

WONDER STRUCK



AWAKEN TO THE NEARNESS
of GOD

MARGARET
FEINBERG

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR	4
DEAR LEADER	5
LEADER'S GUIDE	6
SESSION ONE: THE WONDER OF DIVINE EXPECTATION	8
SESSION TWO: THE WONDER OF GOD'S PRESENCE	30
SESSION THREE: THE WONDER OF REST	56
SESSION FOUR: THE WONDER OF PRAYER	80
SESSION FIVE: THE WONDER OF FRIENDSHIP	106
SESSION SIX: THE WONDER OF FORGIVENESS	132
SESSION SEVEN: FINAL CELEBRATION GATHERING	158
THE WONDERSTRUCK JOURNAL	162
I'VE BEEN WONDERSTRUCK BY ...	172
WONDERSTRUCK SCRIPTURE MEMORIZATION CARDS	177



MEET THE AUTHOR MARGARET FEINBERG

Margaret Feinberg is a popular Bible teacher and speaker at churches and leading conferences such as Catalyst, Thrive, and Extraordinary Women. Her books and Bible studies have sold over 600,000 copies and received critical acclaim and extensive national media coverage from CNN, the Associated Press, *USA Today*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, and many others.

She was recently named one of 50 Women to Watch by *Christianity Today*, one of the 30 Voices who will help lead the church in the next decade by *Charisma* magazine, and one of the '40 Under 40' who will shape Christian publishing by *Christian Retailing* magazine. Margaret currently lives in Morrison, Colorado, with her husband, Leif and their superpup, Hershey.

One of her greatest joys is hearing from her readers. Go ahead, become her friend on Facebook, follow her on Twitter or Pinterest @mafeinberg, or check out her website at www.margaretfeinberg.com.

DEAR LEADER,

I WANT TO BEGIN by giving you a big bear hug, looking deep into your eyes, and saying thank you. Thank you for taking the time to lead participants through this study called *Wonderstruck*. I know your time and energy are pulled in many different directions, and I want to begin by thanking you for your willingness to sacrifice to draw others closer to Christ. I'm grateful for you. I can't wait to hear what our Abba Father is going to do in and through you and your group in the weeks ahead.

You also need to know that I've been praying for you. I've asked God to speak to, lead, guide, encourage, and infuse you with more of His presence. I pray that in the moments you're tempted to believe you have to have all the right answers, the Holy Spirit will gently remind you that what's often most needed is a warm smile, a readiness to pray, and an offer to grab coffee together and allow the person to talk.

I've also asked God that over the upcoming weeks you won't just help others discover the wonder of God, but you would be wonderstruck, too. If you'll drop us a note at wonderstruck@margaretfeinberg.com and let us know when your group is meeting, we want to pray for you and your participants during this time. Oh! And if you have any questions along the way, feel free to send those, too.

Thank you, my friend, for being courageous enough to lead others Christward. I can't wait to meet you and give you that bear hug in person. May you be wonderstruck and live even more awake and aware to the wonder of God all around.

BLESSINGS,

MARGARET

This study invites you deeper into the trade book *Wonderstruck*. You can participate in the study without the trade book, but you'll get more out of the experience if you pick up a copy—(available in paperback, electronic, and audiobook formats).

LEADER'S GUIDE



THIS BRIEF LEADER'S GUIDE is designed to help you take participants through this book and Bible study. As you prepare for this study, go ahead and watch several sessions ahead of time so that you'll have a feel for the study's direction.

In the Leader's Kit, you'll find a copy of the *Wonderstruck* tradebook. Reading the book in advance will help you prepare for leading the study and provide you with additional insights and background. The book is not required for participants, but after reading, you may want to recommend group members pick up an electronic, audiobook, or paperback copy to get the most out of the experience.

As you prepare for each session, here's a basic outline of what to expect:



EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITY

Depending on the amount of time you have to meet together and the resources available, you'll want to begin the session with the experiential activity. You will find these activities on the group page that begins each week. This interactive icebreaker is designed to be a trigger for group engagement as well as move people toward the ideas explored in the teaching. You'll always want to read ahead to the following week's activity to see what's needed and how participants may be able to contribute.



