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

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Manci Acom

Service and Memorial Fund

Nanci's service will be held Sunday, May 15 at 3:30 p.m. PT at Good Shepherd Community Church, 28986 SE Haley Rd, Boring, Oregon. A live stream will be available at http://memorial.gshep.us and the video will also be available at that web address after the service.

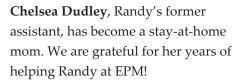
Thanks so much for your continued prayers for the Alcorn family. They would also appreciate prayer that the service will be honoring to Nanci and above all honoring to her beloved Jesus.

The family asks that in lieu of flowers, those who would like to give a gift consider giving to the memorial fund set up in Nanci's honor. Go to 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 some 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).



Staff Changes at EPM

After many years of serving EPM, Linda Jeffries retired last December. We wish her and her husband Kerry all the best in this new season of life!



We recently welcomed **Heidi** McLaughlin to our staff. She oversees EPM's ministry of sending Randy's books to prisoners.



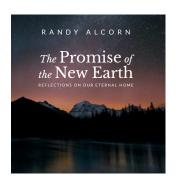




New to EPM in Late 2022

The Promise of the New Earth: Reflections on Our Eternal Home will be available exclusively from EPM in late 2022.

This beautiful gift book combines solid biblical teaching gleaned from Randy Alcorn's bestselling book, Heaven, with



beautiful photographs to help readers joyfully anticipate what awaits Christ's followers on the New Earth.



Trusting

Reflections from Nanci Alcorn, Now with Jesus

Introduction from Randy: On Monday, March 28, Nanci went to be with Jesus. I'm so happy for her, so sad for our family. But our happiness for her triumphs over our sadness. Grieving is ahead, and it will of course be hard, as grieving always is. But these last four years (and especially Nanci's last

year and in particular, her last month) gave us a head start on the grieving process. I am so proud of my wife for her dependence on Jesus and her absolute trust in the sovereign plan and

love of God. Nanci is and always will be an inspiration to me.

What a great and kind Savior we know and serve. Nanci now lives where she sees this firsthand, in the place where joy truly is the air she breathes: "In your presence is fullness of

Though we asked God wholeheartedly to heal Nanci, we recognized Him as Lord and trusted Him to do His will even if it wasn't our will.

joy, at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11). She is safely home with Jesus and God's family—including both of our moms and dads and many dear friends, such as Michele Norquist and Erin Seymour, who both died in January. She lives in the present Heaven, awaiting the resurrection and the New Earth, free from pain and suffering and curse. What could be better for her? I am sad when I think of myself, but so happy when I think of Nanci. I am finding surpassing joy in knowing she is experiencing surpassing joy.

Thank you so much for all your prayers, some of you for four years of praying consistently for Nanci. My heart is full of gratitude to you. Don't feel your prayers were not answered. Many of them were, and many others were answered in a better way than we could ever ask. Oswald Chambers wrote, "We impoverish God in our minds when we say there must be answers to our prayers on the material plane; the biggest answers to our prayers are in the realm of the unseen."

Nanci and I prayed together every night for over four years, asking God to remove the cancer. We asked Him to perform a miracle, and if He didn't do that, to use the medical means over which He is sovereign to save her life. I don't regret all those prayers for a moment. I believe it was right to ask, and I know we were sincere in our asking. God didn't answer as we hoped He would. But then God also didn't answer the prayer of Jesus to have the cup of suffering taken from Him.

In Gethsemane Jesus prayed to His Father three times, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39, NIV). A bit later, Jesus prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done" (Matthew 26:42, NIV). Though we asked God wholeheartedly to heal Nanci, we recognized Him as Lord and trusted Him to do His will even if it wasn't our will. We knew what God sovereignly chose would be both for His glory and Nanci's good.

Similarly, Paul prayed earnestly for God to remove a physical disability, but recognized God had a higher purpose in not removing it (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).

Some people claim that if God doesn't answer your prayers as you wish, it's your fault because you lack faith. By the same logic, Jesus and Paul were at fault that their prayers weren't answered as they desired. (But of course, Scripture does not fault them at all for this.)

I vividly remember hearing the story twenty-two years ago, in May 2000, when Pastor James

Montgomery Boice preached at Tenth

Memorial Church in Philadelphia for the last time. He told his stunned congregation that he was rapidly dying of cancer. At the end of the message Boice said,

Should you pray for a miracle? Well, you're free to do that, of course. My general impression is that the God who is able to perform miracles—and certainly He

can—is also able to keep you from getting the problem in the first place...Above all, I would say pray for the glory of God. If you think of God glorifying Himself in history and you say, 'Where in all of history has God most glorified Himself?' the answer is that He did it at the cross of Jesus Christ, and it wasn't by delivering Jesus from the cross, though He could have... And yet that's where God is most glorified.

