



eternal
perspectives

FALL/WINTER 2021

Healing
A PANDEMIC
OF DISUNITY

ALSO INSIDE

What Will We Experience
on the New Earth?

How to Find Peace in an Anxious,
Out-of-Control World



contents

- | | | | | | |
|----|---|----|--|----|---|
| 3 | My Cancer Is God's Servant
Nanci Alcorn | 12 | What Will We Experience on the New Earth?
Randy Alcorn | 17 | Eternal Perspective Ministries: Get to Know Us |
| 4 | Pray for the Persecuted | 13 | Letters from Prisoners | 18 | How to Find Peace in an Anxious, Out-of-Control World
Doreen Button |
| 5 | News from EPM | 14 | The Kindness of Constructive Criticism
Randy Alcorn | 21 | The World Is Busy Promoting Its Catechism—Will We Get Busy Teaching Ours?
Kevin DeYoung |
| 6 | Healing a Pandemic of Disunity
Randy Alcorn | 16 | Christmas Reflections | | |
| 10 | Unborn Children Don't Have to Prove Their Worth
Benjamin Watson | | | | |

about

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

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

Subscribe

Our magazine is sent free to all who request it. To subscribe by mail or to sign up to receive an email notification when the latest edition is posted online, go to epm.org/subscribe.

Permissions

Articles in this publication (and on our website) written by Randy Alcorn may be freely quoted or copied, in part or in whole, provided EPM's name and website are placed on the copy. (If you wish to revise or leave out portions of an article, please submit to us for permission.) Feel free to reproduce this complete magazine, and pass it on to individuals, churches, or groups.

Contact

39065 Pioneer Blvd., Suite 100, Sandy, OR 97055
info@epm.org | 503.668.5200

Donate

EPM is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. All contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law. Donate online at epm.org/donate.

Copyright © 2021 by Eternal Perspective Ministries. Produced and designed by Stephanie Anderson, EPM staff.

connect

-  epm.org
Find resources and purchase books.
-  epm.org/blog
Read Randy's latest blog posts.
-  facebook.com/randyalcorn
Connect with Randy and read daily posts.
- facebook.com/EPMinistries
Follow EPM for the latest news from our office, including promotions.
-  instagram.com/randyalcorn_epm
See EPM's word art featuring quotes from Randy and others.
-  pinterest.com/randyalcorn
Explore and pin quotes and resources.
-  twitter.com/randyalcorn
Read short daily thoughts from Randy.
-  vimeo.com/randyalcorn
Watch videos and messages from Randy.
-  youtube.com/eternalperspectives
Watch and subscribe to Randy's videos.

Stay in touch with us by email

Sign up to receive updates at
epm.org/subscribe

“My Cancer Is God’s Servant”



Note from Randy: As many of you know, my wife Nanci has been battling cancer for over three years now. We are grateful for everyone’s love and prayers, and are fully trusting God in this. Nanci has a big view of God, and a truly eternal perspective. I am very proud of her, and God has ministered to me through her in great ways, including through her writing. She gave permission to share this journal entry. (Read our updates at caringbridge.org/visit/nancialcorn)

BY NANCI ALCORN

Lately I have been immersed in the Psalms. In them the steadfast love of God for His people is expressed during great trouble as well as great blessing. When our hearts begin to grasp the character of God as revealed in His Word, our faith and trust in His ways digs deeper into our souls. The benefits and delights of knowing and obeying God’s Word is the theme of Psalm 119. Here are a few “treasures” found in verses 68-93:

“You are good and do good... it is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes... Your hands have made and fashioned me... Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because I have hoped in your word... I know, O LORD [Yahweh, God’s personal name], that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me... let your mercy come to me, that I may live; for your law is my delight... In your steadfast love give me life, that I may keep the testimonies of your mouth... you have established the earth, and it stands fast. By your appointment they stand this day, for all things are your servants.”

As is God’s promise, my meditation upon these

words brought instruction and great delight to my soul. I jotted down some observations in my journal:

God is good and His deeds are good. His hands have fashioned everything in my life. It is good that He has afflicted me with cancer to:

- Learn His statutes (teach me His ways)
- Place my hope firmly in Him, causing believers to rejoice
- Recognize His righteousness in me
- Confirm His faithfulness to me
- Reveal His mercy to me
- Invoke in me a vibrant delight in His Word
- Use my life to keep His testimonies

Everything in creation has been established by God and is being sustained by God. All things are subject to God’s purpose and will. “All things are God’s servants.”

The benefit and delight I received from these verses is profound. My cancer is God’s servant in my life. He is using it in ways He has revealed to me in these verses and in many more I have yet to understand. I can rest knowing that my cancer is under the control of God who is good and does good. ■



PRAY FOR THE

PERSECUTED

Our Nigerian friend Samuel shared about talking with a church leader in an area of their country experiencing heavy persecution. This leader stood up in a church gathering when they were praying, and asked the believers, “Is God still there? Does He know and care about what is happening to us?” In response, the entire congregation shouted in unison, “God is with us, and He knows what is happening to us!” Another member stood up and proclaimed, “Ko an kashe mu duka an bar mutum daya, zai rike Yesu,” meaning, **“Even if they kill us all and leave one person, he will hold on to Jesus.”**

Samuel wrote, “When I heard these words, I just kept quiet because the words touched my heart very deeply. Believers are killed, their homes and their farmlands destroyed, and the enemy is still threatening to come back and commit more evil, and yet the believers’ faith is very strong.”

