

# eternal perspectives

FALL/WINTER 2022

## The Promise of the New Earth

REFLECTIONS ON OUR ETERNAL HOME

RANDY ALCORN

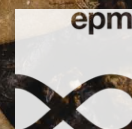
Bestselling author of *Heaven*

### INSIDE

Can Cancer Be God's Servant?

Why Christians Don't Share the Gospel

Joy to the (Grieving) World





# contents

- |   |   |    |  |    |  |
|---|---|----|--|----|--|
| 3 | News from EPM   | 10 | What's the Point of Faith When God Didn't Answer Prayers for Healing?<br>Doreen Button | 19 | "She Reads <i>Heaven</i> Practically Every Day"<br>Reader letter       |
| 4 | Introducing <i>The Promise of the New Earth</i><br>Randy Alcorn | 12 | Can Cancer Be God's Servant?<br>Randy Alcorn   | 20 | Why Our Subjective Feelings Need God's Objective Truth<br>Randy Alcorn |
| 6 | Why Do You Read the Bible?<br>Tim Challies                      | 16 | Why Christians Don't Share the Gospel<br>Greg Stier                                    | 22 | Joy to the (Grieving) World<br>Clarissa Moll                           |
| 7 | God's Providence in Joseph's Story—and in Ours<br>Randy Alcorn  |    |  |    |  |

## 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](http://epm.org/magazine).

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

### Subscribe

Our magazine is sent free to all who request it. To subscribe by mail or to sign up to receive an email notification when the latest edition is posted online, go to [epm.org/subscribe](http://epm.org/subscribe).

### Permissions

Articles in this publication (and on our website) written by Randy Alcorn may be freely quoted or copied, in part or in whole, provided EPM's name and website are placed on the copy. (If you wish to revise or leave out portions of an article, please submit to us for permission.) Feel free to reproduce this complete magazine, and pass it on to individuals, churches, or groups.

### Contact









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

### Donate

EPM is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. All contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law. Donate online at [epm.org/donate](http://epm.org/donate).

Copyright © 2022 by Eternal Perspective Ministries. Produced and designed by Stephanie Anderson, EPM staff.

## connect

-  [epm.org](http://epm.org)  
*Find resources and purchase books.*
-  [epm.org/blog](http://epm.org/blog)  
*Read Randy's latest blog posts.*
-  [facebook.com/randyalcorn](https://facebook.com/randyalcorn)  
*Connect with Randy and read daily posts.*
- [facebook.com/EPMinistries](https://facebook.com/EPMinistries)  
*Follow EPM for the latest news from our office, including promotions.*
-  [instagram.com/randyalcorn\\_epm](https://instagram.com/randyalcorn_epm)  
*See EPM's word art featuring quotes from Randy and others.*
-  [pinterest.com/randyalcorn](https://pinterest.com/randyalcorn)  
*Explore and pin quotes and resources.*
-  [twitter.com/randyalcorn](https://twitter.com/randyalcorn)  
*Read short daily thoughts from Randy.*
-  [vimeo.com/randyalcorn](https://vimeo.com/randyalcorn)  
*Watch videos and messages from Randy.*
-  [youtube.com/eternalperspectives](https://youtube.com/eternalperspectives)  
*Watch and subscribe to Randy's videos.*

## Stay in touch with us by email

Sign up to receive updates at  
[epm.org/subscribe](http://epm.org/subscribe)

# Nanci Alcorn Memorial Service and Fund

If you would like to watch Nanci's service, it is available in its entirety (and in parts) at [epm.org/nancimemorial](https://epm.org/nancimemorial).

Those who wish to give a gift in honor of Nanci may consider giving to EPM's memorial fund. Go to [epm.org/donate](https://epm.org/donate) (select the "Nanci Alcorn Memorial Fund"). If you wish to send a check, make it payable to Eternal Perspective Ministries and send to: 39065 Pioneer Blvd, Suite 100, Sandy, OR 97055. Be sure to write "Nanci" in the notation area. 100% of any donations will be divided among ministries that were dear to her heart: ministry in Cuba, persecuted Christians (currently with special concern for Nigeria), and the Logos Hope Ship (Operation Mobilization).



## Watch "An Eternal Perspective in Grief and Loss"

In October, Randy shared at his home church, Good Shepherd Community Church, about what the Lord has been teaching him in the months since Nanci went to be with Jesus, and how an eternal perspective can help in grief. Watch the full video of the service at [epm.org/perspectivegrief](https://epm.org/perspectivegrief).

## Get Free Shipping This Holiday Season!

Through December 8, get **free media mail shipping** on your order from [epm.org/store](https://epm.org/store) with the code [thankful22](https://epm.org/store) (U.S. continental only). We'll also be offering weekly sales on Randy's books throughout the holiday season! To learn more about our sales, sign up for our email newsletter at [epm.org/subscribe](https://epm.org/subscribe).

## End of Year Donations to EPM

If you've found our books, articles, social media posts, and/or magazine to be helpful, would you prayerfully consider supporting EPM and being a part of this eternity-shaping ministry in 2023? 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](https://epm.org/donate) by 11:59 p.m. PT on December 31, will be included on this year's tax receipts.

INTRODUCING

# *The Promise of the New Earth*

I hope you'll consider reading *The Promise of the New Earth* and experience that tug toward that new world Jesus is preparing for us. And maybe you'll want to share it as a Christmas gift—or any other time—to others, whether believers or unbelievers, older or younger. Here are two excerpts from the book. —**Randy Alcorn**



