

Eternal Perspectives

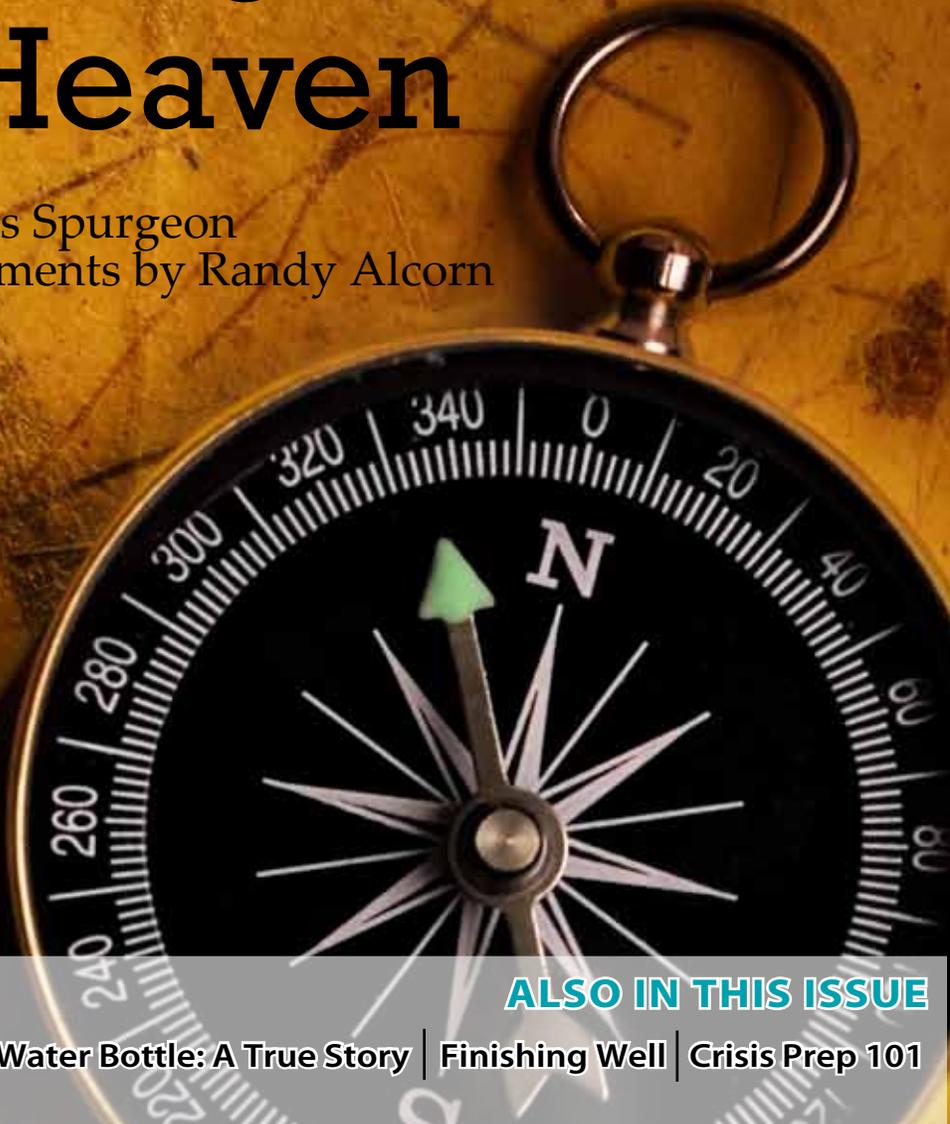


with founder and author Randy Alcorn

Summer 2011

Making Certain of Heaven

by Charles Spurgeon
with comments by Randy Alcorn



ALSO IN THIS ISSUE
The Hot Water Bottle: A True Story | Finishing Well | Crisis Prep 101

a publication of Eternal Perspective Ministries

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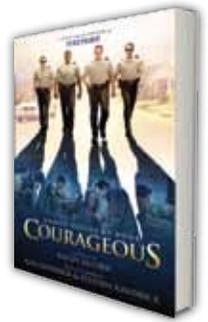


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Randy speaking at the C.S. Lewis Summer Institute at Oxbridge



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Learn more and register at
cslewis.org/programs/oxbridge/2011

Courageous Facebook party



Mark your calendar—we'll be having a Facebook party on Thursday, September 15 from 5 to 7 p.m. PT to celebrate the release of the *Courageous* novel.

There will be giveaways, previews of the book, and more. Randy will be joining us—hope you can, too! The book releases August 15, and you can order your copy from EPM so you'll be ready to ask Randy your questions about *Courageous*.

If you're not following Randy on Facebook, go to facebook.com/randyalcorn and click "like" at the top of the page to join the party.



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In This Issue

Q&A with Randy on Reconciliation	page 3
A Prayer by John Wesley	page 4
Giving Comfort to Hurting People	page 5
Barbecues for God	page 6

Charles Haddon Spurgeon biography	page 7
Making Certain of Heaven	page 8
The Hot Water Bottle: A True Story	page 12
Crisis Prep 101	page 14

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Q How can I work toward reconciliation between myself and my friends when we've offended one another?