HOMEWORK GROUP DISCUSSION

Next in each lesson (with the exception of the first and last) you will lead the group to review the homework from the previous week. Encourage participants to share what they're learning and how the Holy Spirit is at work in their lives.



PLAY SESSION VIDEO

After you've finished the homework discussion, it's time to play the video. The teaching presentations will range from 20-30 minutes.



NOTES

Encourage participants to take notes as they watch the video.



VIDEO DISCUSSION

Dive into the video discussion questions next. Based on the amount of time your group meets, you may need to prayerfully determine which questions are best suited for your group and their needs. Don't feel as though you need to ask every question. Rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance on any additional questions or follow-up that needs to be asked as the discussion progresses.



CLOSING PRAYER

Always save time for prayer before you close. Ask the Holy Spirit to open everyone's eyes and hearts to the wonder of God all around.

Thank you, again, for leading this Bible study. I pray that you experience the wonder of God in amazing ways.

THE WONDER OF DIVINE EXPECTATION



SESSION ONE

GROUP GETTING STARTED: (10-15 minutes)

SESSION ONE: THE WONDER OF DIVINE EXPECTATION



EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITY: RECOGNIZE THE WONDER OF GOD IN OUR LIVES

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:


- Two balloons for each participant
- A black marker for each participant
- A small pin or thumbtack

- 1 Blow up the balloons ahead of time (consider using a small pump) or purchase helium filled balloons.
- 2 Ask participants to write what takes away the wonder of God in their life the most on one balloon (e.g. busyness, responsibility).
- 3 Ask each participant to write what in the last week has renewed their sense of the wonder of God on the second balloon (e.g. birth of a baby, renewal of a friendship, walk through a forest, moment in Scripture).
- 4 Invite each participant to share what they've written on their balloons. After they share what takes away from their sense of wonder, invite them to pop the first balloon so they're left holding the balloon that awakens the wonder of God.
- 5 Discuss the following questions:

Do you tend to focus more of your energy on what takes away from the wonder of God or what awakens the sense of wonder in your life? Why?

What can you do to nurture a sense of wonder as represented by your balloon?

 **PLAY THE SESSION ONE VIDEO: [23:15]**

 **NOTES** _____

 **VIDEO DISCUSSION**

- 1 Turn to page 162. Over the next six weeks, you'll be challenged to awaken even more to the presence of God in your life. One of the ways to do this is to make daily entries into the Wonderstruck Journal. On page 163, begin today by listing three moments in which you've encountered the wonder of God and His handiwork. Note your first three entries and share them with the group.
- 2 Which name of God listed in Isaiah 9:6 is most familiar to you in your spiritual journey? Which is least familiar? Explain.
- 3 Why do you think God reveals His name as Wonderful? What do you think is communicated about the nature and character of God through this title?
- 4 Invite a participant to read Psalm 77:11 aloud. When was the last time you found yourself taken back by the wonder of God? What did you learn about the character or nature of God through the experience?
- 5 What disappointments or letdowns from the past or present tend to dampen any sense of divine expectation in your life?
- 6 What are you currently doing to nurture a sense of divine expectation?

 **CLOSING PRAYER**

As you close in prayer ask:

- God to awaken each person's heart, mind, and spirit to a sense of God's wonder
- God to grant participants a renewed sense of divine expectation in their lives
- the Holy Spirit to orchestrate divine opportunities over the upcoming weeks to experience God's presence and grow closer to Him.

DAY ONE

AWAKE TO WONDER

I NEVER EXPECTED TO FIND love in Alaska. I only travelled to the tiny town of Sitka to help my aunt with her bed and breakfast. But during one stay, I fell head over heels for a six-foot-eight local guy named Leif (pronounced Lay-f). Norwegian by descent, Leif and I were married just a little over a year after we first met. For the first five years of our marriage, we lived in Alaska. During that time I had the privilege of seeing the Northern Lights on countless evenings. But one night stood out above the rest.

