

# eternal perspectives

SPRING/SUMMER 2019

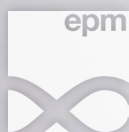
## *Waiting*

**WHEN GOD  
SEEMS SILENT**

### **ALSO INSIDE**

**You Need an Older,  
Bolder Friend**

**God Invites You to  
Delight Yourself in Him**



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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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BECAUSE OF JESUS, WE WILL SEE GOD...

# and Live

BY RANDY ALCORN

**A**s I write this, I'm thinking about Jesus, as I seek to do every day. For sure, there's nothing or no one who deserves to be thought about more than Him!

I grew up in an unbelieving home. My dad, a tavern owner, was totally hostile to Jesus. (He remained so until he was 85 and appeared to be dying, when I had the privilege of leading him to Jesus; he lived four more years.)

When I was in high school, God drew me to Himself, and Jesus changed everything for me. God's Son gave me my first glimpses of the Creator.

When Moses said to God, "Show me your glory," God responded, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you... but you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (Exodus 33:18-20, NIV).

Moses saw God, but not God's face, yet in another sense "the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11, NASB).

God "lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see" (1 Timothy 6:16, NIV). Sinful humans were rightly terrified by the prospect of

seeing God. Samson's father, Manoah, who after seeing the angel of the Lord, told his wife, "We are doomed to die! We have seen God!" (Judges 13:22, NIV).


Yet—and this is really striking to me—Job cried out with this ancient hope, and solid confidence: "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (Job 19:25-27, NIV).

To actually see God and not be struck dead? Job was given a promise of something that, before the incarnation of Jesus, was unthinkable!

The God who lives in unapproachable light became approachable in the person of Jesus (John 1:14). In fact, it was Jesus Himself who made God visible to us: "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known" (John 1:18).

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father." Jesus answered: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:8-9, NIV). Jesus also said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (Matthew 5:8, NIV).

*Continued on next page >>*



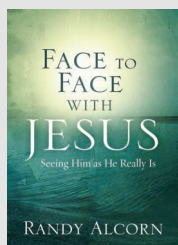
This anticipated what God promises we'll experience after the resurrection, on the New Earth: "No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face" (Revelation 22:3-4, NIV).

"Without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14, NIV). For us to see God would require us to undergo radical transformation

between now and then. And that's *exactly* what will happen.

By faith in Christ, God's children already have His righteousness, which will allow us into Heaven (see Romans 3:22; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Because we stand completely righteous before God in Christ, once we're glorified and forever made sinless, we'll be able to see God and live!

Incredible. Yet absolutely true! ■



For more on Jesus and the anticipation of seeing Him, check out Randy's book *Face to Face with Jesus*, which includes 200 entries focused on the person and character of Jesus.

As you reflect on who Jesus is and what He's done for you, you'll be encouraged to know and love Him more deeply, experience transformation as you meditate on Him, anticipate eternal life with Christ, and see how that changes your perspective today.

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

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## Partner with Us in Reaching Esimbi Speakers

In our last issue, we invited you to join us in honoring our EPM coworker Karen Stout Coleman, who went to be with Jesus last year, by giving to fund a translation of Scripture. She and her family spent 23 years as missionaries in Cameroon involved in Scripture translation work for 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.

We have a short-term goal of raising \$120,000 by September 30, 2020, and to date, over \$27,000 has been contributed. To partner with us, go to [epm.org/donate](http://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's Speaking Engagements

Randy will be speaking several times this year, including at Real Life Ministries in Post Falls, Idaho (May 23 and 26) and at Crossroads Church in Grand Prairie, Texas (August 25). See more details and the full list of speaking events at [epm.org/events](http://epm.org/events).



## NOTES FROM READERS

"Your book *Heaven* fundamentally changed my thinking about eternity. I have recommended it to more people than I can count. What a huge gift to the body of Christ."

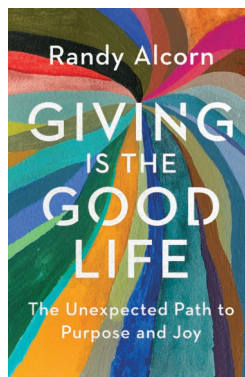
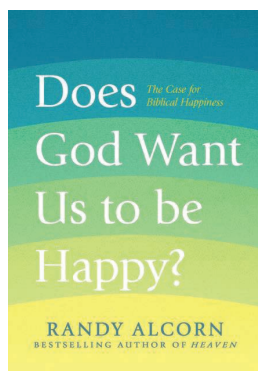
"My family was discussing education and future jobs and my 9-year-old son just used your living for the line, not the dot illustration. It helped me when I read it as a college student, and my kids are being impacted by it as well."

—Readers on Twitter

Watch our video "Live for the Line" and hear Randy share this illustration:  
[epm.org/dotline](http://epm.org/dotline)

## Coming This Summer and Fall

Randy will have two new books out this year: *Does God Want Us to Be Happy?* (August) and *Giving Is the Good Life* (September). To get the latest information about these books, sign up for our email newsletter at [epm.org/connect](http://epm.org/connect).





