

# eternal perspectives

FALL/WINTER 2025

## Do You See *Eternity?*



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Clinging to Christ in Pain

How Can I Share the Gospel with My Neighbor?

Trusting God in Aging



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# about

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## Contact

39065 Pioneer Blvd., Suite 100, Sandy, OR 97055  
[info@epm.org](mailto:info@epm.org) | 503.668.5200

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**We live our lives between the first  
coming of Christ and the second.**

**We look back to that first Christmas and the  
life of Jesus on Earth. At the same time we look  
forward to the return of the resurrected Christ  
when we, His resurrected people, will live with  
Him forever on the New Earth.**

Randy Alcorn



*When One Day  
Your Present  
Life Is Forgotten  
on Earth, **God**  
**Will Forever  
Remember  
and Care***

BY RANDY ALCORN

Our lives are so brief, they may seem like pebbles dropped in a pond. They create ripples for a moment, tiny wrinkles that smooth out, then are gone forever.

Abandoned tombstones with names no one remembers are stark reminders of our eventual anonymity in this world. What do you know about your great-grandparents? What will your great-grandchildren know about you?

Our brief stay here may appear insignificant, but if we spend our lives honoring Jesus and being generous, thereby storing up treasures in Heaven, our lives will have everlasting value. The Bible tells us that although others may not remember us or care what our lives here have been, God will remember perfectly, and He cares very much—so much that the door of eternity swings on the hinges of our present lives.

For he knows our frame;  
he remembers that we are dust.  
As for man, his days are like grass;  
he flourishes like a flower of the field;  
for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,  
and its place knows it no more.  
But the steadfast love of Yahweh is from  
everlasting to everlasting on those who  
fear him,  
and his righteousness to children's children,  
to those who keep his covenant  
and remember to do his commandments.  
(Psalm 103:14-18)

Malachi 3:16-18 is a remarkable passage that tells us God documents the faithful deeds of His children on Earth: "Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name. 'They will be mine,' says the Lord Almighty, 'in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.' "

God is proud of His people for fearing Him and honoring His name, and He promises that all will see the differences between those who serve Him and those who don't. Those distinctions are preserved in this scroll in Heaven.

The king often had scribes record the deeds of his subjects so that he could remember and properly reward his subjects' good deeds (Esther 6:1-11). While God needs no reminder, He makes a permanent record so that the entire universe will one day know His justification for rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked.

Other passages describe a scroll in Heaven. Jesus opens a great scroll (Revelation 5:1, 5), and an angel holds a little scroll (Revelation 10:2). The psalm writer David said, "Record my misery; list my tears

## Your acts of faithfulness and kindness that no one else knows are well-known by God.

on your scroll — are they not in your record?" (Psalm 56:8, NIV). He asked that his tears be kept in Heaven's permanent record.

There's no hint that God will destroy any or all of the books and scrolls presently in Heaven. It's likely that these records of the faithful works of God's people on Earth will be periodically read throughout the ages.

The books contain detailed historical records of all of our lives on this earth. Each of us is part of these records. Obscure events, words heard by only a handful of people, will be known. Your acts of faithfulness and kindness that no one else knows are well-known by God. He is documenting them in his books. He will reward you for them in Heaven.

How many times have we done small acts of kindness on Earth without realizing the effects? How many times have we shared Christ with people we thought didn't take it to heart but who years later came to Jesus partly because of the seeds we planted? How many times have we spoken up for unborn children and seen no result, but as a result someone chose not to have an abortion and saved a child's life? How many dishes have been washed and diapers changed and crying children sung to in the middle of the night, when we couldn't see the impact of the love we showed? And how many times have we seen no response, but God was still pleased by our efforts?

God is watching. He is keeping track. In Heaven, He'll reward us for our acts of faithfulness to Him, right down to every cup of cold water we've given to the needy in His name (Mark 9:41). And He's making a permanent record in Heaven's books. ■



# How Can I Share the Gospel with My Neighbor?

BY RICO TICE

**AS I TRAVEL** around churches in the UK, I have found that Christians are discovering that far more people are spiritually hungry at the moment than have been in previous years. In some ways people are more open, having realized that life is far more fragile than they thought it was.

Amid worldwide conflicts, health concerns, a rising cost of living, and moral chaos, it's no wonder that there is such spiritual hunger. People know that the storm has hit and that they've built their house on sand. They are looking for a

rock. They are spiritually hungry and longing for transcendence.

As we come alongside others to share our faith, we can have confidence because:

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live

on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us. (Acts 17:24–27)

God is the Creator; He made the world and everything in it. He is the Sustainer; He gives everyone life and breath and everything else. He is the Ruler; He decides our appointed times in history and the boundaries of our land. In other words, God decides where we live and how long we live.

What is God's aim for the world? He did this "that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27). God makes us, sustains us, and rules us in order that His elect would know Him.

I've often found that Christians recognize that God has sovereignly placed them where they live, but they don't necessarily realize that God has sovereignly placed unbelievers in their lives. He has placed work colleagues on the same team as you. He has put you beside other parents at youth sports events on a Saturday morning. Every person and every family are where they are because God the Creator, Sustainer, and Ruler has ordained it, even though they suppress all knowledge of Him.