Read more about our persecuted brothers and sisters at
epm.org/persecution

You can donate to EPM’s persecuted church special fund, and 100% of donations will be given to worthy organizations helping persecuted believers, including those in Nigeria and Afghanistan.

epm.org/donate

End of Year Donations to EPM

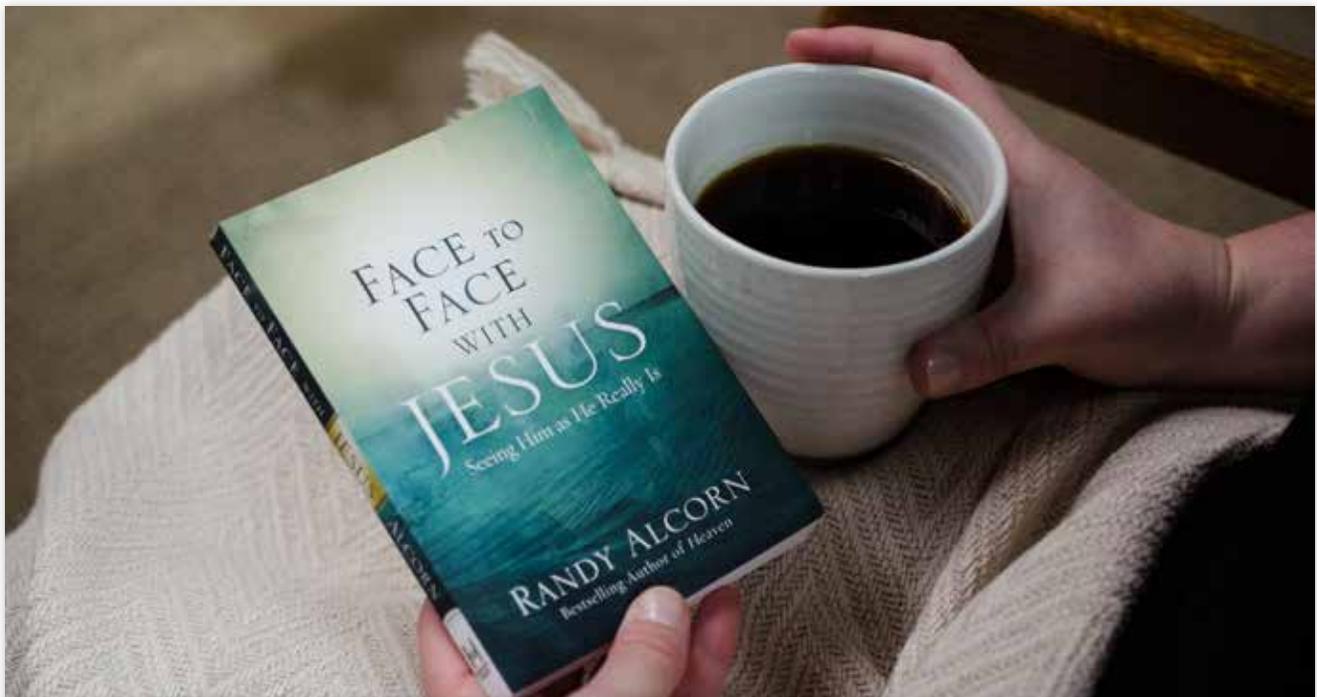
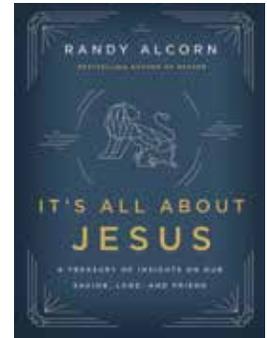
If you have found our books, articles, social media posts, and/or magazine to be helpful, would you prayerfully consider supporting EPM and being a part of this eternity-shaping ministry in 2022? The gifts we receive in December are vital to support our work in the coming year. We are deeply grateful for your partnership through giving and prayer!

Note that a tax-deductible gift at epm.org/donate in 2021 must be received by 11:59 p.m. PT on December 31. If you wish to mail a check, our address is 39065 Pioneer Blvd., Suite 100, Sandy, OR 97055. All envelopes must be postmarked by 12/31/21.

Holiday Specials

This Christmas season, we'll be offering special prices on Randy's books *Face to Face with Jesus*, and *It's All About Jesus*.

Both books make wonderful gifts! The best way to hear about upcoming sales is to sign up for our weekly email newsletter at epm.org/subscribe



Free shipping with code!

Get **FREE** standard (media rate) shipping at epm.org/store
OFFER ENDS DECEMBER 6, 2021.

Use code
FREESHIP21

CONTINENTAL U.S.
ORDERS ONLY.

Please note that due to supply issues and shipping delays, your order may take longer than normal to arrive this holiday season. Thank you for your support and patience.



HEALING A PANDEMIC OF DISUNITY

*The Love of Christians
Is the Gospel's Greatest Defense*

BY RANDY ALCORN

"If an individual Christian does not show love toward other true Christians, the world has a right to judge that he or she is not a Christian."

Francis Schaeffer



read Francis Schaeffer's *The Mark of the Christian* shortly after it was published in 1970. Schaeffer quoted Christ's words in John 13:35: "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Then he cited Jesus's prayer in John 17:21 that the disciples "may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

Schaeffer tied the verses together:

[In John 13:35] if an individual Christian does not show love toward other true Christians, the world has a right to judge that he or she is not a Christian. Here [in John 17:21] Jesus is stating something else that is much more cutting, much more profound: We cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus's claims are true, and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians. (26–27)

A beautiful, biblical slap in the face.

The Final Apologetic

I was 16—a new believer studying how to defend gospel truth to friends and family. Yet Schaeffer called Christian love and unity "the final apologetic," the ultimate defense of our faith.

Schaeffer helped me see what should have been self-evident in Christ's words: believers' love toward each other is the greatest proof that we truly follow Jesus. If we fail to live in loving oneness, the world—or to bring it closer to home, our family, and friends—will have less reason to believe the gospel.

In 1977, some of us who'd struggled at our churches gathered to worship and study Scripture. Before we knew it, God planted a new church. Our fellowship was a breath of fresh air. At 23, as a naive co-pastor, I thought we'd found the secret to unity. But eventually, though our numbers rapidly

increased, too many left our gatherings feeling unloved, not experiencing what Schaeffer called the "reality of the oneness of true Christians."

Our Deep Disunity

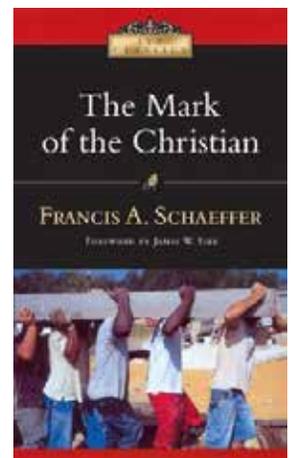
In the 52 years I've known Jesus, I've witnessed countless conflicts between believers. But never more than in the last year. Many have angrily left churches they once loved. Believers who formerly chose churches based on Christ-centered Bible teaching and worship now choose them based on non-essential issues, including political viewpoints and COVID protocols.

