

eternal perspectives

Spring 2016

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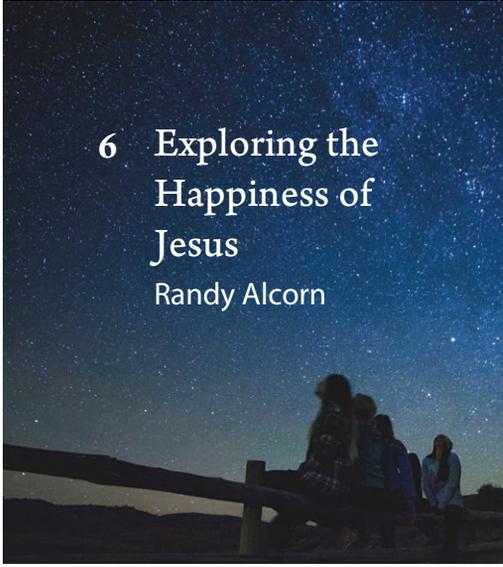
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Gospel-Driven *Hospitality*

BY REVIVE OUR HEARTS

Over twenty years ago, Rosaria Butterfield was a distinguished professor of English at Syracuse University. A staunch feminist, outspoken atheist, and practicing lesbian, she was the least likely candidate to become an advocate for Christ.

But that didn't stop one Presbyterian minister from reaching out to Rosaria in the form of a letter, encouraging her to consider the very questions and accusations she posed against Christians. From that snail-mail correspondence came the most unlikely friendship. Pastor Ken Smith and his wife, Floy, welcomed Rosaria into their home with genuine hospitality, building a relationship with her one meal at a time. Those open arms and the friendship that followed were what was needed to open her eyes to truth.

Woven throughout the tapestry of her personal testimony is this thread of hospitality. It was in the Smith home where she first heard the gospel. And it was through the loving, welcoming arms of their church that her heart was softened to the truth. Even now, hospitality is the avenue she uses to show the love of Christ.

The Gospel Comes with a House Key

In her interview on *Revive Our Hearts*, Rosaria emphasizes the importance of hospitality. She believes God has given us the gift of neighbors to practice being neighborly. When you open your home to others, you're painting a picture of the gospel, for it was by invitation of the Master that you were welcomed into His family and given a seat at His table.

That open-door policy seems easy enough when



we're talking about family or close friends . . . but what about the stranger, the outcast, or that nosy neighbor?

If you look up the word hospitality, what you'll not find is a definition that reads, "Graciously hosting a weekly small group," or "Welcoming your best friend and her family into your home for a home-cooked meal and game of Monopoly."

Rather, true hospitality means loving the stranger; treating a new acquaintance like an old friend; sharing the best of your time and possessions with the underprivileged. Unless you live deep in the jungles or on a lone mountaintop, most of you can look in any direction from your home and see neighbors on all sides. But do you know who they are? It's hard to show Christ's love to the person next door when you don't even know their name.

Get to know your neighbors. The front yard is one

of the most unused places in America, Rosaria says. But not at the Butterfield residence. Rosaria and her husband, Kent, make it a point to spend at least one evening a week in their front yard as a family solely for the purpose of creating opportunities for conversation and prayer with their neighbors.

"We're known as the praying family in our neighborhood," she said. "This community prayer time has become a source of strength to [our] community, and a witness—that we are people who believe that there is a God who made us and will take care of us . . . and hears our prayers. It is our responsibility as believers to take those needs to the Father for the non-believers who do not have access to the throne of grace."

The Purpose of a Bridge

Hospitality is actually a command we're to carry out, but under one condition—"without grumbling" (1 Peter 4:9). This means we all bear the responsibility of gladly showing hospitality to one another and to the stranger.

Depending on the climate you live in or your season of life, having a weekly prayer gathering in your front yard might not be feasible. But there are many other ways to invest in your community:

- Host a summer block party.
- Deliver a plate of cookies to the family who just moved in.
- Offer to help your next-door neighbor rake his

leaves or shovel snow.

- Simply greet your neighbors as you pass on the street!

Rosaria uses this illustration: A believer in Christ is like a bridge. What's the purpose of a bridge? To get walked on. We don't like the sound of that, do we? But as followers of the Savior, we should count it no great loss to sacrifice a little for the sake of the kingdom. What's one evening a week or a few extra dollars from the grocery budget in comparison to what Christ gave up to redeem sinners from eternal condemnation?

At the heart of hospitality is the heart of the gospel—sacrifice, love, humility. And it's hard. Jesus bids us to come and die, and there's nothing easy about that! But there's much at stake when we fail to reach out in love before a watching world.

Hospitality is so much more than having a good time with a handful of friends. It's one of the key ways prescribed to administer the gospel to a needy world. ■

This article originally appeared on the True Woman blog at www.reviveourhearts.com/true-woman/blog.

