bookstore, a woman came in and requested the book *Heaven*. I know that this lady was going through a rough time. Her infant daughter was gravely ill, had to have a heart transplant and had many other issues, the outlook was not good. I asked her why she wanted to read such a BIG book. She said "If you were sending your child off to camp you would read all there is to know about it, therefore, if I have to send her to heaven I am going to know all I can." She did send her daughter off to heaven shortly thereafter, and is loving your book as it is helping her with the grief process. Thanks for writing the book.



I. K., Indiana

I just finished reading *The Grace and Truth Paradox*. I have been challenged to live with a "Christlike balance" as you call it. As a ministry wife I realized that I tend to respond to our church family with a heavier dose of grace out of fear of how they will respond and yet I realized that I parent our three girls with a heavy hand of truth. I am saddened as I now see the impact this lack of grace equal with truth has had on those around me. How have I encouraged women around me to be more Christlike? To strive for holiness like God is holy? And truth has not set my girls free...it has made them afraid of making mistakes. I am asking my Lord and Savior today to help me understand how to balance truth and grace in my relationships and life and to

give me courage and strength to choose to live with that understanding.

Thank you for this book which has challenged me to love my Lord and others more fully. M. A.

I felt the need to let you know how your book, *Heaven* affected me.

My 27-year-old daughter passed away a little over one year ago from cancer. I have been devastated since that time. I felt I had not only lost my daughter, but my faith as well. I truly felt God had let me down by allowing such an awful thing to happen. She was the best gift He had given her Dad and me, so I could not understand why He took that wonderful gift away from us. To tell you the truth I still don't understand, but I do have a desire to be where she is. I have a desire for Heaven.

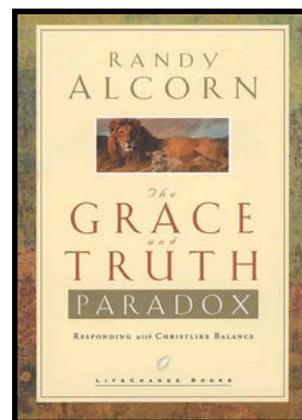
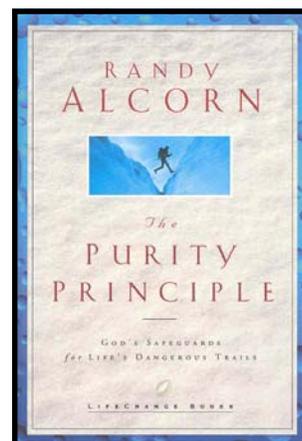
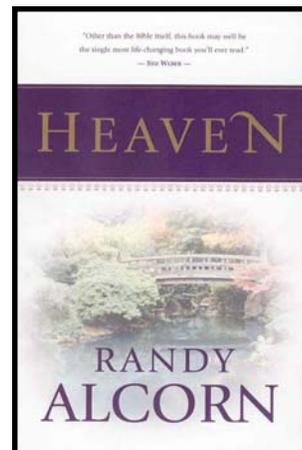
Before she passed away, and before I read your book, I knew I wanted to get to Heaven "eventually." I had a misguided idea of what it would be like and I wasn't too excited to get there...

Now, because of your book, I can't wait to experience it. Because of my daughter's death, I have read everything I could on Heaven and your book has made me feel so much better about where she actually is. I didn't know before about the intermediate Heaven and it brings such comfort to me to realize she isn't in limbo somewhere waiting 'til Jesus returns.

I thank you for that. I appreciate all your hard work. It has been a blessing to me. My heart is lighter. C. H.

I loved your book, *The Purity Principle*. I am preparing to marry a very godly girl and this book gave me some helpful tips on how to stay pure within marriage. I will be using them. Not only that, but it will help me to maintain purity with my future wife while we are in this fragile time. K. S.

What a blessing *The Treasure Principle* is to me and my wife. I recently retired after a 32-year stint in public education. Our giving level was quite high and I was concerned that we would not be able to continue to give that much. God has put a consulting job right in my lap which provides enough to allow us to keep giving as we did before. The Lord knows how to meet our needs at the proper time, not necessarily our time. Thank you for writing the book. The president of the company I am consulting with gave me the book as a gift and I loved every minute of reading. K. O.





