

*‘Three Pennies and a Rock’ part two – Curiosity’* (outline)

Introduction

- a. My Big Fat Greek Wedding Movie – people were gushing over it. So much so that I got curious about it.
- b. So, I went - I was curious. Could this movie be as funny as all these people were saying it was?
- c. Movie wasn't funny. The next time I heard those people, guess what, I was so curious.
- d. Curiosity
  - i. Kills the cat – but that's an adult way of looking at the world. One that's jaded by 1,000 different My Big Fat Greek Wedding disappointments.
    1. But, let's notice, the saying is an adult one.
      - a. One that we try to teach our kids really fast.
  - ii. But Kids are naturally curious and we, standing squarely in the center of adulthood could stand to learn a few things.

II. Child-like Faith Recap

- a. Lillian story briefly
- b. Last week we talked about Wonder
  - i. That sense of astonishment and gratitude over what God has done and is doing
  - ii. We learned that experiencing wonder has some amazingly positive benefits
    1. Slows down the passage of time (we are more patient)
    2. Recuperative health benefits (we heal more rapidly)
    3. Increases productivity and empathy (we're better able to understand others and help them)
- c. But perhaps the best thing about experiencing the Wonder that God so richly provides is that it immediately opens up for us our next means by which to come to a child-like faith -  
CURIOSITY
- d. Read Scripture
  - i. **Matthew 18:1-6** – *“At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ And calling to him a child, He put him in the midst of them and said, ‘Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ‘Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.’”*

III. Kids are Curious

- a. One of the greatest gifts Natalie and I were ever given was what I got to calling “Baby Jail”
  - i. Red plastic, attachable fence that could be put together with a door to create a large, safe space for toddling children.
  - ii. The reason why it was the greatest gift – toddlers were contained
    1. Because they're curious
  - iii. Baby jail allowed our kids to be curious in a defined area that we controlled.
- b. Return to MBFGW
  - i. Children are naturally curious, they have so much to figure out.
  - ii. Adults, on the other hand, have grown accustomed to disappointment. We've become jaded.
  - iii. That experience with the movie MBFGW made me far less willing to take other people's suggestions

- 1. After all, I'd gotten burned, or so I thought.
- c. Define curiosity – A strong desire to know or learn something.
  - i. Opposites – apathy and indifference
    - 1. Seven deadly sins – curiosity helps us avoid
- d. My experience in the church is that most Christians aren't particularly curious, even about Jesus Christ.

#### IV. Lack of Curiosity

- a. We miss out on things when we are not curious
- b. We miss out on good things
  - i. In a general sense, I missed out on Jesus for a great many years
  - ii. I'd made an assumption about Him and never really took the time to investigate matters much further
- c. We might well miss warnings
  - i. Wanted to get Lilian an electronic art pad. Found one I thought was perfect online. Had it in my mind I was right – that's a dangerous thing for most of it, isn't it. I wasn't curious, ended up buying a product that ultimately wasn't compatible with what we needed it to be.
    - 1. Worst of all – there on the box was the warning, doesn't work with Chromebooks. All the information I needed to know was right there.
      - a. I, lacking sufficient curiosity (apathy) and believing I knew it all (Pride), failed to investigate
- d. More often than not, my jadedness, apathy Generally arises from the terrible combination of two deadly sins
  - i. Pride – Tells us we know enough already
  - ii. Sloth – Tells us that it isn't worth OUR effort
- e. My experience in the church
  - i. Not much curiosity – It's actually quite rare to get a question about the Bible or theology which I just don't get, honestly.
- f. Look at the world, Be Curious
  - i. More depression – be curious - ask why
  - ii. More anxiety – be curious, ask why
  - iii. Why does our Presbytery send out multiple newsletters with all sorts of information about Movies to watch, social justice seminars to be involved in (some of them now mandatory) and not once, not one single solitary time mention the name of Jesus Christ?