Churches are experiencing a pandemic of tribalism, blame, and unforgiveness—all fatal to the love and unity Jesus spoke of. Rampant either/or thinking leaves no room for subtlety and nuance. Acknowledging occasional truth in other viewpoints is seen as compromise rather than fairness and charitability.

Sadly, evangelicals sometimes appear as little more than another special-interest group, sharing only a narrow "unity" based on mutual outrage and disdain. This acidic, eager-to-fight negativity highlights Schaeffer's point that we have no right to expect unbelievers to be drawn to the *Good News* when we obsess about bad news and treat brothers and sisters as enemies.

Playing into Satan's Strategy

The increase in Christians bickering over non-essentials doesn't seem to be a passing phase. And it injures our witness, inviting eye rolls and mockery from unbelievers and prompting believers to



wonder whether church hurts more than it helps.

Satan is called the accuser of God's family (Revelation 12:10) and uses every means to undercut our love for each other. Too often we do his work for him. His goal is to divide churches and keep people from believing the gospel. "By this it is

evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother" (1 John 3:10). When we fail to love each other, *we are acting like the devil's children.*

"Give no opportunity to the devil" (Ephesians 4:27). To resist the devil, we must *love God with abandonment, and love our neighbor as ourselves.* That central principle is the heart and soul of Scripture. "The whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another" (Galatians 5:14–15).

Few words of Jesus are as sobering as these: "I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:36-37, NIV).

Unity of Differing Opinions

When Paul wrote to believers in Rome, he addressed the issues of eating "unclean" meat and which day to worship on—each certainly as if not *more* controversial in the culture of their day as most political issues or COVID responses are to us today. The paradigm-shifting revelation he shared in Romans 14 is this: while true love and unity are never achieved at the expense of primary biblical truths, they *are* achieved at the expense of our personal preferences about secondary issues.

We are to welcome those who think and act



We cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus's claims are true, and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians.

Francis Schaeffer

differently than we do and are "not to quarrel over opinions" (Romans 14:1). Or as the NLT puts it, "Don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong." Love doesn't require wholesale agreement.

"Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let

not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him" (Romans 14:3). Paul emphatically states that equally Christ-centered people can have different beliefs, which lead to them taking different—even *opposite*—actions in faith. They are OK with God and therefore should be OK with us (unless we have higher standards than God).

"One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (Romans 14:5). We can take contradictory positions on nonessential issues but still honor God by valuing love over our opinions.

Pursue What Makes for Peace

As long as we hold our convictions with faith and a good conscience, God Himself approves of people on both sides of nonessential matters. And if God can be pleased both by those who do and don't eat certain foods that were addressed under Old Testament law, and by those who worship on the Sabbath or another day of the week, can't He also be pleased with those who choose to take or not take a vaccine, or to wear or not wear a mask?

"Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another?" (Romans 14:4). God warns us not to set up our own judgment seats as if we were omniscient. Why do we imagine we can know that a brother's or sister's decisions, heart, and motives are wrong?

“Each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another” (Romans 14:12–13). We will not ultimately answer to each other, but we *will* answer to God concerning each other. We lack the qualifications of the only true Judge, including omniscience, infinite wisdom, and righteousness.

“So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. . . . The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God” (Romans 14:19, 22). Peace and edification don’t come naturally; they require Spirit-empowered work.

The call to “pursue” peace (or “make every effort,” NIV) means unless there’s a compelling reason to speak or post, and you’ve sought God’s direction and sense his leading, and you can speak graciously, then do what Scripture says and *keep what you believe between yourself and God*. Having a strong opinion never equals God telling us to express it. Scripture confronts us for how we have treated each other before the watching world:

- “A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion” (Proverbs 18:2).
- “When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent” (Proverbs 10:19).
- “There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing” (Proverbs 12:18).

Steps Toward Love and Unity

“Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Romans 13:8). We don’t simply owe it to God to love each other and thereby obey Him. We owe love to one another. We are part of God’s family. We need each other.

What practical steps might we take toward love and unity in our fractured times?

1. Practice James 1:19. If we would only “be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger,” this *alone* would foster love and unity to an astonishing degree.

2. When you disagree, if possible, meet face to face and talk. Don’t shred each other publicly.

3. Ask yourself where you are pointing. Will my words or social-media post be more or less likely to draw others to Jesus?

4. Raise your expectations for love and unity in your church. Lower your expectations for them coming naturally or easily.

5. Repent of being an agitator; commit to becoming a peacemaker.

6. Talk to your church leaders. Honestly articulate problems and ask how you can help foster love and unity.

7. Pray for those who’ve hurt you. Doing so transformed my relationship with a brother. One of my wife’s closest friends is someone she chose to intercede for decades ago, despite their conflicts.

8. Ask God to help you reject pride and develop true humility. A.W. Tozer said, “Only the humble are completely sane, for they are the only ones who see clearly their own size and limitations.” To think clearly is to think humbly. “Think of yourself with sober judgment” (Romans 12:3).

Show Them Jesus

True unity is grounded in

- mutually believed primary truths about Jesus,
- refusal to elevate secondary beliefs over primary beliefs,
- demonstrated heartfelt love for Jesus and others, and
- the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit.

When I reread *The Mark of the Christian* fifty years later, when divisiveness is the air we breathe, it spoke to me more deeply than ever. Schaeffer’s message rings true: when we call upon God, and make concerted efforts to live in humble love and unity, people will see Jesus. By His grace, some will believe in Him. ■



Unborn Children Don't Have to Prove Their Worth



BY BENJAMIN WATSON

Abortion is almost always in the news, but the news almost never gets abortion right. Some of our country's leading politicians refuse to recognize that a preborn child is a human life. And when pro-life advocates fight hard to protect these preborn humans in our laws, they get painted as the bad guys.