On Monday, March 21, exactly one week before Nanci died, our family, including both our daughters and their husbands and children, met for what was the final gathering IN THIS WORLD of our tribe of 11. (It was NOT our final gathering, as I am confident we will gather often after the

resurrection, on the New Earth, and will see each other sooner in the present Heaven.) Honestly, I can't imagine any family having a more Christhonoring send off and short-term goodbye of a loved one. Nanci heard words of deep love and respect from her children and grandchildren, sonsin-law, and husband. She spoke to us for 15 or 20 minutes. It was Christ-centered and remarkably clear, way longer than any period of time in which she had spoken with clarity for weeks. I then read powerful segments from her handwritten journals.

Two of the grandsons said they would never forget this day, and the others in their own way made it clear they felt the same. Nanci's desire was to have an eternal impact on the lives of her grandsons, and her life did that, but this day was the culmination.

It was all encapsulated in those thoughts Nanci

wrote to God in her journal and allowed me to read. Our family members were blown away to hear in her own words the depth of her trust in the love and sovereignty of God. There is so much Scripture and so much Charles Spurgeon woven into her journal, way more than personal details of things happening in her life. This is not a conventional journal. Nanci says five to ten times more about God than she does about herself.

It's very powerful material, with remarkable spiritual depth. Every time I read from her journals, God speaks to and stirs my heart. EPM has already heard from readers on social media that the excerpts and quotes we've shared have been incredibly helpful.

May God use Nanci's words to touch and encourage you today.

From Manci's Journal

"We have no cause of fear. His eye is upon us, his arm over us, his ear open to our prayer—his grace sufficient, his promise unchangeable." - John Newton

That promise, found in Romans 8:27-30, is:

- The Holy Spirit prays for me according to the will of God.
- God always works to cause everything to result in my best interest.
- God works "everything" to conform me to the image of His Son.
- God called me; He justified me; and He will glorify me.

God is in control. I am not. God knows my future. I do not. God always has my best interest in mind. I can trust that.

"If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies. Yet distance makes no difference. He is praying for me." -Robert Murray M'Cheyne

Yesterday I was mourning my summer. I was looking at pictures on my phone of last summer at the beach with Maggie and the boys; of Dodge Park; of doing things. I had tears of "what I had missed." Now I'm missing the boys' games, missing walking our dog Maggie, the PAO conference, and doing many more

things! Then one of my devotionals from Face to Face with Jesus talked about clinging to our own plans and desires instead of yielding to the path God has for us.

The path God laid out for me over the past eight months did not provide me with many if any—options wherein I could choose to follow my own plans and desires. Surgery and pain, radiation and chemo and pain and fatigue, more chemo with greater pain and fatigue. All these were unavoidable.

But the best that came my way in God's sovereign plan over these months has been my heart yielding to God's plan. I have sat reading books about God. I have sat reading God's Word. I have sat pouring my heart out to God and praising God, and coming to a new and greater belief in His love for me; a new and greater trust in His plans for me, a new and greater expectation of what my death will bring!

I would not trade a spring and summer filled with fun and projects needing to get done, over what God had planned. He knew what was in my best interest! He knew what would draw me to Himself in ways I never anticipated.

My Savior ministered to me greatly this morning with this truth: I will be ready to die when my time comes because my Shepherd will give me His joy, peace, and readiness. It will not be me working up enough faith and trust; my God will fight that battle for me! It will be His perfect ministering Spirit who will carry me peacefully—jubilantly—into God's arms.

"What if we should soon be called to the heavenly realm? Certainly, there would be nothing to deplore in such a summons, but everything to rejoice in. Living or dying we are the Lord's. If we live, Jesus will be with us; if we die, we will be with Jesus." —Charles Spurgeon

"In those days when you pray, I will listen. You will find me when you seek me, if you look for me in earnest. Yes, says the Lord, I will be found by you" (Jeremiah 29:12-14, TLB).

We know these days that God always listens to us because of His Son's work on our behalf. When I pray I never worry about having God's attention. I never need to plead for His ear, or His heart to take heed. God always listens to me.

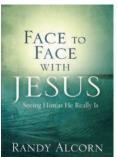
The Holy Spirit gives me words to say. Jesus advocates my prayers with God the Father. God wants me to pray to Him.

Even though God has already sovereignly determined the plans for my life, somehow my prayer requests play a solid role in it all. I do not need to understand how this fits; I do need to trust that God has declared to use my prayers. God wants to hear my prayers.

My prayers to God keep my spiritual life alive. I recognize God's sovereignty and power when I pray. I feel His love, grace, and faithfulness. Prayer helps me keep things in perspective. Nothing "just happens." Everything is planned in love. Everything is carried out in wisdom, power, and love.

Because I am not God, I should never question why things go the way they go. It is the height of foolishness to determine that my ways are preferable to God's ways.

I am not omniscient, all-wise, or totally just. I don't even love myself nearly as much as God loves me!!! So why would I ever second guess God? He always, always has my best interests in mind even when His way for me



is painful, unclear, frightening, seemingly unfair, emotionally difficult, mentally challenging. I need to trust, to believe that God does all things well.

"And I pray that Christ will be more at home in your hearts as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love" (Ephesians 3:17, TLB).