## Will Heaven ever be boring?

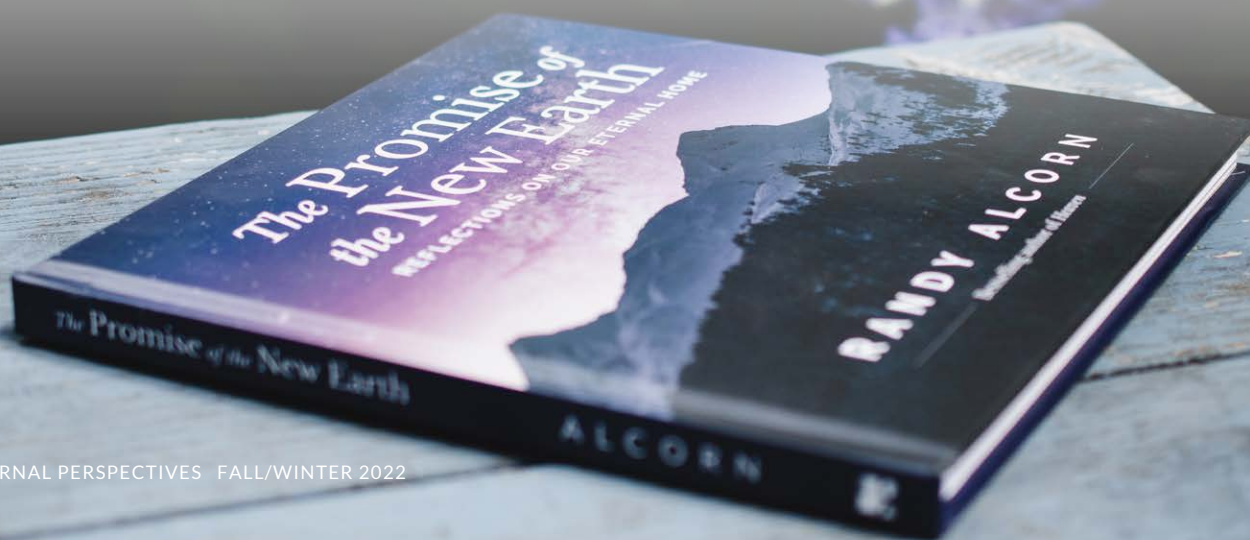
A sincere believer once told me, “I hate to admit this, but I don’t look forward to Heaven. I wish I could live with Jesus on this Earth. I hate sin and suffering and death, and I want that to end, but I wish the Earth would go on forever. I don’t want to stop enjoying the beauty of God’s world!”

As much as this man loved Jesus, the Heaven he’d heard about seemed terribly boring and tedious. He thought eternity would mean living in an inhuman realm and that death would mark the end of his opportunity to enjoy music, literature, adventure, travel, learning, discovery, work, and service. So he hoped God would understand why he spent his time and money fulfilling his bucket list. After all, he thought, *now* was his only chance to experience what made him most happy.

Ironically, what this man wished for is exactly what the Bible promises! But as long as he failed to grasp the true biblical story—the unfolding drama of redemption culminating in the resurrection of our bodies and the universe itself—he had no way to realize that for God’s children, there’s simply no need for a bucket list!

People sometimes say, “I’d rather have a good time in Hell than be bored in Heaven.” Since everything good, enjoyable, fascinating, and exciting comes from God, without God there can be nothing interesting to do. Hell is a place where everyone is lonely and utterly miserable, where friendship and good times don’t exist. Hell will be deadly boring.

King David wrote, “You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever” (Psalm 16:11).



Apart from God, there is *no* joy. In God's presence there's nothing *but* joy.

Since Jesus will always remain the God-man, a human being living with His people on the New Earth (see Revelation 21:3), surely the spirit of play He created and built into people will be reflected in His own nature and actions. What will it be like for people and animals to play with the one who made

them to love play? Nothing short of glorious.

And since Heaven is God's home, made by Him, it will be awesome, exciting, and always fascinating. The New Earth will be full of great surprises and astonishing new adventures as we learn more about God and enjoy His wonders in a new universe. Once we're in Heaven, we'll wonder why we weren't even more excited about going there.

## Will we laugh and be happy?

God created all good things, including humor. If God didn't have a sense of humor, we wouldn't either. But it's obvious He does: Think about aardvarks and baboons and giraffes. Take a good look at your dog catching a Frisbee or your cat chasing a ball or an otter at play. You have to smile, don't you?

God's original plan included human beings living happy and fulfilled lives. Imagine sitting around campfires on the New Earth, wide eyed at the adventures recounted. Yes, I mean telling real stories around real campfires. After all, friendship, camaraderie, laughter, stories, and campfires are all good gifts from God for physical people living in a physical world . . . and the Bible tells us that's what we'll be! In Heaven, I think Jesus will laugh with us. His fun-loving nature will probably be our greatest source of endless laughter.

The promise of laughter in Heaven and on the New Earth is something we can frontload to our present lives, even when we are sorrowful and weeping. Heaven's laughter erupts in the present, a welcome foretaste of the unending happiness awaiting us.

As we look forward to the laughter to come, Jesus says we should "leap for joy" now (Luke 6:23). Can you imagine someone leaping for joy in silence, without laughter? Listen to any group of people who are enjoying some kind of celebration, and what do you hear? Laughter.

When life is difficult, remember what Jesus promised about life on the New Earth: "You will laugh" (Luke 6:21). You don't think it was human beings who invented play and fun and joy, do you? And it certainly wasn't the devil, who is miserable and wants to make us miserable. God invented fun and laughter, and it's our privilege now and forever to enjoy those gifts.

## We can be sure of this: Whatever's ahead of us, in the New Heavens and on the New Earth, it's far better than we can even imagine.

*The Promise of the New Earth* combines solid biblical teaching gleaned from Randy Alcorn's bestselling book, *Heaven*, with beautiful photography to create a gift book to be treasured. This refreshed version of Randy's book *The Promise of Heaven* features all new photographs and some brand-new content. *Hardcover, 96 pages.*

Exclusively from EPM: [epm.org/promise](http://epm.org/promise)







# Why Do You Read the Bible?

BY TIM CHALLIES

I recently spent a little bit of time with an older believer and was touched by the most mundane observation: She was reading her Bible. She was reading her Bible so she could better know and serve her God. This simple act touched and challenged me. When I have little life left to live, will I still have reason to take up and read my Bible?

See, I often read my Bible as a means to an end. I want to live a better life, I want to live a life that is pleasing to God, and I read the Bible to teach and equip myself to do this. This is a very good reason to read the Bible. But it made me think: As I get toward the end of life, will I still want to read it? When I have little life left to live, will I still have reason to take up and read my Bible? If

the purpose in reading is to live better, what will I do after I've already lived most of my life?

As I sat with this woman, I realized that she was reading her Bible for a different reason—she was reading her Bible to better get to know the God she would soon meet face-to-face. She was reading the same book but for a different purpose. She knows she will be seeing Him soon, and she wants to be prepared. The nearer she is to God, the greater her longing to know Him, to know Him as He is. She is not passively waiting to see Him face-to-face but meeting Him now in the pages of His living and active Word. She believes that what she knows of God on this side of the grave will not end at the grave. While she may have little life left to live and little

time remaining to improve her life, she has the rest of eternity to grow in her understanding and knowledge of God. She has the rest of eternity to grow in her relationship with God. So why not make a significant beginning now?

So yes, I need to read God's Word to live a life that is pleasing to God. But I also need to read God's Word to know the God I will enjoy for eternity. What I learn about God is not just for this life. What I know of God is not only for now. It is for forever. ■

**Tim Challies** is a pastor, speaker, author, and pioneer in the Christian blogosphere. Challies.com is one of the most widely read Christian blogs in the world.