The problem here is that our country's culture is built upon a pernicious lie about the preborn. In the fight over abortion, our culture suggests that the preborn have to prove to us why and when they deserve protection, care and a chance to live. The preborn have to prove they won't inconvenience us. If the preborn are deemed too burdensome, too genetically different, or just too untimely and unwelcome, they can be killed.

But this approach seriously misunderstands what it means to be a human being. Our dignity as humans—our fundamental worthiness to exist—doesn't have to be proven; it is an endowment we receive at the moment of conception and keep forever until our natural death. Nobody should have to pass a test to deserve to exist.

Does That Baby Measure up?

I know first-hand what it's like to have your performance and your accomplishments determine your validity. For 16 years, I played professional football in the NFL. When you play a competitive sport, your every action and your every mistake is analyzed, turned into stats, and used to judge your



Human dignity

doesn't have to be earned, and it can never be lost.

salary, your status, and even whether you have a career in that sport at all. Your place on the field is earned by sweat and effort.

I'm not complaining about the NFL. But there is something seriously wrong about applying that kind of mindset to something as fundamental as the right to life.

Whenever you conceive a child, our pro-abortion culture wants you to put that child to the test. It wants you to scrutinize his or her stats. Does a baby fit your lifestyle? Is the baby the right gender? (Thirty-nine states let you abort a child specifically because of his or her gender.) Is the baby the right race? (Forty-six states let you abort a child specifically because of his or her race.) Does he or she have any medical conditions or disabilities? Does the baby have Down Syndrome? Do you have just the right amount of money—or what you think is the right amount of money—for the child? Is he or she coming at an opportune time?

To be sure, many women and families do not abort their child cavalierly; they are pained over the decision. But those families need help and support. We should not pressure them into abortion or try to discount the seriousness of abortion by, for instance, normalizing abortion-themed merchandise.

When you just look at the “stats” for preborn life, you get into a mindset where you need to justify the existence of pre-born life. As human beings, we tend to think that whatever looks good or is important to us is what ultimately matters and what ultimately has value. When we look at the preborn in this way, we're unable to see the inherent dignity of the preborn.

But none of these things affect a person's human dignity.

Nobody's Stats Are Perfect

Everyone struggles with something; nobody's stats are perfect. And while stats may matter on the sports field or in your college admissions process, they don't matter when it comes to human dignity.

But this same mindset affects all aspects of our culture. It affects the way we treat vulnerable adult

human life, too; how many of us simply discount the struggles and suffering of the poor, refugees, or the oppressed? How many of us resent how much time and compassion elderly people need?

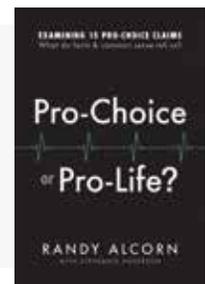
What we have to discover, as a country and as a culture, is a shared understanding that human dignity doesn't have to be earned, and it can never be lost. Our culture should not determine whether the preborn should live, whether the poor should be cared for, and whether the oppressed should be helped.

Instead, we should insist at all times and in all places that that human life is sacred, worthy of respect from conception to natural death. If we could see the inherent worth of every human life, something as devastating and harmful as abortion would not simply be unwelcome or undesirable; it would be unthinkable too. ■

Benjamin Watson is a former Super Bowl champion and NFL tight end, and the author of *Under Our Skin*. He is the current vice president of strategic relationships with Human Coalition, a pro-life organization that operates several telehealth and in-person women's care clinics. Learn more at thewatsonseven.com.



Browse Randy's prolife books, including *Pro-Choice or Pro-Life: Examining 15 Pro-Choice Claims*, at epm.org/prolifebooks



What Will We Experience on the New Earth?

BY RANDY ALCORN

In preparation for a message I shared at my home church this summer, titled, “No More Curse,” I wrote out a list with two parts: what we will forever more experience on the New Earth, and what will we NOT experience on the New Earth because of “No more Curse” (Revelation 22:3). This is just a portion of my list about what will be **forever more:**

Closeness to God greater than we’ve ever known

The companionship of Jesus

Wonderful, loving relationships with people

Reunions with family and old friends

Making new friends

Getting to know angels

Seeing how God truly did work all things together for our good

Meeting and talking to Christians who impacted us through their writings and lives

Happiness and delight

Comfort

Righteous desires and emotions

Perfectly healthy, strong bodies

Eating and drinking (redeemed food and taste buds—you may yet discover your favorite food and beverage!)

Story-telling around tables and fires

Laughter and humor—not degrading and mocking, but enriching

Fun that’s worshipful

Animals—our favorite kinds, with loving relationships, no harm, no fear



Adventures

Travel (there are streets, people come in and out of the New Jerusalem, there's a world to see while serving Jesus)

Learning

Art (drawing, painting, sculpting, _____)

Reading literature (poetry, drama, story, nonfiction)

Music

Play (hiking, climbing, boating, sports—maybe your favorite sport will be one you haven't played yet!)

Exploration of a fantastic planet and likely of other redeemed planets and galaxies

Astronomy

Fulfillment of lost opportunities and dreams

Work God has for us that's fulfilling, engaging, fun, and fascinating

Rest, and leisure time with God and His people

More great things to do than ever

Time to do everything!

Heartfelt worship with people from every tribe, language, and nation

Delightful and engaging service of Jesus



Watch Randy's full message on the New Earth, "No More Curse," at epm.org/nocurse

Browse all of his books on Heaven at epm.org/heavenbooks

Letters FROM PRISONERS

Last year I wrote, and you guys sent me *Face to Face with Jesus* as well as *The Apostle* comic book about Paul. The comic book was actually passed around to a few other guys, and I've found in here it is a great way to get men to read the Bible that never would've picked one up. It was quite a hit in here.

I received your book *90 Days of God's Goodness* and wanted to thank you for sending me this book. It has been such a blessing to me in my walk with God. Especially the people who went through different situations and no matter what, God was always there, and even though it gets hard for me in jail, I too know that God will be there for me in this situation I'm in.

What brought my attention to EPM and Randy Alcorn was one of my Christian brothers in here checked out the book *Courageous* from the library, and I told him about EPM and what I learned while I was in a county jail. That he checked out an Alcorn book really shows me God is good and is always with us and leading us.

