

eternal  
perspectives

FALL/WINTER 2019

A BETTER KIND OF  
*Abundance*

**ALSO INSIDE**

Wait: What (Not) to Ask  
When Hope Is Deferred

Is It Possible to Be Happy  
in Christ Despite Suffering?



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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](http://epm.org/magazine).

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

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# Wait!

## What (Not) to Ask When Hope Is Deferred

BY GLENNA MARSHALL

I wish I were good at waiting. I've sure had lots of practice—15 years of infertility, six years of a chronic pain condition, five years in the adoption process. Yet even with all that experience, I still chafe at how slowly the Lord seems to act when I'm praying for a season to end. I've rarely viewed waiting as anything but a prison. For most of the years, I just wanted out.

We all grapple with unfulfilled desires. Marriage, children, financial stability, physical health—insert your deferred hope here. We long for broken things to be mended, empty things to be filled, tragic things to end. So when we plead with the Lord to change things, but we keep waking to unchanged circumstances, we want to know why. And if we could have a definitive timeframe for those changes—even better!

But the Bible doesn't guarantee our deferred hopes will be met with our desired outcomes. Believe me, I've looked. I spent years combing

God's Word for a special word that would speak to my empty womb or my broken body. I've longed to know when my waiting will end, and I've wondered why God ordained this path for me. When and why are the questions we ask God the most, but as I worked through Scripture looking for the answers, I discovered I was asking the wrong questions.

### 'Why?' and 'When?' Won't Satisfy

When we can't change our circumstances, we're quick to question why God has let this happen or why he won't change it. Consider Job, who had no inkling of the conversation between God and Satan in Job 1–2. As we read the whole story, we can see purpose in Job's suffering and understand that God was revealing and refining Job's faith. But for Job, it seemed arbitrary.

He longed to know why God had permitted so much sorrow in his life, and he had to endure lecture after lecture from his friends. In the end, God answered Job's why with a who—not with a reason, but with a person. Himself.



When God cuts into the conversation about whether Job's suffering was deserved, He simply describes His mighty acts and unassailable sovereignty. Instead of knowing why he must wait, Job needed to grasp who God was. And remembering that his life was in the hands of his Creator sustained Job. After hearing God's self-declaration, Job came to this conclusion: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. . . . Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (Job 42:2-3).

The Lord doesn't fault Job for asking his questions (see Job 42:7), but in His answer to Job, He never explains "why." The truth of God's sovereign wisdom was the answer Job needed, and it was the answer that satisfied him even though he had no explanation for his losses. Job learned he could trust God with his life.

If we can't know the why of our waiting, we often move to when. We long to know that our waiting has a guaranteed expiration date. We can endure, we believe, if we just know when it will end.

The short answer is that there is a guaranteed end to our waiting or suffering, but it's not for us to know when that day will be (Rev. 7:15-17; Matt. 24:36). One day, God will right all wrongs, bringing complete healing and restoration to our bodies and relationships. But eternity can feel like such a long way away, when we're waiting today for a spouse, a child, a diagnosis or treatment, or a way to pay our bills. Perseverance only seems doable if we know how long we'll need to exercise it.

But even if we had a date on the calendar, we'd still find a way to worry about it or try to speed

things along. Waiting like that doesn't cultivate trust in the God who cares for us and has ordered our steps. If we hinge our trust in God to a certain, earthly timeline, we're not really trusting Him. We're trusting in our schedule.

### **'Who?' Will Satisfy**

After a decade of waiting, I finally quit asking when and why as I opened my Bible each day. I couldn't bend the

Scriptures to say something God hadn't said, and I was weary of trying.

Instead, I began asking, "Who are you, God?" Over the next two years (while still waiting for my circumstances to change), I wrote down all the things I learned about God from Scripture each day. Stacks of spiral notebooks piled up, each page filled with notes about His character, kindness, love, mercy, grace. I'd known these facts in my head, but now I saw them revealed every day. In pain and grief—and in joy and laughter—I learned that He is holy, just, wise, sovereign, faithful, and present.

Learning about God's character taught me to trust Him, to wait with peace because He has proven himself faithful time and again. He sent Jesus to meet my greatest need in paying for my sins at the cross. Such a gracious and kind God can be trusted with my waiting for other, lesser needs. As Paul encourages us: "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).

As we wait with deferred hopes, may we find comfort in God's unchanging character, knowing that our ultimate hope is anchored in Him. ■

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*Glenna Marshall is married to her pastor, William, and lives in rural southeast Missouri, where she tries to keep up with her two energetic sons. She is the author of *The Promise Is His Presence*. You can connect with her at [glennamarshall.com](http://glennamarshall.com).*



*This article originally appeared on *The Gospel Coalition* ([thegospelcoalition.org](http://thegospelcoalition.org)) and is used with the author's permission.*



## NOTES FROM READERS

In October, Randy shared the article "Suicide, Heaven, and Jesus—the Final Answer to Our Sorrow" on his blog (see [epm.org/suicide](http://epm.org/suicide)). We received many responses. Here are a few of them:

"I want you to know that your article couldn't have been timed better for my family. My cousin killed himself this last weekend and when your article just 'happened' to show up on my [Facebook] feed (not everything you post does) I shared it. Then my aunt (who found her son's body) shared it because it was a comfort to her. He was a combat veteran who had been suffering from PTSD for quite a few years but he was also a believer in Jesus who even brought several of his brothers in arms to the Lord. Thank you! God is using you to build up His people."

"I lost my husband in June. As a new survivor of suicide, thank you for this. My husband loved Jesus and so do I, but this is a journey I would have never dreamt I would ever be on, and cannot put into words the pain and guilt associated. I wept when reading this, and believe God led me to seeing this article tonight. Thank you for this."

Thank you for your support of and prayers for our ministry, which allow us to continue sharing an eternal perspective and reaching out in Christ's name!

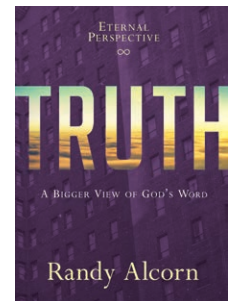


## Clearance Sale

Right now we're offering Randy Alcorn's *Lord Foulgrin's Letters* and *The Ishbane Conspiracy* on audiobook CDs for just \$2 each (93% off retail \$26.99), plus S&H. These two audiobooks make great gifts and are wonderful for a road trip!

