

Eternal Perspectives

with founder and author Randy Alcorn

Spring 2010

Lifestyles *of the Rich and Worry-Free*

Investment with returns that are out of this world



ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

The Paradox of the Cross | EPM Celebrates 20 Years

a publication of Eternal Perspective Ministries

Randy's speaking schedule

April 10–11, 2010 | Oak Hills Church
(Max Lucado) San Antonio, Texas
www.oakhillschurchsa.org

April 24, 2010 | The North at Good Shepherd
Community Church in Boring, Oregon
www.goodshepherdcc.org

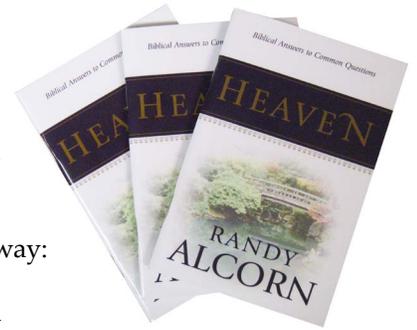
April 30–May 2, 2010 | Clarus Conference
(with Wayne Grudem) Albuquerque, New Mexico
www.desertspringschurch.org/clarus/

May 13, 2010 | Mom to Mom Q & A at Good
Shepherd Community Church in Boring, Oregon
www.goodshepherdcc.org

May 15–16, 2010 | Main services at Good
Shepherd Community Church in Boring, Oregon
www.goodshepherdcc.org

The "Give Away 10 in 2010" challenge

How is God challenging you to share the hope of Heaven with those you know and meet? EPM is encouraging you to give away 10 of Randy Alcorn's *Heaven* booklets in 2010.



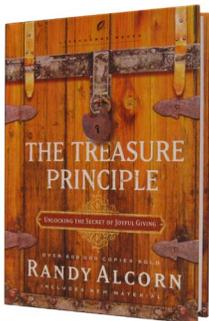
Here are some ideas for giving them away:

- Give a gift basket with goodies and a booklet to your neighbor, friend, relative, co-worker, or someone else who has lost a loved one.
- Leave a booklet for a waiter or waitress who serves you.
- Keep a booklet with you and give it out evangelistically when God provides an opportunity!

Available from EPM in packs of 20 for \$10.00 (retail \$19.80)

We'd love to hear your creative ideas and stories about sharing booklets. E-mail them to info@epm.org

Free audio book download of *The Treasure Principle*



Are you following Randy on Facebook and Twitter?

If not, you'll want to sign up!

April 15 is tax day, but during the week of April 12 to 17, [christianaudio](http://christianaudio.com/epm) (<http://christianaudio.com/epm>) will be offering Randy's Facebook and Twitter followers something **free**—an audio book download of *The Treasure Principle*. Sign up at www.facebook.com/randyalcorn and www.twitter.com/randyalcorn and check back on April 12 for more details!

christianaudio 



www.facebook.com/randyalcorn



www.twitter.com/randyalcorn

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Q When it comes to living the Christian life, where do our efforts come in?



A Scripture says, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Pet. 1:3). So what do we need to live righteously that he has not given us in Christ? Nothing.

The source of strength we call upon is not merely our own, which is insufficient, but God’s, which is infinitely powerful. God says, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). You bring the weakness, he brings the power.

Does any of this imply that it doesn’t take a lot of effort to live the Christian life? Of course not. But notice the intertwining of effort in this partnership with God—“To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me” (Col. 1:29). We must make every effort to be righteous, to obey him, to avoid sinful thoughts and actions. Yet all the while we must do this appealing to his strength, not our own.

One caution is important here. Some people approach the concept of “allowing God to work through me” as if it were some passive condition whereby God invades you and takes over, automatically causing you to live righteously, bypassing your own will. Not true. The spiritual life is warfare. To win the fight you must take on the armor of God and wield the sword of God’s Word, which requires diligence and hard work (Eph. 6:10-18). As J. I. Packer says in his book *Keeping in Step With the Spirit*, “The Christian’s motto should not be ‘Let go and let God’ but ‘Trust God and get going!’”

There is no contradiction between God working in you and you working to follow God. This is the nature of the spiritual partnership he establishes with us. He works, and so must we. If you pray that God will keep your thoughts sexually pure, then turn around and look at pornography, you act in contradiction to your prayer, showing it to be only words. You must demonstrate that you are serious about your prayer by taking all the steps to avoid sexual immorality of the mind and body. In other words, it *matters* what you do. *RA*