Across the nation, God is at work in prisons, drawing men and women without hope to Himself. Please pray for them, as they face extra challenges in this era of COVID. If you'd like to support our efforts to send Randy's books to inmates, donate to the "Books for Prisoners" Fund at epm.org/donate

The Kindness of Constructive Criticism

How Input from Others Can Rescue You from Reckless Words

BY RANDY ALCORN

As a writer, I seek input from others on my writing and take it seriously. I hate having a book published and only then learning some of what I said was inaccurate, misleading, unfair, or confusing. Those who I invite to criticize my writing before it's published thereby do me the greatest possible service. Among other things they help me have less to be held accountable for at the judgment seat of our gracious and holy King, who said to His disciples, "I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak" (Matthew 12:36).

Jesus reminds us we should choose our words with care. After all, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21). Our words are so powerful they can make the dying live or make the living die. "Reckless words pierce like a sword" (Proverbs 12:18a). Social media and people's comments

on it demonstrate this graphically. Tragically, some no longer attend church because they have been so deeply hurt by church members' posts online, concerning secondary things such as political candidates, COVID, masks, and vaccinations.

Words That Heal and Help

Fortunately, the first half of Proverbs 12:18 about reckless words piercing like a sword is followed by the second: "...but the tongue of the wise brings healing." Words in private conversation, spoken in a sermon, and even on social media, can heal instead of wound. And with all the wounding going on in churches right now, this has never been more needed! In contrast to hurtful or careless words, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver" (Proverbs 25:11).

Some reckless, wounding, and misleading words are deliberate,



but others are not by design, and can be prevented if we bounce our words off others first. I am sometimes blind to my misspoken words, which is why each and every time I write something for a public audience, not only in books but also articles and blogs, I call on editors. Most often my editor is Stephanie Anderson, frequently also Doreen Button, and Kathy Norquist has often edited and critiqued in the past. When it's a book, I get editing help from multiple people before the publisher's editor ever sees it. They help me to get it right and see what I and the other editors didn't.

Every edit is a criticism because it is saying, "Your words aren't as correct, or clear or helpful or concise as they could be—here's what I would say instead." Some writers resent this, and if they do, they will never become good writers or for that matter, good thinkers. When I look over someone's edits, usually in red via "track changes" in Microsoft Word, about 70% of the time my immediate response is, "They're right; I'll change that to what they proposed." I press "accept changes." And 20% of the time it's "They're right that it needs to be changed, but I'd prefer to change it differently than they proposed." Even then their criticism has helped me immensely to improve the words, even when I choose different ones. Iron sharpens iron.

The remaining 10% of the time (roughly), I say, "I think it's better as I wrote it, so I won't change it." But the fact is, while what I write that's published still has flaws, it's far better because I have listened to critics whose goal is to help me. I am deeply thankful for them. Being a writer, or a writer who solicits such criticism, has

helped me tremendously to grow in my ability to handle all sorts of criticism, not just of writing and speaking but in all areas of my life. (As I'm reading an otherwise good book, I often bump into sentences and whole paragraphs where I think, "Did no one edit this? Or did someone try but the writer refused to heed the criticism?")

The Best Way to Prevent Valid Criticism

If you can't handle criticism, you shouldn't write or speak or preach. If you resent and resist critical input, that exposes a character flaw in you. If you fail to seek such input, it reveals a lack of wisdom. The best way to prevent valid criticisms after you publish—not just a book or article but a blog or anything you intend for public consumption—is to get good input and editing *before* you publish.

Likewise, the best way to prevent valid criticism after you teach or preach is to show your manuscript or notes to someone before and present it or at least talk it through with them and genuinely ask for their criticism. Don't resist it. Listen to it and take it seriously. Don't wait until you preach to find out you mishandled the text, didn't interpret properly, or were unnecessarily critical—or even that the passing joke you made could hurt someone's feelings, maybe a spouse or child or your fellow pastors or church members.

In fact, most of the unloving, divisive, and unfair words that I've seen on Facebook, blogs, and other online posts could have easily been prevented if people would delay that post one day and have one or two people

“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19).

read it over and give their input and edits before others see it.

One of the worst aspects of online technology is its immediacy. Forty-five years ago as a young pastor, I felt very hurt by someone and wrote them an angry letter. I put the letter in an envelope, addressed it, stamped it and put it in our mailbox. Several hours later I was convicted by the Holy Spirit that I’d done the wrong thing and spoken careless words that dishonored Christ and could be hurtful to the person I wrote to. I immediately ran out our front door to the mail box, and was relieved to find the letter hadn’t been picked up. I destroyed it. I don’t remember who I wrote it to or why. Whatever pain I had is long past. But had that letter been sent, to this day I suspect I would have hurt someone in a way that they might still remember over forty years later. Had it been only five or ten years later, I would likely have emailed the person immediately. In this modern era, this is all the more reason to stop ourselves, be “slow to speak” and “slow to anger,” and perhaps go to a trusted friend and ask, “Should I send this email/post this blog? How would you recommend I change it?”

When you ask for an edit, don’t primarily seek input from people who think just like you do. If they share your same irritations at the world and

the church, they probably share some of your blindness to other viewpoints. Hence, they may not criticize or edit you in the ways you most need it.

Seek input from people who don’t always share your same passions or hobbyhorses. If you get that input and revise what you first wrote, you will be heeding the words of Scripture, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19, NIV).

Don’t post impulsively or when you’re angry. Don’t trust your ability to accurately assess someone else’s words and actions. Don’t overestimate your ability to, on your own and without critical input, speak the truth in love. Seek the help of others to point out where what you’re saying isn’t true or isn’t loving.

The same applies to believers posting all those snarky comments on others’ posts that they may imagine are witty and courageous, when in fact they are mean and cowardly. While you are dropping Bible verses like bombs, you would do better to memorize and practice James 1:19, and repent in light of what Jesus said in Matthew 12:36 about our culpability for every careless word.

Recognizing our accountability to God, may we pray with the psalmist, “LORD, set up a guard for my mouth; keep watch at the door of my lips” (Psalm 141:3). ■

CHRISTMAS REFLECTIONS

Though He was God, He became a man. He was the Ancient of Days, yet He was born at a point in time. He created worlds and companied with celestial beings, yet He came to live in a family setting on earth.