# We're Not Only to Follow Christ, But Also the Examples of Others Who Do

BY RANDY ALCORN

**I**t's not surprising that Scripture calls upon us to imitate and follow the examples of Christ (1 Peter 2:21) and God the Father (Ephesians 5:1). It's more surprising that we are told to follow the examples of the godly people around us, and to strive, by Christ's help, to be such examples ourselves.

Here's what Scripture has to say:

"Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1, NASB).

"And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, when you received the message with joy that comes from the Holy Spirit, despite great affliction" (1 Thessalonians 1:6, NET).

## *The body of Christ needs to let its light shine before men, and we need models of every spiritual discipline.*

“Remember your leaders, who spoke God’s message to you; reflect on the outcome of their lives and imitate their faith” (Hebrews 13:7, NET).

“Be imitators of me, brothers and sisters, and watch carefully those who are living this way, just as you have us as an example” (Philippians 3:17, NET).

“Set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. ...Do not neglect your gift... Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save [rescue, deliver from bondage] both yourself and your hearers” (1 Timothy 4:12, 14-16, NIV).

“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care...not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:2-3, NIV).

“A disciple is not greater than his teacher, but everyone when fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40, NET).

This is why it’s vital that we become part of a Bible-believing local church. God has His faithful people everywhere, and by becoming actively involved in the local body of Christ we can get to know such people and learn from their examples in different areas—and hopefully, be examples ourselves. (Another way we can be inspired is by reading and discussing biographies of faithful believers, as well as the Christ-centered books others have written.)

Notice how the call to good teaching and good living is integrated in Titus 2, among the young and the older, both men and women:

“But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works,

and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us” (Titus 2:1-8).

As you contemplate these passages, consider that we can only follow an example we’re aware of, one that we can actually see or hear about. The body of Christ needs to let its light shine before men, and we need models of every spiritual discipline. (I’ve written extensively on the question of whether the example of our giving should always be kept secret.) We dare not let the risk of our pride keep us from

faithfully disclosing God’s work in our lives. And if we must be silent to avoid our own pride, we should support others who can humbly testify to Christ’s faithfulness in various areas of their lives.

Puritan William Bates wrote, “Precepts instruct us what things are our duty, but examples assure us that they are possible... When we see men like ourselves, who are united to frail flesh and in the same condition with us, to command their passions, to overcome the most glorious and glittering temptations, we are encouraged in our spiritual warfare.” ■





# The KonMari Method Can Be a Helpful Tool, But as Christians

## LET'S TAKE IT FURTHER

BY STEPHANIE ANDERSON

**SHE'S PETITE AND SOFT-SPOKEN,** but Marie Kondo is a force to be reckoned with. Her book *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* has sold over 1.5 million copies in the U.S., and worldwide her books have sold more than 11 million copies in 40 countries. Most recently, she's at the center of the Netflix series *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo*. It seems most everyone is talking about or at least familiar with the KonMari method of organizing a home.

I read *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, and my husband and I have watched a few episodes from the series. My interest was personal: we have two young daughters and a smaller house (at least, for American standards) and struggle to keep our home as neat and organized as we'd like.

I enjoyed much of Marie's book. I found her ideas useful, and my bookshelves, closets, and kitchen drawers are much improved because of her advice. In fact, as I read, I was reminded of what Randy Alcorn has written about possessions in *The Treasure Principle*: "The greater the mass, the greater the hold that mass exerts. The more things we own—the greater their total mass—the more they pull us into orbit around them. Finally, like a black hole, they suck us in." How freeing to reduce our possessions and to have organized homes that serve our families well!

The KonMari Method can be a helpful tool for many people—including followers of Jesus. It can help us simplify and free us to appreciate what we already own. It can help us say "no" to buying unnecessary items. It can be a good way to start conversations with our neighbors and friends.

But we can share something even greater than the KonMari method. It's not a stopping place, but rather, a starting one.

## Have our possessions (whether we have a lot or a little) taken a place that should be God's alone?

**Most of us have way too much stuff. The solution might include drastically reducing the amount of things we own using the KonMari method, but it definitely should include an examination of our hearts.**

Marie writes in *The Magic Art of Tidying Up*, “Rebound occurs because people mistakenly believe they have tidied thoroughly, when in fact they have only sorted and stored things halfway. If you put your house in order properly, you’ll be able to keep your room tidy, even if you are lazy or sloppy by nature” (p. 14). She encourages readers to change their habits by first changing their way of thinking (p. 15) and says that “Anyone who experiences this process, no matter who they are, will vow never to revert to clutter again” (p. 17).

But given human nature, we need to go a step further. Unless we examine the role our possessions (and our shopping habits!) play in our hearts, we can sort our closets and cabinets all we like, but end up in the same position (or worse) years or even just months later. Or we truly can have the neatest house on our block but be proud of it and just as materialistic as someone whose house is filled to the brim with possessions.