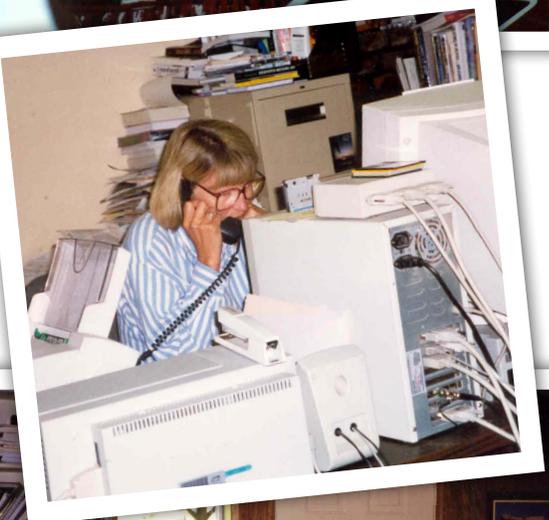
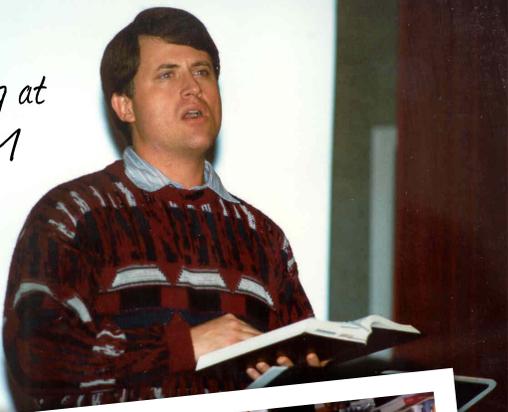
HIS POWER IS PERFECT IN WEAKNESS

You bring the weakness,
God brings the power.

Celebrating 20 years: 1990-2010

Eternal Perspective Ministries then and now

Randy speaking at an EPM dessert in 1993



Kathy Norquist, Randy's assistant, (middle) and Randy hard at work in the basement office in 1997

Then The ministry began in 1990 with the EPM office in the Alcorns' basement. Randy and his wife Nanci were the only employees. In 1997, an office space was added to the Alcorns' home, where EPM resided until 2006.

Now EPM has grown to 10 part-time employees (not including Randy), and has a separate office in Sandy, Oregon, while Randy still works full-time from his home office.

Then Randy had written four books: *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*; *Women Under Stress*; *Christians in the Wake of the Sexual Revolution*; and the *Sexual Temptation Booklet*.

Now Today he has written over 30 books (over 4 million in print), including *The Treasure Principle*, which has sold nearly 1.5 million copies, and *Heaven*, which has sold over 600,000 copies. Various titles of Randy's books have been translated into 26 different languages.

How did Eternal Perspective Ministries begin?

In 1990 Randy was sued by an abortion clinic for his involvement in peaceful, nonviolent rescues. After the abortion clinic won the lawsuit, they were going to garnish his wages from the church where he had been a pastor for 13 years. Randy and his family were faced with a decision. Could he continue as a pastor when the church would be required by law to pay a fourth of his salary each month to the child-killing industry? As a matter of conscience, he had to resign.

Suddenly Randy was without a job he had loved and depended on. For the duration of the legal judgment (originally 10 years, then renewed for another 10), he could never earn more than minimum wage without 25 percent of it being taken by the abortion clinic. So he chose to no longer receive royalties from his books.

But what others intended for evil, God intended for good (Genesis 50:20), and in 1990, Randy and Nanci founded Eternal Perspective Ministries, a nonprofit ministry supported by contributions. It is also the recipient of the royalties from Randy's books, which are given away to missions, famine relief, prolife work, and other ministries. To date, EPM has given away close to \$5.5 million, which includes 100 percent of the book royalties. It may seem strange to contribute to a ministry that gives away far more than it receives. Randy says, "All I can say is, this is how I believe God has led us. I hope our donors have confidence in us, knowing that we freely give what God has entrusted to us. Being dependent on people's giving prompts us to trust God all the more."

The heartbeat of Eternal Perspective Ministries

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Cor. 4:18)

At EPM it's our conviction we must learn to live now with the perspective that will be ours one minute after we die. As there will be no second chance for the unbeliever to go back and live his life over again, this time accepting Christ, so there will be no second chance for the believer to go back and live his life over again, this time serving Christ. Now is our window of opportunity. Now is our chance to follow Christ, speak the truth, and reach out to the needy in love. Now is our chance to invest our lives in eternity.

Randy answers: the future years for EPM?

I hope and pray that if God gives me more years, Eternal Perspective Ministries will be reaching more people—and at a deeper level—first through my books, and also through the EPM website, including my blog, Facebook, and Twitter.

Twenty years ago, we laid out some foundational financial principles which reflect our ministry priorities. My belief is that God raises up some ministries to go on for generations, long outlasting the founder. But in other cases God intends a ministry to serve its purpose in its own generation and then close its doors. EPM is a tool at God's disposal (2 Timothy 2:21), for Him to use how and as long as He chooses. Whether EPM continues for five, ten, twenty, or fifty years, I pray God will continue to be glorified through us.

NOTE: At EPM, we love to give away free services and literature and rarely mention financial needs. However, our board has been concerned that in recent months contributions to our ministry fell significantly. We aren't panicking; we simply believe we should be asking God to provide us with new, likeminded supporters. If God isn't leading you to give to EPM, we don't want you to. If He is, we welcome your partnership. We are deeply grateful to God for our supporters. —Randy Alcorn



EPM staff Catherine Simons (above) and Stephanie Anderson (right) welcome visitors to the current, much more spacious EPM office. It's a good thing, too - we keep adding new books to our shelves!