HENRY GARIEPY
QUOTED IN *IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS*

Eternal Perspective Ministries: Get to Know Us

Some readers are already quite familiar with EPM and our history; others might be new to our magazine. Either way, we hope you learn something about our ministry through this Q&A.

What is Eternal Perspective Ministries, and how is it connected to author Randy Alcorn?

Eternal Perspective Ministries (EPM) is a Bible-believing, Christ-centered nonprofit organization with two goals: one, to teach the principles of God's Word, emphasizing an eternal viewpoint; two, to reach the needy in Christ's name.

Randy Alcorn founded EPM in 1990, and he continues to direct the ministry.

What happens to royalties from Randy's books?

All of the book royalties are owned by EPM, and 100% are used for ministry purposes: 90% is given to other worthy Christian organizations and 10% goes to EPM to help offset the costs related to the writing/researching/editing of Randy's books, as well as to help facilitate the giving away of our books to people all over the world.

Since EPM began, by God's grace we have given over eight million dollars to ministries around the world.

Also, those wishing to give funds to Christian work can give to one of EPM's special funds knowing 100% of all contributions will go to carefully chosen ministries. Our general fund receives no percentage of these donations.

How is the ministry supported?

We are supported through the generous support of our donors. Some give larger one-time donations, while a core group of supporters regularly give smaller amounts to our ministry. We're grateful for every contribution and the investment in God's Kingdom that it represents.

If God does lay on your heart to give to our ministry, or to pray for us (the greatest gift you can offer), know that we deeply appreciate it. If you decide either to regularly or periodically support EPM, you can do so at epm.org/donate.

How does making a purchase from EPM's store make a difference?

The profits from the books and products we sell at epm.org/store are used to directly fund our ministry expenses and the work of our staff. This frees us up to continue giving away 100% of the royalties from Randy's books.

We deeply appreciate our customers. Thank you for being a vital part of our ministry!

What do your staff do at EPM?

Simply put, we keep the ministry running and support Randy. (Some readers are surprised to learn that we are a relatively small ministry, with a part-time staff of fewer than 10 and Randy being our only full-time employee.)

Much of our time is taken up connecting with people, mostly through social media and email. They may want to order books, tell us how God has used a book in their life, or ask a question related to an issue Randy has written about.

Our outreach to prisoners is another significant part of EPM. Every month, we send hundreds of Randy's books free to prisoners across the U.S. who request them.

Each staff member has a slightly different role to play in supporting Randy in his work, from handling his correspondence, assisting with editing, helping with his blog, overseeing the giving of the royalties, and so much more.

We're grateful to be a team united by our desire to glorify Jesus and share an eternal perspective! ■



How to Find Peace in an Anxious, Out-of-Control World

BY DOREEN BUTTON



2020 was a year that anyone might label as out of control (some of us still feel the same way about 2021). We like to have things under control. Our problems begin when we both desire and expect circumstances to be under *our* control.

When we try to clutch the reins of this out-of-control ride we call life, we *will* get thrown from our mount, and it will hurt.

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, “Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting 40 million adults.” That’s more than 18 percent of the population 18 years and older. That percentage would likely skyrocket if it included those of us who struggle with worry, anxiety, and depression without ever telling anyone.

The stress of a pandemic and its aftermath—both economic (job loss, business loss) and psychological (isolation, fear, grief)—has left many of us reeling.

Over the last year, I often wondered, *what’s next?* Fires. The entire Left Coast seemed to be in flames. Massive storms. Hurricanes, ice, and political upheaval pummeled this nation. And woven throughout these events were notifications no one

wants to get—news that another friend or relative had died. Even small losses like not being able to have dinner at a favorite restaurant or finding out a trip was postponed felt like a big deal—not unlike standing in a boxing ring waiting for the next punch to land and wondering if any of us would remain standing.

The Peace We Long for

So what do we do with these uncomfortable feelings? Some of us get depressed. Some ignore them or bury them under recreational drugs or more socially acceptable addictions like exercise, social media, and entertainment. (My personal favorite is a super-sized scoop of cookie dough ice cream—but that started before the pandemic gave me an excuse.)

None of these idols can ever satisfy. They keep demanding more sacrifices from us and delivering less satisfaction to us. Obviously they provide no lasting rest.

Each person who claims Jesus as The Way will say they believe that:

- God is good
- God is all powerful

- Jesus loves me
- Jesus lived, died, and lives again
- The Spirit lives in me
- The Spirit always speaks truth

If God truly is good, powerful, alive, and in us, and if He created us and knows how He designed us to live, and if Jesus “came that we might have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10), then following His lead will give us the peace we so desperately long for and that our idols cannot provide. “Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you” (Psalm 55:22, NIV).

What’s the Bigger Picture?

Max Lucado writes, “Think about what you think about.” And 2 Corinthians 10:5 tells us, “Take every thought captive.” Psalm 131 says, “I have calmed and quieted my soul.” And Psalm 46:10 commands us to “Be still” or “Cease striving.” While seeking professional help for anxiety and depression is sometimes necessary, there’s much we can do on behalf of our own sanity. If God considers us capable of settling ourselves by remembering truth and trusting His Spirit, shouldn’t we at least try?

But how do we “still” ourselves? How do we “cease striving” and get off that debilitating hamster wheel that spins inside our brains? We will never have God’s perfect sovereign perspective, but we can stop and look at the bigger picture when we begin to feel anxious:

- Where is God at work in this situation?
- If Romans 8:28 is true (and it is) how might the things you are most anxious about be “working together for the good of those who love God”?

Hint: “We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation” (Romans 5:3-4, NLT).

Once I caught myself “what-if-ing” about the next possible catastrophe. I decided to turn the tables by asking, “What if God has suddenly fallen off His throne and no longer runs the universe?” That thought was so laughable I stopped worrying!

Stop, Drop, and Breathe

When you find yourself spinning in the anxiety cycle and can’t seem to find the exit, stop whatever you’re doing. Breathe...deeply...slowly...in...out...several times. And when your brain begins to quiet enough that you can slip in an idea edgewise, name—out loud if possible—what you’re anxious about. Keep breathing. As you relax, get curious. Ask questions about your anxiety without any judgment. Is it about sin? Is it about fear? Is it about an injustice? Is it about loss (of a relationship or of control)?