# GOD'S PROVIDENCE

*in Joseph's Story—and Ours*

BY RANDY ALCORN

“**P**rovidence” is a word we use frequently in talking about God, but we may not have thought deeply about what it means. Theologian Timothy George defines it as “God’s faithful and effective care and guidance of everything which He has made toward the end which He has chosen.”

God’s providence was a deep comfort to both Nanci and me as we faced her cancer. In her journal, Nanci quoted Joni Eareckson Tada: “God is not a sweep-up boy who follows you with a dustpan and brush, second-guessing how everything will fit into a divine pattern for good. God’s hands stay on the wheel of your life from start to finish so that everything follows His intention for your life.”

That quote comes from Joni's book *Pain and Providence*, in a section where she writes about God's providence in Joseph's life:

I draw a lot of inspiration from the story of Joseph. There were plenty of unfortunate mishaps in Joseph's life, like being tossed by his envious brothers into a pit and left to die. But later on, after more mishaps, Joseph told his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20-21, NIV).



I like that word, *intended*. He is a God of intention—He has a purpose, a target, a goal, and a plan. Joseph's problems did not catch God off guard. From the beginning, God calculated for Joseph to experience all these things. Why? For the salvation of others.

God is not a sweep-up boy who follows you with a dustpan and brush, second-guessing how everything will fit into a divine pattern for good. God's hands stay on the wheel of your life from start to finish so that everything follows His intention for your life. This means your trials have more meaning—much more—than you realize.

Consider this: If Joseph had not been sold to those caravan traders by his wicked brothers, he would not have been sold as a slave to Pharaoh. And if Joseph had not become Pharaoh's right-hand man, no one would have built giant grain silos to ward off the famine. And if the famine hadn't happened, Jacob and his family would never have come to Egypt for food and safety. And if Jacob's family weren't in Egypt, there would have been no slave laborers. And if no slaves, no Exodus, and no giving

of the law to Moses. And no Promised Land. And, finally, no line of Judah from which the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would come.

What an amazing example of the providence of God! It is enthralling to see how the troubles of one young man named Joseph could kick-start a whole chain of earth-shaking events which would ultimately lead to our salvation.

Joseph's story could be yours. Only Heaven will reveal the incredibly complex intertwining of events in which you have played a pivotal role. Like Joseph, you may not be able to discern it at the time, but God has it all in hand. He has it all in control. And you, dear friend, are needed in His marvelous plan to spread His kingdom in your corner of the world.

As usual, I wholeheartedly agree with Joni. Let's take another look at this amazing story. Joseph recognized God's sovereignty when he said to his brothers, who betrayed and sold him into slavery, "It was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.... God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God" (Genesis 45:5-8). God didn't only *permit* Joseph's journey to Egypt, he *sent* him there through his brothers' evil deeds.



**Only Heaven will reveal the incredibly complex intertwining of events in which you have played a pivotal role.**

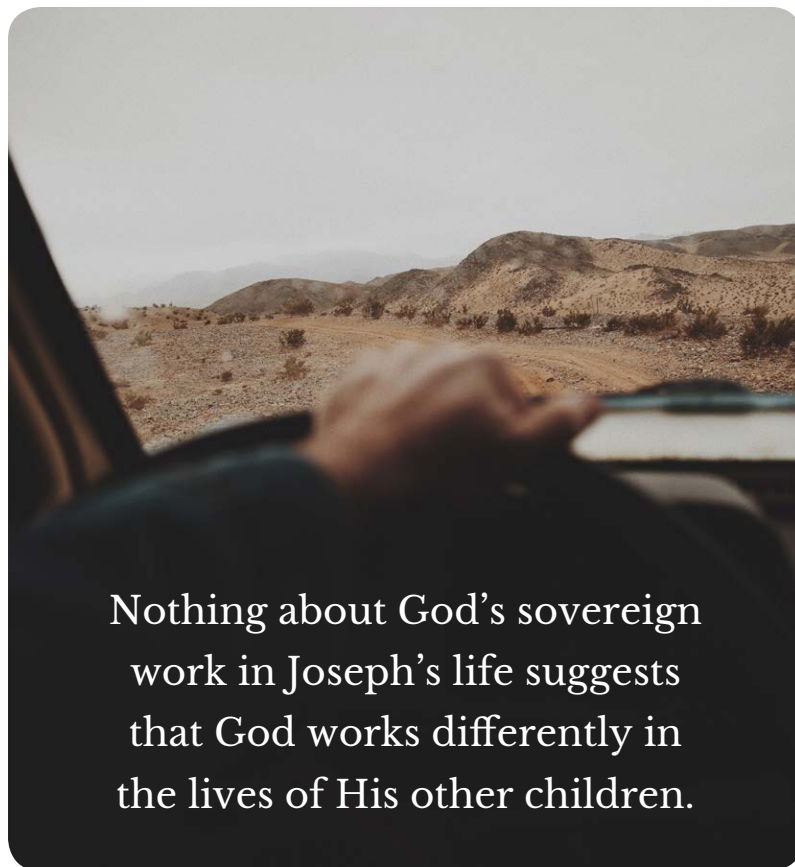


Later Joseph told his brothers, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Genesis 50:20, ESV). “God meant it for good” communicates something far stronger than God being handed lemons and making lemonade. God did not merely make the best of a bad situation; on the contrary, fully aware of what Joseph’s brothers would do, and fully permitting their sin, God *intended* that the bad situation—which He could have prevented, but didn’t—be used for good. As Joni explains, He did so in accordance with His plan from eternity past.

We see two wills at work in Genesis 50:20. The brothers successfully did evil, and God successfully brought about good from their evil—but His good dramatically eclipsed their evil. While God did not *force* them to do evil, He sovereignly worked so that the moral evil they committed, and the consequential evils that came from it, accomplished His ultimately good purposes. These purposes extended not only to Israel, but to Joseph and even to Joseph’s brothers, the evildoers.

Similarly, some of those who crucified Jesus later embraced the redemption accomplished in His crucifixion. Hence, in a sense inexplicable except by God’s sovereign grace, they became beneficiaries of their own evil deed.

How great is our infinitely holy God that He can and does use sin—including my sin and yours—to accomplish His purposes. Should this cause us to minimize the seriousness of our sin? No more than it caused Joseph’s brothers to minimize theirs. What it should do is maximize



Nothing about God’s sovereign work in Joseph’s life suggests that God works differently in the lives of His other children.

the sovereignty and providential wisdom of our almighty God. Our sins are great, but our Savior is infinitely bigger than our sins!

