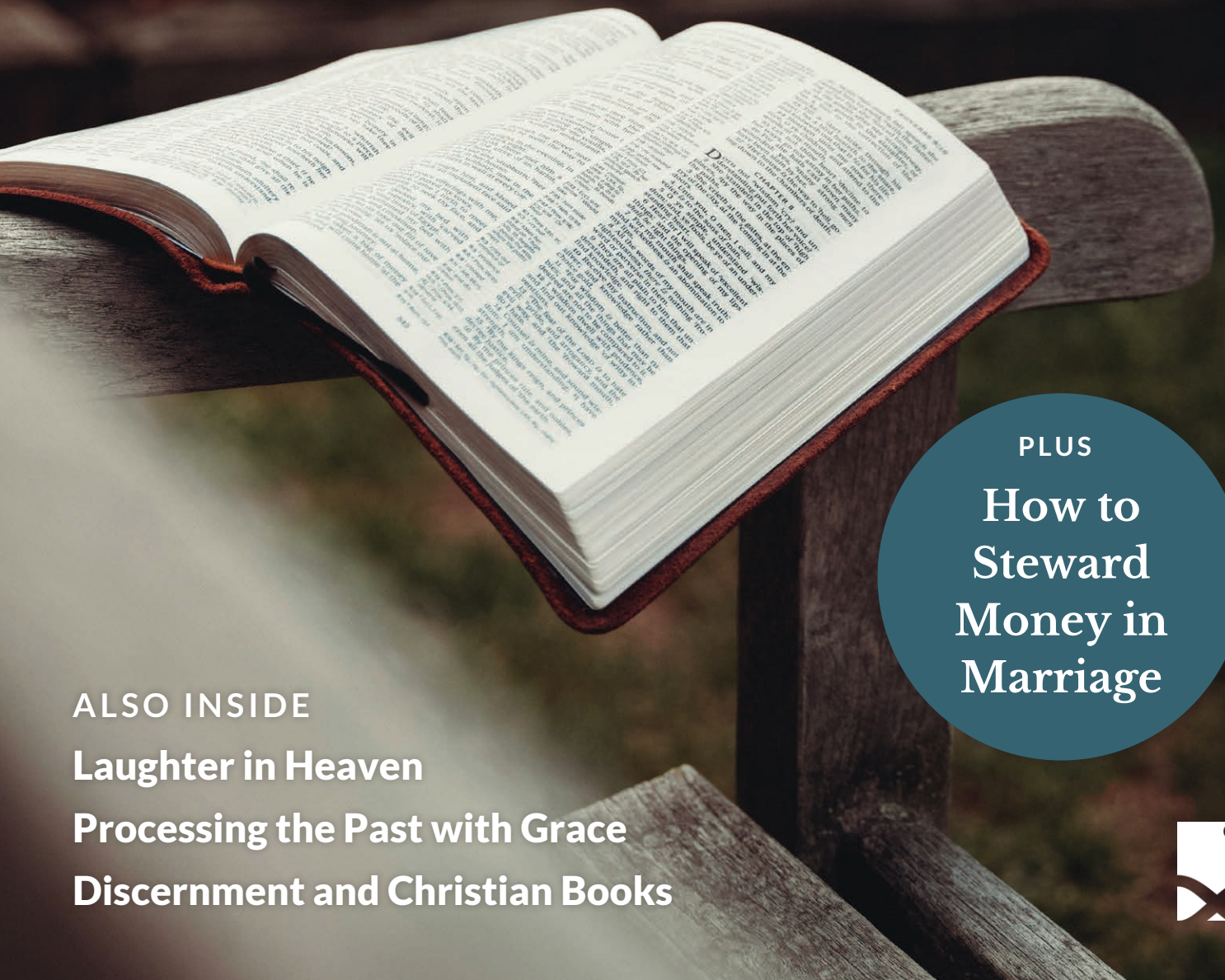


eternal perspectives

SPRING/SUMMER 2025

Randy Alcorn shares 10 Verses That Have Shaped Me



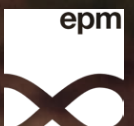
PLUS
How to
Steward
Money in
Marriage

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and Doreen Button

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.

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Laughter in Heaven

BY RANDY ALCORN

“Blessed [happy] are you who weep now, for you will laugh.”

LUKE 6:21

Who said, “If you’re not allowed to laugh in heaven, I don’t want to go there”? (Hint: It wasn’t Mark Twain.)

The answer is, Martin Luther. In Heaven, I believe our joy will often erupt in laughter. When laughter is prompted by what’s appropriate, God always takes pleasure in it. I think Christ will laugh with us, and His wit and fun-loving nature will be our greatest sources of endless laughter.

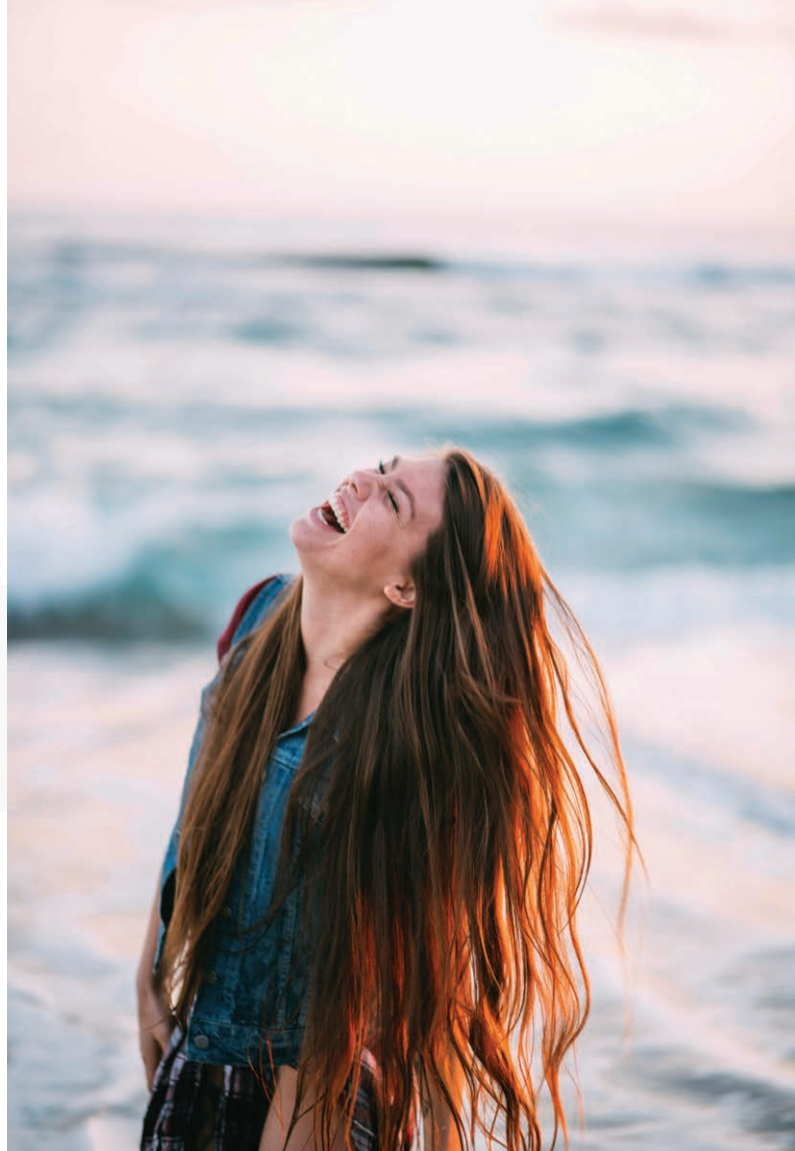
Where did humor originate? Not with people, angels, or Satan. God created all good things, including good humor. If God didn’t have a sense of humor, human beings, as His image-bearers, wouldn’t either. Of course, if God didn’t have a sense of humor, we probably also wouldn’t have aardvarks, baboons, platypuses, and giraffes. You have to smile when you picture one of these, don’t you?

There’s nothing like the laughter of dear friends. The Bible often portrays us around the dinner table in God’s coming Kingdom. What sound do you hear when friends gather to eat and talk? The sound of laughter.

The new universe will ring with laughter. Am I just speculating about this? No. I can point to Scripture worth memorizing. Jesus said, “Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh” (Luke 6:21). You will laugh.

Where will we be satisfied? In Heaven. Where will we laugh? In Heaven. Can we be certain of that? Yes, because Jesus tells us precisely where this promise will be fulfilled: “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven” (Luke 6:23).

Just as Jesus promises satisfaction as a reward in Heaven, He also promises laughter as a reward. Anticipating the laughter to come, Jesus says we should “leap for joy” now. Can you imagine someone leaping for joy in utter silence, without laughter? Take any group of rejoicing people, and what do you hear? Laughter. There may be hugging, backslapping, playful wrestling, singing, and storytelling. But always there is laughter.



It is God's gift to humanity. Surely laughter will not contract but expand in the final resurrection.

The reward of those who mourn now will be laughter later. Passages such as Luke 6 gave the early Christians strength to endure persecution in "an understanding of heaven as the compensation for lost earthly privileges." In early Christian Greek tradition, Easter Monday was a "day of joy and laughter," called Bright Monday. Only the followers of Christ can laugh in the face of persecution and death because they know that their present trouble isn't all there is. They know that someday they will laugh.

By God's grace, we can laugh right now, even under death's shadow. Jesus doesn't say, "If you weep, soon things on Earth will take a better turn, and then you'll laugh." Things won't always take a better turn on an Earth under the Curse. Sickness, loss, grief, and death will find us. Just as our reward will come in Heaven, laughter (itself one of our rewards) will come in Heaven, compensating for our present sorrow. God won't only wipe away all our tears, He'll fill our hearts with joy and our mouths with laughter.

Those who are poor, diseased, and grieving experience therapeutic laughter. At memorial services, people laugh quickly. The best carefree moments on Earth bring laughter. And if we can laugh hard now—in a world full of poverty, disease, and disasters—then surely what awaits us in Heaven is far greater laughter.

One of Satan's great lies is that God—and goodness—is joyless and humorless, while Satan—and evil—bring pleasure and satisfaction. In fact, it's Satan who's humorless. Sin didn't bring him joy; it forever stripped him of joy. In contrast, envision Jesus with His disciples. If you cannot picture Jesus teasing them and laughing with them, you need to reevaluate your theology of Creation and Incarnation. We need a biblical theology of humor that prepares us for an eternity of celebration, spontaneous laughter, and overflowing joy.

C. S. Lewis depicts laughter in Heaven when his characters attend the Great Reunion on the New

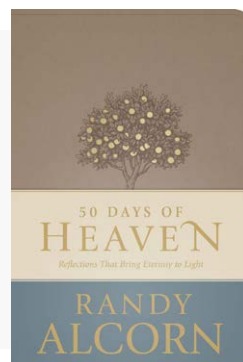
Narnia: "And there was greeting and kissing and handshaking and old jokes revived (you've no idea how good an old joke sounds after you take it out again after a rest of five or six hundred years)."

Who's the most intelligent, creative, witty, and joyful human being in the universe? Jesus Christ. Whose laughter will be loudest and most contagious on the New Earth? Jesus Christ's.

When you face difficulty and discouragement, keep your eyes on joy's source. Recite Christ's promise for the new world, a promise that echoes off the far reaches of the universe: *You will laugh.*

Do you look forward to laughter in Heaven? Are you experiencing the joy of Christ so that there is plenty of laughter in your life now?

Father, today, right now, feeling as we do, with deadlines and health issues and friends who are hurting and world events in flux, we need to hear your promise that in Heaven we will laugh. We picture Jesus, laughing with His disciples, and we can't wait to hear His laugh in person. We look forward to laughing with Him at banquets and on walks and in conversations. Thank you for the gift of laughter. Thank you that you invented it. Thank you that we do not have to wait until Heaven to laugh, but that laughter can carry us on its back through difficult times. We think of the release that laughter brings at memorial services for people who have followed you faithfully, people who are already laughing on death's other side. We have enjoyed rich laughter, mingled with tears, with friends and family in difficult days. When we weep now, Father, remind us that in Heaven, partaking of your joy, we will laugh. ■



Excerpted from *50 Days of Heaven*, now available in a special edition with a leatherlike cover at epm.org/50daysspecial



Processing the Past *with Grace*

Deconstructing the Faith vs.
Disentangling from False Teaching

BY LAUREN SCOTT

Deconstruction and ex-vangelicalism are fads these days. It's now "cool" to talk about all the bad things you experienced or were taught growing up, and then to throw under the bus anyone or any belief system that still holds to anything remotely resembling those things.

Were you pressured to conform to extra-biblical, man-made standards of modesty? *You can now be suspect of anyone that promotes modesty at all.*

Were you hurt by judgmental people in the church? *You can now vent your bitterness, expose the hypocrisy, and throw church away altogether because of it.*

Was Jesus and His word used to manipulate you for someone else's advantage? *You can now be free by abandoning the biblical Jesus altogether, either by becoming agnostic or following your favorite progressive Christian influencer who will tell you that Jesus always agrees with you.*

Don't forget that any appeal to the Scriptures now qualifies as "spiritual manipulation." The Bible is only allowed to make you feel good about yourself, not to convict you of sin—anything but that.

A Dangerous Pendulum Swing

If you listen to the voices promoting deconstruction, you'll be following a pendulum swing from legalism and spiritual abuse on the one end, to license and its spiritual abuses on the other. Be warned: self-righteousness can puff you up whether you're proud of what you condemn or proud of what you accept.

Legalism and spiritual manipulation are certainly real problems. But they're wrong and wind up hurting people *precisely* because they violate what God has said in His word. They're not a reason to abandon the Bible, the church, and faith altogether.

I've seen firsthand the fall-out from the teachings of groups or leaders who elevate personality, tribalism, and fads of supposed holiness over wise, humble faithfulness to God's Word and teaching that refuses to take the Scriptures out of context. But misusing a tool doesn't make the tool bad. It just means you need to learn to use it properly.

Disentangling to Save What's Good

Jinger Duggar Vuolo is the author of *Becoming Free Indeed*, in which she details growing up on the hit TV show *19 Kids and Counting* and being raised under the legalistic teachings of Bill Gothard. She shares how she has become free from false teaching by a biblical understanding of the gospel and the nature of God Himself.

To explain the difference between deconstruction and the kind of careful work it takes to disentangle your faith from false teaching, Jinger uses a helpful illustration of having "putty" caught in your hair. Do you chop it all off to be rid of the putty, or do you carefully take it out bit by bit so that you can preserve what is good—in this case, your hair?

There is something worth holding onto, worth

preserving. Disentangling seeks to keep the good (faith) while detaching it from the bad (false teaching or misguided ideas). Deconstructing, on the other hand, cuts it all off, without a desire to preserve anything.

I have many friends now in their 30s and 40s who have had to process similar things. Some do it well, like Jinger has apparently done. But some have thrown the baby out with the bathwater and are now given over to worldliness (having completely or nearly completely deconstructed). It's my prayer that Jinger's illustration of disentangling might help those who are still sorting things out, and that it might also speak to those who need to come back to Christ.

From what I've observed, Jinger doesn't exhibit the negative attitudes you'll see from some other whistle-blowers. Praise be to God, she speaks graciously of her parents even while exposing the teaching that they promoted to their children. With the help of her husband and solid teaching, Jinger has been able to evaluate what she was taught by reading the Scriptures in context. She doesn't seem to be pendulum swinging or holding onto or promoting bitterness. This makes her an example of how to sort things out in the fruit of the Spirit—something painfully missing from many critiques today.

Beware Your Blind Spots

It's good to be reminded that cult-like following of one man's teaching isn't healthy. I don't care if it's Bill Gothard (problematic), Joel Osteen (problematic), or even John MacArthur or John Piper (faithful teachers). No one-man show is going to have the corner on all biblical truth. The body of Christ is full of believers with different gifts and different experiences in order that we might edify one another. This is true at the local level, and it is also true when it comes to public teachers and writers, both contemporary and from church history.

“ We can choose to give the benefit of the doubt to those who loved us enough to take our raising seriously, being thankful for the good and being wary of the bad or misleading. ”

We benefit from wide reading within Christian orthodoxy. Sometimes in our efforts to be “safe” we fall prey to the sins that we weren’t watching out for. Falling in lock-step with one teacher and his tribe will likely keep you from seeing a host of blind spots.

Offer Grace to Those Who Love You

If no one-man show has the corner on all biblical truth (no matter how well credentialed), I think it’s safe to say that no parents are going to get it all just right in raising their kids. Not your parents, not mine.

We can choose to give the benefit of the doubt to those who loved us enough to take our raising seriously, being thankful for the good and being wary of the bad or misleading. If we have good parents, this is what they desire for their children anyway—to learn not just from what they taught us but also from their mistakes. They want us to do better than they did, but without thinking too highly of ourselves and spurning them in the process.

While Jinger and many others are picking up the pieces after having had some *actual* bad teaching in their growing up years, some people are abandoning ship because of their own misunderstandings and misapplications—perhaps because the teaching they received was a mix of good and bad, or because it was good but incomplete.

The mind of a child or young adult may not put the pieces together just right. This does, of course, raise the bar for us as parents to do the best we can to help them, but it also should humble the grown child who thinks all of their problems came only from their parents or teachers. (We can’t blame everyone else for all of our problems!)

We bring to the teaching we receive our own personality quirks, experiences, and fallible

attempts to make sense of the world, not to mention our own amount of faith or lack thereof. Not only are our teachers fallible in their teaching; we are also fallible in our understanding. This should bring us to a place where we rely on the grace of God in Christ for all of our shortcomings and sins, and on the Holy Spirit to guide us in truth as we interact with God’s Word and His people—with humility and grace.

Processing the Past with Grace

Growing up and keeping the faith takes processing the past (because we all have one) with careful consideration, prayer, study of the Scriptures, and fellowship with godly believers who are willing to discuss these issues with genuine care for one another and humble reverence for Christ. No matter how you were raised, commit yourself to these things, and seek out these kinds of people in a local church.

And may you hold fast to Christ and to what is good! *“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good” (Romans 12:9).* ■

Lauren Scott makes her home in the foothills of the Ozarks, where she and her husband Nathaniel are raising their two energetic teenage boys on the Scriptures, committed church fellowship, good books, the great outdoors, and lots of meaningful work and service. Lauren is an avid gardener and reader and a passionate speaker and teacher. She writes about the Christian life, books, and homeschooling at KeptandKeeping.com.



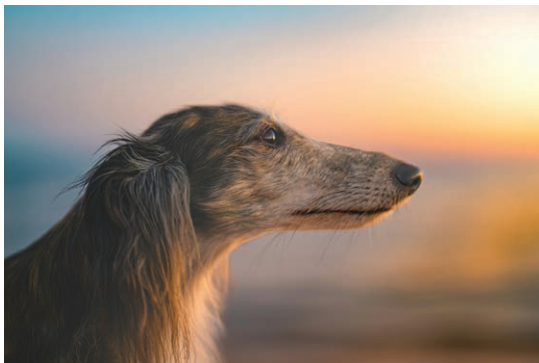
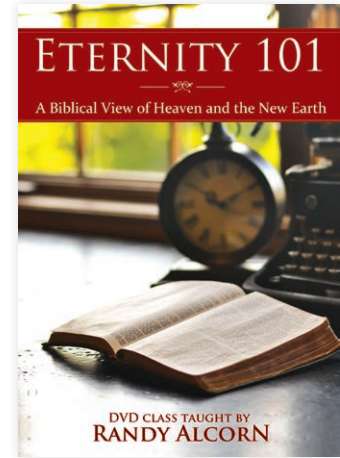
news

Eternity 101 full video sessions now available online

Randy taught an in-depth, 12-hour course on Heaven and the New Earth at Corban University. Viewers can use the course for personal study, or in groups. (Though filmed several years ago, the content has remained timeless!)

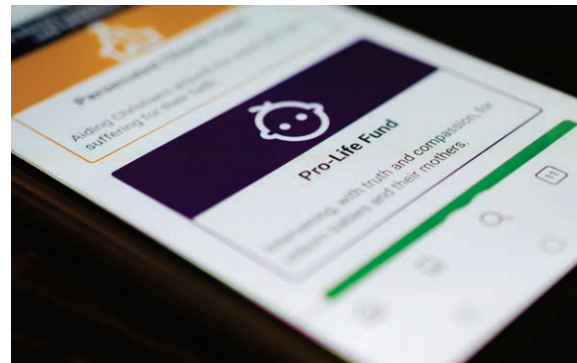
You can now watch sessions 1 to 12 for free on our website (epm.org/eternity101sessions). EPM also offers free class resources, including a study guide and inductive study. For those who would prefer to watch the class on DVD, we offer it in our store (epm.org/eternity101).

A viewer of the class sent our ministry these kind words: "I just wanted to let you know that my church youth group is watching your Eternity 101 series for our youth Bible studies. I love it, and the rest of the group is thoroughly enjoying it as well."



Book project update

Randy has been working on a book about animals and the New Earth. We pray it will help readers more than ever look forward to our coming eternal home! EPM will share more details about the book and its future release on social media and on our website as they come available.



EPM's special funds

Did you know? EPM has several special funds or projects you are welcome to support. We offer the option of giving through EPM, and 100% of all contributions will go to carefully chosen ministries in each particular area; nothing is withheld. Give online at epm.org/donate.



Would you like to receive prayer updates?

Randy deeply appreciates those who pray for him and EPM. We send out occasional prayer emails, and you can sign up to receive them at epm.org/subscribe.



10 Verses That Have Shaped Me

BY RANDY ALCORN

I grew up in an unbelieving home, but at age 15 I came to faith in Jesus while reading the Bible. As a new believer, I couldn't get enough of God's Word. I learned the Bible doesn't contradict itself, but it does contradict me—and I desperately need those mid-course corrections! Scripture was the North Star to which I fixed my life's compass. Fifty-five years later, that's truer than ever.

What a privilege it is to spend time in God's Word! There's nothing like it. Its depths are endless. You

can never exhaust it. Day after day, year after year, it always has more to offer. "Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders" (Psalm 119:27). Through Scripture, the Holy Spirit transforms our hearts and minds. His Word is the source of correction, training, eternal perspective, and joyful rest from weariness and sorrow.

Here are ten verses that have especially shaped my life and ministry.

1

“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18, NIV).

Even though as Christians we affirm the reality of the spiritual realm, sometimes we succumb to the naturalistic assumption that what we see is real and what we don't see isn't. Many people conclude that God can't be real because we can't see Him, and Heaven can't be real because we can't see it. But we must recognize our blindness. The blind must take by faith that there are stars in the sky. If they depend on their ability to see, they will conclude there are no stars.

That's why 2 Corinthians 4:18 is my life verse. Once you catch a glimpse of the other world, the real world, you are weaned from the illusion that reality is limited to our five senses. You can't help but live differently once you learn to see with an eternal perspective!

2

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ...And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14).

Although they are several verses apart, I have always thought of these two verses as inseparable from each other. When we go back to Genesis, we learn that Eden's greatest attraction was God's presence. Sin's greatest tragedy was that God no longer dwelt with His people. But this all changed because of Jesus, and John 1:1 sets it up: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Then comes this verse that bursts forth like fireworks: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The God who lives in unapproachable light became approachable in the person of Jesus! People could look at Jesus and see who God is. He is Immanuel, “God with us.” And He is not only all about truth, He is also all about grace—a grace that delivers us from the Hell we deserve and grants us the Heaven we don't deserve.

In a redemptive work far greater than most imagine, Christ bought and paid for our future and the earth's, ensuring an unending future where we will dwell with the Word who became flesh.

3

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

As we learn to give, we draw closer to God. But no matter how far we move along in the grace of giving, Jesus Christ remains the matchless Giver, who for our sakes “became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9, NIV). “Rich” in this sense is not about finances, and this is not the health and wealth gospel; God gives to us in a thousand ways besides material prosperity. Our greatest resources are spiritual, not material. They come from another world, not this one.

Scripture says Christ gave “himself as a ransom for all people” (1 Timothy 2:6, NIV). Jesus, the sinless one, willingly gave Himself over to be tortured—not for anything He had done, but to save those least deserving. We can never outgive God! Meditate on the truth of that for a few million years. (We will—we may as well get a head start.)

4

“...remembering the words that the Lord Jesus himself said, ‘There is more happiness in giving than in receiving’” (Acts 20:35, GNT).

You might have heard that verse translated as “It is more blessed to give than receive,” but the well-documented fact is that the Greek word *makarios*, translated “blessed,” really means “happy-making.”

Notice what Jesus did not say: “Naturally, we’re happier when we receive than when we give, but giving is a duty, so grit your teeth, make the sacrifice, and force yourself to give.”

Money won’t make us happy, but giving away money can make us profoundly happy! When we give out of love for Christ and others, we experience dramatic and lasting returns for the investments we’ve made—far more than if we’d kept or spent it. Counterintuitive as it may seem, our greatest good, and the happiness that accompanies it, is found in giving, not receiving.

5

“Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you” (1 Peter 5:5–6).

An unattributed quote says, “Only the humble are sane.” Choose pride and you get God’s opposition. Choose humility and you get God’s grace. This is why the proud fall away while the humble endure. It’s why none of us should ever view ourselves as celebrities, only servants. We are God’s errand boys and girls. And what a privilege that is!

God humbles us in the ways He knows best. Two of the best things God ever did for me were to give me a chronic disease (insulin-dependent diabetes),

and abortion-clinic lawsuits that forced me to resign as pastor of the church I loved. I wouldn’t have chosen either, but I’d gladly take both rather than give up what I’ve learned about trusting God. Through our thorns in the flesh God says, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

6

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

There is an all-inclusiveness in the “all things” of Romans 8:28. No translation says each hard thing by itself *is* good, but that all things work together for good, and not on their own but under God’s sovereign hand. So when Paul says, “for good,” he clearly implies final or ultimate good, not good subjectively felt in the midst of our sufferings. God does not ask us to immediately see every individual event as wonderful. He does expect us to trust that He is sovereignly at work even in that event, and will use it in concert with everything else for our very best good.

Perhaps the greatest test of whether we believe this verse is to identify the very worst things that have happened to us, then ask if we believe that in the end God will somehow use them for our good. We can be certain He will!

7

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God’” (Revelation 21:3).

As a young pastor, my mom was dying, and every day I would read to her the last two

chapters of Revelation. My heart was captivated by God's promise of a new heavens and New Earth—a new material universe—without death, suffering and curse.

That God would come down to the New Earth to live with us fits perfectly with His original plan. God could have taken Adam and Eve up to Heaven to visit with Him in His world. Instead, He came down to walk with them in their world (Genesis 3:8). Jesus says of anyone who would be His disciple, "My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23). This is a picture of God's ultimate plan—not to take us up to live in a realm made for Him, but to come down and live with us *in the realm He made for us*.

8

"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).

Utopian idealists who dream of humanity creating "Heaven on Earth" are destined for disappointment. However, one day there *will* be Heaven on Earth. That's God's dream. It's God's plan. And He, not we, will accomplish it.

If I promised you a new car, would you say, "If it's new, it probably won't have an engine, a transmission, doors, wheels, or windows"? No, you'd never make such assumptions. Why? Because if a new car didn't have these things, it wouldn't be a car. Likewise, when Scripture speaks of a New Earth (see 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1), we can expect that it will be a far better version of the old Earth, but it will truly be Earth.

Earth can be delivered only by being resurrected. The removal of the Curse will be as thorough and sweeping as the redemptive work of Christ. In bringing us salvation, Christ has already undone some of the damage in our hearts, but in the end He'll finally and completely restore His entire creation to what God originally intended.



"Make me walk along the path of your commands, for that is where my happiness is found."

PSALM 119:35, NLT

9

"And then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea. They sang: 'Blessing and honor and glory and power belong to the one sitting on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever'" (Revelation 5:13, NLT).

Scripture says a great deal about animals, portraying them as Earth's second most important inhabitants. God entrusted animals to us, and our relationships with animals are a significant part

of our lives. Since God will fashion the New Earth with renewed people, wouldn't we expect Him also to include renewed animals? Indeed, that's the picture we see in Isaiah 11 and 65, both passages about the New Earth.

If "every creature in heaven and on earth" includes animals, then animals praise God. But animals don't sing, do they? Well, birds sing and whales sing (I have listened to them at length and worshipped along with them, though there was a time when I didn't realize they were worshipping too). Animals praising God and singing is real, but that doesn't mean we should expect it to sound like humans.

Psalms 148 commands all of creation to praise the Lord, including the animals: "Beasts and all cattle; Creeping things and winged birds; Kings of the earth and all peoples... Let them praise the name of Yahweh, For His name alone is set on high; His splendor is above earth and heaven" (vv. 10-11, 13, LSB). If in some sense fallen animals, shadows of what they once were, can praise God on this fallen Earth, how much more should we expect them to do so on the New Earth?

10

"Yahweh your God is in your midst, A mighty one who will save. He will be joyful over you with gladness; He will be quiet in His love; He will rejoice over you with joyful singing" (Zephaniah 3:17, LSB). "Delight yourself in Yahweh; And He will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4, LSB).

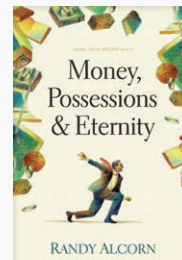
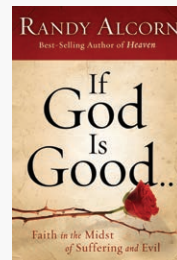
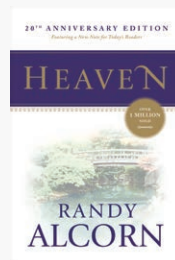
I appreciate that both of these verses include the name Yahweh, thanks to the Legacy Standard Bible translation. I love God's name and believe He calls upon us to use it. These verses are just two examples that come to mind for me. (In most of our English Bibles, whenever the personal name of God is used, the word LORD is substituted and written in what's known as "small caps," e.g. LORD.)

The name Yahweh is related to the Hebrew verb *to be*, translated "I am" in Exodus 3. Yahweh is the eternal self-existent Creator who answers to no one, and to whom all creatures answer. The God who created the Heavens and the earth essentially said to Moses in Exodus, "Call me by my actual name: Yahweh. Tell others Yahweh is who I am." He insists this is His name forever, and by that name we should remember Him through all generations (see Exodus 3:15). And lest we are tempted to forget, He chooses to use His own name so frequently that it's the seventh most frequent occurring word in the entire Old Testament. He isn't just a LORD who is over all; He is also a warm, beloved friend of His people who wants us to call Him by name. (The name Jesus means "Yahweh saves.")

Trusting in the name Yahweh is the source of great gladness: "For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name" (Psalm 33:21). May we do so with happy hearts, delighted to know such a wonderful God, whose magnificent self-chosen name is Yahweh, and who will dwell with us forever! ■

Randy's list of verses reflects the topics he has written books on, including Heaven, grace and truth, suffering, and stewardship and giving.

Browse all of Randy's books, including the ones below, at epm.org/books



Who Gets to Define a ‘Healthy’ Baby?

BY RACHEL ROTH ALDHIZER

“Should human life be optimized?” asks the second installment in a three-part series by *The New York Times* titled “The Embryo Question.”

It features Orchid, a cutting-edge technology company (based in the United States) that offers “polygenic risk scoring” for embryos created through IVF. Orchid’s scientists claim that using whole genome analysis enables them to accurately screen and assess embryos for various “risks,” including cancers, birth defects, chromosomal abnormalities, and neurodevelopmental disorders like autism. Armed with these results, hopeful parents can feel confident when selecting embryos before implantation during an IVF cycle.

Orchid’s tagline is “Have healthy babies.” But who gets to define “healthy”?

Screening for Birth Defects or Personality Problems

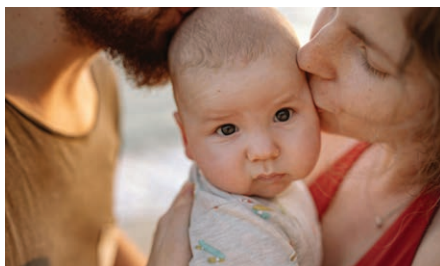
According to the *Times*, it’s unclear if companies like Orchid can deliver on their promises. Genome mapping is complex, and the link between certain genetic propensities and the actualization of a particular condition is nonlinear and often proves confusing, even to the most advanced scientists. Simply rating an embryo for potential



risks doesn’t mean the child will or won’t have a particular condition.

But proponents of the technology, like prominent pronatalists Simone and Malcolm Collins, insist otherwise. According to the *Times*, Elon Musk and the Collinses have used such technology to screen embryos before implantation. The Collinses even report selecting embryos based on behavioral traits. In one particularly revealing comment, Simone explains wanting and then selecting for implantation female embryos that would be “low stress,” and explains that so far, the couples’ two daughters appear “extremely chill and genial.” The subtle misogyny underlying this flippant remark goes unnoticed by the *Times*.

Like the Collinses, I’m expecting a fifth child—I’m weeks away from welcoming him, God willing, into an already large family. But I didn’t make my son in a lab and select him due to potential traits. This child will be welcomed after three consecutive miscarriages, which were most likely due to genetic abnormalities and aberrations that could have been screened for and carefully avoided.



We must resist the temptation to play God and to form families in our own image instead of God's image.

Wrong Moral Choice?

My child will be welcomed, among other siblings, by a big brother with severe congenital abnormalities. David is Deafblind, with a cleft lip and palate and with complex brain abnormalities. Nothing about David was chosen, controlled, or planned. He is, simply, a gift.

Hastings Center president Vardit Ravitsky told the *Times* that the mere availability of technologies like the risk-scoring of embryos leads to societal expectations to use such tools routinely, and “the rejection of it or the refusal of it becomes a morally significant choice.” She points to “extensive literature showing that women who refuse prenatal testing are seen as irresponsible.”

In the future, then, welcoming children like David will be seen as an obvious moral wrong, if it isn’t already. Not only will families like ours be judged for “forcing” a child to endure pain and suffering, but folks will complain that healthcare dollars should be spent elsewhere—on healthy people, instead of on a “voluntary charity project,” like David, doomed to fail expensively. There’s no cure for a child like David.

Illusion of Control

We’ve been here before. A Nazi propaganda poster reminded Germans that a disabled person can cost the community today’s equivalent of hundreds of thousands of dollars over his lifetime. “Comrade, this is your money too!” the poster chides. Peruse the comments of a *Times* article about trisomy 18 and you’ll find similar sentiments.

A closer look at Orchid’s website reveals the true product for sale, the scaffolding that lies underneath innocuous-sounding goals like reducing childhood cancer rates. One customer testimony says it all: “This is the way to reduce disease and suffering in kids, and is the best thing you can do for your child and yourself.”

What companies like Orchid are really selling to parents is the illusion of control repackaged as responsibility. But parenting is fundamentally a project that upends control. This is a feature, not a bug, of forming families. Companies like Orchid prey on real fears: that welcoming children will also, by turn, lead to pain and suffering.

Christian, have no illusions about welcoming children. It will indeed lead to pain and suffering.

Upside-Down Kingdom Parenting

Christians should be the first to reject these insidious technologies of embryonic screens as contrary to the upside-down logic of God's kingdom. Participation in such screenings is a moral evil. Exerting such control over our most precious biological processes and claiming we know best echoes the first sin, repackaged for today's historical moment.

We aren't God, and we certainly don't know best. We belong to Him as his creatures. He created our bodies and called them good. This theological framework allows us to welcome children like David, least in the eyes of this world, as greatest in God's kingdom, and call them good too. My son isn't good because of his health, which he sorely lacks. He's good because he is God's.

Scripture's narrative builds the underlying moral theology and anthropology necessary for Christians to reject these fertility control programs. We must resist the temptation to play God and to form families in our own image instead of God's image. Welcoming children like

David is a witness to a world in pain. This is the hope of the gospel played out in the small life of a boy with a profound disability.

God isn't surprised when the formation of Christian families brings pain and suffering. He gives us His presence in the person of Christ as an answer to our pain. God is with us as we bear children when it feels like the world is falling apart. But more importantly, He's with our children.

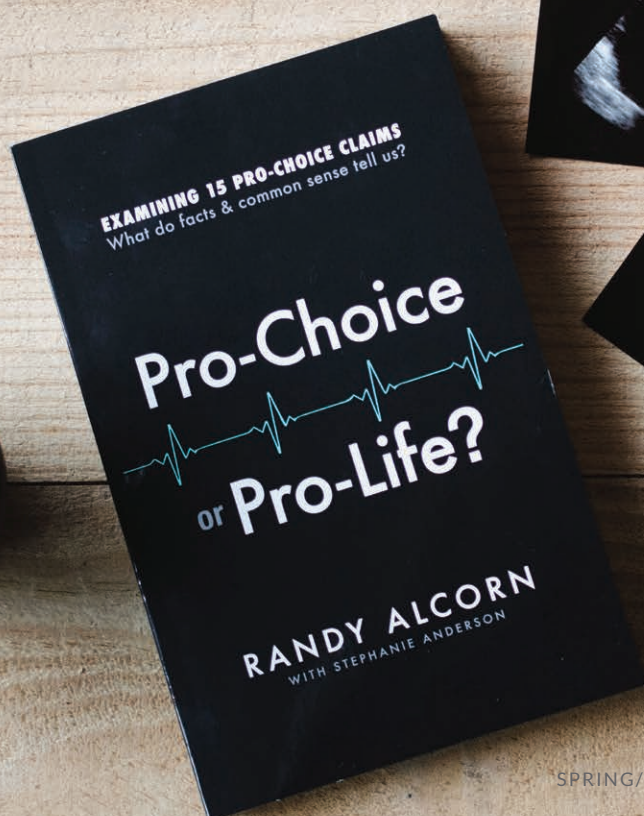
I don't need Orchid's promises of "healthy babies" to quell my anxieties about parenting. I have a God who knit my son together in my womb, in His image, and calls David fearfully and wonderfully made. What better assurance is there? ■

Rachel Roth Aldhizer writes from North Carolina. Her reporting and opinion has been featured in the *Wall Street Journal*, *National Review*, *First Things*, and others. She's a 2024–25 Robert Novak journalism fellow and is working on a book about the fertility crisis.



This article originally appeared on The Gospel Coalition, and is used with permission of the author.

Pro-Choice or Pro-Life? is available in both English and Spanish from EPM. We also offer a free PDF download to help equip you to have pro-life conversations. Learn more about the book at epm.org/prolifebook



For Richer, for Poorer

How to Steward Money in Marriage

BY RANDY ALCORN



Were you to survey married couples about their money-management goals, most answers would focus on some form of financial success. Most people strive to accumulate better houses, nicer cars, more toys, and bigger retirement accounts. But when it comes to the dream of financial prosperity and security, we should ask, “Whose dream is it?” It may be the American dream—but is it the dream of the risen Jesus? And since what glorifies Him is also for our

good, is it a dream that’s ultimately in the best interests of our family?

The process of discovering God’s countercultural will about money and possessions can both excite and liberate. For my late wife, Nanci, and me, our growth in financial stewardship paralleled our spiritual growth. In fact, it propelled it. We learned about faith, grace, commitment, generosity, and God’s provision. We had challenging giving discussions that ultimately strengthened our marriage and bonded us around the common goal of investing in eternity.

Using the word *makarios*, which means “happy-making,” Jesus said, “There is more happiness in giving than in receiving” (Acts 20:35 GNT). Nanci and I found that happiness, not duty, permeates a God-honoring theology of money. When grace-saturated, kingdom-minded disciples use God’s money and possessions, we fulfill the first and second greatest commandments. We store up treasures in Heaven and “take hold of that which is truly life” (1 Timothy 6:19).

The following principles can help you and your spouse develop a lifestyle of good stewardship that will yield dividends, now and *forever*.

1. Recognize the dangers of a possessions-centered life.

Although there is nothing inherently wrong with money, something is desperately wrong with devotion to money. “Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare. . . . For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils” (1 Timothy 6:9–10).

Understanding the dangers of materialism can liberate us to experience the joys of Christ-centered stewardship. Jesus speaks of the “deceitfulness of riches” (Mark 4:19). The psalmist warns, “Though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them” (Psalm 62:10 NIV). None of us is immune to the value-changing nature of wealth.

Things have mass, mass exerts gravity, and gravity holds us in orbit around the things we accumulate. A friend told me that when he and his wife were first married, they spent their time taking walks, playing games, and reading together. They were content. Later, as their income rose, they found themselves trapped by shifting priorities. Little by little, money and possessions took precedence over God, church, and meaningful time together.

Studies and anecdotal evidence have shown a connection between an increase in income and marital infidelity, since having access to more money can provide greater temptation and opportunity to sin. Of course, the point is not the income itself, but the lifestyle it underwrites. A Christian can

make a million dollars a year, give generously, live modestly, and avoid much of that added temptation to immorality. It is not how much we make that matters. It is how much we keep.

How can we recognize if we are falling into materialism’s trap? “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). Jesus is saying, “Show me your bank statement, your credit card statement, and your receipts, and I’ll show you where your heart is.” What we do with our money is an inarguable statement of our values.

God declares, “Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine” (Job 41:11). God’s ownership of everything provides the foundation of a biblical theology of money and the antidote to materialism. Acutely aware of the fact that what we have is God’s and not ours, faithful money-managing stewards regularly consult Him to implement his biblical investment priorities.

2. Make generous giving a priority.

I encourage you to commit to giving regularly to your local church and, above and beyond that, to missions and other ministries. Begin by setting an amount to give—I recommend not less than 10 percent—and stick with it so you honor God with your firstfruits (Proverbs 3:9). If you want Him to bless your family’s finances, don’t place yourself under the curse of disobedience.

As thunder follows lightning, giving follows grace (2 Corinthians 8:1–2). If God’s grace touches you, you can’t help but give generously! Then, when God entrusts you with more, remind yourselves why: “So that you can be generous on every occasion” (2 Corinthians 9:11 NIV). (Contrary to the health-and-wealth gospel, God prospers us not to raise our standard of living, but to raise our standard of giving.)

If you have not been in the habit of giving, it can be challenging to begin. However, I ask people, “If you got a 10 percent pay cut, would you die?” Of course not! God is big enough to take care of you if you step out in faith and return to Him what is His in the first place. (Even though I think in most cases

people really can afford to give away ten percent, obviously if you believe it is impossible for you to do so or your children would go hungry if you did, then by all means feed your family and God will be pleased if you do. I am just encouraging you to take an honest look at whether you are spending money on non-necessities that you could have given away without inflicting suffering on your family.)

What if you and your spouse are not on the same page about giving? I learned over the years that my desire to give sacrificially could sometimes feel insensitive to Nanci. When I learned to be more generous with her (and our daughters), Nanci no longer felt that giving to kingdom causes competed with our family's needs. Through many conversations, she learned to find increasing joy in giving, and I learned to find increasing joy in growing together and leading—but not pushing or pulling. We were holding hands, even if sometimes one of us was a step ahead. (As the years went by, the one ahead was increasingly her.)

Of course, God wants us to do many good things with money that do not involve giving. We must provide for our family's basic material needs, for example (1 Timothy 5:8). But these good things are only a beginning. The money God entrusts to us is eternal investment capital. Every day is an opportunity to buy up more shares in His kingdom!

3. Set a budget so you can spend and save wisely.

Since the long-term consequences are severe when a couple disagrees about money, I can't stress enough the importance of discussing financial matters. Start by making a careful record of spending so you can find out where your money is currently going. Then determine where it should be going. This will become the basis for your budget. (When I was a pastor, I met with families who followed a budget and did fine on a meager income. I met with others who made much more and were regularly in financial crisis.)



For some, the most practical way to budget is the envelope system. When paychecks are cashed, the cash goes into envelopes designated for giving, housing, food, gas, utilities, entertainment, clothing, saving, and so on. If nothing is left in the entertainment envelope halfway through the month, no more movies or eating out. If we overspend in one area, we must underspend elsewhere to compensate. The envelope system may seem antiquated, but it teaches us that resources are limited, which is an invaluable lesson.

What is the right balance between how much we give, use for needs and wants, and save? I believe the tension reflected in that question is healthy. We can prayerfully seek God's guidance, determined to follow His lead as best as we can discern it.

Jesus tells us, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things [what you eat, drink, and wear] will be given to you" (Matthew 6:33 NIV). Unlike the pagans who "run after all these things" and "worry about tomorrow," believers can trust God (Matthew 6:25–34). If we believe that God can create us, redeem us, and bring us through death to spend eternity with Him, we can take Him at His word when He says He will provide for our material needs.

4. Avoid debt, except in rare instances.

The choice to live under debt (except in manageable amounts, such as with a mortgage payment well within your means) is ultimately deadening to the soul and to a marriage. It is always unwise to live above your income. It will invariably produce conflict in your marriage.

Trust means believing God will take care of our needs. When we go into debt, however, we usually do so to obtain wants, not needs. So the Bible cautions us against debt. The ESV translates the beginning of Romans 13:8, "Owe no one anything." This would appear to prohibit debt. The NIV reads, "Let no debt remain outstanding." This would allow debt, if paid off as soon as possible.

Not all debt is the same, however. I'm sympathetic to those in situations where, after prayer and evaluation, debt seems the only alternative. In such cases, nothing is wiser than giving first to God, cutting back expenditures, and systematically paying off debt as aggressively as possible.

Some consider mortgages an exception to avoiding debt, and a case can be made for borrowing to buy a reasonably priced house instead of renting. Unfortunately, many aspiring homeowners buy a house outside their budget. A couple I know assumed a large mortgage that depended on both of their incomes. When the wife became pregnant, they realized that to keep the house, they would have to violate their convictions against leaving their child in a day-care center while the mother worked.

What about credit cards? Some use them for convenience, paying off the amount owed on every statement to avoid interest. Nanci and I did this. This approach has advantages, but it also has drawbacks. The very convenience of having a credit card is often a liability—and constitutes temptation. Here are some prudent guidelines:

- Never use credit cards for anything except budgeted purchases.
- Pay off your credit cards every month.
- The first month you have a credit card bill you cannot pay in full, destroy the card, pay it off, and don't get another one.

5. Enjoy life to God's glory.

As believers in a materialistic culture, we should embrace lifestyles that free up money to further the progress of the gospel. And yet, the answer is not asceticism, believing that money and possessions are inherently evil. Our God is a lavish giver (Romans 8:32). He provides pleasures and comforts he desires us to enjoy: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Over the years, Nanci and I spent reasonable amounts of money on vacations that served to renew us. Even when our girls were small, we would have a date night, believing one of the best things we

could do for our children was to maintain a strong marriage. (Make it a priority to date your spouse. Put it in your schedule and budget!)

Scripture says we are to put our hope not in material things but "in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (1 Timothy 6:17 NIV). That means we shouldn't feel guilty for enjoying His provisions! God does not expect His followers to live like prisoners in a cell, never feasting or celebrating life. He entrusts us with money to care for our needs and the needs of others, but also so we can take pleasure in the life He has given us.

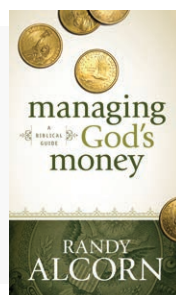
Invest in Eternity—Together

Many Christians store up their treasures on Earth. They end up backing into eternity, heading away from their treasures. Christ calls us to turn it around—to store up our treasures in Heaven. That way, every day moves us closer to our Treasure.

In her last years, Nanci and I reflected on the ways, by God's grace, we had invested in eternity and served the Lord Jesus together. What lay behind us was meaningful, but what awaited us on death's other side was what we spent our lives preparing for.

Shortly before she died, I was holding Nanci's hand, and she said, with a smile and tears, "Randy, thank you for my life." I replied, also crying, "Nanci, thank you for my life." God had used us to grow each other spiritually and make us better followers of Jesus. We certainly didn't do everything right, but with God's help, we sought to store up far greater treasures in Heaven than on Earth.

I encourage you to put Christ in the center of your marriage and finances. You will never regret it. The eternal payoffs will forever bring you joy and your Savior glory! ■



Explore more about what it means to be a steward in *Managing God's Money*: epm.org/mgm

Q&A

Question from a reader:

How can I discern whether a certain Christian book or podcast is good to read or listen to? I have a hard time knowing which ones hold to good teaching and honor what's found in Scripture.

Answer from Stephanie Anderson, EPM staff:

We are to be like the Bereans, who carefully checked the Apostle Paul's teachings against Scripture to discern whether what he said was true (see Acts 17:11). Scripture also tells us to "test all things. Hold on to what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Our ministry frequently receives questions about whether we/Randy are familiar with a particular resource, and the following are some evaluative tips we often use.

In evaluating books, it can be helpful to check a book's Amazon page, and see who it is published by and also who has endorsed the book. Reading customer reviews (both the positive ones and the negative ones!) can give you an idea of the book's content as well as potential pitfalls.

In her article "Becoming a Discerning Christian Reader" (see epm.org/discerning), Brandi Davis offers these tips:

Check the author's social media and/or website. If you see ungodly fruit there, it will most likely show up in what they write.

Research the publisher of the book. Some publishers target a very specific Christian demographic, and knowing more about them may help you make a clear decision.

Read a sample. Many online booksellers allow you to read the first few pages of a chapter on their website.



In the case of a podcast, consider looking through their website and episode descriptions. See what guests have been on the podcast. After sampling some episodes, here are some questions to ask:

- Does this podcast lead me to have a deeper love for God and His Word?
- Does this podcast point me to Christ and help me to know and love Him more?
- Does this podcast help me obey Philippians 4:8 (thinking about whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable)?
- Could my time be better spent studying/listening to other resources?

Randy writes, "Our theology tends to come from whatever we trust." We want to encourage readers to be wise and careful in what they put their trust in.

In his article "15 Discernment Diagnostics" (see his list of questions at epm.org/diagnostics), Kevin DeYoung writes, "Mature Christians do not cast a critical eye on everyone and everything a hair's breadth different from them. But they are discerning, and they are careful."



Question from a reader:

I am disabled and middle aged, and sometimes I wonder why God bothers to keep me here on Earth. Why did He decide to create me?

Answer from Doreen Button, EPM staff:

God “bothers” to keep you here because He created you for a purpose and He loves you. In Ephesians, Paul tells us “Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago” (2:9-10, NLT). Sometimes it’s hard to imagine what that purpose and plan is because we aren’t all-seeing and all-knowing like God is. Our culture tells us that we have to constantly be doing, and the more people see us doing, the better. If we haven’t checked off dozens of to-do boxes each day, we’re not worthwhile.

God doesn’t see things that way. He looks at our hearts, not our hands and certainly not our five- and ten-year goal spreadsheets. (What we do indicates

what’s in our hearts, but God doesn’t need that indicator like humans do.) You may not be able to save the world, but you can be kind to those God puts in your life. You can share Jesus’ love with people who help care for you or who serve you at the grocery store or the doctor’s office. A smile even when you’re not feeling well might make someone’s day and you might not even realize it this side of the New Earth.

Randy once went through a checkout line and engaged with the cashier in a friendly way and gave her a booklet. She had planned to take her life when she got off her shift, but a simple interaction, which was just one of many in his day, changed her mind. She felt seen. He didn’t hear until much later how his actions affected her. There may be dozens of times you’ve done something for which you may never know the outcome, but God does! Because it’s part of His purpose for you. And what you do for Him glorifies Him.

I’d like to encourage you to memorize three very short verses and put them into practice. If you do, you may find that your life becomes richer and more meaningful in time:

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

First Thessalonians 5:16-18 tells you His stated purpose for you.

Keep seeking Him above all! ■



Did you know? Our staff have answered many questions from readers related to Randy's books and topics he has written on. Browse them at epm.org/browse or search by keyword.



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