#### V. The Story of Zacchaeus

- a. A curious tax collector
- b. He's a bad guy, rich but lonely. He hears about Jesus and then, heads out to see Him.
- c. Runs into a bit of a problem – he's too short to see where Jesus will be coming
  - i. He climbs up a sycamore tree
- d. He sees Jesus but, more importantly, Jesus sees him.
  - i. Life is changed forever
- e. What set the whole thing in motion – CURIOSITY
  - i. Sometimes it kills a cat, other times it changes a life for the better

#### VI. Bible on Good Curiosity

- a. **Deuteronomy 29:29** – *“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”*
- b. **Proverbs 8:13** – *“The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.”*

- c. **I Peter 1:10-11** – *“Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.”*

## VII. Advantages of Being Curious - Science

- a. Helps us survive
  - i. It’s an instinctive gift of God
    - 1. Christian science happens when Isaac Newton, looking upon the world as a believer, sought order and understanding because he believed God operated that way. Why? He’d read Genesis a few times.
  - ii. What if the Church of Jesus Christ were to start asking the question, why do we allow other entities to dominate healthcare? Aren’t we supposed to be the healers?
- b. Increases happiness and makes us more productive
  - i. Ignorance may be bliss but knowledge is even better most times
  - ii. It’s when we investigate, we often find out better solutions
    - 1. For years, I’d used a chef’s knife to cut onions
    - 2. Ladies at the church kept telling me all about the Vidalia Onion Chopper
      - a. Thought it was a nice gadget for houses but not for trained Chefs
    - 3. It worked better than a knife, faster and more precise.
- c. More empathetic
  - i. Research shows that merely the process of getting to know someone benefits both parties
    - 1. Y’all, it’s easy to hate generalities.
      - a. I found people that pulled for Duke pretty obnoxious until I went there. Still did, honestly, until I met Sheldon Hunter.
        - i. That’s a joke!
    - 2. Hard to hate people.
    - 3. Get to know them
- d. Opens up new worlds and new possibilities
  - i. If Christians would just open up their Bibles and start asking questions, the entire world would change. I’m convinced of it.

## VIII. Cultivate Curiosity

- a. Read the Bible
  - i. If that doesn’t open up like a billion questions, I don’t know what else would
  - ii. If questions are raised in your mind, seek answers
- b. Expand your relationship with Jesus Christ
  - i. Prayer and meditation
- c. Work in Mission
  - i. Get to know new people
  - ii. Start seeing the world as it really is as opposed to seeing it through your limited thoughts.
- d. Don’t label anything as boring
  - i. Hope my kids hear this one – as soon as you’ve labeled something boring, you’re engaged in a self-defeating proposition
    - 1. Contempt prior to investigation kills more joy & productivity than we’re aware of

## IX. Return to MBFGW

- a. But where does contempt prior to investigation come from?
  - i. Pride – I know already

- ii. Apathy – And I really don't care to begin with.
    - 1. Notice how these two things stand in stark difference to children.
      - a. They know very little
      - b. And they care about everything, or should I say, everyone
        - i. Little Baby, brought me a cup and yogurt snacks.
          - 1. She knew to be hospitable.
- b. I didn't like it the first time I saw it
  - i. It didn't meet my expectations
- c. Second time I saw it, I knew it wasn't going to be riotously funny, so I could watch it.
- d. Not bad
  - i. More heartwarming than funny but a good movie nevertheless
- e. IF you're feeling spiritually apathetic, jaded, lost
  - i. Return to Jesus
  - ii. Give Him your life again
- f. Return to His Holy and Everlasting Word
  - i. Be curious
  - ii. Learn why this world is so messed up and then learn how Jesus calls us to help mend it.

X. Bridge to Communion

- a. Today we come to the Table
- b. Why? Be curious
- c. Because
  - i. The Lord summons us
  - ii. It is best for us – spiritually fed, drawn into communion with all the saints of the church here, and across the globe.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## *‘Three Pennies and a Rock’*

### Chapter 3 - Apathy

Somewhere not long after turning 40, I ran into a common malady among humans – a middle-age crisis. Now, sadly, I didn’t recognize it for what it was at the time. Standing now from the vantage point of being 50, I see things much more clearly. More importantly, I see where my mental health really started going south. It happened within the context of working as a Pastor in a small, denominational church.