Needing to trust in Christ and then choosing to do so, results in Him making a home deeper in my heart. That bond which becomes more established between us comes from my recognition and acceptance of my need for Him. It comes from placing my trust in Him. It is lessened by my questioning and resentment of His ways. My trust allows my soul to continuously grow in the presence of God's love for me, which is a deep and marvelous love.

My prayer:

Ancient of Days,

You have shown yourself to me over these months. You have stayed by my side, of course, but you have allowed me to feel your presence. Thank you with all my heart.

You, in your wisdom, did not choose to remove all side effects, but you, in your mercy, did eliminate some and lighten others.

I pray that you will continue to teach me about your love, faithfulness, and grace through pain, and uncertainty, and waiting—waiting—waiting.

I praise and thank you for your sovereign hand on my life. I truly trust you with my life.

I don't want anything to happen (and it won't) which is outside your will.

You know what is best. You are always working in my best interests.

Now, please, Heavenly Father, give me your strength, your courage, your perspective as I seek to accept with thanksgiving whatever you have for me.

I still need your help to be able to say, "I will accept with joy, praise, and thanksgiving anything and everything ahead."

More pain. More fear. More uncertainty, more waiting. I need your sweet and powerful Holy Spirit to infuse my heart with your joy and thanksgiving. I'm bringing this request to your throne.

"I shall...be united to the Ancient of Days, to God himself, who had no morning, never began...No man ever saw God and lived; and yet I shall not live till I see God; and when I have seen him I shall never die." - John Donne



Closing Thoughts from Randy: Well done, good and faithful daughter of God. What a privilege, my sweetheart, to have lived this life with you. You said to me before you died, "Thank you for my life." And I said, "Thank you for my life." I so look forward to the wonders and glories we will experience together with Jesus and God's family and our family in the world to come, where joy will be the air we breathe.



With one look into Jesus' eyes, a person's life could change forever.

distracted with "more important" things. And with one look into His eyes, a person's life could change forever.

Do You Really See?

Luke records a powerful moment when a sinful woman was forgiven by Jesus (see Luke 7:36-50). But this story isn't just about the forgiveness of the woman's sins; it's also about the power of seeing those around us.

In this story, Jesus was dining with a Pharisee. While he was reclining, a "woman of the city, who was a sinner" came to the Pharisee's house and brought her expensive alabaster flask of ointment to pour on Jesus' feet (Luke 7:37). Weeping, the woman wiped His feet with her hair and kissed them. The Pharisee was appalled by the woman's display and Jesus' receptiveness to her gift. He said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner" (verse 39).

Jesus responded right away to Simon, the prideful and blinded Pharisee, who had missed the point of the moment.

Turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ...You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." (Luke 7:44-47, emphasis added)

Jesus asked Simon, "Do you see this woman?" Though the woman was in Simon's presence,

he didn't really see her the way Jesus did. In his arrogance, he was preoccupied, and he missed the opportunity to see deeper-past her appearance, down to her heart. But Jesus saw her, and He opened Simon's eyes to see her too.

Jesus' challenge to Simon is the same as the challenge to us. Do you see?

Do you see those around you who are broken, beaten, and bruised?

Do you see those in need of love, grace, and mercy?

Do you see the hungry and homeless?

Do you see the widow and the orphan?

Do you see your neighbor?

Jesus taught us the ministry of eye contact and the ministry of presence can powerfully change the person being seen... and the one seeing.

Gretchen Saffles is the author of The Well-Watered Woman: Rooted in Truth, Growing in Grace, Flourishing in Faith, and the founder of Well-Watered Women (wellwateredwomen.com). an online ministry that reaches women worldwide with the hope of the gospel.

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What If I Don't Look Forward to Christ's Return and Heaven?

Question from a reader:

I've read *Heaven* and loved it! However, I still struggle with getting excited about Christ's return. I know Heaven will not be disappointing in any way, but the idea of not being able to live a full life and watching my children grow up is hard for me.

Answer from Stephanie Anderson, EPM staff:

I relate to your concerns because I too, want to watch my children grow up. I believe that ultimately, it is a matter of trust. Do we trust Jesus to return at exactly the right time? Do we trust that He has our children's lives in His hands, and that He knows and has numbered their exact days, and ours too? "...in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them" (Psalm 139:16). His plans for our future and theirs are infinitely better than anything we can come up with. He is wise, and we can rest in His wisdom. "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Romans 11:33).

Randy writes in his book *If God Is Good*: "When Jesus finally came as the Lamb of God, He came not a moment too soon. And when He returns as the Lion, again it will be not a moment too soon—or too late."

