

eternal  
perspectives

SPRING/SUMMER 2021

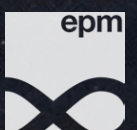
God Answers  
Decades of Prayer

The Closure of Portland's  
Lovejoy Abortion Clinic

ALSO INSIDE

Let Go of Lies about Heaven:  
Eight Myths Many Believe

Don't Feel Sorry for or Fear for Your  
Kids—Raise Them up to Walk in Faith



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## about

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

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

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# A Grieving Mom on the Biblical Teaching about Heaven: "I Grabbed It as Though It Were a Life Preserver"

Earlier this year a reader shared a profound comment in reply to a post on Randy's Facebook page. This is one of the most powerful stories we've received from readers of the *Heaven* book. —EPM

**W**e—very suddenly and unexpectedly—lost our 16-year-old son on 10/6. He was the fourth of our five children. I have struggled mightily with the “whys,” and life very much feels akin to a marathon swim in an ocean of pain. I do believe that God knows what is best. It just hurts mightily.

Though night is inherently so, the first night without him seemed the darkest of my life. It literally felt as though my own heart might cease to beat. As I lay there begging God for a sliver of comfort, I remembered a tiny booklet on Heaven that a co-worker had given me years before. At the time, I was a little confused because it seemed an odd Christmas gift for someone who had not lost anyone. I read it, and I was delighted at the description of eternity that was unlike anything I had heard in my 40ish years of churchgoing. I put it on my shelf after reading it. That first night without our son, I grabbed it as though it were a life preserver and I were going under. Truthfully, I was. The promises and hope in that tiny book helped me breathe until the morning when my other family members rose.

Within a week of saying our earthly goodbye to our child, I looked you up online and ordered the full copy of *Heaven*. It has saved my life. I ordered the *50 Days* version for our other four children, another copy of the big book for my parents, and 100 of the mini-books. In telling much of our testimony, people have asked for the mini books. I gave and mailed out several at Christmas.

I also teach at my son's school, a Christian school, and I teach his class. I could NEVER have returned to work to face his empty desk—and listen to the life he left behind being lived without him—without your book. I put together a Christmas gift for each of his 40 classmates. Most of them had been his friend since pre-school, and they are hurting, too. In the gifts, I included a mini-book for each of them, and they found tremendous comfort as well in reading about the real eternity that God has planned for His children. No clouds and harps!! A life joyful, abundant, and FAMILIAR! I can't tell you how many people already have been reached through your books and the hope they share.

I still have questions about being separated from my child, but I can say with full certainty that

**I vow to  
never again  
take my  
sights off of  
eternity.**

some lives have been changed already. I vow to never again take my sights off of eternity, and I vow to, however painful, walk this road as faithfully as possible so that more lives will join us in that incredible place. Psalm 119:89 says, “Forever, Oh, God, thy word is settled in Heaven.” My tears may rain down here until I am reunited with my child, but I do trust that my anguish already is being settled. God bless you and your ministry, Mr. Alcorn. —P.J.

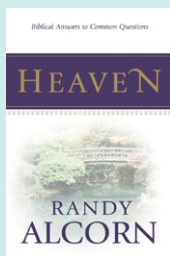
**Here are some responses to her comment from other readers.  
Each is a story in and of itself:**

When our son left us at such a young age of 13, I wanted to read all that I could get my hands on about the biblical Heaven! Randy Alcorn’s book was like reading a college textbook on Heaven! So many amazing details gleaned from God’s Word! What a hope we have in Christ Jesus! Without this eternal hope that our Lord gives, I would have been a heap of dust scattered in the wind! My heart yearns for that day for my faith to be made sight! —S.B.

...I too lost a son suddenly in 2017. I too had to dig into biblical truths to combat the darkness that wanted to take over. *Heaven* was a book that helped me keep the eternal perspective and knowing where my son was. —D.B.

We lost our youngest son eight years ago and are continually reading Randy’s books. *Heaven* was the first one we read, too. ...We needed Heaven to feel more real and solid (less ethereal) after our very real, solid boy moved there. —J.C.

After my dad died, I read the version for children (*Heaven for Kids*) every evening to my boys. Such a sweet time together to journey through the grief and help them better deal with their mama’s frequent tears. —J.P.



Randy’s *Heaven* booklet has been used to minister to many hurting and grieving people. Packs of 20 are available at [epm.org/heavenbooklet](http://epm.org/heavenbooklet)



## Pray for EPM

We are so grateful for the prayers of our ministry partners! Download a free monthly calendar with ideas of how to pray for EPM and Randy at [epm.org/2021pray](http://epm.org/2021pray)