Nothing about God’s sovereign work in Joseph’s life suggests that God works differently in the lives of His other children. In fact, Romans 8:28 and Ephesians 1:11 make it emphatically clear that He works the same way with us. Countless millions of choices and actions are contemplated every second across this globe. Our all-knowing and all-powerful God chooses exactly which ones He will cause or not, ordain or not, permit or not. He does not permit evils arbitrarily, but with purpose.

Though events in our lives may have less drama or historical prominence, God didn’t act out of character with Joseph. Rather, He revealed for our benefit how He sovereignly and providentially works in *our* lives as well. Knowing this can provide great encouragement and perspective as we face our own trials and sufferings today. ■

## What's the Point of Faith When God Didn't Answer Prayers for My Spouse's Healing?

### Question from a reader:

Since I lost my young wife to cancer two years ago, I really struggle to see God as “my best friend” again. We prayed earnestly for healing for over three years, and now I’m raising two children alone. I’ve read much of what Randy and others have written about grief, yet even when I read the Bible it’s hard to find the joy and excitement, because I keep wondering what’s the point of much faith in Him when prayers are not answered accordingly? To unconditionally love a God who gives and takes away whenever He wishes is a hard one. How can I tell if this is a “Job’s situation” or I am actually suffering because of sin?

### Answer from Doreen Button, EPM staff:

Even to imagine the sadness, loneliness, emptiness, and helplessness you must feel breaks my heart. I’m going to share with you a few thoughts which I hope you’ll find encouraging.

You’ve obviously been seeking good input in what you’re choosing to read and think about. Meditating on what is excellent and pure (Philippians 4:4-9) is imperative if you want to truly heal.

Your questions are insightful and very understandable. I’d like to pose one additional question you can ask: “Why did God give me ten years with my wife [instead of just a few weeks or months] and bless me with two children [instead

of one or none]?” Our perspective in grieving is so important. God is infinite, all-knowing, and all-wise along with being sovereign. He knows things we’ll never know and can see the big picture we are incapable of comprehending. We always want answers when things don’t go the way we’d like, and as you know from reading about Job, God only gives us the answers we truly need.

Please remember that it takes time to reach that place of perspective. Be patient with yourself during this process. It can take three or more years just to get past the fog and confusion of a major loss.

I’ve experienced a great deal of loss, and I wouldn’t wish that part of my story on anyone. I also wouldn’t want to have missed the resulting depth of my relationship with God for anything. I promise you: if you keep seeking God’s face and keep being honest with Him about your pain and keep asking Him your questions humbly and with the desire to remain faithful whether you like the answers or not, you *will* make it through this with greater faith and a beautiful sense of God’s great love and care for you. The Valley of the Shadow of Death is a scary, lonely, dark place; aren’t you glad Jesus is our Good Shepherd who walks through it with us to the banquet at the other end? And, also in Psalm 23, don’t miss the beginning: “Because the Lord is my shepherd, I lack *nothing*.”

You asked how to tell whether you’re in a Job situation or whether your suffering results from sin. First John 1:9 tells us that if we confess our



“

*The Valley of the Shadow of Death is a scary, lonely, dark place; aren't you glad Jesus is our Good Shepherd who walks through it with us to the banquet at the other end?*



sins, He promises to forgive them and Romans 8:1 promises that we who love Jesus are under zero condemnation. We're all subject to the consequences of sin and the curse regardless of whether we've lived the life of a sinner or a saint. In both cases, God's sovereignty remains paramount and overarching.

You also asked about the point of faith in a God who doesn't answer our prayers for healing, and how to love a God who treats His people in such a way. God is a Father who allowed His own Son to die a horrible death. Jesus prayed for deliverance and did not receive a "Yes" answer. Yet Jesus never doubted His Father's love. So I'd reframe the question, "How could I not love a God who has spent every moment since Eden's demise trying to get our attention and providing everything we need to be close to Him?" He didn't choose our sin, but He did choose us despite our sin and provided a just and merciful answer to our sin.

Every moment of your life from now until your death, you have a choice to make. You can choose, by God's grace, to trust Him with this moment, or to trust yourself. Sometimes your sadness will be so overwhelming, you may only be able to croak out a prayer of, "Help!" Sometimes your faith may not even seem as big as a mustard seed. That's OK. In God's hands it is enough.

God doesn't promise us strength for tomorrow or next week. He promises to give us what we need right now. I love Isaiah 41:10..."so do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

I pray that you will continue to seek God's face regardless of your circumstances. Ultimately nothing else matters but your relationship with Him. When that's what you seek, you'll have *everything* you need. And, according to Jesus (Matthew 6:33), that's His promise. ■





# Can Cancer Be God's Servant?

## *What I Saw in My Wife's Last Four Years*

BY RANDY ALCORN

**I**n March, my beloved wife, Nanci, lost her four-year battle with colon cancer. All 54 years I've known her, Nanci loved Jesus. But from a front-row seat, I watched a wonderful—and supernatural—change in those last four years.

In 2019, Nanci wrote to a friend and fellow cancer sufferer,

The cancer battle has been tough. However, my time with the Ancient of Days (one of my favorite names for God) has been epic! He has met me in ways I never knew were possible. I have *experienced* His sovereignty, mercy, and steadfast love in tangible ways. I now trust Him at a level I never knew I could.

I saw Nanci meditate on Scripture daily, read great books about God, and journal—writing

out verses, powerful quotations from Spurgeon and many others, and personal reflections. One unforgettable morning, after meditating on Psalm 119:91, “All things are your servants,” she shared with me what she'd just written:

My cancer is God's servant in my life. He is using it in ways He has revealed to me and in many more I have yet to understand. I can rest knowing my cancer is under the control of a sovereign God who *is* good and *does* good.

### **Brokenhearted and Thankful**

Nine months later, at Nanci's request and on short notice, our daughters and their families gathered to hear her speak final words of overflowing love for us and unswerving trust in her sovereign King.



As one of our grandsons sat beside her, listening to her struggling to speak and to me reading powerful words from her journals, he said, “Grams, if you can trust God in this, I know I can trust Him in whatever I’ll go through.” Another grandson told her, “I will never forget what you said to us today.”

Exactly one week later, I held her hand and watched her take her last breath in this world under the curse.

Every day during those four years, I witnessed God’s sanctifying and happy-making work in my wife: “We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope . . . because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Romans 5:3–5).

Nanci and I—and thousands worldwide—prayed daily for her healing. God’s final answer was to rescue her from suffering and bring her into His presence where it’s “better by far” (Philippians 1:23). Through her afflictions, He achieved in her an eternal weight of glory that far outweighs them all (2 Corinthians 4:17). She praised Jesus for it, and I will forever do the same, though I miss her immensely.

