

WHY I GIVE: An Interview with Pastor / Author Randy Alcorn

Randy Alcorn recently sat down with CBN.com's Craig von Buseck to talk about *The Treasure Principle*, and why he gives financially back to the Lord's work.

Craig von Buseck: What inspired you to write this book? I know that you've gone through some major issues financially. Were a lot of the principles learned through that?



Randy Alcorn: Certainly some of them were. The principle of God's ownership was something that I had written about in my book *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*, which came out in 1989. But I really came to experience the reality of it through a lawsuit from abortion clinics back when I was involved in the peaceful, non-violent, civil disobedience rescues that a lot of pastors were involved in. But Oregon is an extremely liberal climate -- we're the physician-assisted suicide state, and all that. So they decided to really crack down on us. Instead of doing what they've always done with civil rights protests or environmental protests (they have people chain themselves to trees) -- which is a slap on the hand, and at most go to jail for a night -- we went to jail and then we had civil suits trying to get our assets and our money to pay a judgement to an abortion clinic, though we had done no physical damage to the clinic. The bottom line was a couple of lawsuits, one of which was for \$8.4 million dollars, and which was successful. As one of the abortion clinic attorneys said to the judge, "My clients have every bit as much right to perform an abortion as McDonalds has to sell hamburgers." And, of course, legally he is correct -- not morally, but legally.

So they came to my church. I had been a pastor for thirteen years. Another pastor and myself had started it in 1977, and this was now 1990. They came to garnish my wages, and they were going to take a quarter of my income each month. So I told the judge, "I'll pay anything I owe. I'm very much a believer in financial integrity. One thing I won't do is write out a check to an abortion clinic because they're going to use it to kill children, and that would be wrong." So they did come to get my wages from the church through a court order. I wasn't defiant in my attitude, but I was refusing to comply with what they were telling me to do, which I thought was morally wrong. Once they came to get what the church owed me, which is the nature of garnishment, the church paid me up to the day what they owed me for that particular time of the month, and I resigned.

That seemed to be the only option at the time, and in retrospect it really was. It was kind of a Genesis 50 situation, where Joseph said to his brothers, "You intended it for evil, but God intended it for good, and for saving lives." And that's really what happened, because even though I loved being a pastor, and I didn't plan on being anything else, the Lord really opened up a door. We started this ministry where we deal with missions, and pro-life issues, and all kinds of things.

But one of the distinctives of that situation was that I couldn't make more than minimum wage, because if I did then it would be garnished. I couldn't own a house, a car, anything, because if I did they could take it. And so my wife became the legal owner of our house, which was already paid off, and any other assets that we have. So I haven't been able to write a check for twelve years. I haven't been able to have my name on anything. I don't mean that we're destitute -- we're not. I make minimum wage, but my wife is able to make a regular salary. And our house is paid off, so we do fine. But it really hit home, the reality of God's ownership and me being a steward.

It's probably easier for me to conceive of not owning anything than it is for most people because of this experience. But it's such a freeing experience, because what's happened is the royalties that come in for my books all go to our ministry. Then our ministry keeps ten percent for our overhead, and then gives away the other ninety percent to other ministries -- missions, prison ministries, pro-life organizations -- some good kingdom causes.

Interestingly, not too long after the ministry started owning all my royalties, all of a sudden the books started hitting the best seller's list. We wondered what was going on, and we came to the conclusion that God was raising money for His kingdom. Hopefully the books are having an impact on people, but in the last three years we had more than \$500,000 in royalties come in, and we were able to give away \$450,000 of that for kingdom causes.

Craig von Buseck: So the Treasure Principle is?

Randy Alcorn: The Treasure Principle is, you can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead. And that has to do with what Jesus said in Matthew 6:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and

rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21).

So the idea is that everybody knows, you can't take it with you. I tell the story of John D. Rockefeller. When he died his accountant was asked by a newspaper reporter, "How much money did John D. leave?" And the accountant answered, "He left all of it." Solomon, in Ecclesiastes, says what in essence you can paraphrase as 'you can't take it with you.' Scripture is very clear on that. Riches fly away. We will soon be parted from our riches. Either our riches will be destroyed, or we will be destroyed. But of course our lives don't end, we go somewhere else. We relocate. So the idea is, we relocate at death, why don't we relocate our treasures from earth to heaven before death?

One of the things I really emphasize in *The Treasure Principle* is that giving is often encouraged out of a sense of responsibility and duty and guilt. And I don't dismiss those, it is a responsibility. But it is also a privilege and a joy. Now if Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive then we have to believe that. But do we live as if we believe it? We seem to be more on the receiving end.

