

REDISCOVER THE GOD WHO IS
BIGGER THAN BIG, CLOSER THAN CLOSE,
AND GOODER THAN GOOD

**A
Million
Little
Miracles**



MARK BATTERSON
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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MULTNOMAH

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*Miracles are a retelling in small letters of the very
same story which is written across the whole world
in letters too large for some of us to see.*

—C. S. LEWIS

PROLOGUE

A MILLION LITTLE MIRACLES

Before you were conceived, you existed as an egg cell in your mother's ovaries. An interesting way to start a book, but why not begin at the beginning? That ovum measured one-tenth of one millimeter¹—a microscopic miracle-in-waiting. The average woman carries more than a million eggs in her ovaries,² which makes you one in a million, once-in-a-lifetime. Of course, that's only half the equation. The average ejaculation contains as many as three hundred million sperm.³ In other words, there once was a swim meet—300,000,000 swimmers lined up in the starting blocks—and you, my friend, you won that race!

You go, swimmer!

You have been defying the odds since day one! But it gets even more amazing. You once spent five months in your grandmother's womb. Wait, what? Yes, you read that right. All the eggs a woman will ever carry are formed in her ovaries while she is in her mother's womb, which means the egg that was destined to become you was in your mother's womb when your mother was in *her* mother's womb.

From the moment of conception until the day death knocks on our door, life is more mysterious and miraculous than we can imagine. Truth be told? Most of us take everyday miracles for granted. This book is about taking them for gratitude. Why is that so important? Because whatever you don't turn into praise turns into pride! It doesn't just rob God of the glory He deserves; it steals our joy.

I know people who say they have never experienced a miracle. With all due respect, you have never *not*. In fact, you are one!

With the help of fluorescence microscopy, embryologists have captured the moment of conception. Within moments of a sperm penetrating an egg, that egg releases billions of zinc atoms that look like tiny sparks.⁴ Stop and think about this: The miracle of conception mirrors the miracle of creation. Coincidence? I think not. In the beginning, God said, “Let there be light.”⁵ When you were conceived, it’s like God said it all over again: “Let there be you.”

There never has been and never will be anyone like you. That’s not a testament to you. It’s a testament to the God who created you. No one can worship God like you or for you. No one can love like you or lead like you. No one has your fingerprint, voiceprint, eyeprint, or even sweatprint.

Fun fact?

The 373 chemicals that compose sweat combine in a way that makes your sweat unlike anyone else’s.⁶ Did you need to know that to live a long, happy life? I’ll let you be the judge of that, but buyer beware, I’ll sprinkle some fun facts along the way. The uniqueness of your sweatprint may seem trivial, but I think of this and a million other details as creation clues. They are the trail of breadcrumbs left by the Creator since His evening strolls through the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. I hope they add a little levity, a little dimensionality, to your understanding of the everyday miracles that are all around us.

WELCOME TO WONDERLAND

It’s not only God’s mercies that are new every morning. It’s His miracles! Every day, without exception, we experience miracles big and small, visible and invisible, tangible and intangible. As you read this book, it may feel like you are sitting still, but that is an illusion of miraculous proportions. The reality? You are on a giant merry-go-round that is spinning on its axis at 1,000 miles per hour and speeding through space at 67,000 miles per hour.⁷ That is nothing short of miraculous, but we don’t give it a second thought.

Even on a day when you didn't get much done, you did travel 1.6 million miles through space. But wait, there's more. The Milky Way galaxy is spinning at 468,000 miles per hour per hour,⁸ and we don't even get dizzy. Meanwhile, the Milky Way is moving at 1,342,162 miles per hour toward something astrophysicists call "the Great Attractor."⁹ The Great Attractor? Things that make you go, HmMMMM.

Question.

When was the last time you thanked God for keeping us in orbit? For most of us, the answer is never. We don't kneel at the end of the day and pray, *Lord, I wasn't sure we were going to make the full rotation today, but You did it again!* Why? Because God is so good at what God does that we take most miracles for granted.

When was the last time you praised God for dopamine? Or the seventh cranial nerve? Or the 118 elements that compose the periodic table? Or the 330 billion cells your body will recycle today?¹⁰

"There is nothing that God hath established in a constant course of nature, and which therefore is done every day," said John Donne, "but would seem a Miracle, and exercise our admiration, if it were done but once."¹¹ It's true, isn't it? If the sunrise or sunset were a one-off, we'd be overwhelmed with awe. But because God does it every day, we're non-plussed.

