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# THE HERALD

Newsletter of the Orrville Grace Brethren Church

## An \$8.2 Million Judgment, Over \$8.2 Million in Royalties Given Away, and God's Sovereign Grace in Your Life and Mine

By Randy Alcorn

In 1990, I was a pastor of a large church Nanci and I had helped start in 1977, making a good salary and earning book royalties. I had been a pastor for thirteen years, and I didn't want to do anything else. Had you asked me what I expected to be doing in another thirty years I would have said, "Continuing to serve as a pastor at Good Shepherd Community Church." Then our family's life was turned upside down.

I was on the board of a pregnancy resource center, and we had opened our home to a pregnant teenager, helping her place her baby for adoption in a Christian home. We also had the joy of seeing her come to faith in Christ.

After searching Scripture and praying, I began participating in peaceful, nonviolent civil disobedience at abortion clinics. We simply stood in front of the doors to advocate on behalf of unborn children scheduled to

die. I did this nine times in a twelve month period and was arrested seven of those times.

An abortion clinic won a court judgment against a group of us. We were told we were liable to pay \$2,800 for having prevented ten abortions (child-killings) on a particular day. We were also made liable for the abortion clinic's legal fees, which were over \$19,000. Like most of the others, I refused to pay.

I stood before a judge in Portland and told him I would pay anything I owed to anyone else, but I could not in good conscience willingly hand over money to people who would use it to kill babies. I explained to the court and the media and all who were there the human rights of the unborn children, and the established history of civil disobedience to defend human rights. I quoted from Martin Luther King, Jr. among others. I had no idea when I prepared my statement that I would be standing before an African American judge.

Unlike other judges I'd stood before who were disinterested, dismissive, or clearly angry, this particular judge listened intently as I spoke. After I spoke of civil disobedience for matters of human rights and social justice, and quoted MLK, I said there is no more basic human right than the right to live. I saw the emotion on the judge's face. He paused

before responding. Then he said something beautiful I've never forgotten: "One day you may see me out there standing on that sidewalk beside you. But today I am a judge and must follow the law."

He sentenced me to jail for just two days. Amidst news photographers with strobes flashing, I was chained at both the hands and feet, and led away from the courtroom to the Multnomah County jail. It was not an easy time for my church and my fellow pastors, since people's idea of the ministry usually doesn't include newspaper photos and television news about their pastor being arrested and going to jail.

Not long after this, I discovered that my church was about to receive a writ of garnishment in which the court would try to force them to surrender one-fourth of my wages each month to the abortion clinic. The church would have to either pay the abortion clinic or defy a court order. To prevent this, I resigned the day before the writ of garnishment was delivered. I'd already divested myself of book royalties. The only way I could avoid garnishment in the future was to make no more than minimum wage. Fortunately, our family had been living on only a portion of my church salary, and we had just made our final house payment.

Another court judgment followed, involving another abortion clinic. They requested a half million dollars in punitive damages against each of the defendants—for totally peaceful and nonviolent actions—to persuade us not to rescue again. In court, the owner and staff of an abortion clinic falsely accused me and others of yelling and swearing at women, calling them names, and putting our hands on them as they attempted to enter the abortion clinic. When a Portland

pastor testified that he had watched as we quietly and peacefully stood in front of the door, blocking access to the place where innocent children were being killed, the judge's anger erupted. Finally the judge issued a directed verdict. He told the jury they must find us guilty and choose a punitive amount sufficient to deter us from ever coming to the clinic again.

On February 11, 1991, nine of the twelve jurors agreed to award the abortion clinic \$8.2 million dollars, averaging about \$250,000 per defendant. It was the largest judgment ever against a group of peaceful protestors. It seemed likely our family would lose our house, and we would not be able to continue to send our children to the school they loved, Good Shepherd School.

By all appearances, our lives had taken a devastating turn. Right?

Wrong. That judgment was one of the best things that ever happened to us. Because what others intended for evil, God intended for good (Genesis 50:20).

My family faced this situation with the firm belief that God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-loving, and that no matter what happened, He would work things out for our ultimate good (Romans 8:28). That is exactly what He did! The fact that we lost the case was irrelevant. We're fortunate not to have to wait for eternity to see how God worked it for good. We've already seen it in countless ways, though no doubt we'll learn more when we're with Him.

