

Eternal Perspectives

with founder and author Randy Alcorn

Fall 2009

My First Shower Nearly Killed Me by Brett Harris

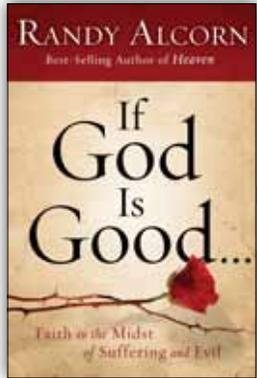
Parenting Teens

by Randy Alcorn

**If You Were the Author,
How Would You Have
Written the Story?**

by Randy Alcorn

If God is Good... Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil



As he did in his best-selling book, *Heaven*, author Randy Alcorn delves deep into a profound subject, and through compelling stories, provocative questions and answers, and keen biblical understanding, he brings assurance and hope to all.

Randy writes, “No question looms larger than the central question of this book: If God is good... why all this evil and suffering? If God loves us, how can he justify allowing (or sending) the sometimes overwhelming difficulties we face? Does this great question interest you? If so, I invite you to join me on a journey of discovery.”

If God Is Good is available from Eternal Perspective Ministries for the introductory price of \$16.49 (retail \$24.99). Order online at www.epm.org or call the EPM office at (503) 668-5200.

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Q: How is truth defined?



Truth is rooted in the eternal God who's all powerful and unchangeable. Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is Truth" (John 17:17).

Truth is far more than facts. It's not just something we act upon. It acts upon us. We can't change the truth, but the truth can change us. It sanctifies (sets us apart) from the falsehoods woven into our sin natures.

As Christ the living Word is truth, so his written word is truth. Though heaven and earth will pass away, God's truth never will.

Over half the New Testament uses of "truth" (*aletheia*) are in John's gospel. Truth is reality. It's the way things really are. What seems to be and what really is are often not the same. As I develop in my novel *Deception*, "Things are not as they appear." To know the truth is to see accurately. To believe what isn't true is to be blind.

God has written His truth on human hearts, in the conscience (Romans 2:15). Shame and twinges of conscience come from a recognition that truth has been violated. When the world hears truth, if spoken graciously, many are drawn to it by the moral vacuum they feel. The heart longs for truth—even the heart that rejects it.

As followers of Christ, we are to walk in the truth (III John 3), love the truth, and believe the truth (II Thessalonians 2:10, 12). We're to speak the truth "in love" (Ephesians 4:32).

Truth is far more than a moral guide. Jesus declared, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no man comes to the Father but by Me" (John 14:6). He didn't say He would show the truth or teach the truth or model the truth. He is the truth. Truth personified. He is the source of all truth, the embodiment of truth and therefore the reference point for evaluating all truth-claims. *R*

Q: What's the problem with having truth without grace?

A: Truth without grace is unbending, like the law of gravity. Gravity doesn't take into consideration the fact that the individual in the car is young, kind, tired or didn't mean to get too close to the edge of the cliff. When the car plunges off the precipice, gravity shows no sympathy.

Truth tells us we're sick. Only grace can cure us.

Jewish tradition says that when the high priest went into the holy of holies, a rope was tied around his ankle. Why? Because if God struck the priest down for some infraction, how else would they retrieve his body? (Would *you* go in after him?!).

If that was the caution and dread with which the holiest man in Israel approached God on the most holy day, what must the average person have felt? To approach this holy God was inconceivable. Yet consider Hebrews 10:19: "We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus."

"Let us then *approach the throne of grace with confidence*, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). To a devout Jew the notion of unhindered access to God is scandalous. (If it's not startling to us, it's only because we don't understand God's holiness.) The only explanation is the word that appears twice in the verse: *grace*. *R*

My first shower nearly killed me



by Brett Harris

I still remember my first shower. It was a horrible experience. I was eight years old and all I had ever known was baths. Baths were neat and tidy ordeals where the water flowed in from below my head and—provided I didn't splash too much—stayed below my head.

I found showers to be an entirely different beast. The water, rather than flowing as a solid stream that was easily visible and avoidable, sprayed out as nearly invisible and unavoidable droplets that seemed to have a magnetic attraction to my eyes.

I did not ask to be promoted from Junior Bath Taker to Junior Shower Taker, but my parents had set the date for my graduation and protesting made little difference. It didn't help that my twin brother Alex loved showers and had taken one earlier that week.

Before I could draft my formal petition, let alone get anyone to sign it, I found myself staring up at the dreadful shower head just as a brave soul stares down the barrel of his executioner's gun.

However, once the trigger was pulled and the shower head began rumbling and hissing, my courage melted away, and I was screaming before the first drop hit me.

The funny thing is that this morning, nearly ten years later, I took a shower and didn't think twice about it. I even purposefully let the water spray on my face! It is incredible that what then seemed to be an impossible hurdle is now part of my everyday routine.

We've All Had "First Shower" Experiences

You probably can remember something in your own life that at the time seemed entirely beyond you. Maybe it was something as simple as tying your shoes or riding a bike without training wheels. Maybe it was learning to read or solving basic math problems in 2nd grade. These

are things that are easy for you now, but were enormous challenges at the time.

My question for you is: What has changed? What is the difference between the enormous challenges of a child and the enormous challenges of a young adult?

What's the difference between a difficult 2nd grade math problem for a seven-year-old and a difficult Algebra problem for a 15-year-old? Though an algebraic equation operates on a higher plateau than a double-digit multiplication problem, that is compensated for by the fact that a teenager operates on a higher plateau than a child.