We tend to think of miracles as the exceptions to the rule, and that's one kind of miracle. There are miracles that defy the laws of nature, but the laws of nature are miraculous and mysterious in and of themselves. "We should always endeavor to wonder at the permanent thing, not the mere exception," said G. K. Chesterton. "We should be startled by the sun, and not by the eclipse."¹² Speaking of, it was Chesterton who made this observation: "God is like the sun; you cannot look at it, but without it you cannot look at anything else."¹³

We praise God for anomalies and epiphanies, as we should. But this book is about praising God for everything else—a million little miracles all too often overlooked and underappreciated. Why is this so significant? There is a fine line between the mundane and the

miraculous. If you see the miraculous as mundane, life becomes a bore. If you learn to discern the miraculous *in* the mundane, welcome to wonderland.

NEVER LOSE A HOLY CURIOSITY

When I was a senior in college, our basketball team took a road trip that changed the trajectory of my life. I can't remember if we won that away game, but I do remember popping into a bookstore and picking up an 878-page biography on Albert Einstein.

Up until that point in my life, I had read fewer than a dozen books not assigned by a teacher. It's a mystery why I bought that biography, but it turned into an out-of-body experience.

The important thing is to not stop questioning. . . . One cannot help but be in awe when [one] contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvellous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery each day. Never lose a holy curiosity.¹⁴

That tagline changed my life—"Never lose a holy curiosity." I read it as if Einstein were issuing a personal challenge. From that moment forward, there was next to nothing that I didn't find endlessly fascinating.

This book is about curating a holy curiosity about the Creator and His creation. It's about recapturing childlike wonder for ordinary miracles, which is an oxymoron. There is nothing ordinary about anything or anyone! Much of this book is based on a simple principle, but it's a principle of great importance. In Aristotelian terms, it's a first principle.

Nothing is as simple as it seems.

Everything is more miraculous than we can imagine.

According to quantum mechanics, every cell in the human body is

99.99 percent empty space.¹⁵ There are thirty-seven sextillion biochemical reactions happening in your body every single second.¹⁶ If your double-helix DNA were stretched end to end, it would reach to the moon and back nearly 150,000 times.¹⁷

Never experienced a miracle?

You have never not.

“There are only two ways to live your life,” said Einstein. “One is as if nothing is a miracle. The other is as if everything is.”¹⁸ Which way are you living your life? Are you taking miracles for granted? Or are you taking them for gratitude? Is your holy curiosity waxing or waning? In the pages that follow, we will explore the art and science of not just perceiving those miracles but praising God for them.

TAKE A BREATH

Take a breath.

You just inhaled half a liter of air containing twenty-five sextillion molecules. That’s more molecules than all the sand on all the seashores on earth, including sandcastles. “All the world’s roads and all the world’s canals,” said Sam Kean, “haven’t handled nearly as much traffic as our lungs do every second.”¹⁹

The average person has thirty trillion red blood cells. Each of those red blood cells contains 260 million proteins called hemoglobin that carry oxygen molecules to the one hundred trillion cells in the body. With every heartbeat, six quarts of blood FedEx that oxygen through sixty thousand miles of veins, arteries, and capillaries.²⁰ That’s twice the circumference of planet Earth. The average heart will pull this off more than two billion times without skipping a beat.

There are no ordinary people.

There are no ordinary days.

There are no ordinary things.

The premise of this book is simple yet sweeping: Miracles are happening all around us all the time. The problem? We’re like Jacob,

pre-Bethel. “Surely the LORD is in this place,” said Jacob, “and I was not aware of it.”²¹ Before Bethel, Jacob was sleepwalking.

The same thing happens to us, doesn’t it? Over time, we stop noticing the sunrise and sunset as something spectacular. We become numb to the simple pleasures of life. We lose our childlike sense of wonder. This book is a wake-up call to rediscover the millions of mysteries and miracles that are hiding in plain sight, and I might as well start with the breath you just took.

I suffered from severe asthma for four decades. There weren’t forty days in forty years that I didn’t take multiple puffs of a rescue inhaler. I slept with it under my pillow and played basketball with it in my sock. My earliest memory is an asthma attack, so it was hard to imagine else. I prayed hundreds of times that God would heal my lungs, but it didn’t happen. Until it did. For some reason that is beyond my pay grade, God answered my prayer on July 2, 2016. I haven’t taken a single puff of an inhaler since. My point? I don’t take a single breath for granted. But it shouldn’t take an asthma attack to praise God for each and every breath.