Even though I was what’s known as a “second-career pastor,” I came into the church at 35 as naïve and overly optimistic as any giddy 21-year-old, excited at the prospect of finally being “grown up.” After 5 full years under-my-robe, so to speak, I had grown weary at the actual work of ministry. It was in that weariness; apathy began its inevitable growth. Any spiritual disciplines I’d worked years to establish evaporated from my daily life.

Even preaching, generally one of my favorite tasks in pastoring, had become difficult. For lack of better words, preaching morphed into burdensome, drab canvas with scant colors upon which to paint with. In a manner of speaking, the bright and vivid light of Jesus Christ had grown dim within me. Not because of what Jesus was doing, mind you. Rather, this descent into jadedness came precisely because of what I wasn’t doing. What I wasn’t doing was actively holding a child-like faith in Jesus. In fact, truth be told, I wasn’t even remotely striving to have a relationship with Him.

Why?

I’d given up.

Again, I only see this through the wonderful vision hindsight provides but as I look back, I see this as incontrovertibly true. After years of not finding satisfaction doing the very thing I’d assumed would make me content vocationally, I was struggling with a great many sins. Eventually, just like playing with fire, the consequences of sin are often felt far removed from the actual transgression. No matter how well you dance around the flames, you’re ultimately going to get singed if not downright burned to a crisp.

I did.

I relapsed back into an alcohol addiction after 10+ years of sobriety. For reasons that still don’t make sense to me to this very day, a member of the church I was serving decided to announce via a mass emailing, what had happened. While I was in detox, scrambling to put my life and my family back together by God’s grace, this email was sent. The mailing was sent to all the members and visitors to that particular church who’d attended over the previous five years. This was, to say the very least, an ugly affair, the consequences of which still reverberate in a great many lives.

As amazing as this might sound, as awful a time it was for all involved, it did come with an unexpected blessing. I was able to “See” with new eyes, the errors of my past. While the ingestion of alcohol was the coup de gras, the actual descent into darkness had begun long before. Simply put, not finding the success in Ministry I wrongly believed I was entitled to, I’d crusted over with apathy. Apathy towards my job. Apathy towards even my family and friends.

It shouldn’t be overlooked that, since around the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the church of Jesus Christ has categorized sloth as one of the Seven Deadly Sins. Sloth, especially

Thus, not only did I find myself in the midst of a mid-life crisis, I also found myself, by my own hands, embroiled in scandal. I can honestly say without question, that period was the worst in my family’s life. Yet I do have something positive to declare – God got us all through it.

While the contours of that time in my life don’t likely match yours, my jadedness prior to and within those turbulent hours might well equal your own. If you find yourself at a point where you can’t escape the following two conclusions, you probably are experiencing a high level of spiritual apathy:

1. You believe that bad things never go away and only increase over time. You look out and see constant arguing, governmental incompetence, and suffering and think, “these are getting much worse than they once were.”
2. You believe that good things are destined to end. You look out and see categories like civility, bipartisanship, compromise and peace disappearing and you believe they’ll never return.

If these two deeply flawed ways of perceiving the world lay at the heart of you presently, your trouble might not be arising from wherever it is you tell yourself its coming from. Chances are your real problem isn't found in other people's politics or actions, the size of your bank account, your marital problem. What lies as the likely source of all these dissatisfactions is that you've become jaded, apathetic towards what God is doing by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

If you find yourself in this spiritual desert, I come bearing good news. There is a way out. And, as you're probably starting to guess right now, the solution is found, I believe, in children. Jesus tells us as much in the Gospel of Matthew. *Matthew 18:1-3* – “*At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, ‘Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.’*”