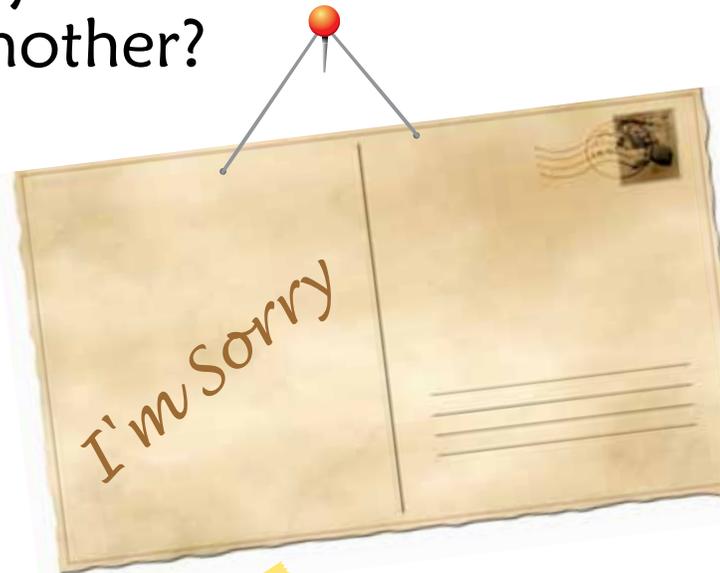
It is not your job to focus on their sins, even as it is not their job to focus on your sins. The fact that they may do so does not mean you should do the same. They are accountable for their choices, you are accountable for yours. You leading the way in confession and admission and apology for whatever you could have done better may or may not prompt them to do so themselves. But whether or not it does, it is still right and Christ-honoring.

It may well be true they have issues that need to be addressed. But the way to do this most effectively is to address your own issues first. Your primary job is to deal with your own issues, and only secondarily theirs.

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye” (Matthew 7:3-4).

I think the plank and speck offer helpful insights. Was Jesus really saying that every time we see something in our brother’s eye there is always something worse in ours? Sometimes, yes, but surely not always. I think the point is that our first duty is always to see our own faults, not the faults of others. And in the case of a relational conflict, if we are acutely aware of our sinfulness, we will see the bigness of our faults outweighing those of our brother. When Paul calls himself the chief of sinners, was he really saying no one on the planet had sinned more? I think, rather, he was saying “I am the worst sinner I know.” Why? Because he knows his own sins far better than anyone else’s, even those who might in fact be worse sinners. But his focus is on his own sin, and by putting the focus there he humbly calls on God for his grace, and sets the example of coming to terms with his faults.

So Jesus didn’t say “forget about the speck in your brother’s eye,” but rather take care of the problems closest to you, the big ones in your own life, so THEN and only then can you really help your brother address his issues. *R*



“All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.” 1 Peter 5:5-6

Lord, I am no longer my own, but Yours. Put me to what You will. Rank me with whom You will. Let me be employed by You or laid aside for You, exalted for You or brought low by You. Let me have all things. Let me have nothing. I freely & heartily yield all things to Your pleasure and disposal. And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, You are mine and I am Yours. So be it. Amen.

-Prayer by John Wesley



Giving Comfort to Hurting People by Randy Alcorn

People need to feel loved. A hurting child needs to feel his father's arms around him. When the father is away, he may leave written words of love, as God has in his Word. But he may also call on the child's older brothers and sisters to express his love to his child.

To ignore someone's pain is to add to that pain. Instead of fearing we'll say the wrong thing, we should reach out to hurting people. Many times it's better just to put our arms around someone and cry with them; people almost always appreciate it when you acknowledge their loss. Yet so long as your heart is right, saying something is nearly always better than saying nothing.

There is a time for silence, to just sit and listen and weep with those who weep. We often condemn Job's friends, but we should remember that they started well. When they saw his misery, they wept aloud. And then for seven days and nights they sat with him, in silence, wordlessly expressing their concern for him (see Job 2:11–13). Later, when they began giving unsolicited advice and rebuke, Job not only had to deal with his suffering, but with his friends' smug responses, which added to his suffering.

When someone in pain expresses raw emotions, we

shouldn't scold them. Friends let friends share honest feelings.

Darrell Scott told me that after his daughter Rachel was murdered at Columbine, people often quoted Romans 8:28 to him. He wasn't ready to hear it. How sad that such a powerful verse, cited carelessly or prematurely, becomes a source of pain when it should offer great comfort. **Think of God's truths like tools.** Don't use a hammer when you need a wrench. And don't use either when you need to give someone a hug, a blanket, or a meal—or just weep with them.

Don't disappear or avoid your friend who needs you now more than ever. If you find yourself not wanting to make a phone call when you hear about someone's crisis, remind yourself that any expression of concern is better than none. When people lose a loved one, they don't want to "move on" as if the person never existed. Even if doing so makes them cry, usually they want and need to talk about them.

"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn" (Romans 12:15). We tend to do better at rejoicing. Because we don't like to feel pain, we tend to ignore others' pain. But they need us to become the arms of Christ to them. If we're not there for them, who will be? *R*

Books and Resources for Those Who Are Grieving

Children and Grief: Helping Your Child Understand Death by Joey O'Connor: resource to help children deal with death, loss and grief.

Experiencing Grief by Norman Wright: a classic book on grief that leads readers through five essential stages of grief.

Five Cries of Grief: One Family's Journey to Healing by Merton and Irene Strommen: written from a grieving parent's perspective, provides strength, insight, and renewal for those who are grieving.

Good Grief by Granger E. Westberg: booklet that guides readers through the ten stages of grief.

A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows Through Loss by Jerry Sittser: shows that it's how we respond to painful circumstances that allows us to experience growth in the midst of grief.

Holding On To Hope: A Pathway Through Suffering to the Heart of God by Nancy Guthrie: excellent book that is biblical, theologically sound, compassionate, and caring.

