

Eternal Perspectives

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Shepherd Status by Randy Alcorn



"And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear."

Luke 2:8-9

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No Christmas program is complete without its little band of gunnysack shepherds. Frightened by the angel's sudden appearance, they marvel at the good news from the angel and rush to Bethlehem to see the Savior-King. As they return to their flocks, they praise God and tell all who will listen about the birth of the chosen Child.

They finish spreading the good tidings, leave the stage, and we hardly give them another thought.

But why did the announcement come to them at all? Why not to priests and kings? Who were they that they should be eyewitnesses of God's glory and receive history's greatest birth announcement?

In Christ's day, shepherds stood on the bottom rung of the Palestinian social ladder. They shared the same unenviable status as tax collectors and dung sweepers. Only Luke mentions them.

During the time of the Patriarchs, shepherding was a noble occupation. Shepherds are mentioned early in Genesis 4:20 where Jabal is called the father of those living in tents and raising livestock. In nomadic societies, everyone—whether sheikh or slave—

was a shepherd. The wealthy sons of Isaac and Jacob tended flocks (Genesis 30:29; 37:12). Jethro, the priest of Midian, employed his daughters as shepherdesses (Exodus 2:16).

When the twelve tribes of Israel migrated to Egypt, they encountered a lifestyle foreign to them. The Egyptians were agriculturalists. As farmers, they despised shepherding because sheep and goats meant death to crops. Battles between farmers and shepherds are as old as they are fierce. The first murder in history erupted from a farmer's resentment of a shepherd (Genesis 4:1-8).

Egyptians considered sheep worthless for food and sacrifice. Egyptian art forms and historical records portray shepherds negatively. Neighboring Arabs—their enemy—were shepherds, and Egyptian hatred climaxed when shepherd kings seized Lower Egypt.

Pharaoh's clean-shaven court looked down on the rugged shepherd sons of Jacob. Joseph matter-of-factly informed his brothers, "Every shepherd is detestable to the Egyptians" (Genesis 46:34).

In the course of 400 years, the Egyptians prejudiced the Israelites' attitude toward shepherding. Jacob's





descendants became accustomed to a settled lifestyle and forgot their nomadic roots. When Israel later settled in Canaan (c. 1400 BC), the few tribes still retaining a fondness for pastoral life chose to live in the Trans-Jordan (Numbers 32:1 ff).

After the settling in Palestine, shepherding ceased to hold its prominent position. As the Israelites acquired more farmland, pasturing decreased. Shepherding became a menial vocation for the laboring class.

Around 1000 BC, David's emergence as king temporarily raised the shepherd's image. The lowliness of this trade made David's promotion striking (2 Samuel 7:8). While poetic sections of Scripture record positive allusions to shepherding, scholars believe these references reflect a literary ideal, not reality.

In the days of the Prophets, shepherders symbolized judgment and social desolation (Zephaniah 2:6). Amos contrasted his high calling as prophet with his former role as a shepherd (Amos 7:14). Dr. Joachim Jeremias says shepherders were "despised in everyday life." In general, they were considered second-class and untrustworthy.

Shepherding had not just lost its widespread appeal; it eventually forfeited its social acceptability. Some shepherders earned their poor reputations, but others became victims of a cruel stereotype. The religious leaders maligned the shepherd's good name; rabbis banned pasturing sheep and goats in Israel, except on desert plains.

The Mishnah, Judaism's written record of the oral law, also reflects this prejudice, referring to shepherders in belittling terms. One passage describes them as "incompetent"; another says no one should ever feel obligated to rescue a shepherd who has fallen into a pit.

Jeremias documents the fact that shepherders were deprived of all civil rights. They

could not fulfill judicial offices or be admitted in court as witnesses.

He wrote, "To buy wool, milk or a kid from a shepherd was forbidden on the assumption that it would be stolen property."

In *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, Jeremias notes: "The rabbis ask with amazement how, in view of the despicable nature of shepherds, one can explain why God was called 'my shepherd' in Psalm 23:1."

Smug religious leaders maintained a strict caste system at the expense of shepherds and other common folk. Shepherds were officially labeled "sinners"—a technical term for a class of despised people.

Into this social context of religious snobbery and class prejudice, God's Son stepped forth. How surprising and significant that Father God handpicked lowly, unpretentious shepherds to first hear the joyous news: "It's a boy, and He's the Messiah!"

What an affront to the religious leaders who were so conspicuously absent from the divine mailing list. Even from birth, Christ moved among the lowly. It was the sinners, not the self-righteous, He came to save (Mark 2:17).



The proud religionists of Christ's day have faded into obscurity, but the shepherd figure is once again elevated in church life as pastors "shepherd their flocks." That figure was immortalized by the Lord Jesus when He said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Christ is also the Great Shepherd (He-

brews 13:20) and the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). No other illustration so vividly portrays His tender care and guiding hand.

As we gaze on nativity scenes and smile at those gunnysack shepherds, let's not lose sight of the striking irony. A handful of shepherds, marginalized by the social and religious elite, were chosen to break the silence of centuries, heralding Messiah's birth.

"Shepherd Status," by Randy Alcorn, in *Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus*, Nancy Guthrie, Editor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), pp. 85-89.

... Father God handpicked lowly, unpretentious shepherds to first hear the joyous news: "It's a boy, and He's the Messiah!"

Not a Soul in This World for Little John

By Kimberly Smith, *President of Make Way Partners*

Please meet John. John first captured our camera one day as we sped by him en route to the Internally Displaced People's (IDP) camp in Sudan. He was alone on the side of the road, but the commissioner of the area was with us, and he said he was on tight time constraints. So, we did not even stop to talk to John on that day.