Just like all of Scripture, context and history bear upon this particular passage greatly. To begin with, one should note that children were not as highly regarded as you might expect. In fact, if children became “out of sight out of mind” at some point, it might well have been in the ancient near east. Children were, as TS Lamos writes, “Israelite society was not attached to particular ages as is the case in our society. There were no Israelite Sweet Sixteen parties where teenagers danced the night away celebrating their newly achieved personhood. Eighteen-year-old Israelites couldn't breathe a sigh of relief knowing their parents would no longer be able to have them killed for drinking too much undiluted wine or leaving their sandals in the entryway for the umpteenth time. No, Israelite personhood was based on social role and physical maturity, not chronological age.” Consequently, children might not have even been understood as people within time period.

For Jesus to bring in a child into the middle of a group of adults thusly is jaw-dropping stuff. To call someone over is to recognize them. For a non-person, this would've been invigorating, frightening even. For those who believed children were some forms of sub-species until they grew in social stature, Jesus actions were scandalous. But Jesus' truth bombs don't stop just by focusing his apostles' and disciples' attention on the lad.

Next, he tells those same people that they have to become LIKE that child if they desire the kingdom of heaven. Just imagine how disruptive this would've seemed to those people gathered around our Lord. First, their societal paradigm gets swallowed up by Jesus like I work over a Supreme Pizza. Then, their expectations of adulthood are shown to be sorely lacking spiritually.

It is my belief and personal experience that, just like in many things, not much has changed. It certainly hasn't within me. Not yet, not entirely but it is slowly altering.

Take for example something that just happened. My daughter is home sick today and I'm choosing to work from home. Just a few moments ago, she came in, obviously bored. She wanted to do something. I, however, had “adult” things to do. I put “adult” in quotation marks because, in my life, that's seldom the right word to use. I oftentimes use “adult” as a subtle way of saying “more important.” It sure feels that way.

But Jesus' instruction in Matthew 18 points us all towards a different way of seeing things, doesn't it?

If adulthood is taken to mean “more important” at all times, then just imagine how joyless this world might become. Personally, I think we're presently seeing just the tip of the iceberg headed our way with this particular dynamic. I find the world infinitely more “serious” than it was in years past. Serious adulthood has even through its life-crushing tentacles around the field of education. While the No Child Left Behind Law contained a noble intent of improving outcomes for all children, it came loaded with a fatal flaw. It led directly towards the metrification of education. In a flash, the goalposts changed. Gone was the general goal of educating kids. It was replaced by a new goal of achieving numbers.

The thing about numbers is that they can be fudged. This is, however, not something that can extend towards actual people. A child at 18 is either equipped to succeed in this world by the educational system or education and all that is involved in it have failed. My own children's school district did this exact same thing. Numbers, being serious, adult business, were employed but they didn't turn out as expected. Even with the “advances” taking place in the educational field, the kids scores were going down.

Instead of trying to wrestle with and understand all the dynamics behind this failure, our school system took the very adult, very serious step of making grades numerically easier to get for kids. This adjustment certainly makes things seem better. But are they? Probably not.

In short, when adults sense they're losing, they have a wretched tendency to change the rules to suit their needs. This, I believe, is the direct and unarguable outcome of becoming apathetic and jaded. Sensing that one can't accomplish goals by conventional or ethical means, it is oftentimes the adult reflex to change the very rules they're playing by. To cheat, in simpler terms.

In younger children, we see almost none of this. Eventually, every child will begin this process of removing their rosy-colored glasses. Yes, your child will one day cheat at Monopoly most likely. But before that happens, it is my experience that you just can't find a disinterested, apathetic young child.

I remember one time when my son was around six years old, we'd signed him up for the very first time to play flag football. Now, Ben started soccer at 3 so by the time he was six, my wife and I logged a lot of hours on ball fields. Overt time, I confess, they'd become rather routine. As in not particularly exciting.