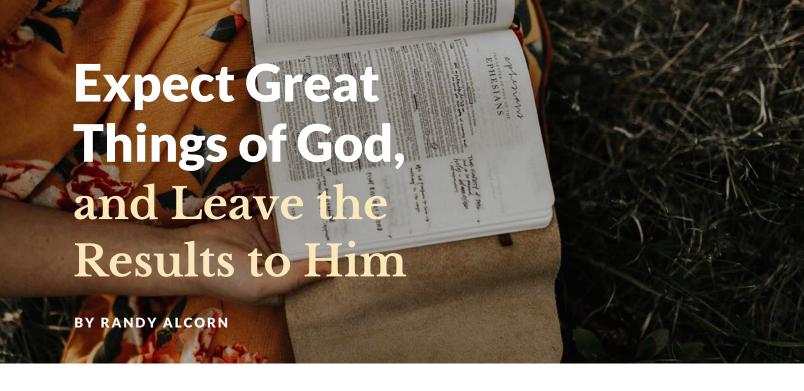
Throughout Christian history, the return of Jesus and the hope of eternity have been a bright light

for believers, keeping them going when times are hard. I think part of the reason that we don't long more for it is because we've had life so good here in modern America. We've not experienced war on our doorsteps or what it is to be starving, in constant danger, afraid for our lives, watching our children die of hunger and violence and disease.

In Luke 21, Jesus talks about the end times and wars and pestilence and suffering. He says, "Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (v. 28). I love that picture of lifting up our heads in hope, knowing that Jesus, our Redeemer, is coming.

When we are in Christ's presence, whether at His return or our deaths, we will experience fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11). That really will be living life to the full. Randy writes about life on the New Earth, "Eternal life will be enjoying forever what life on Earth is at its finest moments, what it was intended to be. Since in Heaven we'll finally experience life at its best, it would be more accurate to call our present existence the beforelife rather than what follows the afterlife."

We can pray and ask God to fill us with a longing for Heaven and our eternal future. And we can also pray with the Psalmist: "My times are in your hand" (Psalm 31:15). That's a good place to be—in our Father's hands, trusting Him for our future and our children's future.



n his article "Beware the Scarcity Gospel," Andy Jones writes, Is it possible that some of us, having rightly rejected the prosperity gospel, have subtly succumbed to another insidious belief? I call it the scarcity gospel—the assumption that we should expect God to do little through our churches or in our lifetime.

We don't expect to see people come to faith in surprising numbers through our churches. We don't expect to see a surprising work of God's Spirit sweep through our churches and strengthen the faith of congregants. We don't expect to see the gospel advance in places and among people where the church is underrepresented. We expect little. And that may be what we actually experience during our lifetime (James 4:2b).

We aren't promised the church will advance or progress exponentially. Yet we should expect God to do more than we can ask or think (Eph. 3:20), while entrusting him with the final result.

The term "scarcity gospel," though catchy, could be mistaken as the opposite of the prosperity gospel (the teaching that God will bless with material abundance and good health those who obey Him and lay claim to His promises). It really isn't, as the

truth is not halfway between the two. Both false perspectives betray the same false Christ-absent focus, just in a different way.

Instead of blind optimism, low expectations of God reveal a blind *pessimism* about the power of God's work. We sometimes raise our expectations to insist upon—even demand—complete divine healing or the perfect mate or job or church or children. And other times, we lower our expectations closer to those of atheists than of believers. We forget that He is able "to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20).

We can't raise the bar of faith too high as long as the object of our faith is God, who always knows better than we do. He sometimes does His greatest work when He doesn't answer our prayers the way we would like them answered, and instead shapes our character, Christlikeness, and faith, and tenderizes our hearts toward hurting believers and unbelievers. If we have eyes to see, we will realize this miracle is far greater than the miracles we sometimes want to see but don't.

Corrie Ten Boom wrote, "The wonderful thing about praying is that you leave a world of not being able to do something, and enter God's realm where everything is possible. He specializes in the

impossible. Nothing is too great for His almighty power. Nothing is too small for His love."

We should see God at work both in the prayers He answers affirmatively and in the prayers He answers differently than we asked. He works behind the scenes, and one day, even if not in this life, we will see His hidden purposes for our suffering. "Who is like you, O Yahweh, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?" (Exodus 15:11).

Last New Year's Eve, we planned to do what we have done nearly every year: spend the evening with two other couples, some of our dearest friends. We usually talk about our families, our church, God's Word, and theological questions, and we watch football and comedy routines and tell stories—sometimes the same stories. Occasionally details change and those stories get funnier. Above all, we talk about Jesus. We laugh and cry together, as close friends do.

Nanci had expected to feel up to going but couldn't. We were all disappointed, but we believed God was at work. We chose to trust in His sovereign love and purposes, knowing He will not fail us or forsake us. We refused to lay claim to the prosperity gospel or wallow in low expectations. By God's grace, we fixed our eyes on Jesus and made Him the object of our faith.

Then the next day, New Year's, one of those friends, Michele, went for a walk after dark. She collapsed and died on a sidewalk two blocks from her house. Her body was found by a neighbor. And almost three months later, Nanci went to be with Iesus.

