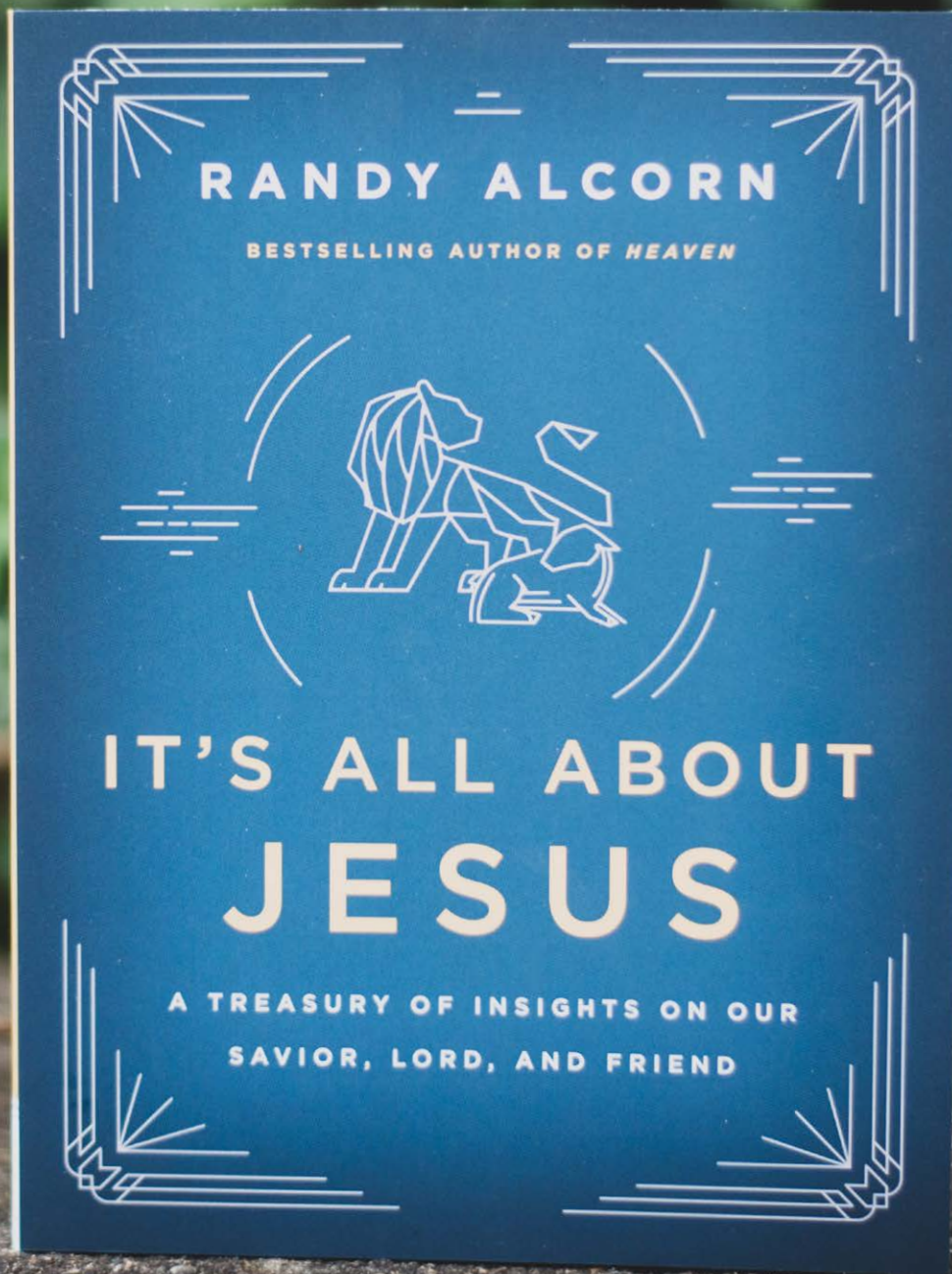


eternal perspectives

FALL/WINTER 2020



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about

This magazine is a publication of Eternal Perspective Ministries, a Christ-centered nonprofit organization founded and directed by author Randy Alcorn. It can be read online at epm.org/magazine.

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

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Our Sovereign King

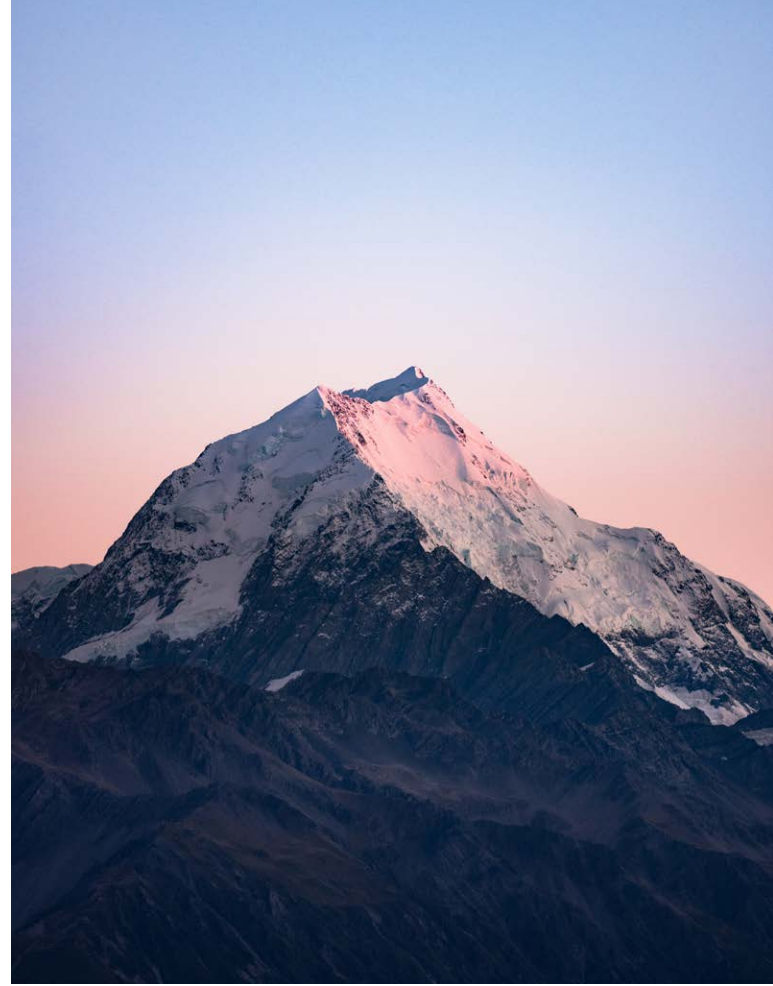
Is Always on His Throne

BY RANDY ALCORN

By the time you receive this magazine, the 2020 election will have come and gone. Whether you are encouraged or distressed by the results, there is great comfort in acknowledging and embracing Scripture's teaching that God is sovereign over human events, including the outcome of elections.