So that day as we drove to the field, Natalie and I chatted happily about adult topics for the most part. Ben, amped up for what lay ahead, went into what he called at the time, "the zone." When we arrived at the field, my wife and I were painting by the numbers, driver here, go there, lay out chair, sit and watch. For Ben, he was heading towards the Super Bowl and was as excited as anyone could be.

In fact, Ben was so excited to play his first flag-football game, he literally bounced up and down on the playing field as the coaches and referees went over the rules of play. Soon though, Ben added yelling, "Rock 'n' Roll" to his bouncing. Loudly. Repeatedly. What happened next captures the excitement of youth. Soon, a handful of Ben's teammates started doing the exact same thing. Soon thereafter, most members of both teams were bouncing up and down yelling, "ROCK 'n' ROLL!" Turns out, just about every kid on that field was as energized at the prospect of what lay directly ahead. Why? Because they're children.

Which, I can't help but believe, lands us precisely at the antithesis to the apathy that plagues you. A sense of wonder!

Make no mistake about it, apathy can be a real joy-killer, even though me might not initially see it that way. Apathy can creep into anyone's life, lurking quietly in the dark until it pounces. Suddenly, a thing you were once excited about becomes "old hat." The relationship that once gave you great excitement, now provides only the occasional thrill while producing a far greater amount of effort and frustration. When these conditions are met, apathy is sure to be along shortly behind.

The thing is, apathy goes by so many names, it's hard to keep a handle on them all. Indifference, lethargy stoicism even, all can serve to point us to this less-than-admirable state of being. In fact, the church of Jesus Christ goes just a bit further. We actually dare to call this disinterested state a sin with a particular name – sloth.

Personally, ever after the Zootopia movie, I can't help but imagine slow-moving sloths as comical. I've been blessed to have seen several sloths in zoos around my part of the country. They really do move comically slow. But this is where the comparison to the animal and the sin departs.

You see, eventually, sloths do move. Sometimes, they even move to help other sloths. Apathy, on the other hand, fails to deliver much of anything but misery, both to the slothful person as well as to others around them. That's why the church records it as a sin and that's why you should steer as clear from it as possible.

Many years ago, my dad took me to Chicago. This trip would've been right around 1983 or so. In order to attend a meeting, dad left me in the temporary care of a customer service professional, a man in his early 40s. Wisely, the man identified that I was interested in sports. Soon we were talking about the Chicago Bears, loaded with talent at the time. The Bulls, on the other hand, had languished in mediocrity for years. Still though, I asked him, what did he think of the Bulls.

His answer was funny and remains with me to this day. The man pointed at a parking lot across the street from my dad's office and said, "If the Bulls were playing right now in that parking lot right there, I wouldn't walk across the street to see them...even if it was free.

It would've been interesting to see how this man's excitement over the Bulls changed in the coming years. Soon thereafter, Michael Jordan arrived and, quickly following, won multiple championships for the Second City. My guess is that his tune changed.

Sadly though, I see the same kind of apathy exist happily within a great number of churches. How many churches are presently "trapped" in an area that has seen major demographic shifts? I can't put my figure on a

number but, I assure you, it's a lot of them. Then consider the example of South Park United Methodist Church.

SPUMC is located on a corner of one of the most affluent areas of the city. As a nearby mall grew and expanded, so did the wealth in the nearby neighborhoods. There, standing like a beacon within that world stood SPUMC. Yet, strangely, despite a massive influx into the area of all types of people, SPUMC continued to languish in apathy. Eventually, their failure led the Bishop to sell much of their land and then tear down their buildings.

This was all done to allow commerce to expand as a strip mall was built on the church's former land. The church didn't leave. They erected a small facility which they imagined would serve as an outpost of evangelism in a sea of consumerism.

So, how did they do?