Some days later, however, I had the blessing of stumbling upon him once again. John told me that he thinks he is five years old. That is what his mother told him before she and his little sister died. John's little sister, Abuk, died first and then his mother stopped eating so that she could give all of the food she found to John. John's mama died soon after Abuk. John did not cry as he told me about his mama. He just said that he missed her because she was his only friend—his father died before John was old enough to know what killed him.

I asked John if he wanted us to take him down the road to the IDP camps so that there would be other people who might help him. He said that his mama told him that he would be safer in the bush than in the camps where the militia came in to get new slaves; John did not want to become a slave. John's mama told him it was better to die a Christian in the bush than live a Muslim in slavery.

I pulled aside James, the director of Make Way Partners' Indigenous Ministry, to ask him if we could take one more orphan into our orphanage. He reminded me that just the day before I had told him that I was concerned that he had taken in 50 new orphans since I had last visited him (raising our total to nearly 450) and that we still didn't have enough sponsors to take care of the ones we already have.

I had told James that I knew it was very hard for him to watch the orphans around him starve to death or be vulnerable to slave raiders and hyenas, but we simply could not take more in until we had provision for our current 450. Through tears, James agreed to not take more orphans.

Now, here I was, facing what James faced every single day of his life.

I thought of the final scene in "Schindler's List" where Schindler counted the cost of his watch, his car, and every single possession he had held onto and thought how many lives he could have saved if he had let go of those "precious" possessions. I thought of what James felt every day. I thought of what it meant to leave little John on the roadside, where he felt safer than in the IDP camps. Now being beyond tears, I knew I had no right to violate what I had just asked James to commit to—to alleviate my conscience.

James and I prayed together over little John. I promised John that I would tell others about him. He wanted to know "who" I would tell and what they would do. I told him that there were too many people for me to tell all of their names but some would be black like him, some would be white like me, some would be brown like the Arabs that he was afraid of, but that all would pray for him.

I gave him a blanket and all the food that was in my bag.

John smiled. We left. James and I both cried.

Kimberly Smith is the president of Make Way Partners, a Christian mission agency committed to preventing and combating human trafficking and all forms of modern-day slavery by educating and mobilizing the body of Christ. Visit their website at www.makewaypartners.org



Through the hope of the Gospel, Make Way Partners (MWP) goes to the most vulnerable and least protected to end human trafficking and sexual slavery. They use two criteria to select places of ministry:

1. Where women and children are at highest risk of human trafficking, forced prostitution, and other forms of modern-day slavery.
2. Where little to no other help is available because it is considered either "too" dangerous, "too" expensive, or "too" remote for most people to go.

A year ago MWP completed the building of a girls' orphanage in the heart of Sudan which currently helps children from both South Sudan and Darfur (the western region of the country); they are currently in the process of completing a boys' dorm. Their next orphanage will be built near the border of Uganda and Sudan. In this strategic location, they will be able to reach both the Sudanese and Ugandan children. There is a huge need for an orphanage on the border because the Arab Northern Sudanese government provides most of the funding for Joseph Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army (www.ctlibrary.com/ct/2006/january/18.30.html), who operate out of Uganda and attack and inflict terror on the Southern Sudanese.

For more information on this ministry, contact:

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



Scriptures for Facing An Uncertain Future

Compiled by Randy Alcorn

Peace, safety, and economic prosperity are all threatened in the world's current crises. People of the world don't need our reassurance that America is unshakable, that democracy will prevail, that our economy will recover, that death and suffering will not touch them, or that America or any country is a safe place to live. What they need, while living in the wreckage of this sin-stained Earth, is to realize that the world's main problem is that it's inhabited by people like us, sinners in need of redemption. These thirsty people need us to reach out our hands and extend to them, as cold water, Christ's offer of citizenship in another world, a coming eternal home.

These passages of Scripture can bring perspective and comfort:

... the world's main problem is that it's inhabited by people like us, sinners in need of redemption.

Life on Earth is short, prosperity is fleeting:

Show me, O LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath (Psalm 39:4-5).

God does not change:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

Circumstances do change:

Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth (Proverbs 27:1).

Be diligent to look ahead and plan ahead:

Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives (Titus 3:14).

Be a wise financial steward:

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law (Romans 13:8).

Seek and heed wise counsel:

The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice (Proverbs 12:15).

Don't fail to plan or to work because of laziness or indifference:

If a man is lazy, the rafters sag; if his hands are idle, the house leaks (Ecclesiastes 10:18).

Make your focus treasures in Heaven, not on Earth:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money (Matthew 6:19-24).

Don't trust in riches and don't be greedy:

Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf (Proverbs 11:28).

Trust God; don't worry; be at peace:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid (John 14:27).

Be content, even if you end up with less than you're used to having:

Two things I ask of you, O LORD; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, "Who is the LORD?" Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God (Proverbs 30:7-9).

Remember God is the owner of all:

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters (Psalm 24:1-2).

Remember God will require an account of us as His stewards:

So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God (Romans 14:12).

Remember God is sovereign over all things:

Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails (Proverbs 19:21).

Be generous with the needy; graciously share what you have now and in hard times:

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world (James 1:27).



Face trials and hardship with eternal perspective:

The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne. He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them. The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates. On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot. For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; upright men will see his face (Psalm 114-7).

Remember God builds character in times of trial:

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But

rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed (1 Peter 4:12-13).

Practice generosity and interdependence in the Christian community:

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, as it is written: "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little" (2 Corinthians 8:13-15).