Journeying through Grief: a set of four short books to share with grieving people throughout the first year after their loss. (Available from stephenministries.org.)

Letter to a Grieving Heart: Comfort and Hope for Those Who Hurt by Billy Sprague and John MacMurray: shares words

of comfort that carried the author through grief to a place of strength. Illustrated with photographs by John MacMurray.

O Love That Will Not Let Me Go: Facing Death with Courageous Confidence in God by various authors (contributors include John Piper, R.C. Sproul, and Randy Alcorn): A collection of writings encouraging believers to face death with a firm and confident belief in the character and promises of God.

The Promise of Heaven by Randy Alcorn: focuses on key questions about Heaven, and contains a clear presentation of the gospel. Includes stunning photos by John MacMurray, giving it the look and feel of a gift book, easily passed on to believers and unbelievers. (Available from epm.org.)

Reflections of a Grieving Spouse: The Unexpected Journey from Loss to Renewed Hope by Norman Wright: help for those who have lost a spouse.

Tear Soup by Chuck DeKlyen, Taylor Bills, and Pat Schwiebert: a story picture book, beneficial for both children and adults.

When Life is Changed Forever By the Death of Someone by Rick Taylor: speaks to wounded hearts and offers a hope that life can be lived fully again.

When Your Family's Lost a Loved One: Finding Hope Together by Dave and Nancy Guthrie: guides readers through the challenges of keeping their family together and strong.

Find these books at your local Christian bookstore or online at christianbook.com.



Barbecues for God

by Mark Early

During the summer many of us enjoy having friends over for a backyard barbecue. The food section of the newspaper is full of menu ideas to please every palate. But do you ever worry that, after all your hard work, your friends won't show up? If they don't, it seems to be a reflection on our importance—or popularity. It's a nightmare scenario, believe it or not, for many a host and hostess.

But maybe we're worrying about the wrong thing. And just maybe we're inviting the wrong people.

In Luke 14, we find Jesus dining at the home of a ruler among the Pharisees. A discussion comes up about the importance of guests. Jesus tells his host, "When you give a...banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or...rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid."

Indeed, Jesus says, you should invite "the poor, the maimed, the lame, [and] the blind." These guests would not be able to repay his hospitality, or yours. The man would, instead, be repaid "at the resurrection of the just."

This theme was echoed by one of Washington's most famous pastors, the Rev. Peter Marshall, who in the 1940's was the chaplain of the Senate. In a collection of his sermons called *Mr. Jones, Meet the Master*, Marshall tells the story of an imaginary businessman who was reading his Bible one day and found the passage from Luke I just quoted. He made up engraved invitations to dinner and passed them out among the poor of Washington—men who were sick or out of work. On the appointed night, the businessman served his guests an elegant dinner. And then, he offered, in the name of Jesus, to help them any way he could.

This is the approach to hospitality we all should have. I live in a town where people put a lot of effort into getting important people to come to dinner—Congressmen, big-time lawyers, Supreme Court justices. But that's the secular worldview at work—that we should honor those with earthly power.

By contrast, Christianity teaches that we should concern ourselves with the poor, the sick and the powerless. Scripture makes it clear that our help should not be limited to dropping off groceries at a food bank, or working in the soup kitchen once a month. Instead, we should invite the poor into our very homes and churches.

The next time you throw a party, don't worry about hosting the smart set or the most important people at your church. Instead, invite neighbors who have lost their jobs and could use some cheering up. Invite someone from your office who is hard to get along with, and probably lonely. Invite the poor in your community—maybe that single mom down the street could use a night out.

Or perhaps you should call your pastor; maybe he knows an ex-prisoner who has joined the congregation and needs fellowship. Find out which families from church are going through a difficult time, and invite them over. Invite people who cannot repay your hospitality.

The Washington Post maybe won't cover your get-together. But Someone far more important will notice, and rejoice. And you won't have to worry about people not showing up. Your backyard barbecue will become a chance to minister to others—and bring down blessings on yourself. •

"From BreakPoint, July 31, 2009, reprinted with permission of Prison Fellowship, www.breakpoint.org.



Charles Haddon Spurgeon

a man faithful to God's Word - by Randy Alcorn

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was born in Essex, England, on June 19, 1834, and after forty-one years as a preacher in London, died January 31, 1892.

Spurgeon came to faith in Christ at age fifteen. He preached his first sermon at sixteen and began his work as a full-time pastor at seventeen. Then, starting at age nineteen, he became pastor of London's New Park Street Chapel.

By age twenty he was preaching to crowds of up to two thousand. The biblical depth and theological insight of the messages Spurgeon wrote and preached at that age seem almost unbelievable, yet for one and a half centuries, his words have stood the test of time. Later, upon completion of the much larger Metropolitan Tabernacle, he preached to crowds of six thousand.

No matter where Spurgeon spoke, nearly every seat was filled. When he spoke at the Crystal Palace, the exact size of the crowd was counted by turnstile: 23,654. And all this was happening at a time when there were no microphones and no public address systems! Imagine the toll it took upon Spurgeon to project his voice so the crowds could hear him, especially later in life when he was frequently very ill.

During his lifetime, Spurgeon founded and maintained sixty-five different institutions, including orphanages, social welfare services, mission groups, and homes for unwed mothers. He also established organizations for distributing literature. He sent people door-to-door to distribute Bibles, Christian books, magazines, and tracts—mostly ones he'd written.