Listen to Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth's 5-part interview with Rosaria Butterfield (aired February 5-12, 2016) at www.reviveourhearts.com/radio.

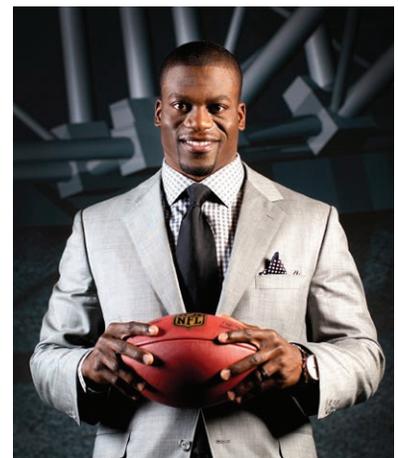
Racism: Ultimately It's a Sin, Not a Skin, Problem

Following the grand jury's decision over the Ferguson, Missouri shooting of Michael Brown, NFL tight end Benjamin Watson wrote and shared a response on Facebook that went viral. Though he originally posted the following in November 2014, Benjamin's thoughts and observations continue to be pertinent to our national and personal conversations about race, especially as followers of Jesus Christ.

BY BENJAMIN WATSON

At some point while I was playing or preparing to play Monday Night Football, the news broke about the Ferguson decision. After trying to figure out how I felt, I decided to write it down. Here are my thoughts:

I'm angry, because the stories of injustice that have been passed down for generations seem to be continuing before our very eyes.



I'm frustrated, because pop culture, music, and movies glorify these types of police-citizen altercations and promote an invincible attitude that continues to get young men killed in real life, away from the safety of movie sets and music studios.

I'm fearful, because in the back of my mind I know that although I'm a law-abiding citizen I could still be looked upon as a "threat" to those who don't know me. So I will continue to have to go the extra mile to earn the benefit of the doubt.

I'm embarrassed, because the looting, violent protests, and lawbreaking only confirm and, in the minds of many, validate the stereotypes and thus the inferior treatment.

I'm sad, because another young life was lost from his family; the racial divide has widened; a community is in shambles; accusations, insensitivity, hurt, and hatred are boiling over; and we may never know the truth about what happened that day.

I'm sympathetic, because I wasn't there, so I don't know exactly what happened. Maybe Darren Wilson acted within his rights and duty as an officer of the law and killed Michael Brown in self-defense like any of us would in the circumstance. Now he has to fear the backlash against himself and his loved ones when he was only doing his job. What a horrible thing to endure. OR maybe he provoked Michael and ignited the series of events that led to him eventually murdering the young man to prove a point.

I'm offended, because of the insulting comments I've seen that are not only insensitive but dismissive to the painful experiences of others.

I'm confused, because I don't know why it's so hard to obey a policeman. You will not win!!! And I don't know why some policemen abuse their power. Power is a responsibility, not a weapon to brandish and lord over the populace.

I'm introspective, because sometimes I want to

take "our" side without looking at the facts in situations like these. Sometimes I feel like it's "us" against "them." Sometimes I'm just as prejudiced as people I point fingers at. And that's not right. How can I look at white skin and make assumptions but not want assumptions made about me? That's not right.

I'm hopeless, because I've lived long enough to expect things like this to continue to happen. I'm not surprised and at some point my little children are going to inherit the weight of being a minority and all that it entails.

I'm hopeful, because I know that while we still have race issues in America, we enjoy a much different normal than that of our parents and grandparents. I see it in my relationships with teammates, friends, and mentors. And it's a beautiful thing.

I'm encouraged, because ultimately the problem is not a SKIN problem, it is a SIN problem. SIN is the reason we rebel against authority. SIN is the reason we abuse our authority. SIN is the reason we are racist, prejudiced, and lie to cover for our own. SIN is the reason we riot, loot, and burn.

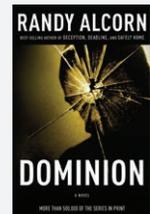
But I'm encouraged, because God has provided a solution for sin through the his Son, Jesus, and, with it, a transformed heart and mind. One that's capable of looking past the outward and seeing what's truly important in every human being. The cure for the Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, and Eric Garner tragedies is not education or exposure. It's the gospel. So, finally, **I'm encouraged**, because the gospel gives mankind hope. ■



Related Reading

Since writing his Facebook post, Benjamin Watson has authored a book, titled *Under Our Skin: Getting Real about Race—and Getting Free from the Fears and Frustrations That Divide Us*. Learn more at www.underourskinbook.com.

Randy's novel *Dominion* addresses racism in fiction form. It explores our perceptions and conflicts, and points toward the only true hope for racial reconciliation. Learn more at www.epm.org/dominion.