I shared at Michele's memorial service that we should not deny death's reality or minimize our sorrow and grief and suffering and shock. But we also must not minimize the love, power, sovereign wisdom, and promises of the God who is infinitely greater than death and will one day swallow up death forever (Isaiah 25:8). Death will not have the last word. Life will. Suffering will not have the last word. Happiness will. Sin will not have the last word. Righteousness will. Satan will not have the last word. God will.

If the object of our faith is a genie God who grants us our wishes, or a handcuffed or impoverished God who no longer does the miraculous, then our faith is not in the true God revealed in Scripture. The solution to both blind optimism and blind pessimism is the same: to learn to see God at work wherever we suppose He isn't—such as in the events of the last two years.

In many ways, believers have largely failed the test of our recent adversity, including politics and COVID, but may we not resign ourselves to ongoing failure. Let us instead call upon the infinite power of God to transform us into the humble, loving, unified servants Jesus commanded and expected us to be in John 13 and 17 and countless other passages. Our high calling of love and unity is not impossible: "For nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).

We should raise the bar of trust in our omnipotent miracleworking God, and lower the bar of trust in what we think all the answers to our prayers should look like. Missionary William Carey set an excellent example: "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God." All the while, may we realize that God is God and leave the results to Him. Let's thank Him for empowering us to be

Death will not have the last word. Life will. Suffering will not have the last word. Happiness will. Sin will not have the last word. Righteousness will. Satan will not have the last word. God will.

who He has called us to be: people of grace, truth, faith, and hope, with eyes open to the power, presence, and sovereign love of our King.

"Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, emphasis added). ■

The Art of **Arguing Well**

Six Strategies for Winning the Abortion Debate Without Losing Your Audience



BY MIKE SPENCER

met Reagan on a flight home from a speaking engagement. After a few friendly questions, I discovered that he had married two years earlier, worked for the United States Air Force, and was returning from a business trip.

Our conversation lapsed, but about twenty minutes before our plane landed, I noticed Reagan had closed his book, so I asked another question. Eventually, he asked about my work. I explained that I advocate for the unborn threatened by abortion, as well as for their mothers facing unplanned pregnancies. Without skipping a beat, he responded, "I lean toward the pro-choice position. Tell me why I should be pro-life." I answered, "Well, actually, you shouldn't be pro-life if the science of human embryology is wrong." Reagan's curiosity was piqued, and we launched into a meaningful dialogue by focusing our discussion on the question at the heart of the abortion debate, "What are the unborn?" Before long, we had an audience as the passengers in the two rows in front of us didn't even pretend not to be listening.

As the plane landed, Reagan surprised me with another direct question: "Thirty years of marriage? What's your secret?" I answered, "Reagan, there's no secret. My wife and I are convinced Jesus Christ is who He claimed to be. We've built our lives on this truth, and it has made all the difference in our marriage." I have no idea what lasting impact, if any, my words had on him or

our extended audience. But God knows, and I trust Him to use my words for His purposes.

I confess this was a conversation I could not have had 20 years ago. At that time, I lacked both the knowledge and the skill to navigate through thorny subjects like abortion without my passions getting the better of me. In my earlier years I meant well, but it is possible to have the right answers and the right motivation but the wrong approach. The apostle Paul must have had this in mind when he wrote, "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Colossians 3:5-6).

Here are six simple strategies that will help you win the abortion debate without losing, or alienating, your audience.

Strategy #1: Take an honest interest in others.

With the noteworthy exception of public pro-life events and displays designed to create public dialogue, generally the most effective way to start one-on-one conversations about abortion is to talk about other things and simply look for natural openings. With Reagan, I did not set out to have a conversation about abortion. However, by expressing an honest interest in his life, a door of opportunity opened.

I've found that people are very interested in discussing abortion but are more inclined to do so when they know our care for them is genuine and not a sneaky sales tactic. If we are not careful, our burden for the unborn (or any theological, political, or social topic) can blind us relationally, causing us to view family, friends, and strangers as targets rather than as people.

Strategy #2: Attack arguments, not people.

Preaching the gospel repeatedly brought Jesus' disciples face-to-face with hostile opponents. They undoubtedly felt the urge to lash out, to respond sarcastically, and to portray their antagonists unfairly. But they didn't. Paul wrote, "Christ's love compels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14). What a powerful example. Clever tactics and good apologetic arguments are vitally important, but arguing well on behalf of the unborn has to begin with love. We must resist the temptation to attack or demonize those with whom we disagree.

However, loving and respecting people does not mean loving and respecting their opinions. Some ideas are so bad and so dangerous that we are dutybound to expose them (2 Corinthians 10:5). When an idea or argument justifies killing innocent human beings, defeating it becomes our calling.

This isn't an easy balance. If we are motivated by anything less than Christ's love, the worst in them will bring out the worst in us.

Strategy #3: Define "winning" from a biblical perspective.

Winning does not necessarily mean having your pro-choice friend on his knees renouncing his proabortion position. There is freedom in recognizing that our part is simply to "make the most of every opportunity," to be sure our conversations are "always full of grace and seasoned with salt," and then to trust God for the results. Understanding this helps take the pressure off. Treat your opponents in such a way that if they visit your church and sit in the pew next to you, you will have nothing for which to apologize.