# Accountability Groups: Men Helping Men in Their Walk With God

by Randy Alcorn

## Foundational Scriptures:

*“As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” (Prov. 27:17)*

*“Carry each other’s burdens...and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” (Gal. 6:2)*

*“Be very careful, then, how you live...” (Eph. 5:15)*

*“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Heb. 11:24-25)*

To experience true accountability, we have both the right and the responsibility to ask each other hard and to-the-point questions. Our goal must be not just to help each other *feel* good, but to help each other *be* good. The following questions are only suggestions. You may add and subtract as you wish. The point is not legalism, but checking in with each other in a meaningful way.

## Questions to Ask Initially— And Come Back To Periodically

1. What are the biggest barriers to your relationship with God?
2. What are the biggest barriers to your relationship with your wife?
3. What are the most serious temptations you face at home? At work? Elsewhere?
4. If Satan were to wage an all-out attack on your life, what area(s) would he focus on? (*What are your greatest points of vulnerability? For example, sexual impurity, financial irresponsibility, dishonesty, greed, pride, etc.*)
5. How can your brothers help you and pray for you?

## Questions to Ask Each Other Regularly

If there are more than two or three men, not all of the following can be asked of each man each week. Even when asked, the answer may be brief. The point is not to always answer each question but to regularly bring up each area and thereby give opportunity for sharing. Don't let more than a few weeks go by without discussing any of these areas. (You may wish to add questions of your own.)

1. What have you learned or memorized this week from God's Word? (*Share a specific passage.*)
2. What happened this week that put you to the test? How did you respond?

3. How are you doing in your relationship with God? (*Be specific—time in the Word, prayer, sense of dependence on the Lord, etc.*)

4. How are you doing in your relationship with your wife? (*Be specific—communication, spiritual sharing, conflict resolution, etc.*)

5. How are you doing in your relationships with your children? Or parents? Other key people?

6. How are you doing in your relationships at work or school?

7. How are you doing with your thought life? This week did you consistently keep your thoughts and actions pure before God? (*If the answer is “yes,” ask “Are you lying?”*)

8. What kind of a ministry did you have this week? Whom did you share Christ with, either directly or indirectly? Or, how did you use your gifts and resources to help the needy?

9. How can the others pray specifically for you this week?

10. Anything else you'd like to share? (*Questions or issues you're dealing with?*)

Be sure to allow time for each other's input, for expressing your praise to God for the things He's doing, and for prayer. This need not always be long, since you'll be praying for each other during the week (right?). If you're in a restaurant, you can pray right at your table, or go elsewhere.

Once in a while you might want to spend a whole morning in prayer or sharing in a more private environment.

You can determine whether you'd like someone to get you started each week, or you can try leaving it open so whoever wishes can take the initiative. Some weeks certain ones will need to share more than others. But be sure that each guy has ample opportunity to share each week, or at least over the long run. We must all consciously discipline



*To experience true accountability, we have both the right and the responsibility to ask each other hard and to-the-point questions.*

ourselves to stick with our purpose—we're not here just to chit-chat but to help each other live for Christ.

If someone is unusually quiet or tending to miss your meetings, be sure to take the initiative and encourage him to share—it may be his time of greatest need. (When we don't feel like sharing or answering the questions, it's often when we most need to.) We must reach out to each other even when—or *especially* when—we sense someone drawing back.

## John Wesley's Rules for Groups

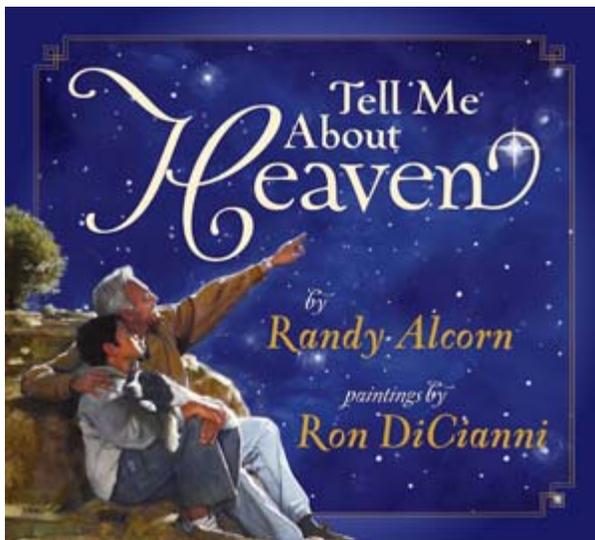
Accountability groups are not a new concept. John Wesley and the early Methodists used them over 200 years ago. Members of the small group were expected to agree to six common disciplines

or commitments. These are the commitments, as recorded in *The Works of John Wesley*:

1. To meet once a week, at the least.
2. To come punctually at the hour appointed, not missing without some extraordinary reason.
3. To begin (those of us who are present) exactly at the hour, with singing or prayer.
4. To speak each of us in order, freely and plainly, the true state of our souls, with the faults we have committed in thought, word or deed, and the temptations we have felt since our last meeting.
5. To end every meeting with prayer suited to the state of each person present.
6. To desire some person among us to speak his own state first, and then to ask the rest, in order, as many and as searching questions as may be, concerning their state, sins, and temptations.