In Isaiah 46:10, God says, "I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please" (NIV). Those who believe in a God who knows "the end from the beginning" can relax because even though *they* don't know what lies ahead, their sovereign God does. "For dominion belongs to the LORD and He rules over the nations" (Psalm 22:28, BSB). Because God has absolute power, no one—including demons and humans who choose to violate His moral will—can thwart His ultimate purpose. "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will" (Proverbs 21:1).

The Lord "works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Ephesians 1:11, NIV). Our fates do not rest in the hands of fallen humankind: politicians, lawyers, military officers, employers, or even spouses and children. If we believe this, our reaction to current events and



to many of the difficulties we face will change. Problems will seem smaller, for although we can't control them, we know God can—and that everything will work out for His glory and our good.

Charles Spurgeon said, "Cheer up, Christian! Things are not left to chance: no blind fate rules the world. God hath purposes, and those purposes are fulfilled. God hath plans, and those plans are wise, and never can be dislocated."

Ultimately our hope must be in Jesus, this Sovereign over the nations: "O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might, so that none is able to withstand you" (2 Chronicles 20:6).

Let these truths about God's sovereignty, purposes, and trustworthiness bring you perspective and peace:

"The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, His sovereignty rules over all." (Psalm 103:19, NASB)

"He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; ... the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men." (Daniel 2:21; 4:17)

"It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes." (Psalm 118:8-9)

"...you are the ruler of everything. Power and might are in your hand, and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all." (1 Chronicles 29:12, CSB)

"He stands alone, and who can oppose him? He does whatever he pleases." (Job 23:13, NIV)

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

"Do not trust in nobles, in a son of man, who cannot save. When his breath leaves him, he returns to the ground; on that day his plans die. Happy is the one whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them. He remains faithful forever..." (Psalm 146:3-6, CSB)

"His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed." (Daniel 7:14, CSB) ■

Those who believe in a God who knows "the end from the beginning" can relax because even though *they* don't know what lies ahead, their sovereign God does.

RANDY ALCORN

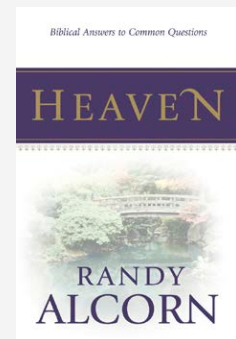
Note from a Reader Who Is a "Travel Agent for Heaven"

"Thank you, Randy Alcorn, for writing that little *Heaven* booklet, and for providing so many materials so that I can be a great "travel agent" in showing others the glories of Heaven! I started a cancer support group on Facebook for wives with husbands who have cancer. We are up to maybe 2,500 members from all over the world. Purely a God thing! It is not specifically a 'Christian' group because I wanted it to minister to those out there who may not know Jesus.

"When a friend in the group tells that their husband/boyfriend/fiancé has died, I try my best to research and find some address where I can send a sympathy card and Randy's *Heaven* booklet. So far I have been able to mail out about 300 of those—and responses I get back are purely amazing! If they show an interest and continue the Heaven conversation with me, then I send out *50 Days of Heaven*.

"Oh my, what a ministry this has become as there are friends in this group from all over the world, including the Middle East. Randy Alcorn's writings have provided to me some excellent materials as a 'travel agent for Heaven.'" —C.L.

***Heaven* booklets are available in 20-packs from epm.org/heavenbooklet and *50 Days of Heaven* is available from epm.org/50days**



A Big Change for EPM

Like many businesses and ministries, COVID-19 has afforded us at EPM the opportunity to reevaluate and do things differently in light of current and ongoing circumstances. One big change is that our board has decided to allow our employees to continue working from home long-term, since we have discovered this works well and is more cost effective. This means closing our office, though we will continue storing and shipping books from the same building.

This isn't about winding down EPM and shrinking our ministry impact. Rather, it's about figuring how best to serve God's kingdom while effectively managing the resources He's entrusted to us. We'll continue to assist those who contact us. Our goal is to maintain the same Christ-centered and high-quality services we've been offering for 30 years.

Please note our new address: 39065 Pioneer Blvd, Suite 100, Sandy Oregon 97055



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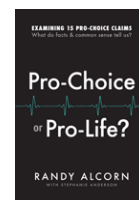
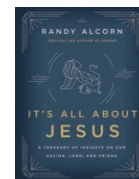
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Two New Books from Randy

We're excited to introduce two books that are now available: *It's All About Jesus: A Treasury of Insights on Our Savior, Lord, and Friend* and *Pro-Choice or Pro-Life: Examining 15 Pro-Choice Claims—What Do Facts & Common Sense Tell Us?*

You'll see excerpts from both books featured in this issue. Find these books and more at epm.org/store



Help Us Finish Reaching Our Goal to Fund the Esimbi Scripture Translation

For the last two years, we've been working towards our goal of funding a translation of Scripture for the Esimbi people in Cameroon in memory of our EPM coworker Karen Stout Coleman, who spent 23 years as a missionary in Cameroon. The Seed Company translation team is eager to complete the full New Testament for their communities, and plan to do so by fall 2021.



To date, \$70,200 has been contributed toward the \$120,000 goal. We are excited to reach 100%! To partner with us, go to epm.org/donate and select the fund "Esimbi Translation Project" or send a check to Eternal Perspective Ministries, 39065 Pioneer Blvd, Suite 100, Sandy, Oregon 97055, with "Esimbi translation" in the memo line. 100% of donations will go directly to The Seed Company.

What Is God Teaching You in This Season?

Earlier this year we asked our staff and board, “What has God been teaching you in this challenging season?” We think you’ll be encouraged by their responses, and especially by the Scripture they included.

Anna Wright, ministry assistant:

This season has challenged me to really believe that Jesus is King over all the crazy things happening around the world. My eyes have been opened to see how much I need Jesus and His grace. This world is uncertain, and people are chaotic and broken. But Jesus isn’t, and He is the only solution to all the fear and pain. His truth is greater than any social media post or news article. He isn’t surprised by any of the things that are happening, nor is any of it out of His hand. These verses have challenged me during this season: “Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain! Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways” (Psalm 119:35-37).



Amy Woodard, ministry assistant:

Trusting the Lord in the face of uncertainty, questions, distrust (of the media), and fear is an area the Lord has grown me these past months. I do not have any answers, do not trust all the information we’ve been given, and have struggled with fear in many ways. I have read and memorized so many verses



to help keep my mind and heart looking in the right direction, like these: “I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. ...Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing” (Psalm 34:4-5, 8-9).

Brenda Abelein, ministry assistant:

In early January, a friend shared this verse: “For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?” (Isaiah 43:19, NLT). She felt God prompting her to claim this verse as her attitude toward the new year, watching expectantly for God’s direction, and encouraged us to do the same. Which of us would have chosen a pandemic to be a “something new” from the Lord?! But if we look for what God might be doing through it (instead of complaining about frustrations), we can see there *is* good! Families are spending more time together, we have simplified our schedules, we’re taking more walks, we’ve reached out more to those in need, and we’ve learned to communicate more creatively.