Win a complete Randy Alcorn library!

In honor of EPM's 20th anniversary, we're giving away a complete set of Randy Alcorn's books (retail value of \$340.76). To enter, fill out the form below and mail it to EPM, or email your name to info@epm.org with "Library" in the subject line. Entries must be received by April 30, 2010. The winner will be randomly drawn and contacted on May 3.

Enter to win a complete Randy Alcorn library from EPM!

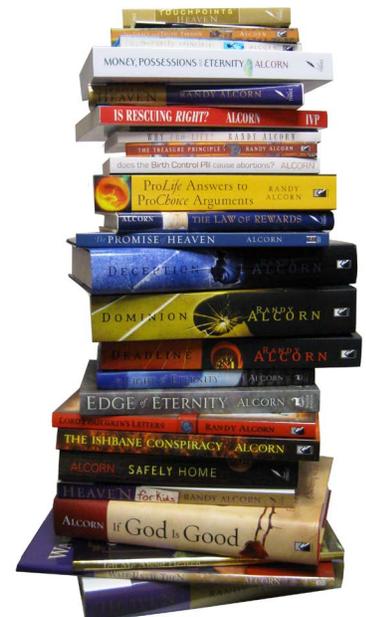
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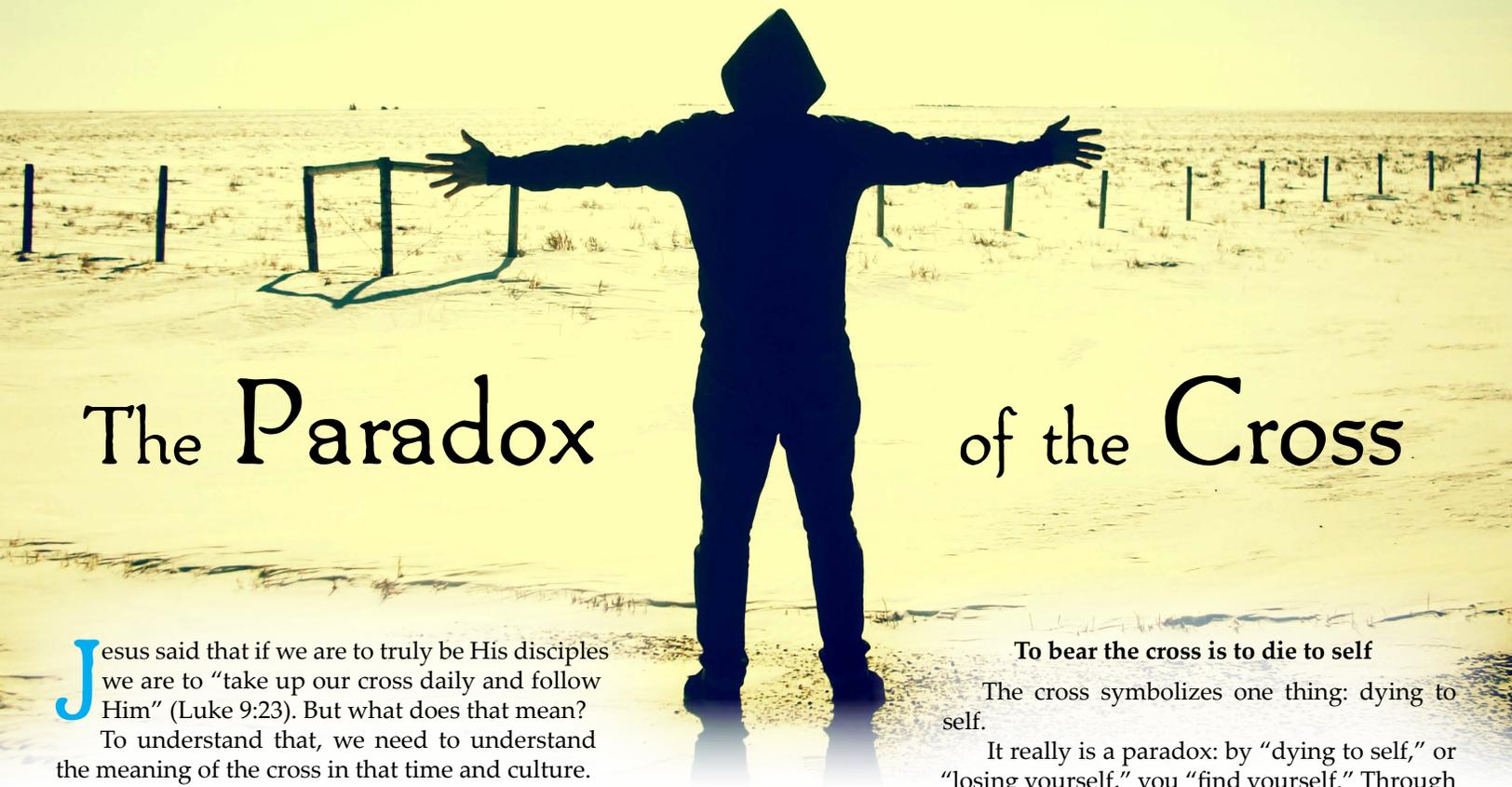
Contact info (e-mail address or phone number) _____

I'd like to sign up for: (Please include your e-mail address above.)

