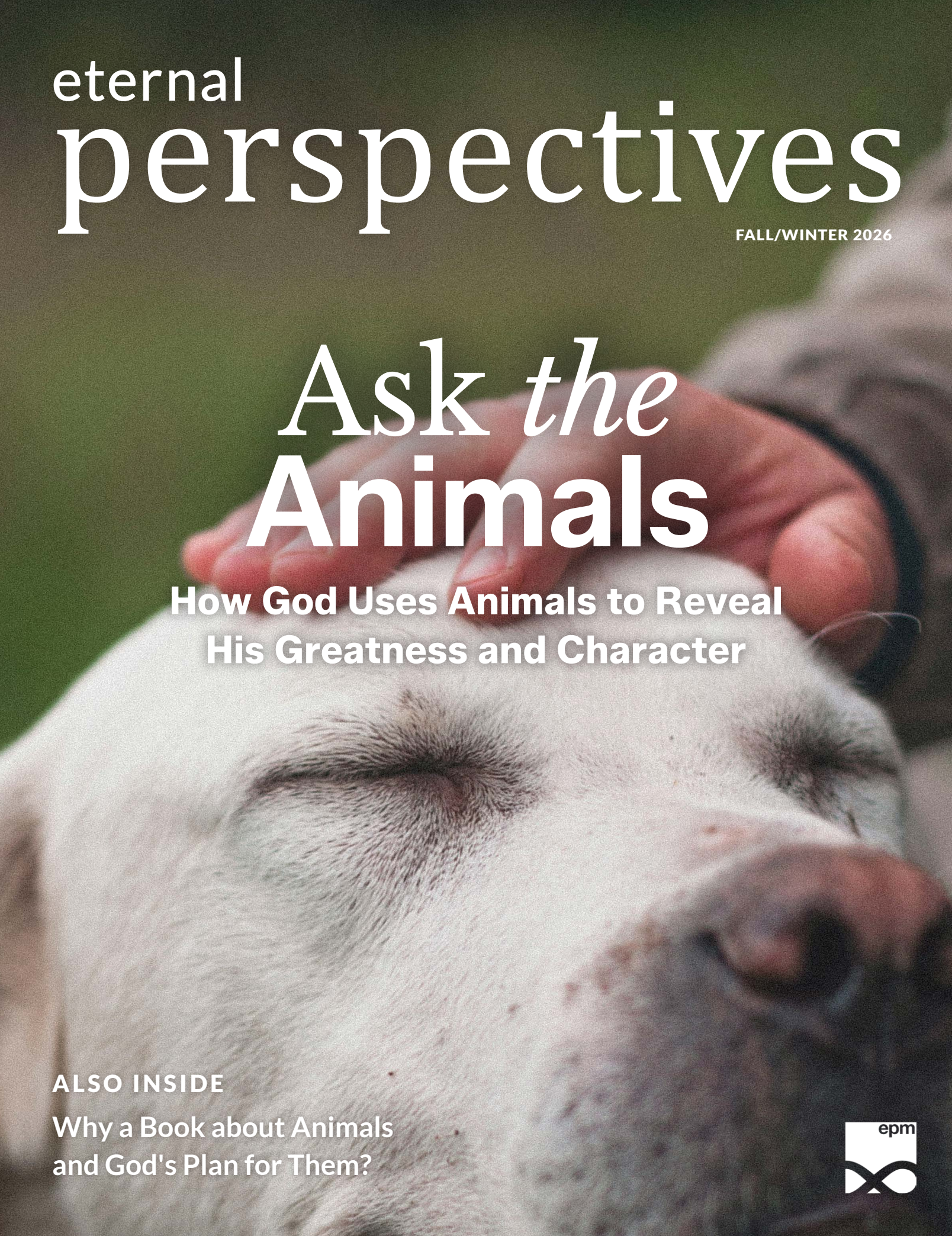
eternal
perspectives
FALL/WINTER 2026

Ask *the* Animals

How God Uses Animals to Reveal His Greatness and Character



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epm

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

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Produced and designed by Stephanie Anderson, EPM staff

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Human logic says the King of kings should have been born in a palace, surrounded by luxury. Instead, the only door open to the humble Savior was a dirty stable.

Amazingly, and revealingly, this was all by God's design.

Why is this good news for us? Because the Savior offered Himself on our behalf, we won't find "No Vacancy" signs in Heaven. If we've made our reservations by receiving God's gift in Christ, then

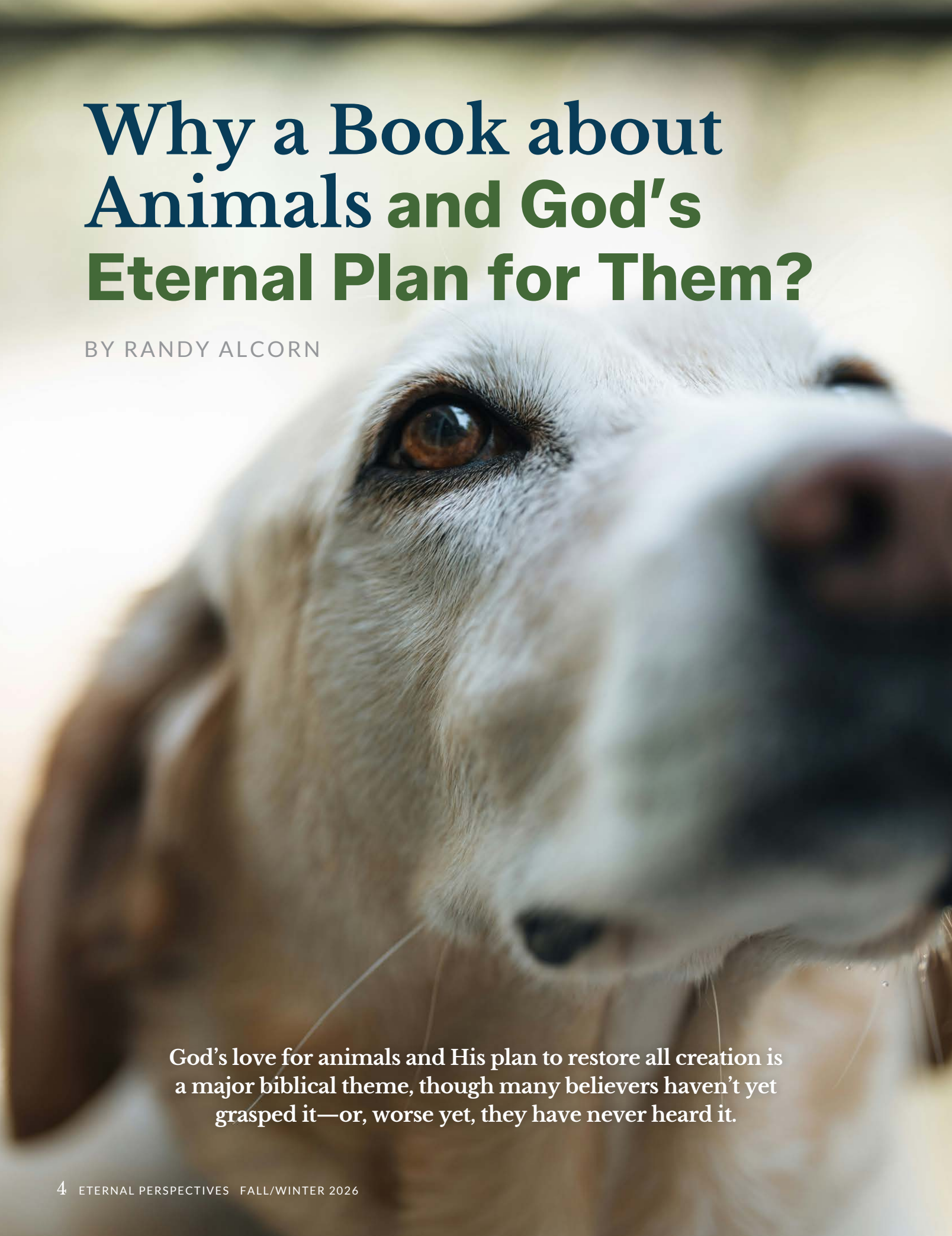
Heaven is wide open

with plenty of room for all of us.