Remember our true home is not in this world but in Heaven:

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

The Return of Christ:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him (2 Peter 3:10-14).

Visit www.epm.org/articles/uncertain.html for a more complete list of Scripture references.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.
(John 14:1)



Pro-Woman or Pro-Child? by Randy Alcorn

My wife and I became involved in pro-life work out of concern for women who'd been devastated by abortion. In 1981 we opened our home to a pregnant teenage girl. I served on the board of one of the first pregnancy centers on the West Coast, offering

help to pregnant women who were needy, confused, and desperate. Our objective was to help women in every way possible. And the best way to help these women was to provide them alternatives to abortion.

As time went on, I became involved in pro-life education, political action, and peaceful nonviolent intervention outside abortion clinics. Some pro-life ministries focus more on saving unborn children, some more on helping pregnant women. I found both kinds to be vitally necessary and completely compatible.

The Movement You May Not Know

Countless myths have been attached to the pro-life movement. One example is the often-repeated statement, "Pro-lifers don't really care about pregnant women, or about children once they're born." A television reporter, with cameras rolling, approached me at a pro-life event and asked for my response to that accusation. I said, "Well, my wife and I opened our home to a pregnant girl and paid her expenses while she lived with us. We supported her when she decided to place her child for adoption. And, since you asked, we give a substantial amount of our income to help poor women and children."

Then I introduced her to a pastor friend standing next to me who, with his wife, had adopted nineteen children, a number of them with Down Syndrome and other special needs. The reporter signaled the cameraman to stop filming. I asked if she wanted to interview my friend. She shook her head and moved on.

The fact is this: thousands of pro-life organizations around the country and throughout the world provide free pregnancy tests, ultrasounds, counseling, support groups, childcare classes, financial management education, babysitting, diapers, children's clothes, and housing. Add to these tens of thousands of churches donating time, money, food, house repairs, and every other kind of help to needy pregnant women, single mothers, and low income families. Countless pro-lifers adopt children, open their homes, and volunteer to help children after they're born. Together these efforts comprise the single largest grassroots volunteer movement in history.

While those who offer abortions charge women for them, those who offer abortion alternatives give their assistance freely, lovingly, and almost entirely behind the scenes. Contrary to some caricatures, these people are not just pro-birth—they are *pro-life*. They care about a child and her mother, and are there to help them both not only before birth, but after.

Our National Schizophrenia

Despite an even split among those calling themselves pro-choice and pro-life, two-thirds of Americans say they believe abortion is "morally wrong." Some pro-life ad-

vocates have interpreted this to mean it's no longer necessary to argue that the unborn is human or that abortion is wrong. Instead, our emphasis should be on helping women to see that abortion isn't in their best interests.

I emphatically agree we should help women with unwanted pregnancies see that abortion will hurt, not help them. Many women believe that abortion is wrong, but that it's the least of evils—bad as it is, they think it's still better than having a baby, raising a child, or surrendering a child for adoption.

We must show them that, while the other alternatives are challenging, abortion is the only one that kills an innocent person. Precisely because it does so, it has by far the most negative consequences in a woman's life.



We should help women with unwanted pregnancies see that abortion will hurt, not help them.

However, many of the same people who believe unborns are human and that abortion is immoral nonetheless choose to have abortions and defend abortion as legitimate. This proves they do not believe unborns are human beings in the same sense they believe three-year-olds are human beings. They don't believe abortion is immoral in the same way that killing a three-year-old is immoral.

Polls also indicate that many of the same people who believe abortion is immoral nonetheless believe it should remain legal. It's fair to assume that these people believe rape, kidnapping, child abuse, and murder are immoral—but they would not argue that rape and murder should be legal. This demonstrates a fundamental difference between what they mean by rape and murder being "immoral" and abortion being "immoral."

No one who considers a preborn child a full-fledged person can rationally defend abortion's legality, unless they also defend legalizing the killing of other human beings. After all, every argument for abortion that appeals to a mother's inconvenience, stress, and financial hardship can be made just as persuasively about her twelve-year-old, her husband, or her parents. In many cases older children are *more* expensive and place greater demands on their mother than an unborn child. But people immediately recognize those arguments are invalid when it comes to killing older children.

Women often say that when they got abortions they had no idea who was inside them. Some knew subconsciously they were carrying a child, but they latched onto the pro-choice rhetoric. They now profoundly regret this. They think of what they did as temporary insanity, enabled by their well-intentioned but misguided friends or family. They wish someone would have tried to talk them out of a choice that now haunts them.

We should love and care for pregnant women who feel pressured toward abortion. We should also love women who've had abortions, and do all we can to help them recover from abortion's trauma.

The ancient book of Proverbs says that the right choice is always wise and brings good consequences, while the wrong choice is always foolish and brings bad consequences.

The False Dichotomy

It's never in anyone's best interests to kill a child. When a child is hurt by his mother, it brings harm not only to the child but to her. It's impossible to separate a woman's welfare from her child's. Precisely because the unborn is a child, the consequences of killing him are severe. It's the identity of the first victim, the child, that brings harm to the second victim, the mother. That's why we need to begin our treatment of abortion with the identity of the unborn.

For further information on this subject, see Randy Alcorn's Why Pro-Life? © Eternal Perspective Ministries, 2004.