And while supplies last, purchase Randy Alcorn's *Truth: A Bigger View of God's Word*, which contains 200 daily meditations with Scripture readings and inspirational quotes, for just \$5 (retail \$14.99).

Shop these deals and more at [epm.org/sale](http://epm.org/sale)



Don't miss our holiday sales, including free shipping over Black Friday weekend! For more information, follow us on [facebook.com/EPMinistries](https://www.facebook.com/EPMinistries) or sign up at [epm.org/connect](http://epm.org/connect) for our email newsletter.

## Updates on Nanci Alcorn

In October, Nanci had a follow-up CT scan that showed spots on her lungs. If it is determined to be cancer through more tests, this means it is metastatic colon cancer. Future updates will be posted at [caringbridge.org/visit/nancialcorn](http://caringbridge.org/visit/nancialcorn) as that's the best way for the Alcorns to keep everyone current with what's happening.

Randy writes, "We will continue to wait on God, something we are getting better at from a lot of experience this last nearly two years! We remain deeply grateful for your prayers!"





# An \$8.2 Million Judgment and Over \$8.2 Million in Royalties Given Away *God's Sovereign Grace in Your Life and Mine*

BY RANDY ALCORN

*Many of our readers already know parts of this story, but I wanted to share it for others who might not have heard it. It also sets up why it's so significant that our ministry has now given away over \$8.2 million in book royalties!*

In 1990, I was a pastor of a large church Nanci and I helped start in 1977, making a good salary and earning book royalties. I had been a pastor for thirteen years, and I didn't want to do anything else. Had you asked me what I expected to be doing in another thirty years I would have said, "Continuing to serve as a pastor at Good Shepherd Community Church." Then our family's life was turned upside down.

I was on the board of a pregnancy resource center, and we had opened our home to a pregnant teenager, helping her place her baby for adoption in a Christian home. We also had the joy of seeing her come to faith in Christ.

After searching Scripture and praying, I began participating in peaceful, nonviolent civil disobedience at abortion clinics. We simply stood in front of the doors, blocking entrance, to advocate

on behalf of unborn children scheduled to die. I did this nine times in a twelve month period and was arrested seven of those times.

An abortion clinic won a court judgment against a group of us. We were told we were liable to pay \$2,800 for having prevented ten abortions (child-killings) on a particular day. We were also made liable for the abortion clinic's legal fees, which were over \$19,000. Like most of the others, I refused to pay.

I stood before a judge in Portland and told him I would pay anything I owed to anyone else, but I could not in good conscience willingly hand over money to people who would use it to kill babies. I explained to the court and the media and all who were there the human rights of the unborn children, and the established history of civil disobedience to defend human rights. I quoted from Martin

*God is sovereign over all the apparent uncertainties  
and negative twists in your life and mine.*



Luther King, Jr. among others. I had no idea when I prepared my statement that I would be standing before an African American judge.

Unlike other judges I'd stood before who were disinterested, dismissive, or clearly angry, this particular judge listened intently as I spoke. After I told of civil disobedience for matters of human rights and social justice, and quoted MLK, I said there is no more basic human right than the right to live. I saw the emotion on the judge's face. He paused before responding. Then he said something beautiful I've never forgotten: "One day you may see me out there standing on that sidewalk beside you. But today I am a judge and must follow the law."

He sentenced me to jail for just two days. Amidst news photographers with strobes flashing, I was chained at both the hands and feet, and led away from the courtroom to the Multnomah County jail. It was not an easy time for my church and my fellow pastors, since people's idea of the ministry usually doesn't include newspaper photos and television news about their pastor being arrested and going to jail.

Not long after this, I discovered that my church was about to receive a writ of garnishment in which the court would try to force them to surrender one-fourth of my wages each month to the abortion clinic. The church would have to either pay the abortion clinic or defy a court order. To prevent this, I resigned the day before the writ of garnishment was delivered. I'd already divested myself of book royalties. The only way I could avoid garnishment in the future was to make no more than minimum wage. Fortunately, our family had been living on only a portion of my church salary, and we had just made our final house payment.

Another court judgment followed, involving another abortion clinic. They requested a half million dollars in punitive damages against each of the defendants—for totally peaceful and nonviolent actions—to persuade us not to rescue again. In court, the owner and staff of an abortion clinic falsely

accused me and others of yelling and swearing at women, calling them names, and putting our hands on them as they attempted to enter the abortion clinic. When a Portland pastor testified that he had watched as we quietly and peacefully stood in front of the door, blocking access to the place where innocent children were being killed, the judge's anger erupted. Finally the judge issued a directed verdict. He told the jury they must find us guilty and choose a punitive amount sufficient to deter us from ever coming to the clinic again.

On February 11, 1991, nine of the twelve jurors agreed to award the abortion clinic \$8.2 million dollars, averaging about \$250,000 per defendant. It was the largest judgment ever against a group of peaceful protestors. It seemed likely our family would lose our house, and we would not be able to continue to send our children to the school they loved, Good Shepherd School.

By all appearances, our lives had taken a devastating turn. Right?

Wrong. That judgment was one of the best things that ever happened to us. Because what others intended for evil, God intended for good (Genesis 50:20).

My family faced this situation with the firm belief that God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-loving, and that no matter what happened, He would work things out for our ultimate good (Romans 8:28). That is exactly what He did! The fact that we lost the case was irrelevant. We're fortunate not to have to wait for eternity to see how God worked it for good. We've already seen it in countless ways, though no doubt we'll learn more when we're with Him.

God is sovereign over all the apparent uncertainties and negative twists in your life and mine. He is never taken by surprise, never perplexed, never faced with circumstances out of His control.





## *We thank our sovereign God for bringing us such freedom and joy in a way we never saw coming.*

In this situation, God's hands weren't tied by the vengeance of child-killers. He didn't merely "make the best of a bad situation." He took a bad situation and used it for His highest good. So much so that I can no longer think of it as a bad situation—it was a severe mercy, a grace disguised in hardship.