Kress Drew, board member:

He is teaching me about grace: how to receive it, and how to give it to others. Back in March, my friend looked at me and said, “People just need more grace right now. Everyone



is overwhelmed. Everyone is trying to figure this all out.” His words hit me like a ton of bricks. I’m a high school teacher, and yes, the good work we were doing to transition from in-person to online learning was important, yet people are always more important than systems and processes. As his words settled in my heart, I made a choice to give grace to people, students and staff alike, as we walked this road together.

“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him Who called us by His own glory and excellence” (2 Peter 1:2-3 NASB).

As a math guy, I love how He says multiplied and not merely added, as things can increase a lot more when you multiply versus just adding; and it comes by His power—through knowing Him.

Doreen Button, editor:

God has used this time to quiet me. Since I was very young, I’ve been consistent with reading the Bible. Church has been a huge part of my life. Prayer is a big deal. Yet this prolonged period of quiet was necessary for God to really get my attention. Psalm 131:1-2 depicts how I now feel: “Lord, I have given up my pride and turned away from my arrogance. I am not concerned with great matters or with subjects too difficult for me. Instead, I am content and at peace. As a child lies quietly in its mother’s arms, so my heart is quiet within me” (GNT).



Linda Jeffries, office manager:

I wrote this in my journal on April 12: This year Easter was celebrated in a way far different than any other. Because we were staying home due to this virus, my husband Kerry and I watched many church services online. Max Lucado spoke words that moved my heart. We look at Good Friday as “The Beginning” and Celebration Sunday as “The end,” but there’s a forgotten day in the middle:



“Silent Saturday.” There’s purpose in the Silent Saturday. It’s a time of reflection. Silent Saturday was confusing, filled with fear and loneliness, a very difficult time, much like today. However, Silent Saturday allows us to watch for and appreciate the miracle to come. *Lord, I don’t know what you are doing, but I know what you have done in the past and I accept today as it is, even though it’s not the way I want it to be.*

Kathy Norquist, board member:

Two things come to mind: God’s sovereignty and my attitude. Proverbs 21:1 says, “The king’s heart is in the hands of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.”



This gives me assurance that He is sovereign over all, especially those in governmental authority over us. I may not like what is happening, but I can be confident God is in complete control.

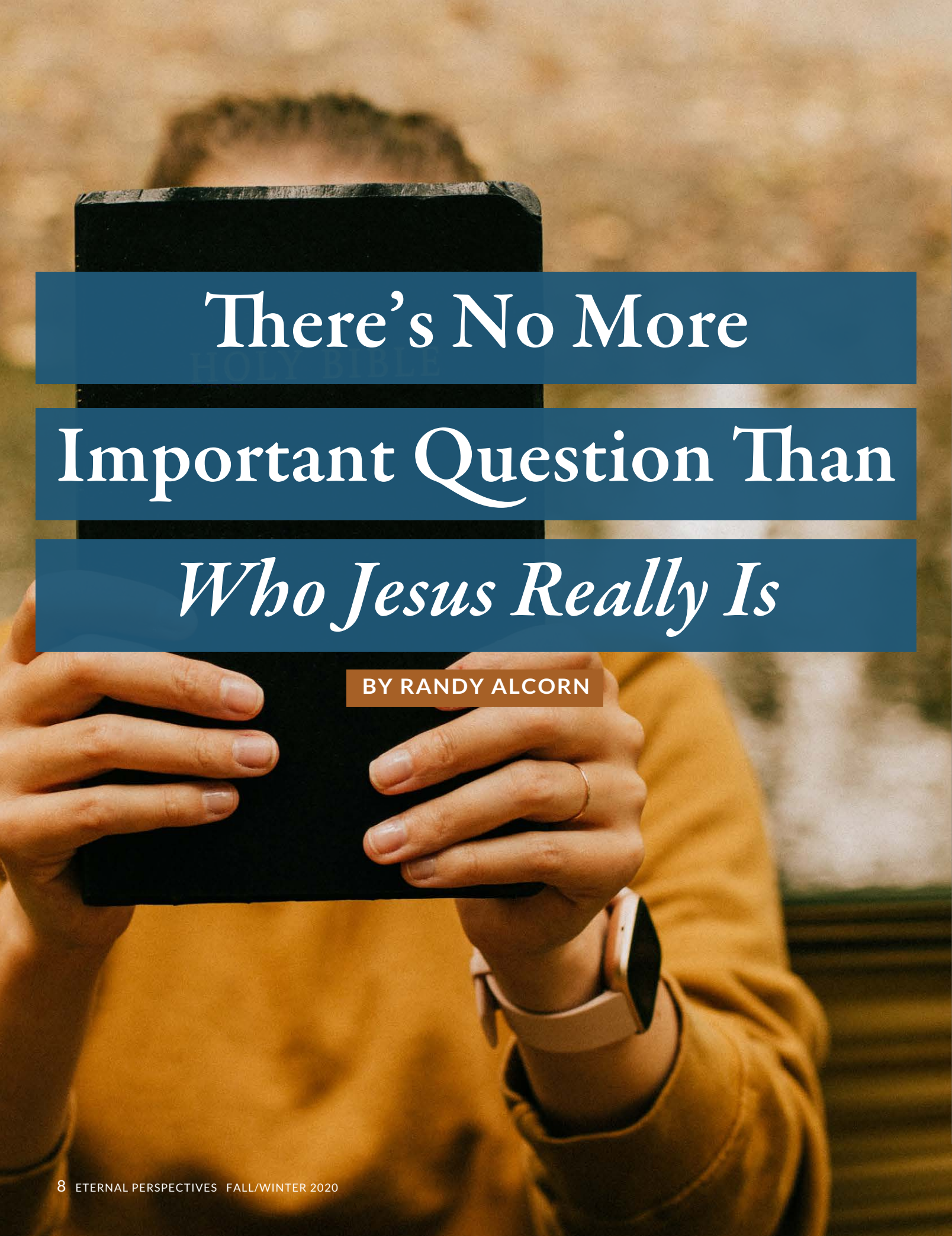
Philippians 2:14 convicts me: “Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God...” Of course, I have an opinion as does everyone. But there’s a fine line between having an opinion and grumbling and complaining.

Stephanie Anderson, communications and graphics specialist:

Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” This has been a precious truth through personal trials over the years, but for some reason it has felt harder to believe in this COVID season, perhaps because there are so many decisions made by people in positions of authority that affect my life and those I love. But I’ve been convicted lately that those decisions in no way negate the truth of this verse. Even though it’s painful and hard to see sometimes, I can trust that He is using this season to bring eternal good in my life and in the lives of those I love. ■



We invite our readers to respond to this question, too. Email your response to info@epm.org.