10 Tips for Communicating the Prolife Message from Randy Alcorn

- 1. Tailor your presentation to your audience so that you're speaking to them, not to yourself.
- 2. Realize the vested interests, denial, and rationalization surrounding this issue.
- 3. Do your homework. The other position can afford to be ignorant of the facts. You can't.
- 4. Present the facts logically, clearly, and succinctly, citing credible sources (secular whenever possible).
- 5. Use terms they're familiar with, not prolife buzzwords.
- 6. Appeal to their curiosity and openmindedness to hear a suppressed and politically incorrect viewpoint. (Prochoice is the status quo. establishment position. Prolife is the radical, counterculture position.)
- 7. Be rational and calm. When you're right, there's no need to be defensive.
- 8. Be prepared for straw man and ad hominem arguments, but don't use them yourself.
- 9. Ask them questions that will make them think.
- 10. Be sensitive to the spiritual needs of your audience. (Look and pray for heart change, not just head change.)

From ProLife Answers to ProChoice Arguments See epm.org/prolifebooks

Strategy #4: Stay focused on the unborn and stay out of the weeds.

Abortion supporters want to talk about anything and everything except the unborn child. They talk about a woman's "right to choose," a broken foster-care system, hard-case scenarios like rape and incest, and a litany of other secondary issues. While these topics deserve our attention, none of them has anything to do with the moral question of abortion.

Even though many pro-choice people would have us believe abortion is a complicated matter, Scott Klusendorf lays out the pro-life argument with clarity: Premise 1: It is morally wrong to intentionally kill an innocent human being. Premise 2: Abortion intentionally kills an innocent human being. Conclusion: Abortion is morally wrong.

So keep the unborn front-and-center in your conversations or you will end up in the tangled weeds of red herrings, empty slogans, and misleading clichés.

Strategy #5: When appropriate, be the one to end the conversation.

We have all encountered well-intentioned pro-lifers whose zeal blinded them to normal social graces, causing others to avoid them like the plague. Being the one to end the conversation in situations where you are likely to have future opportunities to revisit the topic can be particularly helpful. When people know they can leave a conversation, they feel free to stay with it or to return to it at another time.

Strategy #6: Keep in mind that the world is watching you.

Although we shouldn't be consumed with an unhealthy need to be liked or accepted, we should nevertheless care deeply about how we are perceived. We represent another King and another Kingdom: "We are Christ's ambassadors as though God were making His appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). When it comes to conversations about abortion, what we say and how we say it can have life and death consequences for our tiniest neighbors. This should cause us to be on our best behavior, "so that in every

way" we "will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive" (Titus 2:10).

Unfortunately, many of our adversaries have painted us as belligerent, religious know-nothings bent on oppressing women. And much of our public discourse over morality and politics has decayed into a snarky game of "gotcha" where civility and diplomacy are sacrificed on the altar of winning at all costs. But the command to "Make the most of every opportunity" is not about scoring points or crushing people; it is about finding ways to argue our case persuasively, with kindness.

Remember, "Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones" (Proverbs 16:24). We should ask ourselves, "What is in my heart? Do I value crushing my enemies more than winning them over?" A little kindness goes a long way in developing the type of trust that invites greater and more meaningful dialogue.

Mike Spencer serves as the founder and president of Project LifeVoice (projectlifevoice.com), a gospel-driven human rights organization that equips and inspires pro-life ambassadors. He is also the author of Humanly Speaking: The Evil of Abortion, the Silence of the Church, and the Grace of God, available from Amazon.

"In Humanly Speaking, Mike Spencer presents a compelling case for the humanity and dignity of the unborn and calls the church to respond accordingly. May God use this excellent book to empower church



leaders and Christ-followers everywhere."

-Randy Alcorn and Stephanie Anderson



Make More **Disciples** and Fewer **Performers**

he 1977 movie, Capricorn One, depicted NASA's long process of targeting a mission to Mars. Because the program had become increasingly unpopular due to several failures, this mission would make or break the U.S. space program. Everything was in place. The astronauts were ready. Then suddenly, just before takeoff, they were secreted away to an undisclosed location. Meanwhile the capsule was launched into outer space. From the point of view of those on Earth, it appeared to be a complete success.

But why was the launch made without astronauts? Because the scientists discovered a flaw in the capsule's life support system. The oxygen wouldn't last. The astronauts would die.

Then why not reschedule the departure? Because it would be an admission of failure on the part of the space program, and they could

How the movie ends actually doesn't matter, but I see the plot as analogous to what happens in some churches. According to current thinking, churches must chase success. And success is defined by numbers: how many worshippers and how much wealth. The number of Facebook followers becomes more important than the number of Jesus-followers.

Many churches exist solely to seek God and share Him with their communities. They may use technology and programs as tools to reach as many people for Christ as they can. Good for them!