I remember how unthinkable large \$8.2 million seemed to be. I used to joke with people, saying, "\$8.2 million dollars is more than I made as a pastor in a year!" But despite that \$8.2 million court judgment, we never lost our house and thanks to someone's kindness, our daughters were able to continue attending our church school. We began a new ministry, Eternal Perspective Ministries (EPM). While paying me a minimum-wage salary and my wife Nanci a secretary's salary, the ministry received

all the royalties from my books. And wouldn't you know it, suddenly I had books on the best sellers list and royalties began to dramatically increase. (One of the first books I wrote after having to leave pastoral ministry was *ProLife Answers to ProChoice Arguments*, one of the bestselling prolife books in history,

widely used to train young people and other prolife advocates to speak up for unborn children.)

The original court judgment of \$8.2 million was in force for ten years. The abortion clinic was frustrated that it hadn't received very much money—and none at all from us, because minimum wage is not garnishable under Oregon law. They managed to get the judgment extended for another ten years, so I ended up making minimum wage for twenty years. God provided faithfully and most of the time we didn't even think about it. With joy in our hearts, now nearly thirty years later Nanci and I continue to give away 100 percent of the book royalties to a wide variety of Christian missions, famine relief, and pro-life work.

Since EPM began, by God's grace, over eleven

million books have sold. And as our staff pointed out to me, we have now given away over \$8.2 million dollars in royalties—an amount that has now, ironically and delightfully, surpassed the judgment against us and the whole group of proliferators all those years ago!

See how God continues to further His Kingdom by using my going to jail and losing my job as a pastor and those lawsuits from child-killing clinics? What they intended for evil God really DID intend for good. It brings a big smile to my face.

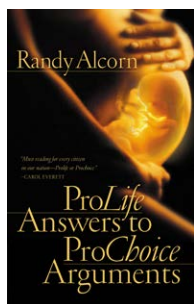
Some have wondered if I realize what we could have done with over \$8 million dollars. My answer is always the same: "Nothing that would have brought us nearly as much joy as we've found in giving it away." I firmly believe they're not my book royalties—they're God's. Nanci and I certainly don't need them, and it delights us to see God using them to touch lives all over the world!

We thank our sovereign God for bringing us such freedom and joy in a way we never saw coming and never would have chosen, but which—if we had it to do over again—would do nothing to change. ■

Listen to Randy share on Breakpoint about this story in a podcast titled "What You Intended for Evil, God Used for Good" at [epm.org/breakpoint](http://epm.org/breakpoint)

To learn about the kinds of ministries EPM has supported with the royalty funds, read this article online at [epm.org/royalties](http://epm.org/royalties) and see a list of organizations we gave to earlier this year.

Learn more about Randy's book *ProLife Answers to ProChoice Arguments* and order at [epm.org/pla](http://epm.org/pla)





# Foster Children Need the Church

BY BRITTANY LIND



One of the bravest women I know is the woman who gave birth to my son. She was young, it was her first child, her life was unstable, and she hadn't made all the best decisions up to that point. In fact, some of her decisions would have lasting consequences for her and her unborn child. Yet she remains one of the most courageous women I know, because she let this little one grow inside her, not knowing what the future would hold. When it would have been perhaps "in her best interest" or "more convenient" to visit the abortion clinic, she chose life. She carried this little one inside her to full-term, went to the hospital when the time came, and gave him life. I'm forever grateful for her decision, and for this little boy who's now my son.

Though many children enter the foster care system later in life, this is how the story begins for many foster children in the United States. By definition, foster children are those whose birth parents are unable to care for them at the present time and need someone to care for them for a week, a month, a year, or permanently. Some have been abused or neglected, but others have birth parents who simply need time to get back on their feet.

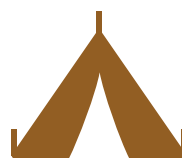
Foster care isn't an adoption agency—the goal is to re-unite children with their birth parents or biological family members, if possible. However, if in time it becomes clear that this reunion will compromise the child's safety or well-

being, adoption becomes the aim. Currently in the United States, about 430,000 children are in foster care, and of those children, nearly 112,000 are waiting to be adopted. Though the numbers can seem overwhelming, the remarkable part is these children have been born. Their unborn lives, like the life of my son, have been protected. They are now toddlers, young children, or teenagers in need of a place to call home for a few months—or for the rest of their life.

## Call to the Church


Orphan and foster care in America actually began as a Christian effort. In the early 1850s, a minister named Charles Loring Brace made efforts to help thousands of homeless children in New York City. He's known as the father of the foster care movement, and went great lengths to place children in Christian families.

As Christians, we have a God who cares for the orphan and for those who cannot help themselves (Psalm 68:5; James 1:27). Foster children are essentially orphans, some only temporarily, but the results can be tragic if they're left to grow up in the system without a family. It's estimated that 30 percent of homeless people were once in the U.S. foster care system. Having never learned



It's estimated that **30 percent of homeless people** were once in the U.S. foster care system.

Icon credit: Vecteezy.com



There are **430,000** children in the foster care system in the U.S., and roughly **348,067** evangelical churches in the U.S.

how to attach to people or places, they struggle to find healthy relationships, to stay in school, and to hold down a job later in life. It has also been documented that 70 percent of foster youth dream of going to college, but only 3 percent actually make it despite the fact many states offer them free college tuition.

The need is enormous, but when you consider that there are roughly 348,067 evangelical churches in America, the 430,000 children-in-foster-care number doesn't seem quite so daunting. Unfortunately, it's not a problem that can be solved by simply doing the math and distributing children among churches. Many factors complicate the issue, but the numbers are still fascinating to consider.

The church really can do something to help. While not all may be called to open a home to foster children, there are numerous ways to get involved and be part of the solution. I've been incredibly blessed by a meal from a friend on a busy week of social worker visits, or by friends who took the time to get fingerprinted so they could be approved babysitters. Larger group homes may be in financial need to care for the children, or they may have a child in need of a tutor or a counselor. The needs are many and ongoing at every level of the foster care system. Who better to meet those needs than the church?

### Join Us

Foster care doesn't have to be "plan B" in your life. Joel and I didn't pursue it because of an inability to have biological children. We also didn't do it

because we're special or possess a unique ability to remain unattached from kids who come into our home. Our plan from the beginning was to get "too attached" to our son, no matter the outcome. The path of foster care isn't safe for the heart, but we embarked down it anyway. And we hope to do it again, because there are children who need homes, and because we have a Savior who has loved us like this.