- EPM E-News Update (monthly e-newsletter)
- EPM Prayer Partners (occasional e-mails with specific prayer requests for Randy)

Mail to: Eternal Perspective Ministries, 39085 Pioneer Blvd., Suite 206, Sandy, OR 97055





The Paradox of the Cross

Jesus said that if we are to truly be His disciples we are to “take up our cross daily and follow Him” (Luke 9:23). But what does that mean?

To understand that, we need to understand the meaning of the cross in that time and culture.

The cross has lost most of its original meaning today. It is shrouded in religiousness and mystery. It has become many things, from a religious icon to a fashion element.

When we see the cross today, it is a symbol of faith, particularly the Christian faith.

But in the time when Jesus made that statement, He had not yet died on the cross. So, in its original context, the cross was a symbol of death.

In fact, it was the symbol of a very cruel death. The Romans reserved it for the worst criminals. It was a form of torture and humiliation, ultimately leading to a long and painful death.

A radical symbol

Why would He use the cross to illustrate what it meant to follow Him?

Jesus intentionally used a gruesome symbol to get the people’s attention. He did this to say that following Him was not “child’s play.” It is not a game and it is not easy. In fact, it will cost you to follow Him as a disciple.

But, on the other hand, it will cost you more not to follow Him.

What is the cross we are to bear?

What does it mean to “bear the cross” today?

Often, we hear people say that they have a “cross” to bear. They will say, “My cross is my parents!” Their parents would probably say, “Our cross is our children!”

They identify whatever problem or obstacle they have as their “cross to bear.” But that is not what the cross means.

To bear the cross is to die to self

The cross symbolizes one thing: dying to self.

It really is a paradox: by “dying to self,” or “losing yourself,” you “find yourself.” Through death, you find real life.

What does it mean to “die to self?” So much could be said, but allow me to give you a few practical examples of how this would work in day-to-day living.

To bear the cross means forgiving, instead of harboring that grudge.

It means resisting that temptation to do what everybody else does.

It means not having sex before marriage, and being faithful to your spouse after.

It means putting down the remote control and picking up your Bible.

It means praying when you would rather be sleeping.

It means “swallowing your pride” and telling someone about Jesus.

It means doing what God wants you to do, instead of what you want to do.

Now let me ask you, “Are you dying to yourself and taking up the cross?”

The fact is, when we do this, we experience joy and overflowing life!

Paul summed it up well when he wrote: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). •

The cross symbolizes one thing: dying to self.

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Lifestyles

of the Rich and Worry-Free

By Randy Alcorn

Worry has a way of chasing after us. It tries to grab hold of us, bleed off our energy, and rob us of joy by limiting our vision to a short-sighted perspective of this life's circumstances. That's why one of my favorite passages is Matthew 6:19-34, where Jesus unveils an investment formula for a secure future and a worry-free present.

In this great sermon, Jesus doesn't tell us not to store up treasures. On the contrary, he commands us to store up treasures (v. 20). He's saying, "Stop storing them up in the wrong place (earth), and start storing them up in the right place (Heaven)." He also says "store up treasures for yourselves." When we follow Jesus, we act not only in His best interests but in ours. No matter how difficult the challenges of the moment, we can be assured that "they are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

This was Paul's consuming motivation throughout his life—the prospect of eternal reward from his Master's hand (1 Corinthians 9:24-27), and it was his greatest anticipation at his death (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Most of us see no further than the horizons of this world. To correct our shortsightedness, God prescribes a vision correction that allows us to see through the lens of eternity. Suddenly we realize this present life is but a brief window of opportunity to invest in what will last for eternity.

There's only one kind of investment that's risk-free—and the returns are out of this world.



A Safe Place for Your Money

In Matthew 6, Jesus says there is only one safe place to invest, and that is in the Kingdom of God. He says, in essence, “You can’t take it with you,” but he adds a life-changing corollary: “but you can send it on ahead.”

Practically speaking, what does this mean? Suppose I had access to \$10,000. With it I could buy a new car. Or, I could use the same money to support ten Nigerian or Indian church planters full time for an entire year. If I have an investment mentality, I ask myself, “What’s the better investment for eternity?” Maybe a \$1,500 used car, or no car at all, would serve His Kingdom purposes better than a new one. It would allow me to invest the rest in Heaven, where it will never get scratched, dented, totaled, stolen, or need repair.

To carry that thought further, imagine you are alive near the end of the United States Civil War. You are temporarily living in the South, but your home is really in the North. While you have been in the South you have accumulated a good deal of Confederate currency. Suppose you know for a fact that the North will ultimately win the war, and that the end could come at any time. Now, here’s the critical question—What will you do with all that Confederate money?