Randy Alcorn

Why a Book about Animals and God's Eternal Plan for Them?

BY RANDY ALCORN



God's love for animals and His plan to restore all creation is a major biblical theme, though many believers haven't yet grasped it—or, worse yet, they have never heard it.

On a flight out of my hometown of Portland, Oregon, I struck up a conversation with the passenger seated beside me. I asked her about her work, and she in turn asked about mine. When I said, "I'm a writer," she wanted to know about my books, so I told her about a few novels and mentioned I had also written nonfiction. But when I said I'd written books about Heaven, her body language changed, and she appeared very uncomfortable. My "religious" reference shut down the conversation. I wasn't entirely surprised, because Portland has the highest percentage of people in the US without any religious affiliation—9 percent higher than San Francisco and Seattle, the nearest runners-up.

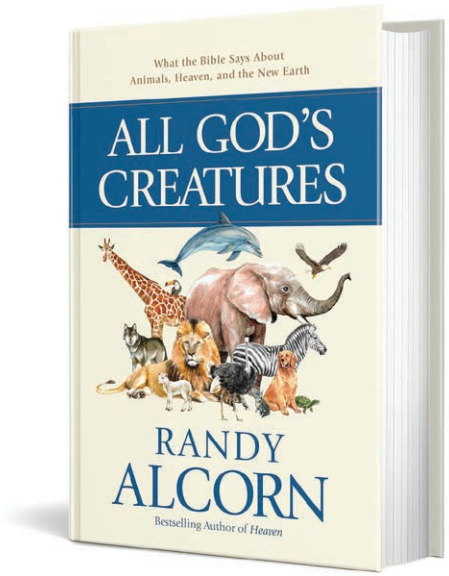
In an effort to revive the conversation, I asked, "Do you have any pets?" Suddenly, her face brightened. "Yes, I have a dog!"

She showed me a photo, happily telling me all about him. I showed her a picture of my dog and shared how much my wife and I loved animals. I mentioned that two chapters in my big book about Heaven address whether animals, including our pets, might have an afterlife.

She looked at me wide-eyed. "Are you saying you believe there will be animals in Heaven?" I briefly explained the Bible's teaching about the new creation and God bringing Heaven down to the New Earth, where many different animal species will live together peacefully with people. Just minutes earlier, she had disengaged at the very mention of Heaven. But now we were talking not just about animals, but about Jesus—the central figure of Heaven and the only way to get there.

Like many people I've met over the years, Christian and non-Christian alike, this woman had never heard of the biblical doctrine of the New Earth—a beautiful, restored planet with all its current wonders and much, much more, yet without evil or suffering. The prospect of such a place, a true Earth that included animals, moved her from disinterest in the afterlife to genuine curiosity.

Many people distrust organized religion but love animals and the natural world. They don't know God, yet they cherish what He created. They catch glimpses of Him in nature (Romans 1:19-21). Their love for animals flows from being God's image-bearers and can be a bridge to the gospel. Why? Because the God who created them also made the animals they adore.



Scripture tells us Jesus went to the cross primarily for humans, but also for the good of His entire creation: "Through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross" (Colossians 1:20, NLT).

God's love for animals and His plan to restore all creation is a major biblical theme, though many believers haven't yet grasped it—or, worse yet, have never heard it. For me, embracing this truth brings paradigm-shifting joy, which explains why the devil has worked so hard to hide what the Bible says about Heaven, even from those who regularly attend church.

That's why I'm so excited about my book *All God's Creatures: What the Bible Says About Animals, Heaven, and the New Earth.* It's been many years since I've been this enthusiastic about one of my books! A large part of my excitement is that it is truly unique. There are many self-published and warm-hearted books about animals in Heaven, but they lack serious treatment of the biblical texts or the arguments throughout church history. Perhaps because of our biases, and partly because seminaries

don't address it, for pastors the subject of animals in Heaven is outside the box of orthodox thinking.

But it's a biblical fact that God has revealed Himself in His creation, and we can see Him through it, even though creation is fallen. After human beings—the only creatures made in God's image—His next most important self-revelation is in animals—the other sentient beings in our world. The attention they get in Genesis 1–2 and again in Genesis 6–9 should clue us in to that.

As I was researching the book, I read Job 38–41 repeatedly. In all the times I had read those chapters before, never once had it sunk in that while Job is struggling with the problem of suffering, God's response is His longest monologue in all of Scripture—a lengthy self-revelation—20% of which is about the inanimate wonders of His creation and 80% of which is about *animals*. I had long been struck with God's obvious admiration for the horse and other animals, including Behemoth and Leviathan, but I never noticed that of all the topics He could've shared to win Job over, He chose to talk about animals! God's revelation somehow brings Job to his knees in wonder and repentance. Clearly, God sees something in His animals beyond what many believers do today. (See "Ask the Animals," page 10.)

The theologians who talk seriously about animals are mostly liberal, but they import evolutionary assumptions and reason instead of appealing to God's Word. I think the conservative overreaction, minimizing animals, is partly due to the liberal tendency toward embracing evolutionary theory. Several conservative theologians, whom I admire and usually agree with, have largely argued, "Animals aren't made in the image of God and therefore, have no place in the world to come." (Try telling that to the angels!) That's why I was so encouraged to receive an endorsement for *All God's Creatures* from my friend Wayne Grudem, whose *Systematic Theology* is deservedly the most respected in the evangelical world.

So, if like me, you were never taught a theology of animals but would like to learn, I hope *All God's Creatures* guides you a good distance on that journey. ■

Some of the Endorsements of *All God's Creatures*



Max Lucado

Pastor, speaker, and best-selling author of 48 books, including *Tame Your Thoughts*

Randy Alcorn's books have blessed my life for decades. His volume *Heaven* guided me from a vague, ethereal perspective to an exciting view of the life to come. My copy is underlined, highlighted, and dog-eared! I have the same enthusiasm for *All God's Creatures.* It specifically addresses the question of animals on the New Earth by explaining the promise of Scripture regarding our eternal home. Prepare to be informed, inspired, and empowered.



Sean McDowell, PhD

Professor of apologetics at Talbot School of Theology, author; popular YouTuber

Do animals have souls? Will they be in Heaven? Why does God allow animals to suffer? In *All God's Creatures*, Randy Alcorn's answers—based on Scripture texts—might surprise you. You may disagree with some of his conclusions, but you will undoubtedly enjoy his insights and be guided to wrestle biblically with these important questions. I love this book and believe you will too.

Available from our online store

Order *All God's Creatures* from EPM at **epm.org/allcreatures**.

news

Randy to speak at the Kingdom Advisors 2027 Conference

Randy will be a speaker at the national Kingdom Advisors Conference, February 23-25, 2027, in Orlando, Florida. Thousands of Christian financial professionals will gather for biblical teaching, worship, practical learning, and authentic faith conversations. All those attending will receive a copy of Randy's new devotional called *Wealth That Lasts*, which will release in early 2027. Learn more at **kingdomadvisorsconference.com**.