Compare learning to dance with learning to walk. When you contrast the motor skills of a baby with those of a young child, you should conclude that, though dancing is more complex, it is not necessarily more difficult.

As a musician I can attest to the fact that my difficult piano pieces in Level 9 were no more arduous than my difficult pieces in Level 3. The only variance was my level of skill and tolerance for practice. It is just as difficult for a seven-year-old beginner to practice "Chopsticks" for 30-minutes as it is for a music major in college to practice Liszt's "Hungarian Rhapsody" for three hours.

If A Baby Can Do It, Why Can't We?

With those examples in mind, I return to my question: What has changed? What is the difference between the enormous challenges of your childhood and the enormous challenges of your young adulthood?

And perhaps a more important question: What is the difference between the way you responded to those challenges as a child and how you respond to them now?

I constantly hear fellow young adults say things like, "You know, I did Algebra 1/2, but I'm just not a math per-

“Both necessity and expectations have incredible power to require much of us and make us strong, or to require little of us and make us weak.”



son,” or “I’m a terrible speller, my brain just doesn’t work that way.” I’ve had other teens tell me, “I’m just a quiet person. I don’t like communicating much,” and “I’m such a compulsive shopper. If I see something I like I can’t help but buy it.” Or what about, “I’m just such a blonde!”

While I don’t doubt that many teens find math, spelling, communication, self-control and intelligence incredibly difficult, I find it very hard to accept that these difficulties should begin to define their personhood.

We would think it was crazy if a toddler said, “You know, I tried to get potty-trained, but I’m just not a toilet person.” But we sympathize with a fellow teenager who says that he’s “just not a people person.”

Low Expectations Strike Again

The fact is that as we get older we begin defining our limitations as what comes easily to us – and our rate of growth in competence and character slows and falters.

When we were children our limitations were not defined by difficulty. Our limitations were not defined by failure – even repeated failure. So what has changed? Why do babies, with inferior motor skills, reasoning ability, and general physical and mental strength, have a nearly 100% success rate in overcoming their big challenges, while teenagers often falter and fail before theirs?

We Expect More of Babies Than We Do of Teens

The truth is that we are incredibly susceptible to cultural expectations and once we have satisfied our culture’s meager requirements we stop pushing ourselves.

Why does every healthy baby learn to walk while very few teenagers are sophisticated enough to have mastered the waltz? One is expected, the other is not.

Why does every normal baby overcome communication barriers by learning to talk while very few teenagers overcome barriers between themselves and their parents by learning to communicate? One is expected, the other is not.

We live in a culture that expects the basics, but nothing more. We live in a culture that expects for you to get by (i.e. be potty-trained), but not to thrive.

The challenge to you is this: Have you really found your limits or have you merely reached a point where our culture’s expectations no longer demand that you succeed?

We Are Capable of Much More Than Is Expected

If you were abandoned in a foreign country with citizens who spoke no English, you would pick up the native dialect. And if your high school required everyone to complete Advanced Calculus in order to graduate, you would find a way to do it.

Both necessity and expectations have incredible power to require much of us and make us strong, or to require little of us and make us weak. We live in a culture where few people do more than is required, yet that is the secret of effectiveness in the Lord’s service.

The application goes far beyond math and language, dancing and speaking; those are simply a few helpful examples. The important question we must ask ourselves is: “Am I unable to do certain things, or am I simply unwilling to invest the time and effort necessary to succeed?”

This Is A Serious Issue

Classifying yourself as “this-kind-of-person” or “that-kind-of-person” is one of the quickest ways to greatly increase or majorly hamper your potential. Adults who at one time decided they “just weren’t computer people” are missing out on all the convenience and power of technology.

A person who decides early in life that he is “just not a public speaker,” and then stops striving for excellence in the area of public communication, has no doubt lost dozens of opportunities to impact the lives of hundreds, if not thousands of people.

History is jammed full of examples of “extremely shy people” who not only overcame their fear of people, but also became famous leaders and communicators. Calvin Coolidge, the United States’ 30th President, is just one such example.

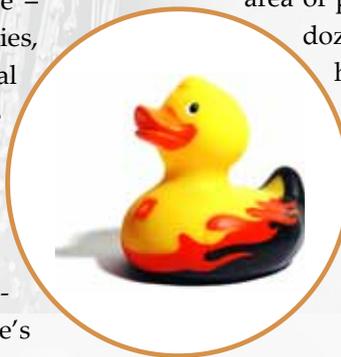
One of the most devastating classifications that can be made is when a person classifies themselves spiritually as “not really one of those extreme Christians.”

Millions of young people, even Christian young people, live through years of spiritual weakness and build up loads of regret simply because they found their identity in being a rebel.

Closing Thoughts

I wasn’t a “shower person” when I was eight, and I’m not sure if I’m a “campaign person” at 17, but by God’s grace and through His strength I can do anything. And so can you.

Nearly a decade after my first shower, one of the great challenges of my childhood, I find myself working long hours on four statewide races for the Alabama Supreme Court. When I find myself thinking that this current challenge is going to kill me, I just remember that I thought the same thing about my first shower. Then I smile, and keep on pushing. •



Condensed excerpt. Original article posted May 2, 2006 on The Rebellion website: <http://www.therebellion.com/blog/2006/05/my-first-shower-nearly-killed-me/>. Alex and Brett Harris are authors of the book *Do Hard Things*. Used with permission.



photo by Ted Haddock/International Justice Mission

RESCUING THE OPPRESSED

THE INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION

When William Wilberforce and his compatriots succeeded in bringing an end to 400 years of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, it may have seemed that the monster of slavery was defeated. These heroes had the courage to fight and win the battle against slavery in their era—but the crime endures in new forms. Today, there are 27 million children, women, and men entrapped in this brutal system. As Christians called to “seek justice [and] rescue the oppressed” (Isaiah 1:17), we must respond to the evil of modern-day slavery. Children like Kumar desperately need us to.

