

## Keeping Awe and Wonder throughout 2019

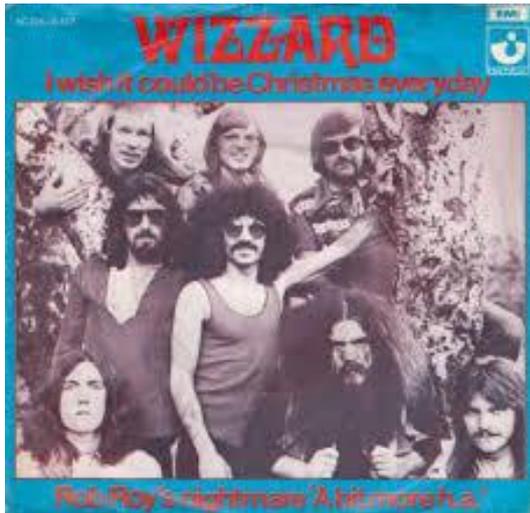
Has anyone put their Christmas decorations away yet? I know some people like to milk how long they can keep the place Christmassy whereas others of us are sitting on Boxing Day wondering if it is too soon to take down the tree yet. Traditionally they would only come down on 6 January after the 12 days of Christmas – not in our house!

The presents are unwrapped – if it is like at our house some are lost or broken already. The leftovers are not so appetising anymore and 5 days after Christmas the sparkle is starting to wear off. Yet there is something so important about Christmas that we need not pack it all up and pop it into storage until next year. This year we have focused as a church on the awe and wonder of Christmas – of realising a fresh the depth and ferociousness of God's love for us shown through Jesus. We need to make sure that we don't pack that away or throw it out.

There was a campaign started in the late 70s about giving Dogs as presents – did it run in South Africa too?



The same is true for Jesus – He is not just for Christmas. We don't put him away when we pack up our nativity sets. But unlike the Wizard's song we can't have Christmas everyday:



So how do we retain that awe and wonder of who God is throughout the year?

### 1. Awe and wonder are not just for Christmas

Christmas is only part of God's amazing love story to us – it began when He spoke before time began and through His words He created the earth and everything in it. He designed us and the world to be worshippers. Let me read this Psalm to you:

**Psalm 19: 1 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. 2 Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. 3 They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. 4 Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun. 5 It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. 6 It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is deprived of its warmth. 7 The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. 9 The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous. 10 They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. 11 By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward. 12 But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults. 13 Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression. 14 May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.**

Creation stands in awe of God – do you? It can be so easy when you live in such a beautiful place to get blasé about creation – seen it before, seen it when stuck in traffic on the daily commute. But when you take the time to really look and appreciate what God has done, our hearts want to worship. You see retaining awe and wonder through the next year is something that we have to be intentional about. Too often we live our lives sleep walking. Our minds are busy on other things – we have to do lists, we are over committed, stressed and dare I say self-absorbed. How

often have you gotten to your destination and realise you can't actually remember the journey? Unless we intentionally unplug from our busyness and plug into God and His Word we will miss the wonder that is there everyday. You see...

## **2. Awe and wonder are about focus and perspective**

It is hard to be amazed by what you don't see and we don't see because we don't look or focus. We are so easily distracted by the pressures of everyday life that we forget to stop and look to God. We forget to look at the world through His eyes.

Corey Ten Boom wrote this poem:

"My life is but a weaving  
Between my God and me.  
I cannot choose the colors  
He weaveth steadily.

Off' times He weaveth sorrow;  
And I in foolish pride  
Forget He sees the upper  
And I the underside.

Not 'til the loom is silent  
And the shuttles cease to fly  
Will God unroll the canvas  
And reveal the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful  
In the weaver's skillful hand  
As the threads of gold and silver  
In the pattern He has planned

He knows, He loves, He cares;  
Nothing this truth can dim.  
He gives the very best to those  
Who leave the choice to Him."

In the last couple of years, I have taken up sewing – I wished I had learnt from my mum when I had a chance, but between youtube and books I'm teaching myself. But it is so easy to focus on the mistakes and the bits that have gone wrong when making something. Something that other people will overlook you become fixated by – we do that with life too. We focus and fixate on the problems and the worries, instead of seeing things from God's perspective. We need to learn to look at things from God's point of view and if we do we will be in awe and wonder at His amazing

plan for our lives. Yes, because of sin we cannot see Him fully and in all His glory as we are bogged down by our stuff, but we can catch glimpses of Him in everyday life, and how amazing it will be when one day we see Him fully.

**1 Corinthians 13: 12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.**

So how do we intentionally keep the awe and wonder through out this next year – we don't know what lies ahead (good or bad). The only things we can really help to control is our response and our focus, with the Holy Spirit's help.