We’re often blind to our materialism, and our culture’s obsession with stuff makes it hard for us to see where the love of things might be encroaching on our hearts. Randy writes this in *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*:

The hardest part of dealing with our materialism is that it has become so much a part of us. Like people who have lived in darkness for years, we have been removed from the light so long that we don’t know how dark it really is. Many of us have never known what it is not to be materialistic. This is why we need so desperately to read the Scriptures, to grapple with these issues, bring them to God in prayer, discuss them with our brothers and sisters, and look for and learn from those rare models of nonmaterialistic living in our Christian communities.

Jesus reminds us, “You cannot serve both God and money” (Matthew 6:24, NIV). Let’s be willing to continually ask God to show us where our possessions (whether we have a lot or a little) have taken a place that should be His alone.

**We should be grateful for the things we own, but our gratitude should extend to the Giver.**

Read Marie’s book or watch the show, and it’s obvious she’s coming from a worldview and religion that is very different from Christianity. One of the first things she does when she enters someone’s home to help them tidy is introduce herself to the house and thank it for taking care of its occupants.

This extends to items, too. Marie writes, “One of the homework assignments I give my clients is to appreciate their belongings. For example, I urge them to try saying, ‘Thank you for keeping me warm all day,’ when they hang up their clothes after returning home” (p. 168).

Although I haven’t started talking to my clothes (and it saddens me to see someone talking to a house, when we are invited to come directly to the Creator of the universe), I actually found this oddly convicting. How often have I been thankful for the small things I use every day, like my water bottle, my hairbrush, or the spatula that helps me make breakfast? But instead of thanking inanimate objects for their service, as Christians we can thank *God* for His generous provision, as the Giver of “every good and perfect gift” (James 1:17). This can increase our happiness as our eyes are opened to the countless ways God abundantly provides for us.

**Figuring out what items “spark joy” can be helpful in determining what we keep. But our greatest happiness isn’t found in keeping certain things for ourselves, but first in knowing Jesus, and then in giving generously to others.**

One of the cornerstones of the KonMari method is sorting items by determining which ones bring you the most happiness. Marie writes, “My criterion for deciding to keep an item is that we should feel a thrill



There is **more**  
happiness in giving  
than in receiving.

—Jesus (Acts 20:35, GNT)

of joy when we touch it” (p. 59). This has encouraged me to ask, “Am I keeping this shirt because I really like it, or just because I got it for a good deal and hate to admit it just doesn’t fit?” and “Am I keeping this gift I was given out of guilt, or because I really do like it?”

This is helpful—as long as we remember that the ultimate source of our joy isn’t the things we keep, but Jesus Himself. Having our sins forgiven and being reconciled to God is the greatest cause of celebration: “May the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; may they be happy and joyful” (Psalm 68:3).

Marie claims, “Putting your house in order is the magic that creates a vibrant and happy life” (p. 127). But as Megan Hill writes for The Gospel Coalition, “Minimalism is not the gospel.”

Tidying can bring joy, but it can’t give human hearts lasting satisfaction. Only Jesus can.

And there’s more. Because Jesus has transformed our hearts, we can follow His call to generously give away our money and possessions. Christ told us there’s more happiness in giving than receiving (Acts

20:35) and commanded us to store up our treasures in Heaven, not our homes (see Matthew 6:20). When we do, we’ll grow more excited over what we *give* rather than just what we keep.

**So being aware of its limitations, go ahead and purge, sort, and tidy using the KonMari method.**

But remember that we have something far better than a human system for organizing. May we rejoice that because of knowing Christ, we can be free from the love of things, our best possessions are eternal, our joy in the Lord is boundless, and our greatest happiness comes in giving to glorify Him. ■

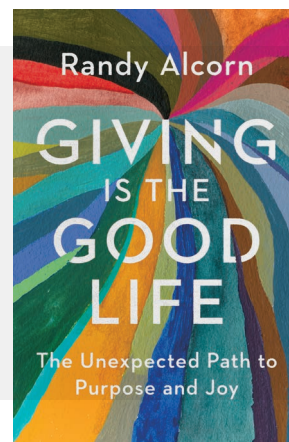
Stephanie Anderson is the communications and graphics specialist at EPM. She works on design projects and the *Eternal Perspectives* magazine, provides editorial support, and helps with Randy’s blog and social media.



COMING  
SEPTEMBER  
2019!

In *Giving Is the Good Life: The Unexpected Path to Purpose and Joy*, Randy Alcorn teaches life-changing biblical principles of generosity and tells stories of people who have put those radical principles into practice. These real-life models give you not just words to remember but footprints to follow. *Giving Is the Good Life* reveals a grander view of God and generosity—and teaches us what the good life is really all about.

Learn more about the book in our next magazine or visit [epm.org/goodlife](http://epm.org/goodlife).



# Conviction or Accusation?

## How Can I Tell the Difference Between the Conviction of the Holy Spirit, and Satan's Accusations?

ANSWERED BY RAY ORTLUND

"He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8).

"... the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down . . . ." (Revelation 12:10).