Join us in welcoming Megan Wood to the EPM team!



Megan works part time as a ministry assistant, and is focused on increasing the foreign-language content on our website. Randy's ministry has greatly impacted her through the years, and she's grateful to be part of a ministry that shares God's goodness with so many people around the world.

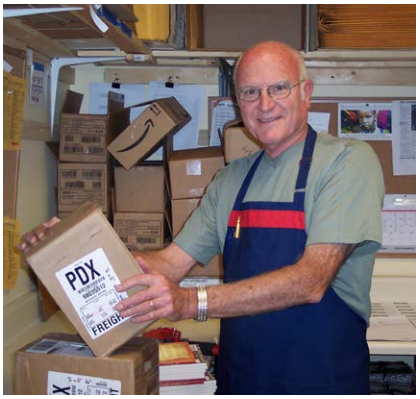
The international reach of EPM is expanding!

Randy's books have now been translated into 75 languages (**epm.org/languages**)

We have articles on our website in 34 languages besides English (**epm.org/resources/languages**)

Former EPM staff member Dwight Myers now with Jesus

Dwight worked as the EPM shipping clerk from 2013 to 2020. On August 18, 2026, at 90 years old, he entered Jesus's presence. Dwight is remembered for living a life of Christ-centered humility and kindness, and for having a great love for people. In addition to their faithful service to their church and family, he and Dawn, his bride of 70 years, served for years as volunteer jail chaplains. Randy writes, "Dwight and Dawn are precious. When I was a pastor at Good Shepherd, they were the kind of people who all of us pastors looked up to. Great rewards await Dawn and have already begun for Dwight." For those of you who knew Dwight, the video of his service, including Randy's message, is at **epm.org/dwight**.



End-of-year donations: partner with EPM in impacting eternity

If you've found our magazine, books, articles, or social media posts to be helpful, would you consider supporting EPM and being a part of this eternity-shaping ministry in 2027? If you wish to make a year-end, tax-deductible donation, please note donations postmarked no later than December 31, or received online at **epm.org/donate** by 11:59 p.m. PT on December 31, will be included on this year's tax receipts.

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Q&A

Question from a reader:

I am just finishing your book *Safely Home* for the fourth time. Do Chinese Christians have more or less freedom today than was portrayed in the book? Are Christians in China still being actively persecuted?

Answer from Randy Alcorn:

It's been 25 years since my novel *Safely Home* was first released. I visited China in the fall of 1999 while doing background research for the book. One of the house church leaders I met with while visiting told me, "Somewhere in China the sun is always shining, and somewhere the snow is always falling." In other words, there's always freedom somewhere and persecution somewhere else.

Years ago a missionary in China wrote me, "*Safely Home* was very, very accurate." She knows a Chinese woman who couldn't read it because it reminds her of close friends suffering persecution.

What I have heard consistently from those who live in China now, and know the country from the inside, is that persecution in some places can be severe, while in other places it is mild or almost nonexistent.

While it's not accurate to say, "There's no longer any persecution of Christians in China," it's also not true that *all* Chinese Christians are always persecuted. Some are, some aren't. Some registered church Christians and pastors are faithful to Christ, some aren't. Some house church Christians are biblically grounded, some are off base doctrinally. Some of them are persecuted, some aren't. Freedoms vary greatly.

What has changed in the 25 years since the book came out is much more digital access worldwide—which means we in the free world are able to hear more about the persecuted church, but at the same time, also means that the digital world is an increasingly weaponized avenue for intimidation and persecution.



In the ChinaAid 2025 annual report, founder and president Dr. Bob Fu says that "Of particular concern is the growing role of digital governance in religious management."

The report explains that

> "Online preaching space is severely reduced; believer privacy is systematically collected, and platforms serve as tools for national security collaboration. ...Combined with

facial recognition, location monitoring, church surveillance cameras, and real-name entry systems, activities are made fully visible; churches become 'transparent spaces,' restricting genuine worship."

In a news story from October 22, 2026, ChinaAid reports that Chinese police detained more than 20 Christians during a Sunday gathering at a private home. "This incident highlights China's strict stance and law enforcement practices in managing religious affairs," Dr. Bob Fu said. "As the authorities continue to strengthen oversight of unregistered religious groups, house churches still face significant legal and political risks when holding gatherings in private spaces."

Open Doors US says

> In China, ongoing regulations make what is "allowed" ever smaller. Christians are left looking at a shrinking list of freedoms, with more rules requiring religious leaders to submit to the Chinese Communist Party and embrace its ideology. Under this pressure, illegal independent house churches have splintered into small private home meetings of 10-20 people in covert locations with minimal pastoral leadership. Unregistered church pastors increasingly face accusations of economic crimes and fraud for collecting offerings, or "picking quarrels and provoking trouble."

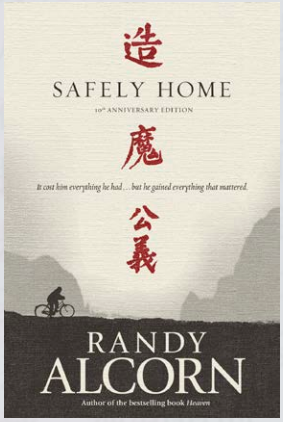
An Open Doors US local partner serving in East China shared these specific examples of persecution against house churches where he lives:

> "Recently, a house church in my area was raided during its Sunday service," he says. "The leader was fined several tens of thousands of yuan [10,000 Chinese yuan is nearly $1,500] and detained for seven days on charges of organizing illegal gatherings. In another house church, two Sunday school teachers were taken from their homes by police on charges of sharing the gospel with minors—one was released the same day, while the other was detained for five days. Furthermore, several Christian university teachers were suddenly taken on the same day from their homes for questioning.

While we should rejoice that persecution has lessened significantly in some places, let's be careful not to insinuate that Christians are no longer persecuted in China. Our brothers and sisters there need our prayers as they face continued challenges: "Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body" (Hebrews 13:3). ■