While taking an overnight ferry from Sitka to Juneau, I remember admiring the faint moonlight backlighting the mountainous coast. Then something compelled me to look up, and a scene unfolded that I suspect caused at least one angel to gasp: The expanse of the sky transformed from inky blackness into an infinite canvas on which brushstrokes of apricot, sapphire, and emerald were painted into the night sky.

The hours passed. In the wake of such beauty, I offered up a silent prayer to lay hold of the wonder of God, to find myself once again awed by another facet of His nature, another glimpse of His presence in our world. God desires to captivate us not just with His handiwork but with Himself—displaying facets of His character, igniting us with His fiery love, awakening us to the intensity of His holiness.

Often such incidents occur when we least anticipate, leaving us wonderstruck much like my encounter with the Northern Lights. But we can live each day trusting that the God who met us in the past will once again greet us with arms wide open in the future.

God extends uncounted invitations to encounter Him, yet too often I sleep straight through. Unconscious of the life God desires for me, I slumber in the presence of the sacred and snore in the company of the divine. Inactive and inert, I become a spiritual sleepyhead who clamors for the snooze button rather than climbing out of bed.

God is busting at the seams to display His glory, His power, and His might in a way that leaves us awestruck, breathless, and wide awake

THIS WEEK:

If you are following along in the trade book, read chapters “.000: Captured by the Night Sky” and “.001: Hidden Among the Highlands” and tackle the five days of homework to prepare for the next gathering.

BONUS ACTIVITY:

To see some breathtaking images of the Northern Lights or Aurora Borealis, search Google for “Images of Northern Lights.”

+ BONUS ACTIVITY:

Spend time committing Psalm 77:11 to memory this week. You'll find a flash card on page 177.

to His presence in our world. God longs for us to live awake to Him and all that He is doing in our world. Indeed, our God is Wonderful.

What three words come to mind when you think of "wonder"?

The dictionary defines wonder as being filled with "admiration, amazement, or awe; marvel."¹

In so many ways, those are the fruits of life with God. We are created to live in such a way that our lives are acts of worship where we express our adoration, affection, and appreciation of God at every turn. The presence of God and His work in our world should leave us awestruck. Now let me be clear: Experiencing the wonder of God isn't about landing a crazy story to tell our friends or experiencing pimply goose bumps. The wonder awakens us to dive even deeper in our relationship with God.

That's why I define the wonder of God as the following:

THE WONDER OF GOD: A MOMENT OF SPIRITUAL AWAKENING THAT MAKES US CURIOUS TO KNOW GOD MORE.

Reflecting on this definition, when was the last time you encountered the wonder of God?

The wonder of God stirs our spiritual longings and makes us hungry for God in ways that often lead us into moments of transformation. Our eyes open. Our ears hear. Our hearts soften in the presence of God. Our wills more readily yield to God. Our worship becomes more pleasing to God.

What are the two components of acceptable worship mentioned in Hebrews 12:28-29?

If I'm honest with you, despite the breathtaking and transformative moments of God that I've experienced, all too often I find myself like so many of the other passengers on the ferry that evening in Alaska—deep in sleep, missing the moment. I succumb to spiritual weariness rather than remaining alert to the wondrous displays that reveal more of God. In those moments, the burning bushes in my life are reduced to smoldering distractions, and the still small voice becomes something I absentmindedly shush.

What are the wonders of God you've taken for granted rather than responding with awe?

BONUS ACTIVITY:

Rich Hammar captures astrophotography images from his driveway in Springfield, Missouri, using specialized equipment. Some of his images have been featured on NASA's homepage. Check out www.seetheglory.com.

On the continuum below, mark how often you pass by God's presence and handiwork unaware:



How do you think you can become more aware and awake to the wonders of God?

 **NOTABLE:**


The wonders that I fail to marvel can be as simple as the gift of each day, the beauty of creation, the delight of God's Word, or the compassion of a friend.

For me, becoming more aware of the wonder of God in my life began with a simple request: I prayed for wonder. To this day, I stand in awe of the ways God has answered—as you'll discover in the weeks ahead.