How can we tell the difference between the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit and the accusing attacks of Satan? Some thoughts:

1. The Holy Spirit puts His finger on a specific sin I have committed, something concrete I can own and confess, but the accusations of Satan are vague and simply demoralizing.

2. The Holy Spirit shows me Christ, the mighty Friend of sinners, but the devil wants me spiraling down into negative self-focus.

3. The Holy Spirit leads me to a threshold of new life, but the devil wants to paralyze me where I am.

4. The Holy Spirit brings peace of heart along with a new hatred of sin, so that I bow before Jesus in reconsecration, but the devil offers peace of mind with smug relief, so that I fold my arms and say, "There, that's over with."

5. The Holy Spirit helps me to be so open to God that I allow Him to control the conversation, but the devil tempts me to take off the table certain questions I just don't want God to talk to me about.

We are thankful for our dear Friend, the Holy Spirit. ■

*Ray Ortlund is senior pastor of Immanuel Church in Nashville, Tennessee, the president of Renewal Ministries, and a Council member of The Gospel Coalition. He has authored a number of books, including Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel.*



# Waiting



What can  
we do when  
God seems  
silent and  
life is dark?

BY RANDY ALCORN

# WHEN GOD SEEMS SILENT

**IN A TIME OF SUFFERING**, David engaged in righteous self-talk about how he should respond in light of God's goodness: "Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!" (Psalm 27:14).

The call to wait on God is an invitation to trust and hope. It entails believing that one day—even if today is not that day—He will make all things right. In times of waiting, as we seek God in prayer, we must learn to *listen* to Him as well as talk to Him—to shut out the clatter and quietly wait as He unfolds to us His person, purposes, promises, and plan.

But what about when we wait and listen, and God still seems silent?

## GOD IS NEAR

In *Deserted by God?* Sinclair Ferguson discusses what our Christian forefathers called "spiritual desertion"—the sense that God has forgotten us, leaving us feeling isolated and directionless. But through faith, we can affirm God's loving presence, even when He seems silent and we feel deserted. "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you" (James 4:8) is a promise God will not break, despite how we feel.

Several years ago, for no apparent reason, I went through four months of depression. I had to learn to trust God for His presence despite what I felt.

Eventually, as I continued to open His word daily and seek His face, while still in that depression, I gradually regained my ability to sense and hear Him.

Many of us have walked the Emmaus road (Luke 24:13–32). Overwhelmed by sorrow. Plagued by questions. We wonder where God is. When, all along, He walks beside us.

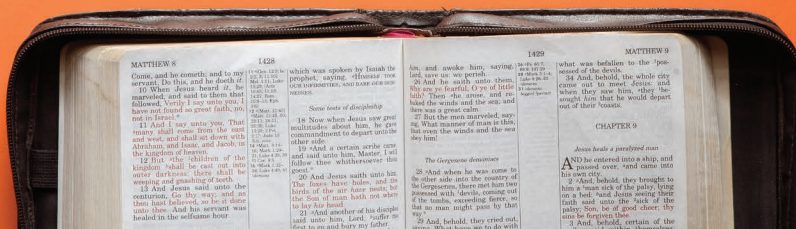
## IS THIS YOUR BEST FOR ME?

A pastor friend told me about his experience after his teenage son's death: "Nearly every morning, for months, I screamed questions at God. I asked, 'What were you thinking?' And, 'Is this your best for me?' And finally, 'Do you really expect me to show up every Sunday and tell everyone how great you are?' Then, when I became silent, God spoke to my soul. He had an answer for each of my questions."

Waiting on God involves learning to lay our questions before Him. It means that there is something better than knowing all the answers: knowing and trusting the only One who *does* know and will never forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

Trusting God when we don't hear Him ultimately strengthens and purifies us. If our faith is based on lack of struggle and affliction and absence of doubt and questions, that's a foundation of sand. Such faith is only one frightening diagnosis or shattering phone call away from collapse. Token faith will not

# THERE'S A SENSE IN WHICH God is never silent



survive the dark night of the soul. When we think God is silent or absent, God may show us that our faith is false or superficial. Upon its ruin, we can learn to rebuild on God our Rock, the only foundation that can bear the weight of our trust.

## HIS SILENCE IS A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE

There's a sense in which God is never silent. He has already spoken in His Word and by becoming man and dying for us on the cross, purchasing our eternal salvation. This is speech, and speech is not silence! What we call God's silence may actually be our inability, or in some cases (certainly not all) our unwillingness, to hear Him. Fortunately, that hearing loss for God's children need not be permanent. And given the promise of resurrection, it certainly won't be permanent.

Psalms 19:1 tells us the heavens shout about God's glory. Romans 1:20 shows how clearly creation proves God's existence. God speaks not only through His Word, but also through His world. When my heart is heavy, walking our dog Maggie or riding a bike through Oregon's beauties is often better than listening to a great sermon or reading a good book.

Still, when we can't hear God, we can keep

showing up and opening His Word, day after day, to look at what He has already said—and done—and contemplate and memorize it until we realize this is not silence but *is* God speaking to us. Naturally, there remains a subjective sense in which we long to hear God in a more personal way. God spoke to Elijah in “a low whisper” (1 Kings 19:12).