A person is holding a black book in front of their face, completely obscuring it. The person is wearing a mustard-colored sweater and a light-colored watch on their left wrist. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with trees and a fence. Overlaid on the image are three horizontal blue bars containing white text. The text reads: "There's No More Important Question Than Who Jesus Really Is".

There's No More Important Question Than *Who Jesus Really Is*

BY RANDY ALCORN

If you're told you're going to meet someone important whom your friends know, you naturally ask them, "Who is he? What's he like? Where did he come from? What does he do? Is he the real deal? Does he live up to expectations?"

Because no other historical figure is as widely known, multitudes live with the illusion that they really *know* Jesus, when in reality they simply have various impressions *about* Him. Impressions are not knowledge. They are a random collection of data picked up from family, friends, books, movies, articles, social media, and in some cases, experiences with churches or professing Christians. Many of these sources are either completely wrong, mostly wrong, or mostly right but with significant errors.

As a result, it is hard to imagine any subject more fraught with confusion, misinformation, and deception than the subject of who Jesus really is. And what a quandary! *The most important person who has ever lived is also the most misunderstood.* People often quote Him—"Judge not," or "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do," for instance—without understanding the context of His words, thereby entirely "missing" His meaning.

Thoughts flow the moment we hear the name *Jesus Christ*. The question is, which thoughts are true, and which are false? Even more important than His teachings on life and ethics is who Jesus actually claimed to be. As Kevin DeYoung has said, "Just about everybody in America likes Jesus, but few like him for who he truly is."

The doctrines of the deity and humanity of Christ, with all their implications, are vitally important not only to sound doctrine but to

loving our Savior and Lord by seeing Him more accurately. We are all theologians. The only issue is whether we're good ones or bad ones. Wouldn't you rather be a *good* one—especially when it comes to believing what's true about Jesus?

Sadly, many religious professionals deny Christ's deity, miracles, atonement, and/or resurrection and view the Gospel accounts as myth and distortion. To them, "the historical Jesus" was merely a moral teacher and example that the church turned into a god, falsely claiming that he performed miracles and was superhuman. These skeptical scholars suppose the Gospel accounts and the New Testament letters to be a human invention and argue that the church elevated Jesus to a divine status He never claimed. (This raises the question of why all the apostles were tortured, and every one of them but John died for what they believed. No one endures that kind of suffering for what they know to be a lie.)

Scripture itself, however, presents Christ not as myth, but history. It emphasizes the role of eyewitnesses. Seeking the historical Jesus while denying the Bible is like seeking to know what happened at Gettysburg while denying the historical records from Gettysburg.

Our faith in Christ is only as good as the authentic reality of the Christ we believe in. It shouldn't surprise us, then, that Satan will attack us by promoting false and unworthy views of the person and work of Jesus.

Peter wrote sobering warnings about those who give false portrayals of Jesus (2 Peter 2:1-3). The worst and most dangerous heresies misrepresent Jesus Christ, denying the truths about Him and making Him out to be less than He really is.

OUR FAITH IN CHRIST IS ONLY AS GOOD AS THE AUTHENTIC REALITY OF THE CHRIST WE BELIEVE IN.

The apostle John also warned about misrepresentations of the Jesus he knew so well:

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God (1 John 4:1-3 NIV).

Since nothing is more important than who Jesus is and what He has done, naturally there are no greater truths—and in turn, no more pernicious and destructive heresies—than those concerning Jesus. If Jesus did not live, if He was not God, if He was not

the Creator but merely one of the created, or if Jesus was not really a man, the consequences would be devastating in the lives of literally billions of people who have believed the words He spoke and the Bible's teachings about Him.

Biblical Christianity is not simply a religion *about* Christ but a relationship *with* Christ. If we get it right about Jesus, we can afford to get some minor things wrong. But if we get it wrong about Jesus, in the end it won't matter what else we get right.

This is why I started section one of my book *It's All About Jesus* with the greatest question Jesus ever asked anyone: "Who do you say I am?" Because our answer to that question, whether silent or spoken, is the single most important answer we will ever give. ■

WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven." **Matthew 16:13-17 NIV**

If you find it hard to believe in God, I strongly advise you to begin your search not with philosophical questions...but with Jesus of Nazareth. **John Stott**

Who is Jesus Christ? You've never met him in person, and you don't know anyone who has. But there is a way to know who he is. How? Jesus Christ—the divine Person revealed in the Bible—has a unique excellence and a spiritual beauty that speaks directly to our souls and says, "Yes, this is truth." It's like seeing the sun and knowing that it is light, or tasting honey and knowing that it is sweet. **John Piper**

Among the Jews there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if He was God...Among Pantheists anyone might say that he was a part of God, or one with God: there would be nothing very odd about it. But this man, since He was a Jew, could not mean that kind of god. God, in their language, meant the Being outside the world Who had made it and was infinitely different from anything else. And when you have grasped that, you will see that what this man said was, quite simply, the most shocking thing that has ever been uttered by human lips. **C.S. Lewis**

The claims of Jesus are so startling that they...challenge us to make up our minds about this most remarkable person. Was he just a great teacher or was he much more? **Michael Green**

Everyone who comes in contact with Jesus has rendered a judgment on him. Even ignoring him is a decision about his identity. **Kevin DeYoung**

Reared in a carpenter shop...this young man gathered disciples about Him, and proclaimed Himself the Messiah. He taught and performed miracles for a few brief months and then was crucified; His disciples were scattered and many of them put to death; His claims were disputed, His resurrection denied and His followers persecuted; and yet from this beginning His religion spread until hundreds of millions have taken His name with reverence upon their lips and millions have been willing to die rather than surrender the faith which He put into their hearts. How shall we account for Him? "What think ye of Christ?" It is easier to believe Him divine than to explain in any other way what He said and did and was. **William Jennings Bryan**

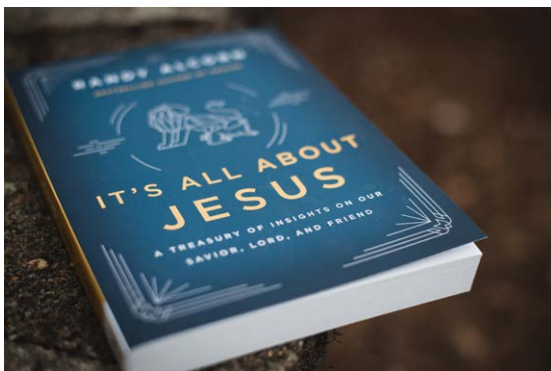
The real question is not what are we to make of Christ, but what is He to make of us? The picture of a fly sitting deciding what it is going to make of an elephant has comic elements about it. **C.S. Lewis**

It takes a fantastic will to unbelief to suppose that Jesus never really "happened," and more to suppose that he did not say the things recorded of him—so incapable of being "invented" by anyone in the world at that time...We must therefore either believe in Him and in what He said and take the consequences; or reject Him and take the consequences. **J.R.R. Tolkien**