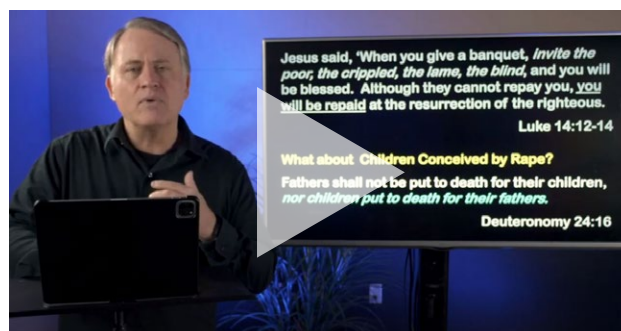


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## Updates from the Alcorns

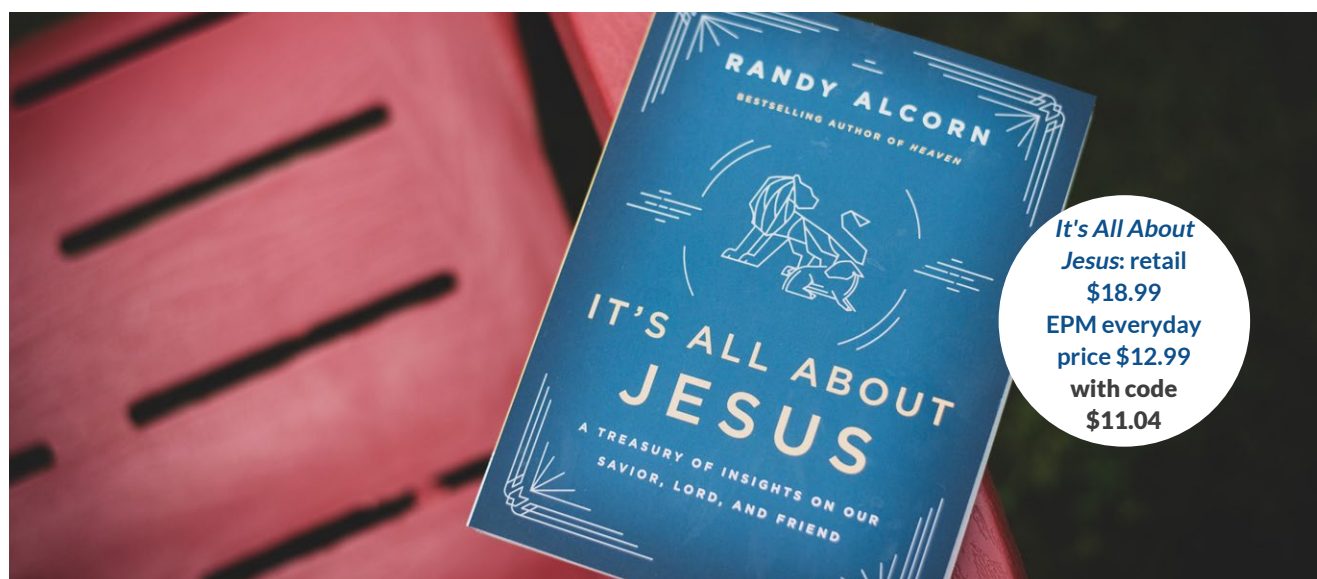
Stay tuned to Nanci's Caringbridge page ([caringbridge.org/visit/nancialcorn](http://caringbridge.org/visit/nancialcorn)) for the latest updates from the Alcorns on Nanci's health.



## Watch Randy's Pro-life Message from His Home Church

In February, Randy spoke at Good Shepherd Community Church on the sanctity of human life and the Great Commission. The full video is available at [epm.org/prolifemessage](http://epm.org/prolifemessage)

Watch more videos from Randy on our Youtube channel: [youtube.com/eternalperspectives](http://youtube.com/eternalperspectives)



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# God Answers Decades of Prayer

## The Closure of Portland's Lovejoy Abortion Clinic

INTERVIEW BY STEPHANIE ANDERSON, EPM STAFF

*with special thanks to Ron Norquist for contributing the introduction*

**I**t's just a small, unassuming medical building nestled in an older residential part of Portland, Oregon. Commuters who stopped for seconds at the blinking light on the corner of NE 25th and Lovejoy Street barely noticed the sparsely landscaped Lovejoy SurgiCenter. But over the years, tens of thousands of women approached the front steps to the clinic, where a pregnant woman could become “un-pregnant.”

In the past, this sleepy corner has been alive with action: people holding signs, little pockets of prayer, sidewalk counselors asking the women to consider other options, often directing them to local pregnancy care centers. One man, Doc Hite, would show up almost daily for many hours even into his late 90s, holding a sign and offering help. When asked why he would do so at his age he simply said, “These are babies.”

In the late 1980s and early 90s a small ministry called Advocates for Life brought groups of volunteers to peacefully block access to the clinic by sitting in front of the doors. Two of those volunteers were Randy Alcorn and myself, Ron Norquist. On those days, the corner of 25th and Lovejoy was a busy one: there were police cars, handcuffed proliferers being dragged into waiting police vans, frustrated clinic workers who wanted to get on with their business, and women waiting for the doors to clear so they could get their abortion procedure. The invisible ones were the pre-born children carried by their mothers into that place of death.



For years prolife advocates prayed that God would do what they couldn't: close it down. They waited and trusted and advocated for those who had no voice.

Then came word in January 2021 that after fifty years, Lovejoy was shutting its doors, ending its business as the largest abortion clinic in the State of Oregon. Local proliferers rejoiced, but their feelings remain mixed. Demand still exists, and in March, an abortion facility under the name The Lilith Clinic opened in downtown Portland and advertises abortions up to 22 weeks. Still, proliferers thank and praise the Author of Life, Jesus Christ, for hearing His people's prayers that the building at 25<sup>th</sup> and Lovejoy would no longer house such evil.

*In this interview, Randy Alcorn and Kathy Norquist, Ron's wife, respond to the closure.*

## **Tell us about your personal history with Lovejoy SurgiCenter.**

**RANDY:** In 1988 I visited Lovejoy, perhaps the world's most ironically named abortion clinic, for the first time. I had never been to an abortion clinic, and I didn't even know where any were located. In December of that year, I attended an Advocates for Life meeting where I was exposed to the idea of civil disobedience to rescue the unborn. They had a rescue scheduled at Lovejoy in January 1989. With some reluctance, I went to my fellow church elders and explained why I believed God was leading me to do this. I asked their permission, and to their credit, while some of them didn't really know whether it was the right decision, they all said that since I believed this action was biblically right and both my conscience and the Holy Spirit were leading me to do it, they could only support me. I also told Ron Norquist about it and to my surprise and great encouragement, he wanted to join me in participating. Since I didn't know any other volunteers well, to have a longtime friend come was a huge help. I no longer felt as profoundly alone.

I rescued nine times in 1989 and was arrested seven times, each time taken to jail and placed in a holding cell, a large room on lockdown also occupied by others arrested for nonviolent crimes. I had many interesting conversations and opportunities to share the gospel. Nanci did sidewalk counseling at Lovejoy for several years, approaching women who came to the clinic for abortions, and giving them one last opportunity to see the truth and rescue their unborn children. That

was a much tougher job. It was hard for her, but I admired her for doing what we both believed was right. (See [epm.org/whyrescue](http://epm.org/whyrescue))

In early 1990 another abortion clinic, called the Downtown Women's Clinic, won a court judgment against me and several other rescuers. The court demanded we pay the full amount for their loss of income from the dozen or so abortions we had prevented one day. This amount was less than \$3,000, but we were also held liable for their attorney expenses which were nearly \$20,000. Later I was summoned to court for refusing to pay this. I told the judge that as a matter of conscience I would pay anybody anything I owed them, but one thing I would never do was hand over money to people who would use it to kill babies.

The judge sentenced me to two days (one night) in jail for refusing to pay the fine. I was handcuffed with what is called a belly chain that went around my waist, to which my hands and ankles were also cuffed, and then led out of the courtroom by two armed police officers who escorted me to the county jail. That's when photojournalists still used flash photography, so my eyes were blinded. Local television news was lined up to cover this spectacle of a pastor chained to the teeth.

Since I still refused to pay the fines, on the first Saturday of May 1990, I was served papers informing me that the church I pastored was receiving a writ of garnishment demanding they send a fourth of my wages each month to the Downtown Clinic. In God's providence, Saturday was the only day of the week where no one was present on the church grounds to receive that writ.