The problem with low whispers is they're not easy to hear—especially when all around us the wind is howling! Why does God sometimes speak so quietly that it's hard to hear Him? The answer may be to bring us to the end of ourselves. To prompt us to be still and seek Him. And to build our faith and eventually speak more clearly or heal our hearing problem.

## WHEN LIFE GOES DARK

Martin Luther's wife, Katherine, saw him discouraged and unresponsive for some time. One day she dressed in black mourning clothes. Luther asked her why. “Someone has died,” she said. “Who?” Luther asked. “It seems,” Katherine said, “that God must have died!” Luther got her point. Since God hadn't died, he needed to stop acting as if He had.

What can we do when God seems silent and life is dark? We can pray with biblical writers who cry out to God:

To you, O Lord, I call; my rock, be not deaf to me, lest, if you be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit. (Psalm 28:1)

O God, do not keep silence; do not hold your peace or be still, O God! (Psalm 83:1)

I cry to you for help and you do not answer me; I stand, and you only look at me. (Job 30:20)

We also can remember that, however long the silence seems, God promises it is temporary. Consider Zephaniah 3:17:

The Lord your God is in your midst, A victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, he will be quiet in his love, he will rejoice over you with shouts of joy (NASB).

Just because we can't hear God exulting doesn't mean He is not rejoicing over us with shouts of joy. A blind or deaf child may not see her father's face or hear his words, but can learn to sense his love and

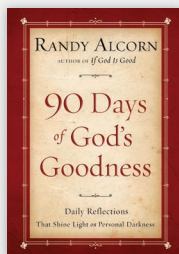
affection nonetheless. The blood-bought promise states that this brief life will be followed with an eternity in which His children "will see his face" (Revelation 22:4).

## MY SOUL WAITS FOR GOD

My wife, Nanci, while going through chemotherapy treatments that ended several months ago, read me this from Andrew Murray's *Waiting on God*: "It is God's Spirit who has begun the work in you of waiting upon God. He will enable you to wait. . . . Waiting continually will be met and rewarded by God himself working continually."

"For God alone my soul waits in silence . . . my hope is from him" (Psalm 62:1, 5). If we lean on Him while we wait, God will give us the grace to wait and to listen carefully as we pray, go to trusted Christ-followers for encouragement, and keep opening His word and asking Him to help us hear Him. ■

**If the Lord Jehovah makes us wait, let us do so with our whole hearts; for blessed are all they that wait for Him. He is worth waiting for. The waiting itself is beneficial to us: it tries faith, exercises patience, trains submission, and endears the blessing when it comes. The Lord's people have always been a waiting people. —CHARLES SPURGEON, *THE TREASURY OF DAVID***



In Randy's devotional *90 Days of God's Goodness*, you'll be continually guided into a deeper glimpse of God's loving ways and higher purposes—the very things we're often most blinded to whenever we battle pain and anguish. You'll become convinced that God's love in Christ Jesus is a bigger, stronger answer than the most troublesome questions you've ever faced.

Read an excerpt and order at [epm.org/90days](http://epm.org/90days).

# You Need an Older, *Bolder* Friend

BY MARISSA HENLEY

I invited Katherine to lunch that day because I knew she'd tell me the truth. I was pressuring my husband into a major financial decision—behavior I knew was wrong but was rationalizing in many ways. I needed someone to lovingly set me straight.

Katherine didn't disappoint. She is my older, bolder friend.

Over the years, God has provided various older women as teachers and examples. In my 20s, I looked up to the women whose children I babysat. In my 30s, it was the older women who led a summer Bible study for young moms. Now in my 40s, I often turn to Katherine for advice. She and my mom have been friends since before I was born. I know she loves me and wants the best for me—and she knows my best means growth in Christlikeness.

Do you have an older, bolder friend? Here are three reasons to commit to spending time with someone who can offer counsel from a deep well of biblical wisdom and life experience.

## 1. Older Friends Are More Likely to Be Bolder Friends

I shared my sin struggle with Katherine that day because I knew she would offer a different perspective from friends my own age. My peers are more likely to excuse my behavior because they struggle with the same issues or because they don't want to rock the boat of our friendship.

Proverbs 27:6 says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy." I don't need someone to excuse my sin; I need a friend willing to risk hurting my feelings for the sake of my sanctification.

Because Katherine is a mentor-friend and not a peer, she's wise and bold. Older women have learned from experience that true friendships can bear the weight of confrontation and emerge stronger. She's less concerned about offending me and more concerned about how my sin offends the Lord. She cares more about my marriage than what I think of her. She speaks the truth gently, but she doesn't shy away from hard conversations.

When I share a struggle with Katherine, she doesn't make excuses for my sin or merely commiserate with me about the difficulty of marriage or parenting. She gently asks probing questions to reveal the sin beneath the surface. She encourages repentance rather than rationalization. And she reminds me of the truth of the gospel: Because I've been saved by Christ's life, death, and resurrection, I can persevere in holiness for His glory until He makes me perfect in Heaven.