Exploring the

Happiness of Jesus

BY RANDY ALCORN

In Your right hand there is happiness forever

PSALM 16:11, NLV

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y wife led a women's Bible study group in discussing a lesson she'd written about the happiness of Jesus. One woman who'd grown up as a churchgoer was startled. She shared how horrified she'd once been to see a picture of Jesus smiling. Why? Because she believed it was blasphemous to make Jesus appear happy!

She's not alone. Ask a random group of believers and unbelievers, "Who is the happiest human being who ever lived?" and few would correctly answer: "Jesus."

Jesus is depicted with a glad heart.

In the first-ever gospel message of the newborn church, the apostle Peter preached that Psalm 16 is about Christ: “David says concerning him, ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was *glad*, and my tongue *rejoiced*. . . . For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. . . . You will make me *full of gladness* with your presence” (Acts 2:25-28, emphasis added). This effusive statement, attributed to the Messiah, is a triple affirmation of his happiness!

The passage Peter ascribed to Jesus includes Psalm 16:11. The New Life Version translates it, “Being with You is to be full of joy. In Your right hand there is happiness forever.”

I’m convinced we should view this first apostolic sermon as a model for sharing the gospel today. Peter, full of the Holy Spirit, asserted three times the happiness of the one at the center of the gospel—Jesus. Yet how many people, unbelievers and believers alike, have ever heard a modern gospel message that makes this point?

What if we regularly declared the happiness of our Savior? Imagine the response if we emphasized that what Jesus did on that terrible cross was for the sake of never-ending happiness—ours and his.

Jesus was—and is—the happiest of people.

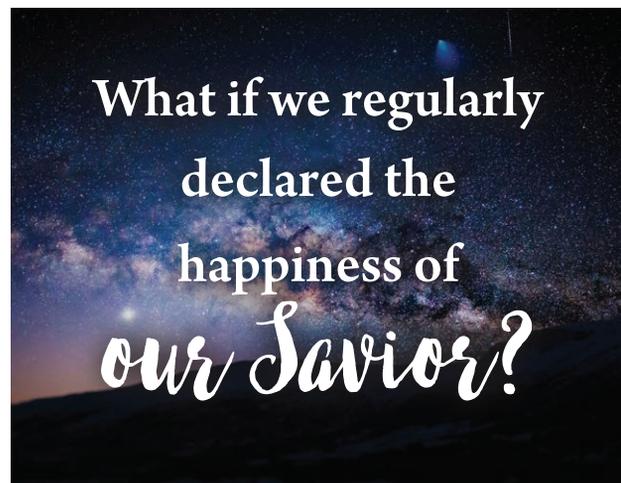
In Hebrews 1:8-9, a direct reference to the Messiah quoted in Psalm 45:6-7, the Father says of his Son: “You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.” The Contemporary English Version renders it, “your God . . . made you happier than any of your friends.”

Who are Jesus’ companions in this passage? This could refer to His immediate group of friends, all believers, or all His fellow human beings. If it’s the latter, He has gladness that exceeds that of all people (which makes sense, because He created us).

Reflecting on these passages in Psalm 45 and Hebrews 1, John Piper writes, “Jesus Christ is the happiest being in the universe. His gladness is greater than all the angelic gladness of heaven. He mirrors perfectly the infinite, holy, indomitable mirth of his Father.”¹

The Bible repeatedly suggests that Jesus exemplified the joy of living.

Scripture contains many additional indications of



Christ’s happiness. It takes a joyful person to instruct His disciples in the art of rejoicing. Jesus said, “Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). The CEV renders the verse, “Be happy that your names are written in heaven!”

The next verse connects His disciples’ joy to Jesus’ joy: “In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit” (Luke 10:21). The Weymouth New Testament reads, “Jesus was filled by the Holy Spirit with rapturous joy.”

Consider this part of the verse: “At that very time [the Son] rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, ‘I praise You, O Father . . .’” (Luke 10:21, NASB). This clearly affirms the Trinity’s gladness—Jesus overflows with joy from the Holy Spirit, and the Father finds pleasure in revealing himself to his children.

Imagine this scene: “Children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.’ And he laid his hands on them and went away” (Matthew 19:13-15). This passage leaves no doubt about Jesus’ love for children. And the fact that children flocked to Him is telling: children are drawn to happy adults, not unhappy ones.

Jesus says, “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” (John 15:11, KJV). The *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* says that *chara*, the word translated here as “joy,” means “a state of joy and gladness—joy, gladness, great happiness.”² The CEV renders the verse, “I have told you this to make you

as completely happy as I am.” What a great life goal: to become as happy as Jesus!

Jesus’ happiness set Him apart from the religious leaders of His time.

First-century Pharisaism, with its endless rules, often negated the joy that God intended through feasts, celebrations, Sabbath days, and everyday life. But Jesus stood in stark contrast to “holy people” of his time. Serious rabbis were never in danger of being accused of gluttony and drunkenness, because they never went to parties. (They probably didn’t get many invitations!) Jesus wasn’t serious enough for their tastes, so they imagined he couldn’t be holy.

