

## Wonder Psalm 139

Let me show you a picture. Take a look and tell me—what do you see? *[ppt]* Any guesses? Believe it or not, that's a glue stick! Now, here's another one. What do you see this time? *[ppt]* A ceramic cross. Here's what's interesting—both pictures were taken in the exact same place, from the same angle. *[ppt]* The only difference? In the first picture, the glue stick was in focus. In the second, the cross became clear.

This is an example of "out-of-focus photography." The camera captures the same scene, but what stands out depends entirely on where the focus is placed. The glue stick and the cross were always there, but the perspective shifted based on what was in focus. Lent began on Ash Wednesday, and this year's theme is "Purveyors of Awe." It's an invitation to shift our focus—to notice the awe-inspiring ways God is present in our ordinary lives, in nature, and in the people around us.

### Seeing the World with Wonder

We experience wonder when something stretches our understanding, surprises us with beauty, or overwhelms us with awe. Think about standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon. Sailing along the Newport coastline. Watching the sunrise from the White Mountains. Moments like these take our breath away. But in the busyness of daily life, that sense of wonder fades. When was the last time you truly felt awe?

One reason we lose our sense of wonder is perspective. A child sees a rainbow and shouts, "*Look! Magic in the sky!*" They dream of chasing a pot of gold at the end. But then, they learn in science class that a rainbow is just light refracting through water droplets—and suddenly, the magic seems to disappear. Somewhere along the way, we learned that miracles aren't miracles if we can explain them. There was a time when the end of a drought felt like a miracle. But today, with weather apps and climate science, we don't always see it that way. And yet, for someone desperate for water, is it any less miraculous? It's the thirsty who truly appreciate water. It's the hungry who see food as a gift. Maybe the reason we don't notice the miracles around us isn't that they aren't happening—but that we've gotten used to them. When something is always within reach, it's easy to take it for granted. But that doesn't make it any less of a miracle.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, "Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement... Get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed." Where did Heschel gain this insight? From deep sorrow. He lost most of his family, including his mother and three sisters, during the Holocaust. He lived through unimaginable darkness. And yet, through that pain, he came to a profound realization—nothing in life is simply given. Everything is a gift. When we recognize that, every day becomes full of miracles.

### Shifting Our Focus

Lent is a season of repentance. And what does it mean to repent? It means turning our focus back to God—away from the things that have pulled us in the wrong direction.

But for that to happen, we first have to face our sins, truly repent, and make the effort to turn back. At the same time, Lent isn't just about wrestling with guilt. I'm often surprised by how many people struggle with deep feelings of guilt and self-loathing.

A pastor I know once told me a story about hiring a sexton for the church. They decided to give the job to a woman who had been sleeping outside the church—someone who had been homeless for a long time. Given this opportunity, she did her best to turn her life around. One day, as they talked, the pastor learned that this woman had attended church before but had never been baptized. So the pastor encouraged her, saying, *"You should be baptized."* But she hesitated and asked, *"Am I even allowed to be baptized?"*

She went on to share that, when she was a child, her mother told her, *"You're a sinner—you're going to hell."* Those words stuck with her. Her younger sibling had been baptized, but she hadn't. And after years of struggling and living a broken life, she came to believe she wasn't worthy of baptism. The pastor gently told her, *"Baptism isn't something we receive because we're good enough. It's not about our worthiness. It's about God's grace."* And with that, she agreed—she was baptized.

Like this sexton, so many people carry the heavy burden of guilt and self-loathing. But here's the truth: Lent isn't just about confessing sin—it's about refocusing our hearts on God. It's about seeing ourselves as God sees us. Psalm 139:14 says, *"I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works that I know very well."* Even when we fall short. Even when we feel broken and unworthy. We are still God's awe-inspiring creation. And when we let that truth sink in—transformation begins. Instead of being weighed down by guilt, we begin to see grace. Instead of defining ourselves by our mistakes, we remember that we were created in God's image—wonderfully made. If your focus has been on your flaws, it's time to shift your perspective. See yourself as God sees you. Because when that happens, real change begins.

### **Living with Wonder**

To see as God sees, we need to recover our sense of wonder. As Marcia McFee points out, wonder is not just a feeling—it's a way of being. It's a state of heart and mind that sees the ordinary as extraordinary. Jesus is a perfect example. In Matthew 8, we hear the story of the centurion who came to Jesus with great faith, believing Jesus could heal his servant. *"When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, 'Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith.'"* Jesus was amazed. He was astonished that a Roman soldier—an outsider—had such deep faith, such humility, and such love. Jesus didn't judge people by their nationality or profession. Instead, he saw the wonder within them. He noticed what others overlooked. That's why he could look at the lilies of the field and marvel at their beauty, teaching that even Solomon's finest robes couldn't compare.

As Heschel said, *"To be spiritual is to be amazed."* So don't take what you have for granted. Every moment, every encounter, every breath is filled with wonder—if you have the eyes to see it. Approach the world and the people around you with that perspective—with a heart open to awe. When we live like this, our days become filled with amazement.

This Lent, let's make it a season of rediscovering the hidden treasures God has placed in our lives. Let's shift our focus—turn our attention back to God, train ourselves to see the world and others with fresh eyes, and embrace each day with a sense of wonder.

And in doing so, may we catch glimpses of God's smile, delighting in all that has been created. Amen.