When he was only five years old, Kumar suffered great loss: his father died suddenly and his mother abandoned him. Orphaned and alone, Kumar went to live with his uncle. Two years after his father’s death, Kumar’s tragedies were compounded when a corrupt brick kiln owner conscripted the little boy into slavery at his kiln.

The brick kiln was a massive operation that churned out hundreds of hard clay bricks every day, powered by slaves who gathered water, sifted sand, molded bricks, and hauled them in and out of the sun for the owner’s profit. All day, seven days a week, Kumar carried heavy clay bricks back and forth in the kiln as they dried. He woke early each morning to begin laboring at 6:30 a.m. and continued until the evening hours, his hands raw and his body exhausted.

Though he was only a child, Kumar knew that his situation was wrong. “I wanted to study. I wanted my parents. I wanted to play. At times I would think of all those things,” he remembers.

But Kumar was not forgotten. International Justice Mission, a Washington, DC-based human rights organization that works in 13 countries in the developing world to bring the protections of the law to the poor, learned of the kiln where he was held.

Around the world, International Justice Mission’s teams of investigators, lawyers, and social workers respond to God’s call to seek justice for the oppressed by tangibly bringing the protection of the law to the poor. IJM staff work with local authorities to investigate cases of violent oppression, including slavery, sex trafficking, illegal seizure of property from widows and orphans, and sexual violence. They bring rescue to victims, meet their long-term needs through ensuring access to excellent aftercare services, and prosecute perpetrators in their local court systems.

IJM investigators documented evidence of conditions at the kiln and partnered with local government authorities and police to plan a rescue operation at the facility to release the slaves. When the team arrived to bring freedom to the slaves, Kumar knew his life was changing. “When I heard that somebody is going to release me from here, I felt very happy,” he remembers.

The next day, while IJM staff began to compile evidence to pursue the prosecution of the slave owner, IJM aftercare staff brought Kumar back to his native village. There he began a new life. IJM helped him enroll in school, where he quickly began to make up for lost time. His life has changed from one of slavery to one of hope.

In response to God’s call to justice, IJM has been able to bring rescue to thousands of victims of violent oppression who urgently wait for an advocate like Kumar did. •

How can I get involved?

Visit www.IJM.org/takeaction to learn about:

- Becoming a Prayer Partner
- Communicating with your government representatives about justice issues
- Mobilizing your church in seeking justice

For more information on this ministry, contact:

International Justice Mission

P.O. Box 58147

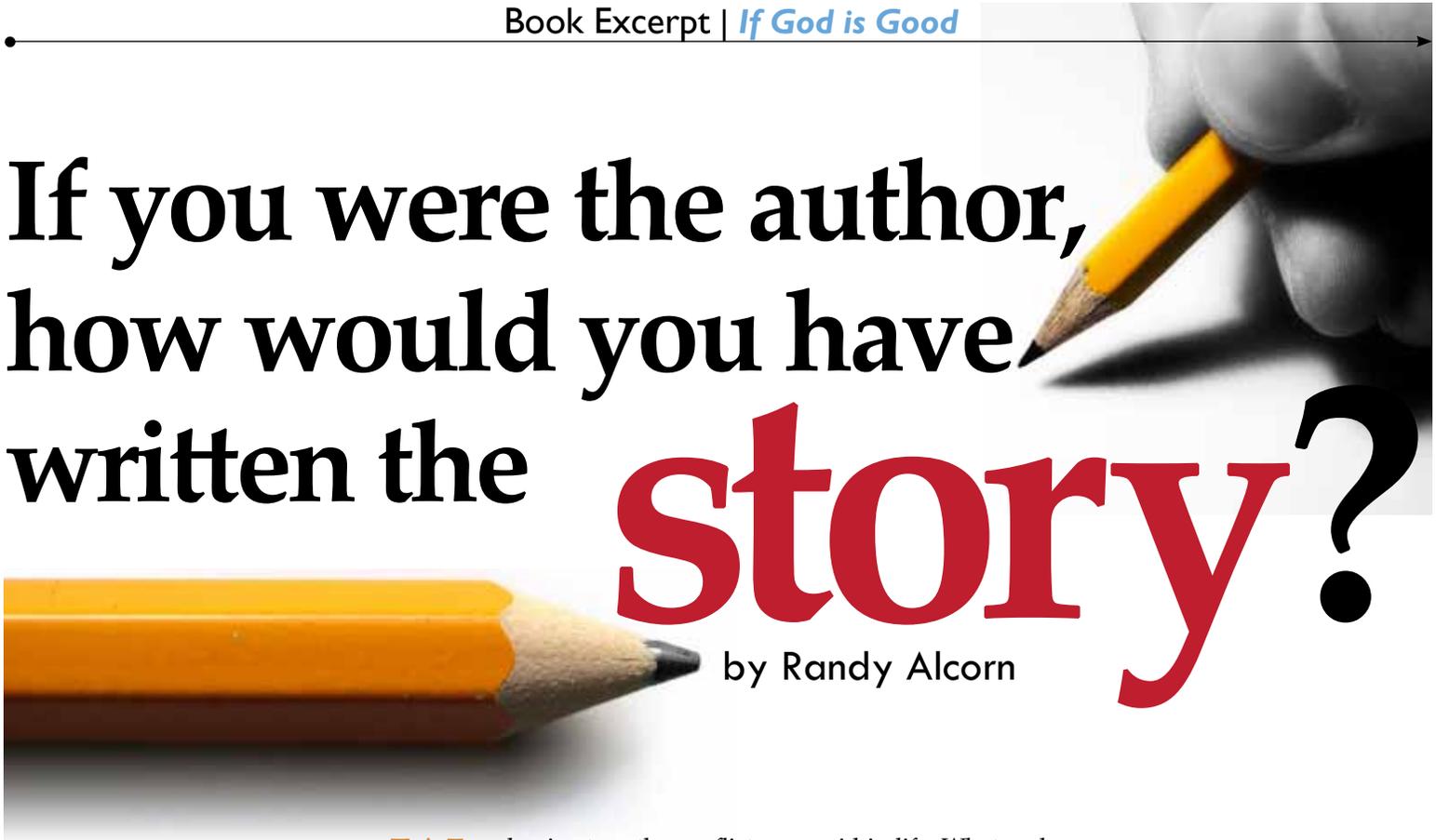
Washington, DC 20037

(703) 465-5495

www.IJM.org

(You may also give a financial contribution through EPM. 100% of designated contributions go directly to the ministry noted.)

If you were the author, how would you have written the **story?**



by Randy Alcorn

We value in story the conflict we avoid in life. What makes a good story? Interesting characters, significant conflict, the thwarting of desires, and a satisfying (if not triumphant) resolution. It must avoid predictability and its characters have to continuously develop—and the higher the stakes, the better the story.

Now, consider God as the great Storyteller. With grand artistry, he writes into the story the characters, both angels and people, with different names, personas, and circumstances. He tells us of Michael and Lucifer, brother archangels. Lucifer rebels and becomes Satan. He takes a third of the angels down with him. When Satan first appears in the garden, we know none of this; God doesn't tell us this backstory until much later.

As the culmination of his new universe, God creates Adam and Eve. He could have kept them from temptation and so prevented evil, suffering, and the Curse. But no rebellion, no drama, no story. Without the high stakes of humanity's alienation from God, there can be no redemption.

Evil enters the world. And right then and there God promises a Redeemer, the woman's offspring. His people, century after century, expect the Redeemer to come soon, overthrow his enemies, and set up his kingdom—end of story.

But that's not how it happens.

Instead, thousands of years pass as humanity continues its struggle with evil and suffering. Finally, in a fantastic plot twist, God becomes a humble carpenter, heals the sick, raises the dead, and allows others to kill him. He does it all to redeem the people he loves. He rises from the dead, commands and empowers his followers to serve him, then leaves but promises to return.



With compelling resurrection evidence to back it up, he reiterates the promise—one day he'll make all things right and will live forever with his people.

The first three chapters of God's story, as told in the Bible, set up the unfolding drama of redemption. The last three chapters show how God will judge evil, reward good, and come down to the New Earth to live with his children forever. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more suffering and evil.

This is the greatest story ever told. Secular reviewers often say of a book, "This is a powerful redemptive story." The very concept of a redemptive story flows from the Bible's story of redemption. It's the prototype of all great stories.

Suppose you could remove from the story Lucifer's fall and Adam and Eve's sin. Take away Cain and Abel's conflict, the

Flood, Babel, and the battles Joseph, Job, Moses, David, and Elijah had with evil and suffering. Remove all wars and heartbreaks and yearnings for something better. Take them all away and you would also take away Jesus, who would not become one of us in order to reveal God's character and save us from our sins.

The second person of the triune God would still exist, of course, but no God-man, no incarnation, no need for incarnation. No first coming, no second coming. No New Heaven and New Earth, only the same one continuing forever. The result? Less appreciation for peace because war had never broken out; less appreciation for food because famine had never occurred; less appreciation for righteousness because sin never appeared. Less love for life because death never happened. Less glory to God and heartfelt worship because we'd never

have seen his attributes of grace and mercy and patience.

As a member of the real-life story's cast, you might wish for a world untouched by evil and suffering. That's understandable, because life is hard as the story unfolds; and it will be hard until it culminates or you leave the stage, having played your part.

But if you sat in the audience, which story would you prefer to watch? And if you wrote the story, which version would you prefer to write? And even as a cast member, having endured such difficulty, ten thousand years from now at the ongoing cast party in honor of the Writer and Director, when grand tales make the rounds at dinner tables on the New Earth—which story do you think you would cast your vote for?

Don't most, if not all, of the greatest virtues surface in response to evil and suffer-

“Don’t most, if not all, of the greatest virtues surface in response to evil and suffering?”



ing? Think of your favorite books and movies. Take *Braveheart*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Schindler’s List*, *Amistad*, *Star Wars*, or *The Lord of the Rings*. The virtues and camaraderie, the courage and sacrifice central to these stories simply would not exist without a context of evil and suffering.

Do you agree that some great goods such as courage and sacrifice and compassion materialize only in the presence of evil and suffering? If you do, then you recognize that if God allowed less evil in the world, there would also be less good.

If you could snap your fingers and remove all evil and suffering that has ever happened, would you? If you did, then Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Abraham Lincoln, Harriet Tubman, Susan B. Anthony, and William Wilberforce would just be names. Without his deafness, we don’t know whether Beethoven would have written his symphonies. Had John Bunyan not been unjustly imprisoned, he almost certainly would not have written *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.