## Why God Permits What He Does

When our ministry posted Nanci’s words, “My cancer is God’s servant,” someone responded, “WHAT? God does NOT give people cancer. Jesus bore our sicknesses and carried our pains on the cross.”

That reader is not alone in trying to distance God from suffering. But by saying sickness comes only from Satan and the fall, not from God, we disconnect Him from our suffering and His deeper purposes. God is sovereign. He never permits or uses evil arbitrarily; everything He does flows from His wisdom and ultimately serves His holiness and love.

Joni Eareckson Tada often shares the words of her friend Steve Estes: “God permits what He hates to accomplish what He loves.” God’s “permitting” something is far stronger than it may sound. After

all, whatever God permits actually happens; what He doesn’t permit doesn’t happen.

In the final chapter of Job, God reveals that Job’s family and friends “showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him” (Job 42:11). The author told us from the beginning that Job’s troubles were Satan’s idea and actions. Yet the inspired wording indicates Satan’s efforts were, indirectly by sovereign permission, God’s own doing. Many find this truth disturbing, but properly understood, it should be comforting. What should be profoundly disturbing is the notion that God stands by passively while Satan, evildoers, diseases, and random accidents ruin the lives of His beloved children.

Charles Spurgeon suffered terribly from depression, gout, rheumatism, neuritis, and a burning kidney inflammation. Yet he said, “It would be a very sharp and trying experience for me to think that I have an affliction which God never sent me . . . that my trials were never measured out by him, nor sent to me by his arrangement of their weight and quantity.”

## Mercy Outstrips Hardship

Nanci and I experienced many glimpses of God’s sovereign purposes for years before her cancer diagnosis. We saw that my becoming an insulin-dependent diabetic 35 years ago was God’s plan to increase my dependence on Him. And we saw, 30 years ago, that a lawsuit by an abortion clinic for \$8.2 million was His way of moving me from pastoring a church we loved into a ministry that reaches further than we ever imagined.

God’s hands were not tied by my genetic propensity for type-1 diabetes (the result of the curse), or by the vengeance of child-killers (the result of human sin and demonic strategy). He didn’t merely “make the best of bad situations.” He took bad situations and used them for His glory and our highest good. His sovereign grace far outstripped our hardships.



If this were not true, anyone facing a terminal illness would have to believe they experienced bad luck, and that God is either not as powerful or not as loving as He claims to be. Parents who have lost a child would have to believe the death was a meaningless accident, and that it wouldn't have happened if only the child hadn't been at that place at that time, or if that man hadn't been driving drunk, or if a thousand other circumstances had been different.

*If onlys* and *what ifs* can rule our lives and drive us crazy. Instead, embracing God's higher purposes—even when invisible to us in painful and tragic events—affirms God's greatness. This is not fatalism. It is trust in the character and promises of our faithful, all-wise God.

My friend David O'Brien told me, with his slurred and laboring voice, that God used cerebral palsy to deepen his dependence on Christ. Was he better off? He lived convinced that his 81 years of suffering were no cosmic accident or satanic victory, but a severe mercy from the good hand of almighty God.

## Reasons Outside Our Sight Lines

By God's grace, Nanci fixed her attention on His attributes. Only eight months into her cancer journey, she wrote,

I honestly would not trade this cancer experience to go back to where I was. These last months have been used by God to propel me into a deeper understanding and experience of His sovereignty, wisdom, steadfast love, mercy, grace, faithfulness, immanency, trustworthiness, and omnipotence.

Psalms 119:71 says, "It was good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes." If affliction was good for the psalmist, then withholding that affliction would have meant withholding good. The universe is first and foremost about the purposes, plans, and glory of God. God sees eternal purposes and plans and knows ultimate good in ways we cannot.

Our sovereign God weaves millions of details into our lives. He may have one big reason, or a



thousand little ones, for bringing a certain person or success or failure or disease or accident into our lives. His reasons often fall outside our present lines of sight. If God uses cancer or a car accident to conform us to Himself, then regardless of the human, demonic, or natural forces involved, He will be glorified.

“O great and mighty God, whose name is the Lord of hosts, great in counsel and mighty in deed” (Jeremiah 32:18–19). God *is* at work behind the scenes, and one day we *will* understand our suffering’s hidden purposes.

### Will You See What She Saw?

Without a doubt, as I saw so clearly even when my tears overflowed, cancer served God’s purposes in Nanci’s life. I said at her service, “The most conspicuous thing about Nanci in her cancer years

## God's reasons often fall outside our *present lines* of sight.

was her wonderfully big view of God, which she fed from Scripture and great books. The more she contemplated God’s love and grace and sovereignty, the more her trust in Him grew.”

So I said to our gathered family, friends, and church members—many of them facing their own painful trials—what I sensed God saying to me: “That huge, beautiful, and transforming view of God is yours for the taking. So why not spend the rest of your life pursuing it?” ■

## EPM's Eternal Impact: Letters from Readers

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

My dad passed very suddenly this summer. He is a believer in Jesus so praise God I know where he is. My mom and I were on the highway driving to the memorial venue and started asking each other questions about Heaven, like if we'd have to sing all the time or if we'd recognize dad. So being 25 I Googled it hoping for a verse I could then go into my Bible with. But instead I stumbled upon your blog. We poured over your posts and the Scripture you cite every time we drove somewhere. Then we ordered your book on Heaven. ...The Holy Spirit works through your writing, Randy. You have inspired me to start a ministry to tell my generation about Heaven. —A.R.

Please know that you have made a difference in my life. Since my husband and soulmate unexpectedly died I lost all faith. I became so mad at God for not preventing his death. Lately, I have been trying to find God and the true reality of seeing my husband again. I find myself grasping at everything. I came across your YouTube videos about Heaven. Your videos help me to have some hope for the future, "here and beyond." I just ordered your new book. So thank you, from my broken and disappointed heart, for helping me in my quest to find hope and God again. —K.T.

# Why Christians Don't Share the Gospel

BY GREG STIER

**O**ver the course of the last 30 years of ministry, I've had the privilege of training millions of believers how to share the Gospel. During that time I've also talked to countless Christians about roadblocks and reasons why so many of them struggle to evangelize. I've narrowed these reasons down to five. Here they are in no particular order:

## 1. Short-sightedness

*"So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal"* (2 Corinthians 4:17).

In the midst of the mayhem of life, many Christians focus their eyes on the *"here and now"* of this world as opposed to the *"there and then"* of eternity. In the midst of all the craziness of work, school, family, fun, and even church, it's easy to forget how important evangelism is.

Sharing the Gospel with others is the primary means God has ordained of rescuing them from the Hell they are headed to (Jude 1:23) and the hell they may be going through (Matthew 9:36) apart from Christ.