It's no accident that God has brought these people across your path. To see this is life-transforming. It means that every encounter is a divine appointment that God has already written into our schedule and theirs. As I teach this truth and train individuals and churches for evangelism, I see people's confidence being transformed by this truth. They've never seen their lives, neighbors, and loved ones through these biblical lenses.

As we consider the unbelievers that God has placed around us, the following five steps can help guide our thinking, prayer, and interaction as we engage with people.

## 1. Value your neighbors.

The people around us are "fearfully and wonderfully made" in God's image (Psalm 139:14; Genesis 1:27). People are the pinnacle of creation, and God has sent us to meet them. We can get to know them by asking friendly questions. What we're seeking to do here is to simply find out about their lives. We're not asking spiritual questions at this point. Rather, we are authentically getting to know them better. These are "level one" questions: Where are they from? What are their hobbies? What are their passions? What is their family like? What is their work like?

God gave them their skills, temperament, intellect, and experience. He uniquely wired them. He sent Christ to die for sinners like us and like them, and He's put us in their lives. May they see the excitement in our eyes as we realize the big story we're in together.

## 2. Serve your neighbors.

Second, we don't just value meeting people, we also want to serve them. We serve them not only because they're made in God's image, but also because Jesus came to serve and we want to follow in His footsteps: "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Everyone we meet is of great value to God because He created them in His image and sent His Son into the world to die so that whoever believes may have eternal life.

In an age where life is about me, my needs, my





feelings, and my fulfillment, where we are absorbed by our phones and personal algorithms, our kindness toward and care for others makes us stand out as we shine as lights in the world (Phil. 2:15).

### 3. Cross the pain-line.

Third, cross the pain-line by asking a spiritual question. There is discomfort in doing so because the other person may find it offensive. So, as we ask this question, we must remember our identity in Christ. Whether we are accepted or rejected does not make us more or less valuable. What makes us valuable is that we are made in God's image.

By asking a "level two" question, we see if there is any spiritual hunger in the person God has placed before us. We might want to preface the question with something like, "This friendship is really important to me, so I'm a bit nervous to say this because it can offend some people, but can I ask, 'Do you celebrate Easter?' or 'Do you ever think about spiritual things?' or 'Where do you find hope amid conflict and change?'"

In the Gospels, Jesus asks over two hundred questions. What spiritual question would you like to ask that neighbor whom God has placed in your life?

### 4. Exit when appropriate.

In Matthew 10:14, Jesus says, "If anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town." This means that if the other person stops

*Our kindness toward and care for others makes us stand out as we shine as lights in the world.*

engaging, we should stop engaging. But if they start discussing the spiritual issue we've raised, we should keep asking questions.

It might be that they don't want to talk about that area at all, in which case we should go back to celebrating and serving them. It might be that God is creating a spiritual hunger in them, and that He has led them to this conversation with you so that you may offer them the only thing that will satisfy them: the Lord Jesus.

### 5. Continue to pray.

Don't assume that you know who is spiritually hungry, who is ready to trust in Jesus, and who isn't. Get to know people, serve them, ask spiritual questions, and perhaps God will show you who He is calling to Himself through your witness. This is the journey, or gospel pathway, that I long to go on with the neighbors that God has placed in my life. Our confidence comes from the fact that the sovereign Lord has placed us where we are and has also placed our neighbors where they are.

With confidence in God's plan for us, our neighbors, and His world, we can pray that He would help us to increasingly know our neighbors, serve them, and tell them about Jesus. ■

**Rico Tice** is co-founder and evangelist at Christianity Explored Ministries. He is author of several books, including *Faithful Leaders and the Things that Matter Most*, *Honest Evangelism*, and *The Real Jesus*.



*Originally posted by Ligonier Ministries, Inc.*



## Heaven booklet now available from EPM in Spanish

We are happy to announce that we have reprinted Randy Alcorn's *Heaven* booklet in Spanish, and it is available exclusively from our online store! *El Cielo: Respuestas Bíblicas a Preguntas Frecuentes* retails for \$2.99 and our EPM price is \$1.99 per single copy, with the discounted price of \$1.50 when you order 20 or more booklets. Order from [epm.org/cielobooklet](http://epm.org/cielobooklet)

Our prayer is that God uses the booklet to reach many Spanish readers for Christ!

## Join us in welcoming Stacy to the EPM team!

Stacy works part-time in the shipping room, in addition to helping with various ministry projects. She is delighted to join the EPM staff in serving the body of Christ by helping put Randy's materials in the hands of people who are ministering around the world. She has personally been encouraged by Eternal Perspective Ministries and is grateful to be a part of it.



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# Do You See *Eternity?*

BY RANDY ALCORN



**W**hen I was a brand-new believer in the 1970s, many Christians eagerly listened to Bible teachers “proving” from Scripture that Christ would return in the 1980s. *The Late Great Planet Earth* told us the fig tree in Matthew 24:32–35 was Israel, and the generation that witnessed Israel’s return as a nation in 1948 wouldn’t pass away before Christ’s return. Convinced of this, one of my friends didn’t get dental work done, saying, “Why spend the money when Christ is going to come back within a couple of years?” (He ended up regretting it!)

Years later, as a pastor, I hesitated before preaching on Christ’s second coming because I was weary of the prophecy obsession, which was less about Jesus than endless speculation about the tribulation, the antichrist, the USSR being Gog and Magog, the Chinese army preparing for Armageddon, the locusts of Revelation 9 being helicopters—and so on.

Yet a healthy emphasis on Christ’s return is vital for believers, since “our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior” (Philippians 3:20). Christ will appear “to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Hebrews 9:28), and He will reward “all who have loved his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8).

Scripture calls His return “the happy fulfillment of our hope” (Titus 2:13 NET). The hope in view is not wishful thinking but rock-solid, blood-bought certainty. Since Christ’s return is the believer’s great hope, we should ask ourselves: What will it mean when He does return?

## That Happy Day

It’s not essential that we understand in detail how the future will fall together. But the cornerstone of all orthodox eschatology is belief in the second coming of Christ—His physical return to this earth.

Preaching on the second coming, Charles Spurgeon said, “To stand star-gazing at the prophecies, with your mouth wide open, is just the wrong thing; far better will it be to go on working

for your Lord, getting yourself and your service ready for his appearing, and cheering yourself all the while with this thought, ‘While I am at work, my Master may come. Before I get weary, my Master may return.’”

The imminent return of Christ means He can return soon, within short order, as has been true for two thousand years. It also means He does not have to return when we think (1 Thessalonians 5:1–3). As Jesus Himself said, “The Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Matthew 24:44).

Unless Christ returns in our lifetime, we’re all going to die. In God’s perfect timing, He will take each of us out of this fallen world. Then, at the appointed time, He’ll send His Son back to set up His kingdom and initiate a resurrection of believers for eternal life on the New Earth. How grateful we are for God’s promise of resurrected bodies and renewed minds, with which we will be better able to glorify Him by enjoying Him forever!

John Calvin wrote, “Let us not hesitate to await the Lord’s coming, not only with longing, but also with groaning and sighs, as the happiest thing of all. He will come to us as Redeemer” (*Institutes* 3.9.5).

That will be the day when everything changes.

## Only the Beginning

Our interest in the end times often extends to the period preceding and immediately following Christ’s return. But while His return will be unspeakably wonderful, it will end quickly. What will not end is our ongoing, ever-deepening relationship with Jesus. It will get richer and

“As we wait for Jesus above all, we can also long for our eternal home.”

“The return of Christ is not just an explosive event that ends history *but one that begins a new history.*”

richer, day after day, for “in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11). And as we wait for Jesus above all, we can also long for our eternal home: “According to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).

A woman engaged to a man living far away joyfully anticipates the day he will return for their wedding, an event that will change their lives. The same is true for us, the corporate bride of Christ, as we await His return. Yet a wedding, wonderful as it is, is only the beginning. I recall my wedding with great fondness, but when I consider the 54 total years of knowing Nanci and our 47 years of marriage, I can say that among the countless memories we shared, only a sliver of them are from our actual wedding day.

Likewise, the return of Christ is not just an explosive event that ends history but one that begins a new history and removes the curse, such that we will never again be hindered in our relationship with Jesus. “When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:4). We will experience the ongoing, daily revelation of His person as we live in His direct presence. Best of all, once He returns, He will never leave us again.

## Face-to-Face with Our Bridegroom

When you are in love, you desire to be in your beloved’s presence. Where you go and what you talk about are secondary to the joy of simply experiencing life together. The same will be true of life in the direct presence of Jesus, our true Bridegroom and best Friend.

I sometimes ponder what it will be like to see Jesus face-to-face, to fall on my knees before Him,

and then to talk and eat and walk with Him as a resurrected person living on a resurrected earth. Like Job, I’m struck with the realization that “I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:27 NIV).

Sometimes we imagine too much when it comes to eternal life. But usually, the problem isn’t that we imagine; it’s that what we imagine can be biblically ungrounded. We fail to picture in our minds the realities that Christ reveals to us in His word. Rather than ignore our imagination, I believe we should fuel it with Scripture, stepping just through doors the Bible opens.

We only look forward to what we can imagine. So do imagine what it will be like on the New Earth to walk with Jesus, as the first disciples once did. Living in Christ’s presence will be the ultimate fulfillment of the abundant, overflowing life God promised.

In the meantime, many unanswered questions remain. For instance, how will every eye see Him when He returns (Revelation 1:7)? Or how will untold millions of believers on the New Earth be able to talk and walk with Jesus one-on-one? Will we take turns enjoying His bodily presence? Or will the one body of Jesus somehow be simultaneously present with His people in a million places? The questions abound, but what we know is that God is capable of doing far more than we imagine.

All that will surround us on the New Earth—the people, banquets, work, culture, arts, sciences—all of it will point us toward Jesus. Though we’ll always be finite, we will continue growing in our knowledge of the infinite God. In the coming ages, He will show us “the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness

toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:7). What will we learn about Him as we worship with the four living creatures (Revelation 7:11)? What will we learn from angels (Revelation 5:11), and what might they learn from us? What insights will we glean from the animals on the New Earth (Isaiah 11:6–9; 65:25)?

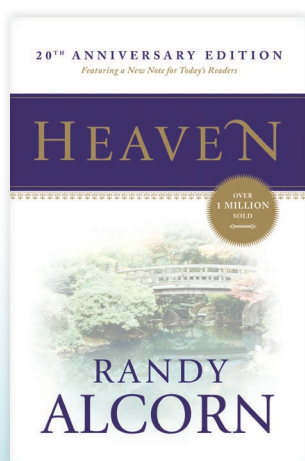
As we look into the faces of people and angels and animals, we’ll see the myriad ways our Creator has revealed Himself to us. We will forever progress in the depth and breadth of our relationship with Jesus—first, directly with Him; second, through other living beings and the fascinating new world that He will create. Our entire lives will be centered on Him, and we will learn more about Him through the countless adventures that await us.

## Come, Lord Jesus

Jesus will return after the last martyr is killed (Revelation 6:11) and after the last convert is converted. But “concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only” (Matthew 24:36). As we wait, we’re to serve Him faithfully, trusting Jesus to return when He deems it good to do so—whether that’s within our lifetime or hundreds of years from now.

Meanwhile, we fully place our hope in Christ and His promises. He will return, and we will be resurrected to life on the New Earth, where we will behold God’s face and joyfully know and serve Him forever.

So, eyes lifted upward, together we say, “Come, Lord Jesus!” ■



Learn more about our eternal home on the New Earth in the 20th anniversary edition of Randy's book *Heaven*: [epm.org/heavenbook](http://epm.org/heavenbook)

# Clinging to Christ in Pain

BY JONI EARECKSON TADA

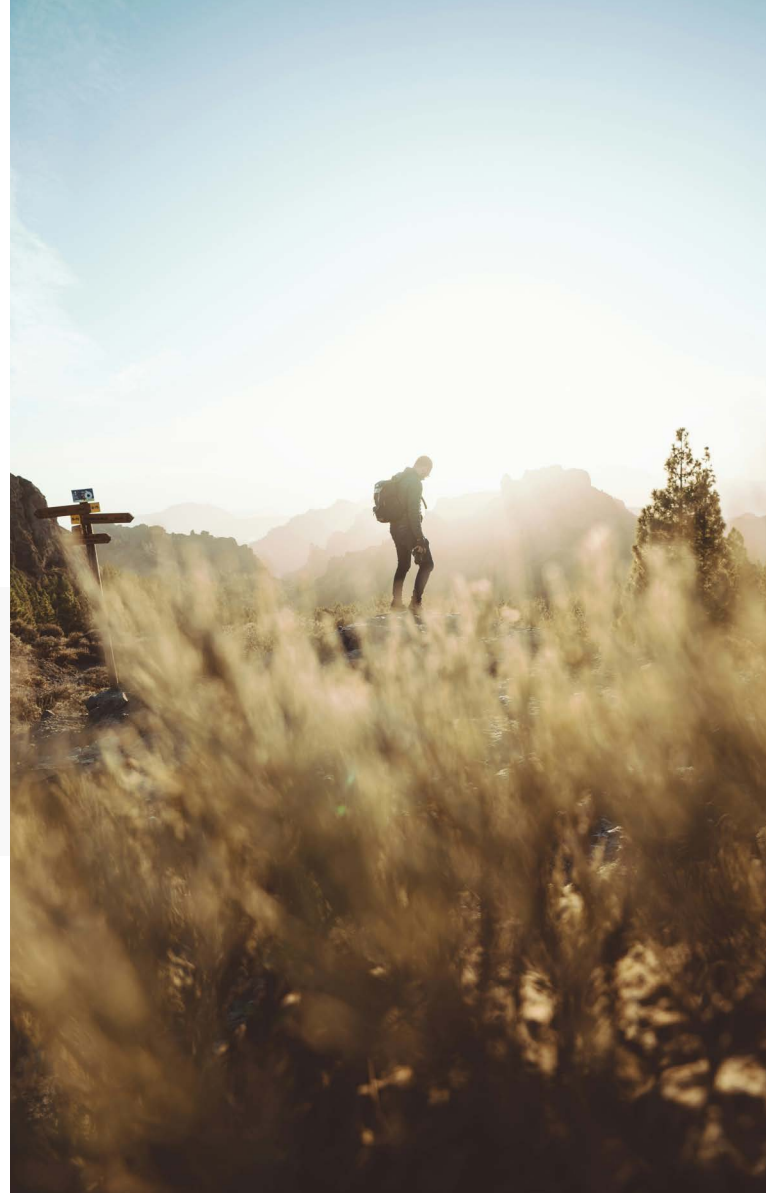
“I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.”

ISAIAH 46:4B

**M**y chronic pain makes my quadriplegia feel like a walk in the park. People often ask how I manage my pain. Well, when its fangs sink deep into my hips and back, that’s my signal. I begin deep breathing, slow and steady. And when fiery pain threatens to overtake me—just as the flames threatened to consume Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in that fiery furnace found in the book of Daniel—I have a conversation with it.

I don’t say, “I can’t stand this; it’s killing me,” because words like that are fraught with anxiety. Fear only makes things worse. Instead, I calmly ask Jesus to meet me in my pain, to not let it crush me. And the Son of God never fails to meet me, just as He met those three Hebrews in that hot furnace of fire.