## 2. Older, Bolder Friends Offer the Benefit of Hindsight

Our peers are in the trenches with us. They're struggling to cope with the pressure of others' expectations, to navigate shifting roles with aging parents, or to keep a marriage fun with a house full of toddlers. Don't get me wrong—these friendships are valuable. Yes, we need our "I struggle too" friends, but we also need a "here's what to do" friend.

Katherine is a pioneer who's journeyed through my season of life and gained the benefit of hindsight. She's a guide with greater wisdom, life experience, and time in God's Word. As Proverbs 16:31 puts it, "Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life."



My older, bolder friend has seen how sinful patterns that start in our 30s or 40s have long-term ramifications in our 50s and 60s. She can look beyond my current circumstances and see how my choices will play out down the road—because she’s seen this before. Her gift of hindsight allows her to give warnings and encouragement from decades my peers haven’t lived.

### 3. Older, Bolder Friends Walk with Us in Wisdom

Katherine has been studying God’s Word and applying the gospel to her life for about three decades longer than I have. Her heart and mind are a treasure chest of wisdom, understanding, and insight. Scripture is constantly on her lips.

She doesn’t give the impression that she’s arrived at perfection. She honestly shares her own struggles and reminds me that we’re in this process of sanctification together. But every trial the Lord has brought her through, every temptation she’s battled, every hour she’s spent in God’s Word has moved her farther along wisdom’s path. I’m grateful she’s willing to turn around and share what she’s learned with a younger sister who’s a few hundred miles behind.

Proverbs 13:20 says, “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.” Walking with my wise friend encourages me

to keep studying God’s Word and growing in the gospel.

When Katherine and I had lunch that day, she lovingly pointed out my discontentment, selfishness, and lack of gratitude for what God has given me. She reminded me of the Lord’s goodness and encouraged me to wait on His timing. She tenderly turned me away from causing damage in my marriage and guided me back onto the path of submitting to my husband and to the Lord.

If you don’t have a Katherine in your life, ask God to provide the right woman. Ask Him for courage to risk vulnerability and gain the benefit of her wisdom. It may be that, a few years from now, the wisdom you gain becomes the thing that makes *you* someone else’s older, bolder friend. ■

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*Marissa Henley, author of Loving Your Friend through Cancer, is a cancer survivor who writes and speaks about faith, friendship, Scripture, and suffering. She lives in Northwest Arkansas with her family. Learn more at [marissahenley.com](http://marissahenley.com).*



*This article was originally published on The Gospel Coalition’s website, at [thegospelcoalition.org/article/you-need-older-bolder-friend](http://thegospelcoalition.org/article/you-need-older-bolder-friend).*



# GOD INVITES YOU TO *Delight* YOURSELF IN HIM

BY RANDY ALCORN

**P**salm 37:4 is a great but often misunderstood verse: “Delight yourselves in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.” Some people take this to mean that God will give us whatever we think we want. But the key part is “delight yourself in God.” When we delight in the Lord He often *changes* our heart’s desires to what most honors Him, *then* grants them to us. It’s not that we always get what we want, but that He teaches us to value and even want what He—in His sovereign and loving plan—gives us.

As we contemplate God, and ponder who He is, we will want what He wants. The desire of our hearts will be to hear Him say to us, “Well done.”

And when that day comes, He will flood us with more joy than we can imagine. He will say, “Enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:21, 23).

But we don’t have to wait until we die to know how He wants us to live! He commands us, for His glory and our good, to delight in Him not just in Heaven forever, but also on this present earth, *here and now*.

To delight in God is to be happy with Him and in Him. To do that, we must cultivate our relationship with Him just as we do with other people by spending time with Him, bowing our knee before Him as our Lord, and also spending time with Him as our friend. That’s how we get to know Him, by learning



and meditating daily on what's true about Him. (I recommend these great books: *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* by A.W. Tozer, and *Trusting God* by Jerry Bridges.)

In Bible study it's always helpful to think about what the text says in contrast to what it does *not* say. It says, "Delight yourself in the Lord." It doesn't say, "Sit there and wait for the Lord to come and delight you."

It's active, not passive. God doesn't spoon-feed us His pleasures; we need to go to His banquet, reach out our hands, and select that delicious cuisine. As surely as it's our responsibility to put good food in our mouths, it's our responsibility to move our bodies to open His Word and move our minds toward God, and to seek to delight in Him!

While it's true that God and His Word are nourishing, just knowing that won't bring us to the table. We need to turn from our self-preoccupied thoughts and instead seek to cultivate our appetite for God: "Taste and see that the Lord is good. How happy is the man who takes refuge in Him!" (Psalm 34:8, HCSB).

When I contemplate Christ—when I meditate on His unfathomable love and grace—I lose myself in Him instead of in my hurts and disappointments and fears. When He's the center of my thinking, before I know it, I'm happy.