Heaven and Hell are real. Those who die without Christ will spend an eternity in Hell. Those who put their faith in Jesus, based on His finished work on the cross, will spend an eternity in Heaven. May this reality remind us to *"fix our eyes"* on what is unseen and inspire us to take evangelism seriously.

## 2. Fear

*"Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly as I should"* (Ephesians 6:19-20).

Evangelism is scary. I've been sharing the Gospel with others for 45 years now, and I still get nervous every time I open my mouth to declare it. Even the apostle Paul got nervous. That's why he asked the Ephesians to pray for him as he shared the Gospel!

But, I believe a little fear is good for you when it comes to evangelism, as long as it reminds you to depend on the Holy Spirit as you share Christ with others. The Holy Spirit is where our evangelism power source resides (Acts 1:8). He'll give us the boldness we need to share the Gospel with those around us, as we fully depend on Him.

When it comes to evangelism, we must face our fears, count the cost, trust the Holy Spirit, and then open our mouths to *"declare it fearlessly,"* as we should.

## 3. Ignorance

*"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures"* (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Many Christians don't share the Gospel because they don't know what the Gospel is.



In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Paul trained the Corinthian believers in the core message of the Gospel creed he, himself, had been trained to memorize. This pre-Pauline creed laid out the basic message of the Gospel. Paul trained the believers of Corinth to memorize it. This created what I have come to nickname “Gospel fluency” for these believers. When you’re fluent in the Gospel message, it’s much easier to explain.

For the last 30 years we, at Dare 2 Share, have used a G.O.S.P.E.L. acrostic to help teenagers and adults alike gain Gospel fluency. When someone has mastered the message of the Gospel, it’s much easier for them to share it effectively with those around them. Think of these six sentences like six chords on a guitar. Master six chords, and you can play almost any popular song on the guitar. Master these six sentences, and you can master sharing the Gospel clearly and effectively:

- G**od created us to be with Him.
- O**ur sins separate us from God.
- S**ins cannot be removed by good deeds.
- P**aying the price for sin, Jesus died and rose again.
- E**veryone who trusts in Him alone has eternal life.
- L**ife with Jesus starts now and lasts forever.

A version of this acrostic is in 16 languages on our Life in 6 Words app. If you can swipe and read, you can share the G.O.S.P.E.L. using this amazingly effective and completely free app. I encourage you to download and use it. But whether you do or not, memorize this simple acrostic that clearly lays out the whole story of the Good News of Jesus!

It will give you Gospel fluency, which is necessary for consistently effective evangelism.



## Which of these reasons have kept you from sharing the Gospel?

### 4. Bad theology

*“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Romans 10:14).*

I have a lot of reformed friends. I know a lot of reformed preachers. The vast majority of them believe in and promote the importance of evangelism. But there’s a small percentage of them who vastly undervalue the strategic need for evangelism because, after all, according to this small crew of ultra-Calvinists, the elect will be saved with or without our evangelistic efforts.

But it’s interesting to me that the great apostle Paul, right in the middle of his classic treatise on God’s sovereignty in evangelism (Romans 8-11), takes time to remind his readers that the lost will not hear the Gospel unless someone preaches to them. He asks: *“How will they hear without someone preaching to them?”* The indication is that they will not.

It’s God’s responsibility to save the lost (Jonah 2:9). It’s our responsibility to share the Gospel (Matthew 28:19). It’s the lost person’s responsibility to believe the Gospel (Romans 1:20). Quit fixating on God’s responsibility in evangelism and take care of yours. Your job and my job is to share the Gospel with our lives and our lips. Don’t worry about God’s responsibility. He will take care of His. You take care of yours.

### 5. Lack of proximity

*“Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).*

If we have a Christian family, work with a lot of Christians, go to Christian Bible studies, and hang out with only Christian friends, we may have, what I’ve come to call a *proximity problem*. Jesus was accused again and again of being a friend of sinners (Matthew 11:19). He went to sinner parties, talked

to sinful people, hung out with the least and the lost...and reached many of them with His shocking message of grace.

That’s one of the reasons I do a lot of work in coffee shops. It gives me proximity to the unreached. That’s one of the reasons I strike up conversations with random strangers at the airport. That’s one of the reasons I ask servers at restaurants if there’s anything we can pray about for them when we pray before our meal. That’s one of the reasons I go out monthly with my daughter and her group of friends to reach into the city with the hope of Christ on Go Share Day ([goshareday.org](http://goshareday.org)).

You too must find your *proximity* place. Where can you be in proximity to the yet-to-be-rescued so you can begin to build a relationship and share the hope of Jesus with them? Maybe it’s at work or the gym or a coffee shop. Wherever it is, find your place and start sharing the Good News.

Which of these reasons have kept you from sharing the Gospel? Identify it, and then crucify it.

Start sharing your faith. (If you need some help, see [dare2share.org/resources/how-to-share-the-gospel](http://dare2share.org/resources/how-to-share-the-gospel).) Training believers to share the Gospel with boldness, wisdom, and love is exactly what we do. And we would love to train you too.

Sharing the Gospel is easier than you think and more important than you can imagine. Start today! ■

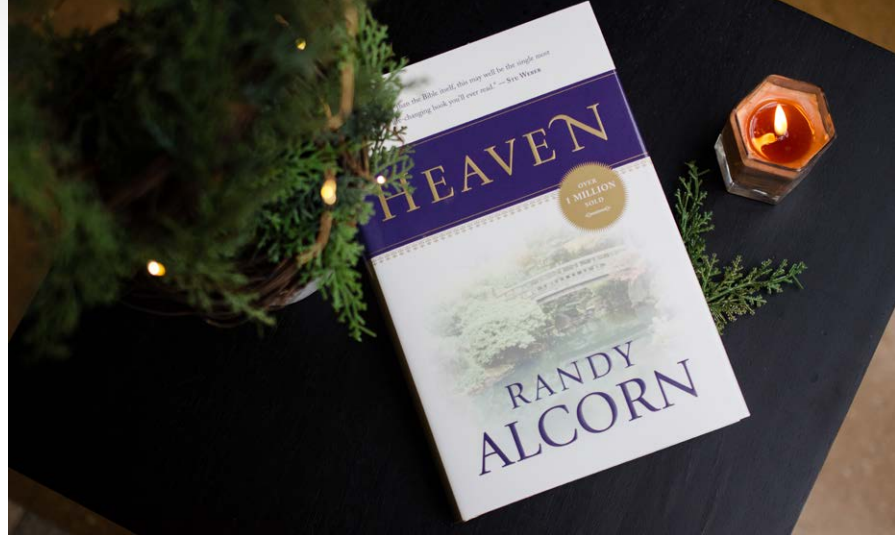
**Greg Stier**, the founder of Dare 2 Share Ministries, is driven to help the Church activate Christian teenagers to reach their friends with the Good News of Jesus. A



much sought-after speaker, Greg is a former pastor, church planter, youth leader, as well as the author of numerous books, including *Unlikely Fighter: The Story of How a Fatherless Street Kid Overcame Violence, Chaos, and Confusion to Become a Radical Christ Follower*.