If you are smart, you will cash in your Confederate currency for U.S. currency—the only money that will have value in the long run. You will keep only enough Confederate money to meet your basic needs until the war is over.

As Christ’s disciples, we have inside knowledge of a major change in the worldwide social and economic situation. There is a coming holocaust during which no earthly possession will survive (2 Peter 3:10). The currency of this world—its money, possessions, values, fashions, and whims—will be worthless at our death or at Christ’s return, both of which are imminent. This “insider’s tip” should radically affect our investment strategy. To accumulate vast earthly treasures in the face of this knowledge is equivalent to stockpiling Confederate money in a Union economy.

The Big Picture

Financial planners have a hard time convincing people to look down the road instead of just focusing on today, this week, or this year. “Don’t think one year,” they’ll tell you, “think thirty years

from now.” Then they’ll share ways to prepare for thirty years from now by budgeting, saving so much a month, contributing to an IRA, investing in this mutual fund or that real estate partnership.

But it’s only slightly less short-sighted to think thirty years down the road than to think thirty days. The wise man does indeed think thirty years ahead, but far more—he thinks an eternity ahead. He thinks not just to his retirement years, not merely to the end of his earthly life, but far beyond. He plans for the day that he will stand before the Lord, and he prepares for the eternity that will follow.

Following Christ doesn’t always improve our circumstances—some of my circumstances (including my income) would be better if I hadn’t followed the Lord. But better for what? Better for accumulating earthly possessions, but not better for laying up treasures in Heaven and experiencing the exhilaration of trusting God to provide. What following Christ does change is our perspective. The unbeliever’s vision is restricted to the horizons of this world. But we have the big picture. We know this life is the preface to the book, the tune-up to the concert. If we are wise investors, we will spend our lives buying up shares in the world to come.

Why Worry?

After talking about two treasuries and two perspectives, Jesus speaks of two masters, God and Money (Matthew 6:24). We can’t serve both, so we have to make a conscious choice between them. Our Lord immediately follows this by commanding us three times, “Do not worry” (v. 25, 31, 34). The “therefore” of verse 25 tells us that His command not to worry must be understood in light of what He has just stated. In other words, anyone who is investing in the right treasury, adopting the right perspective, and serving the right master has nothing to worry about. In contrast, those who invest in the wrong treasure, adopt the wrong perspective, and serve the wrong master have every reason to worry.

Unlike the pagans who “run after all these things” (v. 32) and “worry about tomorrow” (v. 34), the believer is to follow Christ, live the radical life of faith, and trust God to provide. God is ready to accept full responsibility for a life wholly committed to Him. So why worry?

In Matthew 6:33 Christ doesn’t just say, “All these

[material] things will be given to you.” Instead, He specifically limits that promise to those who fulfill the prior condition of seeking first His Kingdom and His righteousness. Rather than a blanket promise to all, this is a contractual agreement with those who are sold out to Christ and employed in God’s service. Those committed to building their own temporary, financial kingdom receive no such assurances.

It’s no accident that the command not to worry follows the command not to lay up treasures on earth. God warns people “not to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God” (1 Timothy 6:17). None of us is more secure than the object of our trust. If our trust is in material things—a house, a certain job, or people—we set ourselves up to worry. Those things are uncertain; God isn’t.

“The sleep of a laborer is sweet, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep” (Ecclesiastes 5:12). God guards any treasures we put in Heaven, so we can relax. In contrast, we have to restlessly guard the treasures we store up here.

Where Are Your Treasures?

Christ’s radical perspective on money, possessions, provision, and trust raises some practical questions. Do my long-term savings or retirement plans, my insurance policies, my beautiful house, car, or real estate holdings reduce my sense of dependence on God? Do they give me misplaced security? Considering what the money spent on these things would do if directly invested in the Kingdom of God, do I really believe the money is being used in the best way? Am I forfeiting treasures in Heaven by storing up treasures on earth? Am I setting myself up for worry by trusting in the things that cannot bear the weight of my trust?

To those who seek first His Kingdom and sacrificially give of their assets to it, Christ’s promise is material provision (Matthew 6:32-33, Philippians 4:19). Trust Him and there is nothing to worry about. Trust anything else and you’ve got every reason to worry.

With every challenge my family and I have faced over the years, I have found myself thinking more and more about the treasures of Heaven. Every moment of our lives we are one step closer to the world to come, and one step further from this present world. Are we headed toward our eternal treasure or away from it? The choice is ours. •

*If God has control of everything,
and God takes care of his
children, and God gives everything
necessary to those who walk
with him; and if you are his
child, and you are walking with
him—why worry? Worrying
never helps anything anyway—
but has hurt plenty.*

—Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions and Eternity*

CHARLES SPURGEON

on knowing Christ



“Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

—2 Peter 3:18

“Grow in grace”—not in one grace only, but in all grace. Grow in that root-grace, faith. Believe the promises more firmly than you have done. Let faith increase in fullness, constancy, simplicity. Grow also in love. Ask that your love may become extended, more intense, more practical, influencing every thought, word, and deed. Grow likewise in humility. Seek to lie very low, and know more of your own nothingness. As you grow downward in humility, seek also to grow upward—having nearer approaches to God in prayer and more intimate fellowship with Jesus. May God the Holy Spirit enable you to “grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour.” He who grows not in the knowledge of Jesus, refuses to be blessed. To know Him is “life eternal,” and to advance in the knowledge of Him is to increase in happiness.