Spurgeon preached to perhaps 10 million people in his lifetime. He wrote out his sermons fully before preaching but brought into the pulpit only a note card with an outline. As he spoke, stenographers would take down the sermon as it was delivered. Spurgeon then had one day to revise the transcripts before they were sent off for publication. In those times of telegraph, his messages became available across the Atlantic, in America, within two days and around the world within a week.

Spurgeon's 3,561 sermons are bound in sixty-three volumes. In addition to his sermons, he wrote many books, including the classic devotionals *Morning by Morning* and *Evening by Evening* (best known in their combined form, *Morning and Evening*).

In the span of six years alone, from the time Spurgeon was twenty-one until he was twenty-seven, his books sold over 6 million copies. It's possible that even today no author, Christian or otherwise, has as much material in print as Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

His preaching and writing affected his world far and wide while he lived and continue to do so even today. His sermons have been printed in Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Arabic, and many other languages. Today, some 120 years after his death, Spurgeon's works are still read and studied and preached on by Christians of various backgrounds and denominations.

Spurgeon took great pains to conform his preaching to God's Word, and he did so in the face of severe criticism. We need to hear Spurgeon's voice because he was faithful to speak God's Word, and today there aren't nearly enough voices like his.

One of the highest compliments was paid to Spurgeon by a public enemy who spoke of Spurgeon's faithfulness in standing up for God's Word: "Here is a man who has not moved an inch forward in all his ministry, and at the close of the nineteenth century is teaching the theology of the first century, and . . . is proclaiming the doctrines of Nazareth and Jerusalem current eighteen hundred years ago." Spurgeon's response was to smile and say, "Those words did please me!"



People said to me years ago, "You will break your constitution down with preaching ten times a week," and the like. Well, if I have done so, I am glad of it. I would do the same again. If I had fifty constitutions I would rejoice to break them down in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

—Charles Spurgeon



This biography is excerpted from Randy's new book *We Shall See God: Charles Spurgeon's Classic Devotional Thoughts on Heaven*.

Making Certain of Heaven

by Charles Spurgeon

with comments by Randy Alcorn

Excerpted from Randy's new book:
We Shall See God

Many people view Heaven as an uncertain gamble, spending their lives wondering if they will arrive at their desired destination. But it doesn't have to be this way. Through Christ, we can be assured of eternal life!

Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name!

Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits,
who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit,
who crowns you with steadfast
love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good
so that your youth is renewed
like the eagle's.

Psalm 103:1-5 (ESV)

Spurgeon:

Do we not wish to mount above and fly away, to enter into the rest which awaits the people of God?

This glorious rest is to be best of all commended for its certainty. "There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God" (Hebrews 4:9). Doubter, you have often said, "I fear I shall never enter Heaven." Fear not—all the people of God shall enter there. There is no fear about it. I love the quaint saying of a dying man, who, in his country brogue, exclaimed, "I have no fear of going home; I have sent all before me. God's finger is on the latch of my door, and I am ready for him to enter."

"But are you not afraid that you might miss your inheritance?"

"No," said he, "there is one crown in Heaven that the angel Gabriel could not wear; it will fit no head but mine. There is one throne in Heaven that Paul the apostle could not fill; it was made for me, and I shall have it. There is one dish at the banquet that I must eat, or else it will be untasted, for God has set it apart for me."

Oh Christian, what a joyous thought! Your portion is secure! "There remains a Sabbath rest." "But cannot I forfeit it?" No, it is secure. If I be a child of God, I shall not lose it. It is mine as surely as if I were there.

Poor doubting one, see your inheritance—it is yours. If you believe in the Lord Jesus, you are one of the Lord's people; if you have repented of sin, you are one of the

Lord's people; if you have been renewed in heart, you are one of the Lord's people, and there is a place for you, a crown for you. No one else shall have it but you, and you shall have it before long.

I beg you to conceive of yourselves as being in Heaven. Is it not a strange thing to think of—a poor clown in Heaven? Think, how will you feel with your crown on your head? Weary mother, many years have rolled over you. How changed will be the scene when you are young again. Ah, toil-worn laborer, only think when you shall rest. Can you conceive it? Could you but think for a moment of yourself as being in Heaven now, what a strange surprise would seize you.

You would say, "What! Are these streets of gold? What! Are these walls of jasper? What, am I here? In white? Am I here, with a crown on my head? Am I here singing—I who once groaned? I who once cursed God now praise him? What! I now lift up my voice in his honor? Oh, precious blood that washed me clean! Oh, precious faith that set me free! Oh, precious Spirit that made me repent, lest I'd have been cast away to Hell! Oh, joys that never fade!"

"Profusion of happiness! Wonder of wonders! Miracle of miracles! What a world I am in! And oh, that I am here—this is the greatest miracle of all!" And yet it's true. And that is the glory of it. It is true.

Then come, wings of faith. Come, leap with all power. Come, eternal ages. Come, and you shall prove that there

are joys that the eye has not seen, which the ear has not heard, and which only God can reveal to us by his Spirit.