God is sovereign over all the apparent uncertainties and negative twists in your life and mine. He is never taken by surprise, never perplexed, never faced with circumstances out of His control. In this situation, God's hands weren't tied by the vengeance of child-

killers. He didn't merely "make the best of a bad situation." He took a bad situation and used it for His highest good. So much so that I can no longer think of it as a bad situation—it was a severe mercy, a grace disguised in hardship.

I remember how unthinkably large \$8.2 million seemed to be. I used to joke with people, saying, "\$8.2 million dollars is more than I made as a pastor in a year!" But despite that \$8.2 million court judgment, we never lost our house and thanks to someone's kindness, our daughters were able to continue attending our church school. We began a new ministry, Eternal Perspective Ministries (EPM). While paying me a minimum-wage salary and my wife Nanci a secretary's salary, the ministry received all the royalties from my books. And wouldn't you know it, suddenly I had books on the best-sellers list and royalties began to dramatically increase. (One of the first books I wrote after having to leave pastoral ministry was ProLife Answers to ProChoice Arguments, one of the bestselling prolife books in history, widely used to train young people and other prolife advocates to speak up for unborn children.)

The original court judgment of \$8.2 million was in force for ten years. The abortion clinic was frustrated that it hadn't received very much money—and none at all from us, because minimum wage is not garnishable under Oregon law. They managed to get the judgment extended for another ten years, so I ended up making minimum wage for twenty years.[1] God provided faithfully and most of the time we didn't even think about it. With joy in our hearts, now nearly thirty years later Nanci and I continue to give away 100 percent of the book royalties to a wide

variety of Christian missions, famine relief, and pro-life work.

Since EPM began, by God's grace, over eleven million books have sold. And as our staff recently pointed out to me, we have now given away over \$8.2 million dollars in royalties—an amount that has now, ironically and delightfully, surpassed the judgment against us and the whole group of proliferers all those years ago!

Some have wondered if I realize what we could have done with over \$8 million dollars. My answer is always the same: "Nothing that would have brought us nearly as much joy as we've found in giving it away." I firmly believe they're not my book royalties—they're God's. Nanci and I certainly don't need them, and it delights us to see God using them to touch lives all over the world!

We thank our sovereign God for bringing us such freedom and joy in a way we never saw coming and never would have chosen, but which—if we had it to do over again—would do nothing to change.

"But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand" (1 Chronicles 29:14).

[1] An extension on the judgment finally expired in 2012. A year later our ministry board significantly increased my salary. Since then I've been paid a good wage by American standards and a great wage by global standards. We're grateful for the higher pay, and we've enjoyed being able to do things we weren't able to before. As the wages have increased, our personal giving has increased. Still, God was with us all those years when our salary was lower, and He always faithfully provided.

# FUNNIES

A man sent his friend a cryptic Christmas card. It said: A B C D E F G H I J K M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z. The recipient puzzled over it for weeks, finally gave up and wrote asking for an explanation. In July he received the explanation on a postcard: "No L."

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The nativity play was going as planned and Joseph and Mary were going from house to house knocking on the doors and asking if there was any room for them. As they continued to get "no room" answers a little voice called from the back "YOU SHOULD HAVE BOOKED!" bringing the house down.

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A ten-year-old, under the tutelage of her grandmother, was becoming quite knowledgeable about the Bible. Then one day she floored her grandmother by asking, "Which virgin was the mother of Jesus? The virgin Mary or the King James Virgin?"

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At Sunday school, the younger children were drawing pictures illustrating Biblical stories. The teacher walked by

and noticed one little boy was drawing an airplane! "Oh, what Bible story are you drawing?" she asked. "This is the Flight into Egypt," the little boy answered. "See, here is Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus. And this," he said, pointing to the front of the plane, "is Pontius. He's the Pilot."

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Two young boys were spending the night at their grandparents' house the week before Christmas. At bedtime, the two boys knelt beside their beds to say their prayers. The younger one began praying at the top of his lungs:

"I PRAY FOR A NEW BICYCLE..."

"I PRAY FOR A NEW NINTENDO..."

His older brother leaned over, nudged him and said, "Why are you shouting? God isn't deaf." to which the little brother replied, "No, but Grandma is!"

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## Actual children's versions of Christmas Carols:

"...sleep in heavenly peas";

"Joy to the world, the Savior rains";

"This is he whom Sears of old...";

"Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o'er the plane";

"While shepherds washed their socks by night."