While I'm sure the strip mall merchants are doing okay, the church isn't. It's failure in its' new endeavor ensured by the same apathy towards Jesus Christ which led to it's downsizing. You see, for any church not wired to aggressively meet and evangelize the people right around them, failure is always going to be the end result. Further, if this church, largely populated with comfortable Charlotte Ans wasn't able to invite others like them to participate in the life of Jesus Christ, will a smaller facility and more store neighbors do anything to change the trajectory away from failure?

For many churches, SPUMC's location seems a thing to be envied. After all, there are legions of majority white congregations that now find themselves in largely populated by people of color. So, whether it's the rich or the poor, many churches essentially say to their most proximate neighbors, "If the person I could evangelize was right over there I wouldn't go out and talk to them about Jesus Christ."

The thing is, that person IS right over there. Literally, like across the street. A recent survey discovered that it is much more likely for a Christian to neighbor non-Christians and other believers. That means the person could be helping lead to Jesus Christ is sitting no more than 500 yards away from you right now. Are you ready to go and chat with them? Probably not.

Why not? I'm sure you could articulate a thousand different reasons for this. Some might actually be legitimate. Most, however, will not. In fact, they all are probably a likely dodge for something you know down deep in your gut. You're apathetic about other's belief in Jesus Christ.

And we wonder why nobody is here? Folks, it isn't culture's fault nobody's here. It's ours and it is directly linked to our apathy. IT is hard, after all, to imagine a relationship with Jesus Christ when the sole and only point of contact one has with Him is an hour a week on a Sunday.

And that's okay...for a bit.

Sure, it's fine to be apathetic about a sports team on occasion, but when it becomes crushing to your soul, you simply must take a new action.

Here are some numbers which I think go a long, long way to help us understanding why there is such widespread apathy within the church to do the actual work Jesus Called us to – make and disciple Jesus followers.

- Only about half of regular church goers pray on a daily basis
  - Nearly 25% never pray at all
- Under ½ of Christians read the Bible on a daily basis
  - Nearly 20% never read at all
- 80% of Christians admit they rarely witness for and to Jesus Christ.
  - 2% are intentionally engaged in the work of evangelism

Simply stated, the church's main problem right now? It isn't critical race theory, republicans, society, culture. The failure of the church can be directly tracked to the sloth of her members. Churches became social clubs, not outposts of healing in a lost and broken world. In fact, congregational dynamics are better understood along the lines of a country club than a spiritual body of believers.

We can turn this all around. In order to do so though, we're going to need to get in touch with a state of mind that doesn't come as easily to us as we march forward in years – wonder!



## Chapter 4 – Wonders Upon Wonders

Years ago, I watched a toddler's face as his grandfather began showing him a couple of simple magic tricks. First, his grandpa pulled a quarter out of his ear. That, as you might imagine, brought the befuddlement of a child. He was, at one and the same time, confused and impressed. It was clear that even with his limited logic, what occurred before his eyes just simple wasn't possible. While that was initially exciting but opened up a can of questions.

Then, his grandfather showed him another, simple trick. The older man did the sleight-of-hand trick where it appears as though your thumb is detachable. As his grandpa did this over and over again, the young child's face returned to a state of wonder. Now, it was clear, things were starting to add up. His grandfather was magic.

Isn't it just natural to sense a feeling of astonishment and wonder when something good upends your expectations?

Just like that child that day, I can remember the time long ago when the 1980 Men's USA Hockey team defeated the much superior Soviet Union team. An American win would be an upset of a preposterous order for most hockey gurus. Thus, almost no one with any knowledge whatsoever thought the Americans stood a chance. Ultimately thanks to an all-in effort by the United States, they won. Anytime the team you're pulling for wins a big contest, it's natural to get excited. But when that team is thought to have an infinitesimal chance of winning beforehand, there is an extra sweetness to the jubilation. So, when the victory became clear, people were going crazy!

