

eternal perspectives

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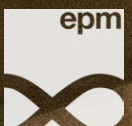
Featuring a New Note for Today's Readers

HEAVEN

OVER
1 MILLION
SOLD

Celebrating
the 20th
anniversary
of *Heaven*

RANDY
ALCORN



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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.

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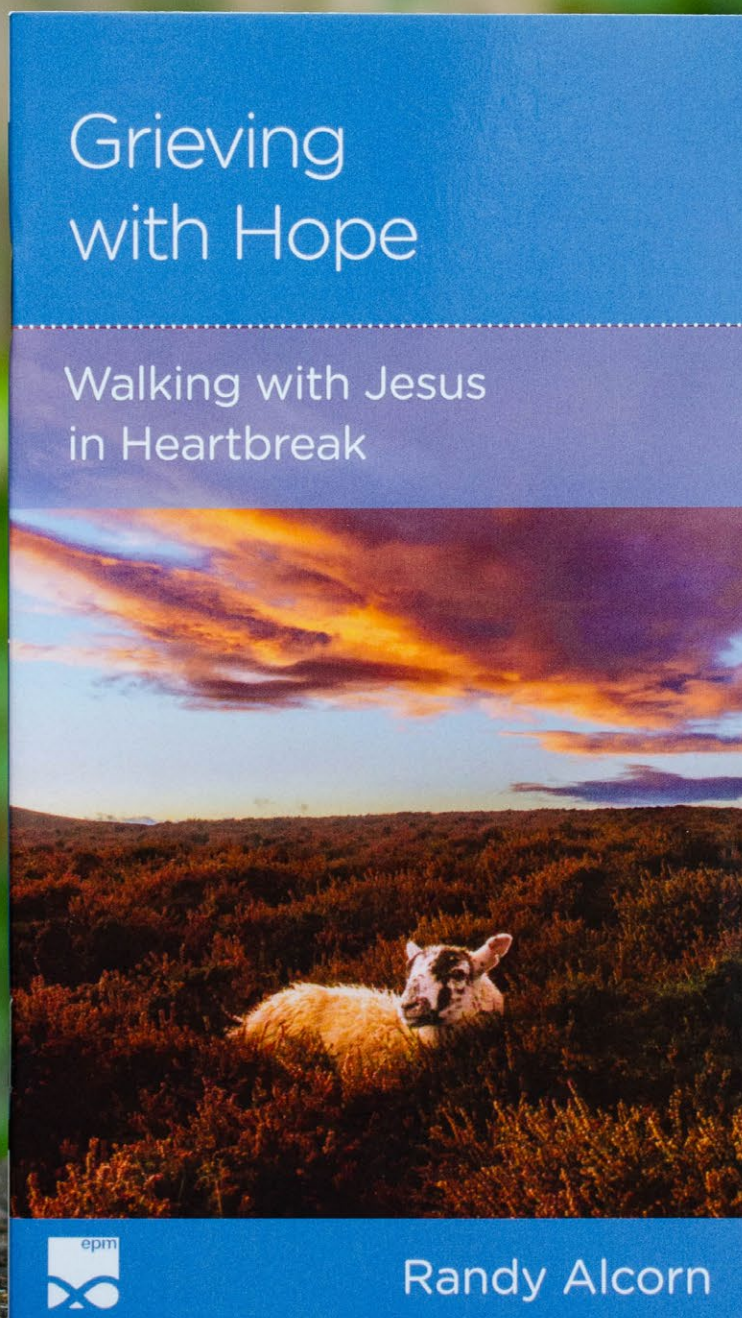
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In the booklet *Grieving with Hope*, Randy gives perspective and practical advice to help readers on the grieving journey, so that in time, your grief will be accompanied by joy and hope.

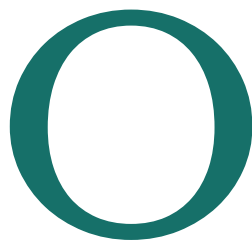
Preview an excerpt and order at epm.org/grievinghope





The Comfort and Friendship *of Jesus* in Our Grief

BY RANDY ALCORN



ver the four-plus years my beloved wife Nanci faced cancer, there were many good reports and many bad ones. We rode a roller coaster of emotions throughout her three surgeries, three rounds of radiation, and three rounds of chemo.

I vividly remember the day when the doctor said it was now stage-four cancer that had spread to her lungs.

That night we prayed together, and then I went downstairs, got on my knees by the couch, buried my face in my hands, and wept. I poured out my heart to God, begging Him to intervene. I did what 1 Peter 5:7 tells us to do: “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (NIV).

Suddenly I felt a presence beside me. I opened my eyes and saw our Golden Retriever Maggie’s front paws next to my hands.



“ God has been doing a work of grace in my life, bringing me comfort that allows me to go forward without Nanci.

She gave me a look of loving concern, licked my tears, and then made a loud mournful sound she had never made before and never did after. I can only describe it as a groan. It startled me.

I thought immediately of Romans 8 which tells us that we groan, the whole creation groans, and God's Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. I realized that three of us were groaning together for Nanci, who we all loved—our God, myself, and our dog. And then I wept more, this time finding great comfort in both my companions.

The God of All Comfort

A year later, I was there when Nanci took her last breath. I felt profoundly sad, yet so privileged to have been her husband and to be there till death did us part. In the over two years now since she relocated to Heaven, her absence has been palpable. I miss her frequent texts about dogs and football and great quotes from Charles Spurgeon and J. I. Packer and others. I miss the sound of her voice and her laughter, always so loud and contagious.

The grief has been difficult. Yet God has been doing a work of grace in my life, bringing me comfort that allows me to go forward without her. (This is greatly helped by the anticipation of one day being with her again in the presence of Jesus!) In Psalm 16:8 David says, “I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.” To set God before me is to recognize His presence and constant help.