And what does Jesus say to me in that agonizing place? He comforts me with His own words. He will say something like, Joni, my Spirit inspired 2 Corinthians 4:8 for a good reason. For although you “are hard pressed on every side,” you will not be crushed.



Oh, what a promise! Pain may tighten its vise grip, but it cannot crush me. As I cling to Christ’s promises, my pain pushes me further into His heart. There’s nothing sweeter than finding my Savior in the middle of my hellish circumstances. It helps deflect the pain and helps me to suffer well. Jesus helps me be in that unhappy place well.

All the years I lived in my wheelchair, I never got delivered from pain. But I met my Deliverer in it. I didn’t get healed, but I found intimate fellowship with the Healer.

Friend, pain does not have to crush you. As you courageously look at the stern countenance of pain and enter unafraid into its recesses, you will defang it of its terror. You’ll see that the Lord

is in your pain, having transfigured it to become a place of union with Him. Jesus conquered the insidious ways of pain and because of that, He's your prescription for pain—whether it's in your hip, your head, or your heart.

And remember, there is a Day coming when "He will wipe every tear from your eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain" (Revelation 21:4). Until then, when pain encroaches, start deep breathing and cling to a Bible promise. There are thousands to hold onto. Perhaps my favorite is this one uttered by Almighty God to you and me, promising, "I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you

and I will rescue you" (Isaiah 46:4b).

And He will. He promised. ■

**Joni Eareckson Tada** is an author, speaker, and international advocate for people with disabilities. A diving accident in 1967 left Joni a quadriplegic. After years of rehabilitation, she emerged with new skills and a fresh determination to help others. Her ministry, Joni and Friends, provides programs to special-needs families, as well as training to churches worldwide.



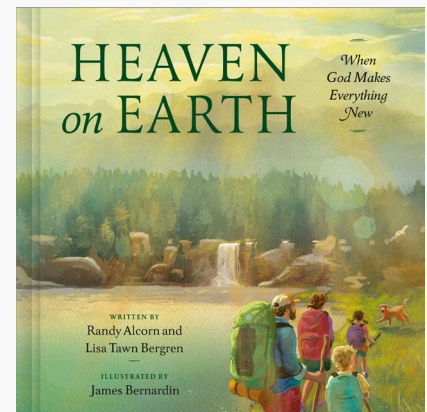
## Update on Randy Alcorn's Writing and Speaking

This summer and fall, Randy has been focused on working on several upcoming book projects. We are excited to share that he has partnered with author Lisa Tawn Bergren to write a children's picture book titled *Heaven on Earth: When God Makes Everything New*. It will be released in August of 2026, and we look forward to sharing a preview of the beautiful artwork with our readers.

We also have a projected date of fall 2026 for the release of his book on animals and the New Earth.

Although Randy's focus has been on writing, he did accept a select few speaking events this fall. He was especially enthusiastic about traveling to Boston in October to speak to students at Harvard as well as at Sattler College. These were extremely strategic opportunities to share with future leaders in our nation about the joy and eternal impact of generous giving.

Randy also met with two new friends, Robin John and Finny Kuruvilla, who are the cofounders of Eventide Investments, a venture capital firm focusing on high-performance investments that align with a biblical worldview. He described the trip as a totally unique and unforgettable experience, during which God answered prayers in powerful ways.

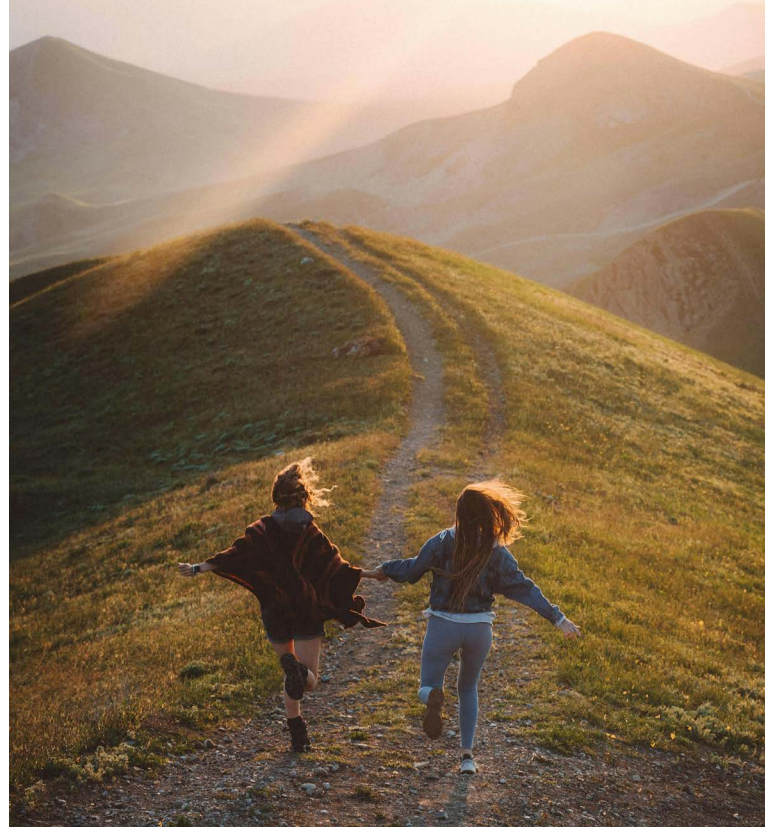


# Imagine Seeing in Heaven Those We've Forgotten or Only Briefly Met in This Life

BY RANDY ALCORN

**H**ave you ever wished you had a better memory to recall the people you've met throughout your lifetime? I've often wished I could call up recordings of conversing with people I've met at churches, conventions, airports, and many more places. I suspect we will be able to recall conversations and "chance" meetings when we see those believers again in Heaven, and instantly bond over what we had once completely or largely forgotten. I think that will be delightful, and we will suddenly understand how different people influenced our thoughts and even life directions in ways that we never realized.