Since they didn't serve writs on Sunday, that meant I knew two days before the church did that the writ of garnishment would be delivered to them on Monday.

This was a great blessing because it allowed me to call a special meeting of the elders on Sunday, where I resigned as pastor to keep my church from having to either pay an abortion clinic or defy a court order. The church was able to disburse my last paycheck, so they could honestly say the next day I wasn't their employee, and they owed me no wages that could be garnished.

Later in 1990, shortly after we started EPM, Frank Peretti and his wife Barb spent a weekend at our house when he was researching his next novel after *This Present Darkness* and *Piercing the Darkness*. He wanted the story to center around abortion. After a meeting in our living room with women who had experienced abortions and were now regularly involved in ministry at Lovejoy, I took Frank to see it. I told him stories as we stood across the street from the building. There was a New-Agey "altar" in front of one of the homes nearby, and the owners had placed on it an offering, some kind of fresh meat that we couldn't identify. The spirit of darkness surrounding this place that was so familiar to me by then was immediately evident to Frank.

As we stood there, the clinic owner, who I had come to know well, drove up in her luxury car and entered the building. I won't describe what she looked like, but let's just say it was evil. In his novel *Prophet*, Frank used Lovejoy as the basis for the abortion clinic that is a significant part of his story. He portrays the web of deception and complicity surrounding legal abortion and its exploitation of both women and the church.

In real life and in Frank's book, family members, doctors, the media, and political figures all have vested interests in covering up the dangers of

abortion. In fact, six weeks after finishing the first edition of my book *ProLife Answers to ProChoice Arguments*, I attended the funeral of a woman who died at a nearby hospital after "treatment" at Lovejoy. There was no media coverage indicating the place of her surgery or her cause of death.

In February 1991, nine months after I had to resign from the church, we were set for a major courtroom trial that had been looming over us for a year, *Lovejoy SurgiCenter v. Portland, Oregon ProLifers*. The time came for the judge, who had been overtly hostile toward us during the trial, to give his last instructions to the jury before sending them away for deliberations. His final words were, "You must find these people guilty and you must punish them sufficiently to insure they'll never do this again." For our totally peaceful nonviolent actions, the jury awarded the abortion clinic \$8.2 million dollars. (At the time it was the largest court judgment in history against a group of peaceful protestors.)

While we were in this thirty-day trial, several amazing things happened. Three Lovejoy employees quit. One explained to a prolife protester outside, "I don't know what happened. It's like I suddenly woke up and realized we're killing babies here. That's not what I want to do with my life."

What others intended for evil, God intended for good (Genesis 50:20). Much of what I wrote about the beginnings of EPM involves Lovejoy (see [epm.org/beginEPM](http://epm.org/beginEPM)).

(Our attorney in the month-long Lovejoy lawsuit asked me to prepare closing arguments. See [epm.org/lovejoy](http://epm.org/lovejoy). It might speak to your heart as a resource to reflect on as our culture leaves less and less room for the exercise of Christian convictions.)

**KATHY:** Ron was arrested multiple times for rescuing, mostly at Lovejoy clinic, and spent seven months over a one-year period in jail and lost his job as a result. He then had a jail ministry and to this day is still good friends with one of the guys he met in jail.

Ron was not always prolife and can remember debating with his brother Rick about abortion when he was in high school. But when our firstborn son was stillborn in 1976, that solidified in his heart



the humanity of the preborn child. So years later when Ron heard about rescuing through Randy, he immediately wanted to join him. That decision changed our family's life, but God was faithful beyond what we could have ever asked for.

I (Kathy) spent many times over the years down at Lovejoy alongside other dear friends praying, holding signs, and reaching out to the women and men going into the clinic. There were numerous opportunities to share the love of Christ and His message of salvation. My experience at the clinic forced me out of my comfort zone. I often didn't look forward to going but always left there strengthened with a sense of privilege to stand for Christ and be a light in the darkness. The heaviest drive I made was to Lovejoy and the lightest drive was away from Lovejoy. The relief in leaving was sometimes accompanied by sadness as there was often no one to take our place.

During the year that Ron was in and out of jail and our family was in the news, I felt like we were living in a fishbowl. It was difficult to have people see your husband as "the abortion guy," as though that was our whole life. But throughout that stressful and trying time, God was at work. I wouldn't trade those years for anything because God was with us, and He used it all for His good purposes.

### **What has changed in the prolife movement in the 30+ years since you were first involved with rescuing and sidewalk counseling? What is the same?**

**KATHY:** Rescuing has become a thing of the past for several reasons, but sidewalk counseling has remained. I think God used rescuing and the publicity that resulted to awaken hearts to stand more boldly for life. There are thousands of pregnancy resource centers as well as many other dynamic prolife ministries so the work is still going strong. But there is an ongoing need to have a presence at the clinics, quietly praying and/or holding a sign or reaching out to those going in.

**RANDY:** Now there are many more prolife clinics and prolife volunteers than in those early days.

There are many more churches that support those clinics. The political prolife arms, such as Oregon Right to Life, continue their faithful efforts.

However, precious innocent children are still being killed daily, men are still failing to defend and care for the children they've fathered, and women are still being deceived into believing that abortion can solve their problems. The truth is, it is never—absolutely *never*—in a mom or dad's best interest to kill their child.

What is missing is the regular presence at abortion clinics in large numbers, which drew attention to the fact that children are being killed every day at every abortion clinic. Sidewalk counseling done by some faithful people continues. That's wonderful. We rescued until the cost of rescuing became so high that it prevented us from doing much else. Ron Norquist paid that high price more than anyone, and I will always respect Ron and Kathy deeply for that.

In my case, I could both live with my wife and young daughters *and* do a lot for unborn children by speaking out on their behalf and writing books to equip people to defend them. (My 1992 book *ProLife Answers to ProChoice Arguments* was a surprise best-seller, and has been used, now in an updated form, to train proliferators for nearly thirty years. Our ministry also gives substantial funds from my book royalties to support the prolife cause.)

### **What role do you think prolife advocacy and prayer played in the clinic's closure?**

**KATHY:** God truly answered the prayers of His people! Some dear people spent several days a week





advocating at the clinic. Year after year many of us prayed for something that seemed impossible—the closing of Lovejoy clinic—but “with God all things are possible.” When you are standing right next to it, watching women go in and then come out in wheelchairs, it is heart wrenching. I know He used all of the advocates in ways we will never know this side of eternity.