My concern is with churches that use God as a tool to launch programs and meet benchmarks of success. Instead of sharing the true gospel, which is what people really need, they compromise on the nature of the gospel and adopt the world's message and methodology. What these churches produce ends up essentially mirroring what NASA did in Capricorn One. They focus on performance over process. On stagecraft over sanctification. Pastorsturned-performers act as if the Spirit of God were doing great and wonderful things, when in fact nothing supernatural has happened.

This breeds attendees who become like the astronauts-turned-actors. They are exposed to the world throughout the week and come to church for entertainment packaged as a religious and transcendent experience. They want the best of this world and the next without the sacrifice—and they want it now.

Our tendency is to believe that those who act like us, since we are converts, are true converts.



When Jesus is the center of gravity, the church body becomes truly healthy in all the right ways.

But the point of conversion is a transformed life, the kind of life that re-centers itself around Christ. If you and your fellow church goers exhibit the characteristic fruit of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23), then you are on the right track. When Jesus is the center of gravity not pleasure, success, wealth, and health—the church body becomes truly healthy and wealthy in all the right ways.

When the world offers those things, it does so as substitutes for Christ. This means the lives of actor-converts are not Christ-centered, no matter how Christian their vocabulary may sound. Jesus Himself expected radical obedience from His followers: "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" (Luke 6:46).

Pretend actors-for-Jesus can quote Scripture, but their desires haven't changed. They merely feel good that they now have religion, too. Their faith is not a central transforming reality; it's an add-on to enhance their lives. They believe in a god made in their own image, not the true God of the Bible. They worship a cosmic genie who meets their needs and gives them what they want. They may call themselves servants of Christ. But in fact, they are masters, calling the shots, claiming what they want to claim and believing what they want to believe and expecting God to come through for them. And when He doesn't, they either blame Him for not being good or blame themselves and others for not having enough faith to get their way.

How different from the biblical description of us as slaves of Jesus Christ! Yes, the original word is best translated slaves, not servants, and describes those who are sold out to His ownership and committed to do whatever He calls them to do, including dying on His behalf should He so desire. "Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves" (1 Peter 2:16, NIV).

We are also called children of the King, and there is a time when we will enjoy all the privileges of royalty. But now is not that time! Presently we

"The Kingdom of God is not going to be advanced by our churches becoming filled with men, but by men in our churches becoming filled with God."

—Duncan Campbell

"The one indispensable requirement for producing godly, mature Christians is godly, mature Christians." -Kevin DeYoung

experience some royal kingdom privileges, including constant and unhindered access to the One who sits on the throne. We can "come boldly before the throne of grace," as Hebrews says. God's Holy Spirit dwells within us. He has promised to provide what we need to serve Him (Matthew 6:25-32). But when it comes to enjoying all the material provisions living in the King's mansion provides, we are not yet there.

We are still on foreign soil—hostile soil—where people are fighting against God's kingdom. We are not just tourists or palace-dwellers; we are "strangers and exiles on the earth," who are "seeking a homeland" (Hebrews 11:13-14), and longing for "a better country, that is, a heavenly one" (Hebrews 11:16).

What we need in our churches today are fewer actors and more sold-out followers of Jesus—converted people living lives centered on Jesus, the King of kings.

And the good news is, there truly are many such people in our churches. Our goal should be to cultivate more and more of them. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20, NIV).

We don't need makeovers and airbrushing; we need transformation. We need a miracle that God alone can perform in our hearts. And we need to stand together, arm in arm, loving one another and showing the world the marvelous truth about Jesus. Some will misunderstand and even hate that. But others will be drawn to Jesus and His Good News, and forever changed.

If we're going to act, let's act like Jesus and watch what happens. ■

The Value of **Knowing Both Sides**

BY DAN FRANKLIN

The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.

PROVERBS 18:17

n formal debate, participants prepare themselves to be able to articulate and defend a certain side of an argument. But they often are not told until right before the debate which side they will need to argue. For example, they may know that the debate is about the death penalty, but they may not know whether they will be arguing for or against it.

Because of this, debaters are forced to learn both sides of an issue. In fact, they are forced to know both sides so well that they would be able to effectively argue for positions with which they disagree.

This skill—the ability to articulate both sides of an issue—is in short supply in American culture. Most debates that we observe on television consist of two people trying to outshout and demonize each other. This is because it is much easier to dismiss opposing arguments than it is to understand them.

And most of us opt for the easy way more than we realize. We do this by listening to podcasts, reading books, and watching shows that reinforce—rather than challenge—our beliefs. It is more comfortable to think that the other side (politically, theologically, or in relationships) is immoral or foolish than to think that they may have arguments that would challenge us.

Proverbs 18:17 says, "In a lawsuit, the first to speak seems right until someone comes forward and cross-examines" (NIV). In this verse, Solomon says that wise people make sure that they know both sides of an issue before drawing a conclusion. Because this practice is so rare in our culture, I want to offer four ways that we can follow Solomon's wise words and pursue understanding both sides.