When I wrote my first graphic novel, *Eternity*, I had to decide how I wanted the artist to portray Jesus’ face in a typical scene. Having read the Gospels many times and known Jesus for forty years, I knew His default look should be one of happiness. Yes, I asked the artist to portray Him as angry when facing off with the Pharisees and sad when heading to the cross. But the man who held children in His arms, healed people, fed the multitudes, and made wine at a wedding was, more often than not, happy!

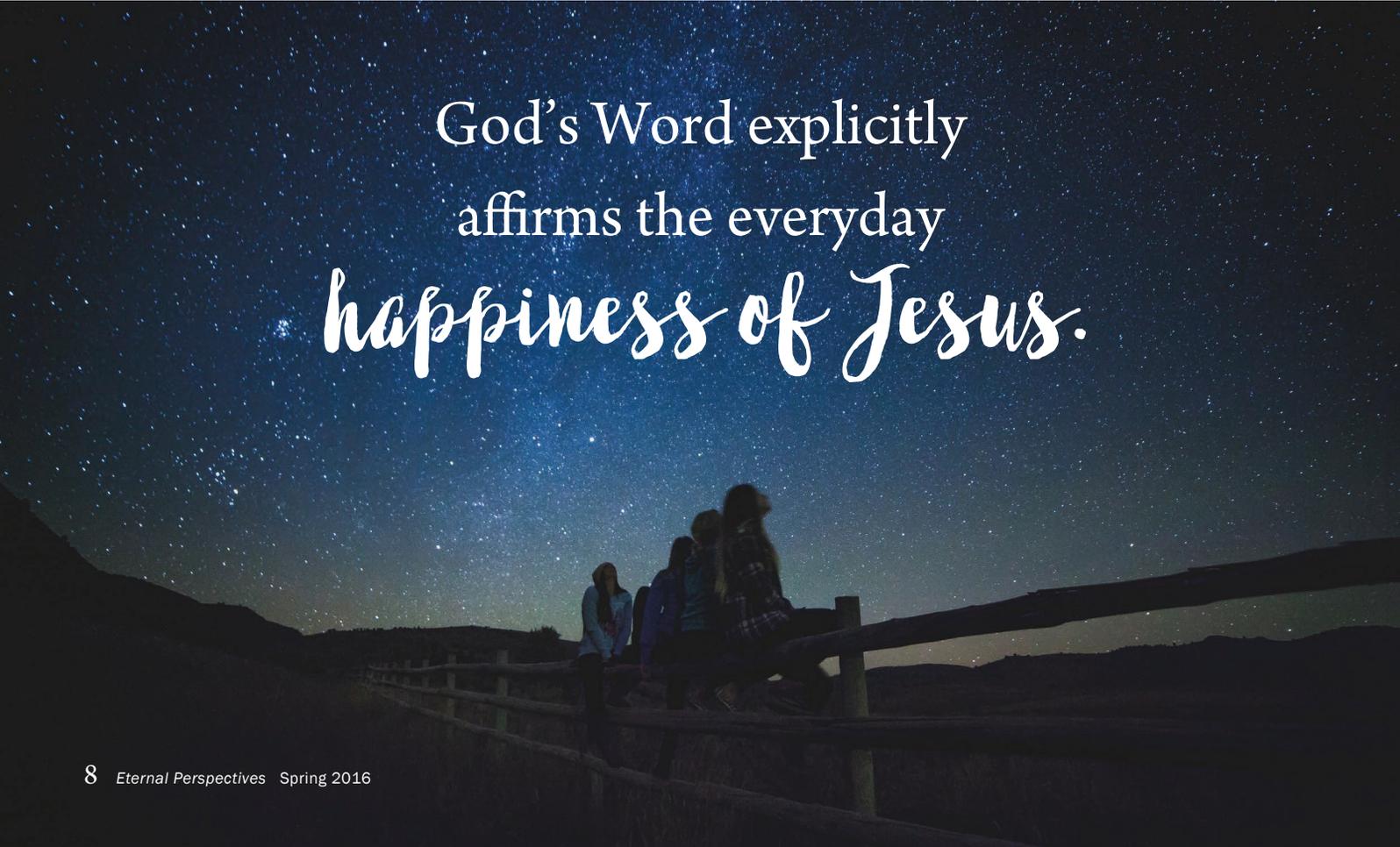
Jesus was both a man of sorrows and a man of joy.

It is written of the Messiah, “He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised” (Isaiah 53:3). Note that He’s called “a man of sorrows” specifically in relationship to His redemptive work.

When He was headed to the cross, Jesus said, “My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death” (Mark 14:34, NASB). But this was the worst day of his life—he was heading to a worse death than any human has ever faced. It doesn’t indicate the typical, day-to-day temperament of Jesus.