The win was a wonder, something that literally took people's breath away. I am convinced that the wonder of God is ever-present to us. Paul, in the first chapter of Romans, assures us that God's handiwork is all around every one of us, every single day. **Romans 1:19-20a** – *“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.”*

As a matter of fact, Paul clearly suggests that this ubiquitous glory is impossible to deny. But, he adds, God's greatness can be ignored...but only by a willful choice. One thing we shouldn't miss, is that our apathy towards God is likely a signal of our idolatry. In fact, I think that not at least striving to see God's awesome wonder on a daily basis is a sure-fire pathway towards a depressed state of your spirit.

That day Lillian encountered just three pennies and a rock,” she declared it “The Best Day Ever,” she was in a child-like state of wonder. Things like the probabilities or likely outcomes weren't yet known to her. After all, while I wouldn't wager on it, chances are just about any day at the school one could find the change that falls out of kids pants as they play. And a rock? There are hundreds of them, no doubt. Unaware of those very adult realities, Lillian was able to express her joy in finding some very common things on a playground.

If you're the crusted over and jaded type, the prospect of returning to the wide-eyed wonder of a child might seem downright scary or annoying. Life is freighted with its share of disappointments, sorrows and tragedy. My experience leads me to believe that most of the jaded and apathetic people in the world didn't start out that way. Something along their path, be it one large disappointment or a hundred-thousand slight let-downs, leaves them hard to impress, sadly.

So, if that's you, I really want you to read this next part very, very closely. There is, I believe, a terrible power in inertia. When we stop moving, either our bodies, our minds or our spirits, we start getting walled in. Our inactivity forms a prison. One that becomes more and more difficult to escape the further you're removed from action.

After my father retired, he really found himself without a tether for the first time in a great many years. Lacking much desire, he settled in on the family room couch and didn't do much else thereafter. In those years what I witnessed was my dad slow down. Then, when my sister died unexpectedly, Dad slipped further and further into a depression that he lacked the resources to fight.

As I look back on things now that he's passed away, it seems very clear in my memory that as the years rolled by, there was less and less of a sparkle in his eye, let alone a skip to his step.

My guess is, somewhere along the way, dad gave up caring about many things. I've always suspected that this was a byproduct of his lack of faith. dad's Christian faith gave way quickly as this intelligent, farmer's

son landed at a very secular Chapel Hill in the late 1950s for college. From that time forward, Faith in anything wasn't much of a part of my dad's life, other than in himself.

Having a successful career in marketing, that faith in himself only grew stronger, shutting out most of the sunlight of the Holy Spirit. What he didn't realize is that, growing prideful, he was erecting exactly the kind of prison I mentioned above. As his body began breaking down, his spirit already was broken. One of the last times I saw him, he was laying on the ground following a fall. No matter what we said to him, he wouldn't even try to get up. The life in him, largely gone.

His experience adds an extra measure of confidence in this one belief – a life lived without faith, and especially a child-like one, isn't going to be an enjoyable one no matter how hard you try or how much you get.

Faith in God, I'm convinced, leads to an ongoing expectation of wonder.

How could it not? As we open up the Bible and turn our attention into the Word, we discover an amazing number of verses concern themselves with just how great our God is.

### The Benefits and Practices of Wonder

There are, curiously enough, a host of well-known and well-researched benefits for those who deliberately seek out wonder in their day-to-day lives. What I found really interesting was just how many of these effects are either mentioned or encouraged by verses of Scripture.

The first thing that really stands out to me as a benefit of wonder deals with time. Ever noticed how time seems relative? When we go on a family vacation, days seem to evaporate as quickly as mist off a lake in the morning. However, when I'm at a long, boring meeting (I've been to a fair amount of these, thanks Presbytery meetings!), time honestly feels as though it is barely creeping along.

The way I always think about this involves an experience my daughter and I had a few years back. Back in 2017, virtual reality games were a future hope, at best. In Myrtle Beach however, there was a place which rented the equipment and a place to play some amazing virtual reality games.

I agreed to let Lillian play for a bit. After securing her a spot in the queue, we sat and waited for her turn. Time drug a bit but, after about 20 minutes, it was Lillian's turn. I'd purchased for her a 30-minute block of time in a virtual game. A screen overhead her area allowed me to watch what she was playing. Lillian began the game and it was quickly obvious, she and I were having completely different experiences.