**RANDY:** Lovejoy, where such darkness prevailed, was like the temples where children were sacrificed to Molech in ancient times. I absolutely believe the prayers and actions of faithful people, many people far more faithful than I, were used of God to pull down a heathen child-killing idol.

Certainly there is great spiritual warfare associated with the issue of abortion. It has now been years since Nanci or I have been to that dark and demonic place. I remember a peaceful prolife gathering there when we and our daughters stood across the street from Lovejoy holding up three large beautiful photographs of live unborn children—not aborted babies—one in each trimester of pregnancy. A limo slowly drove around the corner, and the man in the passenger seat looked at us with obvious scorn and made an obscene gesture.

That man, believe it or not, was immediately recognizable as the mayor of Portland. As a dad, part of me wanted to go after him for having done that to my wife and little girls. Trying to explain who he was to our daughters put a heaviness on our hearts. How could the most powerful and influential person in the city of Portland be so dedicated to the killing of unborn children and make a vile gesture to *born children*? Only under the influence of Satan. Jesus said, “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44, NIV).

### What were your emotions and thoughts when you heard about the closure?

**RANDY:** I cried for joy. I thought, “On this wicked corner where tens of thousands of babies have died, Satan will no longer be murdering children.” The single

largest abortion clinic in the state of Oregon, responsible for killing more children than anywhere else in our state’s history, no longer existed. If ever setting off fireworks was warranted, that was the occasion!

**KATHY:** I felt like crying my eyes out. I was overjoyed and could hardly believe it! Just the building itself represents so much evil. To think that it will no longer be the place where babies are being sucked out of their mother’s wombs, and women are being deceived into thinking they are no longer mothers, makes me so happy. My heart has always been with the many women I know and love who have had abortions and the pain they have lived with. I didn’t want other women to have to go through what they did, so I’m overjoyed that Lovejoy will no longer be an option! I still can’t believe it.

### What is your prayer for the city of Portland and for the local prolife movement moving forward?


**RANDY:** My prayer is that proliferers will be patient, realizing that despite laws and the policies of a given administration, no one can prevent us from sharing our prolife values and helping women in need. You can talk to the sixteen-year-old girl next door, and you can give a book like *ProChoice or ProLife?* to kids in the church youth group. You can offer childcare and financial aid to help moms choose life and raise their children or place them for adoption.

**KATHY:** I would love to see the Lovejoy building destroyed and a life-giving ministry take its place. That would be incredible!

The news about the new Lilith Clinic is certainly discouraging. Portland Monthly reports, “Its location in a multi-use downtown office building could also help deter protesters; the Lovejoy SurgiCenter was located on a highly visible corner in Northwest Portland.”







My prayer has been that God would raise up younger women to advocate outside of abortion clinics. It is a last-ditch effort to save a baby's life and help the mom. What kept me going back to the clinic was hearing the story of a pastor counseling a young woman who had previously had an abortion. He asked her what she would have done if someone was outside the clinic standing for life when she drove up. She said, "I told myself on the way to the clinic that if anyone was outside, I'd keep driving and not go through with the abortion." Sadly, no one was there.

40 Days for Life ([40daysforlife.com](http://40daysforlife.com)) is a wonderful prolife ministry that organizes a peaceful prayer presence at the clinics. There is a great need for more people, and it makes a huge difference.

### What's your advice to prolife advocates today?

**RANDY:** Find your place and learn what your gifting is and where you can best serve Jesus and the cause of women in need and unborn children. Love your fellow proliferers and respect their different callings. Resist the turf-consciousness that inhibits cooperative action and therefore contributes to the very killing we are trying to stop. We must end needless duplication of efforts in the same communities and learn from the experience and expertise of others. We must hold loosely our volunteers and donors and not fear losing them to other groups working for the same cause. We must set aside some of our personal agendas and realize that we can accomplish a great deal more if it doesn't matter who gets the credit as long as God gets the glory.

There are a variety of legitimate prolife activities. The Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines and their special forces all have their role in winning a war, but without strategy and cooperation, they would end up wasting resources. Likewise, there's an important place for abortion alternative centers, prolife education, literature distribution, sidewalk counseling, picketing, boycotts, political action, Life Chain, and many other activities. But each of these is to serve the whole, not as "the" prolife effort but one working in concert with the others. If one of us wins, we all win; if one loses, we all lose. Without mutual respect and cooperation,

prolife organizations will get caught in each other's crossfire, and we'll end up fighting the wrong side.

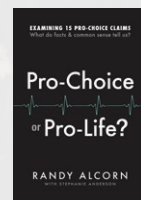
We must work harder *and* smarter, ever broadening the base of prolife activists, not just burning out a few. All our efforts need to be harnessed as part of a strategic long-term plan to save the most children and women from abortion. At the heart of this must be the mobilization of whole churches, not just individual Christians. Only churches can provide the numbers and resources needed to win the battle for children's lives. Churches must be helped to form prolife task forces to educate and mobilize their people and make community impact. There are many excellent groups and resources, including books and videos (see [epm.org/proliferesource](http://epm.org/proliferesource)).

**KATHY:** Never give up! Galatians 6:9 says, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (NIV). God is doing so many things behind the scenes that we won't know about until we get to Heaven. James 1:27 says, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress" (NIV). The unborn are true orphans when their mothers and fathers want to abandon them.

I have great respect for those in prolife work, and we should do all we can to encourage them with our prayers and financial support. There is such a darkness and deception surrounding abortion, and it isn't an easy ministry. Satan is a "liar and a murderer" and doesn't like people standing up for life and truth. Yet the darker it gets, the brighter the light of Jesus can shine, and what joy that light brings! ■

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

Watch an interview Randy recorded about the closure at [epm.org/lovejoyclosure](http://epm.org/lovejoyclosure)



# Hot Takes Are Harming Us

BY TREVIN WAX

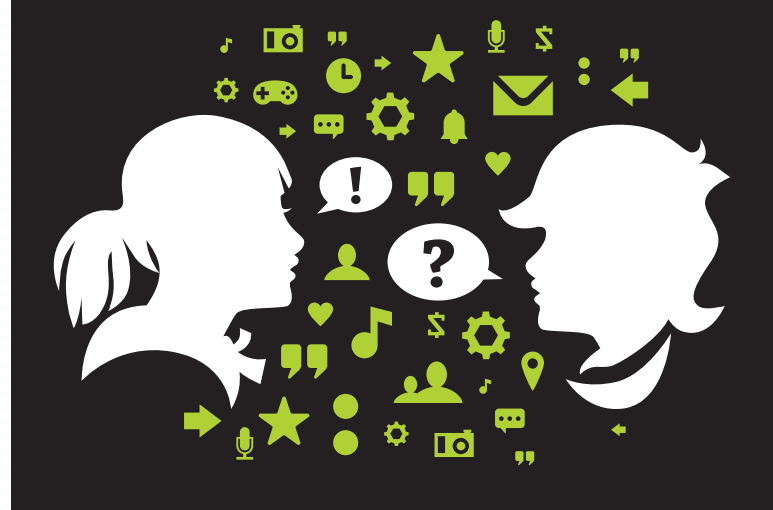
**It's not easy to follow** James' command to be "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger" in a world that rewards those quick to broadcast, slow to think, and quick to express the anger of the echo chamber.