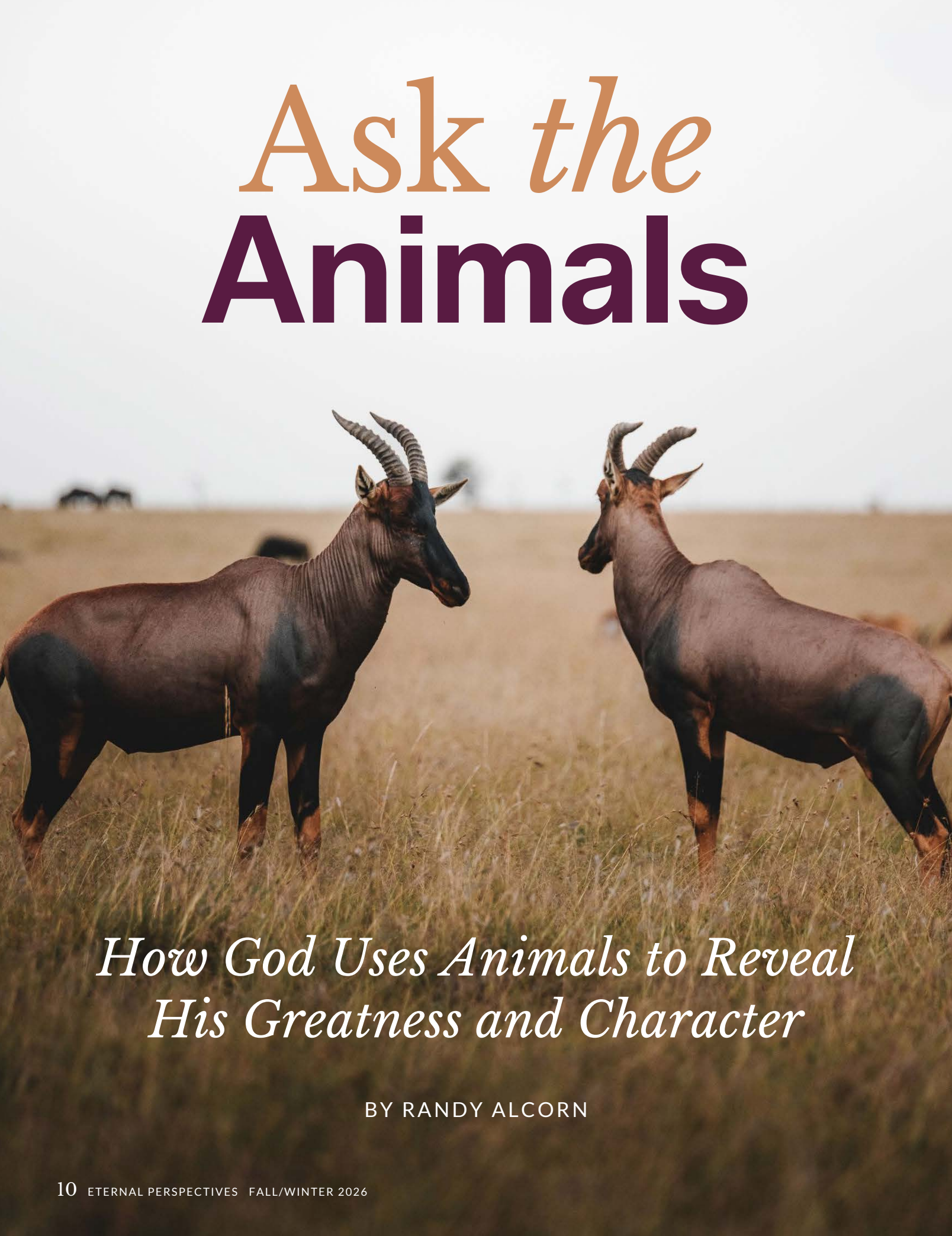
For more information and news on China, we recommend ChinaAid (**chinaaid.org**) and Open Doors US (**opendoorsus.org**).

To learn more about Randy's novel *Safely Home*, visit **epm.org/safelyhomebook**.



"*Safely Home* has stayed with me and touched me in a way I never expected. It was very well researched and true to Scripture. It made me realize how truly blessed I am to live in South Africa where I can attend church, read my Bible, and practice my faith without fear of persecution. While this is a work of fiction, the characters are so real and the story so compelling that it brought me closer to Jesus." —M. D.

Ask *the* Animals



How God Uses Animals to Reveal His Greatness and Character

BY RANDY ALCORN

Suppose you were a new Christian who didn't yet know much about the Bible. What if someone told you there was only one place in Scripture where God Himself speaks directly, and at length, on a particular subject, instead of speaking through an inspired lawgiver, prophet, or apostle? Wouldn't you be curious to know the subject He chose? And wouldn't you hang on every word?

In the book of Job, chapters 38 through 41, God tells His faithful servant Job about the wonders of His creation in general (20 percent of his monologue) and about the animals he created in particular (80 percent) and how they manifest His greatness and attributes. In the process, God demonstrates His great personal affection for animals.

Most people would probably expect God to choose a "more important" topic for His longest direct address in Scripture. Maybe His plan to redeem the world through the Messiah, or His love for His people. (So, what does that teach us about how different God's thoughts are from our own?)

Job is known as a book about suffering and faith (and a lesson about how not to treat a suffering friend). But it is so much more than that. It is a profound self-revelation of God's nature.

Early in the book, we hear from Job's fickle friends, who imagine they know what they really don't. But Job replies,

> Ask the animals, and they will teach you.
> Ask the birds of the sky, and they will tell you.
> Speak to the earth, and it will instruct you.
> Let the fish in the sea speak to you.
> For they all know
> that my disaster has come from the hand of the LORD. (Job 12:7-9, NLT)

In essence Job says, "Not only does the God above you know you are completely wrong, but the animals beneath you know it too. You arrogant men, who are so quick to give pat answers, should sit at the feet, paws, hoofs, and talons of animals of the land, air, and sea, and learn what God wants to teach you about Himself." (That would be good advice for all God's children!)

After Job and his friends voice their opinions for thirty-plus chapters, God takes the microphone for four. Surprisingly, in three of those chapters, and part of the fourth, God expounds on animals to illustrate His own attributes.

God begins by highlighting His inanimate creation, including Earth, the seas, light and the sun, rain, ice, stars and constellations, and finally lightning. He then moves on to discuss the animal kingdom.

Lions

> Can you stalk prey for a lioness
> and satisfy the young lions' appetites
> as they lie in their dens
> or crouch in the thicket? (Job 38:39-40, NLT)

It seems the God who loves both prey and predator is in an impossible position. He created the world without death and in the end "will swallow up death forever!" (Isaiah 25:8) and change the diet of lions from meat to hay. Yet in this present world under the Curse, by helping some animals live, the Creator and Giver of Life facilitates the death of others. Without a doubt, no one will be happier than God Himself when the world is no longer under the Curse.



Ravens

> Who provides food for the ravens when their young cry out to God and wander about in hunger? (Job 38:41, NLT)

God knows the needs of even the smallest creatures, and His heart's desire is to nurture them. His rhetorical question recognizes that He provides food for the ravens and listens to their young cry out—not just in general, but to Him in particular.

(Animals intuitively know they have a Creator and Provider.)

Wild Goats and Deer

> Do you know when the wild goats give birth?
> Have you watched as deer are born in the wild?
> Do you know how many months they carry their young?
> Are you aware of the time of their delivery?
> (Job 39:1-2, NLT)

Our Creator, unlike Job, watches young deer born in the wild. He has witnessed hundreds of billions of animal pregnancies and births. He not only sees every sparrow's death, but also each moment of their lives before that, and every moment of any future life they may have on the New Earth. The same has been true of every sheep, goat, cow, cat, rabbit, dog, bird, fish, whale, turtle, and dinosaur that ever lived. He made them all, gave life to them all, and has more than enough room in His mind and heart to know and love them all.

Wild Donkeys

> Who gives the wild donkey its freedom?
> Who untied its ropes?
> I have placed it in the wilderness;
> its home is the wasteland.
> (Job 39:5-6, NLT)



Genesis 16:12 uses wild donkeys as a figurative reference to people, when God says of Ishmael, "He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him" (NIV). The same is true in Hosea 8:9, describing Israel's waywardness and unfaithfulness to God. Remarkably, however, in this passage, God expresses only affection for actual wild donkeys. God delights in their untamed spirit.

Wild Oxen

> Will the wild ox consent to being tamed? Will it spend the night in your stall?
> Can you hitch a wild ox to a plow?
> Will it plow a field for you? (Job 39:9-10, NLT)

A wild ox is incredibly strong, and even if you could coax it into a stall, it would beat the walls to shreds. Hitch it to a plow? Ludicrous. Essentially, God is saying, "It's even more ridiculous, Job, for you to think that I exist to do your will." It is through the wild ox that God conveys His message: "If that animal of mine is outside your control, how much more am I?"

