

# AWE AND WONDER

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*Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, February 11, 2007*

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Is your religion dry and nearly lifeless? Do you feel like you live in a perpetual desert wilderness?

How long has it been since the presence of the Lord brought tears of gratitude to your eyes? How long since your heart overflowed with joy and excitement, just because you know the Living God on a personal level?

Is prayer a drudgery or often neglected? Do you struggle to find the words with which to praise God? Do you catch yourself putting on a “Christian face” to hide the sour thoughts and feelings inside?

If so, I have good news for you today! All of that can change! Yes, it can. Even if that description has fit your experience for decades, it can begin to turn around today. This is the day that the Lord has made. And He made it for you to enjoy. I will tell you how.

But first, let me tell you why. Your life can change for the better, because of who God is and what He likes to do for people just like you.

You’re not alone. I have been there, too. Millions of others have been there, too. In all likelihood, everyone who has ever known Him has walked that valley. But you don’t have to stay there. And you surely don’t have to die there.

The Bible tells multiple stories of wandering in the desert, being tested in the wilderness, and nearly going under at sea. And the way God worked in those situations is the way He wants to work for you.

## **All Aboard! Look Up**

To begin our journey, we need to take a fresh look at who God is. Stop excluding yourself from His goodness. Stop turning a deaf ear to what He’s done for others, because their experiences are simply illustrations of what He wants to do for you.

Decide right now that you will listen with an open mind. Let God’s Word overrule your thoughts, not the other way around. Be more convinced by His truth than you are by your own. Don’t judge the wisdom of ages by the experience of a single life. Begin again to believe.

Say this aloud:

*Exodus 15:11* **Who is like you among the gods, O Lord— glorious in holiness, awesome in splendor, performing great wonders?**

Moses wrote: *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”* John echoed: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God. All things were made by Him, and nothing was made apart from Him.”* He is the Creator of all creation! And how did He do it? He simply said, “Be.” And it was.

*Psalms 33:6* **The Lord merely spoke, and the heavens were created. He breathed the word, and all the stars were born.** <sup>7</sup> **He assigned the sea its boundaries and locked the oceans in vast reservoirs.** <sup>8</sup> **Let the whole world fear the Lord, and let everyone stand in awe of him.** <sup>9</sup> **For when he spoke, the world began! It appeared at his command.**

*Psalm 65:8 Those who live at the ends of the earth stand in awe of your wonders. From where the sun rises to where it sets, you inspire shouts of joy.*

Jesus' miraculous deeds also amazed the people. Do you remember the paralyzed man, whose friends brought him to Jesus to be healed?

*Luke 5:25 And immediately, as everyone watched, the man jumped up, picked up his mat, and went home praising God. <sup>26</sup> Everyone was gripped with great wonder and awe, and they praised God, exclaiming, "We have seen amazing things today!"*

Or the anguished father, whose son was tormented by demons that seized him from time to time and tried to destroy him?

*Luke 9:42 Jesus rebuked the evil spirit and healed the boy. Then he gave him back to his father. <sup>43</sup> Awe gripped the people as they saw this majestic display of God's power.*

The world is full of people who appreciate the wonders of creation; some have even made that their religion. And many more people have witnessed radical miracles than those who personally received them. Yet, marveling at the wonders of creation and puzzling over powerful miracles hold no promise of changed lives. Some hearts only grow harder.

*Psalm 78:32 But in spite of this, the people kept sinning. Despite his wonders, they refused to trust him. <sup>33</sup> So he ended their lives in failure their years in terror.*

But the Creator is also the Redeemer!

*Psalm 77:13 O God, your ways are holy. Is there any god as mighty as you? <sup>14</sup> You are the God of great wonders! You demonstrate your awesome power among the nations. <sup>15</sup> By your strong arm, you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.*

Redemption is a word that implies some form of captivity or bondage from which people are loosed and liberated. And it plainly indicates that the method of their release is by payment of a ransom price. Not sheer brute force, but an above-board transaction that procures legal and official freedom. Redemption! This was the greatest wonder that God ever worked!

