



I Wonder

We're heading toward winter, and in just a few weeks some of us, like it or not, will be engulfed in snow. My dad, for one, liked it. For me as a kid, that didn't seem remarkable because—sleds, toboggans, snow forts, snowball fights, snowmen, snow days and so on. But as I got older (during the times in cooler climates), my appreciation of the white stuff began to wane. Slippery streets, chains, snow tires, shoveling, getting stuck, freezing pipes...

At some point I wondered about my father's delight with snow. Every winter, well into his 60s, he would watch the weather forecasts with anticipation, and when snow began to fall he would gaze happily out the living room window. He would grab his 35mm Ricoh and shoot photos of the front and back yards and the neighborhood covered in snow. He would comment in detail about it in letters.

Why? I think he was one of those people who don't lose their sense of wonder as they age. How did he manage to keep that sense when so many of us seem to let it slip away?

I can think of times when my own sense of wonder took a back seat. Those were the times when I was on a treadmill of doing stuff—overly busy with the nuts and bolts of life.

Not that anything is wrong with taking care of business. We should be taking care of business. Every day. But there's that passage where Jesus cautions a lady named Martha who was frantically preparing a big dinner for him. "You are worried and upset about many things," he says, "but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Your sister, Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:38-41).

Martha was scattered and distracted by the many nuts and bolts of producing a feast for Jesus. A worthy task, and who deserved a feast more than Jesus?

But her sister Mary was focused on one thing—Jesus himself. A dinner, after all, is temporary—"taken away." A relationship with God is forever.

Which brings us back to our sense of wonder. Whenever I carve out a little time to relax with nature—whether it's watching snow fall, trees moving in the wind or water cascading over ancient rocks—I discover I'm really contemplating the nature of God. Even then, we might get distracted by nuts and bolts, such as whether the lawn needs watering or mowing. But if we can calm ourselves and look beyond all that, then our sense of wonder emerges.

Wonder happens when something is beyond our scope—beyond our control. It happens when we humbly realize we don't need to know all the answers, and therefore must resign ourselves to God.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson put it, "*The happiest man is he who learns from nature the lesson of worship.*"

By contrast, when we believe we have all the answers—when we view the world through lenses of arrogant certainty, dogma and control—we are also inclined to think we've earned everything by our own hard work and accomplishments.

Wonder allows us to recognize that most (if not all) of what and who we are is not of our own doing. We are, in fact, fully dependent on God and on each other. The natural outcome of this perspective is gratefulness and thanksgiving.

My father's sense of wonder didn't end with snow. He seemed to be fascinated with every aspect of creation, noticing ordinary things most of us take for granted, which caused him to be grateful for them. He told me once that even in late middle age—and despite his various ailments—he still felt like a kid. I suspect that was his sense of wonder talking.

Maybe this is part of what Jesus meant when he said "...unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3, RSV).

I believe we must all eventually take this wonderful turn. □

—Monte Wolverton