My earnest prayer is that none of you may fall short of this rest. May you enter into it and enjoy it forever and ever. God give you his great blessing, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

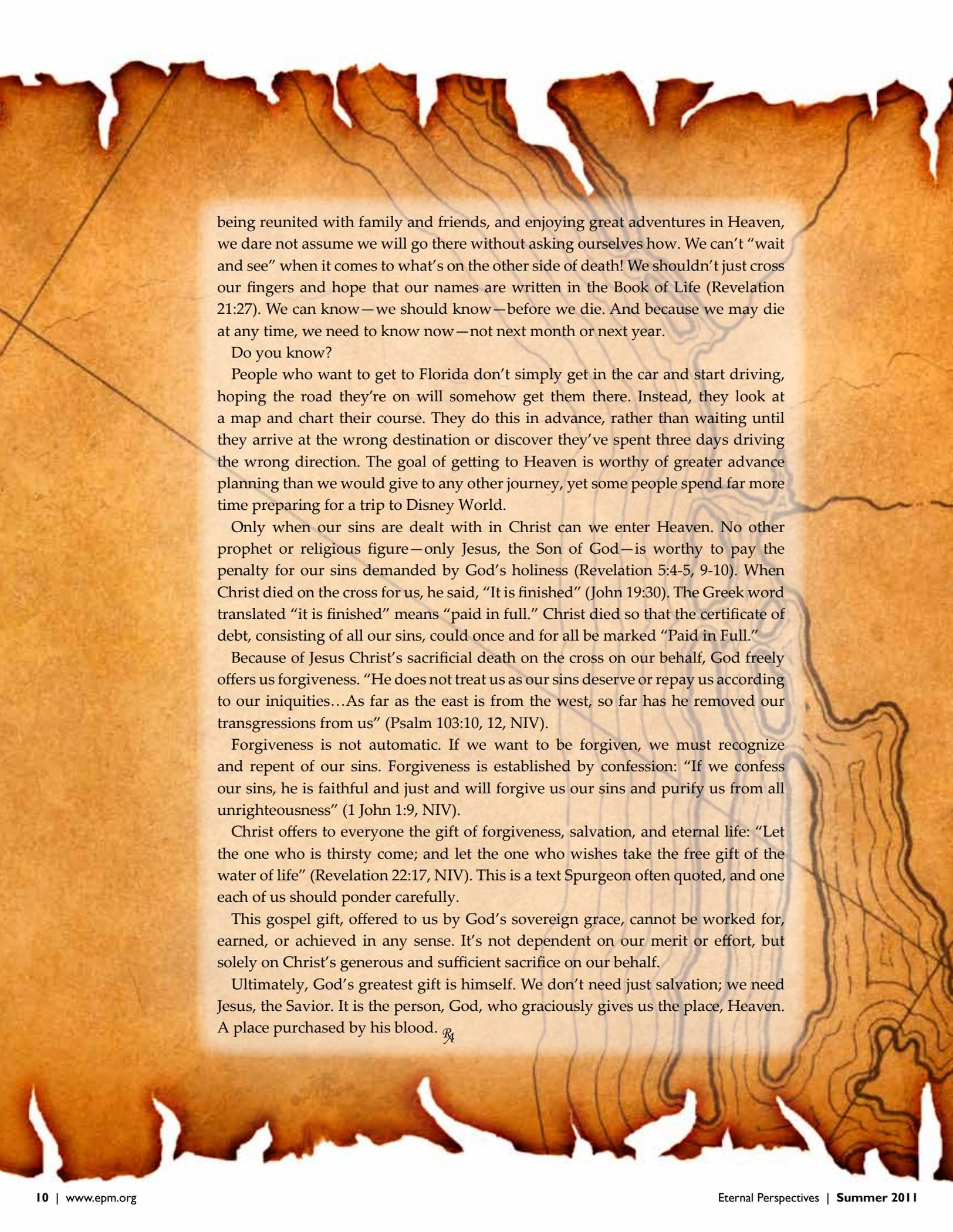
Alcorn:

Not only did Spurgeon have a passion about the Heaven he had seen in his mind's eye, he also had an overwhelming longing for his congregation to come to faith in Christ and know for certain that Heaven awaited them when they died.

Can we really know in advance where we're going when we die? The apostle John, the same one who wrote about the new heavens and New Earth, said in one of his letters, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God *so that you may know that you have eternal life*" (1 John 5:13, NIV, emphasis added).

What would keep us out of Heaven is universal: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23, NIV). Sin separates us from a relationship with God (Isaiah 59:2). God is so holy that he cannot allow sin into his presence: "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing" (Habakkuk 1:13, NIV). Because we are sinners, we are not entitled to enter God's presence as we are.

In the midst of these discussions about being with Jesus,



being reunited with family and friends, and enjoying great adventures in Heaven, we dare not assume we will go there without asking ourselves how. We can't "wait and see" when it comes to what's on the other side of death! We shouldn't just cross our fingers and hope that our names are written in the Book of Life (Revelation 21:27). We can know—we should know—before we die. And because we may die at any time, we need to know now—not next month or next year.

Do you know?

People who want to get to Florida don't simply get in the car and start driving, hoping the road they're on will somehow get them there. Instead, they look at a map and chart their course. They do this in advance, rather than waiting until they arrive at the wrong destination or discover they've spent three days driving the wrong direction. The goal of getting to Heaven is worthy of greater advance planning than we would give to any other journey, yet some people spend far more time preparing for a trip to Disney World.

Only when our sins are dealt with in Christ can we enter Heaven. No other prophet or religious figure—only Jesus, the Son of God—is worthy to pay the penalty for our sins demanded by God's holiness (Revelation 5:4-5, 9-10). When Christ died on the cross for us, he said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). The Greek word translated "it is finished" means "paid in full." Christ died so that the certificate of debt, consisting of all our sins, could once and for all be marked "Paid in Full."

Because of Jesus Christ's sacrificial death on the cross on our behalf, God freely offers us forgiveness. "He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities...As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:10, 12, NIV).

Forgiveness is not automatic. If we want to be forgiven, we must recognize and repent of our sins. Forgiveness is established by confession: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, NIV).