She was giggling, jumping, thrusting and slashing with her arms. I, on the other hand, was seated. For a few minutes, it was just a joy to see just how much fun she was having. Her giggles and shrieks let me and everyone in the arcade know she was having an excellent time. What Father doesn't find enjoyment in their child's enrapturement? She was filled with wonder at the virtual world she was exploring. I momentarily filled with that same spirit, just watching her.

After several minutes though, her excitement and energy were still there, but my attention was flagging. Adulthood beckoned withing. Quickly I departed the world of vicarious wonder and began, well, worrying. I had a lot on my mind that summer and it rapidly sapped both my attention and energy. You know how it is when you're anxious. I started feeling like I had a thousand "real" things to get done. Sitting around watching a 6-year-old play a glorified videogame wasn't on the list. In a short period of time I went from a state of wonder to a state of anxiousness.

As Lillian concluded her half-hour of casting spells and chasing dragons, she emerged. When the headset was removed, her first reaction was, "I can't believe it's over." I, on the other hand, was relieved that my long, arid period of stewing in my own self-centered fears and worries was over. Two opposite reactions to the same sequence of events. Lillian felt time move quickly. For me, the same period seemed very lengthy.

Time is relative, that's what we always say. Well, it is. The example above is something we all have experienced in our own unique ways. Feeling a sense of wonder, Lillian felt time pass quickly. Since I was wrapped up in anxiety and fear, time passed very, very slowly.

## Chapter 4 - Wonder

- I. Wonder
  - a. What Lillian experienced that day several years back – “Look Daddy, I found three pennies and a rock!”
  - b. Two Forms of Wonder
    - i. Amazement – “Awe-filled amazement”
    - ii. Curiosity – “I wonder why?”
- II. Awe-Filled Amazement
  - a. This is SOOOO important to developing a child-like faith.
  - b. Just listen to a recent study done by researchers at the University of Minnesota
    - i. People who experience a feeling of wonder tend to:
      - 1. Feel they have more time available – feel less pressure as impatience dwindles
        - a. **Psalm 46:10** – “*Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth!*”
      - 2. Are much more likely to volunteer
        - a. **Acts 20:35** – “*In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’*”
      - 3. Experience greater life satisfaction
        - a. **Psalm 118:24** – “*This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.*”
      - 4. Favor experiences over the accumulation of things
        - a. **Matthew 6:19-21** – “*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*”
    - c. The Proper Response towards God is awe-filled wonder.
  - III. Cultivating a Sense of Wonder in your Life – from Psychology Today
    - a. Seek out Displays of Mastery and Wonder
      - i. In the Bible
        - 1. The greatest book ever written. Best seller of all-all-time.
          - a. 66 books across hundreds of years, one subject matter – God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
        - 2. This is going to be a recurring suggestion
      - ii. In Nature
        - 1. GET OUTSIDE!
          - a. James and the Great Outdoors
            - i. Move to Idaho
              - 1. Jason, you hate the cold
          - 2. Science Articles
            - a. Particle Physics
    - b. Approach things from NEW ANGLES
      - i. Sermon on the Mount
        - 1. The Formula – you have heard it said, this. BUT I SAY THAT. Jesus is all about us trying things from HIS ANGLES.
    - c. Look at your life through someone else’s eyes
      - i. The Gospels are all from a different perspective
      - ii. Dance recital story about awkward pre-teen girls
      - iii. Look at you from God’s point of view

1. **Genesis 1:26-27** – *“Then God said, “Let us make humanity in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So, God created man in his own image in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”*
  - a. You are:
    - i. Loved
      1. **John 3:16** – *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”*
    - ii. Forgiven
      1. **Romans 5:8** – *“but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*
    - iii. Kept safe until the coming day of the Lord
      1. **Philippians 4:19** – *“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus*