

eternal perspectives

FALL/WINTER 2023

Why Remembering *Our True Inheritance* Changes How We Live and Give

ALSO INSIDE

Introducing the Nanci Alcorn Memorial Library

How Scripture Memorization Tethers You to Christ

The Darkness Does Not Win



contents

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|----|---|----|--|
| 3 | News from EPM | 10 | Q&A
Randy Alcorn | 19 | Giving Is a Major Pathway to
Spiritual Growth and Joy
Randy Alcorn |
| 4 | Combating the Spirit of
Entitlement with Gratitude
Randy Alcorn | 11 | Could You Summarize the
Christmas Story with One
Word?
Paul David Tripp | 21 | Yahweh Is the Sweetest Name
I Know
John Piper |
| 6 | 9 Lessons God Teaches Us
Through Sickness
J. C. Ryle | 12 | Start Giving Before You Inherit
Randy Alcorn | 22 | The Darkness Does Not Win
Kevin DeYoung |
| 8 | Introducing the Nanci Alcorn
Memorial Library | 16 | How Scripture Memorization
Tethers You to Christ
Glenna Marshall | | |

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.

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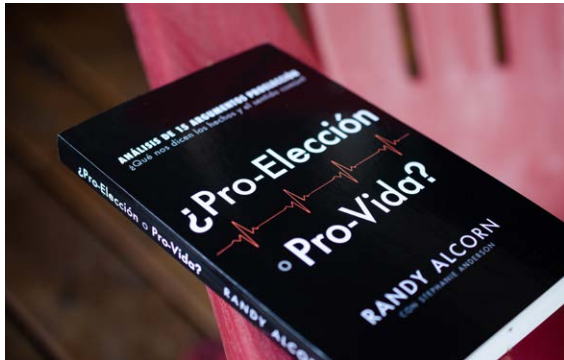
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Pro-Choice or Pro-Life? Now Available in Spanish

Over the years, we've received requests for an affordable prolife book that ministries and individuals could share with Spanish speakers. *¿Proelección o Provida? Análisis de 15 argumentos proelección* is available for just \$3.00/copy (retail \$9.99), and we offer a discount price of \$2.50/each for 80 or more copies, and \$2.25/each for 1,000 or more copies. Print copies and a free PDF download are available at epm.org/provida. Join us in praying that God will use this book to make an eternal impact!

Welcome Amy Schafer to EPM

Amy works part-time assisting with shipping, customer service, and special projects. She is excited to be part of a ministry God is using to reach people all over every day. Join us in welcoming her to the EPM staff!



Don't Miss Our Holiday Specials on Randy's Books

We'll be offering specials on several books during the weeks leading up to Christmas, including *Heaven for Kids*, on sale November 16-20, for \$7 (regularly \$9.99, retail \$13.99). Sign up for our email newsletter at epm.org/connected, which is the best way to follow our specials.

November 8 through December 8, get free media mail shipping on orders of \$30 or more with the code **23THANKFUL** (U.S. continental orders only.) Visit epm.org/store to see our latest specials.

Blog Series on Gender Confusion

Earlier this year, Randy posted a series of guest blogs related to gender and sexuality. The articles looked at gender as God's creation and gender confusion as part of the Fall. These articles can help guide us as to what we need to believe and do to walk as God wants. Read the series at epm.org/gender.

Combating the Spirit of Entitlement with Gratitude

BY RANDY ALCORN

In Exodus 13-15 God brings a startling multi-stage miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egypt. It's truly breathtaking, culminating in the miraculous dividing and crossing of the Red Sea, and the destruction of the powerful Egyptian army pursuing them. If ever an intervention of God would be unforgettable, this surely was it.

But before Exodus 15 is completed, Israel had already forgotten! A few days of travel and they are thirsty. This is understandable. God is not insensitive to their needs or ours. So do they fall on their knees thanking God for their deliverance, and humbly asking Him to provide them water? No, they grumble and complain and whine, and accuse Moses, and by proxy, God. (This passage proves that the spirit of entitlement did not begin in America, but we are perfecting it as an art form.)

The people find water, but it's bitter. They complain further. Moses throws the branch in the water, and it's purified. Grateful for the moment, they swear they'll never doubt God or Moses again. (Showing that we need more than periodic moments of gratitude, we need an ongoing spirit of gratitude to God that becomes the lens through which we view life.)



Forgetful and Entitled

The Israelites in the wilderness are unbearably similar to us. When their circumstances are good, they see God. But as soon as their circumstances turn bad, they forget Him and all they have to be thankful for. It's as if present trials blot out and negate God's past track record of faithfulness.

Luke 17:11-19 tells the story of ten lepers who were all healed of their leprosy but only one of them returned to say, "Thank you." He ran back to Jesus, praising God for His incredible goodness to him. Jesus asked him, "What happened to the other nine that were also healed?"

God preserve us from such attitudes! Ingratitude is not just wrong thinking—it's the source of

endless wrong thinking. An ungrateful person not only offends God, but is also the source of his own misery, and a cancer to others, spreading his misery. Ungrateful people are not only ungrateful to God but to their families and friends and co-workers and neighbors. They're ungrateful to their church leaders, and quick to judge and condemn everyone for falling short of their standards.

Others must be blamed for the injustices they have to put up with. Everyone is at fault, including those who drive too slow or too fast, who steal that parking space they had their eye on, who grab up that sweater on sale they were looking at.

We live in a culture where there is a spirit of entitlement—where we think we deserve all of these great things. If something doesn't go our way, we feel like we've been robbed and deprived. And even when a person gets what they think they're already entitled to, they're not grateful for it. After all, "I deserved it!"

Stir up Thanksgiving

In contrast, Puritan pastor Richard Baxter wrote, "Resolve to spend most of your time in thanksgiving and praising God. If you cannot do it with the joy that you should, yet do it as you can.... Doing it as you can is the way to be able to do it better.

Thanksgiving stirreth up thankfulness in the heart."

Baxter is right—expressing gratitude makes a grateful heart. Children who learn to say thanks become more thankful. Gratitude is a wonderful perspective-shaping habit.

Psalm 107 begins, "Oh give thanks to Yahweh, for He is good, for His lovingkindness endures forever" (LSB). The psalmist details the sufferings of God's people, wandering in desert wastelands, without homes, hungry, and thirsty. "Then they cried out to Yahweh...He delivered them out of their distresses" (verse 6). For their deliverance he says, "Let them give thanks to Yahweh for His lovingkindness, and for His wondrous deeds to the sons of men! For He has satisfied the thirsty soul, and the hungry soul He has filled with what is good" (verses 8–9).

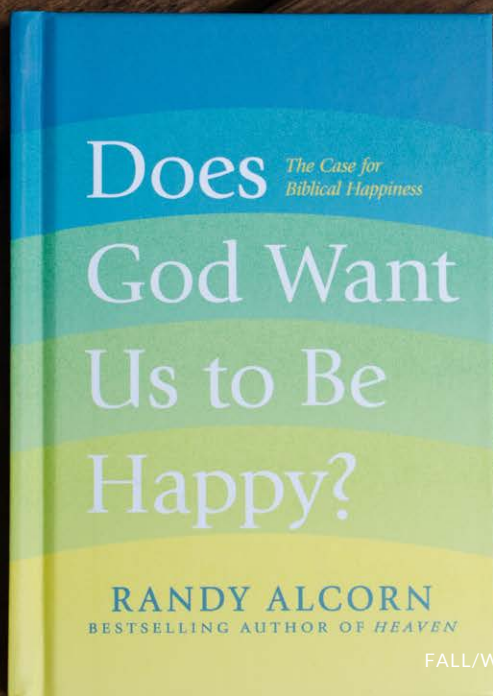
Gratitude Sets Us Apart

It is God's will that you give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18). This is something that is built into what it means to be a follower of Christ. Thankfulness should draw a clear line between us and a Christless world.

If the same spirit of entitlement and ingratitude that characterizes our culture characterizes us, what do we have to offer? ■

What if we are wired for happiness in Jesus?

God tells us, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Randy writes, "This is as close as Scripture gets to a formula for happiness." Explore more about Christ-honoring happiness in his book *Does God Want Us to Be Happy?*, available from epm.org/happy





9 Lessons God Teaches Us Through Sickness

BY J. C. RYLE

Note from Randy: During her four-year battle with cancer, my precious wife and soulmate, Nanci, immersed herself daily in God's Word, read great books about His attributes, and wrote to Him in her journal. Together we turned to Jesus in prayer and worship as we drew close to God and each other and faced her death side by side. Nanci's physical decline was heartbreaking, but her spiritual growth was stunning and profound.

Recently I read "9 Lessons from God Concerning Sickness" from J. C. Ryle, an Anglican bishop (1816–1900). Every lesson he shares applies to how Nanci lived out her last years before relocating to Heaven. In fact, I was surprised I'd never read this before. Nanci would've loved it, and she probably loves it now more than ever. Praise God for J. C. Ryle!

Affliction is a friendly letter from Heaven. It is a knock at the door of conscience. It is the voice of the Savior knocking at the heart's door. Happy is he who opens the letter and reads it, who hears the

knock and opens the door, who welcomes Christ to the sick room. Come now, and let me show you a few of the lessons which He by sickness would teach us.

1 To make us think, to remind us that we have a soul as well as a body—an immortal soul, a soul that will live forever in happiness or in misery—and that if this soul is not saved we had better never have been born.

2 To teach us that there is a world beyond the grave, and that the world we now live in is only a training place for another dwelling, where there will be no decay, no sorrow, no tears, no misery, and no sin.

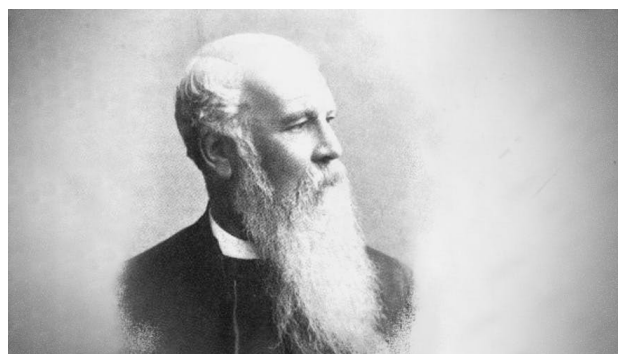
3 To make us look at our past lives honestly, fairly, and conscientiously. Am I ready for my great change if I should not get better? Do I repent truly of my sins? Are my sins forgiven and washed away in Christ's blood? Am I prepared to meet God?

4 To make us see the emptiness of the world and its utter inability to satisfy the highest and deepest needs of the soul.

5 To send us to our Bibles. That blessed Book, in the days of health, is too often left on the shelf, becomes the safest place in which to put a bank-note, and is never opened from January to December. But sickness often brings it down from the shelf and throws new light on its pages.

6 To make us pray. Too many, I fear, never pray at all, or they only rattle over a few hurried words morning and evening without thinking what they do. But prayer often becomes a reality when the valley of the shadow of death is in sight.

7 To make us repent and break off our sins. If we will not hear the voice of mercies, God sometimes makes us "hear the rod."



8 To draw us to Christ. Naturally we do not see the full value of that blessed Savior. We secretly imagine that our prayers, good deeds, and sacrament-receiving will save our souls. But when flesh begins to fail, the absolute necessity of a Redeemer, a Mediator, and an Advocate with the Father, stands out before men's eyes like fire, and makes them understand those words, "Simply to Your cross I cling," as they never did before. Sickness has done this for many—they have found Christ in the sick room.

9 To make us feeling and sympathizing towards others. By nature we are all far below our blessed Master's example, who had not only a hand to help all, but a heart to feel for all. None, I suspect, are so unable to sympathize as those who have never had trouble themselves—and none are so able to feel as those who have drunk most deeply the cup of pain and sorrow.

Summary: Beware of fretting, murmuring, complaining, and giving way to an impatient spirit. Regard your sickness as a blessing in disguise—a good and not an evil—a friend and not an enemy. No doubt we should all prefer to learn spiritual lessons in the school of ease and not under the rod. But rest assured that God knows better than we do how to teach us. The light of the last day will show you that there was a meaning and a "need be" in all your bodily ailments. The lessons that we learn on a sick-bed, when we are shut out from the world, are often lessons which we should never learn elsewhere. ■

Introducing the Nanci Alcorn Memorial Library

Reflections from Randy

Six years ago, Nanci and I traveled to Jamaica. First, I spoke at a donors' conference to help raise funds for Operation Mobilization's ship *Logos Hope*. I had asked OM if it would be possible for Nanci and me to stay on board the ship after the conference, and that turned out to be one of the best experiences of our lives.

After Nanci went to be with Jesus, OM wanted to honor her influence on the ministry by renaming the library on board *Logos Hope*, "The Nanci Alcorn Memorial Library." (Learn more about the ministry at om.org/eng/ships.)

I'm so thankful for the memories I have of countless trips with Nanci now that flying across the world as an insulin-dependent diabetic has become more difficult. As hard as it was to say no to visiting the ship for the dedication this October, it prompted me to ask our daughters Karina and Angela if they wanted to make the trip to Tanzania. I am so happy that they were able to witness firsthand their mom being honored by one of the favorite ministries she ever saw (and she saw many over our years together)!



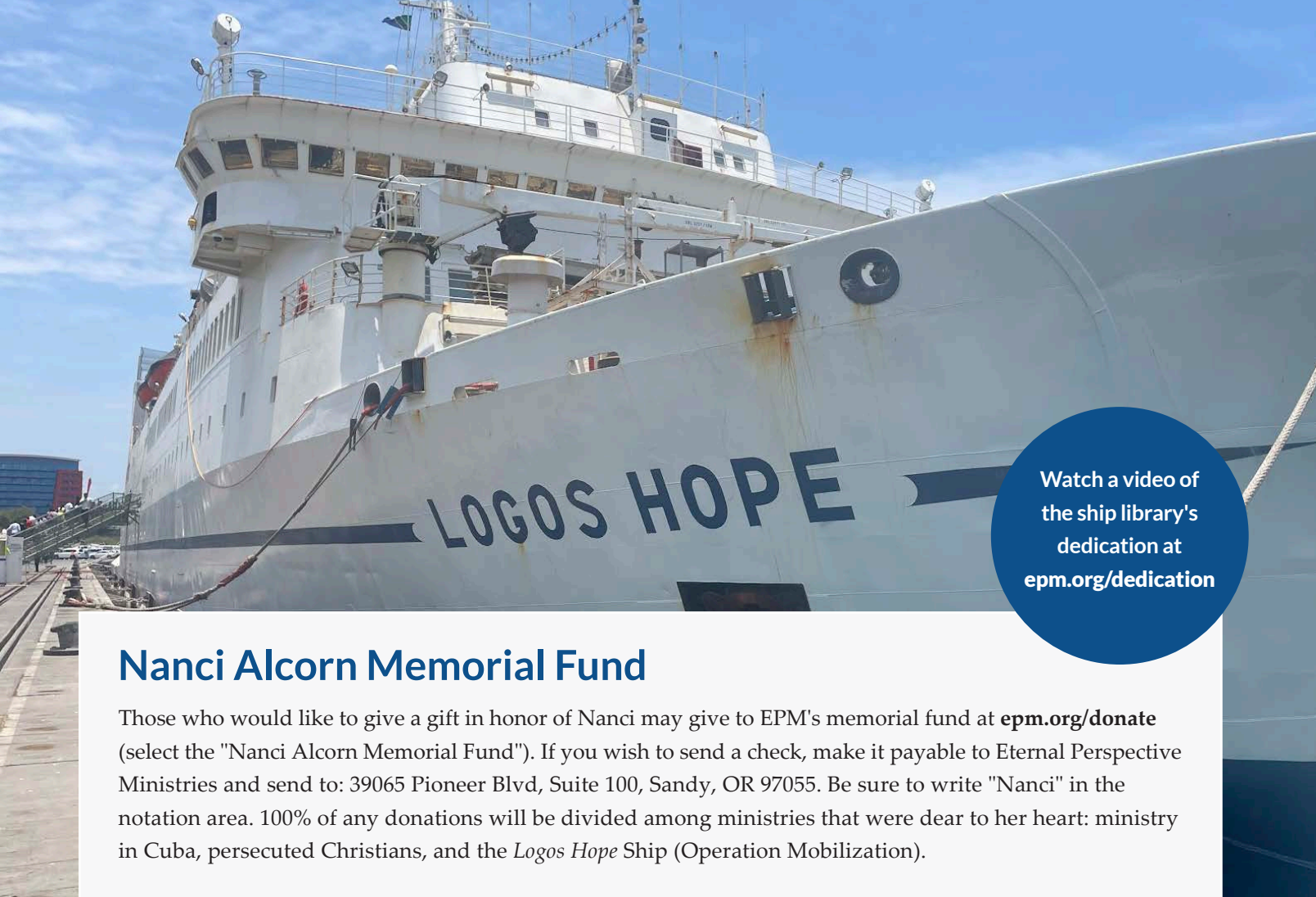
From Karina (Alcorn) Franklin

Angela and I were able to tour the ship and see the school, the galley, the engine room, and experience all the different teams that come together to make life on the ship possible. I enjoyed meeting professionals who are bringing their skills to life on board, as well as young volunteers who are learning on the job.

We were able to join in the community prayer meeting, participate in a women's conference on board for local Tanzanian women, and check out the book fair, which was full of elementary school students at the time we were there. There's a huge variety of books available, and it was interesting seeing behind the scenes where those books are organized and stored. So much thought and care goes into this ministry!

I'm so thankful we were able to celebrate the dedication of the library in mom's honor and experience life aboard ship. We had so many fascinating conversations and were able to meet a wide variety of people from many nations. What a great reminder that we serve a God who is worshiped all around the world, and who is accomplishing His purposes in many languages, tribes, and tongues. Worshiping, praying, and sharing meals with our international brothers and sisters was a great privilege and blessing.





Watch a video of
the ship library's
dedication at
epm.org/dedication

Nanci Alcorn Memorial Fund

Those who would like to give a gift in honor of Nanci may give to EPM's memorial fund at epm.org/donate (select the "Nanci Alcorn Memorial Fund"). If you wish to send a check, make it payable to Eternal Perspective Ministries and send to: 39065 Pioneer Blvd, Suite 100, Sandy, OR 97055. Be sure to write "Nanci" in the notation area. 100% of any donations will be divided among ministries that were dear to her heart: ministry in Cuba, persecuted Christians, and the *Logos Hope* Ship (Operation Mobilization).

From Angela (Alcorn) Stump

Even though I had geared myself up for massive waves of emotion during this trip and the need to process through all my grief once again, God had other things in mind. As Karina and I walked around *Logos Hope*, meeting the crew of people representing 70+ different countries and hearing their stories, I began to realize just how self focused I was. With each person I met, I was struck with the fact that although we looked different, spoke different languages, and live continents apart, everyone on board had a story like mine: full of ups and downs, with great joys and heartbreaking losses.

Logos Hope is a microcosm, full of people like you and me, stumbling through this broken world, but who have made the choice to take their eyes off themselves and put them on Jesus and on those who don't yet know Him.

This trip wasn't about me or my experience. This was about honoring my mom, and my mom's life was spent honoring people like the members of this crew, and most importantly, honoring the Lord. The people on the ship—and for that matter, the ship itself—aren't fancy or flashy, but neither was my mom. These are people who have ordinary lives, but are choosing, by the grace of God, to do something extraordinary with them. Like my mom did.

Over just the course of a few days on *Logos Hope*, I saw what I believe my mom saw and fell in love with: a foretaste of Heaven, a beautiful picture of "every tribe, tongue and nation." And now she is there, a part of the great multitude that no one could number, worshipping before the throne of God. I can't wait to join her. ■

Q&A

Question from a reader:

What do you think about linking current events to the end times? Is this a good thing for Christians to focus on?

Answer from Randy Alcorn:

Jesus made clear in Matthew 24:36-44 that there is no way to know for sure *when* He will return, only *that* He will return. I certainly believe in the return of Christ. But I do not put much faith in prophecy specialists. What international conflict in the past century, especially involving the Middle East, has not inspired books and sermons affirming “this is it”?

Eventually some of the prophecy “experts” will be right about some things. Will it be this time, and will recent events trigger the end of the age? It’s possible, of course. But I’ve heard dozens of theories about “men who must be the Anti-Christ,” as well as countless “this is the beginning of the tribulation for sure” predictions, during the decades since I became a Christian as a teenager.

What exactly is going to be the outcome of today’s current events in the Middle East and around the world? We simply don’t know. That takes us right back to the Word of God, where we need to be in the first place: “Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’ As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil” (James 4:13-16).

This puts us in our place. We’re not God, we don’t hold the universe in the palm of our hands, and we just don’t know what lies ahead of us. I don’t know if I’ll be killed in a car wreck tomorrow or diagnosed with a terminal disease. I’m not in charge—neither are you.

“

We need to focus on faithfully serving our King until we die or He returns, either of which could happen any day.



God is in charge, and He is not taken by surprise. He knew about today’s events before He created the world. He can and will use it as part of His plan, which may or may not include judging society and disciplining His church.

Rather than speculate on what will happen, we should focus on what the Bible has told us all along—fear God, trust God, be wise, be prepared, be faithful, be generous, care for your family, look after the body of Christ, reach out to those who don’t know Him. We don’t know the day or the hour of His return, and need to focus on faithfully serving our King until we die or He returns, either of which could happen any day.

Scripture tells us, “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7, YLT). We should respond to current events not with a spirit of fear, but of power (knowing God has given us in Christ all the resources we need to face any difficulty), love (putting the glory of God and the good of others before ourselves), and a sound mind (a disciplined, self-controlled and Spirit-controlled intellect that evaluates the available information and acts in light of biblical priorities and wisdom).

If we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, we need not worry about tomorrow (Matthew 6:24-34). The best way to prepare for tomorrow is to walk with God today. ■

Could You Summarize the *Christmas Story* with One Word?

BY PAUL DAVID TRIPP

If you had to summarize the Christmas story with one word, what word would you choose? Now, your word would have to capture what this story points to as the core of human need and the way God would meet that need. Do you have a word in mind? Maybe you're thinking that it's just not possible to summarize the greatest story ever with one word. But I think you can. Let's consider one lovely, amazing, history-changing, and eternally significant word.

It doesn't take paragraph after paragraph, written on page after page, filling volume after volume to communicate how God chose to respond to the outrageous rebellion of Adam and Eve and the subtle and not-so-subtle rebellion of everyone since. God's response to the sin of people against His rightful and holy rule can be captured in a single word. I wonder if you thought, "I know the word: *grace*." But the single word that captures God's response to sin even better than the word *grace* is not a theological word; it is a name. That name is Jesus.



God's response wasn't a thing. It wasn't the establishment of an institution. It wasn't a process of intervention. It wasn't some new divine program. In His infinite wisdom God knew that the only thing that could rescue us from ourselves and repair the horrendous damage that sin had done to the world was not a thing at all. It was a person, His Son, the Lord Jesus. ■



Paul David Tripp is a pastor, event speaker, and a best-selling and award-winning author of over 30 books, including *Come, Let Us Adore Him: A Daily Advent Devotional*. This book of daily readings for the month of December will help you slow down, prepare your heart, and focus on what matters most: adoring our Savior, Jesus.



Start Giving *Before* You Inherit

Why Remembering Our
True Inheritance Changes
How We Live and Give

BY RANDY ALCORN



M

illennials may inherit over \$68 trillion from previous generations by 2030. According to Newsweek, some experts believe this “could be

the largest transfer of wealth in the history of humankind.”

What will younger generations do with that wealth?

Studies show the younger someone is, the less he or she tends to give financially. Not just less in amount, but less in proportion. According to Barna Group, “Only 13 percent of Millennials and even fewer Gen Z (6%) give money on a frequent basis.” In “The Generosity Gap,” Barna reported that 7 percent of those who are 70 or older give 10 percent or more of their income to their churches, but only 1 percent of millennials say they do so. Only 21 percent of all believers give 10 percent or more of their income to their local churches, while 25 percent give nothing.

Without a vision for giving as investing in eternity—and a sense that God’s purpose for prospering us is so we can help the church, aid the poor, and reach the lost—inheriting such wealth could be a curse rather than a blessing.

Dangerous Inheritance

Scripture says that “A good man leaves an inheritance for his children’s children” (Proverbs 13:22). In Old Testament times, passing on ownership of the land to the next generation was vital. Many people lived at a subsistence level, too poor to buy land. With no inheritance, they would likely end up enslaved or unable to care for their children, parents, or grandparents.

In the Western World today, however, things are very different. There are exceptions, but inheritances are usually windfalls coming to people who live separately from their parents, have their own careers, and are financially independent. They have dependable sources of income generated by their own work, skills, saving, and investing. In

many cases by their forties or fifties, they will have a higher net worth than their parents do.

In a society with such affluence and opportunity, I’ve advocated that, in most cases, Christian parents should seriously consider leaving the bulk of their estate to churches, parachurch ministries, missions, and other kingdom purposes, leaving a relatively small portion to their children.

If your parents are among those who’ve decided to give away most of their wealth rather than pass it on to you and your siblings, I encourage you to rejoice. Honor their choice and support them in it. Having grown up in an unbelieving family, I would’ve loved for my parents to have had such a kingdom vision.

If your parents do leave you with the majority of their wealth, ask God what He wants you to do with it. Understand it doesn’t truly belong to you and that many lives and marriages have been ruined by an infusion of unearned wealth. Yes, an inheritance can be a blessing. But that isn’t all God tells us. He also says, “An

inheritance gained hastily in the beginning will not be blessed in the end” (Proverbs 20:21). Jesus knew our tendency to live in denial about the dangers of money love, so He sounded this alarm: “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions” (Luke 12:15, NIV).

When I was a missions pastor, I worked with a couple who finished their missionary training and were soon headed to the field. Unexpectedly, the wife inherited significant wealth. The couple was excited, thinking they could now become self-supported missionaries. When they asked my advice, I encouraged them that they needed the accountability and prayer support of having financial partners. We talked about how they could

**Jesus knew our
tendency to live
in denial about
*the dangers of
money love.***

give away the majority of the inheritance, thanking God for the opportunity to invest in eternity. This would allow them to trust God to provide, as missionaries normally do, and move forward undistracted.

In the end, they kept most of the money, and what happened next broke my wife's and my hearts. Over the next few years, their marriage, family and ministry plans fell apart. Sadly they never recovered. Obviously, the money wasn't the only problem, but it certainly had a significant negative effect. What seemed like a blessing—what we believe *could* have been a blessing if they'd given most of it away—proved to be a curse.

Speaking of God's kind provision of wealth, Paul says "You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God" (2 Corinthians 9:11). In other words, God provides more money to us not simply to increase our standard of living, but to increase our standard of giving.

Give Today

When it comes to money and possessions, we tend to compare upward, not downward. But even if

we're lower-middle class in America, the truth is we're in the upper 98th percentile of the world's wealthy. Whether we're set to receive an inheritance or not, most of us are already rich by global standards. So instead of starting to make purchases based on money you think you'll inherit, start giving *now* as good stewards of what God supplies.

The key to such giving—and to avoiding greed, pride, and possessiveness—is recognizing God's ownership of everything: "Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it" (Deuteronomy 10:14). If our possessions and money ultimately belong to us, no one has the right to tell us what to do with them. Until we truly grasp that God is the owner and we're merely stewards of his assets, we won't be generous givers. But once we embrace God's ownership of everything, it's a small step to ask Him what He wants us to do with *His* money and possessions.

When God prospers us, it's not merely to give us new toys and more beautiful homes but to allow us to give still more: "You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way" (2 Cor. 9:11). God's extra provision isn't usually intended

“When God prospers us, it's not merely to give us new toys and more beautiful homes but to allow us to give still more.”



to raise our standard of living but to raise our standard of giving.

It's human nature to imagine that spending on ourselves will make us happiest. But the Macedonian Christians understood the joy of giving: "Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity" (2 Corinthians 8:2). If giving wasn't an act of love, if it didn't help others, and even if God didn't tell us to do it, it'd still be in our best interests. Because generosity leads to joy.

Jesus told His disciples that when they gave money away, their hearts would follow the treasures they were storing in Heaven (Matthew 6:19–21). He said God would reward them for helping the needy (Luke 14:14). We're forever connected to what we give and the people we give it to. As Martin Luther said, "I have held many things in my hands and I have lost them all. But whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess."

Greater Reward

Our role in Christ's kingdom isn't only as a son or daughter of the King but also as an investor, an asset

Giving to God's kingdom
is the most dependable and
profitable investment ever.

manager, and an eternal beneficiary. The command to store up treasures in Heaven proves giving isn't simply parting with wealth—it's transferring wealth to another location where it can never be lost. Giving to God's kingdom is the most dependable and profitable investment ever. When you give, don't think of it as divesting but investing.

Peter speaks of an inheritance God has awaiting us after death that includes both our salvation and the eternal treasures we store up through generous giving: "He keeps them for you in heaven, where they cannot decay or spoil or fade away" (1 Peter 1:4, GNT). God promises our wise stewardship and generous giving will pay off, with joy now and rewards in the future.

May we always remember that God—not real estate or wealth—is our true inheritance. May we live and give accordingly so that what we inherit doesn't become for us a curse but a true blessing from God's hand. ■

Giving Is the Good Life: The Unexpected Path to Purpose and Joy

Randy teaches life-changing biblical principles of generosity and tells stories of people who have put those radical principles into practice. Each story is a practical application that can help stimulate your imagination and expand your dreams of serving Jesus in fresh ways. Learn more and order from epm.org/goodlife





How Scripture Memorization Tethers You to Christ

BY GLENNA MARSHALL

The older I get, the more forgetful I seem to become. One day last fall I stood at the pharmacy counter and went completely blank when the pharmacist asked for my phone number to confirm my prescription. I've also learned I must consciously repeat a new acquaintance's name several times to ensure that I will remember it the next time I see them (and

even that is no guarantee). And let's not talk about the grocery list I regularly manage to leave on the kitchen counter. I've learned that my memory is not as reliable as I'd like it to be, and the struggle isn't limited to people's names, phone numbers, or grocery lists.

Have you ever had days when you finished your Bible reading but later can't remember what you

studied? Or maybe you enjoyed an encouraging time of prayer and meditation on Scripture when you woke up this morning but the cares of work and family and life have pushed that sweet time of intimacy with Christ to the periphery of your mind. It's easy to get so caught up in daily living that you forget to remain in communion with Christ. You forget that you're supposed to be praying without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17), taking your thoughts captive (2 Corinthians 10:5), and seeking wisdom from the Lord (James 1:5–8). You get busy with work or grocery shopping or driving kids to various activities, and you just forget about the commands and encouragements from Scripture you read in the morning. It slips your mind that you should pray for wisdom before walking into that meeting. You forget to weave that verse you studied this morning into your conversation with your lost neighbor like you planned to earlier when your mind wasn't so saturated with to-do lists. You're not alone in this!

Scripture Helps Us Remember

God knew that we would be a forgetful people, so He gave us His Word to help us remember what is true. When He gave His law to the people of Israel, He commanded them:

You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (Deuteronomy 11:18–19 ESV)

This is a command to remember God's Word throughout the entire day! While we are not living under the old covenant as Israel did, the principle of keeping God's Word ever before us is applicable and helpful. Paul tells us that all Scripture is breathed out by God and useful for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness

(2 Timothy 3:16). God's Word aids us in living as God's people, so keeping it before our eyes at all times will keep us connected to Christ and help us discern what is true in this life.

I've learned that Scripture memorization can keep my forgetful mind on Jesus long after I've closed my Bible.

As forgetful as we might be, hiding God's Word in our hearts through Scripture memory is a valuable tool for remaining tethered to Christ and His kingdom throughout our busy days. You might think that having a poor memory would prevent you from this very practice, but I've learned that Scripture memorization can keep my forgetful mind on Jesus long after I've closed my Bible. God has supplied us with everything we need for life and godliness, and He gave us minds that can store up the treasures of His Word.

The Point of Memorization

The Bible contains many exhortations to memorize Scripture. We're called to meditate on it day and night (Psalm 1:2), to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly (Colossians 3:16), and to put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator (Colossians 3:10). We even

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Scripture memorization helps us remember what's true, tethering our thoughts to God and His Word.

have an entire psalm—Psalm 119—dedicated to the celebration of God's Word and its usefulness in our daily living and thinking! We will never outgrow our need for Scripture, and memorization helps us work God's Word down deep into our hearts. While you may never stand and recite a passage before your church, recitation isn't the point of memorization. Remembering is. The process of repeating and rehearsing Scripture throughout the day keeps God's good, true, applicable words before our eyes so we don't forget who He is, how He has sent Christ to pay for our sins at the cross, and how we are to live as loved, redeemed children of God. Scripture memorization helps us remember what's true, tethering our thoughts to God and His Word.

Redeem Your Day to Remember God's Word

It might seem daunting to find time to memorize Scripture when your calendar is already full, so look for ways to make the best use of the time you already have.

- Rather than closing your Bible when you're done reading it for the day, consider leaving it open to your desired passage, placing it on the kitchen counter or the dining room table. Every time you walk past it, take a moment to read a section aloud. Start with the first phrase and recite it ten times. In a few days, move on to the next phrase, reciting aloud what you've learned so far.
- If you commute to work each morning, take advantage of audio Bible apps and listen to a passage on repeat, reciting aloud with the narrator.
- Stick index cards in your purse that you can whip out while standing in line or sitting in the doctor's office.

- Use the time when you would ordinarily scroll social media to meditate on

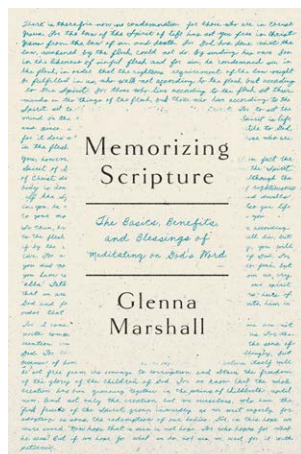
God's Word. As you work on remembering God's Word, think deeply about it—this is the meditation part. Rather than emptying our minds, we want to fill them to the very brim with Scripture!

Not only will you find that memorization is more doable than you imagined, you'll also grow in affection for the Lord and find your thoughts moving toward Him over and over again throughout your day. His words will come out in your speech, encouraging fellow believers, and

more readily sharing Christ with the lost. You'll stop to consider the Lord when your mind is regularly feasting upon the sweet words of Scripture. You'll become a doer of the word instead of just a hearer (James 1:22–25).

You might be just as forgetful as I am about phone numbers and grocery lists, but God has given you a mind that He designed for remembering Scripture. The more you hide His Word in your heart, the more you will think like Him, speak like Him, respond like Him, love like Him.

Keeping the living and active Word of God ever before your eyes will tether your heart to His. ■



Glenna Marshall is a pastor's wife

and mother of two energetic

sons. She is the author of

The Promise is His Presence,

Everyday Faithfulness, and her

new book *Memorizing Scripture,*

which helps readers build and maintain the

practice of hiding Scripture in their hearts. She

writes regularly at GlennaMarshall.com on biblical literacy, suffering, and the faithfulness of God.



Giving Is a Major Pathway to Spiritual Growth and Joy

BY RANDY ALCORN

Christmas season is upon us, and it is wrapped up in the joyful spirit of giving, with the ultimate gift being the Spirit of God giving His Son: “Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). “Grace” is giving, and Jesus was full of grace and truth. Giving is an expression of His basic nature. We give because He first gave to us—His incarnation and atonement being the most lavish gift in the history of the universe.

Christmas becomes more meaningful as we remember it is about giving. In that giving we gain so much, for we draw near to Christ. Gaze upon Christ long enough, and you’ll become more of a giver. Give long enough, and you’ll become more like Christ.

Will We Discover the Joy of Giving?

I wasn’t raised in a Christian home, but from the day I came to Christ as a high school student,



giving has been an integral part of my walk with God. Many of the greatest joys of my life, and some of the closest times of intimacy with my Lord, have come in giving. When I become aware of a need and God leads me to give, suddenly I’m infused with energy, purpose, and joy.

Jesus said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Why? One reason is that “blessed” (*makarios* in Greek) means happy, and who doesn’t want to be happy? The New Life Version translates this verse as, “We must remember what the Lord Jesus said, ‘We are more happy when we give than when we receive.’” When we give it makes not one, but three parties happy—God, the recipients, and us.

We shouldn’t be content with the first blessing, which is when we receive money from God. There is the second blessing of our giving so that others receive, the third blessing of God being pleased, and the fourth blessing of our own happiness in Jesus. It is the second, third, and fourth blessings

that keep the first blessing from becoming a curse of having too much, tempting us to center our lives around money and things. Ironically, the blessing on us when we give money is always greater than if we had kept it.

Giving Brings Greater Blessing Than Receiving

By not giving, we don't just rob God or rob others of blessing. We rob ourselves of the rewards God wants to give us. How many blessings have we kept from ourselves in the last year by failing to give as we could have? How much spiritual growth and joy have we missed out on by not living by God's law of rewards?

For Nanci and me, the process of discovering God's will about money and possessions was exciting and liberating. Our growth in financial stewardship closely paralleled our overall spiritual growth. In fact, it propelled it. We learned more about faith, trust, grace, commitment, and God's provision in this area than any other. These choices required us to have some challenging giving discussions which ultimately strengthened our marriage, and bonded us around common goals of investing in eternity.

That unforgettable Monday morning in 2022, when I held Nanci's hand as she exited her body and entered the presence of Jesus, I could picture Christ's outstretched arms and hear His loving

words, "Well done." I could imagine her broad smile as He hugged her. Home at last! And I thought of all the people from all over the world she would then meet and get to know and love—those we had the privilege of helping through our giving, and who thereby received the gospel, food, clothes, clean water, medicines, Bibles, and good books. Sometimes I feel like part of me went to Heaven with Nanci. That's not only because of our deep love for each other, but because she and I partnered together to invest in people for eternity. I so look forward not only to seeing old friends but to having Nanci introduce me to these new friends we invested in before we ever met them!

Paul said, "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). I have found that cheerful givers love God, and that love grows deeper each time they give. To me, one of the few experiences comparable to the joy of leading someone to Christ is the joy of making wise and generous eternity-impacting choices with the money and possessions God has entrusted to me. Both are supreme acts of worship. Both are exhilarating. Both are what we were made for.

I pray you will join a multitude of God's people, past and present, in not just talking about the blessings of giving, but also experiencing them at your heart's deepest level—this Christmas season and beyond. ■

Err on the Side of Giving: Randy's Interview on the Generous Business Owner Podcast

The hosts of the Generous Business Owner podcast discuss with Randy the role giving has played in his faith and Christian life, as well as the importance of giving for all believers.

Listen to the podcast episode at epm.org/generous-owner



Yahweh Is the Sweetest Name I Know

BY JOHN PIPER

You are not wrong to sing, “Jesus is the sweetest name I know,” even though Yahweh is. Here’s why.

God gave Himself the name Yahweh. No man gave Him this name. It is God’s chosen personal name. He loves to be known by this name. It is used over 5,000 times in the Old Testament. It is almost always translated by LORD (small caps). But it is not a title. It is a personal name, like James or Elizabeth.

You know the name Yahweh best from its shortened form Yah at the end of “Hallelujah,” which means “praise Yahweh.” I love to think about this when I sing. When I sing, “Hallelujah,” I love to really mean, “No! I don’t praise you *Bel*, or *Nebo*, or *Molech*, or *Rimmon*, or *Dagon*, or *Chemosh*. I turn from you with disdain to *Yah*! I praise *Yah*. Hallelu *Yah*!”

God announced His name to Moses in Exodus 3:15. God said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘Yahweh, the God of your fathers, . . . has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever.”

He preceded this announcement with two other statements so the meaning would be clear. He said, “*I am who I am*” (Exodus 3:14a). And He said, “Say to the people of Israel, ‘*I am* has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:14b).

The Hebrew name Yahweh is connected to the Hebrew verb “I am.” So Yahweh is most fundamentally the *One-Who-Is*. “*I am who I am*” is the most foundational meaning of Yahweh. It means: My *am-ness* comes from my *am-ness*. My being from my being. My existence from my existence.

There are vast personal and covenantal implications of this. But this is foundational. No beginning. No ending. No dependence. He simply is, always was, and always will be. He communicates all of this with a personal name. To be sure, He has titles, and He has attributes. But this is a personal name. He packs the weightiest truth about Himself into a personal name. Infinite greatness and personal knowability are in the name *Yahweh*.

Jesus is Yahweh with a human nature coming to save His people from sin. Then in the fullness of time, Yahweh came into the world to seek and save the lost. The angel said to Joseph, “You shall call his name *Jesus*, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). *Jesus* is an English transliteration of the Greek *Iesoun*. And this in turn is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew *Joshua*. And Joshua is a combination of *Yah* and “salvation” or “save.” It means “Yahweh saves.”

So *Jesus* means “Yahweh saves.” Jesus is Yahweh with a human nature coming to save his people from sin. Paul confirms this in Philippians 2:11. He says of the risen Jesus, “Every tongue [will] confess that *Jesus Christ is Lord*, to the glory of God the Father.” That is a quote from Isaiah 45:23 where *Yahweh* is the one to whom every knee shall bow and every tongue confess. Paul is saying that, in the end, the whole world will acknowledge that Jesus is in fact *Yahweh incarnate*.

So you don’t have to choose between singing, “Jesus is the sweetest name I know” and “Yahweh is the sweetest name I know.” Indeed you dare not choose. ■

John Piper is founder and teacher of desiringGod.org and chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary. For more than thirty years, he served as pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis. He is author of more than fifty books, and his sermons, articles, books, and more are available free of charge at desiringGod.org.



The Darkness *Does Not Win*

BY KEVIN DEYOUNG

The title of this article is hard to believe, isn't it? Doesn't it seem like every week we hear about wars and rumors of wars, about terrorism or mass shootings, about Christian persecution and cultural degradation? We can look back on this past year and think of loved ones who've died, or friends who've been diagnosed with cancer. And others who are gripped by addiction or saddled with chronic pain or mired in a depression that will not lift.

In our own lives, there are too many tears, too many unknowns, too many closed doors. It's not hard to be discouraged, maybe even despair.

And yet, the spoiler is true: the darkness does not win.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:1-5).

The symbolism of "light" in John's Gospel has many layers. Light can refer to Christ (as in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world"), or to obeying the will of God (as in John 3:20, "everyone who does wicked things hates the light"), or to eternal life and the abundant life that can be found only in Christ (which is what verse 4 means by "In him was life, and the life was the light of men"). I think

John is being deliberately ambiguous in verse 5. What he is saying is that the entire Light Side is victorious over the entire Dark Side.

Christians will not be overcome by the darkness—either amid our lifetime struggle with sin or in the life of eternal bliss to come—because we belong to the One who is the Light of the World. Darkness, which is John's way of talking about the fallen world of sin and Satan, will not prove victorious in its long, persistent fight against the light.

Light is more powerful, even when darkness is more pervasive. Have your kids ever shone a flashlight in your face in the middle of the night? Have you ever been kept awake by an overly bright night light in the corner of the room? Have you ever been drawn with curiosity to some grand sale in town because the establishment blasted a spotlight into the sky? No matter how much darkness, light pierces that darkness. And the darker the night, the brighter the light shines.

This is not a pie-in-the-sky inspirational pep talk. There are all sorts of generic, vaguely spiritual messages that sound forth during December. Yes, Christmas is about the Good News that the bad guys will not ultimately defeat the good guys. Yes, Christmas is about peace on earth and good will toward men. Yes, Christmas is about the hope of better days to come and a better life after this life. Christmas is supposed to be happy and cheerful and inspiring. But if that's all we say, or all we



believe, we haven't gotten the literal beating heart of the Christmas story.

Why can we be confident that the darkness will not win? It's not because of grandma's cooking or a familiar Christmas movie. It's not because dreams come true when we believe, no matter what we actually believe. Our confidence is rooted in history; our faith is based on fact. What we celebrate in this season is not the triumph of the human spirit or the importance of family or the power of positive thinking. We worship a Baby Boy born in a bloody mess in a manger in Bethlehem.

That Baby was really born, to a real virgin, just as the prophets foretold. He lived. He died. He rose from the dead on the third day. He is coming again. We know that the darkness will not be victorious over the world, because it was not victorious over the One through whom the world was made.

If God can summon light into existence when there was only darkness, surely He can send His light into the world with assurance of complete success, no matter how impossible the odds. For this is the miracle and the wonder of Christmas: The Light of the world was born in the darkness of

night, as the Word of God lay in the manger unable to speak a syllable.

The story is true, all of it—the Baby, the virgin, the shepherds, the angel, the manger, the star, the wise men, even the hard-to-pronounce words like Quirinius and Ephrathah. All true.

So now what?

Repent. Believe. Trust. Obey. Worship and rejoice. "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). The True Light, which gives light to everyone, has come into the world. ■

Kevin DeYoung is senior pastor of Christ Covenant Church (PCA) in Matthews, North Carolina, and associate professor of systematic

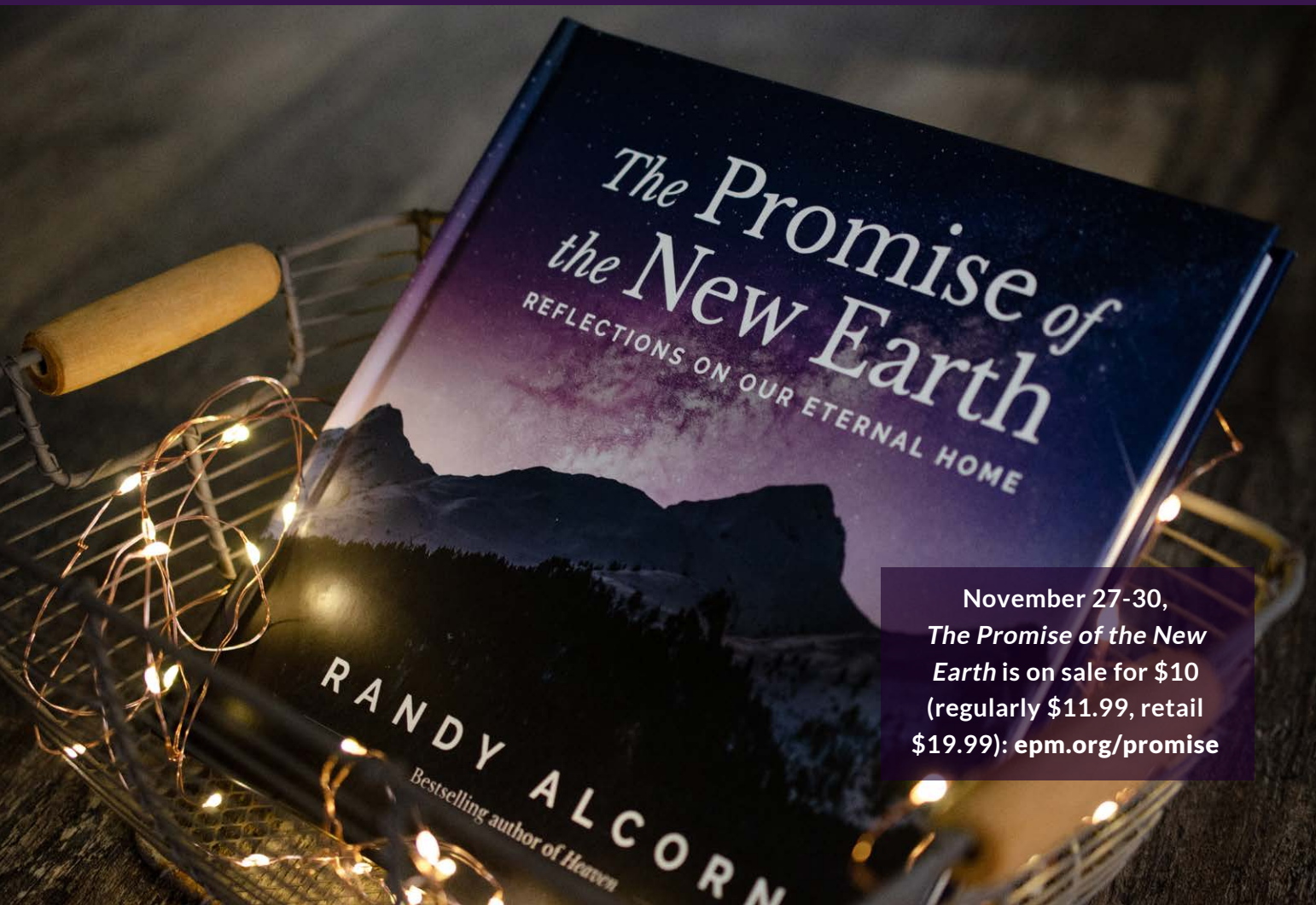
theology at Reformed Theological Seminary (Charlotte). He is the author of more than 20 books and a popular columnist, blogger, and podcaster. Kevin's work can be found on clearlyreformed.org.





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