Related articles can be found on EPM's website, www.epm.org:

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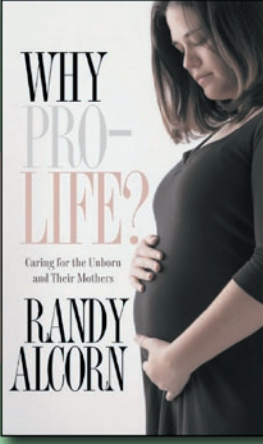
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God's Jewels by Joni Eareckson Tada

Not far from the farm in Maryland where I grew up was this stone quarry. They called it Sylvan Dell. When I was little, my sisters and I would ride our horses by there all the time. Daddy told us to be very careful and stay on the trail, and that was because the ground, not 20 feet from the path, dropped into this sheer cliff that plunged to the bottom of the quarry.

This quarry was a busy place. There were steam shovels and trucks moving rocks because the flagstone was for the new housing developments going up near the farm. The quarry was noisy—a lot of hammering, a lot of dust, a lot of hard work and sweat.

But that quarry produced flagstone and some pretty, beautiful, Maryland quartz crystal. We would ride our horses along the trail and anywhere, on either side of the bridle path, there would be these little bits of sparkling quartz scattered everywhere, all shiny and glittery and dazzling.

When I was a kid, I thought we were walking on diamonds—like somebody opened a treasure chest and scattered precious jewels everywhere.

Malachi 3:16 describes how the Lord has a book in which all the names of those who love Him are written down. And He calls these people His jewels. So how do we become jewels that glitter, and I mean really shine?

I know if I want a rock, let's say my diamond wedding ring, to dazzle, I'll ask my "get-up" girl in the morning to take my toothbrush and scrub my ring.

A real stone like this one can take a good scrubbing. Jewelry is not as delicate as we think. So God gets out His toothbrush and says in Zechariah 13:9, "I will refine them like silver, and I will test them like gold."

That's me. What can I say? I long, I desire, I want to be a jewel that does not cringe if God chooses to give my soul a hard scrubbing every now and then.

Now, I'm not glorifying the suffering it takes to polish my faith. But I am glorifying the God whose image is reflected on the surface of any smile—my smile—that might be hard-fought for through pain or problems. If you want God's glory to be your shine, it will be on His terms. His glory will be the glow of His godliness in your life; His patience and perseverance.

The conviction is that the Father is worth trusting and obeying, no matter how painful the trial. His terms call for you to be refined like silver and for me to be tested like gold. That is something over 40 years in a wheelchair has shown me.

And like a good chunk of rock straight out of the quarry, my soul is not as delicate as I would like to think. You know, sometimes I think, "Oh, Lord, it's quadriplegia, don't be too hard on me here."

But no, my soul can stand a good scrubbing, because I have not arrived. This week, when I had to call Nancy and tell her that I could not be with you [live at the conference], when pain was blind-siding me, it was obvious to me that God thinks my soul can still take a good scouring.

And with this pain, I struggle with claustrophobia and fear—claustrophobia, thinking that it's going to get worse, and fear that it's not going to go away, and it's not going to get better.

I know you can identify. You've got problems that never go away. You pray, you plead until your knees get sore, yet your pinched nerve doesn't heal, the pregnancy test doesn't come back positive, the multiple sclerosis doesn't halt, your teenager keeps sneaking drugs, your parent's Alzheimer's doesn't regress, the marriage doesn't get better, the job promotion never comes, the engagement ring never arrives. Well, my paralysis never went away.

Job was right when he said, "Man was born to trouble." Jesus was right when He said, "In this world you will have trouble." Trouble is the textbook that will teach you who you really are.

Trouble is what will squeeze the lemon inside of you—you know, that squeezed lemon that keeps revealing the stuff of which you are made, and it's not very pretty.

I'll confess it. When I'm in pain, I implode; I collapse in defeat. And if I let it simmer, not going to God's Word, not turning to Him in prayer, I become selfish; I become impatient; I become irritated, mean-spirited. I get this—there's no better word for it—peevish, really sour attitude.

Maybe for you, when trouble hits you, you've got a smile for everybody at the supermarket or J. C. Penny's, or Macy's, but that smile stays right there at the cashier's desk.

"I will refine them like silver, and I will test them like gold."

(Zechariah 13:9)

And when you head home, you leave it back where you were shopping.

Or maybe for you, it's a lazy approach to God's Word. I know that happens to me. Unbelief in prayer, snapping at your kids, your husband, you sit there stewing in church, and you think about the workweek ahead.

You're tired, indifferent, stale, sour, itching to get things your own way—oh my goodness, get out the toothbrush, because God knows that's the dirt, the scum, and the impurities the Lord wants to scour away.

You see, here it is, plain and simple: the core of God's plan is to rescue us from our own sin. Yes, He did that back on the Cross. But with this whole sanctification thing, He's got a long way to go with us, and the Father is Heaven-bent on conforming us—conforming you—to the image of Jesus Christ.

And first and foremost, that means getting rid of sin. Yes, to be made like Jesus is to become kind and gentle and thoughtful and compassionate, but first, if you really want to be like Christ, then you've got to learn to hate sin, because to be like Jesus is to be made sin-less.

God is concerned about your poverty or my pain. He's concerned about your broken heart or my broken neck, but those things are not His ultimate focus. He cares about them, but those things are merely symptoms of the root and real problem. God cares most, not about making you and me comfortable, but about teaching us to hate our transgression and to grow up spiritually to love Him. That's the purpose behind the toothbrush. That's the purpose behind the refining and the chipping and the polishing.

Joni Eareckson Tada is the founder and CEO of Joni and Friends (www.joniandfriends.org), an organization that promotes Christian ministry in the disability community. This excerpt is taken from her longer message at the True Woman '08 Conference. Visit www.truewoman.com to read or watch it in its entirety.