When a child falls off a bike, she doesn't need her father to say, “Sweetheart, here's why it happened—given your speed and the weight of this bike, it couldn't tolerate that sharp turn and...” No. The child simply wants comfort. We don't need explanations, most of which we

wouldn't understand anyway. We need “God, who comforts the downcast” (2 Corinthians 7:6). Millions of people, including me, attest to the comfort He has brought them in their darkest hours. “...you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me” (Psalm 86:17).

Joni Eareckson Tada and Steve Estes write in *When God Weeps*,

God, like a father, doesn't just give advice. He gives himself. He becomes the husband to the grieving widow (Isaiah 54:5). He becomes the comforter to the barren woman (Isaiah 54:1). He becomes the father of the orphaned (Psalm 10:14). He becomes the bridegroom to the single person (Isaiah 62:5). He is the healer to the sick (Exodus 15:26). He is the wonderful counselor to the confused and depressed (Isaiah 9:6).

Paul says, “[The] God of all comfort... comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4). Often when we are grieving, we think only of receiving comfort, not giving it. There are times in grief when receiving needs to be our sole focus. But when God comforts us, we are enabled to also use that same comfort to console others.

While He pours out His comfort to us directly by a ministry of His Holy Spirit, God is also fond of using other people to comfort us. I have experienced this through my friends and family members. There is great pleasure in both giving and receiving comfort in God's family. It's fulfilling to be His instrument, and that's a source of comfort as well.

The Friendship of Jesus

Jesus says, “No longer do I call you servants... but I have called you friends” (John 15:15). This stunning truth has become a deep daily comfort to me.

Ever since I came to know Jesus as a teenager, I’ve had a friendship with Him; but it really hit home when my second best friend, Nanci, was no longer here for me. While other friendships have helped, nothing has meant more to me than the friendship of Jesus. It still does. Every day.

I have never felt closer to Him than I do now. I tell myself that Nanci now lives with her best friend and mine. And I am experiencing and sensing His presence with me every day. At her death, neither of us lost our best friend. He is still with both of us, even though we are not yet reunited.

That Jesus truly is and wants to be our friend is a revolutionary concept to many Christians. True, we should never deny or minimize the fact that we are God’s servants, and that itself is a high calling. But we should simultaneously affirm the wondrous fact that we are His children and friends. God can and does love His servants, but He certainly loves wholeheartedly His children and His friends. And He intends to do His best for us, even when that best takes a different form than we might have chosen.

Dwight L. Moody said, “A rule I have had for years is to treat the Lord Jesus Christ as a personal friend. His is not a creed, a mere doctrine, but it is He Himself we have.”

As we grieve, we find that grief itself is a companion; but our greater companion and closest friend is Jesus. He has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). Jesus is our mentor and best friend, as well as Savior and Lord. Our relationship with Him grows as we spend time with Him—talking and listening to Him. As Oswald Chambers wrote, “The dearest friend on earth is a mere shadow compared to Jesus Christ.”

We Will Behold His Face

Suffering and weeping are real and profound, but for God’s children, they are temporary. One day, grief will end. Forever. Eternal joy is on its way. Jesus, our forever friend, “will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain” (Revelation 21:4). This is the blood-bought promise of Jesus.

In the meantime, when our hearts ache, let’s turn to Jesus, our greatest source of comfort and peace. “This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life” (Psalm 119:50). ■

An Index of What Randy Has Written on Loss, Grief, Eternal Hope, and Nanci’s Life and Homecoming

Nanci’s death has given Randy opportunities to write and speak about grief, pointing readers to an eternal perspective. This page lists in one place all the resources on grief he has shared on his blog: epm.org/indexgrief



How Four Simple but Profound Words Can Keep You from Sin

BY DAVID POWLISON

God says many times, “I am with you.” Those are His exact words. . . . What if you are facing a temptation to some immorality? For starters, nothing is private; no secrets are possible.

“I am with you.” “I . . . am . . . with . . . you.”

Say it ten different ways. Say it back to Him, the way Psalm 23:4 does: “You are with me.”

Slow it down. Speed it up. Say it out loud.


You’ll probably find that you immediately need to say more: “You are with me. Help me. Make me know that. Have mercy on me. Don’t forsake me. I need you. Make me understand.”

You will find that the competing, lying, tempting voices become more obvious. They are sly and argumentative. They will try to drown out God’s reality. They will scoff at what God says. They will scoff at you. They will seek to allure you or overpower you to plunge you into a dark parallel universe that has no God.

To the degree that you remember that your Lord is with you and you seek Him, then those other voices will sound devious, tawdry, and hostile to your welfare. How did they ever sound so appealing? The contrast, the battle of wills, the conflict between good and evil will be more evident. Your immediate choice—which voice will I listen to?—will become stark.

Remembering what’s true does not chalk up automatic victory. But we do secretive things only when we’re kidding ourselves. Every time you remember that you are out in public, then you live an out-in-public life. “I am with you” means you’re always out in the open.

Even if you sin by high-handed choice, you will still be in broad daylight before God’s searching eyes.



He’s still here. You can open your eyes, listen, and turn around in order to find help. He who loves you says, “I am with you” to awaken and encourage you.

What if you face a different struggle today? What if you feel overwhelmed with aloneness and fear, buried under your hurt, abandoned and betrayed by people?

“I am with you.”

“I am with you.”

“I am with you.”

Again, when you really hear that and take it to heart, you know you are not alone. You are safe. Someone’s manipulative and violent lust violated you; the steadfast love of God never betrays you.

Or what if you’re overwhelmed by the grime of past failures? You feel guilty, shameful, unacceptable and ask, “How could God ever accept me?”

He responds, “I am with you.” God is not shocked by the ugliness of your real-time evils. He came to give His life for the “foremost” sinner (as Paul twice calls himself—1 Tim. 1:15-16). Christ truly forgives. Truly.

Whatever your struggle, “I am with you” changes the terrain of battle. You start to see the fork in the road. There is a way of life. Your choices count, and you can choose life. A good road runs uphill toward the light, where previously you only knew to stumble over the edge into the abyss. ■

Excerpted from *Making All Things New: Restoring Joy to the Sexually Broken*.

David Powlison (1949–2019)

was a teacher, a counselor, and the executive director of the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation.



Eternal Perspectives on the Election

What God's Word Says



“I think we can all agree that we are glad this election is behind us, regardless of how we feel about the outcome. (I don’t know the outcome yet, as I write this before the election, which they say is too close to call.) Let’s realize what Philippians 3:20 says: our citizenship is not on this present Earth. Our citizenship is in Heaven. We are citizens of another country, “and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ” (CSB).

America (and any other country) may or may not unravel in coming decades, but God’s kingdom certainly won’t! Human kingdoms will rise and

fall until Christ sets up a Kingdom in which humanity forever rules in righteousness: “The world has now become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15, NLT). Because Christ will be the King of kings, this will be the Kingdom of kingdoms—the greatest kingdom in human history. Yes, I say human history, for our history will not end at Christ’s return. It will continue forever, to the glory of God.

May these verses encourage you to set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at Christ’s return (1 Peter 1:13).

RANDY ALCORN

God’s sovereignty over the nations and leaders of earth:

“...for dominion belongs to Yahweh and he rules over the nations” (Psalm 22:28, NIV).

“O Yahweh, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might, so that none is able to withstand you” (2 Chronicles 20:6).

“He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding” (Daniel 2:21).

“It is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another” (Psalm 75:7, NIV).

“The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of Yahweh; he turns it wherever he will” (Proverbs 21:1).

“Yahweh brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of Yahweh stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations” (Psalm 33:10-11).

Where our trust should be placed:

“It is better to take refuge in Yahweh than to trust in princes” (Psalm 118:9).

“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of Yahweh our God” (Psalm 20:7).

“Do not trust in nobles, in a son of man, who cannot save. ...Happy is the one whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in Yahweh his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them. He remains faithful forever” (Psalm 146:3-6, CSB).

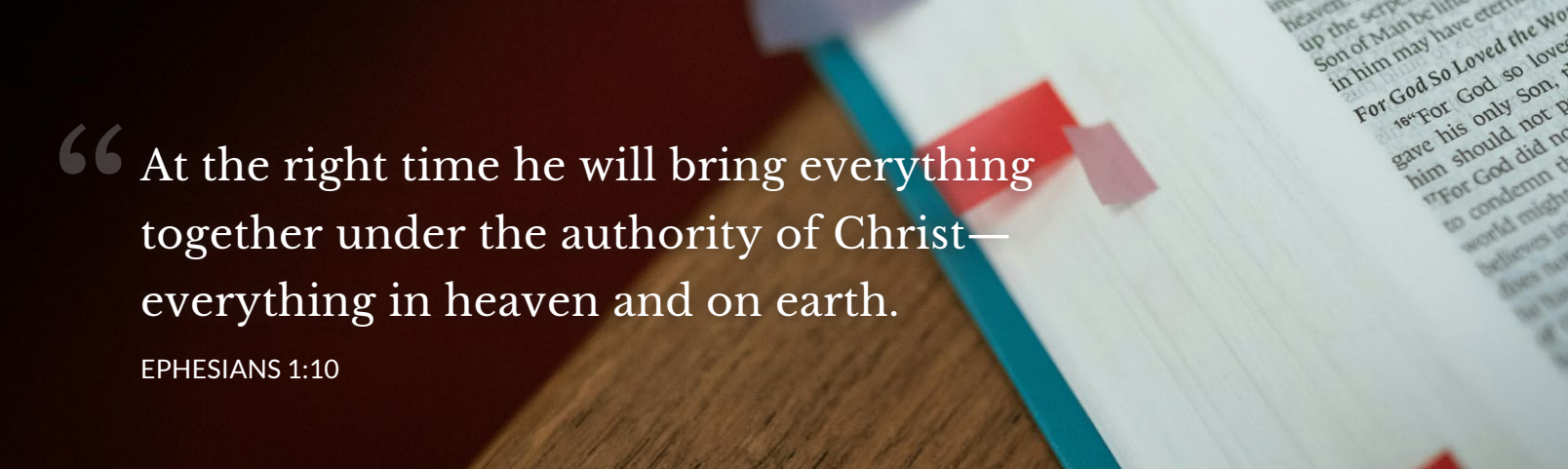
“You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in your word” (Psalm 119:114).

“The steadfast love of Yahweh never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ‘Yahweh is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in him’” (Lamentations 3:22-24).

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea” (Psalm 46:1-2).

Our calling as Christians, presently living as citizens of earthly countries:

“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that



“At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth.

EPHESIANS 1:10

we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

“Everyone must submit himself to governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God” (Romans 13:1).

“But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to Yahweh on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jeremiah 29:7).

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33).

“Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good” (1 Peter 4:19).

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does Yahweh require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10).

Our rock-solid, blood-bought hope in turbulent and uncertain times:

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

“Trust God; don’t worry; be at peace. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In

my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am...Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:1-3, 27).

“...we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed” (Titus 2:13, NLT).

Christ’s coming eternal kingdom on the New Earth:

“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever” (Daniel 2:44).

“At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth” (Ephesians 1:10, NLT).

“But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13, NIV).

“And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:14). ■

“God with Us” Is Exquisite Delight

BY CHARLES SPURGEON

“GOD WITH US”: all that “God” means, the Deity, the infinite Jehovah with us; this, this is worthy of the burst of midnight song, when angels startled the shepherds with their carols, singing “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased” (Luke 2:14). This was worthy of the foresight of seers and prophets, worthy of a new star in the heavens, worthy of the care which inspiration has manifested to preserve the record. This, too, was worthy of the martyr deaths of apostles and confessors who counted not their lives dear unto them for the sake of the incarnate God; and this, my brothers and sisters, is worthy at this day of your most earnest endeavors to spread the glad tidings, worthy of a holy life to illustrate its blessed influences, and worthy of a joyful death to prove its consoling power. Here is the first truth of our holy faith—“Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16).

He who was born at Bethlehem is God, and “God with us.” God—there lies the majesty; “God with us,” therein is grace. God alone might well strike

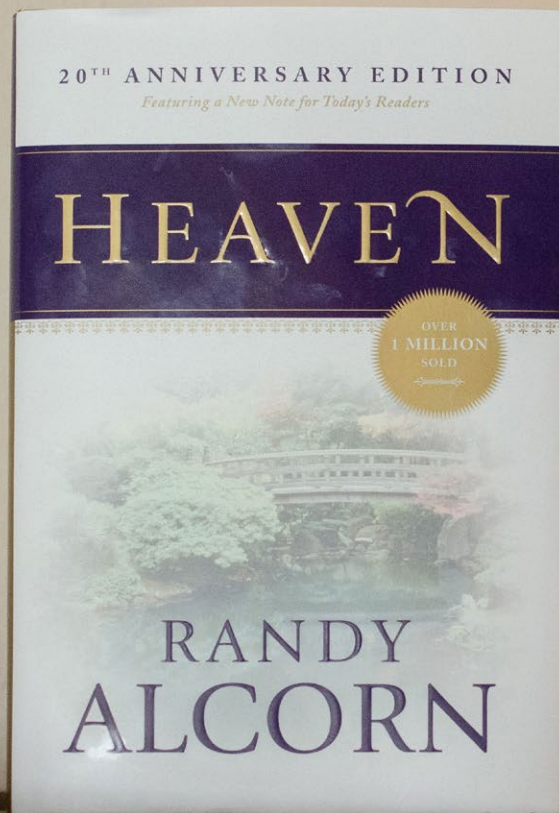


us with terror; but “God with us” inspires us with hope and confidence.



Let us admire this truth: “God with us.” Let us stand at a reverent distance from it as Moses when he saw God in the bush stood a little back, and put his shoes from off his feet, feeling that the place on which he stood was holy ground. This is a wonderful fact, God the Infinite once dwelt in the frail body of a child, and tabernacled in the suffering form of a lowly man, “God was in Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:19, KJV). “He made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7 KJV). ■

Excerpted from *A Wondrous Mystery: Daily Advent Devotions*. Randy writes about the book: “No preacher of God’s Word speaks to me more powerfully than Charles Spurgeon. His are the words of an old friend, though sadly many of my other friends don’t yet know him. Many thanks to Geoffrey Chang for giving us Spurgeon’s rich insights into Christ’s incarnation.”



Heaven

20 Years Later

October 2024 marked the 20-year anniversary since the release of Randy's book *Heaven*. By God's grace, over one million copies have been sold. In this interview, Randy reflects on writing the book and what has changed since it was first published.

What prompted you to study and write about Heaven?

A close friend of mine, Greg, died when I was in high school. I was a brand-new Christian, and it affected me profoundly. Then after I'd been a pastor five years, my mother died in 1981. The last month before she died, nearly every day I read to her from the final two chapters of the Bible, Revelation 21 and 22, which portray the eternal

Heaven as centered on the New Earth. Though we had never discussed it in Bible college or seminary, I found compelling this picture of a resurrected world where people with real bodies will live in a redeemed culture forever centered on Christ the King of Kings.

As the years went on, as a pastor I was at the bedsides of many dying people and spoke at their gravesides and memorial services. Eleven years to the day after my mother died, my best friend from

childhood died, and I had the privilege of being there with Jerry when he left this world for a far better one.

After writing my novel *Safely Home* in 2001, I decided to write a big book on Heaven, emphasizing not just the present Heaven where we go when we die, but the eternal Heaven where God promises to put His throne on the New Earth and dwell with us.

Big 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 *Heaven* have sold. Innumerable readers, including pastors, have told me their views of the afterlife have radically changed. No one has been more surprised than I've been!

What was most challenging about writing the book? **What has brought you the most joy?**

In my research for *Heaven*, I read over 150 books on the afterlife, most of them long out of print. I did this over a three-year period, and of course, the more you research, the more material you have to handle, and the more you have to cut. If you do five or six revisions on a book manuscript, as I usually do, it's easy to lose sight of the end.

I had some very discouraging times where I was up half the night writing and asking, "Lord, is this going to make a difference? Is it worth it?" In that moment, it's something you have to accept by faith—that a measurable result will come, even if the book isn't read by people for another two years.

The payoff did indeed come when the book was published. Over the years, we've received hundreds of wonderful letters from people, including many who begin by saying, "My husband/wife/son/granddaughter/mother died,

and your book has helped me in my grief." I have found great joy in hearing how lives have been changed: people have come to Christ, grown and been stretched, or taken bold new steps in following Jesus.

When I receive such letters, it's like God is graciously saying, "Yes, all the work you put into writing really *is* worth it."

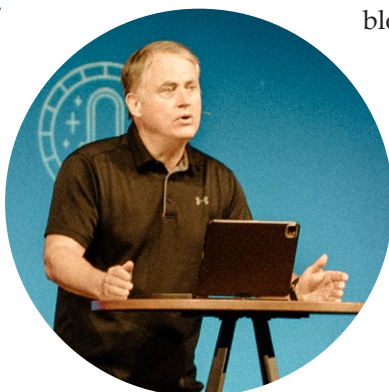
What are the most frequently asked questions about Heaven you receive?

Those who are grieving have many questions like, "Does my loved one still care about me? Are they aware of what's happening on Earth? What are they experiencing in the present Heaven?" We've addressed these and similar questions on my blog and in Q&As our staff have helped me answer.

Believers who have lost a spouse often have questions about the nature of marriage in Heaven. As I share in the book, there will be one marriage in Heaven, not many. Our marriage to Him is the true Marriage, of which the best of earthly marriages was a symbol and shadow.

But while Jesus said the institution of human marriage would end, having fulfilled its purpose, He never hinted that deep relationships between married people would disappear. I was married to Nanci, my best friend and my closest sister in Christ, for 47 years. Will we become more distant in the new world? Of course not—we'll become closer, I'm convinced. Of this I'm sure: what Jesus has for us in eternity will be wonderful beyond anything we can begin to imagine (and what we can imagine right now is pretty wonderful!).

One subject the book did not address is that of cremation. We receive emails asking, "What about bodies that were cremated? How will that affect the resurrection?" While I do have some thoughts



about cremation as it relates to the precedent we see in Scripture (I share those perspectives on my blog for those who are curious and are considering future decisions), my response is that our all-powerful God will have no trouble making a perfect resurrection body out of the fragments He will raise!

I'm also frequently asked about animals on the New Earth, and specifically whether it's possible that our pets might be there too. I love animals, and especially the dogs Nanci and I have had over the years, so I completely sympathize with the heart behind such questions. That has prompted me to work on a theology of animals and Heaven, which will also release from Tyndale in the future.

What parts of the book have received the most pushback from readers?

Countless Christians in Bible-believing churches have been held in bondage for many years by false and widespread views of Heaven and eternity. Despite the clear teaching of Scripture, the pushback against the New Earth used to be very strong. (Many people had only heard the New Earth mentioned in reference to Jehovah's Witness beliefs.)

When Heaven came out in 2004, it was regarded as unique and radical, and by some as off-the-wall. There are readers and pastors who have struggled to embrace the Scriptural truth that the eternal Heaven will be a physical place. Once, after I preached about the Resurrection and New Earth, a fine Christian man said to me, "This idea of having bodies and eating food and living in an earthly place . . . it just sounds so *unspiritual*."

Likewise, 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?

Yet there are many more readers who have resonated with what Scripture has taught all along. I believe more now in the truth of what the Bible teaches about Heaven than I even did when I first wrote the book. I would not have written it had I not believed it—but it was so different than 98% of what I was reading! I could only find references to the New Earth in mostly obscure books and a few reformed systematic theologies and serious books of reformed eschatology.

I am from a dispensational background, but there is an unfortunate habit of dispensational writers to always think biblical references to the eternal New Earth are actually references to the millennium, which takes place on the old earth still under the curse. It is possible to believe in a literal millennium, but it is *mandatory* that biblically-based Christians believe in an eternal New Earth and that they not confuse the two. At best the millennium may anticipate or prefigure or be a sampling of the New Earth to come. But because it is a temporary period that happens on the old earth still under the curse and ends in death and destruction, and the New Earth is both eternal and from day one without sin, death, and suffering, the two should not be mistaken for one another.

What has changed in the 20 years since you wrote the book? Do you see a change in how Christians approach the subject of Heaven?

To be honest, it was remarkably difficult to find much at all about the New Earth in those 150 books I read in 1999-2003, and especially much that was biblically grounded. Information about the New Earth was maybe 1-2% of what I read, if even that, but it jumped out to me. Here was a central truth of Scripture that I had never once been taught in a church or Bible college or seminary! In my conversations with people, it was shocking what pastors and Christian leaders believed and did not believe about Heaven.

I have had people tell me (and I hope they're right) that *Heaven* has had a major effect on changing the perspectives of evangelical pastors and laypeople on the subject of the New Earth. It's true I have noticed a striking difference when I speak to groups today and when I spoke to them 20 years ago. Sometimes I still hear people say, "I've never heard that before," but they are noticeably fewer.

More than anything, I hear from people that they have a transformed picture of Heaven and the New Earth that's helped them fear death less, focus less on bucket lists, and embrace the blood-bought promises of Jesus about the wonders of eternal life with Him and His people. If the belief that God's people really will live happily ever after as resurrected people on a resurrected earth is a significant part of my legacy as a writer, I'll certainly be happy and grateful to God!

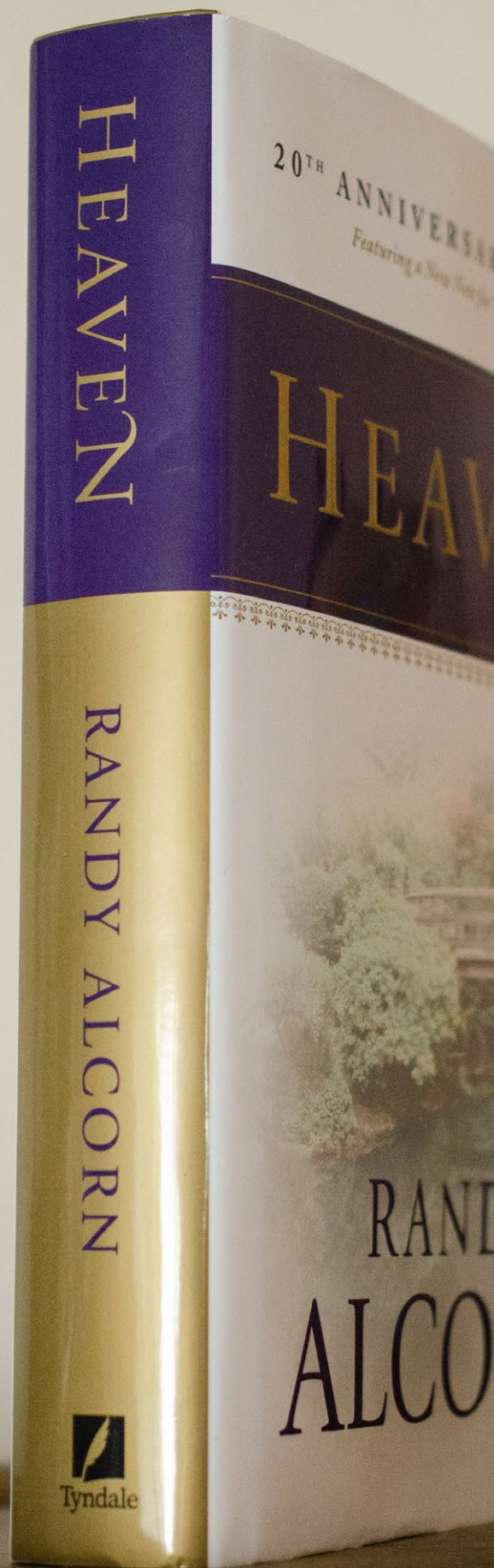
How has Nanci's homecoming to Heaven influenced how you talk and write about this subject?

I doubt many people have talked about eternity more than Nanci and I did. Twenty-some years of my researching, writing, and speaking about Heaven gave us much to talk about! I am eternally grateful for those conversations that began decades before Nanci was diagnosed with cancer.

While what I learned during those hundreds (come to think of it, thousands) of hours of study was a great encouragement, it didn't necessarily make saying goodbye to Nanci easy. All that study, however, bolstered my wholehearted belief that Nanci's death was not the end of our relationship, only a temporary interruption. The great reunion awaits us, and I anticipate it and delight in imagining it with everything in me.

Paul said that "we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). My true home is where Jesus is. It warms my heart that Jesus and Nanci are in the same home. He is the One who makes Heaven such a wonderful place, all because He is such a wonderful person.

Nanci's death has given me opportunities to write and speak about grief, and I hope, help readers have an



eternal perspective. (My new booklet *Grieving with Hope* was born out of what I've learned during the last two and a half years since Nanci relocated to Heaven.)

How do you hope the message of Heaven will impact the church in the next 20 years?

My hope is that the church will increasingly be able to do exactly what Peter assumes all Christians are doing: "looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13).

Peter links the promise of life together in the new universe with the call to be holy and pure and to live for Christ: "...You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God" (2 Peter 3:11-12). God wants us to use this time He's given us to serve Him with all our hearts. I pray that's what God's people will do.

Joni Eareckson Tada writes in *Heaven: Your Real Home*,

When a Christian realizes his citizenship is in heaven, he begins acting as a responsible citizen of earth. He invests wisely in relationships because he knows they're eternal. His conversations, goals, and motives become pure

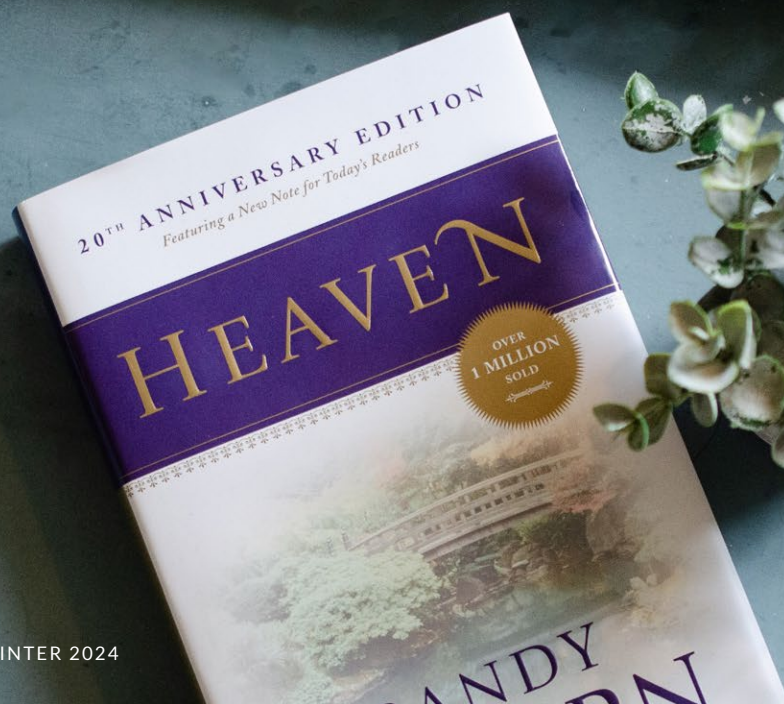
and honest because he realizes these will have a bearing on everlasting reward. ...He gives generously of time, money, and talent because he's laying up treasure for eternity. He spreads the good news of Christ because he longs to fill heaven's ranks with his friends and neighbors.

Not only will an eternal perspective change our actions, but it will also change our attitudes. Living with eternity in mind will infuse us with a joy and purpose that can sustain us in daily life, even as we face suffering.

Charles Spurgeon wrote in his classic devotional *Morning and Evening*, "Christian, meditate much on Heaven, it will help thee to press on, and to forget the toil of the way." If we are anticipating life on the New Earth, we will not view suffering or death the same—not our death, or the death of a loved one.

May the church live upon eternity's joys now, discarding unbiblical and unworthy views of Heaven, and believing that the best truly is yet to come! ■

The 20th anniversary edition of *Heaven* includes a new note from Randy for today's readers. It's available from epm.org/heavenbook



Reader Responses to *Heaven*



Great Peace

Thank you, Randy, for this book. Our daughter left us eight years ago, and I clung to this book every day for months. It brought me so much peace.

Renewed Faith

I'm about in the middle of reading your book *Heaven*. My walk was not in a good place. I couldn't find my way into a better state of mind. I started reading your book, and it's put everything in perspective. I didn't even realize that I had some wrong beliefs about Heaven. It's renewed my faith.

Hope in Grief

Today is the nineteenth anniversary of the day our four-year-old flew to the arms of Jesus. Your book *Heaven* was a lifeline to me in the early days. Knowing where she is and how she is made so much difference in both my and my husband's grief journey. The tears still fall, and I will not be whole until that day when we are reunited, but the promise of Heaven is everything to me.

Eternal Perspective

After losing my fourteen-year-old to suicide three years ago, I questioned many things, including my faith. Your book *Heaven*, and the Bible, of course, are the two things that brought me great comfort each day. Suicide will never make sense, but I am learning to trust that Jesus knows and sees ALL things, and this is all I need to know while I am on this earth.



