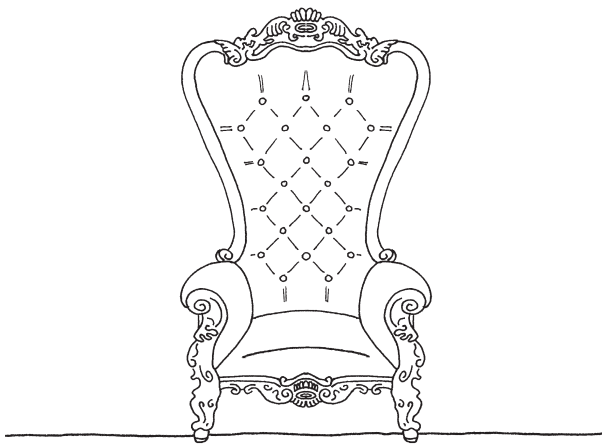


The
Names
of Jesus



Experiencing the blessing
of knowing Him

Warren W. Wiersbe

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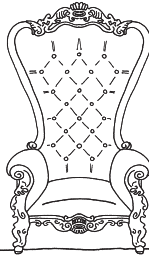
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Wonderful



“His name will be called Wonderful ...” This takes care of the dullness of life, because “You are the God who does wonders” (Psalms 77:14).

Bertrand Russell claimed that “at least half the sins of mankind” were caused by the fear of boredom. Perhaps this explains why children don’t usually commit the kinds of sins that their elders commit, since, for the most part, children live in a world filled with wonder. A child can

stare at a butterfly perched on a flower or at fish swimming in a pool and be perfectly content. Jesus may have had this in mind when he warned a group of adults, “Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

In today’s society, we’re surrounded by the miracles of modern science; yet people are bored, some of them to such an extent that they take their own lives. We face a population explosion; yet millions of people are slowly dying of the effects of loneliness and boredom. Our cities are crowded; yet hearts are empty. Henry David Thoreau once described the city as “hundreds of people being lonely together.” In a world filled with exciting, electronic marvels, you would think that life would be exciting. However, for many people, life is just plain dull. They look for new toys, but once the novelty has worn off they go back to the same old routine. Obviously, something is wrong.

Wonder versus Novelty

Let’s start with the basic question: What is wonder? Many different concepts cluster around

the word “wonder”: amazement, surprise, astonishment, awe, admiration, perhaps even bewilderment, and even worship. The Hebrew word that Isaiah used means “to separate, to distinguish.” Throughout the Old Testament, it is translated a number of interesting ways: marvelous, hidden, too high, too difficult, miracle. It carries the basic meaning of being unique and different.

But we must be careful to distinguish “wonder” from some of the substitute ideas that might lead us astray. True wonder has depth. It isn’t a shallow emotion or a passing wave of excitement. Wonder penetrates; it goes much deeper than the exciting or the sensational. The reason is that wonder has value; it isn’t cheap amusement. When a person experiences true wonder, it enriches him and leaves him a better person. True wonder will draw the very best out of us and put the very best into us. True wonder creates in us an attitude of humility: we’re overwhelmed and sense in ourselves the greatness of God and the littleness of man. David knew this feeling when he said, “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your

fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man, that You visit him?" (Ps. 8:3–4).

Many people have the false notion that wonder is based on ignorance. "Bring an ignorant savage to the big city," they say, "and he'll be amazed at everything he sees." But true wonder is based on knowledge, not ignorance. The more we know, the more we wonder. This childlike spirit of wonder isn't founded on innocent ignorance; it's founded on an inquisitive and intelligent attitude toward reality.

Wise people gladly confess how little they really know. Each trickle of truth only leads to a river that takes us to the vast ocean of knowledge whose depths we can't measure. Excitement over novelty passes once the novelty is explained and understood; wonder grows deeper when knowledge increases. British mathematician and scientist Sir Isaac Newton wrote: "To myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all

undiscovered before me.” Albert Einstein put it this way: “The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious ... He who knows it not, can no longer wonder, no longer feel amazement, is as good as dead, a snuffed out candle.”

Finally, true wonder possesses the whole person, the mind, the heart, the will. Wonder isn't an isolated experience that perplexes the mind or stirs the emotions. True wonder captures the whole person; otherwise the experience is simply novelty or surprise, merely a passing entertainment. This is because true wonder is an attitude of life and not an interruption or an isolated event. The person who lives in childlike wonder always lives this way. Wonder isn't something we turn on and off like a radio; true wonder is the total outlook and attitude of life at all times. In other words, all of our being is involved in wonder all of the time. This kind of wonder is hard to find these days.