True Woman '08 Conference

"Yes, Lord," and "surrender" were the often-repeated refrains when over 6,300 women gathered together for the first-ever True Woman Conference, October 9-11, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois.

The EPM staff women along with one board member attended the conference organized by Revive Our Hearts, the ministry of Nancy Leigh DeMoss. It has been Nancy's burden to see revival and reformation in the hearts of Christian women, and this began what she hopes is a widespread movement.

Speakers at the conference included John Piper, Mary Kassian, Karen Loritts, and Janet Parshall, all of whom were "powerful," said EPM's Bonnie Hiestand. "They touched us where we live."

A moving part of the weekend for the EPM staff was a video presentation from Joni Eareckson Tada about how God uses suffering in our lives. Her message was especially powerful as she was unable to travel to the conference to speak in person due to unrelenting pain.

The conference came to a fitting close with the public reading and signing of the "True Woman Manifesto," which affirms that biblical womanhood is a gift from God and exhorts women to fulfill His calling and purposes for their lives.

Visit www.truewoman.com for free resources from the conference, including audio, video, and transcripts of all the messages. You can also read and sign the "True Woman Manifesto."

EPM's Office Responds to the True Woman '08 Conference

Joni's message via DVD instead of in person was especially significant. "My soul can stand a good scrubbing, because I have not arrived." To have these words come from someone who has suffered so much in her life—and couldn't come to the conference because of her pain—spoke volumes to me. Oh, that I would recognize and be receptive to God's scrubbing! — **Kathy Norquist**, *Randy Alcorn's executive assistant*

My impression of the overall True Woman '08 Conference was one of awe. During the conference it struck me again and again how profoundly we are affected by feminist thought in the current age. We were told that 40 years ago 200 women gathered in Chicago to start the women's movement. And there we were in the same geographic location, gathering to pray and stand against the results of that movement. — **Robin Green**, *EPM board member*

The Staff's Most Memorable Quotes from the Weekend

In every situation God is doing a thousand things that we do not know and cannot see. — **John Piper**

However deep your problems, however deep your challenges, however deep your issues, there is something—should we say *Someone*—that is deeper.

— **Nancy Leigh DeMoss**

Can you accept His will for your life right now, even if it isn't what you want?

— **Janet Parshall**

Wimpy theology makes wimpy women. — **John Piper**

No situation is so desperate that God cannot redeem it. Don't judge the outcome of the battle by the way things look now. — **Nancy Leigh DeMoss**



God Came Down: The Gospel in Every El and Que Village By Christmas 2009

by Stephanie Anderson

God's truth
is scarce on
this island....

Last year, EPM introduced readers of *Eternal Perspectives* to our plans to fund the translation of the gospel into two languages, the El and Que languages, through the work of one of our ministry partners. Translation

has never before been attempted in these languages, which represent approximately 750,000 people living on a Southeast Asian island near China. Since the project began a year ago, the teams have seen encouraging progress with a goal of translating the entire gospel of Luke by spring 2009.

The El and Que people are very poor and are mostly rural farmers and fishermen. God's truth is scarce on this island; there are no missionaries who are specifically assigned to these people. Some of them have heard the gospel from other languages, but because it's not available in their native tongue, the Good News has yet to take root in their hearts. There are a small number of believers and only a few churches, all of which are government-run and lack spiritual vitality. This is partly due to the fact that the national language is used instead of the peoples' heart languages. According to the project facilitator, having the gospel in their own languages will make a huge difference.



was so moved by what was shared that she became a believer in Christ. This is the impact of the Good News!

The translation is not without its challenges, however. Part of the difficulty is choosing the right audience to test the translated portions. Another challenge is finding the right expression in the people's languages for certain Biblical terminology, such as "kingdom of God."

At this time, there is only an El language team, and no Que team. They would ask for your prayers that God would provide just the right translators. The team also needs prayer to stay focused and continue the pace of translation.

"We feel an extreme urgency to get the Scriptures and the JESUS Film translated so they can be used to share the gospel," said the project facilitator.

They hope to have both the gospel of Luke and the JESUS film finished by late spring 2009. Their goal for Christmas 2009 is to get copies of both the gospel and the film into every village so that the El and Que people can know of Jesus' coming.

When asked what the motivation is for the translation, the field coordinator pointed to the promise of Scripture that tells us believers from every nation, tribe, people, and language will worship before the Lamb's throne. "According to Revelation 7:9, the El and Que people will be there as well!"

To receive postal mail prayer requests and updates about the translation's progress, please contact Eternal Perspective Ministries at (503) 668-5200, or e-mail stephanie@epm.org with your name and physical mailing address. Because of the confidential nature of this project, and for security reasons, detailed progress updates will not be available on the EPM website, Randy's blog, or through email.

(Contributions to the project may be designated and mailed to EPM at 39085 Pioneer Blvd., Suite 206, Sandy, OR 97055. 100% of designated contributions will be passed on to the project.)



Already the chapters of Luke that have been translated have produced fruit for Christ. A few months ago, the translation team went to a local restaurant to celebrate their first consultation. They were waited on by two waitresses from the El and Que people groups, and throughout the meal, the translators were able to share some of the stories from the translated portions of Luke. As the team continued "testing" the portions to see if they were understandable, one of the waitresses

The Checks and Balances of EPM by Janet Albers

Many opportunities in life come in simple, unexpected ways. Looking back, I recall single phone calls and brief prayer requests that have changed the course of my life. One of those calls came from a caseworker in January 1975. A baby boy had been born who was to be placed in our home. Overnight I was diverted from a career path to motherhood. "I prayed for this child, and the LORD granted me what I asked of him." (I Samuel 1:27) Fifteen months later I gave birth to our daughter, and eventually we had two more sons. In less than six years I had become "the happy mother" of four children.

