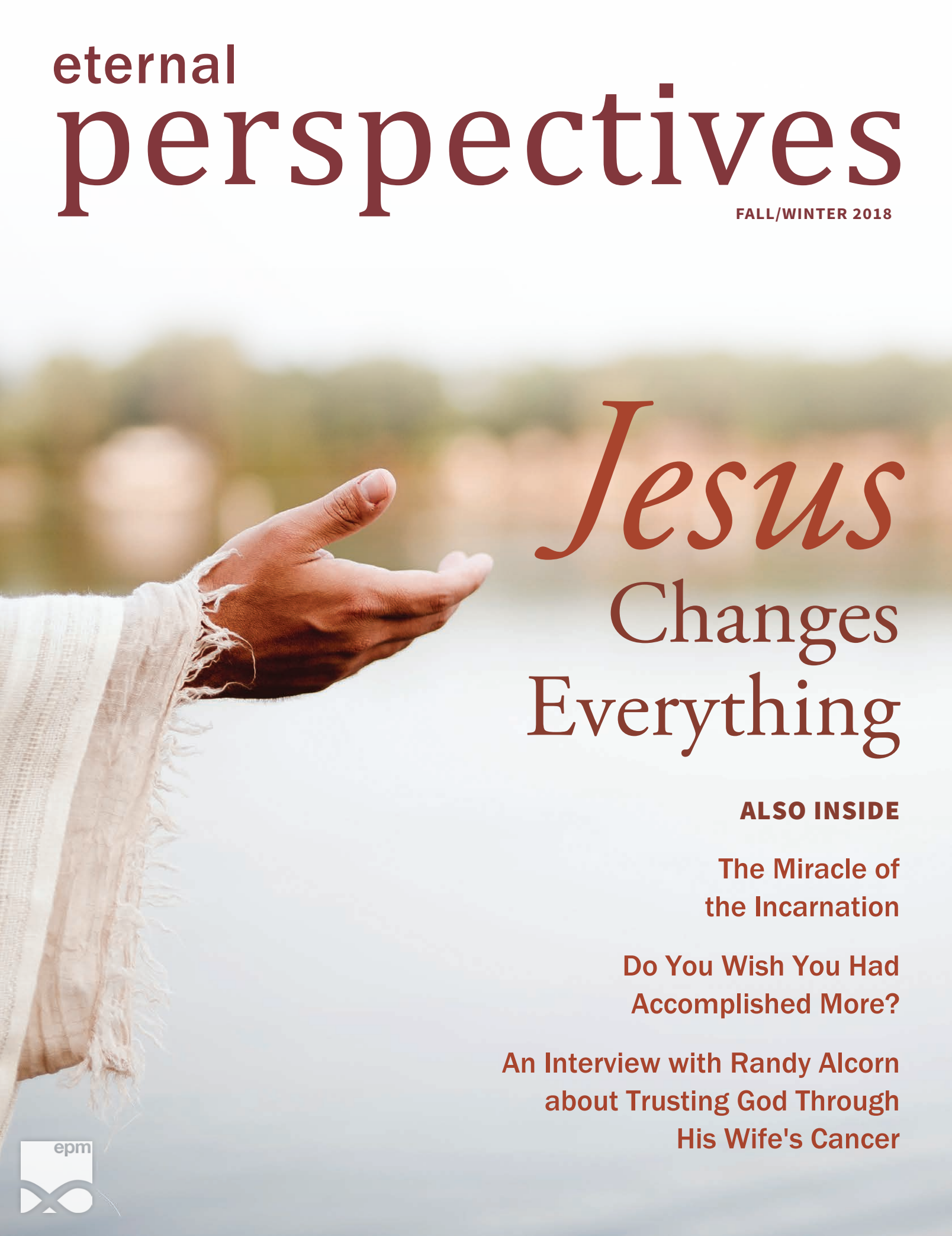


eternal
perspectives

FALL/WINTER 2018



Jesus
Changes
Everything

ALSO INSIDE

The Miracle of
the Incarnation

Do You Wish You Had
Accomplished More?

An Interview with Randy Alcorn
about Trusting God Through
His Wife's Cancer

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about

This magazine is a publication of Eternal Perspective Ministries, a Christ-centered nonprofit organization founded and directed by author Randy Alcorn. It can be read online at epm.org/magazine.

All Scripture quoted in Randy's articles are from the English Standard Version (ESV), unless otherwise noted.

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Who Is the Happiest Human Being Who Ever Lived?

ANSWERED BY RANDY ALCORN

Though the answer wouldn't be obvious to unbelievers or even to most Christians, the Bible is clear on this: it's Jesus.

Psalm 45:6-7 is quoted in direct reference to the Messiah, in Hebrews 1:8-9, where 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." Most scholars think "companions," in context, is the whole human race that Jesus became part of in His incarnation.

Note the connection between Christ's righteousness and His gladness, whereas in Scripture wickedness brings misery. Ironically, we often think of ourselves as fun-loving, and of God as a humorless killjoy. But we've got it backward. We are the dull ones, not God. Did we invent wit, humor, and laughter? No. God did. We'll never begin to exhaust God's sense of humor and His love for pleasure-filled joy. "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11).

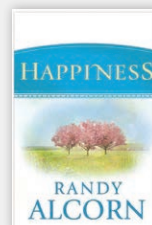
Growing up in a faithful Jewish family, Jesus would have enjoyed many feasts and holidays, as well as the weekly Sabbath, all celebratory experiences (see chapter 33 of my book *Happiness*). One of the psalms that Jesus would have meditated on from His childhood says, "When the Lord brought us back to Jerusalem it was like a dream! How we

laughed, how we sang for joy! . . . Indeed He did great things for us; how happy we were!" (Psalm 126:1-3, GNT).

For Nanci and me, as much now as ever as she's battling cancer, laughter is pure therapy. We were with six dear friends recently, and we ate and laughed and told stories till late. I'm still smiling at the evening we enjoyed together.

We love to laugh, and there's a lot of it with family and friends. As long as our laughter isn't impure or demeaning, I think Christ laughs with us. On the New Earth, the wit and fun-loving nature of our Lord will be our greatest source of endless laughter. I am convinced no one's laughter will be louder and more contagious than that of Jesus.

So thank God for laughter, and realize if it's not celebrating sin, Jesus joins in your laughter. If that's clear in our minds, then it will counteract the stereotype of unhappy Christians, and people around us will see that the gospel of Jesus is truly "the good news of happiness" (Isaiah 52:7). ■



Explore more about the happiness of Jesus, and the implications for us as His followers, in Randy's book *Happiness*. Read an excerpt and order at epm.org/happiness.