The atmosphere of social media and the tribal instincts of a polarized culture conspire to drive us toward expressing ourselves online. I see the impulse take shape through a five-step process:

1. Something momentous has happened, usually of a tragic nature.
2. We feel we must broadcast our sympathies, our concerns, and our immediate reaction, lest we be seen as aloof, out of touch, or complicit with the blameworthy.
3. We believe we have the power to glean important lessons that will help us learn something from the event.
4. Since most of these lessons fit (conveniently) within our overall framework of interpretation, we reinforce the tribal lines and worldly categories we've constructed.
5. As commentary increases and arguments rise, we use the tragedy as a weapon in the ongoing battles in which we're already invested.

Here is an example of how this has worked out in the past.

1. The Catholic Church is embroiled in scandal due to a number of priests who have found to be sexually abusing children.
2. Christians from other traditions express shock and horror at the revelations and demand justice for the victims.



3. Many of these commentators begin to draw important lessons from the tragedy. *There's danger in ecclesiastical hierarchy! These actions must be related to Catholicism's requirement of celibacy! This is what happens when you're part of a patriarchal organization!*
4. Protestants then rely on these lessons in order to reinforce concerns they already have about Catholicism. *Catholics are compromised because of the papacy and their unbiblical top-down leadership! The emphasis on celibacy is strange and dangerous! Women should be priests, too!*
5. Over time, as debates rage on social media, Protestants use the child-abuse scandals as a weapon against Catholicism—ammunition for a battle in which they're already invested.

I've seen this five-step process play out over the course of months and years. But what shocks me today is that for many tragedies, all five steps take place *the same day*. The news barely breaks, and we already have a number of hot takes on social media that *use* the event to reinforce a narrative.

- *Ravi Zacharias is what happens when leaders don't belong to a church and aren't held accountable! (As if more church involvement would have been an obstacle to a wolf preying on women all around the world.)*
- *The horror of these police officers being killed in broad daylight is a direct result of "woke" Christians who say Black Lives Matter! (As if concerns about racial injustice or the desire for police reform necessitates violence against law enforcement officers.)*



## We are more likely to harden our hearts toward true compassion when we rush to our phones to vent our frustrations rather than turn to God and to each other to express our grief.

- *The Atlanta mass killer is proof that the conservative wing of the Southern Baptist Convention is discipling young people toward violence against women! (As if a conservative church more likely to actually engage in church discipline toward wayward Christians is responsible for the actions of a depraved member.)*

In a society given over to shallowness and superficiality, we do not feel the weight of this rush to judgment, and we feel no qualms about marshaling the latest tragedy as ammo in our ongoing debates about what is wrong about the world and how to fix it. We are blinded to our self-righteousness, sense of superiority, and spirit of judgment by a drive we consider to be good and true: the desire for justice. And so we slot the latest news into whatever our preferred “unified theory of everything” might be: racism, “wokeness,” “the patriarchy,” “leftism,” etc. We may be quick to speak, and slow to listen, and quick to anger—the opposite of the biblical admonition—but surely our disregard of James’ command is excused by our sincerity, right? Aren’t these hot takes justifiable because of the strong sense of justice we possess?

No. James did not qualify his words when he told Christians to refrain from hasty speech. And James’ words of warning here do not contradict justice. *They are its foundation.* We are more likely to treat others unjustly when we jump to rash conclusions. We are more likely to bypass true justice, mercy, and humility when we overlook slander in service of a good cause. We are more likely to harden our hearts toward true compassion

when we rush to our phones to vent our frustrations rather than turn to God and to each other to express our grief.

Christians today show signs of being just as helplessly and hopelessly polarized as America’s political tribes. In such a season of rancor and outrage, it’s difficult to reject Twitter cheap shots and manipulative sound bites. It may be harder than ever to extend to other Christians—brothers and sisters with whom you may have serious differences—grace.

James’ instruction shouldn’t shut us up, but it should at least slow us down. Heeding his words would press pause on our commentary so that we have time to look for the best in our online opponents and not tar them with the worst possible motives. Only then do we walk the road of grace and truth. Only then do we have a chance at actually persuading someone to a different point of view. Only then will the embers of our commitment to one another burn hotter than the flames of the latest online flare-up. *Quick to listen, slow to speak.* Let’s make sure tragedies stir up those ancient embers, not fan the new flames. ■

Trevin Wax is general editor of *The Gospel Project*, Theology Advisor at LifeWay Christian Resources, and a visiting professor at Wheaton College. He is the author of multiple books, including *Rethink Your Self*, *This Is Our Time*, *Eschatological Discipleship*, and *Gospel Centered Teaching*.



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# When Darkness Hides His Lovely Face

BY SCOTTY SMITH



*Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. (Psalm 43:5, NIV)*

**H**eavenly Father, I woke up heart-heavy for those of us living somewhere between mild melancholia and deep depression. In the past year, fears and anxieties, inner-darkness and heart-distresses have multiplied. Thank you for being our Father of mercies and God of all comfort. Life between the two comings of Jesus generates plenty of reasons to feel the normal “blues”—even deep sadness. But help us when darkness doesn’t just hide your “lovely face,” but friends (and we) question if you’re there at all.

We pray for friends whose “downcast-ness” is COVID generated. Isolation, the “what-if’s,” the loss of loved ones and livelihood, the stress of schooling, working, and planning... these things add up with compound interest. Have mercy, Father.

We pray for friends with PTSD, trauma-triggers, abuse stories, and physiological reasons for their depression. Our brains and bodies are more complex than we realize. Bring healing, Father.

We pray for friends who live in an echo-chamber of contempt. The father of lies condemns, blames, and shames nonstop—often through family members, bosses, and coaches. Oh, Father, silence the meanness, by the power of the Gospel, and the love of Jesus.