My husband and I have been married for almost 39 years, and we now have seven grandchildren. What a blessing to see our children enjoying each other when they have the opportunity to get together—and to see our grandchildren, "the cousins," developing friendships for life. They love to spend time together on our 20-acre farm.

In November 1999 I received a phone call from Kathy Norquist, Randy Alcorn's administrative assistant. I knew Randy was an author, but that was about the extent of my knowledge of Eternal Perspective Ministries. Kathy told me they were looking for a bookkeeper, and they would like to talk with me if I was interested. Circumstances in my life made the timing perfect, and so...I've been the financial secretary at EPM for almost nine years.

Just when I needed a place to use my abilities because my children had become adults, God placed me at EPM. What a shift in thinking—from employment with a for-profit company naturally concerned about the bottom line to working for a non-profit ministry where the director wanted to give it all away to help the needy—the unreached, the unborn, the unloved, and so on. My eyes were opened to a world previously outside my thinking. And that changes you. Houses, cars, and interesting vacations start being measured against the needs around the world. My wants versus their needs don't mesh comfortably.

As the financial secretary, I process all contributions and receipts, maintain accounts payable and accounts receivable,

prepare book orders for the shipper, process payroll, and generate financial reports as needed. One of my favorite things to do is send checks to the many ministries that Randy gives to. It is my privilege to see the complete cycle of how the money comes in and how it is distributed.

While bookkeeping and proof-reading are my primary responsibilities at EPM, I really enjoy interaction with people, both by phone and by e-mail. I'm looking forward to getting acquainted with people in Heaven I'll probably never meet on Earth. One of those is a friend of mine in Washington. For the past two years I've "walked" with her through a process that has taken her from being a self-described recluse to being actively involved in a church, a lady who now shares her anticipation of Heaven with those she encounters from day to day. And a new e-mail acquaintance recently invited me to meet for a conversation over a cup of coffee—when we get to Heaven. She had shared with me about a tragedy in their family. And then there is Marilyn who started her *Heaven* book distribution ministry a couple of years ago. She has faithfully given away three *Heaven* books a month, watching for opportunities to do so when God brings someone her way. Now she sees her ministry expanding to the distribution of children's *Heaven* materials as well. She is so excited, and shares her excitement with me. Another friend I've never met in person.

Probably the most important thing I've learned from Randy is to watch for divine appointments. A simple phone call, a word of encouragement, the suggestion of a book to read, can result in a changed life. We're not called to do the changing, just to be faithful. What a privilege it's been to work in a place where we "fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen...." I am looking forward to Heaven and meeting all the friends I've made but have never yet seen. And hopefully I'll also see people whose paths I crossed only briefly but whose lives were touched because I took the "risk" of responding to a divine appointment.



"My eyes were opened to a world previously outside my thinking."



Headed Home by Randy Alcorn

God's people are described as aliens and strangers, looking for a country of their own (Hebrews 11:14). This world, under the curse, is not our home. In fact, our real home is a place we've never lived.

When I ride my bike through my old neighborhood (not far from where I now live), a fond familiarity washes over me. The hills, the houses, the fences and fields, the schoolyard where I played ball. When I gaze at the house I grew up in, it reverberates with memories of my father, mother, brother, friends, dogs, cats, frogs, and lizards, and the soldiers and aliens I fought in those over-

grown fields.

A place with loved ones—that's a central quality of home. The hominess of the house I live in now is inseparable from my wife, Nanci, and my daughters, Karina and Angela, who are married and have their own homes but often come to visit. We have four grandsons we love having with us here. We have rich memories of extended family and friends who've been here, some now living with Jesus. Home is where we're with the ones we love—eating and drinking and playing and laughing and telling stories.

Heaven will be like that. Scripture often speaks of banquets and feasts in Heaven. We'll be with people we love, and we'll love no one more than Jesus, who purchased with His own blood the real estate of the New Earth. Because we've already lived on Earth, I think it will seem from the first that we're coming home; the New Earth will strike us as familiar, because it will be the old Earth raised, as our bodies will be our old bodies raised. The New Earth will be the home we've always

longed for.

Home is a place where we fit right in. It's the place we were made for. Most houses we live in on Earth weren't really made just for us. But the New Earth will be (John 14:2).

When Nanci was pregnant with each of our girls, she and I prepared a place for them. We decorated the room, selected the wallpaper, set up the crib just so. The quality of the place we prepared for our daughters was limited only by our skills, resources, and imagination. In Heaven, what kind of a place can we expect our Lord to have prepared for us? Because He isn't limited, and He loves us even more than we love our children, we can expect to find the best place ever made. The God who commends hospitality will not be outdone in His hospitality to us.

A good carpenter envisions what he wants to build. He plans and designs. Then he does his work, skillfully fashioning it to exact specifications. He takes pride in his work and delights in showing it to others. And when he makes something for his bride or his children, he takes special care and delight.

Jesus is the carpenter from Nazareth. He knows how to build. He's had experience building entire worlds, billions of them, throughout the universe. He's also an expert at repairing what has been damaged—whether people or worlds (Revelation 21:3, 4). He doesn't consider His creation disposable. As Romans 8 tells us, this damaged universe cries out to be repaired, and it is His plan to repair it as well as us. He's going to remodel the old Earth on a grand scale.

God promises He will come down and dwell upon that new world with us. Christ will sit on His throne in the New Jerusalem, capital city of the capital planet of the New Universe. How great will be that resurrected world God calls the New Earth. And the greatest part will be that it won't just be our home. It will be His.