As Christians, we've been adopted into an eternal family through the blood of Jesus. In light of His grace, may we care for the lives of the born, and consider opening our earthly homes for a week, a month, or all our days on earth to the countless number of children in need. And as we do, may we point them, their birth parents, social workers, and a watching world to Jesus—the One who welcomes us into His forever home. ■

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*Brittany Lind is a wife, mother, and writer. She and her husband, Joel, live in Louisville, Kentucky, where they are members of Third Avenue Baptist Church.*



**For more information about getting involved in foster care, go to your state's website and search "foster care" or find an organization in your city that works with foster children.**

**EPM also recommends "Wait No More," a ministry of Focus on the Family ([waitnomore.org](http://waitnomore.org)) and Hope for Orphans, a ministry of FamilyLife ([hopefororphans.org](http://hopefororphans.org)).**

The original version of this article was posted on The Gospel Coalition and is used here by permission of the author. To view the full article, which includes more of the Linds' personal story and a video, go to [thegospelcoalition.org/article/foster-children-need-the-church](http://thegospelcoalition.org/article/foster-children-need-the-church)



# Why Is It Necessary to Find and Be Part of a Local Church?

I was brought up in church and have gone to several, but I find the focus seems to be more on social connections and entertainment. I study your books and listen to solid Bible teaching. I don't really understand why I need to find a church. Can you explain why?

ANSWERED BY BRENDA ABELEIN, EPM STAFF

It's wonderful you are learning and growing from the teaching of various books and listening/watching sermons online. But being part of a community of believers learning to be more like Jesus *together* is important too. Here's what Randy writes in his book *Heaven*:



Scripture teaches that we need each other and should not withdraw from each other's fellowship, instruction, or accountability. It's unbiblical to imagine that we can successfully seek God on our own (Hebrews 10:25). Because we will be part of a community of saints that constitutes the bride of Christ for eternity, and because we will worship and serve him together, to prepare properly for Heaven we must be part of a church now.

There are so many ways God wants us to grow to be like Him, and many of these can only be learned and experienced as we are in community with others. Likewise, there are ways He wants to use us to help others grow and mature that *they* will miss out on if we are not willing to be involved in a church body. So it's not just all about us. *Your* knowledge and faith can bless others as well.

Paul David Tripp writes in *New Morning Mercies*:

One of the themes that courses through the New Testament...is that your walk with God is designed by God to be a community project. Anonymous, consumerist, isolated, independent, self-sufficient, "Jesus and me" Christianity is a distant and distorted facsimile of the faith of the New Testament. You and

I simply were not created ("It is not good that the man should be alone"; Genesis 2:18) or re-created in Jesus Christ ("For the body does not consist of one member but of many"; 1 Corinthians 12:14) to live all by ourselves. The biblical word pictures of temple (stones joined together to be a place where God dwells) and body (each member dependent on the function of the other) decimate any idea that healthy Christianity can live outside of essential community.

...the Bible is clear. When each part is working properly, the body of Christ grows to maturity in Christ (see Ephesians 4). We each need to live in intentionally intrusive, Christ-centered, grace-driven redemptive community. This community is meant to enlighten and protect. It is meant to motivate and encourage. It is meant to rescue and restore. It is meant to instill hope and courage. It is meant to confront and rebuke. It is meant to guide and protect. It is meant to give vision and sound warning. It is meant to incarnate the love and grace of Jesus when you feel discouraged and alone. It is meant to be a visible representation of the grace of Jesus that is your hope. It is not a luxury. It is a spiritual necessity. ■

*If you would like a church recommendation for your area, please contact us at [epm.org/connect](http://epm.org/connect) and we will do our best to help you.*





A Better Kind of  
*Abundance*

BY RANDY ALCORN



**G**od took physician Renee Lockey completely by surprise one day while she was out running. At the height of her career, she sensed that he was planting an idea in her head: “Work like a doctor and live like a nurse.”

Renee now lives on a nurse’s salary and gives away the rest of her income. She says, “When we take this idea literally — that we are His — it results in a drastically different way of thinking and living.”

While Renee’s colleagues might assume she has denied herself the good life by living below her means, in reality, she has discovered the secret to the abundant life.

### **Treasure No One Can Steal**

John 10 shows us that the false shepherds of Israel, the Pharisees, sought to keep people from Jesus, the one true Shepherd. Jesus promises abundant life, and in contrast, He speaks of false religious teachers as thieves and murderers who rob people of life. He said of Himself:

Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (John 10:7-11)

When Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy,” He was alerting us to how much the devil hates life. But Satan isn’t only a liar and a killer; he is also a thief.

Satan seeks to destroy us by robbing us of the good life God originally gave Adam and Eve—the life Christ came to restore to humanity. A key way he tries to destroy us is by convincing us that money and possessions are the source of an abundant life.

If you assume you’ll never be burglarized, you’ll leave your windows open and your cash lying on the dresser. Jesus knew our tendency to live in denial about the dangers of money-love, which is why He sounded this alarm: “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed” (Luke 12:15, NIV). If we value the good life Jesus came to give us, we’ll clasp it closely when

Satan and his minions try to lay their hands on it. As 1 Timothy 6:19 commands us, we’ll “take hold of that which is truly life.”

The devil might not be able to deceive us into believing outright that nothing’s more important than money and possessions. Instead, he might draw us to a catalog that shows us all those possessions we “really need.” We might say no to Internet sites offering sexual temptation, only to succumb to websites where we indulge an unfiltered lust for things. We might buy dozens of utterly unnecessary things during Black Friday sales, which ironically mark the beginning of a holiday season that culminates in the birth of the One who told us that we need to be on our watch against greed and that life isn’t about the things we possess (Luke 12:15).

Satan has numerous allies in his campaign to make us believe the lies of materialism. Advertising exists to sell us the “goods” that supposedly give us the good life. Fortunately for advertisers, no products exist that actually deliver on that promise, so we keep right on buying more things, hoping this time they’ll deliver. But they never will.

### **Let’s Not Buy Ourselves to Death**

Attempting to experience the abundant life Jesus spoke of while burying ourselves in material abundance isn’t just difficult; it’s impossible. That’s not because material things are inherently bad. It’s because accumulated stuff suffocates us, crushes us, and blocks us from Jesus.