# “She Reads *Heaven* Practically Every Day”



**We received this precious letter from a reader about her daughter, who has been profoundly impacted by Randy’s *Heaven* book. May her example of passionate excitement for eternity encourage us all.**

Dear Mr. Alcorn, I am writing to thank you for the influence that you have been on my daughter and her passion for Heaven. ...**My daughter is 19 years old, but I dare say that she has read your book more than triple the years she has lived. You see, she reads it practically every day.** Even if she is not reading it, the book accompanies her wherever she goes.

Along with her Bible, the *Heaven* book is sitting on her lap whether we are going to the grocery store nearby or a road trip for hours. She reads it aloud to me in the car, a snippet here or there. I can’t tell you how many times that snippet has encouraged me and reminded me of eternity just when I needed to be reminded. **She is on her second hard copy of the book and needs a third because the latest one’s cover has come off from so much use.**

...We hear, “Randy Alcorn says this” and “Randy Alcorn says that” quite frequently. **I jokingly tell her that she could quote your book to you.**

...My daughter just graduated from high school, but because she has autism, she does not know what to think about her future. Her dad and I are praying for wisdom about her future. We know that it might not be a traditional kind of life, but that her life can be rich no matter what.

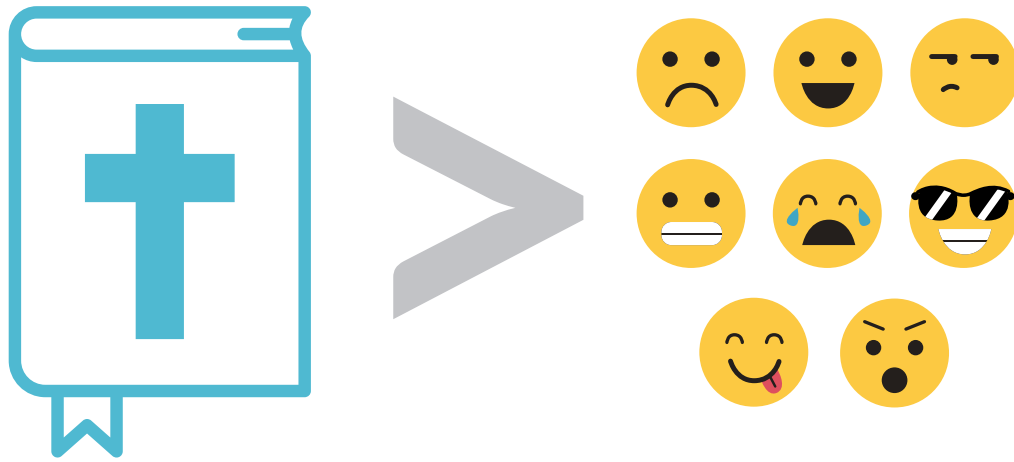
This we know though without a doubt...**there are few people we have ever known that look forward to Heaven like our daughter looks forward to Heaven, and there are likewise few people who talk about it as much as she does.** ...We believe that she can’t wait for Heaven because she knows that her mind will finally be free of the struggles that she has faced and will continue to face until then.

...Thank you for being an encouragement to a precious girl whose favorite topic is Heaven. I wish that I would have had that kind of passion at 19 rather than thinking I wanted so much more of my present life. **God has used my daughter and your book and His Word to open my eyes to the beautiful reality of a new Heaven and new Earth.**

**EPM sent her daughter a new copy of *Heaven*, and received this note in reply:**

“Today has been a fantastic day as I arrived home to find the lovely package in the mail with the *Heaven* book enclosed. I wish that you all could have seen the joy that she expressed as she opened it and read the note from Mr. Alcorn. Thank you so so much!! I am a super grateful mom with an ‘over the moon’ happy girl...it felt like Christmas morning!” ■

We love to hear from readers of Randy's books (and readers of our magazine). Email us at [info@epm.org](mailto:info@epm.org).



# Why Our Subjective Feelings Need God's Objective Truth

BY RANDY ALCORN

**The peace or lack of peace** one feels after praying about a decision can be highly subjective, unless it is specifically rooted in objective truths. Some people feel good about doing wrong things and others feel bad about doing right things. I have seen people make unwise and even catastrophic decisions who told me they prayed and felt good about it.

I know of a woman who walked away from her marriage—without biblical grounds—because in her words, “The Holy Spirit gave me peace about it.” When I tried to point to the truth in Scripture, she said she wasn’t going to be “legalistic.” She’s still going to church, claiming the spiritual high ground, while failing to live by the standards of the same Bible she professes to believe, often reads, and hears taught every Sunday.

She told me, “I’ve never been so close to God.” But is being close to God merely a feeling? Or does it mean trusting in and living by faith in the truth God has revealed to us not subjectively but objectively in His Word? Men guilty of murdering their wives have insisted “I loved her.” Their actions disprove their words.

Often the reason we “feel peace” may be because we are doing what is most comfortable, convenient, natural, or widely accepted. None of these is a good reason to believe we are doing right. We need to search the Scriptures to see what is true, and

Sanctify  
them in  
the truth;  
your word  
is truth.

JOHN 17:17





Once our eyes are opened  
to the transcendent beauty and  
freedom of God's truth, we'll never  
be content with anything less.

subject ourselves to the authority and guidance of the revealed will of God (Acts 17:11). Then when we call upon God's indwelling Spirit to teach and direct us, He can guide us in light of what He has objectively said to us, not merely what we subjectively feel.

We should seek the Lord's will through the reading and study of His Word, prayer, and the *wise* counsel of others. I emphasize "wise" to discourage counsel only from those who automatically agree with us and are not committed to speaking God's truth. Scripture says in an abundance of counselors, there is wisdom and victory.

Some people say, "I just feel that..." as if having a feeling were somehow a good reason to believe something. "I feel" statements are sincere but subjective; they are not always based on reality. This is not to say that feelings are categorically sinful; God made us to feel emotions. We should let our feelings—real as they are—point to our need for the truth of God's words to guide our thinking. Recognizing the reality of objective truth, "true truth," God's truth, is key. Why? Because what we believe about truth will inevitably affect our moral values and how we live.