Given the price He paid for our sins, does being “a man of sorrows” contradict the notion that Jesus was happy? Absolutely not. Sorrow and happiness can and do coexist within the same person. Jesus knew that the basis for our sorrow is temporary, while the basis for our gladness is permanent. In Christ’s case, He’d known unbounded happiness since before the dawn of time, and He knew that it awaited Him again. That had to infuse His days with gladness even in the face of suffering and grief.

William Morrice writes, “The very fact that Jesus



God’s Word explicitly
affirms the everyday
happiness of Jesus.

did attract hurting people to himself shows that he cannot have been forbidding in his manner. It suggests that the 'man of sorrows' conception of his personality has been overrated in the past. Had he been a gloomy individual and a kill-joy, he would not have had such an appeal to common people and to children."³

In Luke 4:17, Jesus unrolls the scroll of Isaiah and reads the first few verses of Isaiah 61, after which He says, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). Isaiah 61 continues with its prophecy about Jesus: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Isaiah 61:10). This passage tells us that the Father is the Son's source of joy. The New Century Version renders the verse, "The Lord makes me very happy; all that I am rejoices in my God." Again, God's Word explicitly affirms the everyday happiness of Jesus.

Another remarkable verse tells us that "For the *joy* that was set before him [Christ] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2, emphasis added).

On Good Friday, Jesus experienced the terrible burden of atonement, the trauma of dying on the cross, and the anguish of being temporarily alienated from his Father when He became our sin (see Matthew 27:46; 2 Corinthians 5:21). But this suffering was overshadowed by the joy of *our* salvation. When Jesus walked the Earth, He lived every moment with divine happiness in His past, the happiness of an eternal perspective in His present, and the anticipation of unending happiness in the future.

Since Jesus is happy, His disciples should follow Him happily.

Francis de Sales, the bishop of Geneva (1567–1622), said, "I cannot understand why those who have given themselves up to God and his goodness are not always cheerful; for what possible happiness can be equal to that? No accidents or imperfections which may happen ought to have power to trouble them, or to hinder their looking upward."⁴

One explanation for our cheerlessness is simple: many of God's people don't believe that the Christ we serve is cheerful.

Spurgeon said, "We are happy to think Christ is happy. I do not know whether you have ever drank that joy, Believer, but I have found it a very sweet joy to be joyful because Christ is joyful."⁵

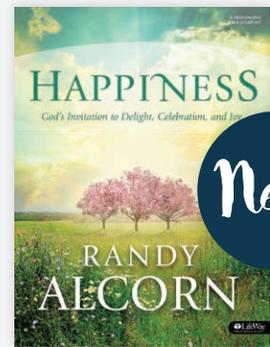
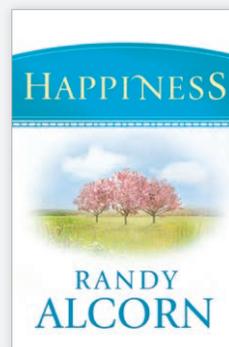
Scripture commands us to follow in Jesus' footsteps (see 1 Peter 2:21). When we become convinced that our Savior walked this Earth not only experiencing suffering and sorrow, but also doing so with an ancient yet forever-young happiness in His heart and a smile on his face, it will inspire us to love Him more deeply and follow Him more cheerfully. ■

Endnotes

1. John Piper, *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 36.
2. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), s.v. "chara."
3. William Morrice, *Joy in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 86.
4. Francis de Sales, "Spiritual Life," *Christian Register*, December 28, 1916.
5. Spurgeon, "The Special Call and the Unfailing Result" (Sermon #616).

Read more about the happiness of God, and cultivating Christ-honoring delight and joy in our lives, in Randy's book *Happiness*, available at www.epm.org/happiness.

Also, now available—the *Happiness Leader Kit: God's Invitation to Delight, Celebration, and Joy*. This six-session Bible Study, which includes a DVD with six 15- to 20-minute teaching sessions from Randy Alcorn, is ideal for small groups. Learn more and watch excerpts at www.epm.org/happinesskit.



Having a Jesus Heart FOR CHILDREN

BY KELLY NEEDHAM

In every season of life, all of us encounter children—whether our own, or a friend’s, or nieces and nephews, or neighborhood kids. It’s important we have a Biblically-informed view of them.

Children Are an Inconvenience: The Common Attitude

Unfortunately, the pervasive attitude about children is that they’re inconvenient: they equal gaining 30 pounds, giving up on your dreams, and not living life your way. *Children get in the way of your plans for you.*

An increasingly sexually active culture has fueled this attitude. Years ago, pregnancy was the normal, expected outcome from having sex. But thanks to birth control and abortion, children are now only an optional result of sex. The push to separate pregnancy from sex is happening to appease a shamelessly self-centered lifestyle. Rather than a joyous moment, a positive pregnancy test is often received with fear as if it were a curse, a disease, or a punishment.