### **3. Awe and wonder needs to be fed/ maintained:**

We can increase our awe and wonder of God feeding it – much like a fire, our faith will grow cold if we don't feed it. How can we do that – there are a number of ways but here is a few to get us started:

#### **a. Read God's word**

**Psalm 19: 7-11 The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. <sup>8</sup> The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. <sup>9</sup> The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous. <sup>10</sup> They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. <sup>11</sup> By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.**

So often our view of God is shaped by our experiences in life rather than on how He has revealed Himself in His Word. The Bible is full of so many stories and pictures of God's love for us, His character, His holiness, His wrath against sin. Unless we spend time in His Word we will never have a chance of seeing Him fully. It is hard to be reverent and in in wonder about someone you don't know so well. So do something intentional this year to get to know God better through His word. Whether it is signing up for the Bible School on Tuesday evenings, or getting yourself a daily reader from Ivan's bookstall, or downloading a read the bible in a year plan (**A link to an example will pop up on the church facebook page by the time this service ends if I get the timer right**). Do something intentional to make sure that you spend time in God's word getting to know Him better.

#### **b. Deal with sin**

**Psalm 19: 9-14 The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous. <sup>10</sup> They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. <sup>11</sup> By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward. <sup>12</sup> But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden**

faults. <sup>13</sup> **Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression.** <sup>14</sup> **May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.**

When we spend time focusing on God we realise that we are sinful and fall so far short of His glory. Unfortunately, we have lost our fear of God – by fear I mean healthy respect of Him and His holiness rather than we need to be scared of Him. It is an older use of the word that had fallen out of fashion. But we have been so focused on His love (which is so amazing) that we neglect the more unsettling parts of God such as His hatred of sin. But our sin is a blockage between God and Him – we need to deal with it. We need to seek His forgiveness that He is so willing to give us. We need not hide away in shame. But we cannot come close to Him when we chose to stay with our sin.

### **c. Record what God has done**

Another way to regain or maintain awe and wonder of what God is doing is to make record of it – to write down what God has done for you. The bible is a testimony of God's work for other to see. Often the bible the people often build monuments or erects stones to testify to what God has done for them:

**1 Samuel 7: 12 Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far the LORD has helped us."**

How can we do this today? A simple way is through journaling or even through something like a thankful jar that we were given for Christmas. You write down what God has done and pull it out at the end of the year and remind yourself of God's goodness and hand on your life. Another way is through sharing testimonies – telling others what He has done for you – in cell groups, in church (chat to a pastor). Our testimonies of God's goodness can feed other people's awe and wonder even when they are facing challenges.

### **d. Live Expectantly**

God is alive and active – yet many of us live each day feeling that He is far off and distant.



We often miss God at work because we don't think He will come through for us Yet Jesus said this:

**John 14:11-14 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. <sup>12</sup> Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. <sup>13</sup> And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. <sup>14</sup> You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.**

We need to live expectantly, in anticipation of God at work. We miss out on so much as we are timid in our faith or so bogged down in our own busyness.

So what is your plan for the next year? Yes we don't know what the year will bring – but we can set our selves up with a good foundation and commitment to be keep our eyes on Jesus instead of our problems, to seek Him in His word and wait expectantly with awe to see what He will do in 2019.

***This prayer from Billy Graham, written for The Saturday Evening Post in 2008, is just as relevant more than a decade later.***

Our Father and our God, as we stand at the beginning of this new year we confess our need of Your presence and Your guidance as we face the future.

We each have our hopes and expectations for the year that is ahead of us—but You alone know what it holds for us, and only You can give us the strength and the wisdom we will need to meet its challenges. So help us to humbly put our hands into Your hand, and to trust You and to seek Your will for our lives during this coming year.

In the midst of life's uncertainties in the days ahead, assure us of the certainty of Your unchanging love.

In the midst of life's inevitable disappointments and heartaches, help us to turn to You for the stability and comfort we will need.

In the midst of life's temptations and the pull of our stubborn self-will, help us not to lose our way but to have the courage to do what is right in Your sight, regardless of the cost.

And in the midst of our daily preoccupations and pursuits, open our eyes to the sorrows and injustices of our hurting world, and help us to respond with compassion and sacrifice to those who are friendless and in need. May our constant prayer be that of the ancient Psalmist: "Teach me, O Lord, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end" (Psalm 119:33).

We pray for our nation and its leaders during these difficult times, and for all those who are seeking to bring peace and justice to our dangerous and troubled world. We pray especially for Your protection on all those who serve in our armed forces, and we thank You for their commitment to defend our freedoms, even at the cost of their own lives. Be with their families also, and assure them of Your love and concern for them.

Bring our divided nation together, and give us a greater vision of what You would have us to be. Your Word reminds us that "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 33:12).

As we look back over this past year we thank You for Your goodness to us—far beyond what we have deserved. May we never presume on Your past goodness or forget all Your mercies to us, but may they instead lead us to repentance, and to a new commitment to [make You the foundation and center of our lives](#) this year.

And so, our Father, we thank You for the promise and hope of this new year, and we look forward to it with expectancy and faith. This I ask in the name of our Lord and Savior, who by His death and resurrection has given us hope both for this world and the world to come.

*Amen.*