That's why I'd like to invite you to offer up a similar prayer. Will you pray for wonder right now? Ask God to awaken your ability to see and savor His sweet presence and recognize His divine handiwork.

Then live eyes wide open to the ways God answers.

One great way to live expectant for God is keep a wonder journal. During the opening session, you were asked to write down three of God's wonders you've experienced. Will you commit to write down three items each day?

 **CLOSING PRAYER:** Spend time praying that you'll be wonderstruck. With each passing page and session, ask God to help you discover another facet of His character, feel the soft pinch of His presence, and step back in astonishment of the One who holds everything together.

DAY TWO

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

ONE OF THE GREAT THINGS we can expect of God is the unexpected. By His nature, God's ways are so much more vibrant, breathtaking, and all encompassing than our own. This is one of the most exciting aspects of living with divine expectation: We can lean into the idea that whatever God has up His sleeve is better than anything we could imagine on our own.

What ignites in you the desire to live with a holy anticipation that God wants to meet you?

As I've been praying for wonder, I've been asking God to infuse me with the Holy Spirit so that I'm more sensitive to His nudging and leading. I hope you are, too. I've been living in awe of the unexpected ways God answers.

On the continuum below, mark how often you tend to live with a sense of divine expectation:



I don't live with any sense of divine expectation.

I live wildly expectant of God to do great things.

What prevents you from living with the expectation that God wants to do awesome work in, through, and around you as described in Exodus 34:10?

We recently traveled through Baltimore when God surprised us with an encounter. We stopped by a local grocery store to grab our favorite road travel supplies—water, fresh fruit, and baked potato chips. Walking out of the grocery store, my husband, Leif, and I saw

QUOTABLE:

"I want the presence of God Himself, or I don't want anything at all to do with religion. I want all that God has or I don't want any." –A.W. Tozer, author and pastor

a woman on her cell phone with three kids in tow. She complained that there weren't enough beds to serve the homeless women in need in the city. We looked at each other, unsure of the best way to respond, and returned to the car.

Then we noticed a quick eats restaurant in the strip mall and decided to grab a meal. As we waited to order, we discussed what we just saw.

"Was it real or a con?" we debated. Yep. We're guilty of watching one too many episodes of *Dateline*, too. The situation seemed a little too perfect.

On her cell phone. Talking loudly. Outside a busy grocery store.

When was the last time you second-guessed a person's motives in asking for help?

How do you handle situations like this?

Before eating, we prayed and waited for a sense of the best way to respond.

Then. She appeared. Again.

She brought her three kids into the eatery to use the restroom.

Leif and I debated how to assist her and if we were the ones to help. Neither of us had a tremendous sense of peace about what to do or how to do it. The parable of the man whose body was left for dead along the road came to mind. I calculated dozens of reasons not to help the woman—including getting conned.

Make a list of five reasonable explanations for not helping the man left for dead along the road in Luke 10:29-37.

The priest and Levite (temple worker) in this story aren't doing something their contemporaries would consider wrong. Avoiding the beaten man on the road was following God's law. If the man was dead and they touched him, or if he died in their arms, they wouldn't be able to do their job for seven days. These two men choose to follow the purity law, but ignore the law about loving their neighbor. They consciously decide that the beaten man must not be their neighbor and move along.

Yet the Samaritan man is the one who reverses the robbers' actions. While the robbers took money, the Samaritan gave. The robbers beat, the Samaritan bandaged. The robbers left the man for dead and never returned; the Samaritan left the man in the care of the innkeeper and promised to return.

Something inside reminded me that showing compassion was worth the risk of being conned.

Leif pulled out cash and asked, "How much should we give her?"

A number came to mind.

Walking out of the restaurant, we saw the woman walking into the liquor store down the strip mall. Again, Leif and I looked at each other, second-guessing that maybe this wasn't such a good idea.

She emerged without a purchase.

I took a gulp and walked toward her.