The most important question in anyone's life is the question asked by poor Pilate in Matthew 27:22: "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" No other question in the whole sweep of human experience is as important as this. It is the choice between life and death, between meaningless existence and life abundant. **Dale Evans Rogers**

After six years given to the impartial investigation of Christianity, as to its truth or falsity, I have come to the deliberate conclusion that Jesus Christ was the Messiah of the Jews, the Saviour of the world, and my personal Saviour. **Lew Wallace**

The battle for human souls pivots on the issue of Christ's identity. He's the watershed, the dividing line between Hell and Heaven. Who do you believe, in your mind and deep in your heart, that he really is? Every person must give an answer—and whether our answer is right could not be more consequential or eternally significant. **Randy Alcorn**



Learn more about Randy's books *It's All About Jesus: A Treasury of Insights on Our Savior, Lord, and Friend* and *Face to Face with Jesus: Seeing Him as He Really Is* at epm.org/books



THE NAME OF

Jesus

BY KEVIN DEYOUNG

Over the past two thousand years, more people on planet earth have known the name of Jesus than any other name. Since AD 33, over eight billion people, by one estimate, have claimed to be followers of this Jesus—or Jésus or Isus or whatever the Christ is called in your language. Billions more have heard of His name. Today, the name of Jesus can be found in more than six thousand languages, and more are being added every year.

On the one hand, it's strange that this single name has dominated the past two thousand years of world history, especially Western history. For most of us, the name Jesus has a sacred ring to it; it sounds holy and divine. But this wasn't the case when Mary and Joseph followed the angel's instructions and gave their baby His name. Granted, it had a special meaning, but it was not an unusual name. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus mentions at least twelve different people he knew with the name Jesus, including four high priests. In Acts 9, we read of the Jewish false prophet,

Bar-Jesus. In Colossians 4, Paul mentions one of his fellow workers, Jesus, called Justus. And some ancient manuscripts of the gospel of Matthew refer to the robber released by Pilate as Jesus Barabbas, which can be translated, ironically enough, “Jesus, son of the father.”

Jesus was a common name, like Jim, John, or Jerry. When Mary and Joseph called their son Jesus, there were no prayers in His name. No one used it as a swear word. No one sang songs about this name, just as there is no religion I am aware of that sings songs to Jim (except for fans of Jim Croce, who know that he’s not to be messed around with). We don’t name our sons John with the expectation that eight billion people will pray in that name over the next two thousand years. We don’t croon, “Jerry, Jerry, Jerry, there’s just something about that name.”

But common as the name was, Jesus was named “Jesus” by design. In Greek, it is Iēsous; in Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, Yesu. Both are derived from the Hebrew, in which the name is Yeshua or Joshua. Joshua is made up of two parts: Ya, which is short for Yahweh, and hoshea, which means “salvation.” Hence, Mary and Joseph gave their little baby the name Jesus — “Yahweh saves.”

That He does. Ever since the first Christmas, Jesus has been more than just a name. It’s been our only comfort in life and in death, our only hope in a hopeless world. When you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, you have life in His name (John 20:31). There is, in fact, no other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved (Acts 4:12). So, naturally, whatever we do, in word or deed, we ought to do in the name of the Lord Jesus (Colossians 3:17). “God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9–11).

But let’s be clear: the name of Jesus is not a magic wand. Chanting it does not give one special powers. The power in the name is the person behind the name. In biblical times, names meant something.

They were more than badges of identification. They often told others who you were and what purpose God had for your life. Thus, Adam was the first man. Eve was the mother of all living things. Abraham was the father of many nations. Benjamin was the son of his father’s right hand. Moses was drawn out of the water. Peter was the rock. Barnabas was the son of encouragement.

What about Jesus? “And you shall call his name Jesus,” the angel told Joseph, “for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). More than a great teacher, more than an enlightened man, more than a worker of miracles, more than a source of meaning in life, more than a self-help guru, more than a self-esteem builder, more than a political liberator, more than a caring friend, more than a transformer of cultures, more than a purpose for the purposeless, Jesus is the Savior of sinners.

“Jesus the name that charms our fears and bids our sorrows cease; ’tis music in the sinner’s ears, ’tis life and health and peace.” That’ll sing. “All hail the power of Jesus’ name! Let angels prostrate fall. Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown him Lord of all.” That’ll work, too.

I guess there really is just something about that name. No, not just something; make that everything. ■

Ever since the
first Christmas,

Jesus

has been more than
just a name. It’s been
our only comfort
in life and in death,
our only hope in a
hopeless world.

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4 Reasons God's People Ought to Be Gentle

BY DANE ORTLUND

As God's people, we all long to make a difference for Christ. We don't want to be unfruitful. We want our lives to matter. We see the clock ticking and know that we'll be dead soon, our one opportunity to make an impact gone forever.

And so it is easy to let zeal and ardor and intensity and hurry color our lives and ministries.

Lessons in Gentleness

What may get overlooked in this is the pursuit of a gentle spirit. Consider what the Bible says about gentleness:

"A gentle tongue is a tree of life..." (Proverbs 15:4).

"Blessed are the meek..." (Matthew 5:5).

"But the fruit of the Spirit is...gentleness..." (Galatians 5:22-23).

"With all humility and gentleness..." (Ephesians 4:2).

"Pursue...gentleness." (1 Timothy 6:11).

"The wisdom from above is...gentle..." (James 3:17).

In this short article, I'd like to ask believers to consider cultivating gentleness. Let me give you four reasons why, and then propose a road to get there.

Four Reasons to Be Gentle

1. *Gentleness surprises people.*

In this angry, irritated world, gentleness sticks out. It catches us off-guard. Amid the clamor, above the din, a gentle voice arrests us.

Gentleness, then, may be considered a powerful apologetic. Not that we wish to be gentle in order to get attention, but as we follow Scripture's call to gentleness, we can be calmed by the knowledge that this will surprise others. It may feel counterproductive, but that is only because we live in a culture (sometimes even a church culture) of loudness and aggression.

2. *Gentleness woos people.*

Like a sea anemone slowly being coaxed to open up again, gentleness coaxes people to open up. Gentleness makes people feel safe.

When we are harsh or needlessly assertive toward

others, they may not show it, but they are putting up defenses. They are on their guard. We may win the argument, but we have not won the person. Gentleness wins the person, whatever happens at the level of rational argumentation.

3. Gentleness dignifies people.

The subtext of hasty aggressiveness is superiority. We get impatient and harsh and raise our voices because, deep down, we think we are superior.

The subtext of gentleness, on the other hand, is: You matter. You have significance, and I dare not neglect that. God made you in his own image.

Not only is everyone made in God's image, everyone is a sufferer. Every human being is walking around loaded down with a heavy backpack of disappointments, rejections, and anxieties. Gentleness treats people according to their inherent glory, however, not according to the adversities of life that may cause them to be difficult people.