Only One Life

BY NATHAN BUSENITZ

To live well is to live for Christ, and to die well is to die for His glory. A brief article in the 1857 edition of *The Scottish Christian Journal*, entitled “Dying Well,” summarized that truth with these words, “Would ye die well? Then, through Christ, live well. The right way to die well is to live well.”

Three years later, on December 2, 1860, a man named Charles Thomas Studd was born into a wealthy family in England. Charles was a teenager when his father committed his life to Christ after attending an evangelistic meeting led by D. L. Moody. A short time later, at the age of 16, Charles himself came to saving faith in the Lord Jesus.

He would go on to Cambridge where he became one of the most celebrated cricket players of his day, famous not only in Britain but around the world. When his time at Cambridge ended, Charles realized that he did not want to pursue a career in athletics. As he said it, “I know that cricket would not last, and honour would not last, and nothing in this world

would last, but it was worthwhile living for the world to come.”

Armed with an eternal perspective and motivated by a desire to glorify the Lord no matter the cost, Charles Thomas Studd (often referred to by his initials, C. T.) left England to serve as a missionary in China, under the oversight of Hudson Taylor. Explaining his missionary zeal, Studd quipped, “Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.”

The former cricketer spent a decade in China, much of that time working in a rehabilitation center for opium addicts, sharing the gospel and seeing lives transformed by the truth. While he was in China, his father died and left him a sizeable inheritance. But rather than keeping it, he immediately gave it all away to support evangelical ministries like those led by George Müller and D. L. Moody.

After a short time back in England, Charles and his wife (along with their four daughters) moved to India, where he pastored a local congregation for seven years. Though he struggled with severe asthma, often staying awake most of the night struggling to

breathe, he faithfully preached the gospel, and many souls in Southern India were converted to Christ.

Shortly thereafter, Charles became convinced that God was calling him to take the gospel to the innermost jungles of Africa. He eventually reached the Belgian Congo in 1913, though it was not easy. At one point, he contracted a severe case of malaria; on another occasion, he woke up in the morning to discover a poisonous snake had been sleeping by his side all night long.

Along with his fellow missionaries, Charles established a number of missionary stations in the heart of Africa—bringing the gospel to tribes that had previously never heard the name of Jesus Christ. He wrote over 200 hymns, translated the New Testament into the native language, and witnessed thousands of African people turn to the Lord.

C. T. Studd died in Africa, at the age of seventy, having spent most of his adult life in missionary service: ten years in China, seven years in India, and roughly twenty years in Africa. The pioneering missionary work he did was rigorous. But it was fueled by a simple and sincere conviction. He said, “If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.”

His unwavering commitment to serve Christ no matter the cost is perhaps best captured in the words of a well-known poem he penned:

Two little lines I heard one day, Traveling along
life’s busy way;
Bringing conviction to my heart, And from my
mind would not depart;
Only one life, ‘twill soon be past, Only what’s
done for Christ will last.

Only one life, yes only one, Soon will its fleeting
hours be done;
Then, in ‘that day’ my Lord to meet, And stand
before His Judgment seat;
Only one life, ‘twill soon be past, Only what’s
done for Christ will last.

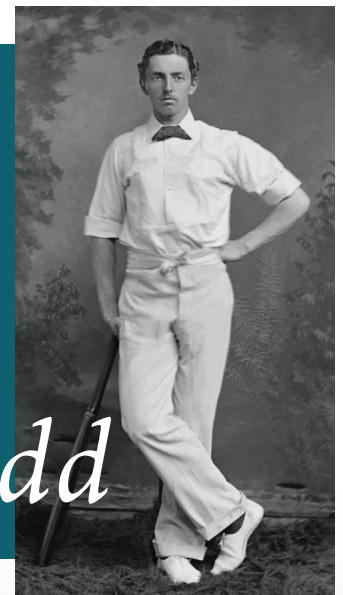
Nineteen centuries earlier, the apostle Paul articulated that same perspective in these words, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). The apostle’s mission was to glorify his Savior in everything. As he explained to the Corinthians, “Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent [meaning in life or in death], to be pleasing to Him” (2 Corinthians 5:9).

Armed with that resolve, Paul joyfully endured numerous hardships for the sake of the gospel, including imprisonments, beatings, stoning, and shipwrecks. As he explained to the Corinthians,

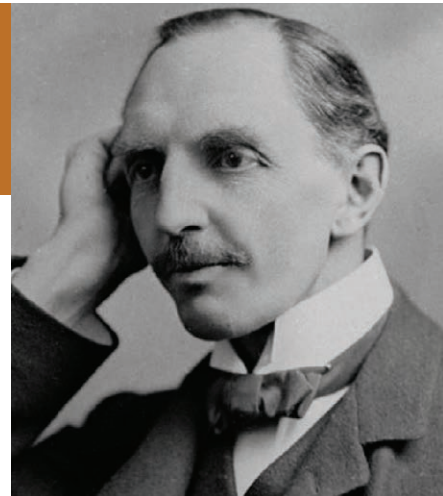
I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers

“...I do not say, don’t play games or cricket and so forth. By all means play and enjoy them, giving thanks to Jesus for them. **Only take care that games do not become an idol to you as they did to me.** What good will it do to anybody in the next world to have been the best player that ever has been? And then think of the difference between that and winning souls for Jesus.”

—C. T. Studd



“If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.”



on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. (2 Corinthians 11:26–29)

Incredibly, Paul wrote those words when his career as a missionary was only about half over (around A. D. 55–56). The unwearied apostle had not yet faced many of his best-known trials, including his arrest in Jerusalem, his two-year incarceration in Caesarea, his shipwreck on the isle of Malta, and his two Roman imprisonments (cf. Acts 21–28).

Even a brief survey of Paul’s life evidences his passion to live and die for the glory of God. Because he belonged to Christ, his one aim was to live for Him (cf. Galatians 2:20). As he told the Romans, “For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s” (Romans 14:7–8).

At the end of Paul’s earthly sojourn, as he awaited execution in a dank Roman dungeon, the faithful apostle could look back on decades of Christ-exalting ministry and say:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award

to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing (2 Timothy 4:7–8).

Just a few verses later, at the close of his final epistle, Paul again articulated the hope-filled theme that had characterized his entire Christian life: “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (v. 18). Soon he would enter the presence of his Savior and hear Him say, “Well done.”