It is more obvious to consider those we know we owe much to, such as parents, grandparents, and teachers, and it's clear that we'll know and recognize our loved ones and friends in Heaven. But how many people—including people whose names we never knew—said or did something that impacted us profoundly? Perhaps one day we will realize it, and I think we'll be stunned and amazed how God used that stranger (and perhaps that angel in disguise; see Hebrews 13:2) to encourage, warn, or rebuke us. Or perhaps their words or actions prompted us to explore new directions or go to a certain place where God did a particular thing in us that molded and shaped us into Christlikeness.



I think this could even extend to animal encounters that we had in this life, and since there are biblical grounds to believe there will be animals on the New Earth, perhaps we will see a dog, a frog, or a deer and remember what we had forgotten, or realize, for the first time ever, what we never knew. For certain, we won't be dumber once we get to Heaven; we'll be smarter, with better memories than ever!

Ephesians 2:6-7 says, "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace." The word show means "to reveal." The phrase in the coming ages clearly indicates this will be a progressive, ongoing revelation, in which we learn more and more about God's grace. This may well include learning how God was working in our lives in ways we weren't aware of at the time. And it will all be to His praise and glory.

What joy awaits us in reacquainting ourselves with people, angels, and animals that God brought into our lives for a purpose we didn't have a clue about! ■



# Trusting God in Aging

## When Your Best Years Are Behind You

BY JOHN PIPER

**W**hat we have to get clear in our minds (and God's word makes it crystal clear) is that this world is not our home. It's not Heaven.

It's not intended to be an endless playground, or even an endless ministry ground, that lasts until you drop. It's not intended to be easy. It is the prelude to Heaven and the world to come, and it is given to us as a test of whether we will trust God and treasure Him above all things and display Him as superior to the world, even at the end of our lives. If we think of our years from 65 to 95 as our last, best chance at life, we're idiots. We're unbelieving idiots to think like that, which is the way the world, the word of man, wants us to think.

Our last, best chance at life is with Christ in glory beyond the grave. That's our last, best chance of life. Or if He comes first, before we die, that would

be even better. And this world, whether at age thirty or ninety, is nothing compared to the glory that will be revealed to us (Romans 8:18). This is God's word, not man's word; we must believe it. The losses of old age are simply one kind of test for our faith, but this test is not unique.

Joni Eareckson Tada has been in a wheelchair since she was seventeen. That's a big loss. Fanny Crosby was blind. That's a big loss, and she produced eight thousand hymns. John Milton went blind in the middle of writing *Paradise Lost*, and he finished it. That's a great loss and gain. Beethoven went deaf and continued to write great music. That was a huge loss. The losses we experience as we move toward death are just one species of loss that mark all of Christian life, and the Bible has lots to say about what those losses are meant to accomplish in our lives.

“With every loss, there is a thousandfold gain of glory in the age to come.”

## The Word of God

Here's what the word of God, not the word of man, says: "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds"—like the trials of aging—"for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2–4). And that effect it produces when you endure trial, that effect is not physical fitness. Oh, Lord! It's not physical fitness, but "endurance and patience with joy," as Colossians 1:11 says.

Take Paul as an example. I love the apostle Paul. I have a picture of him—at least, of Rembrandt's imagination of what he looked like—hanging on the wall in my attic. Here he is, in prison. He's in prison as an old man, writing to Philemon for the sake of Onesimus. Here's what he says in Philemon 9–10: "For love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus—I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus." He's old, his body is wracked with the effects of decades of suffering and his thorn in the flesh, and he's in prison. And what does he do? He does what he can do. What can he do? He writes a letter to Philemon, out of love for Onesimus, to try to help them be reconciled. That's a ministry—that's a ministry! And it was glorious. It was beautiful. It makes me love the apostle Paul.

Jesus said, "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much" (Luke 16:10). In other words, we will only be held accountable for the little we can do. That's what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 8:12: "If the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have." God doesn't expect from eighty-somethings what he expected from thirty-somethings. When you were thirty, you could store up a reward in Heaven by traveling a hundred miles and staying up all night with a grieving saint—

and not miss a beat in the next two days. When you're ninety, you may store up that same reward by scratching out in your shaky handwriting a precious short note of encouragement to your great-grandchild. Same reward.

The word of God does not leave us guessing as to how aging or even disabled or imprisoned saints maintain hope and joy. Paul was very self-conscious about the fading away of his powers. Here's what he said in 2 Corinthians 4:16–17: "We do not lose heart." I ask myself: How do I not lose heart? "We do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day." How? "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison."