Christ offers to everyone the gift of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life: "Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life" (Revelation 22:17, NIV). This is a text Spurgeon often quoted, and one each of us should ponder carefully.

This gospel gift, offered to us by God's sovereign grace, cannot be worked for, earned, or achieved in any sense. It's not dependent on our merit or effort, but solely on Christ's generous and sufficient sacrifice on our behalf.

Ultimately, God's greatest gift is himself. We don't need just salvation; we need Jesus, the Savior. It is the person, God, who graciously gives us the place, Heaven. A place purchased by his blood. *R*

WE SHALL SEE GOD

No author in history has more material in print than Charles Spurgeon. Today, more than a century after his death, countless people continue to have a passion for this London preacher, and more and more continue to discover him every day.

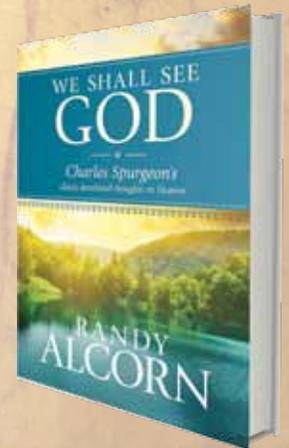
Some of Spurgeon's most powerful sermons were those that he preached on the topic of Heaven. Up until now, however, very few of these sermons have been accessible to a mass audience.

Randy has compiled the most profound spiritual insights on the topic of eternity from these sermons and arranged them into an easily-accessible, highly inspirational format complete with his own comments and devotional thoughts.

EPM Price \$10.49 (retail \$14.99)

Available as an audio book: EPM Price \$20.99 (retail \$27.99). Unabridged, read by Simon Vance and Randy Alcorn.

Also available as an eBook from Christianbook.com



THE HOT WATER BOTTLE : A TRUE STORY

By HELEN ROSEVEARE

One night, in Central Africa, I had worked hard to help a mother in the labor ward; but in spite of all that we could do, she died leaving us with a tiny, premature baby and a crying, two-year-old daughter. We would have difficulty keeping the baby alive. We had no incubator. We had no electricity to run an incubator, and no special feeding facilities. Although we lived on the equator, nights were often chilly with treacherous drafts.

A student-midwife went for the box we had for such babies and for the cotton wool that the baby would be wrapped in. Another went to stoke up the fire and fill a hot water bottle. She came back shortly, in distress, to tell me that in filling the bottle, it had burst. Rubber perishes easily in tropical climates. "...and it is our last hot water bottle!" she exclaimed. As in the West, it is no good crying over spilled milk; so, in Central Africa it might be considered no good crying over a burst water bottle. They do not grow on trees, and there are no drugstores down forest pathways. "All right," I said, "Put the baby as near the fire as you safely can; sleep between the baby and the door to keep it free from drafts. Your job is to keep the baby warm."

The following noon, as I did most days, I went to have prayers with many of the orphanage children who chose to gather with me. I gave the youngsters various suggestions of things to pray about and told them about the tiny baby. I explained our problem about keeping the baby warm enough, mentioning the hot water bottle. The baby could so easily die if it got chilled. I also told them about the two-year-old sister, crying because her mother had died.

During the prayer time, one ten-year-old girl, Ruth, prayed with the usual blunt consciousness of our African children. "Please, God," she prayed, "send us a water bottle. It'll be no good tomorrow, God, the baby'll be dead; so, please send it this afternoon." While I gasped inwardly at the audacity of the prayer, she added by way of corollary, "...And while You are about it, would You please send a dolly for the little girl so she'll know You really love her?" As often with children's prayers, I was put on the spot. Could I honestly say, "Amen?" I just did not believe that God could do this. Oh, yes, I know that He can do everything: The Bible says so, but there are limits, aren't there? The only way God

could answer this particular prayer would be by sending a parcel from the homeland. I had been in Africa for almost four years at that time, and I had never, ever received a parcel from home. Anyway, if anyone did send a parcel, who would put in a hot water bottle? I lived on the equator!

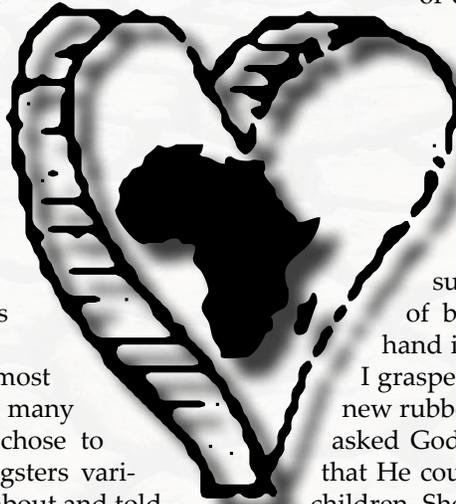
Halfway through the afternoon, while I was teaching in the nurses' training school, a message was sent that there was a car at my front door. By the time that I reached home, the car had gone, but there, on the veranda, was a large twenty-two pound parcel! I felt tears pricking my eyes. I could not open the parcel alone; so, I sent for the orphanage children. Together we pulled off the string, carefully undoing each knot. We folded the paper, taking care not to tear it unduly. Excitement was mounting. Some thirty or forty pairs of eyes were focused on the large cardboard box.

From the top, I lifted out brightly colored, knitted jerseys. Eyes sparkled as I gave them out. Then, there were the knitted bandages for the leprosy patients, and the children began to look a little bored.