Again, without judgment, put each of your reasons into its own separate mental drawer. As soon as you are able, open those drawers *one at a time* and look hard at the contents. Are they worth keeping? Do you need help (from a professional or a wise friend) sorting out what to keep and what to toss? Do you need to forgive or ask for forgiveness?

Often, simply bringing these anxious thoughts out into the light shrinks them to their proper size and sometimes they disappear entirely! Like a troll in daylight an anxious thought becomes impotent.

Proactively allow the following scriptures to percolate deep into your soul. Pick one or two that resonate and post them in prominent places or schedule a phone reminder to pop up several times a day, putting these words of life in front of you. Better yet, memorize them (no, you’re *not* really too old or too busy) so the Holy Spirit can bring them to mind when you need them most.

Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself...Refrain from anger and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. (Psalm 37:7-8)

Often, simply bringing anxious thoughts out into the light shrinks them to their proper size.



“Peace I [Jesus] leave with you; my peace I give to you....Let not your hearts be troubled.” (John 14:27, ESV)

[Jesus said,] “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” (Matthew 6:33-34, ESV)

The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:5-7, NIV)

“Come to me [Jesus], all who labor and are heavy laden... Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:28-30, ESV)

My first panic attack was a nasty surprise. Never before had I felt like suicide was the only way to end the horror. The next time I felt one lurking I began to recite the following Psalm. I had to fight harder than I thought possible to get each word out but by the time I got through “the valley of the shadow” the words became easier and by the end I knew Jesus had led me to the other side. The third time, soon after I began speaking the words the attack disappeared and has not returned:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You

are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (Psalm 23 NKJV)

Find Your Delight in Him

Finally, fall in love with Jesus. “Take delight in the Lord” (Psalm 37:4, NLT). Marinate in God’s words and surround yourself with others who radiate His love. Take regular Sabbath breaks to spend

truly quiet times—just you and Him (not you, Him and your smartphone)—listening and sharing your heart, and “you will find rest for your soul.”

“I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, NLT). Jesus promises that for now, this seemingly out-of-control world is here to stay. So is Jesus. “Never, no never will I leave you. Never, not ever

will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). Since “the Lord IS near” you really can choose to “not be anxious about anything.” ■

Doreen (Sam) Button is one of Randy Alcorn’s staff editors, a certified biblical counselor with r3stored.com, and provides an “oasis” of rest and restoration for full time Christian workers through lifeimpact.care.



Take regular Sabbath breaks to spend truly quiet times—just you and Him (not you, Him and your smartphone)—listening and sharing your heart, and “you will find rest for your soul.”

For more resources on anxiety, EPM highly recommends the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation (ccef.org).



THE WORLD IS BUSY PROMOTING ITS CATECHISM— Will We Get Busy Teaching Ours?

BY KEVIN DEYOUNG

I love the Olympics. I got up early and stayed up late to watch whatever I could in real time. As a family, we figured out the various NBC platforms and turned on something from the Olympics almost all the time for two weeks. I'd put our knowledge of Olympic swimming and (especially) track and field up against almost anyone. I'm a big fan of the Olympics.

But something was different this time around. And judging from conversations with many others, I'm not the only one who noticed.

You couldn't watch two weeks of the Olympics—or at times, even two minutes—without being catechized in the inviolable truths of the sexual revolution. Earlier in the summer, I watched parts of the Euro, and you would have thought the whole event was a commercial for rainbow flags. And yet, the packaging of the Olympics was even more deliberate. Every day we were taught to celebrate men weightlifting as women or to smile as a male diver talked about his husband. Every commercial break was sure to feature a same-sex couple, a man



**The Christian family,
Christian church, and
Christian school must
not assume that the next
generations will accept the
conclusions that seem so
obvious to older generations.**

putting on makeup, or a generic ode to expressive individualism. And of course, Megan Rapinoe and Sue Bird were nearly ubiquitous. If America used to be about motherhood and apple pie, it's now about birthing persons and lesbian soccer stars hawking Subway sandwiches.

Some will object at this point that the last paragraph is filled with a toxic mix of homophobia, heteronormativity, cisgender privilege, and a host of other terms that were virtually unknown until five minutes ago. But those labels are not arguments against biblical sexual morality so much as they represent powerful assumptions that no decent person could possibly believe that homosexuality is sinful behavior, that marriage is between a man and a woman, and that switching genders is a sign of confusion more than courage. What NBC presented as heroic and wonderful was considered wrong and troublesome by almost everyone in the Christian West for 2,000 years. Is it possible that instead of deconstructing the beliefs that have marked Christianity for two millennia, we might want to deconstruct the academic jargon our culture has only come to affirm within my lifetime? Remember, it was only in 2008—hardly the dark days of the Middle Ages—that Barack Obama said he did not support marriage for same-sex couples.

I know there are many issues confronting the church today. In some contexts, there may be a lack of love toward outsiders, or a fascination with conspiracy theories, or a temptation toward idolatrous forms of Christian nationalism. You may think that the drumbeat of the advancing sexual revolution is still far off in the distance, a problem in someone else's village but not in yours.

But no one lives in an isolated village anymore, and the wider world is not tempting young people with the blessings of chastity and church attendance. People older than me may have enough Christian maturity and cultural memory to roll their eyes at the sexual revolution's round-the-clock bombardment. But if you are a Millennial or Gen Z (or whatever comes next) your first instinct is likely to be more upset with Christians offering criticism of Megan and Sue kissing than with the fact that their kissing is demonstrably not Christian.

It is worth remembering David Well's famous definition: worldliness is whatever makes righteousness look strange and sin look normal. Here's the reality facing every Christian in the West: the money, power, and prestige of the mainstream media, big time sports, big business, big tech, and almost all the institutions of education and entertainment are invested in making sin look normal. Make no mistake: no

matter how good your church, no matter how strong your family, no matter how gospel-centered your Christian school or homeschool, if your children and grandchildren are even remotely engaged with contemporary culture (and they are), they are being taught by a thousand memes and messages every week to pay homage to the rainbow flag.