It was C. T. Studd who said, “There is no greater honour, after living for Christ, than to die for Him.” Clearly, his perspective was patterned after Paul’s. As both men understood, to live well is to live for Christ; to die well is to die for His glory. ■

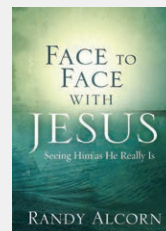
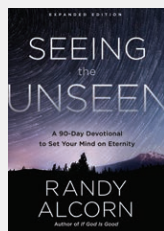
Nathan Busenitz teaches historical theology at The Master’s Seminary and is the author of Long Before Luther:



Tracing the Heart of the Gospel from Christ to the Reformation. He currently co-pastors the Cornerstone fellowship group at Grace Church in Sun Valley, California.

This article originally appeared on The Master’s Seminary Blog, tms.edu/blog.

THIS CHRISTMAS,
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Thank You, Kathy Norquist, for Your 21 Years at EPM!

Kathy Norquist retired from EPM this past September. We are grateful for her faithful service to the Lord and will miss her in the office! We hope this Q&A will give you a look into her long relationship with EPM as well as her future plans.

Tell us a little about your history with Randy and EPM.

I first started working for Randy when he was one of the founding pastors at Good Shepherd Community Church. Seven years after he left GSCC to begin Eternal Perspective Ministries, I became his assistant. I was at EPM for the past 21 years, 17 as his assistant and four in a more part-time role in ministry development.

How has working for EPM impacted you personally?

It's difficult to quantify the impact that Randy and EPM have had on my life and my family. Probably the biggest influence is in the area of giving. I've watched Randy and Nanci and their generous giving and seen how God has provided for them over and over again. It's contagious, and Ron and I have been blessed by growing in the area of giving. It truly is more "happy making" to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

What is your biggest take away from working with Randy?

What joy it's been to be part of a ministry where you hear on a regular basis how Randy's writings and giving have impacted lives for eternity.

It's been a privilege to work for a man who lives out what he writes about. He has been the best combination of friend, employer, counselor, servant, and giver.

What are some things you know from working with Randy that others might not know?

He will put people first before his own comfort. I recall many times when he had a pressing book deadline



Kathy Norquist and Randy Alcorn

along with a speaking engagement or appointment and was also not feeling well (sickness is complicated because he's an insulin-dependent diabetic). Yet if at all possible he would keep his commitment and others would never know how he was really feeling. He's one of the most loyal people I know.

I remember a time when he was ill yet still delivered a Baskin Robbins ice cream cake to my home for my birthday since my hubby was away for an extended time and wasn't able to celebrate with me.

He has a great sense of humor and has played many practical jokes on me. You also can never get the last word in when it comes to his sarcastic sense of humor! We've been known to go back and forth on emails and I finally give up because he never will! We've had a lot of fun over the years bantering back and forth. :)

Now that you're retired, what are you doing with your time?

Ministry isn't ending; it's just being redirected. Ron and I are caregivers for our 19-year-old special-needs grandson as he attends a transitional high school program in our local area. Christian was adopted at a young age by our son and his wife after a tragic auto accident took the lives of his parents and left him with brain damage and other physical and emotional handicaps, even though he's quite functional. If you'd like to read more of the story "A Tragedy and a Blessing" you can check out www.epm.org/kathychristian. I will also remain on the EPM board, so I plan on staying as connected as I can with this wonderful ministry.

Eventually Ron and I plan to do some traveling around the U.S. and look forward to celebrating 50 years of marriage next August. ■

She Still Speaks

A LETTER FROM KAREN COLEMAN, WRITTEN IN HER FINAL DAYS

*And through [Abel's] faith, though he died,
he still speaks. Hebrews 11:4*

On Sunday, June 10, at 10:45 a.m., our dear friend and EPM coworker Karen Stout Coleman entered Jesus' presence, after being diagnosed with stage four metastatic breast cancer in March. For the previous three and a half years, Karen was a vital member of our staff, and brought with her a deep love for the Lord and a heart for ministry.

Even during her last weeks on earth, Karen's desire to reach people for Jesus filled her thoughts, and she was handing out booklets and gospel tracts to those she met in the hospital and later to her hospice workers. She also told a friend, who helped care for her in her final days, to let her believing friends know it was OK if they couldn't come by to visit. She knew she would see them again. But when her unbelieving friends called, Karen made clear she definitely wanted to see them as she didn't have that same assurance and wanted to share Christ as much as possible.

As Karen planned for her own memorial service, her greatest hope was that the gospel would be clearly communicated and Jesus would be glorified. She wrote out the following message, which was included in the bulletin:

June 1, 2018

If I could speak from beyond the grave, my message would be simple: JESUS... JESUS... JESUS... It's all about JESUS.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

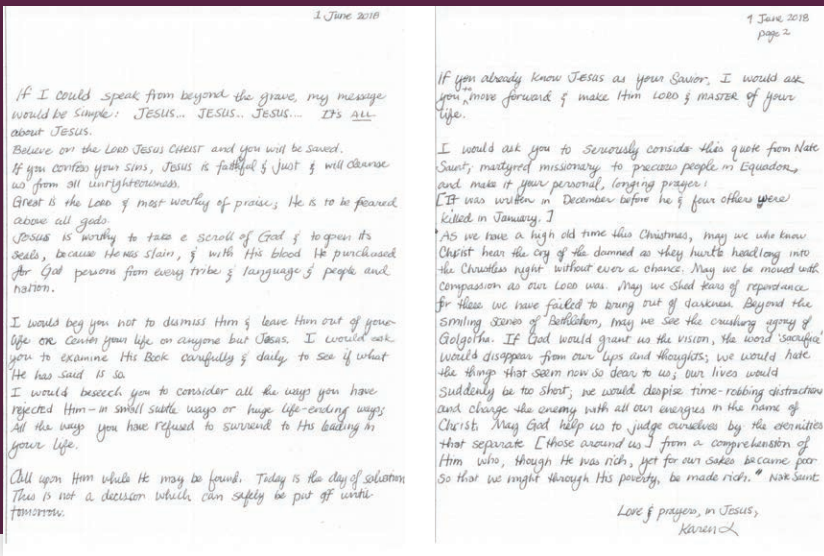
If you confess your sins, Jesus is faithful and just and will cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; He is to be feared above all gods.

Jesus is worthy to take a scroll of God and to open its seals, because He was slain, and with His blood



*Love & prayers, in Jesus,
Karen*



IF I COULD SPEAK FROM
BEYOND THE GRAVE,
MY MESSAGE WOULD
BE SIMPLE: JESUS...
JESUS... JESUS... IT'S
ALL ABOUT JESUS.