One of the analogies I make is that we're God's Fed Ex guys or girls. The Fed Ex guy comes to the door and you give him a package, and you assume that he's gonna take it and the company is going to get it to where it's supposed to go. Well what would you think if you found out that the Fed Ex guy just took your package home, opens it, and keeps it? You'd say, "Wait a minute, something is wrong." And they might say, "If you didn't want me to keep it you shouldn't have given it to me." You'd reply, "Hey, you're a delivery guy."

We have lost the notion -- and probably most of us have never had the notion, though it is a very biblical one -- of what Second Corinthians 8 says. Speaking in the context of giving and financial matters, it says, "You will be made rich in every way so that" and then it's going to finish the sentence. So I say to people, "How would you finish the sentence?" Would you finish it with health and wealth gospel, prosperity theology? Would you say, "so that you can drive the best car, live in the nicest homes, and prove that God really takes care of His children?" Or does it show you something else?

What it says is, "You will be made rich in every way so that you may be generous on every occasion." So you keep enough to meet your basic needs. I can go to Starbucks, and I've got a tennis racket -- I'm not talking about the world's standards of depriving yourself. I'm talking about a life, by American standards, that is modest, in control, and that does not say that the

latest product I hear advertised I must go out and have it. Instead, what God has provided I will take, and then I'll invest in His kingdom.

Craig von Buseck: You use some examples in the book. Can you give us some stories of people that have inspired you, or that you have learned from?

Randy Alcorn: Historically, John Wesley is a great example. I quote from Wesley several different times in *The Treasure Principle*, and also in my larger book, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*. Here's a guy that made a lot of money on book royalties. His books were widely distributed. He was one of the most prolific authors of his day. He had a lot of wealth coming in. He said, "When money comes into my hands I give it away, because if I hold onto it, it will get too close to my heart." He understood that concept.

I use several modern analogies of businessmen. I have a friend named Scott Lewis, and I tell his story in the book. He has a machinery business, and he was making thirty-some thousand dollars a year. He heard Bill Bright speak somewhere, and Bill was challenging people to trust God to provide for you in such a way that you give away a million dollars to kingdom causes. So Scott spoke to Bill afterwards and he said, "Wait a minute. I make thirty eight thousand dollars a year. It's totally unrealistic for me to think in terms of giving away a million dollars, even over the process of many years." So Bill Bright looked at him and said, "How much do you give now?" He said he was proud of himself for the answer, because it was like a third of his income that he was giving away. That was pretty good. And Bill Bright said, "Why don't you trust God that next year you'll be able to give away fifty thousand dollars." So Scott replied, "Maybe you didn't understand what I said. This is how much I make over here, so that would be more than what I make. How can we do that." Bill answered, "Ask God to do it, because God is perfectly capable of providing it." So he did, and he and his wife took it to the Lord, and the next year, through a series of events, they gave away fifty thousand dollars. The next year they increased it to a hundred thousand dollars. God blessed his business, and kept increasing his business, but they stayed at the same standard of living.

That is similar to what some people teach, with this critical difference. Some people are teaching that you can't outgive God, and that's absolutely true. God is generous, and He provides. But why does He provide? Does He provide just so that I can have more and more? Or does He provide so I can give more and more?

One of the five keys for unlocking The Treasure Principle is God prospers me, not to increase my standard of living, but to increase my standard of giving -- to raise the bar of giving, to lay up eternal reward in heaven, rather than short-term reward on earth.

Craig von Buseck: And to have a Kingdom perspective.

Randy Alcorn: Exactly, because where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. So someone says, "I want a heart for missions." Jesus tells you exactly how you can get a heart for missions -- if you put your treasure there.

That word, "treasure," every time it's used, it is specifically talking about financial wealth. If you put your treasure in heaven, your heart will follow. If you put your treasure in God's kingdom, you will gain a vested interest in God's kingdom. It's just like if you buy shares of Microsoft. If you did, you would be interested in Microsoft. Why, because you have a vested interest as an owner.

Recently there was a volcano in Congo, and many people died. Relief organizations like World Relief came over from Rwanda to help these dear people -- to feed them, clothe them, and get the Gospel to them. The moment I heard that story, I had an interest in it. Why? Because we give significantly to God's work with relief and development through this organization in Africa. So I had ownership of this thing. I pray for those people. With these natural disasters, for most of us you hear something and you just go, "Well, I'm sorry," and two minutes later you just go on to whatever is next. But when we have kingdom interests, vested interest because we have given to it, it totally changes our perspective.