In moderate quantities, certain possessions might draw our attention to him as our provider. For instance, when I buy a good book or my wife gives me a thermal mug, I am truly grateful to God. Other possessions, such as clothes I will never wear or the third version of a gadget I already own and don’t use, do nothing for me or God’s Kingdom. If it’s something that will sap hours of my time, it may even draw my attention away from God and his Word.

Many things may be neutral or even fun, but it’s too easy to end up trusting our stuff instead of our Savior.

In some circles, the abundant life has been confused with material wealth. Prosperity theology says that God’s plan is always for us to be wealthy—and to spend our money primarily on ourselves. Jesus, who didn’t even

have a place to lay His head and who owned nothing but a robe and sandals (Matthew 8:20), clearly didn't live a money- and possessions-centered life. Surely that's not what He wants for us either.

Jesus told the church in Laodicea, "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked" (Revelation 3:17, NIV). What had buried these Christians' sense of spiritual poverty? Their material abundance. It tricked them into believing they were living the abundant life when in reality they were sabotaging it.

Jesus promises, "Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14, NIV). The abundant life isn't measured in gold or material goods. It's rooted in the precious fact that our Creator and Redeemer himself indwells us, imparting His delight-giving presence to us. He says the very reason he came is to give us "a rich and satisfying life" (John 10:10, NLT) or "life to the full, till it overflows" (AMP).

### Abundant Life Begins Today

Jesus doesn't make us wait until we die to start living the abundant life. The abundant life begins now! So if you're a Christian and you're searching for the good life, you don't have to go far to find it. Look no further than Jesus. Know Him, delight in Him, serve Him, learn from His people, and do what He says. (Of course, you must study His Word to do this.) There's no life better than that.

Jesus Himself is the entrance to an Eden of the heart—the ultimate refuge for refugees, and the home for every homeless and heartsick person in this world, whether they live in poverty or wealth.

God didn't send a spokesperson, a prophet, or an angel to give us life, protection, provision, safety, and guidance. He sent His Son—His very best. He's the only Savior, and He freely offers all of Himself to us.

When I was a young Christian, some sincere believers tried to convince me that I should seek a life in which miraculous events were the norm.

After a year spent searching for more, I recall reading the promise that God has "blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:3). I also read, "[God's] divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3).

That's when I asked myself, What more do I need than what God has already given me? I realized that Jesus, along with the power of God's indwelling Spirit (Romans 8:11), was enough for me to enjoy abundant life.

The same is true for all of us who know Christ. We simply need to enter into and enjoy the abundant life Jesus promises.

### Abundance Naturally Overflows

Jesus said, "The one who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within him" (John 7:38, CSB). There's an unmistakable sign of an overflowing, abundant life that comes from knowing Jesus, the author of life: generosity to others.

An old but helpful illustration applies to the abundant, generous life. In northern Israel lies the beautiful Sea of Galilee, where Jesus often sailed with his disciples. Water freely flows into the Sea of Galilee from the Jordan River, and its water is fresh and life giving.

Eighty-eight miles to the south is a larger and radically different body of water. One of the lowest places on the planet, the Dead Sea collects large volumes of water but disperses none. Its salt concentration is so high—ten times greater than ocean water—that no fish or vegetation can survive there.

While the Jordan River flows into the Sea of Galilee, it also flows out. The water simply passes through, allowing it to support fish life and plants. Trapped, with no outlet, the Dead Sea keeps taking water in, but no water leaves it except by evaporation. No outlet means no life.

This is a good parable of the Christian life in general—and an even better parable of the generous life in particular. In order to be faithful stewards

Jesus says the  
very reason  
He came is to  
give us *life to  
the full, till it  
overflows.*



and to love others, we must be not only recipients of God's provision but also outlets of it. Only then will we experience the true and abundant life He intends for us.

Such a dramatic overflow can have an amazing effect even on those who are hostile to the Christian faith. My friend pastors a church that rents a public school auditorium on Sundays. When a new principal arrived, he showed hostility toward Christians and urged the pastor to find another place to meet.

But over the next few years, something happened. The principal discovered that church members cheerfully give time and money for the sake of the school—a practice that was in place before he came. They schedule cleanup days. They serve teachers meals during parent-teacher conferences. They give teachers gift cards each year. They do this not simply to win favor but because Christ's love and kindness overflow from their lives.

The pastor of the church told me, "Three years later, this principal is no longer an antagonist; he's our advocate. Our works of service have softened his heart toward the Lord."

The cause for this astonishing turnaround? It was simply Christians living the good life, which always entails good deeds of generosity. Jesus put it this way: "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16, NIV).

## Generosity Is Contagious

The more we give in Christ's name, the more life he will put into us. And the more life we have flowing into us, the more that life will flow out of us to others. "Give, and it will be given to you," Jesus said. "A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap" (Luke 6:38, NIV).

By giving generously of our money and possessions, we're able to open our hands to receive the abundant life God has for us. God is the greatest giver in the universe, and it's impossible to outgive Him. This is not prosperity theology. It is simply the

To be faithful stewards and to love others, we must be not only recipients of God's provision but also outlets of it.

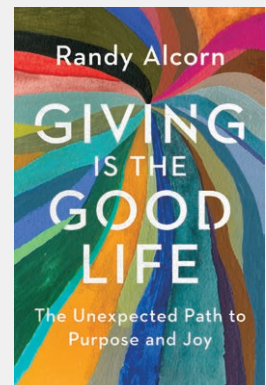
way our generous God delights to work in the lives of His children.

Out of a deep love for Jesus, Pete and Debbie Ochs decided to acquire a business constructing industrial products in prisons. They employ inmates, some of whom have committed violent crimes. They invest in these prisoners' lives by offering life lessons on topics like parenting, finances, and relationships. Pete says, "In one of our life lessons, we presented this whole concept of generosity and challenged [the prisoners] that we would match dollar for dollar any dollar that they gave to one of a number of charities and we gave them a list. It was amazing the amount of money that these prisoners gave to charity. . . . Most of the charities . . . existed to help the victims of the crimes that they committed."

Pete and Debbie's overflowing good life has not only brought these men the gospel but has also introduced them to the overflow of joyful giving so they, too, can experience abundant life.