Ostriches

> The ostrich flaps her wings grandly,
> but they are no match for the feathers of the stork.
> She lays her eggs on top of the earth, letting them be warmed in the dust.
> She doesn't worry that a foot might crush them or a wild animal might destroy them.
> She is harsh toward her young, as if they were not her own. She doesn't care if they die.
> For God has deprived her of wisdom. He has given her no understanding.
> But whenever she jumps up to run,
> she passes the swiftest horse with its rider.
> (Job 39:13-18, NLT)

We could easily be unimpressed with the laughably awkward ostrich; but if you're tempted to underestimate her, you'll change your mind when she sprints past at an eyebrow-raising 43 mph. (The fastest human's peak speed is 27.5 mph.)

The ostrich is careless and insensitive with her offspring, and "doesn't care if they die." She's a paradoxical mixture of strength and speed on the

one hand (Job 39:18), and cluelessness and foolishness on the other (Job 39:13-17). Perhaps by now Job is starting to recognize His own foolishness in the face of God's instruction.



Horses

> Do you give the horse its strength
> or clothe its neck with a flowing
> mane?
> Do you make it leap like a locust,
> striking terror with its proud
> snorting? It paws fiercely, rejoicing
> in its strength,
> and charges into the fray.
> It laughs at fear, afraid of nothing;
> it does not shy away from the
> sword.
> (Job 39:19-22, NIV)

A domestic horse may run 30 mph, exceed 40 mph for very short distances, and in a few cases peak at 50 mph. God's depiction of the horse as a creature that charges into battle exemplifies its dynamic energy derived from His power.

I celebrate God's absolute delight in His horses. Rightfully so, He boasts about these marvelous animals. It's as if He's saying, "Look, Job, do you not see how incredible my horses are? Can you resist loving them like I do?"

Hawks and Eagles

> Is it your wisdom that makes the hawk soar
> and spread its wings toward the south?
> Is it at your command that the eagle rises to
> the heights to make its nest?
> It lives on the cliffs,
> making its home on a distant, rocky crag.
> From there it hunts its prey,
> keeping watch with piercing eyes.
> (Job 39:26-29, NLT)

Eagles soar high above the earth, appearing to be kings of the sky. They can make their nests so high and inaccessible that they convey a sense of God's transcendence. Then when they swoop low, they amaze us with their immanence, just like God. Eagles in their soaring loftiness suggest divine providence and peace: "Those who hope in Yahweh will gain new power; they will mount up with wings like eagles" (Isaiah 40:31, LSB).

God and Job converse in honest, face-to-face dialogue.

God's response invites Job to take his eyes off himself. God challenges Job's self-importance and his narrow view of his suffering, when in fact the world is full of suffering—both human and animal. By highlighting the animal kingdom, God helps Job move from self-obsession to a better understanding of humanity's less-than-exclusive part in the natural world.

> Then the Lord said to Job,
> "Do you still want to argue with the Almighty?
> You are God's critic, but do you have the
> answers?" (Job 40:1-2, NLT)

Such words are intended to make us feel small, not as an insult but as a wakeup call. We should feel small precisely because we are! There is no sin in being finite. But there is sin in imagining we are bigger than God, in becoming His critics and looking to ourselves for answers rather than

humbly learning from what He teaches us through the natural world. Job shows us how to respond to God's self-revelation:

> I am nothing—how could I ever find the answers?
> I will cover my mouth with my hand.
> I have said too much already.
> I have nothing more to say. (Job 40:4-5, NLT)

You might expect God to commend Job for humbly changing his tune. But God isn't done yet.

Behemoth

After that quick aside, God speaks of Behemoth, a huge and powerful land animal that some say was an elephant and others say was a hippopotamus. But neither of those associations makes sense, because God says in Job 40:17, "Its tail sways like a cedar" (NIV). Look up elephants and hippos and notice their tiny tails! Now look up a drawing of a brontosaurus and realize how perfectly the comparison of a mighty cedar tree fits with its great tail.

This raises the question of whether, during the time of Job, the Bible's oldest book, a living memory, passed on through generations, remained of the days of the dinosaurs. I know many will insist that's not possible because the scientific consensus is that humans didn't exist until sixty million years after dinosaurs were extinct. Though it's beyond the scope of this article to address theories about the age of the earth, Genesis 1:31 declares that, after creating a world that includes people and animals, "God saw that all he had made was very good!" That would mean no suffering, disease, or death for people or animals. Romans 5:12 says, "When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death to everyone, for everyone sinned." Though animals didn't sin, the Bible appears to say that death came to them because of, and therefore after, human sin.

No matter how old you believe the earth is, the affirmation that death came into the world through human sin causes many to believe that people and animals—originally including dinosaurs—lived in Eden together.

> Take a look at Behemoth,
> which I made, just as I made you. It eats grass like an ox.
> See its powerful loins
> and the muscles of its belly.
> Its tail is as strong as a cedar.
> The sinews of its thighs are knit tightly together.
> Its bones are tubes of bronze. Its limbs are bars of iron.
> It is a prime example of God's handiwork, and only its Creator can threaten it. . . .
> It is not disturbed by the raging river,
> not concerned when the swelling Jordan rushes around it.
> No one can catch it off guard
> or put a ring in its nose and lead it away.
> (Job 40:15-19 , 23-24, NLT)

The idea of putting a ring in Behemoth's nose and turning it into an easily led pet is absurd by human standards. God made Behemoth immensely powerful, a symbol of God's own strength and sovereignty. No one overpowers Behemoth, and no one comes remotely close to over-powering God.



Leviathan

The Creator continues His challenge to Job by going on in even more detail about Leviathan, the king of the sea.

Many people think Leviathan was a crocodile,

> God's creatures are manifestations of His magnificence, grandeur, and creative power.

which seems odd since people can overcome crocodiles. Leviathan was at another level. Sarcosuchus is a long-extinct super-crocodile that grew to more than thirty feet long and weighed up to five tons. With these monster reptiles in the fossil record, it's hard for me to restrict Leviathan to the dimensions of a modern crocodile that seems to fall far short of God's description.

All controversies aside, listen to what God says about how obviously proud and even fond He is of this great creature:

> Will its hide be hurt by spears or its head by a harpoon?
> If you lay a hand on it,
> you will certainly remember the battle that follows. You won't try that again!
> No, it is useless to try to capture it.
> The hunter who attempts it will be knocked down.
> And since no one dares to disturb it, who then can stand up to me?
> Who has given me anything that I need to pay back?
> Everything under heaven is mine.
> (Job 41:7-11, NLT)

Mess with Leviathan? Only if you have a death wish! God is communicating His immeasurable power by means of animals He effortlessly made. But notice God's fondness for this great beast:

> I want to emphasize Leviathan's limbs
> and its enormous strength and graceful form.
> Who can strip off its hide,
> and who can penetrate its double layer of armor?
> Who could pry open its jaws? For its teeth are terrible!
> The scales on its back are like rows of shields tightly sealed together. . . .
> When it sneezes, it flashes light!
> Its eyes are like the red of dawn.
> Lightning leaps from its mouth; flames of fire flash out. (Job 41:12-15 , 18-19, NLT)

Leviathan's description doesn't conform to any currently known animal, yet there it is in the Bible. Some claim that Leviathan is merely mythical, but the animals on this list are not imaginary. Apart from Leviathan and Behemoth, we are familiar with every creature mentioned.

That God devotes thirty-four verses in Job to Leviathan, as part of His own self-revelation, means that He intends for us to see Him revealed in His animals. These creatures are manifestations of God's magnificence, grandeur, and creative power.