On January 13, 1982, Air Florida Flight 90 faced icy weather upon departing Washington, DC. The Boeing 737 skidded off the runway, slammed into the Fourteenth Street Bridge, and careened into the deathly cold Potomac River. Five passengers clung to the

broken-off tailpiece, floating in icy water.

A rescue helicopter dropped a lifeline, pulling up one person. When the second lifeline fell to Arland Williams, forty-six, he quickly passed it on to save another. The third and fourth lifelines came, and again he passed them to others. By the time the fifth and last lifeline dropped, Williams had drowned in the frigid water. Rescuer Gene Windsor wept as he described what Williams had done: “He could have gone on the first trip, but he put everyone else ahead of himself. Everyone.”

My heart aches for the many families whose loved ones perished in that crash. Yet this act of heroism, as have countless others, enriches us and challenges us to strengthen our own characters so in a similar circumstance we might do the same.

I don’t ask my characters for permission to let them suffer and face evil because, as the author, I know the best ending for the story.

Let’s, for a moment, grant life to fictional characters. If, in an interview with a character from one of my novels, you were to ask whether he’d like to be written out of the story, he would answer no. Nonexistence appeals to no one. Now, ask him if he would like to suffer less, and he’ll answer yes.

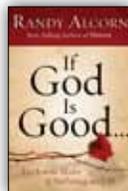
Ah, but I know I have something greater in store for my characters. So I do not let them walk out of my novels in protest.

I sympathize with my characters, since I too am a character in God’s story. At times I’d like to take a break from the drama. Three months off without stress would feel nice. But I honestly wouldn’t want a permanent break, because the story gives meaning to my life. I’m part of something great, far bigger than myself. And I trust God not only to bring the whole story together, but to do with my part of it what he knows to be best.

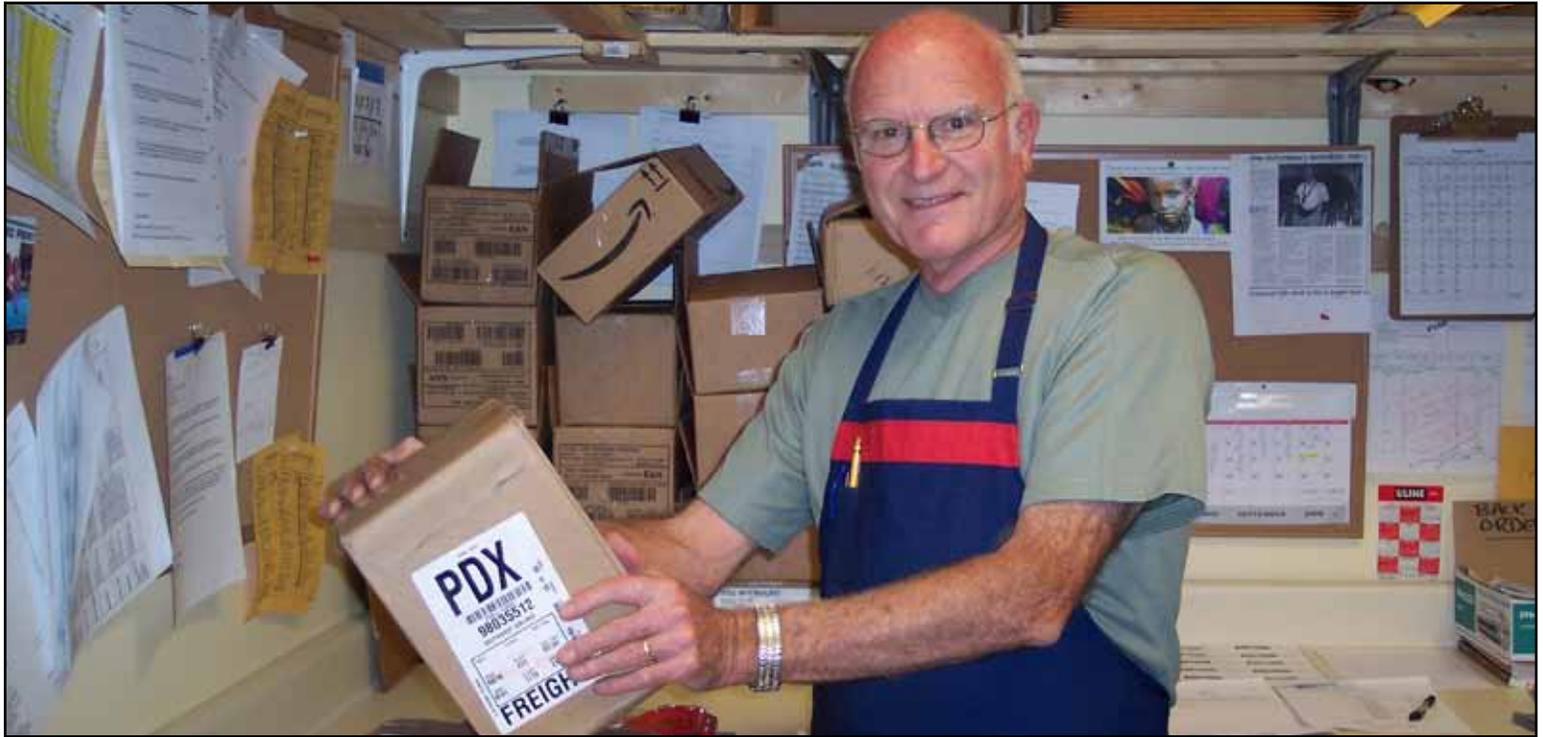
How many of us would have chosen to leave the warmth and security of our mother’s womb for a world of noise, bright lights, cold, hunger, and thirst? Yet, knowing what you know now, would you want to go back?