He who does not long to know more of Christ, knows nothing of Him yet. Whoever hath sipped this wine will thirst for more, for although Christ doth satisfy, yet it is such a satisfaction, that the appetite is not cloyed, but whetted. If you know the love of Jesus—as the hart panteth for the water-brooks, so will you pant after deeper draughts of His love. If you do not desire to know Him better, then you love Him not, for love always cries, “Nearer, nearer.”

Absence from Christ is hell; but the presence of Jesus is heaven. Rest not then content without an increasing acquaintance with Jesus. Seek to know more of Him in His divine nature, in His human relationship, in His finished work, in His death, in His resurrection, in His present glorious intercession, and in His future royal advent. Abide hard by the Cross, and search the mystery of His wounds. An increase of love to Jesus, and a more perfect apprehension of His love to us is one of the best tests of growth in grace.

“I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.”

—Philippians 3:8

Spiritual knowledge of Christ will be a personal knowledge. I cannot know Jesus through another person’s acquaintance with Him. No, I must know Him myself; I must know Him on my own account. It will be an intelligent knowledge—I must know Him, not as the visionary dreams of Him, but as the Word reveals Him. I must know His natures, divine and human. I must know His offices—His attributes—His works—His shame—His glory. I must meditate upon Him until I “comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.”

It will be an affectionate knowledge of Him; indeed, if I know Him at all, I must love Him. An ounce of heart knowledge is worth a ton of head learning. Our knowledge of Him will be a satisfying knowledge. When I know my Saviour, my mind will be full to the brim—I shall feel that I have that which my spirit panted after. “This is that bread whereof if a man eat he shall never hunger.” At the same time, it will be an exciting knowledge; the more I know of my Beloved, the more I shall want to know. The higher I climb the loftier will be the summits which invite my eager footsteps. I shall want the more as I get the more. Like the miser’s treasure, my gold will make me covet more.

To conclude; this knowledge of Christ Jesus will be a most happy one; in fact, so elevating, that sometimes it will completely bear me up above all trials, and doubts, and sorrows; and it will, while I enjoy it, make me something more than “Man that is born of woman, who is of few days, and full of trouble”; for it will fling about me the immortality of the everliving Saviour, and gird me with the golden girdle of His eternal joy. Come, my soul, sit at Jesus’ feet and learn of Him all this day.

From Charles Spurgeon’s daily devotional, *Morning and Evening*.

Go to www.daily-devotional.com to sign up to receive emails with each day’s reading.

Read *Eternal Perspectives* in color

You can view the full color version of the quarterly newsletter online before it even gets to your mailbox! Go to www.epm.org/newsletters.html to download our current newsletter and any past issues.

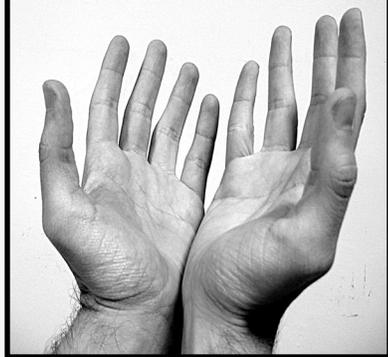
We're very happy to send it to you by mail, but if viewed online, you have the added benefit of seeing it in beautiful color. It also saves EPM printing and mailing costs.

If you currently receive a newsletter in the mail, but would prefer to read it online in color, email info@epm.org. You will be sent an email notification when a new issue is available.

Did you know
you can view this
newsletter online?

prayer is primary

by Randy Alcorn



God's greatest works,
accomplished through
prayer, are often
invisible to us for now.

1 Prayer isn't passive, it's active. It's really doing something. Prayer isn't the least we can do, it's the most.

2 Prayer is supernatural. It's reaching out of the visible world into the unseen world, and tapping into powers beyond this dimension. (Prayer picks fights with demons—and empowers righteous angels to win those fights.)

"Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12).

3 Prayer is never secondary, it's always primary. It's not the last recourse, when options run out; it's the first and best recourse. Prayer is the central work which causes all other work to bear fruit. (No prayer, no power.)

"Therefore put on the whole armor of God...take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the gospel...Pray that I may declare it fearlessly" (Eph. 6:13, 17-20).

4 God's greatest works, accomplished through prayer, are often invisible to us for now. (What's visible to us, except in rare moments of clarity, are not God's greatest works.)

5 We pray now in faith, believing our prayers are making an eternal difference; we anticipate Heaven, where we'll learn God's breath-taking answers to our prayers, including many that seemed unheard and ignored.