Next, came a box of mixed raisins and sultanas—that would make a nice batch of buns for the weekend. As I put my hand in again, I felt the...could it really be? I grasped it, and pulled it out. Yes, "A brand-new rubber, hot water bottle!" I cried. I had not asked God to send it; I had not truly believed that He could. Ruth was in the front row of the children. She rushed forward, crying out, "If God has sent the bottle, He must have sent the dolly, too!" Rummaging down to the bottom of the box, she pulled out the small, beautifully dressed dolly. Her eyes shone: She had never doubted! Looking up at me, she asked, "Can I go over with you, Mummy, and give this dolly to that little girl, so she'll know that Jesus really loves her?"

That parcel had been on the way for five whole months, packed up by my former Sunday School class, whose leader had heard and obeyed God's prompting to send a hot water bottle, even to the equator. One of the girls had put in a dolly for an African child -- five months earlier in answer to the believing prayer of a ten-year-old to bring it!" •

This story originates from Helen Roseveare, a missionary from Northern Ireland. She included this story in her book *Living Faith* published by Christian Focus Publications.



Resources and Kits *for Pastors*

Part of Eternal Perspective Ministries' teaching goal includes offering no-cost and low-cost materials to pastors. All of the kits pictured are available for free to pastors. To request the kits, email info@epm.org.

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- *Heaven* booklet
- 30-minute DVD with Randy Alcorn speaking to pastors about Heaven
- *Heaven* Tract
- An informational brochure listing many other Heaven resources



Treasure Principle Kit >

- *The Treasure Principle* book
- 40-minute DVD of Randy speaking about the Treasure Principle
- Wallet-size money card
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< If God Is Good Kit

- *If God Is Good: Why Do We Hurt?* booklet
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- An informational brochure listing many other resources on evil and suffering



I want to say thank you for making so many of your resources available for free. I know there are other pastors who have benefited from epm.org and most of them will never write you an email. So on behalf of all the pastors and their congregations who have been blessed by your ministry—thank you. —V. B., pastor

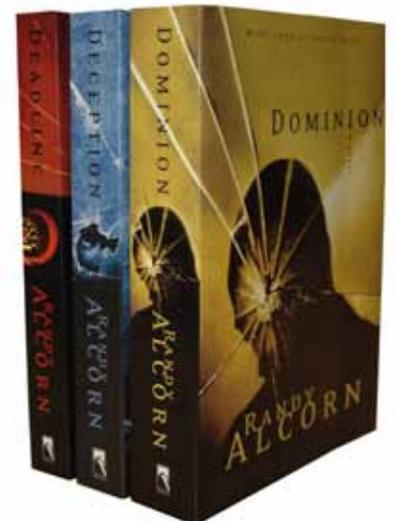
A practical ministry you can do

Share a book you enjoy—with a friend or a stranger

Reader Cathy P. shared this story on Randy's Facebook page ([facebook.com/andyalcorn](https://www.facebook.com/andyalcorn)): "I got your book *Deadline*. I loved it. I lent it to a friend, and she loved it. She lent it to her sister in Egypt, and she loved it. She sent it to her daughter in Texas, and she loved it. Two years later, I got it back. It had been around the world, read by at least 20 people, and was falling apart."

A book can be a powerful and practical way to encourage a friend (or a stranger) or even reach them with the gospel. Perhaps you have one of Randy's books, or another Christ-honoring book you enjoy, that you could give or lend. Ask the Lord and look for an opportunity!

Have a story about sharing one of Randy's books? We'd love to hear it. Email your story to info@epm.org.



CRISIS PREP 101

by Carolyn McCulley

It's not easy to follow our national news these days. There's a free-floating sense of dread in these reports: Will the various bailouts work? How can we afford them? Will the economy recover — or collapse entirely? How many jobs will be lost before we hit bottom? Whose will be among them?

Peppered among the higher-profile financial stories are reports of increased opposition to Christian activity or beliefs. A pastor is arrested for praying outside an abortion clinic. A military chaplain is not allowed to pray in the name of Jesus. A little girl is reprimanded for talking about her pro-life beliefs in class. A church service is interrupted by obscene protesters.

At first glance, these kinds of reports may not seem to be related. But both lead to some kind of loss — loss of fortune or loss of freedom. Faced with the possibility of loss in either category, believing Christians can panic ... or we can prepare.

Preparing for difficulties might seem odd, but it is a biblical concept (Luke 21:34-36). Throughout history and even in many nations today, Christians face loss and persecution for their beliefs. American Christianity's recent history of prosperity and comfort may be the exception, not the rule. In fact, the apostle Paul warned Timothy that "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). As theologian Iain Duguid notes:

Believers around the world know this from experience, yet here in the prosperous and supposedly tolerant West we have come to expect our lives as Christians to run smoothly and successfully, at least if we are faithfully following the Lord. We think that the slogan "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life" means that our lives should be protected by God from any form of unpleasantness. This is a false belief, however. Persecution comes to us in a variety of forms and from a variety of directions, yet it is something that we should expect constantly to mark out our lives in a fallen world. It may come in the form of mockery and isolation at school, or conflict or trouble at work, or simply being regarded as peculiar and strange people, but one way or another we should expect to suffer abuse for the sake of Christ.

I've heard many wise pastors say that the time to prepare for a crisis is before it happens. When faced with a sobering diagnosis, the loss of a job, the rejection of an unbelieving friend, the criticism of a non-Christian culture — these are not the times you want to dig deep into your faith only to discover shallow roots.

Crisis management is not the time to do an in-depth study on God's character, lovingkindness, and sovereignty over our

lives. You have to have that kind of knowledge ready on tap for the day of crisis.