 **NOTABLE:**

The 17-mile journey from Jerusalem down to Jericho is known as "The Bloody Way." The elevation drops from 2,500 feet above sea level to 825 feet below sea level. Walking the windy, steep, rocky road would be similar to walking in a dangerous alley in a big city with money dangling out of your pockets.

“What is this?” she asked as I shoved the money into her hand.

“Cash,” I said. “Bless you!”

“Who are you—an angel?” she asked, welling up with tears.

“No,” I smiled and started to turn away.

“Wait!” she yelled. Then the woman pointed to her son and explained that the boy had autism. “But he knows how to love. Can he give you a hug?”

This boy wrapped his arms around me, my face squished in the nape of his neck, and I knew I’d encountered the wonder of God.

Driving away, Leif and I prayed for this woman and her children. I was so grateful for the opportunity to be a conduit of God’s goodness, but I never expected to receive such a gift, a pure expression of love from a child, in return. Sometimes we have to take risks, including getting conned, to be wonderstruck by the love of God.

When have you seen God answer the prayer of Psalm 17:7 in your life? Spend a few moments asking God to reveal this wonder in greater measure.


 **QUOTABLE:**

“Who among the gods is like you, LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?” –Exodus 15:11

What stops you from taking bigger risks in your walk with God?

When have you taken a risk and been wonderstruck by God through the process?

My hope for you is that you'll take big risks in order to reach out to others and share God's love with them. Not every story will end like you hope, but along the way you're going to encounter our God, who is full of wonders, in unexpected ways.

 **CLOSING PRAYER:** Spend some time asking God to raise the level of divine expectation in your life and expect the unexpected. Ask God to place people in your life over the course of the next week on whom you can lavish the love of God.

DAY THREE

WONDERSTRUCK BY A GLIMPSE OF GOD

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU found yourself taken back by the wonder of God? If you spend time reflecting on who God is and all that He's done, it's hard not to be caught up in the wonder.

Take a few moments and reflect on the some of the characteristics of God listed below:

WISE	MERCIFUL	MAJESTIC
TRUTHFUL	GRACIOUS	ETERNAL
GOOD	PEACEFUL	ALL-POWERFUL
LOVING	FAITHFUL	UNCHANGING
JUST	EMINENCE	SOVEREIGN

My heart melts whenever I start thinking about the wondrous love of God. Or when I consider how many times God has extended the mercy I-so-don't-deserve, gratitude exudes from the core of my being. But when I think about God as being eternal I sometimes struggle to wrap my head, let alone my heart, around all that means.

Now some of these characteristics evoke a sense of wonder more than others—and that's OK. Every facet of God's character invites us to know more of Him.

To what characteristics of God does Isaiah 40:25-26 allude? Which provide you with the greatest sense of wonder?

As we pray for wonder each day, we need to live expectant for the ways God wants to reveal Himself even in the tiniest details of life. Our attention might be drawn to patterns and particulars in Scripture we've never seen before. Our spirits may waken to prayer in fresh and unexpected ways. God may choose to reveal Himself in unexpected conversations as we go through our daily life.

Here's what I've discovered: When we pray for wonder and live eyes wide open to wonder, the tone and tenacity with which we live our lives change. We become expectant to catch glimpses of God in ways we've never seen Him before.

One of my favorite places in the Bible where this occurs is in the Book of Isaiah. The death of King Uzziah ushers in an uneasy time for Judah, the Southern Kingdom. The Northern Kingdom, Israel, is about to fall to the Assyrians, leaving Judah without a buffer between the much larger enemies of the time. During this time, Isaiah's spiritual eyes are opened and he glimpses God. The Lord gives Isaiah specific instructions to speak to the people, ultimately telling them that destruction is unavoidable, but promising them that healing is coming. The scene radiates the power, wonder, and majesty of God. Yet rather than focus on the beauty or radiance of the Divine, Isaiah is reduced to describing the garnishes of the room.

As the holiness of God echoes throughout the chamber, even the building is not immune. The structure seizes in the wake of reverential awe and worship; smoke, a symbol of both God's acceptance and anger, fills the air. Taken back in wonder of a scene bursting with sights and smells that defy description, Isaiah only has one response: he becomes deftly aware of his own inadequacies.