Comfort in Loss

I have almost devoured *Heaven*, reading it over and over. I learned about the book shortly after my husband of 54 years went to be with Jesus, and the comfort it brought me was more than I could ever put in words.

Motivated Faith

Besides the Bible, of course, *Heaven* is one of my two favorite Christian books, along with *The Pursuit of Holiness*, and made me so much more excited about my faith. It motivates me all the more to be about the Father's business in the present.



Courage to Face Death

Your book *Heaven* gave me the courage to look at the imminent loss of both of my parents while I saw their decline side-by-side. It gave me comfort again when they passed into Heaven, and still gives me hope and anticipation for when that time comes for me and other loved ones.

Preparation for Eternity

My dad was on hospice for nineteen months. He read your book *Heaven* three times before he went there. I asked him, "Why read it again?" He said that when he plans a trip, he learns all that he can about where he is going. This (along with reading his Bible) was his prep for Heaven! It has greatly encouraged me, too.



Q&A

Question from a reader:

I think a lot about Heaven since my beloved husband went there. I'm so curious about what Heaven is like as I miss him terribly. Words cannot express my sadness and how lonely I am. We had no children; we have no family. Christian friends have their own lives, and we both worked as missionaries overseas. I need help, but I don't even know what help I need!

Answer from Heidi McLaughlin, EPM staff:

I'm so sorry to hear of your loss. The death of a spouse is an earth-shattering and life-altering event.

Randy recalls the first year after losing Nanci as being in a fog. Because of his intensive studies on Heaven and the New Earth, he felt more hope than he would have without knowing God's promises for the future, but that first year especially was hard.

We normally recommend that people attend some type of biblically based grief support group such as Grief Share after the loss of a spouse. You need that kind of support right now. I don't know if

there would be a group like that where you live, but griefshare.org does offer online options. If a support group doesn't work out for you, then we highly recommend grief counseling.

Grief and loss, especially early on, can make it hard for some readers to concentrate on reading a big book like *Heaven*. There are many resources on Heaven and grief on our website. Just do a search and you will see many more articles. Since they come in more bite-size pieces, maybe they will be easier for you to digest than a large book. Randy's small devotional *50 Days of Heaven* has also been a great comfort to many still in the fog of early grief.

I know that it can feel like other couples and families are too busy for you, but you really need to be with people right now. I encourage you to fight through the feelings that your Christian friends have their own lives. This is what the Christian community is supposed to do for each other. Have the courage to tell them what you need, and they might surprise you with how they will show up. And have grace for them too. We often don't know how to help someone in grief. We

want to, but we
end up saying



stupid things sometimes. So be patient with people and tell them you need them and try to think of specific ways they can support you. Maybe you need someone to help you go through your husband's things (at the right time when you are ready), or maybe you just need someone to come sit with you and be present without talking.

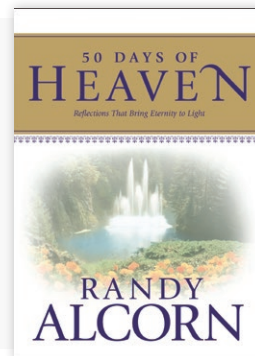
Above all, ask Jesus to walk with you through this. Ask Him to send you the help and support you need. Lean hard into Him. Sometimes when we are in deepest grief, we think He's not showing up but trust what you know about Him to be true! Read the Scriptures that remind you that He walks with you. I wish I could reach across the distance and give you a hug.

Father God, the Great Comforter: please be near to your

beloved child now as she walks through this time of grief. I know that your heart is heavy for her. You care for your children and what we go through because of death. Thank you for defeating it! Thank you that someday we will be with you together with our loved ones who have gone before us, and you will wipe away every tear. Make your presence felt and known to her today. ■

Daily eternal reflections

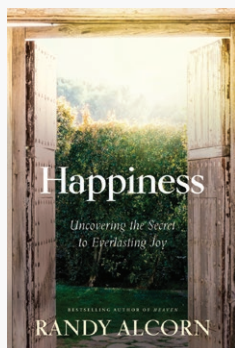
This devotional contains stand alone meditations to be read one at a time, including questions of self-examination as well as prayer. Learn more at epm.org/50days



news

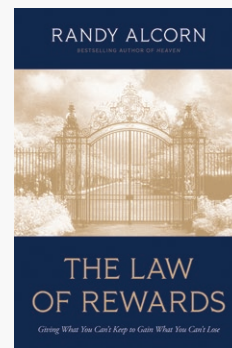
Uncovering the Secret to Everlasting Joy

Randy's book *Happiness* has been released in paperback with a brand new cover. It is available from our store at epm.org/happiness



Gaining What You Can't Lose

Randy's book *The Law of Rewards* has been revised and updated and released in paperback with a refreshed cover. It is available from our store at epm.org/lawrewards



Randy Speaking at Generous Giving's Celebration of Generosity

Randy Alcorn will be a keynote speaker on Thursday, April 24, 2025 at Celebration of Generosity, Generous Giving's annual conference where generous people gather in community. The full event will be held April 24-26, 2025 in Austin, Texas. See generousgiving.org to learn more and register.

The Persecuted Church Teaches Us to Cherish God's Word by Hiding It in Our Hearts

BY ASHERITAH CIUCIU

My great-grandmother, Măicuța, grew up in communist Romania and didn't own a Bible until she was married. In her village, they'd pass around single pages of the Bible and read them, transcribe them, and memorize them before trading the pages with another. I'd grown up hearing this story, and just last year while visiting my grandmother in Romania, she passed it on to my daughter.

The scarcity of the written Word of God made it all the more precious. If any Christian was caught with pages of the Bible in their homes, they risked beatings, imprisonment, and harsh labor.

The Romanian community I grew up in had living memories of people who had endured these punishments because they cherished their Bibles. Even knowing the risk, they continued to read God's Word, memorize it, and share it with anyone who would listen.