4. Gentleness gives people a living picture of Jesus himself.

Outside of word and sacrament, the closest thing to Jesus himself that people will get in this fallen world is Christ-like Christians. Christians are walking vessels of the gentle love of Christ. Your treatment of others tells them what you really think Jesus is like, whatever you may say you believe Jesus is like.

The Source of Gentleness

But where will we find this elusive gentleness?

It does not come naturally. But the call in Scripture to be gentle is a call toward godlikeness. We may conclude from the tsunami and the elephant that God is anything but gentle, but the Bible says:

He will tend his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms;
he will carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead those that are with young.
(Isaiah 40:11)

This is who God is.

And gentleness is not only godlike in general, but Christlike in specific. The one place in all four

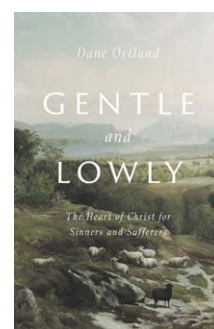
Gospels where Jesus tells us what his heart is, he says it is "gentle and lowly" (Matthew 11:29). This does not contradict Jesus' wrath or righteous anger—as C. S. Lewis put it in a letter late in life,

"Gentle Jesus", my elbow! The most striking thing about our Lord is the union of great ferocity with extreme tenderness. . . . Add to this that he is also a supreme ironist, dialectician, and (occasionally) humorist. So go on! You are on the right track now: getting to the real man behind all the plaster dolls that have been substituted for him. This is the appearance in human form of the God who made the tiger and the lamb, the avalanche and the rose. He'll frighten and puzzle you: but the real Christ can be loved and admired as the doll can't.

But we tend to imitate Christ's zeal out ahead of our imitation of his tender gentleness. I am asking you to consider stepping into a gentleness your life and ministry have, perhaps, never known.


And I am suggesting that you will only do that as you ponder Christ's gentle ways toward you. How many sins does he alone know? How many times have you failed him, sidelined him, taken him for granted? And in how many of those instances has he come to you in harshness? Does he not deal with you tenderly, gently? Have you not found in your own case that "a bruised reed he will not break" (Matthew 12:20)?

Trust God enough to soak you in gentleness. Let the Spirit do the work that our aggressiveness cannot. Pass on through your own gentle and lowly heart the gentle and lowly heart of Jesus himself. ■



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Is It Judgmental and Unloving to Believe That Abortion Is Child-Killing?

BY RANDY ALCORN

Despite the clear teaching of Scripture that the preborn are fully human and created by God, the Bible's message of love is often misused when it comes to abortion. This comment on my Facebook page expresses a common sentiment: "God wants union, understanding, compassion, love, no judgment. ...people saying that women shouldn't have abortions is like saying, 'I'm judging you and criticizing you.'"

To many people, Jesus' words "Do not judge" mean never questioning someone's choice of abortion, and love and compassion mean never trying to deter someone from considering abortion. In fact, many consider it "judgmental" even to say abortion is wrong. But is it judgmental and unloving to say slapping or abandoning a baby is wrong? When people hear of infants found in trash cans, are they being judgmental and unloving to believe that was a terrible thing for someone to do?

True, God is love (1 John 4:16), and His followers are to love their neighbors as themselves (Mark 12:31). They are to be full of compassion and humility (1 Peter 3:8), and not be self-righteous or unfairly or hypocritically judge or condemn others (Luke 6:37).

But believers are also called to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15, 25). Love does not mean saying all choices are valid. (If it did, a God of love would never condemn sin, which He repeatedly does in Scripture, nor would there be such a thing as sin or any need to be forgiven.) If abortion truly does harm women and kill children, then we owe it to women to gently and lovingly point out the truth, while offering grace and help.

A young woman who said she believed that

abortion takes the life of an innocent child told me that because she loved her friend, she was going to drive her to the clinic to get an abortion. She said, "That's what you do when you love someone, even if you disagree."

I asked, "If your friend wanted to kill her parents or brother or sister and had a shotgun in hand, and asked you to drive her to their house, would you do it?"

"Of course not!"

But other than legality, what's the difference? It is never loving to help others kill, not only because of the harm to the victims, but also because of the harm to themselves. It's never in a mother's best interest to kill her child, so we should never tell her it's fine to do so, and never assist her in taking a life and thereby heaping guilt and a lifetime of regret upon her. Real compassion is full of both grace and truth, like Jesus (John 1:14). ■

This article is excerpted from the PDF of Randy's book Pro-Choice or Pro-Life: Examining 15 Pro-Choice Claims—What Do Facts & Common Sense Tell Us?

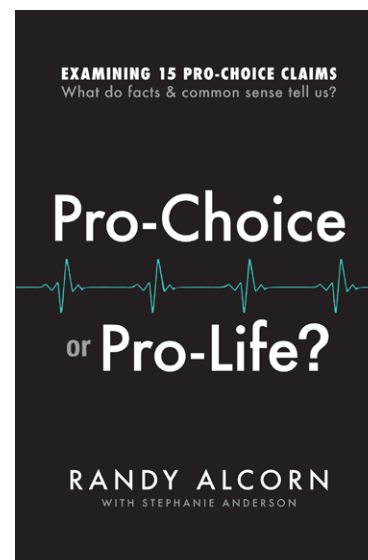




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Interested in translating *Pro-Choice or Pro-Life?* Our prayer is that people around the world with a firm pro-life understanding and significant translation skills would be involved in rendering this book into other languages. There are no royalties or licensing fees. Groups can print and give it away or sell it as they wish. Our goal is simply to get the truth out. Contact us for more details at info@epm.org



“Love Thy What?”

7 Ways to Befriend Your Neighbor

DURING COVID-19

BY DANNY FRANKS

Our culture didn't need any assistance in further isolating ourselves, and yet a global pandemic has managed to do just that. Each day we hear stories of people who yearn for community and friendship. Singles and shut-ins are just two examples of the loneliness epidemic. So how do we combat that both in normal times and in times of COVID?

The Problem with Back Porch Living

I'm no expert on American housing, but it seems that the last few decades have seen a migration to the homeowner's backyard. Gated neighborhoods, two-car garages that seal us off at the push of a button, privacy fences, and even fire pits have conspired to remove the front porch in favor of the back porch. Add the threat of a highly-contagious virus, and it's the perfect mix for boxing ourselves off from the world.

What we gain in comfort, we lose in community. Gone are the days of front porch swings and rocking chairs, sipping lemonade while waving a friendly hello or having an impromptu conversation with a neighbor who stops by. Locked in our living rooms or sequestered on the back deck, we miss natural, easy opportunities to connect.

I recognize that this is a first-world problem that not even everyone in the first-world has. I realize that COVID is a real threat to our health and that of our neighbor. That said, I've discovered that many of us will take any excuse to stay in the backyard. While I believe that hospitality is the new apologetic, I'll be the first to admit I'm not always quick to live it out. So how does an introverted, unintentional, comfort-loving guy like me nudge himself to neighbor well in lockdown time or anytime?