The Christian family, Christian church, and Christian school must not assume that the next generations will accept the conclusions that seem so obvious to older generations. We must talk about the things our kids are already talking about among themselves. We must disciple. We must be countercultural. We must prepare them to love and teach them what biblical love really means. We must pass on the right beliefs and the right reasons for those beliefs.

We must prepare our children—and be prepared ourselves—that following Christ comes with a cost (Luke 9:23). The Jesus who affirmed marriage as between a man a woman (Matt. 19:4-6), the Jesus who warned of the porneia within (Mark 7:20-23), the Jesus who warned against living to be liked by others (John 12:43), this Jesus demands our total allegiance (Matthew 28:20).

The world is already busy promoting its catechism. The only question is whether we will get busy promoting ours. ■

Kevin DeYoung is the senior pastor at Christ Covenant Church in Matthews, North Carolina. He serves as a council member at The Gospel Coalition and blogs on TGC's DeYoung, Restless and Reformed (thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung). He has authored several books, including *Just Do Something*, *The Hole in Our Holiness*, *Crazy Busy*, *Taking God at His Word*, and *The Biggest Story*.



Resources for Parents

In his ebook *A Parent's Guide to Teaching Your Children About Gender*, Jared Kennedy offers step-by-step guidance for parents seeking to understand and address various issues related to gender and sexuality.



Available from erlc.com/store

Christ-Centered Parenting: Gospel Conversations on Complex Cultural Issues equips parents to address pressing cultural topics which children of all ages face, including gender issues and same-sex marriage.



Available from erlc.com/store

Rebecca McLaughlin's book *10 Questions Every Teen Should Ask (and Answer) about Christianity* has two chapters on "Why Can't We Just Agree That Love Is Love?" and "Who Cares If You're a Boy or a Girl?"



Available from christianbook.com

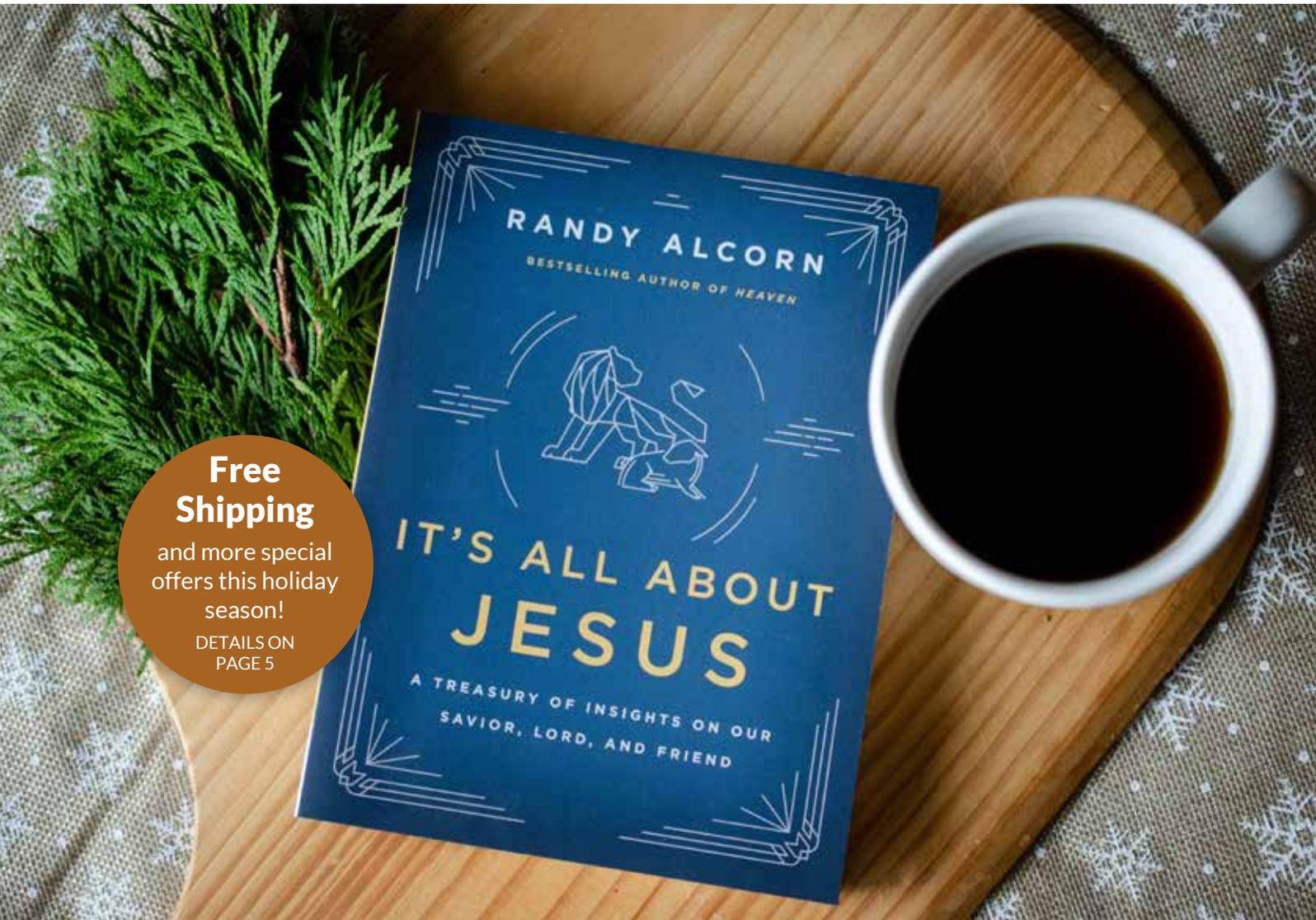
For younger children, in his book *God Made Boys and Girls: Helping Children Understand the Gift of Gender*,



Marty Machowski shares the simple, clear truth that all of us are made in God's image as either male or female and what God made is very good. Available from christianbook.com



eternal perspective ministries
39065 Pioneer Blvd., Suite 100
Sandy, OR 97055



**Free
Shipping**

and more special
offers this holiday
season!

DETAILS ON
PAGE 5