The good life in Christ is not only wonderful for those who live it; it is also a joy for those who behold it. Generosity is just as contagious as materialism. However, it brings life instead of death. ■

This article is excerpted from *Giving Is the Good Life: The Unexpected Path to Purpose and Joy*. In this new book, Randy Alcorn teaches life-changing biblical principles of generosity and tells stories of people who have put them into practice. It's available from EPM at [epm.org/goodlife](http://epm.org/goodlife)



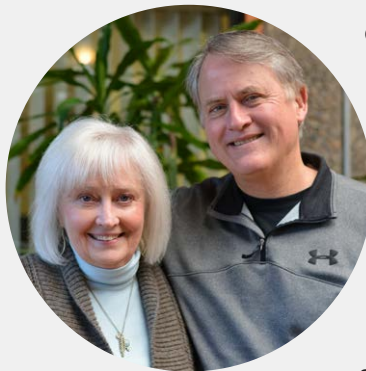
# A Heart for Prisoners

## Q&A with Sharon Misenhimer

Earlier this year, our dear friend Sharon Misenhimer retired from Eternal Perspective Ministries. Her impact on this ministry has been far reaching.

When I started EPM in 1990, I never anticipated God would use us to reach so many prisoners with the gospel or help disciple believers in prison. The key to this vital part of our ministry has been Sharon. With her great heart for prisoners, for many years she has handled their correspondence and sent requested books without charge.

We're a small ministry, and reaching prisoners isn't our main focus. Yet more than 30,000 inmates have contacted us! We've sent them over 86,000 books, a great investment because each



book is typically read by many prisoners. Heartfelt letters from inmates tell us of conversions, profound life changes, and gratitude for our help.

Sharon has been both a giver and a gift, not only to us but to thousands of prisoners.

Our ministry to prisoners wouldn't have existed without her faithful and diligent follow-up with people in need, who are often forgotten. (I'm grateful for our staff member Amy Woodard, who now oversees this ministry, as well as for our other staff involved with packaging and shipping the books!)

I hope you enjoy this Q&A with Sharon. It will give you a glimpse into this godly woman's heart for prisoners and her great love for the Lord. —Randy Alcorn

### QUESTIONS FROM STEPHANIE ANDERSON, EPM STAFF

#### Tell us a little about your history with EPM.

I had the privilege of working at EPM for 17 years. I started as a volunteer in 2002 and became part of the staff in 2007 as a Ministry Assistant. I also managed the prison outreach part of the ministry.

#### How has working for EPM and with Randy affected you personally?

Working at EPM has shaped and blessed my life more than I could have ever imagined and has been

one of my greatest privileges.

Randy's writings and his and Nanci's influence (by the way they live) changed my thinking and life in many ways. One of the main themes in his writings that has deeply influenced me is living our lives in light of eternity by investing in things that will last forever. Randy reminds us this life and the opportunity we have is temporary and brief, and I love his "Live for the Line, Not the Dot" video that powerfully illustrates this message (see [epm.org/dotline](http://epm.org/dotline)).



"I can honestly say my greatest trials have brought about some of the greatest blessings in my life."



### What would you like people to know about EPM's book ministry to prisoners?

Even before I started working at EPM, prisoners were writing to Randy and requesting his books. I'm thankful God gave me a genuine love for the inmates that I've served and prayed for over the years; it became the part of my job that I loved the most.

### How can others get involved in helping EPM reach inmates for Christ?

If you would like to be a part of this ministry, you might want to consider donating to EPM's Books for Prisoners Project (at [epm.org/donate](http://epm.org/donate)). These funds will help with the cost of sending out Randy's books. Another way you can significantly impact their lives is to pray God will use these books to either introduce prisoners to the Savior or draw the believers into a closer walk with Him.

### For several years, you prepared a weekly prayer sheet for our staff with requests from around the world. What does prayer mean to you, and how has God grown you in this area over the years?

Prayer is such a great and awesome privilege because we can talk to Almighty God! It's a vital part of my personal relationship with Him. He is a personal God who cares for me and delights in me bringing my hardships, cares, requests, confessions, and joys to Him, as well as my gratitude and worship.

God began working significantly in my life in the area of prayer six weeks after Joe and I were married, when he was deployed to Vietnam. I had never prayed so much in my life. Years later we weren't able to have children and that's when a long 10-year journey began of infertility, miscarriage, failed medical interventions, and adoption attempts, which brought about a lot of discouragement and persistent prayers. God answered and gave us our own child and a second one after seven more years of infertility. Later in life, the devastation of a

prodigal child also had us on our knees, desperate and crying out to God.

Trials are very difficult and painful to go through. But looking back, Joe and I are so grateful for God's wisdom in allowing trials in our lives to change us. They developed in us a stronger prayer life as well as a deeper trust and dependence on Him. I can honestly say my greatest trials have brought about some of the greatest blessings in my life, and I'm thankful for how God used them to change me. I would not want to be who I was prior to these trials. As we depended on Him in the deep valleys of hardships, we discovered the rich treasures of God's love, comfort, grace, and intimacy, and experienced His transforming work in our lives.

A couple of meaningful verses during those years were 2 Corinthians 4:17-18: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (NKJV). Through these verses and many others, God helped us to see that He was using our trials for our good and that they were not meaningless. God's Word helped us to persevere and gave us the strength to keep our eyes on Jesus and on what mattered for eternity.

### Now that you're retired, what will you be doing with your time?

Joe and I are really looking forward to spending more time with our kids and grandkids. We also look forward to doing some camping and traveling.

I remember reading John Piper's book *Rethinking Retirement* years ago, about living out our retirement years for a greater purpose than what most people dream of. Even though I'm retiring from my work at EPM, God still has work He wants me to do. My prayer is that He would show me how He wants to use me to love and serve others. ■

# The Church Behind Bars: Supporting Christians in Prison

BY ZOE ERLER



Set against the backdrop of multi-million dollar homes, the Carol Vance Unit in Richmond, Texas, is small and unassuming for a prison. Behind the correctional facility's gates is Prison Fellowship's® longest-running Academy.

Jerrel Martin has been at Carol Vance for less than two years, only entering a life of crime at 40 after his business went downhill. Until his incarceration, Martin didn't think he had much use for God, whom he blamed for the death of his four brothers to a childhood disease. But after staring at the inside of a prison for long enough, Martin decided to stop giving God the cold shoulder.

"God put me on Earth for a purpose," he says in a strong Louisiana cadence. "A living

dog is better than a dead lion. As long as you're living, there's still hope."