John Wesley



## Tell Me About Heaven

Randy's new children's book *Tell Me About Heaven*, features beautiful paintings by gifted artist Ron DiCianni. If Ron's style of painting looks familiar, it is because you might have seen his painting *Safely Home*, which was featured in Randy's novel, also titled *Safely Home*.

*Tell Me About Heaven* will help kids better understand Biblical truths about Heaven as they read about ten-year-old Jake, who struggles to under-

stand his grandma's death. But as he spends two weeks at his grandfather's home, he is able to receive answers to his questions about Heaven.

As Jake and Grandpa fish, watch the stars, and take long walks, Grandpa shares what the Bible says about the reality and beauty of Heaven. As Jake learns the truth about Heaven, he begins to better understand and accept his grandmother's death.

As readers uncover the truths in the dialogue between Grandpa and Jake, they will better appreciate the home that awaits all who place their faith in Christ.

In case you were wondering, *Tell Me About Heaven* is a very different book from *Wait Until Then*, a 32-page book that also involves a grandfather and grandson. Each page of *Wait Until Then* is illustrated, and contains only a fraction of the words in *Tell Me About Heaven*. The setting and story are different, as are the size and the format. It is Randy's hope that both books will serve as resources for families as they teach their children truths about Heaven.

*(Tell Me About Heaven has just been published and may be purchased at your local bookstore or by contacting EPM at [www.epm.org](http://www.epm.org) or 503-668-5200)*



# The Christian and the Word of God Reclaiming Our Heritage: Celebrating God's Word

by Chuck Colson

Roughly 21 percent of Americans read the Bible weekly and 16 percent read it daily, according to surveys by George Gallup. The Bible remains the best-selling book of all time—about 26 million copies are sold annually! No other book has the Bible's reach, nor has any book had such a profound influence on so many lives.

Still, for many Americans—and especially the young—the Bible is largely unknown, unfamiliar, and unread. The main reason is that, for the past forty years, the Bible has been withdrawn from our public schools.

How did this happen? In 1963, the U. S. Supreme Court ruled, in *Abington v. Schempp*, that reading from the Bible before the start of public school classes was devotional and, thus, unconstitutional. The ruling ended a practice that had been in place since the earliest days of this nation.

Educators then interpreted the ruling to mean that the Bible could not be read or studied in classrooms. As a result, in most public schools all references to the Bible have been removed. Today, less than 10 percent of public schools teach about the Bible in class.

Yet the Supreme Court, even as it ruled against devotional activity, has upheld teaching about the Bible in public schools as constitutional. Justice Clark, writing for the majority in that opinion, said: "It might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization."

"Nothing we have said here," he added, "indicates that such study of the Bible or religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment."

Justice Arthur Goldberg concurred: "Neither government nor this Court can or should ignore the significance of the fact that a vast portion of our people believe in and worship God, and that many of our legal, political, and personal values derive historically from religious teachings."

Goldberg continued, "Government must inevitably take cognizance of the existence of religion and, indeed, under certain circumstances, the First Amendment may require that it do so."

We can all say "Amen!" to that.

Well, in this spirit, the National Bible Association and the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center released "The Bible and Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide." This guide was endorsed by eighteen different Jewish, Christian, and Muslim groups, including: the National Council of Churches, the National Association of Evangelicals, the Christian Legal Society, the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, and People for the American Way.

The two largest teacher unions, the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, and the National School Boards Foundation, signed on as well.

This is a blueprint—the first in more than 160 years of public education—for teaching about the Bible in literature, history, and social studies—something that surveys show three out of four Americans want.

You can help advance this effort. To download a copy of this guide, visit [www.teachaboutthebible.org](http://www.teachaboutthebible.org), or call 1-800-830-3733 and request Publication No. 99-F03. And when you get it, give it to the school principals and teachers in your community. Tell them the Bible is a heritage that all our children should share.

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## Eternal Perspective Ministries

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