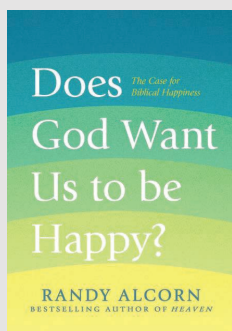
Here's the Good News Translation's rendering of Psalm 37:4: "Seek your happiness in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desire." This corresponds to the words of Jesus: "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need" (Matthew 6:33, NLT).

Augustine said, "Love God and do as you please." At first this sounds shocking, but it fits perfectly with "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will grant you the desires of your heart." When we find our happiness in God, we will naturally want to do what pleases Him. But it's up to us to go to Him and ask for His help and empowerment to delight in Him.

God placed just one restriction on Adam and Eve in Eden, and when they disregarded it, the universe unraveled. On the New Earth, that test will no longer be before us. God's law, the expression of His attributes, will be written on our hearts (Hebrews 8:10). No rules will be needed, for our hearts will be given over to God. We will *always* delight ourselves in the Lord and He will *always* give us the desires of our hearts.

Whatever we want will be exactly what He wants for us. What we *should* do will at last be identical with what we *want* to do. On God's New Earth there will never be any difference between duty and delight!

But we don't have to wait, and we dare not, to discover this. Let's delight ourselves in Him so that we can enter into His happiness *now*, not just after we die. ■



Browse Randy's books on happiness at [epm.org/happinessbooks](http://epm.org/happinessbooks).

**New this year:** *Does God Want Us to Be Happy?* releases August 2019, and is adapted from Randy's 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. Preorder your copy at [epm.org/happy](http://epm.org/happy) for the introductory price of \$10.99 (EPM's everyday low price \$11.99, retail \$14.99)!

A photograph of a woman's hands clasped together on a dark, textured metal table. She is wearing a white t-shirt and a blue and white beaded necklace. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with greenery and a body of water.

# What Not to Ask Someone Suffering

Asking "How are you?" to a grieving friend might feel natural, caring, and inviting. But many grieving people find this question difficult.

BY NANCY GUTHRIE

People ask me all the time what to say and what to do for people who are grieving the death of someone they love. And I'm glad they ask. I'm glad they want to know what is really helpful and meaningful, and what is completely unhelpful and actually hurtful. And I wish I could tell you that I always know myself what to say. But sometimes words fail me. And I wish I could tell you that I never say the wrong thing. But I do. In fact, a few days ago, I made the mistake I often tell other people not to make.

The minute I said it I wished I hadn't. I should know better. But it's just what came out. Maybe it's what comes out when you talk to grieving people too. Here's what I said. Or more accurately, what I asked:

*How are you?*

It doesn't seem so wrong, does it? It's a question that reveals that we care. It lets the person know we haven't forgotten about their loss. Really it is an invitation for the grieving person to talk about their loss. But many grieving people say they simply hate the question. They feel put on the spot to report on

their job performance in this task they've been given—continuing to live when their loved one has died—a task for which they had no training and for which they seem to have no resources. It's a question they don't know how to answer. "I'm fine" isn't quite right. They may be functioning, and perhaps even feeling better, but they know they're not "fine." "I'm terrible" seems whiney. "I'm angry!" seems unacceptable. "I'm crying all the time" seems pathetic.

### Something Is Wrong

"How are you?" is one of those questions that always bothered my husband, David, in those days after our daughter, and later our son, died. He always felt like he was supposed to quantify his progress back toward normalcy. In our book *When Your Family's Lost a Loved One*, he wrote, "In the midst of my own pain and confusion, I suddenly also felt responsible to others to give an account for my progress. As the words of my reply came measured through my lips, I wondered if my report would be acceptable."

The grieving person knows what the questioner most likely wants to hear—that everything is getting better, the world is getting brighter, the darkness is lifting, and the tears are subsiding. But oftentimes that just isn't the way it is, and it is awkward to be honest about the confusion, listlessness, and loneliness of grief. The reality of grief is that sometimes right after the loss we feel strong, but as time passes, and the reality of life without that person settles in, we feel weak and weepy. And it's awkward to talk about.

We're afraid that if we tell you how sad we are, you might think there is something "wrong" with the way we're doing this grief thing. We're afraid you will assume we should be on a steady upward path toward normalcy and that we're going in the wrong direction. Sometimes we want to scream that we will never be "normal" again. And sometimes we just want to say, "How am I? I'm sad. And I wish the world—including you—would simply give me some time and space to simply be sad. This person I loved has died and I miss him. He mattered to me and therefore it makes sense that I would not get over his absence easily or quickly."

### What Should You Say?

So, as you interact with someone going through the lonely adjustment of grief, what should you ask in place of "How are you?" Here are some ideas:

*What is your grief like these days?* This question assumes that it makes sense that the person is sad and gives him the opportunity to talk about it.

*I can't imagine how hard it must be to face these days without (name of person who died). Are there particular times of day or days of the week you're finding especially hard?* Keep on saying the name of the person who died. It is music to the grieving person's ears.

*I find myself really missing (name of person who died) when I . . .* It is a great comfort for the grieving person to know that he or she is not the only one who misses the person who died.