—Karen

He purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.

I would beg you not to dismiss Him and leave Him out of your life or center your life on anyone but Jesus. I would ask you to examine His Book carefully and daily to see if what He has said is so.

I would beseech you to consider all the ways you have rejected Him—in small subtle ways or huge life-ending ways; all the ways you have refused to surrender to His leading in your life.

Call upon Him while He may be found. Today is the day of salvation. This is not a decision which can safely be put off until tomorrow.

If you already know Jesus as your Savior, I would ask you to move forward and make Him Lord and Master of your life. I would ask you to seriously consider this quote from Nate Saint, martyred missionary to peccano people in Ecuador, and make it your personal, longing prayer (it was written in December before he and four others were killed in January):

As we have a high old time this Christmas, may we who know Christ hear the cry of the damned as they hurtle headlong into the Christless night without ever a chance. May we be moved with compassion as our Lord was. May we shed tears of repentance for these we have failed to bring out of darkness. Beyond the smiling scenes of Bethlehem may we see the crushing agony of Golgotha. If God would grant us the vision, the word "sacrifice" would disappear from our lips and thoughts; we would hate the things that seem now so dear to us; our lives would suddenly be too short; we would despise time-robbing distractions and charge the enemy with all our energies in the name of Christ. May God help us to judge ourselves by the eternities that separate [those around us] from a comprehension of Christmas and Him, who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor so that we might, through His poverty, be made rich. —Nate Saint

Love and prayers, in Jesus,
Karen

Though you may not have known Karen personally, we think you'll be touched by hearing what was shared at her service and learning how she served Jesus. You can watch the full video, or just Randy's message, at epm.org/karenservice. Read Randy's and the EPM staff's tributes to Karen at epm.org/karentribute.

SEE THE NEXT
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An Opportunity to Invest in Eternity

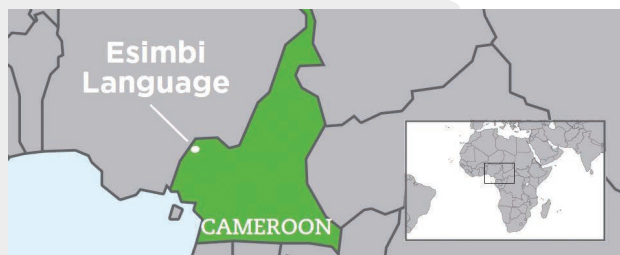
HELP BRING GOD'S WORD TO ESIMBI SPEAKERS

We'd like to invite you to join us in honoring **Karen Stout Coleman** by giving to fund a translation of Scripture. She and her family spent 23 years as missionaries in Cameroon involved in the Scripture translation work of the Esimbi language. We can't think of a better way to remember her legacy than to partner with The Seed Company by funding their continued efforts to bring God's Word to 20,000 people who live in isolated areas of Karen's beloved Cameroon.

Translation efforts aren't projected to be finished until 2023, but we have a short-term goal of raising **\$120,000 by September 30, 2020**. To date, over \$21,000 has been contributed. To partner with us, go to epm.org/donate and select the fund "Esimbi Translation Project" or send a check to Eternal Perspective Ministries, 39085 Pioneer Blvd., Suite 206, Sandy, OR 97055, with "Esimbi translation" in the memo line. 100% of donations will go directly to The Seed Company.

Randy shared this during the end of his message at Karen's service:

I'm thinking of people in Cameroon who still well remember Karen and the Coleman family, and who will one day hold a Bible in their hands that's in their own language. They'll be reading the words of God, and they'll remember Karen. And they'll know that her friends came together to help provide the Word of God for them in their heart language.



Karen at work as a missionary in Cameroon



Esimbi people who need Scripture in their heart language

**DID YOU
KNOW?**

Worldwide, there are at least
100 MILLION PEOPLE
who do not have one scripture they can understand.

Statistic:
seedcompany.com

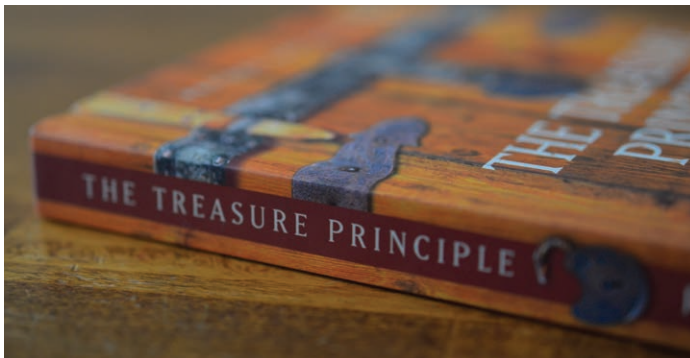
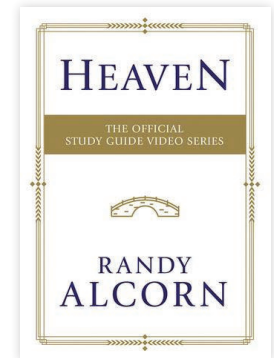
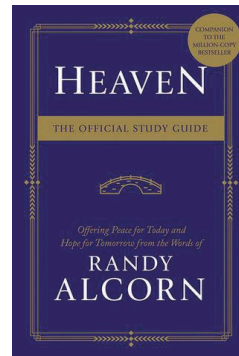
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Accompanying *Heaven: The Official Study Guide*, this six-session DVD contains videos of Randy teaching and sets the tone for study, reflection, and response to biblical truths that give us peace for today and hope for tomorrow. Watch an excerpt and order at epm.org/heavenofficialdvd.

These materials work as stand-alones or together.



Free Resources for Pastors

Are you a pastor? (Or you can share this information with yours!) Pastors can request free resources and books from Eternal Perspective Ministries on topics Randy has written on, including happiness, Heaven, prolife issues, money and giving, purity, and more. Learn more and browse the resources we offer at epm.org/pastorsresources.

Our Holiday Specials

Each year we offer book deals and special offers during Black Friday and Cyber Monday and into the Christmas season! The best way to learn about our promotions is to sign up for our weekly email newsletter at epm.org/connect.



Year-End Gifts to EPM

If you've been impacted by the ministry and resources of EPM, including this magazine, we invite you to partner with us by making a year-end gift. It's through the generous support of ministry partners that we're able to continue our work of investing in eternity.