Today, Martin is one of the leaders of a tight-knit group of men that meets regularly for worship, teaching, discipleship, and prayer to encourage each other to grow in faith while behind bars. It's Church. Prison Church. And it's clear that God is here.

## Life Together...on the Inside

While it's yet to be documented how many prisoners regularly attend Christian services in America, almost 24,000 prisoners nationwide participate in Prison Fellowship classes and services every month.

In the Christian community at Carol Vance, lives change every day. After coming to Christ, guys have abandoned gang affiliations, and members of rival gangs have become friends and brothers in Christ. Men pray for the healing of each other's family

members and for the people they've hurt, and encourage each other to walk faithfully in the face of temptation to return to old habits and thought patterns. They even take up tithes and offerings, not in the form of cash, but in toiletries and other items that they then donate to the homeless or to those in their midst who can't afford them.

While their circumstances might be different, Martin doesn't think the church on the inside is all that different from the church on the outside.

"Every church has problems, whether it's here or there," Martin says. "[Someone once told me], 'If you're looking for the perfect church, you're not going to find it (on this side of heaven). If you do, once you get there, it won't be perfect anymore.'"

## The Church behind Bars

"The church behind bars is a diverse, vibrant, and active body of believers knit together and drawn to Jesus



by the need for forgiveness and transformation,” says James Ackerman, president and CEO of Prison Fellowship. “They are men and women aware of their brokenness, overcoming their shame, and praying for their restoration. They are tens of thousands strong and live all around you, but often go unnoticed, unthought-of, and overlooked. They are those of the highways and hedges, gathered by Christ and looking for you, the

church on the outside, to come in to visit them.”

For Martin and others like him, knowing that the church on the outside remembers them makes all the difference.

“Once released from prison I’d like to see the church welcome us with open arms, be there to love us, encourage, and support us,” says Martin. “It would mean a great deal to me because as men stay connected to the church and the church continues to embrace them, we would have a

much better chance of becoming productive citizens in our communities.” ■

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*About Prison Fellowship: Every person is made in the image of God. No life is beyond His reach. Founded in 1976, Prison Fellowship® exists to serve all those affected by crime and incarceration, and to see lives and communities restored in and out of prison—one transformed life at a time. Learn more at [prisonfellowship.org](http://prisonfellowship.org)*

## December 3 is Giving Tuesday: Partner with EPM and Help Fund a Scripture Translation

"Giving Tuesday" is the generosity community's response to the consumerism of Black Friday and Cyber Monday, and it's designed to provide people with a charitable day to consider giving as they go into the holiday season.

This year, Giving Tuesday is December 3, and we'd like to invite you to consider giving through EPM to support Scripture translation. For the past year and a half, to honor the legacy of our late coworker Karen Coleman, we've been partnering with Seed Company to help fund the Esimbi project, which will bring God's Word to 20,000 people who live in isolated areas in Cameroon.

Our latest progress update was encouraging, and shows that God's Word in these people's heart language is already bearing fruit. After a man named Elijah read Luke 6:12 in Esimbi at a conference, attendee Doris noted that she understood the passage clearly for the first time. "Read it again, please," urged several elderly conference participants. They wanted to listen to it once more. The Seed Company reports that "Most members of the community now hunger for the Word of God in their own language."

Although translation efforts aren't projected to be finished until 2023, we have a goal of raising \$120,000 by September 30, 2020. So far, over \$47,000 has been given to the project by EPM and donors. Would you prayerfully consider partnering with us to finish our goal? To donate, select the fund "Esimbi Translation Project" at [epm.org/donate](http://epm.org/donate) and 100% of donations will go directly to Seed Company.





# Is It Possible to Be Happy in Christ Despite Suffering?

Our basis for happiness remains true—  
and sometimes becomes clearer—in suffering.

BY RANDY ALCORN

**G**od never guarantees that the Christian life will be smooth or easy. In fact, he promises the opposite: “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12, NKJV). We’re not to be surprised when we face great difficulties (see 1 Peter 4:12).

All the psalms of lament, the book of Lamentations, and many other Scripture passages reveal the importance of realism and sorrow in the Christian life. No treatment of joy and happiness should deny or minimize such texts.

Indeed, a truly biblical worldview and an authentic doctrine of joy and happiness fully recognize and embrace the realities of suffering in this present age.



# We can't be happy, and remain happy, without believing in the sovereignty of a loving God.



The happiness described in Scripture is all the richer because it doesn't involve denial or pretense and can be experienced amid severe difficulty. Christ-followers don't preach the flimsy kind of happiness that's built on wishful thinking. Instead, our basis for happiness remains true—and sometimes becomes clearer—in suffering.

## Rejoicing Is Rooted in Our God, Not Our Circumstances

Rejoicing always in the Lord (see Philippians 4:4) may seem unrealistic at times. But we must remember that this rejoicing is centered not in a passing circumstance but in a constant reality—God himself, and His Son, Jesus, who died for us and rose again.

On the one hand, we might suppose that Scripture doesn't command us to rejoice in our nation's condition, our culture's trajectory, our spouse's attitude, our child's struggle, our church's conflicts, our job loss, or our poor health. On the other hand, we're told to "always [give] thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:20, NIV). Likewise, Scripture tells us to "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18, NIV).

I don't think this means that we are to rejoice in evil, per se, since God hates evil (Zechariah 8:17; Proverbs 6:16-19) and commands us to hate it (Psalm 97:10; Proverbs 8:13; Romans 12:9). I do think it means that we should believe Romans 8:28, which tells us God will work all things together for our good, including evil things that happen to us.

Believing this frees us to thank God in the middle of difficult and even evil circumstances, knowing that in His sovereign grace, He is accomplishing great, eternal purposes in us through these things.

We're told to rejoice in the Lord and to "consider it all joy" when we face hardship (James 1:2, NASB). Choosing to rejoice, by rehearsing reasons to be happy and grateful while suffering, affirms trust in God. We walk by faith, believing in what God has

done, is doing, and will do to bring a good end to all that troubles us.

This response requires faith that God lovingly superintends our challenges. Viewing our sufferings as random or obsessing over someone else's bad choices that caused our sufferings robs us of happiness. A weak, small, or faulty view of God always poisons the well of our contentment.