In my novels, the main characters face great conflict, turmoil, uncertainty, and suffering. Some die. So who am I to say God shouldn’t write such things into his story, including my part?

God created all the characters in his story. He loves a great story, and he has made us to love it. Before we fault him for the plot twists we don’t like, we should remember that Jesus has written this story in his own blood. *R*



Condensed excerpt from *If God is Good: Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil* by Randy Alcorn. Read more excerpts or order the book at epm.org.



Shipping Clerk Dwight Myers

by Wendy Jeffries

Dwight Myers is the shipping clerk for Eternal Perspective Ministries. He also monitors inventory and receives incoming book shipments from publishers and suppliers. October 1st will be Dwight's 3rd anniversary of working for EPM.

All his life, Dwight has worked with inventory control. But he had never before worked in the publishing field. "You gotta think different," said Dwight. When a new book comes out, he knows that means a large stock will need to be maintained of the book or item being promoted. But that doesn't mean carrying less of anything else. Dwight just finds a way to make space in his stock room, which is deceptively small for how much stock goes through it. "It's like working out of a suitcase."

His favorite thing about working at EPM "is the thing I didn't want to get involved in the first time I heard about it."

That was to help determine where to give part of the royalties of Randy's books. It is a privilege of the EPM staff that Dwight does not take lightly. "It scared me to death," said Dwight. But he also said that "being allowed to give like that" has brought him the most joy.

The teaching of Randy's book *The Treasure Principle* has been important in

Dwight's life. "I go over *The Treasure Principle* probably once a year to refresh my mind on some of the principles in there." Dwight is enthusiastic about the freedom of a life lived away from the bondage of debt. He said it was a lesson learned later in life, but one that he hopes to pass on to his family by example.

I'd rather be doing something with my hands... making something or restoring something.

Dwight has been married to Dawn for 53 years. They have 3 children, 6 grandchildren, and 4 great grandchildren.

The couple enjoy spending time with their family, especially in the outdoors. "We usually camp annually on some lake," said Dwight. They enjoy watching their grandkids and great grandkids excel in life and mature.

Dwight likes the occasional good book, but as he said, "I'd rather be doing something with my hands...making some-

thing or restoring something." He does have a special place in his heart for Randy Alcorn's novel *Safely Home*. "That was the first time that when I got to the last chapter I was emotionally involved," he said.

If you really want to see his eyes light up with joy, ask him about farming. "To me, to get out on a rototiller is the most relaxing therapy, to nurture the soil and watch things grow," said Dwight, who enjoys sharing the analogies for the Christian life that he sees in nature.

For the past 15 years, Dwight and Dawn have served as volunteer chaplains at Multnomah County Inverness Jail. Dawn talks with the girls, one or two at a time. Every other Sunday, Dwight does back to back chapel services for two different men's dorms. "It's really concentrated," said Dwight. He encourages the men to initiate a conversation one-on-one with a chaplain at another time. At any given time, a chaplain may be available, but is not allowed to initiate the conversation.

Dwight's favorite passage from Scripture is Psalm 1. He reads it at least once a week. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly," Dwight quoted from the passage, saying, "There's a difference between being with them and following their advice." •

Suffering: God's Megaphone

an excerpt from *Lord Foulgrin's Letters* by Randy Alcorn

My gloating Squaltaint,

I tire of your rhapsodies concerning vermin suffering. They're signs of a rank amateur. You could learn from a Nazi soldier of mine who idly filed his nails while women and children paraded past him on their way to the gas chamber. Show some class.

You gloat you've inflamed Fletcher's lower back until he's in constant pain. You brag his wife is pregnant and because of their age you think this will weaken their marriage. To top it off, you think you've managed to create a chromosomal abnormality.

You're drunk on suffering. Sober up! Concerning your boasts about illness and deformities, there's considerable debate on the extent to which we can inflict such maladies. Ratskull argues the Enemy alone creates, and we can only twist what He's created. He holds we cannot take credit for the conception of a handicapped child. Curiously, the Enemy claims these wretches are His work. He says He makes blind and deaf image-bearers, as though this were cause for pride rather than shame.

Be alert to the purposes the Enemy may have in bringing this child to them. Fletcher's convictions as a Christian may trigger a different response than you anticipate—what would have worked a year ago might not now.

If you can get them to kill the idiot child, you succeed. They'd do it "for the child's sake," of course. They'll then carry guilt, which will likely destroy their marriage, reinforce their materialism, and deaden Fletcher's faith.

But even then, look out. For the evils people do can boomerang on us. How many maggot-feeders years or decades later turn to the Enemy through coming to terms with past choices that plague them?

If the child lives, you imagine he'll drain their time and distract them from pursuits they'd have preferred? But how many families have we seen transformed by the presence of such children? How many have we seen

drawn closer to the Enemy by the traumas we celebrated?

You must not look at immediate results, Squaltaint, but ultimate ones. As for Fletcher's back, I'm sure it's pleasant to see him unable to tie his own shoe without pain, to see his eyes well up with tears. Don't get too sentimental. The pain is dangerous because it reminds him something's wrong; not all is as it should be. It could make him recognize his powerlessness and long for a better world. His pain and tears could prompt him to be more sensitive to his wife's ailments and to the suffering of a world he's always ignored.

Pain is the Enemy's megaphone. With it He can get through to the nearly deaf. The forbidden Book calls Him the "God of all comfort." When they seek comfort He makes Himself known to them. But men only seek comfort when in pain.

You keep celebrating the latest wars and famines and natural disasters. Don't put too much hope in them. Our job is much easier in peacetime and affluence, when death hides behind marquees and billboards.