If you'd like to make a year-end, tax-deductible donation, you can give at epm.org/donate or call us toll-free at 1.877.376.4567 during office hours (Monday - Thursday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and Fridays 8:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. PT). As a reminder, a tax deductible online gift in 2018 must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. on December 31. Thank you for your support!

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Jesus Changes Everything

BY RANDY ALCORN

From childhood I've loved astronomy. I grew up in an unbelieving home. Night after night I'd gaze at the stars, clueless about a Creator, but yearning for something greater than myself.

One night, as I stared through my telescope at the great galaxy of Andromeda with its trillion stars 2.5 million light years away, I was filled with awe. I longed to explore its wonders and lose myself in its vastness.

I read fantasy and science fiction stories of other worlds, of great battles and causes. I knew that the universe was huge beyond comprehension. But my wonder was trumped by a sometimes unbearable sense of loneliness and separation. In retrospect, I think I wanted to worship, but I didn't know what or who to worship. I wept not only because I felt so insignificant, but also because I felt so disconnected from the Significant One I did not know or know of.

Several years later, at age fifteen, after attending a church youth group, I opened a Bible and saw these words for the first time: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." And then I read verse 14, the greatest understatement ever: "He made the stars also." A universe one hundred billion light years across containing countless stars, and the Bible

makes them sound like a casual add-on!

I quickly realized that this book was about the Person who made the universe, including Andromeda and Earth—and me.

I had no reference points when I read the Bible. All of it was new, intriguing, sometimes confusing, and utterly disorienting. But when I reached the Gospels, something changed. I was immediately fascinated by Jesus. I'd been an avid reader of fiction, but I knew this wasn't fiction. I knew Jesus wasn't just a character in a story. I soon came to believe that He not only lived two thousand years ago, but that He still lived. Everything about Jesus of Nazareth struck me as completely believable. And, somehow, I knew He was the One my heart had always longed for.

By a miracle of grace, Jesus touched me deeply, gave me a new heart, and utterly transformed my life. Forty-nine years later, He's still unveiling Himself and changing me into His image and likeness. I couldn't be happier that He's every bit as real to me now as the moment I met Him—but now I know Him better, and therefore worship Him more deeply.

For me, Jesus didn't just change everything back then. He still changes everything today.

Humble Savior

Having been raised with no knowledge of God, part of what drew me to Christ is how the Gospel accounts seemed so contrary to typical human reasoning. Yet I found them completely credible. No human would make up such a story! It had the ring of truth to me... and still has.

In the Old Testament, we read how God kept reaching down to His people: “The Lord...sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people...But they mocked God’s messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets” (2 Chronicles 36:15-16, NIV).

The prophets foretold the coming of Messiah. Yet centuries of oppression and suffering passed, and many lost hope. In every generation there were people like Simeon and Anna who longed for and prayed for Messiah’s coming. And finally, when the Redeemer’s absence became unbearable, He came: “But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman” (Galatians 4:4, NIV).

Jesus came to us in humility. He didn’t have the honor of being born to the house of a king. He wasn’t born in Rome, the world’s political capital, or Athens, the philosophical capital, or Alexandria, the intellectual capital, or even Jerusalem, the religious capital. He was born in tiny Bethlehem, which means simply “House of Bread.”

Jesus came in humiliation. Everyone who could count thought He was conceived out of wedlock, a shameful thing in that time and place. He grew up in a town of ill repute, where a Roman military outpost accounted for moral corruption: “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” (John 1:46, NIV).

Jesus worked as a humble carpenter, lived in relative poverty, and endured many indignities as He spent three years teaching and healing and speaking the good news of God’s Kingdom. And then, the eternal and infinitely holy Son of God chose to endure the most shameful death—crucifixion with its excruciating suffering—to take our sins on Himself. Not some, but all of them.

Who Is He?

Jesus made bold claims about His identity, which



religious leaders of His day considered blasphemy. He claimed to be God’s only Son, one with the Father, descended from Heaven and destined to rule the universe as King. And what response was He met with? “For this reason they tried all the more to kill him” (John 5:18, NIV).

Many today try to reduce Jesus to the role of a good teacher, one good moral example, maybe the best among many. But His own claims about Himself in Scripture make that impossible.

The battle for human souls pivots on the issue of Christ’s identity. He’s the watershed, the dividing line between Hell and Heaven. Jesus made that clear when He asked His disciples about His divinity: “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” (Matthew 16:15, NIV).

That question is the most important one we will ever answer. Our own eternity hangs in the balance. Who do *you* say Jesus is? Who do you believe, in your mind and deep in your heart, that He really is? Every person must give an answer—and whether our answer is right could not be more consequential.

Come and See

When Peter identified Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus said to Him, “Simon son of Jonah, you are a *happy* man! Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven” (Matthew 16:17, TJB).

Happy is the person who recognizes the real Jesus! It was true of His disciples then, and it’s true of us now.

Biblical Christianity is fundamentally not simply a religion *about* Christ, but a relationship *with* Christ. If we get it right about Jesus, we can afford to get some minor things wrong. But if we get it wrong about Jesus, it won’t matter in the end what else we get right.

Besides knowing His name, have you come to know Jesus as your Savior and Lord and best friend?

The Bible reveals that Jesus Christ, God's Son, in a supreme act of love became a man to deliver us from sin and suffering (John 3:16). Jesus lived a sinless life (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15-16). He died to pay the penalty for our sins (2 Corinthians 5:21). On the cross, He took upon Himself the Hell we do deserve in order to purchase for us the Heaven we don't deserve. At His death He said, "It is finished" (John 19:30), using the Greek word for canceling certificates of debt—meaning "paid in full." Jesus then rose from the grave, defeating sin and conquering death (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, 54-57).

Christ offers freely the gift of forgiveness 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).

Besides knowing His name, have you come to know Jesus as your Savior and Lord and best friend? "Come and see what God has done," the psalmist says, "his awesome deeds for mankind!" (Psalm 66:5, NIV). "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8).

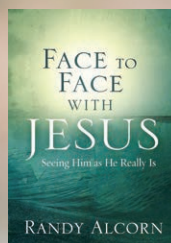
Scripture gives us many invitations to come to God and personally experience Him. Open the Bible and learn about Jesus. Set aside all other arguments and study the person of Christ. Read of His life in the Gospels, the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Listen to His words. Ask yourself who He is and whether you could believe in Him. If you hold Him at a distance, you will never see Him for who He is. Philip simply invited his friend Nathanael to "come and see" Jesus (John 1:45-46).