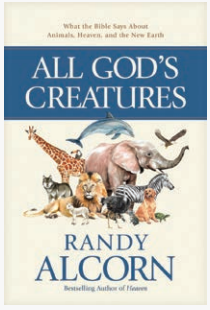
God concludes His unprecedented lecture on comparative zoology.

Read back through these descriptions and enter into God's obvious and contagious delight; look at the animals around you with fresh eyes of appreciation. And more than ever, take joy in them as their Creator does.

What the Creator tells us about animals in these marvelous chapters is intended to whet our appetite for what He reveals about Himself in the millions of other animal species we have never seen in this life, but which I believe God will introduce us to, and reveal Himself through, in the world to come.

While we're still here in this present world, let's follow Job's advice, which is also God's command: "Ask the animals, and they will teach you" (Job 12:7). ■

Excerpted from *All God's Creatures: What the Bible Says About Animals, Heaven, and the New Earth.* Learn more at **epm.org/allcreatures**.



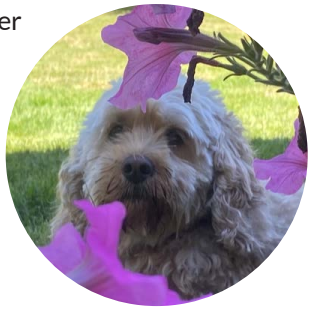
EPM Staff Feature

How Has God Used Animals in Your Life?

Heidi McLaughlin

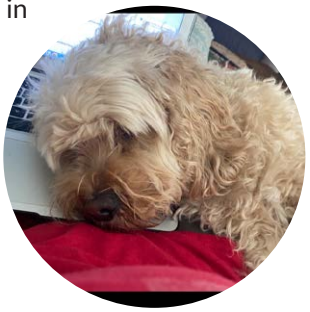
Ministry Assistant

I have had several pets throughout my life but none of them compare to my current dog. **Penny** is a cockapoo. I got her hoping for a lap dog, and while she is my shadow, she prefers her own space. The most I would ever get was maybe 10 minutes of lap time before she would move to the floor, always keeping a close eye on me. In fact, as she has aged (she's now nearly 12 years old) her tolerance for close contact has diminished.



But a year ago, I saw a significant change in Penny's behavior. Every time I sat down she was right there ready to settle into my lap, and to my astonishment, she would stay until I got up. Even when I was working with a laptop computer, she would jump up and nose it out of the way. I would often work with her on my lap and the laptop off to the side.

As my husband and I considered the timing, we realized that it coincided with the approximate time of my dad's sudden decline in health. Penny continued to offer extra snuggles, licks, and very close companionship and lap time during the months leading up to and following his going to be with Jesus. We think she knows that I was grieving and is willing to give up her preference for space to give me comfort. It has been a special experience to have this kind of love and devotion lavished upon me.



Doreen Button

Editor

Everyone in our neighborhood lived on anywhere from three to 80 acres, so our houses were not close to each other. **Shelby**, one neighbor's yellow lab, started spending the night on our front porch after hanging out in our yard all day. Since she wasn't ours, we didn't feed her. Occasionally her owners would take her home and feed her but she'd always come right back to us.

When I went for walks through the tree farm across the road, Shelby would walk with me. When the kids were playing in the yard, Shelby would join them. When it was cold at night, we'd lay a blanket over her. Eventually her owners let us have her, and we were thrilled.



Every morning, she and another neighbor's black lab, Jimi, would walk a circuit around all our properties before lounging in our yard or on Jimi's porch. When Jimi got old and arthritic, he went to the pond on his morning rounds with Shelby and got stuck. Shelby found his owner and guided her to Jimi to rescue

him. Months later, when it was time to put Jimi "to sleep," Shelby very quietly stood between him and the vet.



I wasn't a "dog person" until Shelby won me over. Her fierce loyalty to us and her commitment to her furry friend along with her wonderful intelligence and empathy mirrored her Creator's: "His steadfast love never ceases; His mercies never come to an end." I thanked God every day for bringing her into our lives. What a gift!

Stephanie Anderson

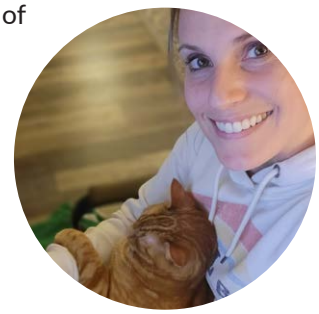
Communications and Graphics Specialist



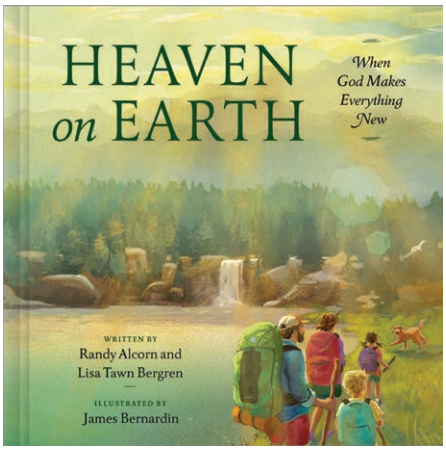
Four years ago, we brought home two orange kittens, which our daughters named **Arthur** and **Caspian**. I cried the day before we picked them up; there had been two failed attempts to get pets, and though I love animals, I thought I just wasn't an indoor pet person. I didn't want to let my girls down again, but my husband felt it was a good decision to get them kitties so they could experience pet ownership. He was right.

The cats were "for our girls," but God knew I would need them, too. When life is challenging, there are times I bury my face in their fur or put my ear to their abdomens to hear that soothing purr. (In my opinion, it's one of the best sounds God created!) Our cats follow me everywhere and have made excellent companions. God has given me such comfort, joy, and love through them! I'm reminded of what Romans 1 says about God's nature being evident through His creation.

Randy adores dogs, but I appreciate that he acknowledges in *All God's Creatures* that people have bonds with all kinds of animals, and he also says the joke about no cats in Heaven is a tired one and not funny to those of us who love them. (The feeling of a warm cat on your lap is wonderful. Caspian was my frequent companion while I was helping with the editing for the book, which was fitting!)



Isaiah 65:25 says there will be lions on the New Earth; I look forward to meeting cats of every kind there. Lions and tigers can't purr, but cheetahs, mountain lions, and snow leopards can, and I'd like to hear their rumble. I can't wait to be able to (safely!) enjoy all species of cats in that beautiful new world to come. What delights await us in Christ's presence! ■



The perfect gift this Christmas season for families with young children

"This children's book is filled with beautiful illustrations (by James Bernardin), but the story within is equally beautiful. A wonderful reminder that God has promised to dwell with followers of Jesus on a New Earth. The whole story of the Bible is about Him coming down to us. This book is written so a child can understand it, and I can't wait to gift it to the little ones in my family!" *—Robin Lee Hatcher, best-selling author of nearly 100 novels and novellas*

Learn more and purchase from **epm.org/heavenonearth**.

A Liturgy for *Birdwatching*

Our Father,
King of Land, Sea, and Sky,
whose vision encompasses galaxies
but whose compassions extend even
to the common sparrow,

you bid me to consider
your birds and flowers,
rather than to worry about what
I will eat or wear.

You hide food and drink for the jay
and bless him with a mind to find them.

You clothe even the smallest hummingbird
with extravagant iridescence.

You are ever mindful of the ostrich's eggs,
even when her attention is elsewhere.

Yet the loud voices of my own needs
and desires so often deafen my ability
to perceive your gracious provision and
tender care for me.

So quiet me, O Christ.
Quiet the noise in my head and heart.