Polluted. Filthy. Corrupt. Contaminated.

Though the veil is pulled back revealing all that is wonderful, Isaiah responds with the heartbreaking cry, "Woe is me!"

In a most merciful yet mysterious scene, which alludes to the coming of Christ, a burning creature removes a live coal from the altar with tongs and touches the mouth of Isaiah. The prophet's lips cauterized and purified, the seraphim announces, "Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

NOTABLE:

During the Old Testament, God's people believed that God resided in the temple. When Isaiah glimpses God on the throne, he sees that God's robe fills the temple. God can't be confined to one location. Not even the hem of His robe fits inside.

NOTABLE:

The name of the seraphim, which means "burning ones," suggests they're ablaze in their love of God.

NOTABLE:

Exodus 24:15-17 reminds us that God's glory and greatness cannot be measured or described. When we try to describe God in the frame of creation, we fail. But God reveals Himself as something more attainable to human understanding in Jesus Christ.

The words of the fiery angel melt me. Forgiven and cleansed, woe is replaced by wonder.

God forever ruins Isaiah. This single encounter shapes the rest of the prophet's life and message.

The encounter is stamped on Isaiah's heart, an intimate knowledge of God as "the Holy One of Israel" and becomes one of the prophet's distinctive signatures.

One glimpse of God changes everything.

Have you been transformed through encounters with God?

How were they similar to Isaiah's experience in Isaiah 6, and how were they different?

NOTABLE:

The word "holy" is repeated three times by the seraphim in verse 3. Because ancient writers didn't have punctuation or typesetting, they emphasized important points through repetition. God isn't just holy. He is the Holy of all holies.

While we may never have an encounter with God quite like Isaiah's, rest assured that God wants to meet us and give us glimpses of Himself that leave us wonderstruck and transformed. Like Isaiah, some of our encounters with God and His Word will reveal our areas of sin, leaving us with a sense of "Woe is me!"—exposing our great need for God. Other encounters will remind us of what we've been called and created to be as children of God. Still others will reveal aspects of God's character we've never considered before.

While God probably won't reveal Himself in the same way He did to Isaiah, you and I can still petition God to meet us so that we become more like Him. We can become awakened to the wonders of God all around us. As you go through this week, will you pray that God will continue to fill you with wonder? Will you note in the journal on 162 the ways He answers?

If so, your life may never be the same. You might find yourself awakened to God in ways that transform you forever.



CLOSING PRAYER: Courageously spend time in prayer asking God to reveal to you a fresh understanding of Himself. Ask God that along the way you'll find yourself awakened to facets of His character you've never seen before that will transform you forever.

DAY FOUR

WONDERSTRUCK BY THE PRAISEWORTHY DEEDS OF GOD

BONUS ACTIVITY:

God continually paints the skies with beauty. One of my favorite websites that captures portraits of God's handwork is www.clouds365.com. The award-winning site records photographs of the sky. Some of the pictures will take your breath away.

ONCE I BEGAN PRAYING FOR WONDER in my life, I began finding a sense of marvel and awe throughout the Scriptures. Not only is God full of wonders, but He displays His wonders throughout the ages. Through God's wonders people are set free, anchored deeper in their faith, and exposed to the bottomless depths of the love of God.

When we begin to pray for wonder, we need to live wide-eyed to the ways God wants to answer us. God paints facets of His handiwork and character in the sunrise and etches aspects of His nature into the canyon walls.

What are some of the ways you're beginning to experience the wonder of God as alluded to in Psalm 65:8? Don't forget to add some of your list to the Wonderstruck Journal on page 162.

God calls us not only to live wide-eyed and awake to the wonders that He is doing all around us, but to remember His wondrous works in the past. We're asked to actively remember the displays of God's faithfulness.