The more we grow in our understanding of God's attributes, the happier we become.

## We Have a Sovereign and Loving God

The deeper our knowledge of God's character, the deeper our reservoir of strength, perspective, and happiness in hard times. Who is this God we are to trust? What is He really like?

As we have dealt with her cancer over the past two years, Nanci and I have spent time meditating on the attributes of God, rereading and listening to audiobooks such as *The Knowledge of the Holy* by A. W. Tozer and *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer and *Trusting God* by Jerry Bridges. Our hearts are lifted in praise as we contemplate His holiness, grace, justice, mercy, and every facet of His being revealed to us in Scripture.

Scripture teaches that we have a God who loves us and is sovereign over the universe, including all evil. We can't be happy, and remain happy, without believing in the sovereignty of a loving God. The beauty of the Christian worldview is that while we're encouraged to take initiative and control what's within our power, we also know that the enormous part of life we can't control is under God's governance.

Scripture tells us, "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases" (Psalm 115:3). It assures us, "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps" (Proverbs 16:9). And since God is eternally wise and good and happy, and we're not, we're far better off with Him, not us, in control.

## Gratitude Is Central

One surefire way to raise our level of happiness in times of suffering is choosing to be thankful.



## Being Spirit controlled is inseparable from giving thanks in everything.

In every circumstance, no matter how difficult, we can give thanks to God and experience his joy. Ephesians 5:18-20 says, “Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Being Spirit controlled is inseparable from giving thanks in everything.

When Nanci and I had to cancel a trip we were really looking forward to, we began to contemplate all the good things that we could do with the time we now had. Then we started doing those good things and got excited about them. Instead of clinging to unhappiness for something we lost, we found happiness in something we gained.

Whether we find ourselves having reason to celebrate or to mourn, there’s never a time not to express our gratitude to God. Psalm 140:13 declares, “Surely the righteous shall give thanks to your name.”

While it may seem hard to “make ourselves happy,” it’s not hard to choose to give thanks, which in turn always kindles happiness. No matter how difficult our circumstances, the happiness thanksgiving generates is always within our reach.

### Our Suffering Will End

Even if the worst suffering of our lives still lies ahead of us, our loving God assures us it will be for only a short time. But He promises far more—a future payoff for our present sufferings:

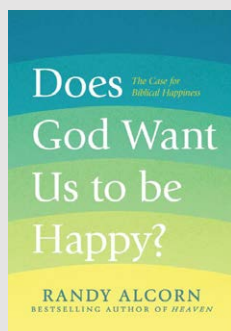
Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18, NIV)

Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. (2 Corinthians 4:17, NIV)

In light of that eternal glory being achieved for us by our momentary troubles, Paul offers the following words of eternal perspective: “We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18, NIV). This verse has always cleared my head, and that’s why I named our organization Eternal Perspective Ministries.

How wonderful to be promised not only that our present sufferings will end but also that even now they have a hidden purpose that will forever outlast this life! The more we fix our eyes on what’s presently unseen, the more we can experience reassurance and comfort and the increase in happiness they inevitably bring. That’s why Scottish evangelist Duncan Matheson (1824–1869) prayed, “Lord, stamp eternity upon my eyeballs.”

A normal day as resurrected people on the New Earth will be far better than the best day we’ve ever experienced here. And we will one day see our worst day on Earth under the Curse as not having been wasted but as making a positive and eternal difference. ■



This article is excerpted from Randy's new book *Does God Want Us to Be Happy?*, which is adapted from the comprehensive book *Happiness*. It offers a collection of short, easy readings on one of life's biggest questions: in a world full of brokenness, is happiness a worthy pursuit for Christians? This book answers the question with a different approach and contains some new material. It's perfect for those who would like to consider the central question in *Happiness* in a shorter form.

Learn more and order at [epm.org/happy](http://epm.org/happy)



The page is decorated with various natural elements: dark green leaves and red berries in the top left and bottom left corners; a sprig of holly with red berries in the top right; a sprig of rosemary in the middle right; and a sprig of red berries in the bottom right. The background is a light, textured surface.

# Immanuel

## God with Us

*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)*

“Immanuel, God with us.” It is hell’s terror. Satan trembles at the sound of it. . . . Let him come to you suddenly, and do you but whisper that word, ‘God with us,’ back he falls, confounded and confused. . . . “God with us” is the laborer’s strength. How could he preach the gospel, how could he bend his knees in prayer, how could the missionary go into foreign lands, how could the martyr stand at the stake, how could the confessor own his Master, how could men labor if that one word were taken away? . . . “God with us” is eternity’s sonnet, heaven’s hallelujah, the shout of the glorified, the song of the redeemed, the chorus of the angels, the everlasting oratorio of the great orchestra of the sky. . . .

Feast, Christians, feast; you have a right to feast. . . . But in your feasting, think of the Man in Bethlehem. Let him have a place in your hearts, give him the glory, think of the virgin who conceived him, but think most of all of the Man born, the Child given. I finish by again saying, A happy Christmas to you all!

—Charles Spurgeon

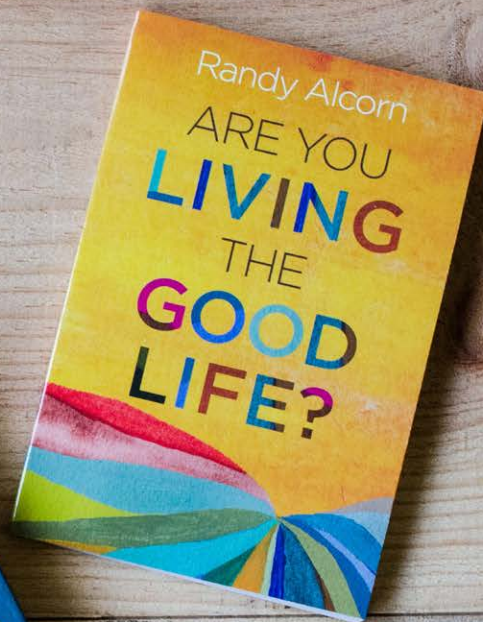
Christ, by highest heaven adored. Christ, the everlasting Lord, Late in time behold Him come, Offspring of a virgin’s womb. Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate Deity! Pleased as Man with men to dwell; Jesus, our Immanuel!

—Charles Wesley





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