O Christ, use the practice of birdwatching to refine my vision to more fully see as you see.

As I consider your kindness to your creatures,
let me also find a deeper trust and a deeper rest
in your lovingkindness toward me.

Let me even now make space
to still my thoughts,
and meditate more intentionally
upon your works
both great and small.

As I ponder the myriad forms, the
varied habits, and the peculiar beauties
of the birds you created, O Lord,
shepherd my thoughts
and awaken my perceptions
for all I have disregarded as scenery.

Open my eyes to your glory
  displayed in their particularities
  and varieties.

Open my ears to your joy
  expressed in their calls and songs.

Open my heart to your concern
  for their common cries and daily dramas.

More than merely looking,
  may I actually see.
More than merely hearing,
  may I truly perceive.

Teach me to trust more deeply
your infinite provision and intimate attention
  that I might partake of your unselfconscious
  delight in all you have created.

Let me join you in the joy of noting
the great diversity of
  crests, wingspans, beak lengths,
  nests, habits, colors, patterns, rituals, voices,
  and character traits among the species
    I observe.

Lead me to cast off the veil of familiarity,
that I might detect notable nuances in
what at first seems so similar,
  beholding your glory
in numberless, distinct lives beyond my own.

O Christ, use this practice of birdwatching
to refine my vision to more fully see as you see,
to look hard for the unseen and unpraised,
  as you so perfectly modeled for us when you
  admired the widow's secret sacrifice
    in the temple,
  or stooped to the cries of suffering outcasts
    along the road,
  or looked up in love at the desperate tax thief
    perched in a tree,

for I know my own blindness extends well
beyond the birds of my yard.

Let this practice incline my heart
to better see as you see, O Lord,
  my neighbors,
  my family in Christ,
  even my enemies.

Let this avocation of birdwatching
become for me a training ground, tutoring
my thoughts, my heart,
my habits, to more intently see
your love expressed in all the details
of your creation, your world, your people.

As I am daily moved by that wild choir
of praise inadvertently raised
by the bustle of these little beings,
so let my own daily living and interacting
with others also bring you much glory.

Amen. ■

"A Liturgy for Birdwatching," by Chris Slaten & Douglas McKelvey, from Every Moment Holy Volume III: The Work of the People, *ed. Douglas Kaine McKelvey, copyright 2023 by Rabbit Room Press. Learn more at* everymomentholy.com.

The Grammar *of Grief*

BY JOY LUCIUS



Saturday, June 20, marked three years since the death of our youngest son, Chris.

In some ways, these past three years have flown by. In other ways, the moments have crawled by at a snail's pace. But in those three years of slow-fast days of grief, I made some interesting observations about myself and others.

Maybe I was just naïve or unprepared, but most of my observations were totally unexpected. For example, it continues to amaze me that lots of people, Christians included, tend to deal best with the grief of others by total avoidance of the topic. I get it; I really do, and I am certain I was guilty of that same approach to my grieving friends before Chris died.

It's not that people are callous (for the most part). It's more a matter of not knowing what to say or how to react. Even my closest friends often choose to remain silent on the subject. To be honest, I appreciate that tactic far more than offering obligatory words and clichéd phrases.

So, along the way, I really have learned to accept both silence and platitudes with His grace, because I was once in the same predicament, choosing whether to say nothing to a grieving friend or risk saying the wrong thing altogether.

But there is one attitude about grief that really does bug me badly. So much so that I still am a little shocked and insulted when I hear or even sense the sentiment from others, suggesting that my family and I should already be "over" our grief by now.

It is such a ridiculous sentiment that I almost want to laugh aloud. How do parents "get over" the fact that their child is not here and never will be?

Now, don't get me wrong. We have total peace about the loss of our son. We know where Chris is, *who* made a way for him to be there, and how important it is that the rest of us also make our way homeward to Chris and his Savior.

Consequently, we probably live more purposefully and more intently than we ever have. In fact, our lives have never been more focused on sharing the gospel than now. We live, give, and pray with more compassion, direction, and humility than we did before Chris died. Our lives are also much more one-directional now, since we know firsthand about the frailty and temporal nature of this life.

Yes, our blood-bought peace is ever-present, but it is not passive. We want every other mother and

father to have this same peace we have in knowing that we will see our son again because of the life, death, burial, and resurrection of God's only begotten Son.

But no, we will not "get over" the loss of Chris. He is and always will be (throughout all eternity) an integral part of our lives.

That is exactly why we consistently integrate our love of Chris (and our continual ache to be with him again) into every aspect of our daily walk.

According to numerous articles and research on grief, our approach to grief is one of the healthiest ways to live with the loss of a loved one. As a matter of fact, the clinical term for this approach to life after loss is integrated grief.

Please be aware, though, that when exploring the topic of grief online, it can quickly become confusing. Not only are there medically defined stages of grief, but some clinical sources discuss as many as 11 or 12 types of grief.

Thankfully, the counselors at Australia's Griefline concisely explained that grief can occur after any type of loss, but grief over a death is termed bereavement. This type of grief often manifests in four ways:

- Acute grief involves the intense emotions experienced right after a death.
- Integrated grief occurs when emotions are integrated into normal life functions.
- Prolonged grief is persistent, preventing normal integration of emotions.
- Disenfranchised grief describes emotions that cannot be acknowledged.

Obviously, we are no longer experiencing acute grief, and we definitely do not suffer from disenfranchised grief. So, the question becomes whether we are "normally" integrating our loss into our regular life functions.

I believe we are physically, emotionally, and spiritually integrating our grief over the death of Chris quite well into our daily lives, even now, three years since he went home to heaven. That does not mean that we will ever "get over" his absence. Nor will we get through it, get around it, or even get beyond it.

Grief is not simply a matter of prepositions. Even as a retired English teacher, it seems trite, or even somewhat sacrilegious, for me to use grammatical terms of any type to explain away our deep sense of loss over the death of our son.

Even today, it became almost impossible to resolve those contradictions as I tried to finish writing this blog. I sensed God's leading to write about this topic, but it was also hard to construct an appropriate ending to this article on the grammar of grief.

Then, during some additional research, God graciously led me to an amazing article on this topic by Randy Alcorn, one of my all-time favorite Christian writers. Ironically, Alcorn expressed similar feelings to mine over the grammatical perplexities of grief. In his timely article, penned on the second anniversary of his wife Nanci's death, Alcorn even stated: "There is something in me that does not want to ever 'get over' my loss of Nanci."

Alcorn's words had me hooked, but what I read after those words held my attention and my heart: "Yet I also recognize that God has been doing a work of grace in my life over the last two years, and bringing me comfort that allows me to go forward without her. Greatly helped by the anticipation of being with her again in the presence of Jesus!"

Exactly! So, even though our ongoing grief for Chris cannot be explained away with simple prepositions, it does come down to the basic grammatical bedrock of subject-verb agreement: **Hope reigns because Jesus lives.** ■



Joy Lucius is first and foremost a reader—then a writer. After retiring from teaching high school English, she now writes weekly for American Family Association's The Stand and has authored two Young Adult novels. She has been married to her high school sweetheart, Randy, for 47 years.



A Lesson from the Birds: the Delight of Giving Thanks



Susannah Spurgeon (1832-1903) was wife to Charles Spurgeon, England's best-known preacher for most of the second half of the nineteenth century. From her mid-thirties on, she was often incapacitated by an unknown chronic illness. Besides writing letters to missionaries and sending them her husband's sermons, she found great comfort in her piping bullfinch, a bird with a striking rosy-red chest and belly, and a black cap, face, and tail.