*Psalm 111:1 Praise the Lord! I will thank the Lord with all my heart as I meet with his godly people. <sup>2</sup> How amazing are the deeds of the Lord! All who delight in him should ponder them. <sup>3</sup> Everything he does reveals his glory and majesty. His righteousness never fails. <sup>4</sup> He causes us to remember his wonderful works. How gracious and merciful is our Lord! <sup>5</sup> He gives food to those who fear him; he always remembers his covenant. <sup>6</sup> He has shown his great power to his people by giving them the lands of other nations. <sup>7</sup> All he does is just and good, and all his commandments are trustworthy. <sup>8</sup> They are forever true, to be obeyed faithfully and with integrity. <sup>9</sup> He has paid a full ransom for his people. He has guaranteed his covenant with them forever. What a holy, awe-inspiring name he has! <sup>10</sup> Fear of the Lord is the foundation of true wisdom. All who obey his commandments will grow in wisdom. Praise him forever!*

A "full ransom." A "guaranteed covenant." God's deeds inspire a change of life. The Apostle Paul wrote: "God's goodness inspires you to repent." Who else is like Him?!

God has redeemed us! Through the death of Jesus, God ransomed us from sin's judgment. He forgave us all our sins. (Not so we could sin some more, but so we could be done with sin and live for God.)

Nebuchadnezzar was a godless king, who masterminded the overthrow of Jerusalem and the captivity of the nation of Israel. But among the Jewish slaves were noble believers like Daniel and his friends,

whose lifestyle, wisdom and deeds softened the king's hard heart. As God worked in his life, to reveal His awesome character and power, Nebuchadnezzar was transformed. So profound was the change he experienced, that he became a bold witness for God:

*Daniel 4:1 King Nebuchadnezzar sent this message to the people of every race and nation and language throughout the world:*

*"Peace and prosperity to you!*

*<sup>2</sup> "I want you all to know about the miraculous signs and wonders the Most High God has performed for me. <sup>3</sup> How great are his signs, how powerful his wonders! His kingdom will last forever, his rule through all generations.*

We used to be enemies of God, separated and distanced from Him by our selfish thoughts and ways. But now, He has forgiven us *and* adopted us as His own family.

It would be fantastic just to escape the judgment of hell, but who would have guessed that He couldn't be satisfied just to forgive us and send us away? He had to have us near. He made a place for us at His side! He gave us the key to the front door!

Those who appreciate their salvation find no end of awe and wonder!

D. L. Moody reported: "I remember the morning on which I came out of my room after I had first trusted Christ. I thought the old sun shone a good deal brighter than it ever had before.... As I walked out upon Boston Common and heard the birds singing in the trees, I thought they were singing a song to me.... It seemed to me that I was in love with all creation."

*Psalms 5:7 Because of your unfailing love, I can enter your house; I will worship at your Temple with deepest awe.*

Paul's letter to the church in Rome refers repeatedly to the "wonderful grace" of God, which now rules over our lives.

Is it any surprise that He is called "Wonderful Defender"?!

## **Destination in Sight: Look Around**

The second part of our journey involves devotion—the kind of devotion that takes time to think and reflect and relate.

Reflection can either bring you down or build you up—it all depends on what you reflect on. If you reflect on how other people have mistreated you, it will deepen your wounds and increase your bitterness and anger. But people will mistreat you, even when you have done your best and done nothing to provoke them. So, what can you do? Balance your heart by reflecting on what God has done, in at least these three areas:

- What God has done in the creation around you.
- What God has done for other people who are significant to you.
- What God has done within your life (His mercy, kindness, and faithfulness).

Reflection leads to awe, as many have discovered. And awe leads to bold prayers, and bold prayers lead to revival!

*Habakkuk 3:2 I have heard all about you, Lord. I am filled with awe by your amazing works. In this time of our deep need, help us again as you did in years gone by. And in your anger, remember your mercy.*

Revival, in turn, leads to community-wide transformation (and it all began with personal reflection).

*Acts 2:42 All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.*

<sup>43</sup> *A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders.*

I note that their devotion was the source of their awe. You *can* develop awe and wonder in your life. It *begins* with a pattern of devotion and is *sustained* by attentive observation and appreciation of the little things God does in your everyday life. And it *grows* as you share with others what you observe of God's hand in your life.