This mindset that children just get in the way continues beyond pregnancy. Career rules all in our culture, and men and women everywhere are finding ways to farm out their parenting responsibilities to daycares, nannies, and grandparents so they can continue to live their life the way they want.

Sadly, this attitude isn’t

just found in the world around us, but also among those who follow Christ. We see this happening even among Jesus’ disciples in Mark 10:13: “And they were bringing children to Jesus so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them.”

Imagine that moment. The disciples see a bunch of moms with crying babies, busy toddlers, and rambunctious 7-year-old boys coming to Jesus. Perhaps the disciples thought they were being incredibly spiritual and Kingdom-minded: “All these kids are slowing Jesus down. He’s got places to be, sermons to preach, people to heal, demons to cast out! Get them out of the way so we can get onto the important stuff.”

The disciples considered children to be an inconvenience to Jesus’s ministry. And very often, so do many of His followers today. It might not be a career that causes us to sideline children; it might even be “important, world-changing ministry.”

Children Are a Gift: The Biblical View of Children

The Bible gives us no other way to think about children than this: they are a gift. A blessing. A reward. So how did Jesus respond to the disciples’ rebuke of the children?

And they were bringing children to Jesus so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, “Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all.” And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them. (Mark 10:13-16)

Here are a few things we can learn from Jesus about children.

Do Not Hinder the Children

The disciples were trying to prevent these children from coming to Jesus. But He says *do not hinder*



them. Literally, don't get in their way! Don't forbid these children to come to me! How often do we stand in the way of the natural curiosity of a child because we're too busy with "more important things"?

A child may be interested to learn about this Jesus you're talking about with your friend, or understand what's so special about the Bible you're reading. Do we respond like the disciples in those moments, rebuking the child to "Leave me alone, go play with your toys. I'm busy meeting with Jesus or talking about Jesus"? Do not hinder the children! Don't stand in their way. Let them interrupt your plans and your day.

Learn from Children

Jesus tells the disciples that these inconvenient, time-consuming children actually have something to teach them: "The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all." What a massive statement.

Not only should we welcome the interruptions of children, we should also have a heart to learn from them. Kids have something to teach us about true faith and love for God and His Kingdom. This should make us want to be around kids, and even seek them out, prefer them, and be eager to listen to their thoughts!

If Jesus had said, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a lawyer will not enter it at all," wouldn't we find a way to spend time with a law student to understand what He meant by that? But Jesus has called us to learn from children. So pay attention to them, value them, and ask them questions. Learn from them.

Slow Down for Children

"And Jesus took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them." Jesus slowed down and engaged with these little ones. He got on their level. He spoke words of blessing over them. He stopped what He was doing to spend time with them.

Who are the children in your life? Do you purposely engage them? They may be your own children. Your grandchildren. Nieces, nephews. Friends' kids. Children running around the lobby of your church. Maybe it's the children who come into the doctor's office where you work. Don't let your primary assumption of these little ones be one of

inconvenience. Welcome them. Engage them. Speak positively to them and about them.

Children Are Arrows: Thinking Strategically

"Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them" (Psalm 127:3-5).

I love that Scripture calls children arrows in the hand of a warrior. Not only are they a gift, they're also an offensive weapon! Do you desire to make a difference in this world for the cause of Christ and influence the next generation? Then pour into children! An investment in the life of a child pays huge dividends.

Think of your own childhood. Are there adults who took the time to slow down and get to know you? To teach you? To help you? Or adults that didn't value you, but harmed you or spoke negatively to you? How did that affect your life? Think of your parents. The things they did (or sometimes didn't do) have likely impacted how you see the world even to this very day. Adults have a tremendous impact on

children's lives, for better or for worse!

What if we determined to pour into the lives of the preschoolers, elementary age kids, and preteens around us? What if we taught them about God, who He is, and what He has done for broken sinners through Christ? What if we took every opportunity to listen to them and speak truth to them, to counsel and encourage them? *This is an investment that is never wasted.*

Look for opportunities to invest in the life of a child. Serve in your church's preschool or children's ministry. Become a mentor for a teenager through your school district. Do you have young siblings? Invest in them. Does your friend have children? Engage them when you go to visit. And of course, for those of us who have our own children, may we allow God's view of children to permeate our homes and our actions.

As Christians, we're to be set apart from this utterly self-centered world. We are those who follow the Selfless, Cross-Carrying Servant of God who welcomed children. May we do the same. ■

Who are the children
in your life? Do you
purposely engage them?

Kelly Needham is married to Christian singer/songwriter Jimmy Needham and is a full-time mom to their two young daughters. She blogs at www.kellyneedham.com.



Each day brings news of terrible things happening around the world. You write about happiness, but how can we be happy in Christ when there's so much evil and suffering?

ANSWERED BY RANDY ALCORN

Romans 8:28 says, "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." By recognizing and believing in God's sovereignty, even over Satan's work, our perspective is transformed.