Help each of us steward our struggles well. Free us from withdrawal and denial, medicating poorly and bad theology. Lead us to proper care, the right friends, much more of You. So very Amen we pray, in Jesus’ strong and loving name. ■

*Scotty Smith, DMin, planted and pastored Christ Community Church in Franklin, TN, for twenty-six years. He also served as adjunct faculty for Covenant Seminary, Westminster (Philadelphia), RTS, Orlando, and Western Seminary in Portland, OR. He is the author of several books, including Unveiled Hope, Objects of His Affection, Restoring Broken Things, Everyday Prayers, and Every Season Prayers.*



See Randy's blogs  
on depression  
at [epm.org/  
depression](https://epm.org/depression)

EPM also highly  
recommends  
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Foundation  
([cccf.org](https://cccf.org))

# LET GO OF LIES ABOUT HEAVEN

## Eight Myths Many Believe

BY RANDY ALCORN

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**B**ig books full of Scripture, theology, and quotations from people long dead don't normally sell well. Yet to my surprise, and the publisher's, over a million copies of my 2004 book *Heaven* have sold. Innumerable readers, including pastors, have told me their views of the afterlife have radically changed.

Why? In an age when people try to make doctrines more appealing by ignoring or twisting biblical truth, here's the irony—the true biblical doctrine of Heaven is *far more attractive* than the dull, inhuman view of the afterlife that has long prevailed in evangelicalism.

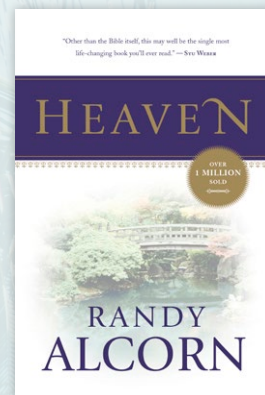
That off-putting perspective still imprisons many believers. Based on countless interactions I've had with readers of the book and others over the past sixteen years, here are eight persistent misconceptions about Heaven.

### Myth 1: We will spend eternity in the clouds.

After the final judgment, God will remake the universe itself and then relocate the present Heaven to the New Earth, where He will live with His people (Revelation 21:1–4). The promise of Heaven on earth shouldn't surprise us, but it's shocking and suspicious if we've always believed something else.

Many throughout history understood this biblical doctrine, including more recent Reformed theologians such as Herman Bavinck, Cornelius Venema, Anthony Hoekema, and Albert Wolters. Sadly, the great majority of evangelicals have not read their books. Even those who have don't always grasp the implications.

At Bible college and seminary, my last New Testament classes ended with the final judgment in Revelation 20. In eschatology, we examined the pros and cons of a mid-trib rapture, and discussed the millennium, but we never talked about



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the New Earth, the central subject of Scripture's last two chapters. So we paid zero attention to the place where we will live with Jesus and each other forever! Pastors who have read *Heaven* often contact me to share that their education was nearly identical.

As humans, we're no more drawn to a vague angelic realm than we are to eating gravel. We need to recover the biblical doctrine of Heaven, culminating in the New Earth.

### **Myth 2: The Bible says very little about Heaven.**

A Christian leader once visited my office, asking what I was researching. "A big book on heaven," I answered. He replied, "First Corinthians 2:9 says, 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.' So what will you write about?" I gave my usual response: "You didn't complete the sentence: '*but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.*'"

When God reveals otherwise undiscoverable truths to us, we'd better pay attention. "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever" (Deuteronomy 29:29). The Bible's substantial information about the world to come belongs to us—and the Bible provides far more information than most realize (for example, Isaiah 60 is quoted twice in Revelation 22, suggesting it's about the New Earth).



**We need to recover the biblical doctrine of Heaven, culminating in the New Earth.**

God *wants* us to anticipate what awaits us. That's why Peter says, "According to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13).

### **Myth 3: We can learn about Heaven from people's claims of going there.**

A television network once called my office and asked, "Has Randy been to heaven?" Our receptionist answered, "If he has, he's never mentioned it. But he did do years of research in the Bible and church history." The conversation ended abruptly: "We want to interview people who have actually been there."

Too often, people view accounts of visiting Heaven as gospel. Obviously, God can show someone the afterlife if He so chooses. But "it is appointed for man to die once" (Hebrews 9:27). Since these stories are told by people who will "die twice," it seems likely that they did not truly die the first time, even if vital signs weren't measurable. A person's memories under heavy sedation—and his or her ability to distinguish dreams from reality—aren't reliable, but God's word is (John 17:17).

The apostle Paul, who had been to Heaven, said, "This man was caught up into paradise . . . and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter" (2 Corinthians 12:3–4). Many books, however, claim to divulge secrets that, sadly, some readers believe instead of Scripture.

### **Myth 4: The Present Heaven is just like the Future Heaven.**

When Christians die, they enter the present Heaven. "Grandma's now in Heaven" refers to a temporary period between life on earth and the resurrection.

Though the present Heaven is wonderful, "far better" than earth under the curse (Philippians 1:23), it is not the place we're made for. Our destiny is a resurrected life on a resurrected earth: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. . . . I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them'" (Revelation 21:1–3). Heaven is wherever God dwells



and His throne is, and God's dwelling place *and* throne will be on the new earth (Revelation 22:3).

God's ultimate plan is not to take us up to live with Him in His place (which happens at death). His plan is, rather, to come down after the resurrection to live with us forever in our place, the New Earth. As Jesus is God incarnate, so the New Earth will be Heaven incarnate.

### **Myth 5: We'll live forever without a body.**

Plato believed that material things, including bodies, are evil, while immaterial things, such as souls, are good. What I call "Christoplatonism" infects many churches, teaching that human spirits are better off without bodies, and Heaven is a disembodied realm.

Our inability to appreciate the physical nature of the resurrection robs believers of excitement for Heaven. God's future plan of a renewed physical universe means we will live, eat and drink, laugh and play, rest and work, exercise our gifts as God's image-bearers, and most importantly, be with, worship, and serve King Jesus.

Jesus spoke of the "*renewal* of all things" (Matthew 19:28 NIV). Peter preached that Christ will remain in Heaven "until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets" (Acts 3:21). Yet somehow, we've overlooked an entire biblical vocabulary. *Reconcile. Redeem. Restore. Recover. Return. Renew. Resurrect.* God plans to physically *restore his entire creation*, including us, earth, and animals (Isaiah 11:6–9; 65:17, 25; Romans 8:19–23).