Substitutes for Wonder

Why is there so little true wonder in our world today? One reason is that the world God made is disappointing to most people. In every area of

life we seem to see nothing but problems: low wages and high prices, discrimination, political immorality, slums and smog and pollution, hypocrisy—the list is a long one. The good seem to suffer and the bad seem to succeed. It's very easy to develop a “what's-the-use” attitude, become cynical, pull into our own little shell, and let the rest of the world go by.

But the real reason for our present-day loss of wonder goes much deeper. We're living in a mechanical world that's very impersonal. Most people look at the world and think of scientific law instead of a gracious Lawgiver. We are persons, made in the image of God; therefore, we must have a personal world if life is to have any meaning. When life loses its meaning, life loses its wonder; then we become machines! A false view of science and technology has robbed us of a heavenly Father who makes the lilies more glorious than Solomon's wardrobe and who puts out his hand when the sparrow falls.

We live in a mechanical world, and we live in a commercial world. The two questions that seem to control society are “Does it work?” and “Does it pay?” with the emphasis on the

latter question. To quote Thoreau again, we have “improved means to unimproved ends.” For centuries the philosophers and mystics have been reminding us that we can’t enjoy the things that money can buy if we lose the things money can’t buy. Making a living has replaced making a life, and searching after new schemes and methods has replaced discovering truth and building character. The very fact of wonder demands values, for we don’t wonder at that which is cheap and contemptible. When values vanish, wonder must vanish, too.

Our world is a busy world. We have little time to pause, contemplate, and wonder. Even vacationers pause only long enough to take photos or make videos that they can look at back home when they have more time. They don’t have time to get close to people or God’s creation, to stand and wonder at what he has made. Quick! Get a picture or two and buy some postcards. We have miles to cover before the day ends!

The child lives in a world of wonder because he stands still long enough to watch and to ponder. Our lives are so full they are perpetually empty. We boast about the quantity of our

activity without admitting the lack of quality in our experience. We know how to count activities, but we don't know how to weigh experiences, and we're the losers in the long run.

Perhaps the greatest cause for the lack of wonder is this: we live in an artificial world. Most people are living on substitutes and don't know it. Stupid vulgar comedy has replaced true wit and humor; cheap amusement has replaced wholesome recreation; and propaganda has replaced truth. Millions of bored people depend on manufactured experiences to rescue them from their tedious existence. Each experience must be greater than the previous one, and the result is a nervous system so taxed by substitute stimulants that the person finds it harder and harder to recognize and enjoy an emotional experience that is normal and real. When you exist on artificial stimulants, you gradually lose the ability to recognize and enjoy the real.

The greatest substitute of all is sin, and this is what lies at the root of the whole matter. Unless you and I do something about our sins, we'll never be able to experience and enjoy the wonder that God wants to bring into our

lives. The essence of idolatry is worshiping and serving something other than God; living, if you please, on substitutes. But it's a basic law of life that we become like the gods we worship, so if our god is an artificial substitute, we will become artificial too. The very senses that ought to thrill us with wonder become jaded, then paralyzed, then dead.

“They have mouths, but they do not speak; eyes they have, but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear; noses they have, but they do not smell. . . . Those who make them [the idols] are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them” (Ps. 115:5–6, 8).

The only person who can deal with our basic needs and restore wonder to our lives is Jesus Christ, because his name is Wonderful.

The Wonders of Jesus

Why is Jesus Christ called Wonderful? To name his name is to give the answer, for we would be amazed if he were not called Wonderful! Everything about Jesus Christ makes the believing heart say, “I will now turn aside and see this great sight!”

To start with, he's wonderful in his person.
Imagine God coming to earth as man!

*Christ, by highest heaven adored;
Christ, the Everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come,
Offspring of the virgin's womb:
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail th' Incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man with man to dwell,
Jesus, our Emanuel.*

(Charles Wesley)

When the shepherds shared the news of the birth of Jesus, “all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds” (Luke 2:18). It was something to wonder at: “God was manifested in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16).

Christ was wonderful in the life he lived on earth. Everything that yielded to him participated in wonder. It was just another wedding until Jesus arrived, and he transformed it into a wonderful occasion that is still pondered by devout souls. Ordinary servants put ordinary