The gospel's good news is that because of Christ's death and resurrection, happiness, not sorrow, has the last word—and it will have the last word forever. This secure future invades our present, so that even while death and sorrow remain, the new normal in Christ isn't sorrow but happiness. And if our happiness is grounded in God, we won't lose the basis for it, because nothing will separate us from the love of Christ (see Romans 8:37-39).

We certainly live in a world filled with suffering and death. It's unrealistic to expect perpetual happiness while the Curse is in effect. But as believers, we understand God is with us and won't forsake us, and one day we'll live on a redeemed Earth, a place full of joy and delight. Yes, the day hasn't yet come when God will "wipe away every tear from [His children's] eyes" (Revelation 21:4). But it will come. Anticipating this reality has breathtaking implications for our present happiness.

Sometimes sorrow and joy do battle; sometimes they coexist, but when our hearts and minds are on Christ, joy is never far away: "You changed my sorrow into dancing. You took away my clothes of sadness, and clothed me in happiness" (Psalm 30:11, NCV). ■

Does someone who gives of their time or goods instead of their money earn the same eternal reward? Is giving money the only and best way to help the needy and earn reward from Christ?

ANSWERED BY CHELSEA WEBER, EPM STAFF

Caring for the poor and needy is obviously very close to the heart of Jesus. He talks numerous times about caring for the poor and needy in tangible ways (especially see Matthew 25:31-40). In James we learn that true religion is caring for the orphans and widows (James 1:27) and in Luke we read the story of the Good Samaritan and Jesus commands us to "go and do likewise" (Luke 10:25-37). It is clear that believers will be rewarded for the good works they do (Galatians 6:9, Colossians 3:23-24, Hebrews 6:10, 1 Corinthians 3:12-15).

What is also clear is that God commands us to give of our money *and* to do good works (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

I've heard people say, "I don't tithe to my church with my money, I tithe to my church with my time." This is not what God commands in Scripture. By giving your time and not your money, you're robbing God and not being a good steward of what He's entrusted to you. By giving your money and not doing good works, you're robbing the body of Christ and failing to be a light in this dark world. Both are sin, both rob others, and both harm you. Jesus encourages and commands us to give our money *and* our time in caring for others. God will reward us for our faithfulness in these areas. In one situation you may be called to give of your time; in another you may be called to give of your money; and in some cases, you'll do both. ■



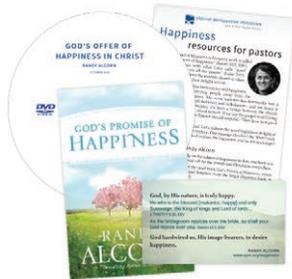
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EPM now offers pastors and church leaders a free Happiness pastor kit, which includes a copy of Randy's small book *God's Promise of Happiness*, a DVD of him speaking on the topic of happiness, a wallet card, and an informational brochure listing the other resources available for those teaching on the subject. Learn more at www.epm.org/happinespastors. (We welcome readers to share this information and link with their pastors!)



Randy speaking at Good Shepherd Community Church

Randy will speak on the topic of happiness at his home church, Good Shepherd Community Church in Gresham, Oregon, on April 2-3, 2016. He'll be speaking on Saturday, April 2 at 5 pm and on Sunday, April 3 at 9:00 and 10:45 am. Anyone is welcome to attend. Each session will be different, so feel free to come to one, two or all three of them. Directions and church info at <http://goodshepherdcc.org>.

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Watching Our Words on Social Media

BY RANDY ALCORN

The power of the words we speak and write is far greater than we realize. Proverbs 18:21 tells us that “Life and death is in the power of the tongue.” In fact, usually our written words assume more permanence and reach further and wider than our spoken ones.

Yet as I’ve observed Christians interacting on the internet, including through social media, I’m concerned that many of us are failing to use our words in a way that is honoring to Christ. We’re neglecting to remember that these powerful tools many of us are using—whether in blogs, as comments on blogs, on Facebook or Twitter, or as responses to them—can serve either God or Satan, good or evil.

God holds us accountable for every word we say, including the careless ones we share over the

internet. Jesus said, “But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken” (Matthew 12:36). This means we better *think carefully* before we hit post or reply.

Words as Weapons

Jackie Hill Perry writes, “It is not wise or healthy to disassociate what you say on social media from who you are. It seems as if many, including Christians, feel the freedom to be critical, divisive, harsh, and flat out wicked with speech via social media as if it is not AS damaging. Don’t be fooled, you will be judged just as much for what you said with your mouth as you will with what you’ve typed with your hands.”

I’ve seen Bible-believing, Christ-centered people post thoughts on a blog or on social media only

to receive a string of hypercritical responses from people who wield Scripture verses like pickaxes, swiftly condemning the slightest hint of a viewpoint they consider suspicious. Others quickly join the fray, and soon it appears that no one has bothered to read what the blogger actually said. Responders assume the worst, not giving the benefit of the doubt and engaging in shotgun-style character assassination. (If I were an unbeliever reading such responses, I certainly wouldn't be drawn to the Christian faith!)