6 There is no greater ministry, no higher calling, no better investment than prayer. (It's not just right, it's smart.)

7 Prayer is trusting God that He can accomplish more when I'm on my knees than I can accomplish on my feet. •

Setting a Reading Goal

BY TREVIN WAX

Reading rates are down even as literacy rises. Americans can read; we just don't. Christians tend to read more than non-Christian counterparts, but a quick glance at the book selection in your local Christian bookstore will deflate your bubble of joy. Serious books for serious minds are usually relegated to the back of the bookstore (or occasionally in the bargain bin!).

Several years ago, I began setting a goal of reading 100 books a year. That's roughly two books a week. 2007 was the first year I met the quota. Since then, several people have asked about setting goals for book-reading. Others have asked, "Can it really be done?" Here are some tips to get you started.

Set a reasonable goal.

If you're not already an avid reader, don't try for 100. You might try for 40 or 50 in 2010. Let me encourage you to set the bar high. But don't make it so high you can never make it.

Read everywhere.

Waiting for a haircut? Read. Waiting at the doctor's office? Read. Going on a trip? Read. Watching TV? Read. Taking a bath? Read. Getting dressed in the morning? Listen to an audio book while you're combing your hair, brushing your teeth, taking a shower. Boring sermon? Read. (Just kidding on that last one... although I will admit that as a kid I used to read Scripture if the preacher was making me sleepy.) Get in the habit of reading anywhere and everywhere.

Read faster.

Don't read out loud. Use your finger or a bookmark to follow the lines on the page. Pace yourself so that you are forcing your eyes to take in the lines and paragraphs faster than you normally would read. Stop reading word-for-word, and start reading line-by-line.

Read smarter.

If you're reading an intellectual work, read the introduction and conclusion of the chapter first. Glance at the subtitles and get an idea for where the author is going. Then go back and read the chapter quickly. You will be able to fly through the chapter because you'll already know what the author is saying.

Turn off the TV.

Start using your down time to read good magazines and good books. Don't let entertainment rob you of your brain cells. Wake up a little earlier in the morning to get some reading in (if you can stay awake).

Read what you like.

Find books on topics that interest you. Read widely. Don't get into a rut of only reading one type of book from one theological persuasion. Read some fiction. Read biographies. Read the classics. Mix it up and keep it interesting. If you start a book and don't like it, put it down. Don't slow yourself down by sludging through a book. Better to find another book you like more and read it.

Stretch yourself.

Don't read just what you like. Push yourself to read important books and not fluff. Take a look at what great Christian thinkers are reading and read those books, too. Read famous authors. Read hard books. Just make sure you read hard books in between more enjoyable books so you don't lose your passion for reading. Who knows? You might start liking the books that stretch you.

I hope these words of advice inspire you to set a reading goal in 2010. Happy reading! •

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same
words

Different Meaning

Defining Truth in Postmodern Christianity

By Randy Alcorn

A friend in our church came to me about his nonchristian, theologically liberal sister, a Princeton grad. He had proposed to her they each pick a book and ask the other to read it, and then discuss both books. She picked *A New Kind of Christian* by Brian McLaren. A revealing choice. While McLaren takes the Bible more seriously than she does, as a fairly extreme theological liberal she nonetheless respects his departure from “modernism” (which essentially means evangelicalism, an ironic turn of the phrase since fundamentalists, the parents of evangelicals, fought “modernism,” which meant theological liberalism).

Of course, evangelicalism as a subculture is riddled with any number of failings, and tends to be geared toward a certain audience that can unintentionally exclude postmoderns. These criticisms we should welcome and take seriously and make changes where appropriate. But we dare not throw out the baby of Christian truth with the bathwater of evangelical failings. What’s at stake in this issue is not merely different ideas on how we relate to culture or live out and share the faith—what is at stake is the faith itself, historic Christianity.

When it comes to the issue of objective truth, this is where some churches seem to me to be stepping over the line. Truth is an issue of seismic proportions, and if we have eyes to see, it is everywhere around us. Often we don’t see it, though, because we can have nice conversations at church in which we assume that those we’ve talked with meant the same thing we did when they used certain words. But in fact, they didn’t.

For instance, a teenager comes home from school. Her Christian parent asks, “What did you learn today?”

After an obligatory mumble, she says, “In social science we talked about the importance of being tolerant.”

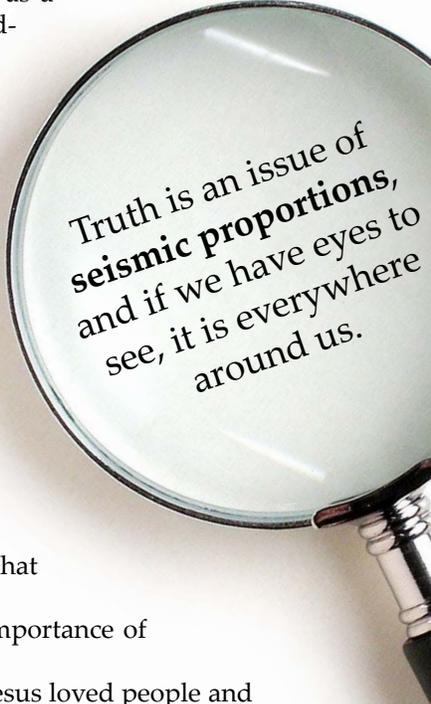
“That’s nice,” the parent says. Daughter talks, and you nod, because you know Jesus loved people and extended them grace, and we should too. A few minutes later the conversation is over, and you walk away having affirmed what she learned in class, without understanding the context and meaning of her culture—and the fact that what you actually affirmed was anti-Christian.