One of these women, my dear friend Silvia Tărniceriu, spent several years in a Romanian prison, locked up for her faith and deprived of her Bible. For four months she was systematically brainwashed and mentally tortured until she couldn't remember a single verse of the hundreds she had memorized during her childhood.

(I can't even imagine... can you?)

In her darkest moment, Silvia cried out to God asking for a verse—any verse—to bring her comfort

in her suffering. He responded with a whispered *Love your enemies*.

At first, Silvia resisted, hoping for an encouraging promise or a psalm; but when none came, she resolved to obey the Spirit's prompting. The next morning, she cheerfully greeted the prison guard who had mistreated her just the day before.

And the most incredible thing happened!

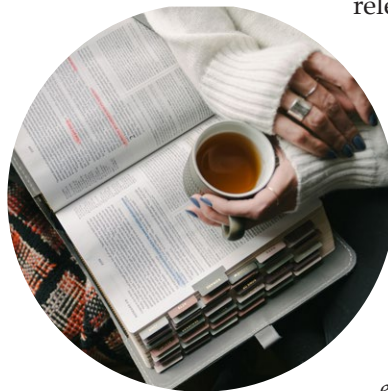
As soon as she obeyed the prompt to love her enemy, in the very next moment, God graciously released all the verses she had stored up in

her mind, starting with Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. [...] Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me."

Silvia writes in her memoir:

"My memory was back! I clasped my hands together! I could clearly remember everything! I was free! Oh, I cannot tell in words the freedom that came over my soul. I was no longer in prison! My spirit was free in Christ! [...] I could not stop praising God, and I could not stop quoting verses. Songs came back. I laughed and cried. I had to keep on working, but I could not keep from singing. 'There's no other friend like Jesus,' I sang. I could not keep silent. A well of joy was flowing from me."

As Silvia served the rest of her prison sentence, the treasured Scriptures that she'd memorized all those years before brought her comfort, courage, and peace, until the day she was finally released.



Silvia spent the rest of her life touring the globe, raising awareness for the persecuted church and talking about God's love to whoever would listen. Her blue eyes sparkled whenever she spoke of her friend Jesus, up until the day she went to be with Him in 2013.

Corrie ten Boom, who had also been imprisoned for her faith and obedience to Jesus said this: "Gather the riches of God's promises. Nobody can take away from you those texts from the Bible which you have learned by heart."

Silvia's story has inspired me over the years to continue hiding God's Word in my heart, not out of fear of future persecution, but as a way to cherish the treasure we hold in our hands.

Because sadly, our generation has unlimited access to the Word of God at our fingertips—and for all that, we're living in the most biblically illiterate generation since the Reformation.

But wait! If your Bible's collecting dust on a shelf, Silvia would be the first to tell you: there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (see Romans 8:1). Instead, God's compassionate Spirit convicts us to turn toward Him in repentance, that He may stir up our hearts and restore our joy.

So don't let guilt or shame turn you away. Instead, I hope you're inspired, like I am, to pick up your Bible and meditate on God's truth today. Set aside a few minutes each day this week to memorize a verse, or pray through a passage, or study a chapter.

Whatever you do, don't just finish reading this article and do nothing. Listen to God's gentle voice prompting you to come and find your soul's delight in Him.

He's waiting for you. ■

Adapted from *Delighting in Jesus* by Asheritah Ciuciu (© 2024). Published by Moody Publishers. Used by permission.

Asheritah Ciuciu is an author and speaker, and the founder of One Thing Alone Ministries—an online ministry that helps overwhelmed women find joy in Jesus. Learn more at onethingalone.com



The Esimbi People

Celebrate Receiving the New Testament in Their Heart Language

In June 2018, our beloved coworker and dear friend Karen Coleman went to be with Jesus. Prior to working at EPM, she and her family spent 23 years as missionaries in Africa. We couldn't think of a better way to remember Karen's legacy than to give in her honor towards the translation of Scripture.

EPM partnered with The Seed Company to help fund the Esimbi project, bringing God's Word to 20,000 people who live in isolated areas in Karen's beloved Cameroon. It's especially appropriate that we chose the Esimbi language project as this is the language group that Karen went to minister to in Cameroon.

Six years later, we are thrilled to report that the New Testament is complete! We want to extend a big thank you to those donors who partnered with us in giving to finish this project in Karen's honor.



BY THE SEED COMPANY

The Esimbi people's homeland is nestled in the forests of Northwest Cameroon. But since 2017, armed conflict in the region has forced families to flee. Amid this unrest and the added uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, many Esimbi who once sacrificed to traditional gods and viewed the Lord as a distant "Supreme Being" have placed their trust in Him. For over 10 years, the Cameroon Association of Bible Translation and Literacy (CABTAL) has been working with the Esimbi to translate Scripture into their language.

In 2021, they completed the New Testament—and then waited three more years for physical copies to arrive. On June 22, 2024, a crowd of 200 gathered in Edéa, Cameroon, to dedicate the Esimbi New Testament. This was to be the first of three celebrations held for the diaspora, with a fourth being held in the Esimbi homeland. Among the attendees were four Esimbi chiefs who traveled

over 250 miles on dangerous roads to witness this historic moment. In a display of honor, four women carried in the New Testament on a small platform. The ceremony included traditional dances, a presentation of gifts, and a shared meal.

In one of many speeches, a Seed Company representative recognized the numerous trials the Esimbi have endured. "But God has not abandoned you," he told the crowd, "and you have not abandoned God's work." A CABTAL representative proceeded to declare, "It is hence going down in the history of Bible translation that God now speaks Esimbi." An Esimbi translator urged the people to not only buy the New Testament but to read it. "Because to have the Bible is not the point," he said. But to open its pages and be transformed—this is the future of the Esimbi people, for they now can hold the Word of God in their hands. ■

Below, Esimbi women bring in the symbolic first copy of the New Testament. Learn more about The Seed Company and their Bible translation efforts at seedcompany.com





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