List the praiseworthy deeds of God in each of the following areas:

THE PRAISEWORTHY DEEDS THAT GOD

Performed in the Old Testament

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

THE PRAISEWORTHY DEEDS THAT GOD

Performed in the New Testament

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

THE PRAISEWORTHY DEEDS THAT GOD

Performed in My Faith Community in the Last Year

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

THE PRAISEWORTHY DEEDS THAT GOD

Performed in My Life in the Last Year

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Now that you've filled in the chart, you should have a list of at least 20 ways God has revealed Himself as wonderful, not only in your life but in your church and in history. Reflecting on the list, it's hard not to be wonderstruck by God's love, intimate involvement, provision, and tender care.

One practical way to remind yourself of God's wondrous works is to make a list of His praiseworthy deeds. Why is this so important? Because unless we are intentional about remembering the deeds of God, we become forgetful about God and His presence in our world. This principle is displayed in one of the most potent psalms.

In some traditions, Psalm 78 is recited on the third through sixth days of Passover as a reminder of God's work in the lives of the Israelites from the exodus to the reign of King David. Attributed to the priests of Asaph, Psalm 78 challenges us to remember and share the wondrous work of God in our lives.



NOTABLE:

Notable: Psalm 78:9 describes the "men of Ephraim." Ephraim was one of Joseph's sons who, along with Manasseh, received land as part of the 12 tribes of Israel. Levi and Joseph did not receive tribal lands. Ephraim is another name for the Northern Kingdom or Israel.

Psalm 78 is presented as a parable or mashal, not to give chronological and accurate historical information, but to remind the Israelites about how God has worked in their lives over centuries. God's original covenant with Abraham comes to fruition despite the people's rebellion and unfaithfulness. Psalm 78 encourages readers even today to remember the active role God plays and place trust in Him.

Why is recalling and sharing God's praiseworthy deeds with others important according to Psalm 78:1-8?

 **NOTABLE:**


Our God is an active God. Psalm 78 describes action after action of how God participated directly in the lives of the Israelites throughout history. God doesn't sit back as a spectator, but protects, saves, creates, delivers, and leads.

What can happen if we fail to recall and share these praiseworthy deeds according to Psalm 78:9-31?

Despite the people's forgetfulness and hard-heartedness, how does God continue to reveal Himself as Wonderful to the people according to Psalm 78:32-55?

What aspect or attribute of God leaves you most wonderstruck in Psalm 78:55-72?

This powerful psalm is a beautiful reminder that we need to reflect on the praiseworthy deeds of God on a regular basis. And as we remember the work of God in our lives, we can't help but live more awake to the work He wants to do.

 **CLOSING PRAYER:** Spend some time praising God for His wondrous work in your life, family, and community. Thank God for the work He's doing around the world and the way He has shown Himself faithful throughout history.

DAY FIVE

APPREHENDED BY DIVINE AMAZEMENT

FOR ME, GROWING SLEEPY to the things of God isn't an option. I don't want a faith that's dry, boring, or feels like punching a clock. Maybe that's one reason I've been praying so persistently to be apprehended by the wonder of God. I want to be caught up in the amazement of who He is and all that He's done.

Of all the Gospel writers, I'd argue that none was caught up in the amazement of Christ as much as Luke. Now this is not to say the other authors of the Gospels weren't awestruck by Jesus. John uses the term *amazed* six times. Matthew describes people being amazed twice as much. Mark, though noted for his brevity, uses the word *amazed* 15 times. But Luke seems to be caught up in amazement at every turn.

The Greek language provides five different words that can be used to translate amazed. Luke uses all of them. In Luke 5:26, he manages to use two of them in a single verse.

The breathless excitement of Christ and all He does exudes throughout Luke's Gospel.

The wonder begins in the first chapter with the announcement of John the Baptist's birth. The miraculous circumstances of this boy's birth to a barren couple leaves everyone astonished by the wondrous display of God's power.

When have you been amazed by God's work in someone else's life like those who learned of John's birth in Luke 1:57-66?

That's just the beginning of the astonishment. The next chapter of Luke describes the birth of Jesus and His younger years. Even as a child, Jesus leaves people awestruck.