Why? Because the word *tolerant* means two radically different things to you and to her. To you it means being kind and loving to people who think and act in ways you know to be wrong, according to Scripture. To the students and their teacher—and by assimilation even to your Christian teenager unless she is exceptionally well-grounded in Scripture—tolerant means believing that all ways of thinking and acting are equally valid, and NOT wrong.

By believing Jesus is the only way for people to enter Heaven, you are by definition intolerant. By embracing tolerance, in the sense it is most widely used in this culture, our young people (whether or not they state it and regardless of what their church believes) are rejecting the idea that Jesus is the only way.

There are significantly different meanings out there for the old words *truth*, *tolerance*, *love*, *grace*, *redemption*, *salvation*, and even *Christ*. Postmodern evangelicalism does not simply invent new words, which would be far better for purposes of clarity—it uses the same old words and attaches to them new meanings, often meanings contradictory to the original.

It is a mistake to assume a postmodern (or anyone) is just using different words to express old truths. Many resort to saying, it’s “just semantics,” that is, “You and I mean the same thing though we’re using



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different words." What's more common is exactly the opposite—today we are meaning radically different things even though we're using the same words.

When you say you believe in the resurrection, you may mean it as it has always been meant as a doctrine of historic Christianity, or you may mean what one famous minister meant by the resurrection: "Though the remains of Jesus are in an unmarked Palestinian grave, his deathless spirit goes marching on."

For example, Marcus Borg of the Jesus Seminar said, "As a child, I took it for granted that Easter meant that Jesus literally rose from the dead. I now see Easter very differently. For me, it is irrelevant whether or not the tomb was empty. Whether Easter involved something remarkable happening to the physical body of Jesus is irrelevant."

As a child, Borg was right. As an adult—considered a spokesman for Christianity—he couldn't be more wrong. What he calls irrelevant is what Paul considers absolutely vital to the Christian faith: "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins...we are to be pitied more than all men" (1 Corinthians 15:12-58)

Borg does not only commit heresy—he commits one of the most significant heresies possible. He fails to grasp that the physical resurrection of Christ is the cornerstone of redemption, both man's and the earth's. Indeed, without the resurrection and what it means, there is no Christianity left for Borg to be a spokesman for.

Marcus Borg is not young, but he is postmodern and people like him are trying to take Christianity down paths that will make it no longer Christian. But does he believe in the resurrection? Sure. (He's a Christian, after all, right?) He just redefines resurrection in a way that actually denies the resurrection.

The notion that there is no such thing as objective truth—and therefore no objective meaning for words such as the *resurrection* and *grace*—is a natural extension of both our culture's self-preoccupation and mental laziness. It is self-flattery to imagine truth is merely whatever I decide, think, and make of life. It is also laziness. Once people sought truth by going to philosophers and historic religions. Now they sit and watch television and simply absorb worldviews without consciously evaluating them.

Everyone has a worldview, but few really seek to find the right one. The myth that there is no right worldview, that all are equally valid, becomes moral justification for believing whatever I wish, and keeps us from seeking further. One need not go to the trouble of searching for truth if no objective truth exists. If truth is merely whatever I think, at the end of the day—or the end of my life—I will have truth even though I've never expended any effort to find it. (Let's face it, as Christians we can be just as lazy when it comes to

studying and exploring the central doctrines of Christianity, and therefore we can be as gullible, failing to recognize heresy and passing it off as merely a different way of saying—or a fresh way of perceiving—the same old truths).

The bane of fundamentalism is truth without grace. The bane of much postmodern evangelicalism (or post-evangelicalism, if you prefer) is grace without truth. This is tolerance, something much cheaper than grace, and which—unlike grace—doesn't require Christ to empower it.

Tolerance is the world's self-righteous substitute for grace. True grace recognizes truth and sin and deals with it in the most radical and painful way—Christ's redemption. Tolerance recognizes neither truth nor sin, and says "Everything's fine," negating or trivializing incarnation, redemption, and the need for regeneration. Christ came precisely because people are not fine without him.

Francis Schaeffer profoundly affected me and countless other young seeking minds in the '70s. We need to hear voices like his today. And we need to listen carefully as we talk with each other and especially with the young not only just in our culture, but also in our own homes and churches. We need to not simply hear the words they say, but also ask them, "What do you mean?" Then we need to say words back to them, words steeped in Scripture, and explain to them what we mean—which is hopefully what God means—by those revealed words. *R*

"True grace recognizes truth and sin and deals with it in the most radical and painful way—Christ's redemption."

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