### **Myth 6: Heaven will be boring.**

Believing that eternal life consists of endless harp strumming furthers Satan's strategy "to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling" (Revelation 13:6).

Thinking that Heaven will be boring betrays a heresy—that God is boring. Nonsense! God made our taste buds, adrenaline, the nerve endings that convey pleasure to our brains, our imaginations, and our capacity for happiness and excitement.



**God's plan is to come down after the resurrection to live with us forever in our place, the New Earth.**

"No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him" (Revelation 22:3 NIV). Servants have things to do, places to go, people to see. Our most common everyday activities will be worship, punctuated by the joy of joining the multitudes to praise Him.

First Corinthians 10:31 will apply just as much in eternity as it does now: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." We can worship God now by working, painting, playing, reading, writing, and enjoying every other innocent activity. How much more on a New Earth where righteousness reigns?

### **Myth 7: We won't be us anymore or remember our former lives.**

The idea that we'll lose our identities in Heaven is Hindu, not Christian. Resurrection will forever reestablish us as glorified human individuals.

Christ's resurrection is our prototype. He proclaimed, "It is I myself" (Luke 24:39). When Thomas said, "My Lord and my God," he knew he was speaking to the same Jesus he'd lived with for years. Job said, "After my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself" (Job 19:26–27).

You will be *you* in Heaven. Who else would you be? Since we'll give an account of our lives on earth, we must remain us, and our memories will have to be better, not worse. Scripture gives no indication of a memory wipe causing us not to recognize family



**We really will live happily ever after. That's not wishful thinking. It's the blood-bought promise of Jesus.**

and friends. In fact, if we wouldn't know our loved ones, the comfort of an afterlife reunion, taught in 1 Thessalonians 4:14–18, would be no comfort at all.

### **Myth 8: Heaven will be a spiritual realm with no human culture.**

A Bible college professor took offense at my suggestion that culture—including inventions, concerts, drama, and sports—will likely be part of the New Earth. But if we will be God's resurrected image-bearers living on a resurrected earth, why *wouldn't* they be?

We're told Heaven is a city (Hebrews 11:10; 13:14). Cities have buildings, art, music, commerce, science, and technology. And of course, cities have *people* engaged in gatherings, conversations, work, and play. Heaven is also a country (Hebrews 11:16). Countries have land, animals, rulers, and citizens who are both diverse and unified. We're told "the kings of the earth will bring their glory into" the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:24).

Culture is the natural, God-intended product of His calling for mankind to rule over creation. If we believe Scripture's teaching that mankind and earth

will exist in physical form, as the entire doctrine of resurrection dictates, then culture *must* continue. How could it not?

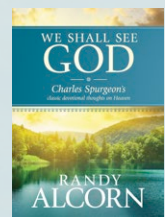
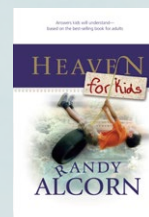
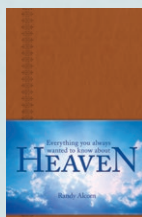
### **The Best Is Yet to Come (That's NOT a Myth!)**

Since the resurrection awaits God's children, we haven't passed our peak happiness and never will. There's no need for bucket lists, because our new universe adventures will far exceed this life's. We really *will* live happily ever after. That's not wishful thinking. It's the blood-bought promise of Jesus.

We should daily look forward to a world without evil, suffering, or death, where God will live with us and wipe away our tears forever (Revelation 21:4). Anticipating the glorious realities of the resurrected earth has breathtaking implications for our present happiness and our sense of the far-reaching scope of the gospel message.

Let's live upon Heaven's joys now, abandoning unbiblical and unworthy views of Heaven, and believing that the best truly is yet to come. ■

Browse Randy's  
books on Heaven  
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# 5 Trends in Christian Persecution

BY OPEN DOORS USA

Open Doors' annual World Watch List examines the 50 countries worldwide where it's most difficult to be a Christian. It is the only annual in-depth survey of its kind, and reveals several trends in how Christians are being targeted around the world.

1

## The devastating persecution no one saw coming

The coronavirus pandemic was the event of a generation. And in addition to the pain felt by people all over the world, it also exposed the ugliness of Christian persecution in a new way. In India (No. 10 on the World Watch List), more than 100,000 Christians received relief aid from Open Doors partners to help them through the pandemic. Of these believers, 80 percent reported to World Watch List researchers that they were dismissed from food distribution points. Some walked miles and hid their Christian identity to get food elsewhere. Another 15 percent received food aid, but reported other discrimination, such as being passed over for employment.

And it wasn't just India: The global pandemic made persecution more obvious than ever—simply because so many people needed help. The clear discrimination and oppression suffered by Christians in 2020 must not be forgotten, even after the COVID-19 crisis fades into our collective memory.

2

## The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the most vulnerable Christians

The coronavirus pandemic has exposed the persecution of Christians. But it's also shown how vulnerable so many of our sisters and brothers are in the places where they live. Christians who abandon a majority faith to follow Christ know they risk losing all support from spouses, families, tribes and communities, as well as local and national authorities. If they lose income due to COVID-19, they can't fall back on customary networks for survival.

For church leaders, COVID-19 also exposed how difficult daily life is. Many are not paid salaries, but depend on financial support from community donations. When church services stop, donations drop—by about 40 percent, said leaders ranging from Egypt to Latin America. This also affects humanitarian assistance to their own communities, both inside and outside churches.



3

### Lockdowns didn't matter: The violence is astounding

In much of the world, violence against Christians actually decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic. But across sub-Saharan Africa, that wasn't the case. Christians there faced up to 30 percent *higher* levels of violence than the previous year. Several hundred mostly Christian villages in Nigeria were either occupied or ransacked by armed Hausa-Fulani Muslim militant herdsmen; sometimes, fields and crops were destroyed as well. Boko Haram—and splinter group Islamic State of West Africa Province—continue to plague Nigeria and northern Cameroon.

4

### The terrifying technological reality of persecution

As China's global influence spreads, it exports its all-pervasive systems for "protection" and "security"—which can be seen now to brutally oppress the Uighur population in Xinjiang. Chinese companies are supported by the government to supply AI surveillance technology to 63 countries, including countries on the 2021 World Watch List like Myanmar, Laos, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, in India, religious minorities fear contact-tracing apps will have "function creep" and will be used to keep an eye on them and their movements. Another app, already in use, can predict age, gender and race. India's data protection bill does not cover surveillance. Indeed, it has provisions to allow the government to bypass protection standards and even consent in circumstances such as national security or crime investigation.