Smother the vermin in prosperity, curse them with good health, lead them down the easy street to hell in comfort and abundance. We can pick the meat from their bones later precisely because we've labored to fatten them now.

If comfort proves the best way to achieve bad character, by all means do what you can to make Fletcher comfortable. True, suffering can dismantle faith in the Enemy, but even that's a danger, for the faith dismantled was not a true faith in the first place. We'd be better served by the false faith remaining intact. For once pseudo faith comes crashing down, there's danger true faith may be built upon its ruins.

Don't let the Enemy fool you. Above all, don't let Him use you.

Wise to His insidious tactics,

Lord Foulgrin

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

1 Peter 5:8 (ESV)



How good it is to thank the Lord:

Why Scripture commands us to sing



by Chuck Colson

Enjoying good music makes us smile. It's part of what makes us human. And one recent TV show drives the point home in an unexpected and astounding way.

At BreakPoint's blog, *The Point*, we had a lively debate over church music—especially the now-common practice of bands performing during Sunday worship.

Much of the debate focused on contemporary music versus traditional hymns. But one of our bloggers invited readers to consider another question: Does God intend us to merely listen to music—or to sing ourselves?

Theologian T.M. Moore answers this question in an article he wrote for *BreakPoint Online* called “Whatever Happened to Singing?” It's curious, Moore writes, that “Scripture gives us no specific guidance in how to *listen* to music. Music, according to the Bible, is not the spectator sport we have made it to be.” Instead, we find many commands to sing.

Earlier generations of Christians sang on all sorts of occasions, Moore writes. When they were locked up in jail, Paul and Silas sang psalms. So did early Christians as they went about their chores. As Moore notes: “Celtic Christians considered singing an important spiritual discipline for making progress in the life of faith. Their spiritual descendants of the 16th to the 19th centuries wrote songs for everything from lighting the fire to milking the cows to heading out to sea. They set those songs in the form of prayers to God for blessing, guidance, and help.”

We see this point illustrated in the 1985 film *Witness*. After the barn-raising, Amish men sang together as they began walking home.

Why do so many modern Christians neglect the practice of singing spiritual songs?

First, it's much more enjoyable to listen to professional singers than to the sound of our own voices—especially if you have a voice like mine. Second, Moore writes, “singing is hard work.” It “takes a commitment of the mind (in remembering

the lyrics, melody, and beat). It takes a commitment of the heart (in summoning up the proper affections).” It also calls on our strength “(in exercising the voice and lungs).”

Third, most of us don't know many spiritual songs all the way through.

But singing is good for us—which is why we ought to recover the spiritual discipline of singing to the Lord. And when learning the songs all the way through, we ought to look for

“Singing hymns about God's love and protection can also provide comfort in a dangerous situation.”

opportunities to sing “the Lord's own words back to Him.”

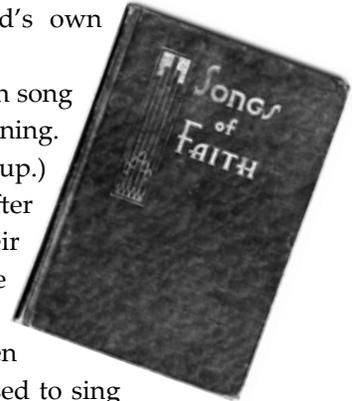
Moms could lead their kids in song on the drive to school in the morning. (It might even help wake them up.) Instead of turning on the TV after dinner, parents might lead their kids in some joyous singing to the Lord. This is a practice in Scotland. Just for fun, we might even dig up those songs Christians used to sing when they lit the fire and milked the cows.

Singing hymns about God's love and protection can also provide comfort in a dangerous situation—like when a loved one is undergoing surgery, or when you're driving during a blizzard.

As Moore puts it, “Singing psalms deepens us theologically, [and] puts us in the company of that great unseen host who have gone before us and surround us as faithful witnesses to the Lord.”

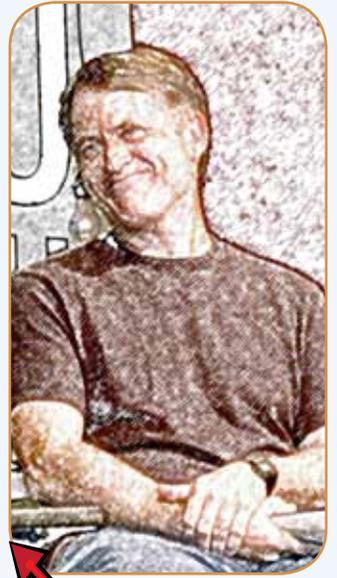
So no matter what kind of voice you have, or what day of the week it is, lift up your voice and sing praise to God Most High. •

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In July Randy spoke at *The Way*, Solid Rock Church's gathering for 18 to 20-somethings. He answered questions about Heaven. These photos and quotes are from the event. Go to epm.org to hear the full message.

“One day, the **greatest joy** that will ever be had in the history of humanity will be that we will see God, who is the source of all joy. You may wonder sometimes, in the dark moments of life, ‘Where are you, God? Do you care? Do you really love me? Why would you let all of this happen?’ Imagine us looking at **Jesus** someday, and standing before Him and seeing the scars on His hands and feet. He might look at us and say, ‘Do these look like the hands of a God who does not care?’ He went to the cross for us! We will see God, but we won’t just see God at a distance. He will come to us, and embrace us, and we will talk with Him and walk with Him. We will see the scars, and we will **never wonder.**”



“Certainly the people we’ve gotten to know on earth, in eternity, ten thousand years from now, ten million years from now, will be our oldest friends. There will also be lots of new friends. It’s possible that you’ve not yet met, and won’t meet in this life, the person who will one day become your closest friend, besides Jesus Himself.”

People think, ‘Oh, it would be so boring to be in the presence of God where you can’t do anything ‘on the edge’ or sinful or wrong.’ How has that worked for us? Not well! Look around—it has not worked well. People say, “Oh, I want to be in Hell with my buddies shooting pool.” They may well be shooting pool on the New Earth, but nobody in Hell is going to be shooting pool.

“God is the source of all joy, and all pleasure, and all fascination, and all adventure, for all eternity!”



Parenting Teens

Leaving a lasting spiritual heritage

by Randy Alcorn



If we don't think strategically about parenting, then we've made a statement: our children aren't important, or parenting comes so naturally that it happens without our attention. My advice is to get more involved in your teenagers' lives, and be more alert to youth culture. Understanding that culture allows you to recognize the temptations, challenges, and opportunities they face.

Too often youth pastors get the blame for students whose parents expect the church to "fix" their kids. Unfortunately, speaking as both a parent and a former youth pastor, it isn't that easy. The church can and should be a source of guidance and support for parents. But no youth group is a substitute for attentive, hands-on parenting. (Not to mention on-your-knees parenting.)

The choices your children make when it comes to friends are critically important. As I look back on our daughters' teenage years, their solid friendships with committed Christians—most of them in our church youth group—were absolutely crucial. As parents we took primary responsibility for input to their lives. Still, there is no way to overestimate the importance of their peer influences.

Parents also need to understand the balance of truth and grace. Regarding truth, if we parents don't teach our kids to discern between good and evil, who will? The church needs to be there not only to train and guide children, but to equip parents. But no parents should wait for the church to teach their children. As Deuteronomy 6 makes clear, a child's primary education is inside their home.

Regarding grace, if parents aren't loving and forgiving, then our children won't see Jesus in us. And our well-intentioned rules will drive them away from God, not toward him. Our kids need us to not only raise the bar high for them—and make

no mistake, they do need that—but to believe the best of them, being quick to affirm and offer grace when they stumble. This will help them not to give up because they think they can't please us, and therefore can't please God. May your children see in you the Jesus who came "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14)

Parents, if I could give you one piece of advice, it would be this: When it comes to your children's lives, no one can take your place. So, don't wait for someone else to talk to your kids about Jesus. Do it yourself. Read Scripture with them.

Memorize it together. Pray with them. Go help the needy together. Give together and serve together. Show them what it means to be a disciple.

Leave your children a lasting spiritual legacy.

It only takes money to leave an inheritance. It takes character and spiritual vitality, "a long obedience in the same direction," to leave a true heritage.

What will your kids remember? Dad was too busy to help me, too busy to talk with Mom, too busy to volunteer for even the most basic ministry at church, so busy reading the newspaper that there was no time for the Bible, so busy buying new cars there was no money to give to missions? If that's true, my friend, no amount of money you leave can cover up the fact that you have left your family nothing of eternal value.

My mother left me no money, but she left me a heritage that I thank God for every day. She didn't even come to Christ until after I did. In everything of value I do, in everything of value my daughters do, the quality of my mother's life is and will always be present. That is heritage.

"We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done" (Psalm 78:4). *R*

When it comes to your children's lives, no one can take your place.

Thy Wiser Determinations

Right when I needed it, God led me to this Puritan prayer, from Arthur Bennett's book

The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions.

This is the final portion of it. —Randy Alcorn

*T*hou art all my good in times of peace,
my only support in days of trouble,
my one sufficiency when life shall end.
Help me to see how good thy will is in all,
and even when it crosses mine
teach me to be pleased with it.
Grant me to feel thee in fire, and food and every providence,
and to see that thy many gifts and creatures
are but thy hands and fingers taking hold of me.
Thou bottomless fountain of all good,
I give myself to thee out of love,
for all I have or own is thine,
my goods, family, church, self,
to do with as thou wilt,
to honour thyself by me, and by all mine.
If it be consistent with thy eternal counsels,
the purpose of thy grace,
and the great ends of thy glory,
then bestow upon me the blessings of thy comforts;
If not, let me resign myself to thy wiser determinations.

The Treasure Principle Resources for Pastors

Pastors may request a complimentary copy of Randy Alcorn's book *The Treasure Principle*, as well as a free DVD of Randy speaking about the Treasure Principle. Email your shipping address and mention this offer to info@epm.org or call the EPM office at (503) 668-5200.

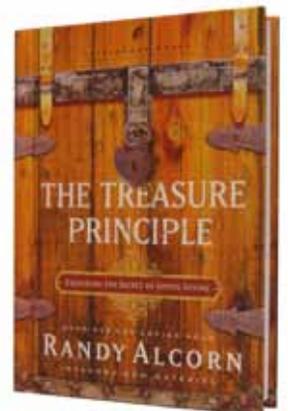
The Treasure Principle (retail price \$9.99) is available from EPM for \$7.99/book.

Additional discounts are offered on quantity purchases:

Quantity	Price
24 books (1 case or more)	\$5.99/book plus shipping (40% discount off retail)
96 books (4 cases or more)	\$5.00/book plus shipping (50% discount off retail)

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

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- ♦ My First Shower Nearly Killed Me *by Brett Harris*
- ♦ Parenting Teens *by Randy Alcorn*
- ♦ If You Were the Author *by Randy Alcorn*
(excerpt from new book *If God is Good*)



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