Have you come? Have you seen Him? If not, brace yourself. Because once you see Jesus—I mean see Him as He *really* is—you, your worldview, goals, affections, and *everything* will change. And because He never gives up on us, the changes won't stop. He's about growth not death, sanctification not stagnation. That's the key to a Christian life, and it's not boring but adventurous. Jesus, who spun the galaxies into being, paints the sunsets, and taught the humpback whales to migrate, can be comforting and restgiving, but He is *never* boring!

Our Best Thought

Even if you *have* come and seen Jesus, accepted His invitation, and walked with Him for years, you can never exhaust His depths. Puritan John Flavel wrote, "The longer you know Christ, and the nearer you come to him, still the more do you see of his glory. Every farther prospect of Christ entertains the mind with a fresh delight. He is as it were a new Christ every day—and yet the same Christ still."

There's no more worthy subject to set our minds on than Jesus Himself. He is "the Alpha and the Omega...the Beginning and the End" (Revelation 22:13). I thank God that today I don't just know and love Jesus as much as I used to; I know and love Him more. That is to His credit, and I'm deeply grateful. He's what makes life so exciting and so worthwhile. Like the apostle Paul, more than ever, I want to know Christ (Philippians 3:10). How about you? ■



This article is from the introduction to Randy's new devotional, *Face to Face with Jesus*, which includes 200 entries focused on the person and character of Jesus. See the next page for a sample entry, and learn more and order at epm.org/facetoface.

THE *Miracle* OF THE *Incarnation*

BY RANDY ALCORN

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us. —Titus 3:4-5

*T*he miracle of the cross was made possible by the miracle of the incarnation. The angels must have been stunned to see the second member of the triune God become a human being.

The baby born in that Bethlehem barn was God, and He was born to die. His death delivers us from our fear of death. His suffering on the cross atoned for our sins, allowing Him to understand and help us.

And incredibly, the incarnation is permanent. Christ rose in a glorified human body that He'll have forever. It's not that Jesus suddenly stopped being a man after the ascension. No, the second member of the triune God will be a human being who reigns eternally on the New Earth.

“He was created by a mother whom he created. He cried in the manger in wordless infancy, he the Word, without whom all human eloquence is mute.” —Augustine



Do You Wish You Had Accomplished More?



BY VANEETHA RENDALL RISNER

John the Baptist's life began with great promise. An angelic proclamation. A call from God. A thriving ministry. Yet his life ended in virtual obscurity—alone in a small prison cell.

John is not what we would consider a success. We celebrate people who begin with nothing and end with great accomplishments. We often find little to admire when it's the other way around. Most of us begin with great expectations for our own lives. We want to make a name for ourselves, or have a fulfilling career, or raise an exceptional family.

When the years go by and we have not accomplished what we had hoped to, we are left wondering what good our lives have been. We have a nagging feeling that somehow we haven't measured up.

I know that feeling all too well.

Chasing Success

I started off wanting it all. I wanted to make a name for myself in a successful career, while being a Proverbs 31 woman and raising an exceptional family. At first, it all seemed attainable.

After earning my MBA, it felt like I was on the fast track to success. When I chose, a few years later, to be a stay-at-home mom, I felt the sting of embarrassment when several classmates laughed at my "admirable" choices.

I then focused my energies on making our home a warm and hospitable place, a place where people felt welcome and cared for. But a diagnosis of post-polio syndrome forced me to stop using my arms for anything besides self-care, leaving little room



for hospitality, much less home-cooked meals.

Though I couldn't serve others physically, I still poured myself into raising a strong family by trying to be a supportive wife and mother. So, when my husband left our family and later filed for divorce, I was completely devastated. Not only for myself, but also for our children. They struggled with explosive anger and hurt, further intensifying my sadness and shame.

I felt like an absolute failure. Not only could I not meet all my goals; I couldn't meet any of them.

Not Called to Succeed

Mother Teresa's words gave me life as I considered all the ways I hadn't measured up. I hung onto this simple statement and have reminded myself of it throughout my life: "God did not call me to be successful; He called me to be faithful."

John the Baptist would have agreed. His coming was marked with great anticipation. Both Isaiah and Malachi prophesied about the one who would prepare the way for the Messiah (Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1). Even before he was born, the angel Gabriel said that he would be great before the Lord, would be filled with the Holy Spirit even in his mother's womb, and would go out in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:15-17).

With proclamations like that, how could John the Baptist not be successful?

The Last Great Prophet

At first, he achieved great success. Indeed, John preached with great power, like Elijah. Crowds flocked to him in his short public ministry, which scholars say may have lasted less than a year. In that brief time, John drew much attention from the scribes

God did not call me to be successful; He called me To be faithful

and Pharisees, who were threatened by the people who thought John was the Messiah.

John was the last of the old-covenant prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, who all predicted the coming of Christ. He was "the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord'" (Matthew 3:3). But John was the only prophet who was privileged to see the Messiah in the flesh. John even baptized Jesus, and saw the Spirit descending on Him, and heard with his own ears God saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

John undoubtedly would have been excited about what God was doing. The long-awaited Messiah had come, and John might have assumed that he, His herald, would minister (and succeed) at His side.

I Must Decrease

But John was imprisoned just a few months after Jesus began His public ministry. John didn't see the fulfillment of his ministry; he simply had to trust that God was using his life's work.

John exemplified these words from the Lord's Prayer: "Your kingdom come, your will be done" (Matthew 6:10). John was not focused on his own kingdom; he was focused on the kingdom of God. He didn't try to expand his ministry or influence; he was content to go where God had called him. He didn't feel slighted that his popularity was waning; he rejoiced that Christ's fame was spreading. In every case, John subordinated his ego and his plans to God's.

John's life kept diminishing and fading away. Once Jesus emerged, the masses paid less and less attention to John. Some of his disciples, like Andrew, left him to follow Jesus. When his ministry overlapped with Jesus's, John's disciples noted, "Look, he is baptizing,



and all are going to him” (John 3:26). John’s response: “This joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:29–30).

Faithful unto Death

From a worldly perspective, John probably looked like a failure. He was never prosperous, and his ministry evaporated quickly. He didn’t even have a glorious death. He died at the whim of a foolish girl, her vengeful mother, and a wicked and weak king.

Yet John the Baptist was wildly successful in God’s eyes. John had served a crucial purpose in the kingdom, faithfully preparing the way for Christ. He didn’t see the fruit of his ministry. Many of us never do. Yet Jesus exhorts us in Revelation 2:10, “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

Jesus had nothing but praise for John. He said he was the greatest man who had ever lived up to that time (Matthew 11:11). But John’s life and ministry was probably nothing like John envisioned.