Home is a place where we fit right in. It's the place we were made for.

Letters to EPM

Safely Home was extremely moving and heartrending; *Dominion* was an exciting journey through black culture and the dangers of gangs. Both books had God throughout them. But how do I categorize *Deception*? It amazes me how you can have a very serious and sometimes morose murder investigation going on, and yet on a second level, I found myself busting out laughing every couple of lines! Detective Ollie Chandler is a wonderful character who does and says all the things we wish we could! I've never laughed at a novel from cover to cover, and still enjoyed the riveting suspense of solving a murder. Bravo!

— R. F.

I've gone through many trials where God has taught me to maintain an eternal perspective. Your writings on Heaven have deeply impacted my life.

As you know, the Church has most misconceptions about Heaven because Satan and his minions work to blaspheme God and His dwelling place. Your writings on Heaven and the growing spiritual life are excellent and rooted in the Scriptures. Your books *Lord Foulgrin's Letters* and *The Ishbane Conspiracy* gave me a better understanding of demons' strategies to take us down.

Also, I have discovered the joy of giving and discovered from your writings the doctrine of eternal rewards. I have found it is more blessed to give than receive. I could not understand how you as a successful author would give most of the money away but now I know why. Your articles on Christian living have also been a big help to me in walking the walk. Thank you for your writing.

— B. T.

Jesus was full of grace and truth. We should seek to be full of grace and truth. This is the simple and profound message of *The Grace and Truth Paradox*. This matter of grace and truth is at the heart of many of the difficulties of the church. Some people have been burned by churches that were so "truth-oriented" that they came up short in love and compassion. Other churches

are so "grace-oriented" that truth is compromised so that the true purposes of the church dissolve into a muddled sentimentality. We need both, as churches and as Christians.

— J. F.

I've been working with a financial organization on distributing *The Treasure Principle* to everyone in their database. Over the last couple of months, we've sent out 200 books to various supporters in our state.

One affluent and well-known older businessman read the book and was convicted by God to up his giving from 50% to 90% of his income. We already know that this has resulted in one pledge of \$100,000 to a local ministry over the next three years.

Only God knows how many other worthy ministries will receive much-needed financial assistance as a result of this experience...and the giver accrues all of the future reward and present joy of generous giving!

— P. J.

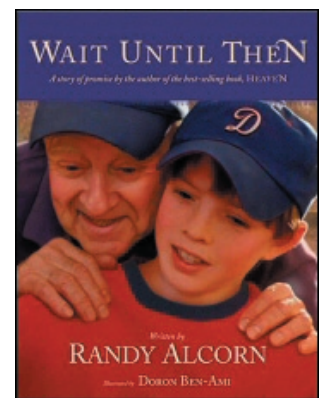
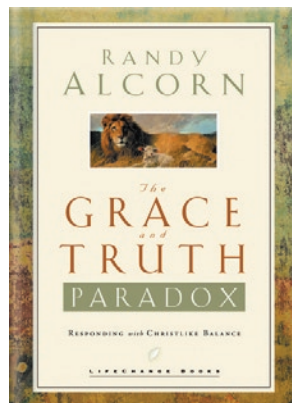
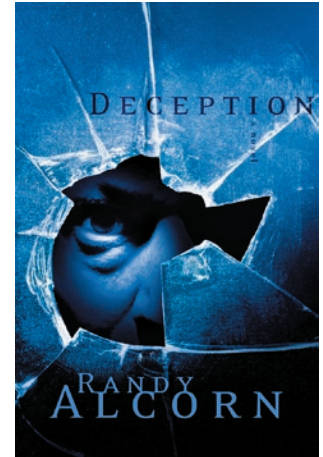
Knowing of Randy's extensive study of Heaven, I ordered *Wait Until Then* to help my children discuss my 97-year-old father's home going with their

young children.

What I did not expect was what a beautiful blessing it would be to my dad and the four of us who "walked him home" last week. Dad had been an avid, voracious reader, but preferred seeing the printed page to hearing it read. However, he was too weak to read for himself, and too tired to concentrate on anything very involved. We sat beside his bed and read this book aloud, twice, in the days before his death. We know he is with his Lord. His passion for 70 years, since his conversion at age 27, was to "bring men unto God," including every hospice worker who visited him his last 5 ½ weeks.

I have not only recommended this book to all our friends, but also to those ministering to grieving families: hospice workers, the funeral home director, and the casket company we used.

— S. R.





What are the Challenges and Payoffs of Writing? by Randy Alcorn

I've been asked about what the biggest payoffs and challenges in my writing are. One question was whether writer's block is one of the difficulties.

Writer's block is never a problem for me. Perhaps it's because I do so many other things besides writing. When I get to it I'm so ready words tend to pour out of me. I learned long ago that I should never wait for inspiration or a good beginning. I jump right in. I'll either cut it out or clean it up later. Years ago I heard someone say "Never edit at the point of conception." The best writing comes in revision, not creation—but you must have something to revise. I think a lot of writer's block happens when people wait for the right words. I just write. Later, I labor over the right words, and there's no block because I'm already looking at something on the screen.

For me, the toughest part about being a writer is working on the big books, the ones that take a couple of years. In my research for *Heaven* I read over a hundred and fifty books on Heaven, most of them long out of print. I did this over a three-year period, and of course, the more you research, the more you have to handle, and the more you have to cut. If you do five or six revisions, as I usually do, it's easy to lose sight of the end. I had some very discouraging times where I stayed up half the night and asked, "Lord, is this going to make a difference? Is it worth it?"