QUOTABLE:

"They were, all of them, quite simply amazed. Zechariah's friends, the shepherds, all who heard the shepherds, Joseph and Mary, the people in his hometown of Nazareth, those in Capernaum, those who heard the boy Jesus in the temple, the disciples, the parents of the girl who had died, even the Pharisees: all were amazed, astonished, in awe and afraid. And thirty years away from the events that was Jesus' life, Luke still finds himself amazed as well." –Michael Card, musician and author²

Who is astonished by Jesus in Luke 2:18, 2:47, and 2:48?

NOTABLE:

The Greek word *thaumazo* is used more than 40 times in the New Testament. Translated as to wonder, marvel, admire, flatter, astonish, amaze, *thaumazo* is the most common of all the Greek words that translate amaze. *Existemi* is used 17 times; *ekplesso* is used 13 times; *ekstasis* is used seven times; and *thambeo* is used four times. Throughout the Gospels, these five words almost always describe the attitudes of those listening to Jesus or witnessing His miracles.

As Jesus grows older and enters into His earthly ministry, those who hear His teaching are often spellbound and marvel at His words.

Why are listeners so amazed by Jesus in Luke 4:22, 4:32, and 4:36?

Jesus' miracles leave His followers amazed throughout Luke's Gospel. When the disciples are first instructed to throw their nets into deep water after a long night, they're astonished by the haul of fish they bring in (Luke 5:9). When Jesus heals a paralyzed man, they're filled with awe at the remarkable things they've seen (Luke 5:26).

A widow is astonished when Jesus gives her only son's life back (Luke 7:16), and everyone is amazed when a demon possessed boy is set free (Luke 9:43). On another occasion, a man is freed from a demon that rendered him mute, leaving the crowd marveling (Luke 11:14). And in the presence of some of the most brilliant teachers of the law, Jesus gives answers that leave even His accusers astonished (Luke 20:26).

The writing of Luke's Gospel challenges us that we are meant to live wide-eyed to the wonder of the amazing, mysterious, remarkable Person of Jesus Christ.

One last detail worth noting about this Gospel: Throughout the entire book, there's only one person who amazed Jesus.

Do you know who accomplished this feat? (Hint: Luke 7:1-9)

The person wasn't a disciple or religious leader. Rather, he was a Roman centurion, an unlikely candidate to leave anyone astonished. Technically, the man doesn't give or do anything for Jesus, but the Son of God stands in amazement of this man.

Why is this man in Luke 7:1-9 such a source of amazement to the Son of God?

In all the Gospels, one consistent theme amazes Jesus.

Do you know what theme? (Hint: Mark 6:6)

Think about this for a moment. The only things that cause Jesus to marvel are belief and unbelief or faith and lack of faith. This strikes me because God knows everything, yet He is still awed by our belief and faith or unbelief and lack of faith.


Would you rather live life like the Roman centurion or like the people in Nazareth described in Mark 6:6?

I don't know about you, but I want to live in such a way that I leave Jesus marveling, astonished, and wonderstruck—much like the Roman centurion.

Some of the wonders God wants to reveal are going to require us to believe in Him in greater measure and to make larger strides by faith. But make no mistake: Jesus will be cheering for us every step of the way.

Are you willing to make the journey?

If so, you're not going to want to miss the next lesson. The wonder of God's presence awaits.

 **CLOSING PRAYER:** Spend some time asking God to give you a fresh sense of amazement of His faithfulness and presence in your life. Ask God to soften your heart to any areas where you've grown hard or disbelieving and give you the ability to trust Him wholeheartedly.

NOTABLE:

After witnessing Jesus heal a paralyzed man, Luke describes the people as being amazed in Luke 5:26. The word *amazed* is the Greek word *ekstasis*, which describes someone who is displaced out of a normal state of being or thinking. English derives the word *ecstasy* from this word. Usually, a person deemed insane or demon possessed is experiencing *ekstasis*, but the word also describes someone who witnesses something that is out of this world—a blended form of fear and wonderment. In the same verse, Luke describes the people as filled with awe. In the Greek, the people are filled with *phobos*, which literally translates fear or respect. The people are so displaced by what they saw, they are fearful. But they tell others what they've seen has left them wonderstruck.