*Psalms 40:5 O Lord my God, you have performed many wonders for us. Your plans for us are too numerous to list. You have no equal. If I tried to recite all your wonderful deeds, I would never come to the end of them.*

*Psalms 145:4 Let each generation tell its children of your mighty acts; let them proclaim your power. <sup>5</sup> I will meditate on your majestic, glorious splendor and your wonderful miracles. <sup>6</sup> Your awe-inspiring deeds will be on every tongue; I will proclaim your greatness. <sup>7</sup> Everyone will share the story of your wonderful goodness; they will sing with joy about your righteousness.*

## **Awesome God**

Even in Heaven, God's wonder prevails and He is held in awe, by angels and saints alike.

*Psalms 89:5 All heaven will praise your great wonders, Lord; myriads of angels will praise you for your faithfulness.*

<sup>6</sup> *For who in all of heaven can compare with the Lord? What mightiest angel is anything like the Lord?*

<sup>7</sup> *The highest angelic powers stand in awe of God. He is far more awesome than all who surround his throne. <sup>8</sup> O Lord God of Heaven's Armies! Where is there anyone as mighty as you, O Lord? You are entirely faithful.*

How much more on earth, by those who have personally tasted of His mercies and His grace!

Awe and wonder are not for mystics or religious kooks alone. They are integral to the life of faith.

Without awe and wonder, your faith will be weakened and dissipate. Your salvation experience will turn to mere religion. Your praise will turn to skepticism.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said about the stars that if the constellations appeared only once in a thousand years, imagine what an exciting event it would be. But because they're there every night, we barely give them a look.

Vance Havner lamented, "Some of us grow so familiar with the Gospel, with the worship and ordinances of the church, that we lose our reverence. It is easy to lose the wonder. The spirit of the age is against us. A lot of religious activity today has lost the wonder. We engage in shop talk about men and methods and movement, but we do not exult in the wonderful news that Christ died and rose again."

Late in life, Charles Darwin wrote in his autobiography: "I have said that in one respect my mind has changed during the last twenty or thirty years. Up to the age of thirty, or beyond it, poetry of many kinds ... gave me great pleasure, and even as a schoolboy I took intense delight in Shakespeare.... I have also said that formerly pictures gave me considerable, and music very great, delight. But now, for many years I cannot endure to read a line of poetry: I have tried to read Shakespeare, and found it so intolerable."

erably dull that it nauseated me. I have also lost any taste for pictures or music.... I retain some taste for fine scenery, but it does not cause me the exquisite delight that it formerly did.... My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts....”

The one component in your world that is required for awe and wonder to grow is time—your time. It takes time to pay attention. Often not a lot, but it does take at least a moment’s pause.

Sure it’s chilly, but stop and notice the freshness of the morning air. Sure you’re in a hurry, but stop and notice the warmth of the sunlight. Sure you don’t want to get drenched by the rain, but pause enough to notice the shape and color and speed of the clouds passing overhead. In the midst of the drone of traffic, listen for the chirping of birds in the trees.

God not only made the sunset sky, but He made the eyes that enjoy it. He not only made the sound of music, but the ears that treasure it. God not only made the herbs and spices that season your food, but the palate that finds it scrumptious. Don’t take it for granted—*think* about it and be thankful.

Jim Elliot, in a letter to his wife Elisabeth, wrote: “Amy Carmichael writes of little joys, like flowers springing up by the path unnoticed except by those who are looking for them.... Little things, like a quietly sinking sun, a friendly dog, a ready smile. We sang a little song in kindergarten which I’ve never forgotten: ‘The world is so full of a number of things / I’m sure we should all be as happy as kings.’ Simple, but such a devastating rebuke to the complaining heart. I am impressed with the joy that is ours in Christ, so that heaven above and earth below become brighter and fairer.”

Pay attention to the “little miracles” in your day-to-day life—people who call and things that appear just when you need them, things that last just long enough to complete the job, things that fit just right, things that turn out right, things that work the way they’re supposed to and make life easier.

If you think of all the problems or disappointments of your day—even if there was only one—you’ll be troubled. But if you think of all the blessings or serendipitous moments of your day—even if there was only one—you’ll be blessed.

Choose your way. Don’t say that life has chosen it for you. Don’t let others choose it for you. God is active enough in the creation around you and in the people around you and within your own heart to blow your mind—if you look for it! You can develop a life of awe and wonder—a life of praise and thankfulness. No matter how dry your desert has been or how long you’ve been holed up there. It can all change today, if you’ll look up toward God and then look around at what He’s done.