*I often think of you when I'm (gardening/driving by your house/going for a walk/getting up in the morning/etc.) and whisper a prayer for you to experience God's comfort. Are there particular things I could be praying for you as you go through this time of grief?*

*I know that (name of the person who died)'s birthday/deathday is coming up and it must be so very hard to anticipate that day without him/her here. What are you thinking about that day? Is there anything we could do to help you get through that day?*

*I know a holiday, Mother's Day/Father's Day/your anniversary, is coming up. I will be especially thinking of you and praying for you as that approaches. We would love to have you over. Would you join us?*

In a sense, all of these questions are asking, "How are you?" but somehow they express a desire to enter into the sorrow of another instead of merely getting a report on their sorrow. In this way we come alongside to "bear one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:2). ■

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Nancy Guthrie, the author of numerous books, teaches the Bible at her home church in Tennessee, as well as at conferences around the country and internationally. She offers biblical insight to the grieving through *Respite Retreats* that she and her husband, David, host for couples who have faced the death of a child, and through the *GriefShare* video series. Learn more at [nancyguthrie.com](http://nancyguthrie.com).



# How Should We Respond to Those Who Reject Jesus Because Some Christians Are Hypocrites?

BY RANDY ALCORN

**A**ll of us probably know co-workers or family members or neighbors who say they reject Jesus because some of His followers are hypocrites. How should we respond to this? First, I think we should acknowledge to our skeptical friends that there are indeed many hypocrites. (And if *you* are a hypocrite, then repent, ask forgiveness, and trust God to empower you to no longer be one. And if it happens again, repent again, and get help from those walking with Jesus who can hold you accountable.)

But we also need to explain to our unbelieving friends that it makes no sense at all to reject Jesus because some of His followers, including us, can sometimes be hypocritical!

What, after all, is the gospel all about? Is it about us? No! Consider what we're told in Acts 16:29-31:

The jailer...fell trembling before Paul and Silas... and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household" (NIV).

It's notable that Paul and Silas were in jail and instead of complaining about it, were singing songs of praise to God. So yes, their example was important. The jailer wouldn't have been drawn to their faith had they not been visibly different than the average prisoner. The same is true for us in our neighborhoods and workplaces and locker rooms. People should see Jesus in us.

However, note what Paul and Silas did *not* say to the jailer: "Believe in *us*—since we're so great—and you will be saved." No, they said, "Believe in *Jesus* and you'll be saved." The Good News is not about how great you and I are (thank God for that). It's



about how great *Jesus* is and the wonderful things He's done for us.

Regarding the problem of hypocritical Christians keeping people from believing, we should point out that this is true of all groups, not just Christians. Many people of all sorts, including atheists and agnostics and Hindus, don't live consistently with what they profess to believe. (For instance, some of the most intolerant people I know pride themselves on their tolerance, and are blind to their own intolerance, e.g. toward the sincere beliefs of Christ-followers.)

In other words, Christians don't own the monopoly on hypocrisy. Furthermore, there are plenty of humble and lovable Christians. People need to open their eyes and see them. Unfortunately, the attention typically falls on false Christians or loudmouths or hypocrites.

This is all part of Satan's diversionary tactics. But the gospel is all about Jesus. The Jesus that Christians believe in is good, even when His followers violate His teachings. The Bible never says you have to believe in Christians to be saved. It says you have to believe in Jesus, who said, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6, RSV). He's the One we're invited to come and see (John 1:46). He's the only One who can save and transform us.

As Tim Keller puts it, "Jesus himself is the main argument for why we should believe Christianity." That's the life-changing truth, and that should be the message we share. ■



# MAKING THE PROLIFE CASE FOR LIFE, IN 250 WORDS

Scott Klusendorf, president of Life Training Institute ([prolifetraining.com](http://prolifetraining.com)) and author of *The Case for Life*, provides this simple and straightforward argument for human life. —Randy Alcorn

**B**y all means, [we should] preach a biblical view of human value. But students in local churches also need to know how to make an essential pro-life argument and convey it to non-Christians. The basic shape of that argument looks like this:

Premise #1: It is wrong to intentionally kill innocent human beings.

Premise #2: Abortion intentionally kills innocent human beings.

Conclusion: Therefore, abortion is morally wrong.

Pro-life advocates defend that argument with science and philosophy.

We argue from science that the unborn are distinct, living, and whole human beings. You didn't come *from* an embryo; you once *were* an embryo.

We argue from philosophy that there is no relevant difference between *you the embryo* and *you the adult* that justifies killing you at that earlier stage of development. Differences of size, level of development, environment, and degree of dependency are not good reasons for saying you could be killed then but not now.

Instead of arguing at a fever pitch, Christian students can be taught to ask thoughtful questions aimed at giving people something to think about. Two of my favorites are,

"Do you believe that each and every human being has an equal right to life, or do only some have it based on something none of us share equally?"

and,

"If it's wrong to hurt people because of skin color or gender, why is it okay to hurt them because they are smaller, less developed, or in a different location?"

The goal of asking is not dominance but thoughtful engagement. ■





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