I wonder why it's not immediately recognized by those engaging in such behavior that what they're doing is utterly contrary to the faith they profess and the Bible they believe. How is it that perpetual disdain, suspicion, unkindness, and hostility are seen as taking the spiritual high ground? We dishonor our God and each other when we accuse and delight in our brothers' and sisters' alleged errors.

A Call for Wisdom

The ancient book of Proverbs has much to say about our words. These biblical principles apply every bit as much to our written words as our spoken ones. Proverbs 12:18 says, "Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." "A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered" (Proverbs 17:27). "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1).

Paul David Tripp writes, "...you have never spoken a neutral word in your life. Your words have direction to them. If your words are moving in the life direction, they will be words of encouragement, hope, love, peace, unity, instruction, wisdom, and correction. But if your words are moving in a death direction, they will be words of anger, malice, slander, jealousy, gossip, division, contempt, racism, violence, judgment, and condemnation."

Truth and Grace

James 2:13 says, "Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!" Where is the mercy among evangelical Christians? Personally, I've seen a lot of it. But I've also seen a lot of unmerciful condemnation of the sort that Jesus repeatedly denounced.

Yes, we can and will disagree in the Christian community, but we should speak the truth in love: "Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things

**Are we going out of our way to assume the best rather than the worst of others?
Are we laboring to share our opinions in a spirit of love and grace?**

grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ" (Ephesians 4:15-16). God calls us "to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men" (Titus 3:2).

While we should desire that truth not be compromised, we should also remember that Jesus often condemned the Pharisees, those whose doctrine was closest to his own. Why? For their lack of grace. Our Jesus came "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). He calls for us to be full of both.

Psalm 133:1 says, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!" What are we doing to cultivate this kind of unity? Sometimes we must disagree with our brothers. But are we going out of our way to assume the best rather than the worst? Are we laboring to share our opinions in a spirit of love and grace? "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (Romans 14:19).

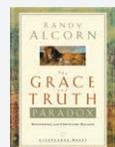
A Higher Calling

Paul reminds us to "Let all that you do be done in love" (1 Corinthians 16:14). Wouldn't it be wonderful for those of us who are already each other's brothers and sisters to learn how to believe the best of each other? And to speak the truth to each other in love? And to be like Jesus toward each other: full of grace and truth? (One thing is certain: a world torn apart by criticism, suspicion, and hostility will never be won to Christ by a church riddled with the same.)

Galatians 6:10 is an apt reminder for our interactions on social media: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." On social media, in our conversations, and everywhere in between, may we seek to do good to our brothers and sisters in Christ through our words, always remembering our accountability to the Lord Jesus. ■

Read a compilation of Scriptures about our words at www.epm.org/words.

Learn about Randy's book *The Grace and Truth Paradox* at www.epm.org/gandt.

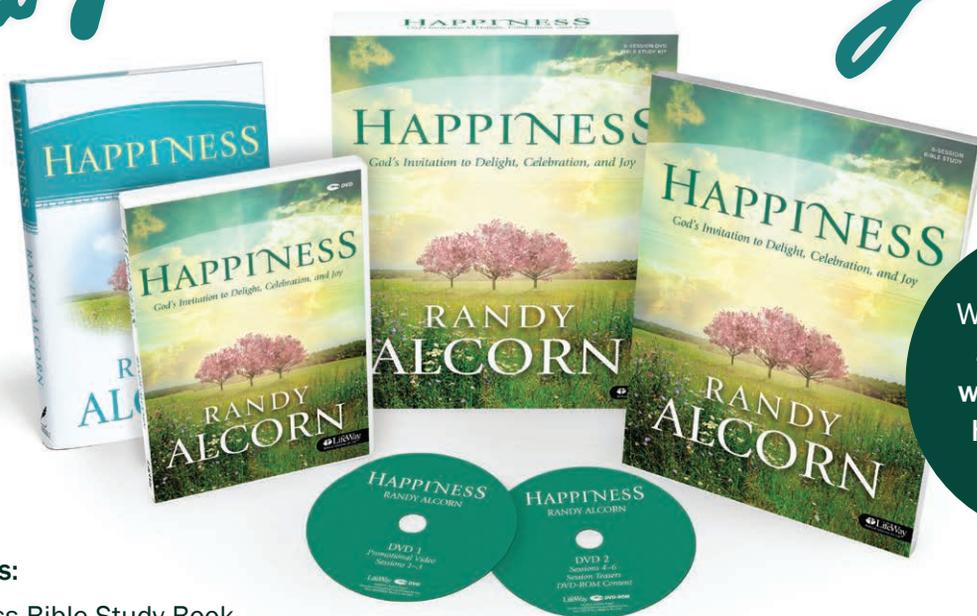




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