It's really something you have to accept by faith, trusting that a measurable result will come, even if the book isn't read by people for another two years. Perseverance is essential in writing...especially on larger projects. I sometimes get stretched to the brink. (And that's good, because it takes me to my knees—apart from Him we can do nothing.)

The payoff comes when the book is published and I receive feedback like these three letters:

* * *

I have been contemplating for months how to end my life. Then this morning I was reading Chapter 25 in *In Light of Eternity* and it hit me like God himself was talking. You

wrote, "There's something important I need to add here. As long as God keeps you on earth, it's where he wants you..."

* * *

You may not remember me, but about 4 years ago you saw me reading a Bible in the Chicago airport on your way home from a conference. You stopped and gave me a copy of your book, *Safely Home*. I read it and a couple years later wrote you an email telling you how it impacted my life.

Well, now I am writing you again and telling you that Father used your book to begin and grow a passion and love for China in my heart. Now I am an English teacher at a university in China. Without saying much more you can guess what else Father has given me: the chance to share with hundreds of locals who have never heard the good news. I just thought that I'd let you know how Father used your book in my life and how He has led me to a team in China sharing and spreading His story.

* * *

Our helicopter pilot son was shot down in Iraq 2-27-91. He had sent us a letter to be opened only if he did not come back.

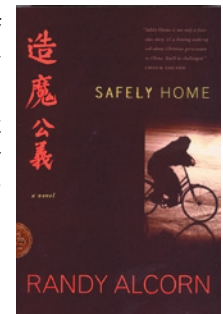
"Well, if you have to open this up, please don't worry about me. For once I know something you don't, what Heaven's like."

His words have travelled far—giving millions a hope for Heaven. I have been collecting "heaven" books all these years. Thanks for the best book of all about heaven, your book *Heaven*.

* * *

Sometimes we get to see results firsthand. One night after Nanci and I were leaving the theatre, Nanci noticed a man leaning on a walker, struggling in the wind and rain. I got out to help him to his car. He seemed exhausted, so I asked if I could drive him home.

He declined, but I insisted we follow him so I could help get him into his apartment. He pulled out, swerving through the parking



Perseverance is essential in writing...

lot. We prayed he wouldn't make it to the street. God answered that prayer when he accidentally ended up in the drive-through line at Jack in the Box. That allowed me to get into his car, so I could drive him home, Nanci following.

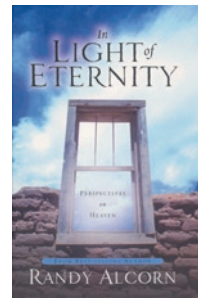
When we reached his place, we talked. George had been a political science professor at San Francisco State University. Shelves full of books by Karl Marx (who was not one of the Marx brothers, by the way) made it safe to assume George wasn't a great fan of your average Bible-believing Christian. But he wondered why we'd helped him, what was our angle. I told him it was because we're followers of Christ. Jesus said to love people, and it was a privilege to help him out, no big deal.

I left George my book *In Light of Eternity*,

and I prayed God would touch his life. We figured maybe we'd hear the rest of the story in eternity, but in George's case, we didn't have to wait that long.

Three months later my assistant, Kathy, woke up with a medical problem she'd never had before and hasn't had since. She went to her doctor, whom she hadn't seen in a year. She brought him *In Light of Eternity*. When he saw it he said, "One of my patients was carrying that same book. He wished he could talk with the author."

The doctor wrote down George's phone number. I called and went to see him. He was full of questions about Jesus Christ and grace and forgiveness. We talked for several hours. I saw God's Spirit at work. George prayed, confessed his sin, and gave his life to Christ.



The Church:

The Cure for Difficulties

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."
—1 Samuel 16:7

Indeed it may be truthfully said that everything of lasting value in the Christian life is unseen and eternal. Things seen are of little real significance in the light of God's presence. He pays small attention to the beauty of a woman or the strength of a man. With Him the heart is all that matters. The rest of the life comes into notice only because it represents the dwelling place of the eternal being.

The solution to life's problems is spiritual because the essence of life is spiritual. It is astonishing how many difficulties clear up without any effort when the inner life gets straightened out.

Church difficulties are spiritual also and admit of a spiritual answer.

Whatever may be wrong in the life of any church may be cleared up by recognizing the quality of the trouble and dealing with it at the root.

Prayer, humility and a generous application of the Spirit of Christ will cure just about any disease in the body of believers. Yet this is usually the last thing we think about when difficulties arise. We often attempt to cure spiritual ills with carnal medicines, and the results are more than disappointing.

A. W. Tozer, *The Next Chapter After the Last*, 82-83.

The Genuine Joy of the Lord

Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." —Nehemiah 8:10

We are missing the mark about Christian victory and the life of joy in our Savior. We ought to be standing straight and praising our God!

I must agree with the psalmist that the joy of the Lord is the strength of His people. I do believe that the sad world is attracted to spiritual sunshine—the genuine thing, that is.

Some churches train their greeters and ushers to smile, showing as many teeth as possible. But I can sense that kind of display, and when I am greeted by a person who is smiling because he or she has been trained to smile, I know I am shaking the flipper of a trained seal.

When the warmth and joy of the Holy Spirit are in a congregation, however, and the folks are spontaneously joyful, the result is a wonderful influence upon others....

I have said it a hundred times: The reason we have to search for so many things to cheer us up is the fact that we are not really joyful and contentedly happy within....But we are Christians, and Christians have every right to be the happiest people in the world.

A. W. Tozer,
Tragedy in the Church: The Missing Gifts, 10,11.

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