The Roots of Endurance

Many believers who have gone before us have done this kind of preparation by studying God's Word in depth before trouble comes. They rooted themselves and their families in the biblical essentials in order to stand fast and endure to the end. They steeped themselves in God's perspective and promises so that no one would say of them, "Oh, ye of little faith."

I particularly like how Reformation activist Martin Luther prepared his wife for widowhood. Not only did he make financial arrangements for her, he also tended to her soul. A friend of Luther's made this comment after Luther's death:

I often wondered why Doctor Martin Luther had his wife, Kate, memorize the 31st Psalm when she was still young, alert, and carefree and did not yet know how pleasing and comforting this Psalm could be. But her husband did not encourage her to do this without a reason. He knew that after his death she would be a sorrowful and pitiable woman, very much in need of the comfort that the 31st Psalm had to offer.

One biographer of Luther's wife added:

Over the years the Luthers had received expressions of kindness, love, and sympathy from friends and neighbors. Luther also knew the ingratitude of people, the forgetfulness of rulers, the opportunism of bureaucrats, the jealousy of colleagues and wives, and the spitefulness of enemies, who from the moment of [her] arrival at Wittenberg had cruelly slandered her and gossiped about her. Luther also anticipated that after his death such thankless treatment of Kate would only increase. That is why he encouraged her with these powerful words in Psalm 31: "In Thee, O LORD, do I seek refuge; let me never be put to shame; in Thy righteousness deliver me! ... Yea, Thou art my rock and my fortress" (31:1, 3).

The same gospel-centered perspective enabled William Wilberforce to persevere faithfully until his last days. Popular accounts paint Wilberforce as a man driven by the immorality of slavery, but that's an incomplete picture. Though the abolition of slavery and the slave trade may have been Wilberforce's crowning achievement, he was a man who championed many causes that today we would collect under the banner of "social justice."

One biographer noted that at one point he was involved in 69 different initiatives, including child labor conditions, prison reform, the prevention of cruelty to animals, and even the tyrannies of the caste system in India.

YOU CAN'T ENDURE IN BEARING
FRUIT IF YOU SEVER THE ROOT.



Yet, these were not general do-good efforts. According to John Piper's account of his life, Wilberforce's work was so effective because it was rooted in a gospel-centered perspective. By studying the doctrine of justification, Wilberforce had a tool, if you will, to withstand criticism and even self-doubt in the numerous years he dedicated to the cause of abolition.

It is a stunning thing that a politician and a man with no formal theological education should not only know the workings of God in justification and sanctification, but consider them so utterly essential for Christian living and public virtue. Many public people say that changing society requires changing people, but few show the depth of understanding Wilberforce did concerning how that comes about. For him, the right grasp of the central doctrine of justification and its relation to sanctification — an emerging Christlikeness in private and public — were essential to his own endurance and for the reformation of the morals of England.

This was why he wrote *A Practical View of Christianity*. The "bulk" of Christians in his day were "nominal," he observed, and what was the root difference between the nominal and the real? It was this:

The nominal pursued morality (holiness, sanctification) without first relying utterly on the free gift of justification and reconciliation by faith alone based on Christ's blood and righteousness. After studying the life of Wilberforce, Piper analyzed our generation:

Is it not remarkable that one of the greatest politicians of Britain and one of the most persevering public warriors for social justice should elevate doctrine so highly? Perhaps this is why the impact of the church today is as weak as it is. Those who are most passionate about being practical for the public good are often the least doctrinally interested or informed. Wilberforce would say: You can't endure in bearing fruit if you sever the root.

Security's Source

If we Americans have come to assume that prosperity and ease are our birthrights, the dawning years of the 21st century should sober us. From 9/11 to this deepening global recession, our assumptions of security have been shaken.

The question before us now is from where do we draw this security? If it is in our circumstances, we will crumble in the face of hardship—indulging self-pity and marshaling our coping strategies in such an all-consuming way that we will not have time or energy left to serve others or share the gospel. Let us not be those who hoard in national crises or personal emergencies. Let us not be those who forget to rejoice in our salvation if and when the waves of persecution reach our shores or bubble up from within.

I have to do the same crisis preparation. I've been tested already in a variety of ways and have found myself lacking. I like my material comfort, I enjoy respect for my faith and beliefs,

and I suspect I am not ready for any true opposition. But I know that Luther and Wilberforce were in the same position at one time in their lives, too. I don't take comfort in their personal journeys, but in the fact we all love the same faithful Savior. My prayer is that I will not grow slack in my knowledge and worship of His character and promises, no matter what the future holds.

So for now, crisis preparation 101 means practicing generosity to those in need even when my own budget is tight, studying the character and promises of God, and storing up for myself riches in heaven rather than riches on earth. It means reminding myself that this earth is not my home and that I'm only a pilgrim passing through. But I'm a pilgrim following the One who assures a victorious conclusion.

Above all, crisis prep means being convinced of the source of true peace—something that transcends circumstances. Jesus assured us we have peace in Him: "These things I have spoken to you so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). This precious truth is one to study over and over again as I prepare for whatever the Lord has ordained for my future. •

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THE LOSS OF A JOB, THE REJECTION OF AN UNBELIEVING FRIEND, THE CRITICISM OF A NON-CHRISTIAN CULTURE — THESE ARE NOT THE TIMES YOU WANT TO DIG DEEP INTO YOUR FAITH ONLY TO DISCOVER SHALLOW ROOTS.



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

In this issue

Making Certain of Heaven

Also inside

Giving Comfort to Hurting People
Crisis Prep 101
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