None of your suffering is wasted if you bear it in faith. With every loss, there is a thousandfold gain of glory in the age to come. And even more than that, while we are painfully approaching Heaven, we have this promise according to God's word, not man's word, in Isaiah 46:3–4. Let this sink in. "[You] have been borne by me"—speaking to His people, and that would be Christians now—" [You] have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save." How sweet is that? ■

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



*By John Piper. © Desiring God Foundation. Source: [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org). Excerpted from Ask Pastor John, "When Your Best Years Are Behind You."*

# Preparing for Our Dying Hour

BY J.C. RYLE

**THE DAY MAY COME** when after a long fight with disease, we shall feel that medicine can do no more, and that nothing remains but to die. Friends will be standing by, unable to help us. Hearing, eyesight, even the power of praying, will be fast failing us. The world and its shadows will be melting beneath our feet. Eternity, with its realities, will be looming large before our minds.

What shall support us in that trying hour? What shall enable us to feel, “I fear no evil” (Psalm 23:4)? Nothing, nothing can do it but close communion with Christ. Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith—Christ putting His right arm under our heads—Christ felt to be sitting by our side—Christ can alone give us the complete victory in the last struggle.

Let us cleave to Christ more closely, love Him more heartily, live to Him more thoroughly, copy Him more exactly, confess Him more boldly, follow Him more fully. Religion like this will always bring its own reward. Worldly people may laugh at it. Weak brethren may think it extreme. But it will wear well. At even time it will bring us light. In sickness it will bring us peace. In the world to come it will give us a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

The time is short. The fashion of this world passeth away. A few more sicknesses, and all will be over. A few more funerals, and our own funeral will take place. A few more storms and tossings, and we shall be safe in harbour. We travel towards a world where there is no more sickness—where parting, and pain, and crying, and mourning, are done with for evermore.

Heaven is becoming every year more full, and earth more empty. The friends ahead are becoming more numerous than the friends astern. “Yet a little time and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (Hebrews 10:37). In His presence shall be fulness of joy. Christ shall wipe away all tears from His people’s eyes. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is Death. But he shall be destroyed. Death himself shall one day die (Revelation 20:14).

In the meantime let us live the life of faith in the Son of God. Let us lean all our weight on Christ, and rejoice in the thought that He lives for evermore. Yes: blessed be God! Christ lives, though we may die. Christ lives, though friends and families are carried to the grave. He lives who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel.

He lives who said, “O death, I will be thy plagues: O grave, I will be thy destruction” (Hosea 13:14). He lives who will one day change our vile body, and make it like unto His glorious body. In sickness and in health, in life and in death, let us lean confidently on Him. Surely we ought to say daily with one of old, “Blessed be God for Jesus Christ!” ■

**J.C. Ryle (1816–1900)** was a prolific writer, vigorous preacher, and faithful pastor who became the first Anglican bishop of Liverpool in 1880.



# Reforming Our Vocabulary to Reflect the Coming Resurrection

BY RANDY ALCORN

A radio preacher, speaking about a Christian woman whose Christian husband had died, said, “Little did she know that when she hugged her husband that morning, she would never hug him again.”

Though the preacher’s words were well intentioned, they were not true. He could have said, “She’d never again hug her husband in this life,” or better, “She would not be able to hug her husband again until the next world.” Because of the coming resurrection of the dead, we will be able to hug each other again—on the New Earth.

Someone might say, “We all know what the

preacher meant.” But I’m not sure we really do—or that *he* really did. I’m not trying to be picky, but we need to carefully reform our vocabulary to express what’s actually true. If we don’t, we will ultimately fail to think biblically and continue to embrace predominant stereotypes of Heaven.

“That’s the last time I’ll ever see him in his body,” a man said of his son who died. No. Because they were both Christians, they will see each other again in their resurrection bodies.

“I’ll never see my daughter again on this earth.” But if she is a believer, and you are, then the statement is wrong. You *will* see her again on this earth. You and she will be transformed, and the

earth will be transformed, but it will still *really* be you and your daughter on an Earth that *really* is the same Earth.

We do not just say what we believe—we end up believing what we say. That’s why I propose that we should consciously correct our vocabulary so it conforms to revealed biblical truth. It’s hard for us to think accurately about the New Earth because we’re so accustomed to speaking of Heaven as the opposite of Earth. It may be difficult to retrain ourselves, but we should do it. We must teach ourselves to embrace the principle of continuity of people and the earth in the coming resurrection that Scripture teaches.

Because ethereal notions of Heaven have largely gone unchallenged, we often think of Heaven as less real and less substantial than life here and now.

(Hence, we don’t think of Heaven as a place where people will hug, and certainly not in these bodies.) But in Heaven we won’t be shadow people living in shadowlands—to borrow C. S. Lewis’s imagery. Instead, we’ll be fully alive and fully physical in a fully physical universe.

In one sense, we’ve never seen our friend’s body as truly as we will see it in the eternal Heaven. We’ve never been hugged here as meaningfully as we’ll be hugged there. And we’ve never known this earth to be all that we will then know it to be.

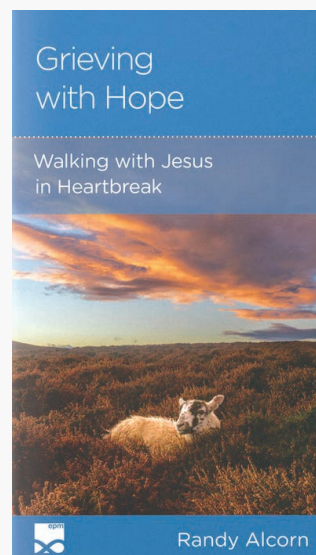
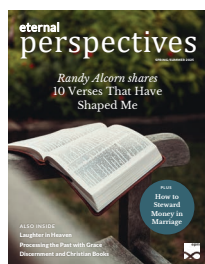
Jesus Christ died to secure for us a resurrected life on a resurrected Earth. Let’s be careful to speak of it in terms that deliver us from our misconceptions and do justice to the greatness of Christ’s redemptive work. ■



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"My brother-in-law shared an article from your magazine, called 'Laughter in Heaven,' at the nursing home where my dad resides. My brother-in-law

does a weekly church service there. He read the article about laughter to the residents. It was so meaningful and inspiring to all of them, but especially to one woman who has been blind since birth. She was so blessed and was praising the Lord for the word she was hearing. She is so excited for Heaven and what her future holds. Thank you for writing this article." —J. S.



Randy's booklet *Grieving with Hope* offers perspective and practical advice to help readers on the grieving journey. It is available from EPM for \$4.50 (retail \$6.25). We offer discounts for larger quantity orders. [epm.org/grievinghope](http://epm.org/grievinghope)

# Q&A

## Question from a reader:

Decades ago, I had the opportunity to get involved in missions overseas, and felt strongly compelled to go, but at the time I chose to say no. In the years that followed, the door for that ministry opportunity shut permanently. I truly believe that if I had pursued it, my life would be much more fruitful spiritually. I've asked God's forgiveness, but I feel so unhappy, afraid, empty, and tormented by self-accusation.

## Answer from Stephanie Anderson, EPM staff:

There is nothing that the enemy of our souls wants more than to see God's people pressed down, burdened with shame, and stuck living with regrets. Paul encouraged us not to be "unaware of his schemes" (2 Corinthians 2:11). Satan doesn't want us to be effective for God's Kingdom in the present, right now, because we are always looking back. (And by always looking back at our past regrets and sins, we are keeping the focus on ourselves rather than keeping our eyes on Jesus.)

It sounds like you have already asked God's forgiveness for the times you have fallen short or not obeyed what you felt was His leading. So ask yourself: does this sound like the way that God wants you to live now, as you walk in His forgiveness, in relationship with Him? Remember, Jesus said: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

The enemy's desire is for you to be unhappy, afraid, and tormented by self-accusation. That's not what God desires. "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death" (2 Corinthians 7:10).



What would have happened if you had chosen differently? We can't know that from this side of Heaven. It reminds me of what C. S. Lewis wrote in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, when Aslan the Lion was speaking to Lucy about her past choice and what would have happened had she obeyed:

"But what would have been the good?"

Aslan said nothing.

"You mean," said Lucy rather faintly, "that it would have turned out all right—somehow? But how? Please, Aslan! Am I not to know?"

"To know what would have happened, child?" said Aslan. "No. Nobody is ever told that."

"Oh dear," said Lucy.

"But anyone can find out what will happen," said Aslan. "If you go back to the others now,

and wake them up; and tell them you have seen me again; and that you must all get up at once and follow me—what will happen? There is only one way of finding out.”

—C. S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*

I love that Lewis has Aslan encourage Lucy to make the right choice now. You can’t change the past, but you can live today by God’s mercy, asking Him for the plan and following it. “Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way” (Psalm 25:8-9). We are all sinners, so what good news that God delights to guide and teach us!

You wrote, “I truly believe that if I had pursued it, my life would have been much more fruitful spiritually.” One, you don’t know that for sure. And two, God is sovereign, and for whatever reasons you ended up where you are, you can trust that He has you where He wants you. So how does He want you to serve Him and impact His kingdom where you live? God’s will is for you to bear much fruit today, as you serve Him right where you live.

Nancy Guthrie writes:

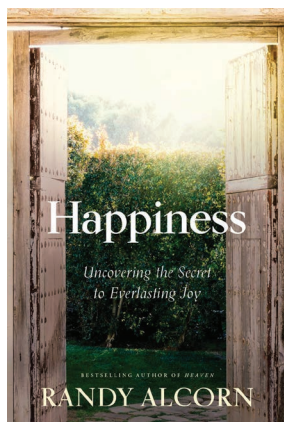
If God’s grace has found us and is clearly at work in us, we do not have to fear that sins in our past or sins in our future will disqualify us from enjoying the benefits of God’s gracious covenant. God has bound himself to us, and nothing can come between us. Your genetic predispositions, your sinful tendencies, the moral failures of your past, the culture you live in, the path you have taken so far in your life—none of these are destined to have the last word in your life. God’s grace toward you in Christ has the last, the lasting, and the determining word in your life... Grace binds you to Christ so that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38–39).

I pray that you will come to a place where you see God’s grace as having the last word in your life, and not your past regrets. ■



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