5

### When citizenship is tied to a faith

In countries like India and Turkey, religious identity is increasingly tied to national identity—meaning, to be a "real" Indian or a good Turk, you must be a Hindu or a Muslim, respectively. This is often implicitly—if not explicitly—encouraged by the ruling government. In other countries on the World Watch List, religious identity is closely tied to national identity, and anyone who follows Jesus risks being seen—and persecuted—as a bad citizen.

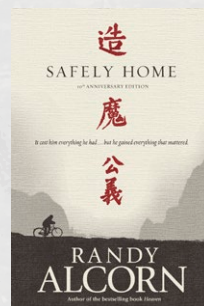
#### In just the last year\*, there have been:

- Over 340 million Christians living in places where they experience high levels of persecution and discrimination
- 4,761 Christians killed for their faith
- 4,488 churches and other Christian buildings attacked
- 4,277 believers detained without trial, arrested, sentenced or imprisoned

These numbers are heart-breaking. And yet, they do not tell the whole story. James 1:2-4 says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance" (NIV). That joy is what we see when we hear and work with Christians all over the world who suffer because they serve Jesus. God cares for His people, and He will never leave or forsake them.

\* 2021 World Watch List reporting period: [opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list](https://opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list)

Randy's novel *Safely Home* was originally released in 2001, but its message about the persecuted church in China and around the world remains timely. Learn more at [epm.org/safelyhomebook](https://epm.org/safelyhomebook)





# Does God Promise His Followers Eternal Rewards for Bearing Burdens in Life?

**Question from a reader:** Randy shared a quote from Andrew Bonar on his Facebook page that said, “We are to be rewarded, not only for work done, but for burdens borne, and I am not sure but that the brightest rewards will be for those who have borne burdens without murmuring.”

I’m interested in this concept of rewards related to burdens. Obviously Heaven is the greatest reward, but is there any Biblical reference to this idea?

ANSWER FROM STEPHANIE ANDERSON, EPM STAFF

**W**hen we read through Revelation 2-3, we see several places where Jesus promises to reward His followers for their trust in Him and for their faithfulness. This theme runs throughout Scripture and can be a great encouragement to us.

There’s hardly anyone more credible to comment on burdens than Joni Eareckson Tada. She writes,

I love to quote 2 Corinthians chapter 4 where it says, “... our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So ... fix [your] eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is [only] temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (NIV). My response to my wheelchair is gaining me an eternal reward that far outweighs the inconvenience of my paralysis. And that’s true for you, too, in your trial.

The key word that Joni says is “response.” It’s not that the burdens themselves automatically lead to reward. It’s our heart response to them that matters: the character-byproducts and the choice to trust Jesus even when things don’t make sense from our perspective.

Randy writes in his book *If God Is Good*:

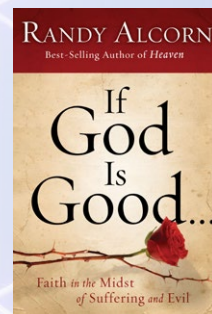
Like James (in 1:2-3), Paul said, “We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance” (Romans 5:3, BSB).

Paul and James both claim we should rejoice in suffering because of what it produces: *perseverance*.

Adversity itself doesn’t cause our joy. Rather, our joy comes in the expectation of adversity’s by-product, the development of godly character. God doesn’t ask us to cheer because we lose our job, or a loved one contracts cancer, or a child has an incurable birth defect. He tells us to rejoice because he will produce in us something money can’t buy and ease will never produce—the precious quality of Christ-exalting perseverance.

Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples” (John 8:31). At the end of his life, Paul said, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4:7-8, NIV).

God gives each of us a race to run. To finish well we must develop perseverance. The Christian life is not a hundred-meter dash, but a marathon. We rejoice in suffering in the same way that Olympic athletes rejoice in their workouts—not because they find them easy, but because they know they will one day produce great reward. ■



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# Don't Feel Sorry for or Fear for Your Kids— Raise Them up to Walk in Faith

**Note from Randy Alcorn:** Acts 17:24-27 says, “The God who made the world and everything in it—he is Lord of heaven and earth—does not live in shrines made by hands. ...From one man he has made every nationality to live over the whole earth and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of where they live. He did this so that they might seek God, and perhaps they might reach out and find him” (CSB).

God has a perfect time and place for all of us. He knows and has planned our circumstances, and while human choice is taken into account, God is not bound by the decisions of people. He makes His own calls, and He truly does work all things together for good for His people (Romans 8:28).

When it comes to His children, God has determined the “times set for them” and “the exact [not just general, but exact] places they should live.” So the One in control of the universe has His time and place for all of us. Knowing the God of providence is sovereign, and is not taken by surprise by anything, should help us walk by faith.

As God raised up Esther for just such a time as hers (Esther 4:14), I’m convinced He’s raised us *and our children and grandchildren* up for this time, to be a witness for Christ and to bring the Good News of great joy to those around the world.

May we be faithful to rise to the challenge of these times and point the next generation to Jesus.

BY ALEX CRAVENS

**D**on't feel sorry for or fear for your kids because the world they are going to grow up in is not what it used to be.

God created them and called them for the exact moment in time that they're in. Their life wasn't a coincidence or an accident.

Raise them up to know the power they walk in as children of God.

Train them up in the authority of His Word.

Teach them to walk in faith knowing that God is in control.

Empower them to know they can change the world.

Don't teach them to be fearful and disheartened by the state of the world but hopeful that they can do something about it.

Every person in all of history has been placed in the time that they were in because of God's sovereign plan.

He knew Daniel could handle the lions' den.



He knew David could handle Goliath.  
He knew Esther could handle Haman.  
He knew Peter could handle persecution.  
He knows that your child can handle whatever challenge they face in their life. He created them specifically for it!  
Don't be scared for your children, but be honored that God chose you to parent the generation that is facing the biggest challenges of our lifetime. Rise up to the challenge.

Raise Daniels, Davids, Esthers, and Peters!

God isn't scratching His head wondering what He's going to do with this mess of a world.

He has an army He's raising up to drive back the darkness and make Him known all over the earth.

Don't let your fear steal the greatness God placed in them. I know it's hard to imagine them as anything besides our sweet little babies, and we just want to protect them from anything that could ever be hard on them, but they were born for such a time as this.

---

*Alex is a husband and the dad of two little boys, and has been a youth pastor for six years. He serves at Butterfield Church in Russellville, Arkansas.*







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