Seven Ways to Be a Good Neighbor

Don't stuff your schedule. When we redline our lives, we leave no room for life. Include enough margin that you have time to get to know your neighbors.

Hold high the hello. Wave. Speak. Yell across the street if that's what it takes. Don't reject an opportunity to connect. Even surface contact can lead to deeper conversations later.

Beware your banners. Political signs, social statements, and pandemic opinions have their place, but prominently displaying them in your front yard or Facebook page could be a way to alienate half of your neighborhood before you get a chance to know them.

Participate in parties. When the coolers come out on the cul-de-sac, be the first to reply to the Evite. Better yet, maybe you can be the one to organize and host a block party. Maintain a safe distance and follow local guidelines, but don't ditch the chance to gather responsibly.

Know what you're known for. My in-laws are the "pineapple people." Every time a new neighbor moves in, they hand-deliver a symbol of hospitality as well as a card with their contact information. The schtick works: they know almost every single person in their neighborhood.

Serve without strings. Provide a meal. Help with virtual learning. Make a grocery run for someone who can't leave their house. And do it all not because your neighbors are a project, but because they're people Jesus loves.

Make the gospel your gravitational pull. We're reminded of the words of the apostle Paul: without love, all of this is clanging cymbals. The gospel should be our driving force and giving them the hope of the gospel should be our primary aim. No, we don't befriend our neighbors only to share the gospel. But it's hard to share the gospel without first befriending our neighbors.

Rosaria Butterfield says, "Practicing radically ordinary hospitality is your street credibility to your post-Christian neighbors." Christian friends, let's get intentional about building street cred with those on our street. ■

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Are the Mission: How Churches Can Welcome Guests Without Compromising the Gospel.



This article originally appeared on ChurchAnswers.com.

Ideas to Share the Gospel During COVID-19 and Beyond

- Post your written or video testimony on social media.
- Use FaceTime, Zoom, Skype, or Google Hangouts to have gospel conversations.
- Check in on your neighbors (while respecting social distancing). Ask how you can pray for them, and if there is anything they need help with.
- Share a tract or booklet (like Randy's *Heaven* or *If God Is Good* booklet) with someone at the pick-up window of a restaurant or grocery store.
- Send a letter or card to someone who is isolated. Consider including a gospel-centered book or booklet.
- Invite friends and family to attend an online church service.
- If you're able, volunteer with a local food bank or ministry.

For more ideas, see <https://sbtexas.com/sharing-the-gospel-covid-19>

9 Ways to Make Social Media More Christian

BY KAREN SWALLOW PRIOR

Remember Emily Post? Her famous rules of etiquette served generations of people needing to know the right way to set a table, proper decorum for houseguests, or the correct titles to use in an invitation.

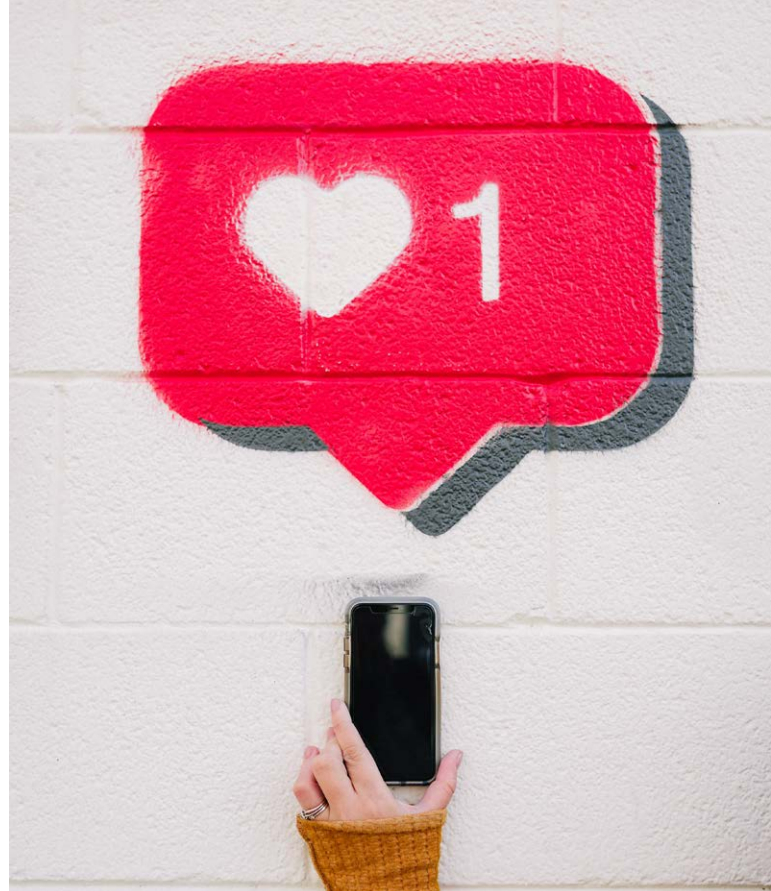
Alas, there is no Emily Post for social media. Those of us who are non-digital natives and find ourselves immersed in this new social media frontier are thus left to figure out for ourselves the rules of conduct, best manners, and infinite varieties of faux pas to avoid.

I'm no expert on social media (or etiquette), but as a heavy user for years, I've observed countless examples of good manners and bad—from both others and myself. Over time, I have begun to develop some of my own rules of conduct and principles of politeness.

Please note that I know little to nothing about the technical side of social media or the tips and strategies that marketing experts suggest as ways to maximize “platform” and “exposure.”

I'm just a person who loves ideas and dialogue—the things that are most human about social media—and who wants to see Christians do more to make social media more *human* and more *Christian*.

These aren't hard and fast rules, and I'm sure I've failed to adhere to them myself at some point. Nevertheless, they are, I suggest, good principles to follow and to deviate from only for good reason and deliberate intent.



For the Christian, even more principles must come into play because believers have an even higher standard to meet beyond basic human decency. This standard should be foremost in engaging with others on social media.

So first, here are nine manners for social media—five general and four specifically for Christians—that might make the internet a more human—and humane—experience.

1 Treat people on social media like actual people. Because they are.

All the subsequent guidelines follow from this one. In many ways, social media is like a dinner party. When it's not, it's usually because people don't treat others the way they would if those others were standing next to them in the same room. Our interactions on social media should be no different than they would be in person.

At a large social gathering, people mix and mingle. Chatting with strangers is not only allowed but also welcome. Yet even in a large gathering, one doesn't enter into a circle of people, shout something obnoxious, and then dart out the nearest door.

Believers have an even higher standard to meet beyond basic human decency. This standard should be foremost in engaging with others on social media.

If you choose to break into an ongoing conversation (which is certainly encouraged at parties and on social media), begin courteously and end courteously. Don't tweet and run.

Of course, even the pleasantest parties can attract rude guests. Sometimes the politest way to deal with a boor is to ignore him and steer the conversation elsewhere with other guests. The same is true on social media. Don't, as the saying goes, feed the trolls. It only encourages their boorishness.