Good and Faithful Servant

Does your life sometimes feel small and insignificant? Did you start off with great plans for your life, yet now it seems you have done little of what you set out

Can we remember that our goal on this earth is to make God’s name look great and not our own?

to do? Are you judging your worth by the standards of worldly success?

If you started out your career or your ministry or your calling full of promise, but it didn’t unfold as you planned, take heart. God is after your faithfulness, not your success.

Remember what God values. He’s after our hearts —our willingness to be used by Him. Can we find joy when God uses us, like John, even if it looks like our influence and popularity is diminishing? Can we find our worth in Christ alone and remember that our goal on this earth is to make God’s name look great and not our own?

I wish I could say that I’ve let go of my desire to look successful in other people’s eyes, but honestly, I still struggle with it. I struggle with viewing success as a benchmark rather than a blessing. I struggle with comparing myself to people who have accomplished more than I have. I struggle with needing to produce measurable fruit, even in ministry.

Yet when I remember that God calls me to be faithful not successful, I realize how misplaced my desires can be. I don’t need to compare myself with others; I need to focus on being faithful in what God has called me to do. I can learn from John the Baptist and await my reward, when I hear those precious words, “Well done, good and faithful servant. . . . Enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:21). ■

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Delighting in God and Trusting in Him through Cancer

An Interview with Randy Alcorn

In January 2018, Nanci Alcorn was diagnosed with colon cancer, and has since undergone several months of treatment. In this interview, Randy shares what the Lord has been doing in their lives during this challenging season.

Were the two of you surprised or even bitter when Nanci was diagnosed?

We were definitely not bitter or resentful in any way. Why would we be? We never ask why God would allow this to happen to us. He often allows hard things to happen to His people, so why not us? Job was the most righteous person on the planet, and look what he went through. Both of my parents had cancer, as did my best friend from childhood, Jerry Hardin, and we've known many others who've had it.

Were we surprised by the cancer diagnosis? Yes, in the sense that, like most people, we didn't see it coming—though Nanci had a lot of pain over an eighteen-month period, due to an undiagnosed hiatal hernia, and there were times when she wondered whether she had cancer or something else since there was clearly something wrong with her body. It turned out that the pain had nothing to do with the colon cancer, though cancer was discovered while trying to figure out the cause.

We have never bought into the prosperity theology mentality that says, "Why's this happening to us? We go to church. We give regularly, and we serve the Lord. Shouldn't we be exempt from trials like these?" I think of 1 Peter 4:12, which says, "Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery ordeal you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you."

So trials are a normal part of life, but when something as serious as this comes on, all of a sudden your life doesn't seem normal anymore. I appreciate how J. B. Phillips translates James 1:2-4: "When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives, my

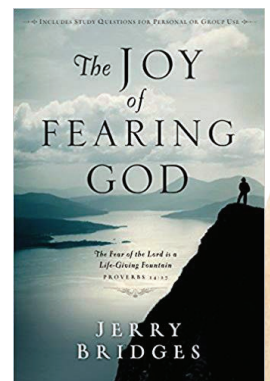
brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends! Realize that they come to test your faith and to produce in you the quality of endurance. But let the process go on until that endurance is fully developed." It's not easy to welcome difficulties instead of resenting them, but Nanci and I are trusting that God tells the truth when He says they can increase our endurance, expand our ministry, and prepare us for eternal joy.

What lessons has the Lord been teaching you both over the last several months?

Even in the midst of doctor visits and rounds of chemo, Nanci and I have been delighting in God through delighting in His Word, and have been discussing His faithfulness and aspects of His character. This has been an anchor for us. Jesus is the object of our faith and the source of our eternal perspective and present comfort.

One of the books Nanci has been reading is *The Joy of Fearing God*, by Jerry Bridges. Jerry writes, "We cannot separate trust in God from the fear of God. We will trust Him only to the extent that we genuinely stand in awe of Him."

Nanci has also loved reading *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer and *Trusting God* by Jerry Bridges, along with A. W. Tozer's *The Knowledge of the Holy*. Both of us highly recommend these books, because they center us on the person of God which is where we all need to set our minds, whether we're facing cancer or anything else. Our hearts have been lifted in praise as we contemplate His holiness, grace, justice, mercy, and every facet of His being revealed to us in Scripture.



As much as we appreciate the physicians and the advances of medical science, we are reminded that our ultimate hope is not in them but in God. Trust in our sovereign and gracious and happy God, who alone is sufficient to bear the weight of our trust, allows Nanci and me to laugh and talk and pray together each night with an underlying foundation of happiness.

We are secure in God's love and fully trust Him to do what He determines is best for His glory and for Nanci's good. Scripture tells us, "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases" (Psalm 115:3).

Nanci has said the Lord has been teaching her about waiting on Him. Can you share more about that?

Just gleaning from what Nanci has written, here are some great perspectives she's come to:

We all find ourselves in situations at times where we desperately want to *do something* to fix, change, or even escape our circumstances. We are in fact willing to do *anything* that God leads us to do, but He seems to be placing us in holding patterns. We want Him to work, but He appears to be waiting to do so.

"Waiting" is an enormous tool that God uses in our hearts and to accomplish His purposes. In the "waiting," He is working.

Andrew Murray, in *Waiting on God*, writes:

When you first begin waiting on God, it is with frequent intermission and failure. But, do believe God is watching over you in love and secretly strengthening you in it. There are times when waiting appears like just losing time, but it is not so. Waiting, even in darkness, is unconscious advance, because it is God you have to do with, and

He is working in you. ...I hope that you and I might learn one thing: God must, God will work continually. (*Read more at epm.org/waiting.*)

How has cancer impacted your marriage relationship?

Nanci and I are treasuring our relationship more than

ever. We are taking it one day at a time, and though it has affected our routines, we are seeking not to let the cancer define our lives. It is a new season and a new calling with new opportunities and new people to minister to. We are loving God and each other and our family and friends. I've had the privilege of being her caregiver for the first extended period in our lives. She's always been there for me and served me, and I've sought to serve her too, but I've never had more opportunity than in these last ten months. It's been a privilege.

What verses from Scripture have been especially meaningful to you during this time?

One of many verses that has meant a lot to Nanci is Psalm 18:30, "This God—his way is perfect; the word of the Lord proves true; He is a shield for all those who take refuge in him."

One of the first passages I memorized over forty years ago as a young Christian is more real and more encouraging to me in this trial than it has ever been:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7).