Charles had received the bird as a gift from a close friend, who said, "I want you to take my pet bird to Mrs. Spurgeon, I would give him to none but her. . . . I know that Bully will interest and amuse [Susannah] in her loneliness while you are so much away from her."

"Does anyone doubt that this bird was a direct love-gift from the pitiful [full of pity] Father?" Susannah later said.

Visitors often spoke of the Spurgeons' affection for animals. When the Jubilee Singers visited them in 1874, they observed, "We had no sooner entered than he called our attention to the exploits of an enormous cat which sprang through his arms with the agility of a trained athlete; we found, also, that his grounds were rich in birds and domestic animals, for which he and Mrs. Spurgeon have great fondness."

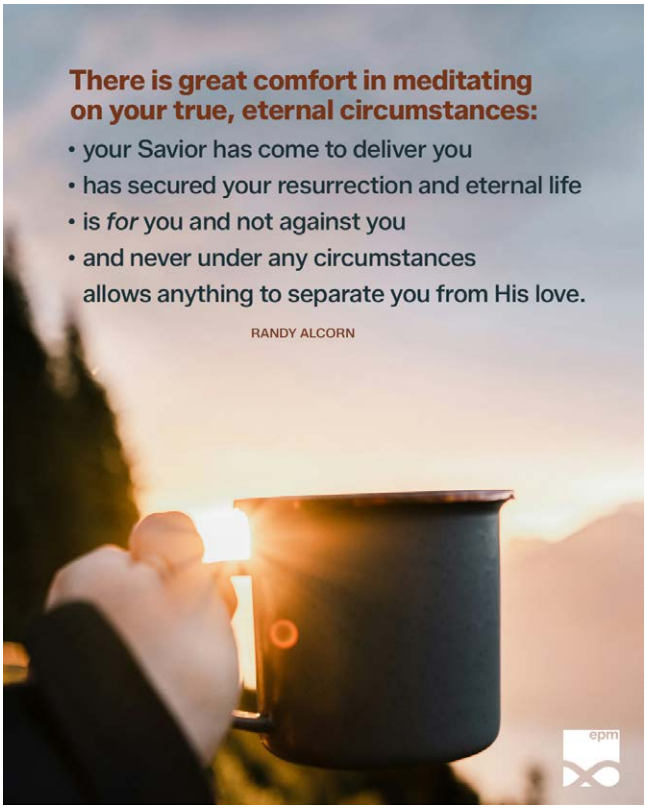
Charles and Susannah enjoyed cultivating the garden outside their London home. In the summer, Susannah liked to lay out a blanket in the yard filled with birdseed, to encourage the birds to come feast.

After Charles's death, Susannah wrote a devotional called *A Basket of Summer Fruit*. She included these insights about how watching birds had instructed her heart:



The Spurgeons in their garden, shortly after their wedding

> "The time of the singing of birds is come," and from early morning until the sun sets, their sweet notes are a constant reminder of the duty and delight of thanksgiving. Out of the joy of their hearts they trill forth their gladness for the sunshine, and the opening flowers, and the unfolding leaves; and I have heard the same tender song when the rain has fallen, and cold winds have blown, and dark clouds have swept across the sky. Many a time have the birds in the garden sung a lesson in my listening ears, and rebuked my dullness or my unbelief, by their gleeful carolings.
>
> ...Does it not make your heart leap to know that your Lord takes pleasure in your praise? In His ears are ever sounding the eternal symphonies of the universe—that majestic chorus which began "when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy;" but He turns from these to you, and with infinite tenderness and love, bends to listen to the grateful songs of His redeemed ones, as they bless Him for all His benefits.
>
> The feeble notes uttered on earth by a truly thankful and sanctified heart must, I think, swell into anthems of glorious melody as they rise to the throne of God! ■

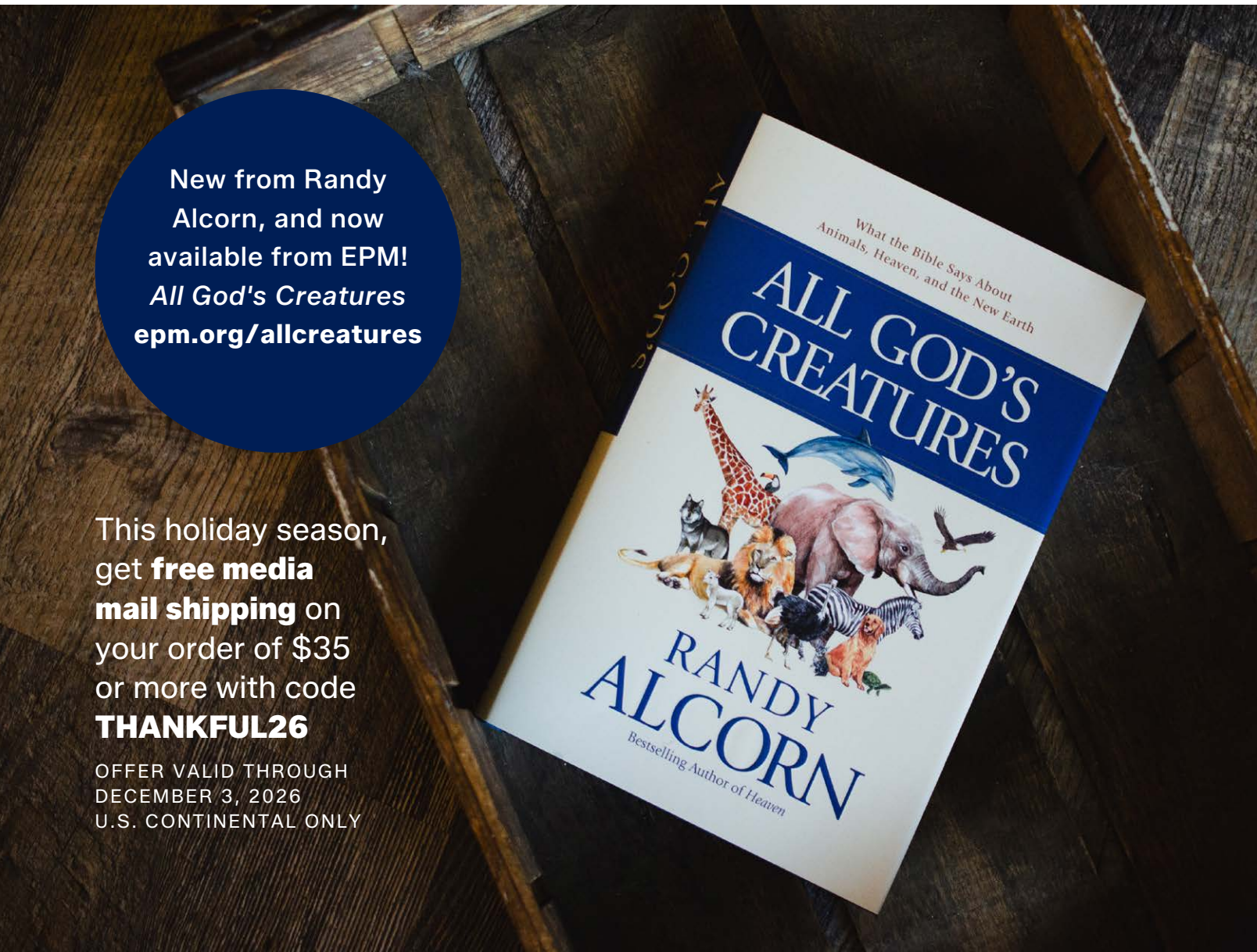


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