Since Jesus said the truth will set us free, failing to believe and live by it will enslave us to error, sin, and self-destruction. It's vital that we join David in saying, "Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me" (Psalm 25:4-5).

John Piper writes in *Finally Alive: What Happens When We Are Born Again?*:

My feelings are not God. God is God. My feelings do not define truth. God's word defines truth. My feelings are echoes and responses to what my mind perceives. And sometimes—many times—my feelings are out of sync with the truth. When that happens—and it happens every day in some measure—I try not to bend the truth to justify my imperfect feelings, but rather, I plead with God: Purify my perceptions of your truth and transform my feelings so that they are in sync with the truth.

As long as we trust our own subjective judgment that ebbs and flows with the current of our culture, we divorce ourselves from God's eternal and unchanging truth. Once our eyes are opened to the transcendent beauty and freedom of God's truth, we'll never be content with anything less.

Jerry Bridges wisely counseled, "We must not allow our emotions to hold sway over our minds. Rather, we must seek to let the truth of God rule our minds. Our emotions must become subservient to the truth."

More than we can imagine hangs in the balance concerning what is true and whether or not we believe it instead of our own subjective feelings. May we look to Jesus who is the Truth. And may God in His mercy help us to embrace and live according to the life-giving truth He has given us—both for His glory and for our good. ■



# Joy to the (Grieving) World

BY CLARISSA MOLL

If you're grieving the loss of a loved one, the span of holidays from Thanksgiving to New Year's can feel like running an emotional gauntlet. You survive the empty chair at one holiday, only to endure the onslaught of joy and festivity at the next. As you see the world intent on keeping celebrations jolly and gay, oblivious to loss, you might suspect that the holidays just aren't for you this year. Where in this world of white Christmases and elves on the shelves could your grief ever fit anyway?

If you find yourself questioning participation in yet another festive day, consider that Christmas carols might offer you entry into celebration of a different kind this year. Store windows may tell a simplistic story of joy that won't support you as you grieve, but Christmas carols can orient your sorrow in a hope that lasts. This year, let Christmas carols become your grace in grief.

## **A Song in the Air**

The Christmas story is filled with suffering. Beneath that star in the sky, God's people lived with the grief of centuries of unmet hopes and expectations. They sorrowed under poverty and

oppression. From shepherds living in subsistence to magi wrestling with spiritual longings, the Christmas story is filled with a cast of characters well-acquainted with grief. And, in that tiny creche, a mother birthed a child in a mixture of grief and joy. Her baby was born to die.

If you're grieving this holiday season, Christmas carols recall these sorrows and invite you into the universal experience of grief. In the companionship of their lyrics, we find acknowledgment of the world's brokenness, a pain we know intimately. In "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," we "mourn in lonely exile," awaiting the redemption of all things. In "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear," we weep over "life's crushing load." We cry out in choral rounds, "Dona nobis pacem" — *give us peace, give us peace*. As we raise our voices in tear-filled song, we discover that carols echo all of the sorrows that fill our hearts. They offer space for our grief to belong at Christmas.

## **The Harmony of Grief and Hope**

In 1535, Martin Luther composed a Christmas carol for his family devotional hour. "Welcome to



earth, O noble Guest, through whom this sinful world is blest!" he wrote. "You came to share my misery, that you might share your joy with me." As the best Christmas carols acknowledge our deep grief, they invite us to see our sorrow in light of the cross. Christmas carols welcome us to mourn with hope.

There's a fine line between rose-colored-glasses optimism and genuine hope, but tried and true Christmas carols hit the mark every single time. "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" repeats the truth of Philippians 2. This One who mildly lays his glory by has been born to give us resurrection life. "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming" reminds us that Christ's power dispels earth's darkness and lightens the burdens that we carry. Charles Wesley assures us in "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus" that the fears and sorrows plaguing us now will one day find full consolation in Jesus's presence.

As we sing into the darkness of our grief, music becomes for us, as Maria von Trapp once said, "a powerful instrument, a mighty weapon" of hope.

## All Ye Citizens of Heav'n Above

If you're grieving the loss of a loved one at the holidays, no doubt you long for her presence. You miss his twinkling eyes on Christmas morning as you unwrap gifts. You miss her welcoming hug when you enter the house for Christmas dinner. The absence of our loved ones can loom large. Bittersweet memories can choke the joy from even the best-intentioned festivities.

I remember standing in church to sing "O Come, All Ye Faithful" after my husband died. I didn't feel particularly festive, and I mumbled the words quietly as the congregation sang with gusto. The music swelled as we began to sing verse two, and suddenly my eyes clouded with tears. "Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation; *O sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!*" The words fell fresh on my heart as I realized with startling clarity: I wasn't singing alone. Yes, the pew beside me stood empty. The space where my husband sat would not be filled again. But as we gathered to celebrate Jesus's arrival and the

inauguration of God's good kingdom, as a citizen now of Heaven, *he was singing too.*

Christmas carols welcome our sorrow. They masterfully engage it and contextualize it in the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And, for those of us who grieve, Christmas carols remind us that we celebrate this year—and every year until Jesus comes again—with the communion of saints. Though absent in body, our loved ones are present in spirit. Together, we lift our hearts in praise to the resurrected Lord who has promised us the "endless bliss" of "Good Christian Friends, Rejoice." As we grieve, we and those we love who have gone before are together the saints of "Angels We Have Heard on High," watching long for our full redemption.

Holidays are hard when you are grieving, but carols can offer solace. The pain we know here will not be forever. Christ's birth assures us that God enters into our sorrow and triumphs over it. Until that day of ultimate consummation, our loved ones are safe in his care, already singing His praises. In anticipation of that great day when we will sing together, may carols tune your heart this Christmas. This holiday, with all the company of Heaven, let's rehearse for our everlasting song.

Christ, to Thee with God the Father,  
And, O Holy Ghost, to Thee,  
Hymn and chant with high thanksgiving,  
And unwearied praises be:  
Honor, glory, and dominion,  
And eternal victory,  
Evermore and evermore! ■

**Clarissa Moll** is an author, a podcaster, and the young widow of author Rob Moll.

Clarissa's writing has appeared in Christianity Today, The Gospel Coalition, RELEVANT, Modern Loss, Grief Digest and more. She is the author of *Beyond the Darkness: A Gentle Guide for Living with Grief and Thriving after Loss*.





eternal perspective ministries  
39065 Pioneer Blvd., Suite 100  
Sandy, OR 97055

free  
shipping

on any order from EPM  
with code **THANKFUL22**

Free media mail shipping  
offer good through  
December 8, 2022. U.S.  
continental orders only.