Speaking of boorishness, don't say anything on social media or say anything in any other way than you would face-to-face.

2 Be yourself.

Your Twitter personality should reflect your real-life personality. A few of my favorite people on twitter are curmudgeonly on Twitter. But they are among my favorites because I know them in real life and they are real-life curmudgeons, too!

On the other hand, some of the most obnoxious interactions I've had on Twitter are with those who list "pastor" on their bios. I find it hard to believe that they behave the same way among their flock as they do with strangers on the internet. This should not be.

No one likes a fake in real life or on social media. So, if you come to the social media party wearing a mask (with an anonymous account), don't expect to be taken seriously.

Likewise, don't take anonymous accounts seriously. Unless they are light-hearted or good-natured accounts (and there are plenty of those), you probably should not even respond to them. Most anonymous accounts are the digital equivalent of men in white hoods, and any response only fuels their fire.

3 Ignore what experts tell you about using social media to build "platform." Instead, use social media to serve people.

What I serve is an eclectic variety of news stories, art, poetry, snark, and lively interaction (because

that reflects who I really am). What you serve should reflect your own interests and personality. This will attract people with an affinity for your interests.

What you serve may develop into a platform, but gaining a certain number of people who follow you but who aren't interested in or engaged with what you serve is no use to anyone.

This also means that you shouldn't treat accounts as platform builders and manipulate them by following someone only in hopes that the person will follow you back.

Even more importantly, don't follow a bunch of people to get a bunch of followers and then drop most of them in order to achieve a follower/following ratio that you think will make you look more popular. This is shallow and rude.

By all means, share things you've written or thoughts you have, but be generous enough to share the ideas, thoughts, and accomplishments of others far more than your own.

4 Talk to people, not at or about them.

For example, consider the quote tweet. A quote tweet occurs when a Twitter user quotes someone else's tweet with added commentary above it. It's common, for example, to share an article and place a quote from it or your own commentary above it. This is one of the most productive and best uses of Twitter.

However, when quote tweeting another person's original tweet, it's important to understand that you are now talking about, not an article or idea, but a person. This is a polite and nice thing to do when you are offering praise or agreement. However, when quote tweeting in order to disagree, mock, or denounce, the quote tweet is akin to talking behind someone's back or pointing at them from across the room.

Instead, reply to the person's tweet. Politely. Your reply will show up in your followers' feeds just as your own tweets do. The only thing the quote tweet does is add a level of grandstanding that is usually

unnecessary and unbecoming.

In the same vein, keep in mind that tweets, posts, and comments function more like verbal speech than published works. The internet is an ephemeral place in both its form and its content. It's a place where most people try out ideas that are in process, where feedback shapes that thought in return.

Don't treat every tweet by a well-known pastor or leader as though it's carved in stone (or even published in a book) because it's not.

5 Don't exist in an echo chamber.

Don't follow or interact only with people who think as you do. Likewise, when responding to others, unless you know the person, do not assume that they hold the same religious or political views you do. Many of us on social media are engaging with friends and family members with whom we don't agree.

Well-meaning people who jump in to the conversation to make Jesus-y remarks that make no sense to those outside the community of faith can do real damage to carefully cultivated or even tense relationships that you know nothing about.

The neat thing about reading and engaging with people whose politics, theology, education, and interests differ from your own is that you can learn a little—and so can they.

6 Be mindful of the fact that believers will give an account to God for every idle word.

The Bible tells us this in Matthew 12:36. Social media beckons our idle words every hour of every day. This may be the most pervasive temptation of our age.

We must recognize this temptation for what it is and counter it with intentional stewardship of every word—not to mention minute—that we spend online that we might be spending elsewhere or with other people.

7 Be known more for what you are for than what (or who) you are against.

There is a time to point out error. But even more effective than pointing out error is proclaiming—or better yet—modeling truth.

If you've spent more than three minutes on social media, you have likely seen the cottage industry some Christians have created in making a name for themselves (or even a profit) not by advancing the truth of the gospel but by scoring points by showing how someone else may have gotten it wrong.

It's much easier, of course, to rant and rail against the errors of others than it is to declare and demonstrate truth. But Scripture calls us to model right teaching and thinking as much as—if not more than—pointing out error. Even on social media, our thoughts and words should dwell on whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8).

8 “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves” (Philippians 2:3).

Even the right messages can be shared for the wrong reasons. Christians will be held to account for this as well. The world is watching, too. And there is likely nothing more representative of the spirit of Christ in this narcissistic world than a genuine spirit of humility. Sadly, this spirit is too rare on social media, even among Christians.

9 Finally, be sure that the fruit of the Spirit is identifiable and manifest in your social media interactions.

If this fruit is not visible in your interactions, then it is time to step away until time with the Lord and in the Word makes the fruit of the Spirit evident once again: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). ■

Karen Swallow Prior is a professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and author of numerous books, including On Reading Well: Finding the Good Life Through Great Books.



This article first appeared on FactsAndTrends.net and is used with permission.

Heaven's ADMISSION PRICE

BY GREG LAURIE



Imagine if someone were to say, “I believe in Disneyland, but I don’t agree with the admission price, and I don’t believe the location is accurate. So, I’m going to go where I think

Disneyland is, and I’ll enter the way I want to.”

Well, okay. Whatever. They’ll probably end up at a miniature golf course somewhere. But if they do happen to make it to Disneyland when it’s open, they’ll still have to enter the Disney way and pay the Disney price. Otherwise, they won’t be going to Disneyland at all.

In the same way, there are people who say they believe in Heaven, yet they refuse to read what the Bible has to say about it.

The Pew Research Center polled people on their beliefs about Heaven and Hell. About 72 percent defined Heaven as a place “where people who have led good lives are eternally rewarded.” And 58 percent defined Hell as a place “where people who have led bad lives and die without being sorry are eternally punished.”

But that isn’t what Heaven is, and that isn’t what Hell is. If you say you believe in Heaven, then you need to read what the Bible says about it. The idea of Heaven uniquely comes from the Bible. We

would not believe in Heaven if it weren’t for the teaching of Scripture.

The Bible tells us there is a Heaven. And to go there, we must do it God’s way. What is God’s admission price?

We can’t afford it. No one can, no matter how much money they have. That’s the bad news. But here’s the good news: The price has been paid. Colossians 1:20 tells us, “[God] made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ’s blood on the cross” (NLT).

Admission is free through Jesus Christ. That’s how we get into Heaven. It’s because of His death for us on the cross. ■

The Bible tells us there is a Heaven. And to go there, we must do it God’s way.

Greg Laurie is an author, evangelist, and the senior pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship with campuses in California and Hawaii. In 1990, he began holding large-scale public evangelistic events called Harvest Crusades. Since then, more than 7.9 million people have participated in Harvest Crusades events in person or online around the United States.



This article originally appeared on Harvest.org.



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