- Assume there is more to the story. I have three sons. When one of them comes to me with a story about how his brother attacked him, I find myself being skeptical. I am not skeptical that a conflict occurred. I am simply skeptical that the conflict arose because of one completely innocent victim and one unprovoked perpetrator. So I ask questions, and I listen to both of them give their explanations for what happened. This is a good practice not only in parenting, but in life as a whole. If you find yourself saying something like, "Why would anyone vote for that candidate?" or "Why would any thinking person be an atheist?" I suggest that you begin with the assumption that your perspective would be different if you had more information. This would not necessarily mean that your opinion about politics or religion would change, but you may end up having more empathy and respect for those who hold differing viewpoints.
- Listen to the other side's best case. We can all find YouTube videos of our favorite debaters ripping their opponents to shreds. However, many of these videos exist because the debate is a mismatch. My suggestion is not simply to listen to a liberal if you are a conservative, or to a prolife person if you are pro-choice. My suggestion is to listen to the most articulate liberal or the most intelligent pro-life person. Listen to the other side make their best case and see if your belief stands up to this. In saying this, I am not suggesting that Christians should only read books by atheists (I think this would be a bad idea because we all need encouragement from other believers). I am simply suggesting that it is best not to draw a firm conclusion unless we have heard the other side give their best argument. I personally read a lot of books by people with whom I agree. But I also read books by people who disagree with me on

foundational issues, whether relating to God, to politics, to the Bible, or to human nature. Listening to the other side gives me a great chance to (a) be more secure in my position or (b) change my mind when presented with a better option.

- Ask questions. Social media thrives on each person expressing strong opinions. While strong opinions may get clicks and likes, they are often uninformed. If wisdom is found in knowing both sides, cultivate the skill of asking questions. If someone says something that you find outlandish, ask them about it instead of simply concluding that they are a fool. We would all do well if we had less name-calling and more question-asking.
 - Offer conclusions humbly. I'm not saying that we shouldn't have strong beliefs and convictions. We absolutely should. G.K. Chesterton—one of my favorite authors—said, "Merely having an open mind is nothing. The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid." So draw conclusions. I personally have very strong beliefs about God as the one and only Creator, about Jesus Christ as God's only Son, about our need for salvation through Christ alone because of our sins, about the resurrection of Jesus, and about a number of other issues. And when we come to strong conclusions, most of us want to share those conclusions with others. But we should do this with humility. After all, if you have arrived at the truth, the great thing that you have to offer is not yourself, but the truth. ■

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he biggest payoffs of writing come in three forms. One is the process itself, the research and the discipline of writing, which are good for the soul. Another is when the royalties come in, and our ministry has the joy of giving them all away to God's work all over the world.



The third payoff is getting responses to the books. I had some very discouraging times while I was writing Heaven where I stayed up half the night and asked, "Lord, is this going to make a difference? Is it worth it?"

Responses like the ones on the next page help me answer that question with a resounding Yes!

My oldest son yearned for Heaven at the young age of six. Little did we know he would be called Home a year later. He was wise beyond his years. Losing my son gave me an eternal perspective. I thank you, Randy, for your ministry. Your books helped me in my time of grief. -S.W.

Randy, you and Nanci both have ministered to countless numbers of people that you'll never know about this side of Heaven! From your prolife ministry to your wonderful advice on finances to encouraging people to a much greater understanding of Heaven...and all the prayers in between! You minister to us from before we are born until we meet eternity! -L.B.

My dad was a pastor for over 60 years. He read *Heaven* when his wife, my mom, was dying . He said about Heaven , "It's fantastical!" Unbeknownst to us, he had full blown cancer and passed into Glory two weeks later! Mom joined him nine months later. What a blessing to know we have eternity together! -M.C.

I, too, have given away many copies of your Heaven book. We lost our 3 1/2 year old little girl (adopted from China) six and a half years ago. A friend shared your book with me, and OH, what a blessing it was. I actually led your study of the book in our women's group at church a couple of years ago. We just lost our 31-year-old son on March 26. When I am able to, I will be reading your book again. -V.W.P.

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You minister to us from before we are born until we meet eternity!

My Mother died 15 years ago. It was Good Friday. Her church, which was in another town, was sending her their newsletters while she was in hospice at my home. The last one contained information that they were reading and studying the book Heaven by Randy Alcorn. I felt compelled to buy the book. What a blessing! This book got me through my stages of grief, giving me hope and faith for all that comes before me. -M.D.T.

Your book Heaven is playing in my ear every night when I fall asleep since I lost my daughter tragically in 2018. Your writing and expounding on Scripture have helped save my heart from such deep sorrow. Your creative writing has helped me (I'm an artist) visualize where my best friend/daughter is today. -M.L.

The *Heaven* book is probably one of the best books I ever read after my young wife died of cancer at 35. ... After reading the book years ago, I've never lost my desire for Heaven. -G.H.

I loved Heaven, especially about animals in Heaven, then read it again four years ago when my husband went to Heaven. I gave a copy to a dear friend and she accepted the Lord before she died. -T.P.H.