Nanci and I have always loved Romans 8, the whole chapter, and continue to. Romans 8:38-39 is rooted in God's love and beautifully reassuring:

I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord (NLT).

In *The Joy of Fearing God* Jerry Bridges also writes, "We've done nothing to earn His love and can do nothing to forfeit it. His love in Christ is eternal and unconditional. Nothing can separate us from His love, as the apostle Paul put it so eloquently. Do we really



believe what Paul says to us here?"

We do!

What has been the most difficult part of this journey?

It's been sad for me to see Nanci have a rough time with fatigue and neuropathy and pain after her treatments. Like her, I find myself clinging to and rejoicing in God's goodness: "Taste and see how good the LORD is! The one who takes refuge in him is truly happy!" (Psalm 34:8, CEB). Not every day is easy for her, but I'm very proud of her for keeping her focus on our Lord and maintaining a sweet, cheerful, and trusting spirit. She is a great example to me, and we are in this together.

Nanci is my beloved soulmate and closest friend, so naturally this is hard for me. Not because I don't trust God, but because I know that His plans are not always ours (which of course is good, but doesn't always feel that way).

And while we still pray fervently for Nanci's healing, we can't just "claim healing" and get exactly what we want, the way we want it, in the time we want it. Of course we still ask Him freely for all that, and will delight in every answer we see. In fact, God may have healed Nanci last spring when we gathered with our pastors and former pastors and wives and they prayed over her and anointed her with oil. (We were told that tests couldn't prove anything at that point.) We trust Him and His purposes, and ask Him for strength to honor Him in a spirit of trust and joy.

What has been the greatest blessing?

We've seen God at work in us, helping us to grow closer to Him and each other. Our daughters Angela and Karina have been very involved and helpful with their mom. We have witnessed friends from our church and several others rise up in prayer and service. It's been my privilege to serve her. For all this we're deeply thankful.

We talk a lot about the Lord and our family and great memories, and we watch football (therapy for Nanci) and enjoy Maggie, our therapy dog (an unofficial title). We seek to thank God for every blessing, of which there are many.

How has having an eternal perspective helped?

Over the years, Nanci and I have talked a lot about our mortality—not in any morbid way, but just simply recognizing that at some point we're going to die. Some families don't even mention that or bring it up, but it's true whether or not we acknowledge it.

We're very aware of the fact that we only have so much time in this world, so I think having an eternal perspective really has helped us as we talk about wanting to finish well. We both have a very well developed doctrine of Heaven, the resurrection, and life on the New Earth. On our toughest days,

it helps to remember that we have not passed our peaks physically or mentally—the resurrection and eternal health of body and mind awaits us!

Any final thoughts?

Nanci and I want to express again our heartfelt thanks for your prayers. We wish we could personally thank every person for every kind word or action or prayer, but that isn't possible. The words "thank you" are on our lips more than ever, both to God and to the people through whom He touches us.

We are well aware that many of you reading this are facing difficult challenges, some considerably more difficult than ours. This humbles us, and we thank Him often for your friendship and prayers and hope you too can sense His nearness to you. Our Lord is always present and will never abandon His children: "God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5, NIV). ■



Randy and Nanci Alcorn (and Maggie!) with dear friends John and Noël Piper, who came to their home to pray over Nanci.

You can follow Randy's updates at caringbridge.org/visit/nancialcorn for the latest on Nanci's health.



The Wrong Address?

BY PAUL DAVID TRIPP

Do you ever think that perhaps you're at the wrong address? Did you ever wonder or wish that the things you deal with everyday weren't meant for you? Did you ever look at the blessings of someone else and wish that they'd landed at your address?

Do you ever feel lost in the middle of your own story? Do you ever feel as though you don't have what it takes to deal with what's on your plate? Have you ever felt ill-prepared and ill-equipped to carry the responsibilities that are your daily duty? Does life at times seem too hard? Have you ever wished you had more control over your own story or a greater ability to deal with all the things that are in your life, but which you didn't plan or choose?

Listen to what the Apostle Paul says about how each of us landed at the place where we now live, relate, and work:

"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything

else. From one man he made every nation of men that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the exact times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us (Acts 17:24-27)."

Consider what the Apostle Paul is saying about your life and mine:

1. When and where you live is never a mistake.

Although many of the things that have shaped your story are out of your control, they're under the careful administration of the God who not only created the world, but is the ultimate definition of everything that's wise, good, loving, and true.

2. Your life hasn't worked according to your plan because it's part of a bigger plan.

There is One who is Lord of heaven and earth. He's written your personal story into His grand redemptive story. He welcomes you out of your own



God has written your personal story into His grand redemptive story.

little kingdom of self to be part of His wonderful, big-sky kingdom.

3. God has you just where He wants you.

Sometimes it's hard to face, but God really does determine exactly where you live, who you live with, the exact period of time in which you live, and the exact length of your life.

4. God has a wonderful purpose for bringing into your life the things that you now face.

Rather than working to deliver to us our personal definition of happiness, satisfaction, and contentment, God is working so that we would know Him in a heart and life transforming way. So He'll put us in places that take us beyond the boundaries of our own character, strength, and wisdom. He does this so that in humility and weakness we'll reach for the help that only He can give us.

He's working to pry open our fingers so that we'll let go of the things that we tend to hold to so tightly, not because He wants us to have less, but because He wants us to have so much more. His rule is never separate from His love and grace. It's comforting to know that His rule is an expression of His grace, and His grace wouldn't be reliable without His rule.

5. God does all of this so that He'll always be near.

Paul's view of God's rule is tender and encouraging.

He doesn't picture God as the ultimate, impersonal chess player, moving the pieces according to his whim. No, Paul pictures a God who understands our weaknesses, who sympathizes with our struggles, and who rules His world in a manner that makes Him near and available. And He welcomes us to reach out and find Him.

So even in moments of confusion, you and I can rest; not because we know exactly why God is doing what He's doing, but because we trust Him. Real rest of heart isn't the result of understanding everything in my life. That will never happen. Real rest is the result of a relationship, just the kind of relationship that God sent His Son to make possible and now invites you to have with Him.

May God enable you to rest, not because you understand, but because you know and trust the Person who's in loving and wise control over the details of your story. ■

Dr. Paul David Tripp is a pastor and an award-winning and best-selling author. With more than 30 books and video series on Christian living, Paul's driving passion is to connect the transforming power of Jesus Christ to everyday life. Paul and his wife Luella live in Philadelphia; they have four grown children. For additional resources, visit PaulTripp.com.





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