We experience millions of little miracles every day, just like the last breath you took. How much happier would we be if we took them for gratitude rather than taking them for granted? We can’t live life to its full potential until we recognize it for what it is—a miracle from start to finish.

HOUSE OF THE RISING SUN

It was a picture-perfect day in Miami, midwinter. For those who live north of the Mason-Dixon Line, *midwinter* is key. I was doing a little vitamin D therapy in a pool when I had an epiphany. As I looked at the sunlight shimmering off the surface of the water, a question fired across my synapses: *What’s really happening when what’s happening is happening?*

It’s a question I’ve asked thousands of times since then. I’m less and

less concerned with what's happening. I'm more and more concerned with what's *really* happening when what's happening is happening! That's where the miracles are hiding!

The sunlight that was shimmering off the surface of that pool originated from a star that is ninety-three million miles from Earth. The sun is 333,000 times the mass of Earth, which is massive. But compared with other stars, it ranks as a mere yellow dwarf. Every second, the sun turns four million tons of matter into energy via nuclear fusion. That's the energy equivalent of a trillion megaton bombs every second of every minute of every hour of every day.²² If Earth were a little farther from or a little closer to the sun, we would freeze or fry. Providentially, our planet is perfectly positioned in the Goldilocks Zone.

If you could catch a flight to the sun—five hundred miles per hour, twenty-four hours per day, 365 days per year—it would take more than two decades to get there. Sunlight is so fast—traveling 186,282 miles per second—that the light shimmering off the surface of that pool in Miami was only eight minutes and twenty seconds old.²³ Along with releasing vitamin D in me, sunlight is responsible for a million other little miracles.

Without light, there is no photosynthesis. Imagine a world without green watermelons or ruby-red grapefruits. For that matter, imagine a world without sky blue, hot pink, or Prince purple. Without light, there is no color. Without light, there is no sight. Without light, there is nothing!

The etymology of every atom in the universe traces back to the first four words spoken by God—"Let there be light."²⁴ Everything you *see* was once *said*. And those four words are still creating galaxies at the edge of the universe.²⁵ The universe is God's way of saying, "Look at what I can do with four words!" Light is God's first gift, and it's the gift that keeps on giving.

"Every good and perfect gift is from above," said the apostle James, "coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights."²⁶ Can I make a confession? I've always loved the first half of that verse, but the second

half felt awfully ethereal. My perspective on that phrase—“Father of the heavenly lights”—radically changed in that pool in Miami. I realized that I was reading it wrong. I was interpreting it figuratively rather than taking it literally.

What was God *really* saying when He spoke light into the darkness? Scientifically speaking, God was saying, “Let there be electromagnetic radiation with varying wavelengths. Let there be radio waves and microwaves and X-rays. Let there be bioluminescence and photosynthesis. Let there be satellite communication, laser surgery, and Crayola crayons. Oh, and let there be rainbows after rainstorms.”

Light is not as simple as it seems!

According to quantum mechanics, light is both a particle and a wave. The duality of light is one of those creation clues that point to Paradox with a capital *P*. “It is not the task of Christianity to provide easy answers to every question,” said Kallistos Ware. “God is not so much the object of our knowledge as the cause of our wonder.”²⁷ The duality of light points to the triality of the Trinity.

God said, “Let us make mankind in our image.”²⁸

Did you notice the plural pronouns—*us* and *our*? The church fathers referred to this plurality as *perichoresis*—a divine dance involving Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We believe in one God, three persons. Mathematically speaking, $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$. That doesn't add up, but that's because we make the mistake of thinking about God in four-dimensional terms.

News flash: God doesn't exist within the four dimensions of space-time He created. There is no past, present, or future for Him. Time stamps don't limit the Eternal Now. There is no here, there, or anywhere. Why? Because God is here, there, and everywhere—the Eternal Here.

FLANNELGRAPH GOD

When I was a young boy—and this will date me—Sunday school teachers used felt figures to reenact the stories of Scripture on a green flannelgraph background. That two-dimensional storytelling technique might have been a step up from a one-dimensional reading of the story, but that's where many of us get stuck in our relationship with God. For many, the God of the Bible never escapes the pages of the Bible. We end up with a flannelgraph god who can never amaze us, never overwhelm us, and never transcend us. That is when we need to deconstruct and reconstruct our understanding of who God is.

In the beginning, God created us in His image. We've been creating God in our image ever since. That is our ancient error. We project our history, our personality, our politics onto God. We think of God in purely human terms. The result is a god—lowercase *g*—that looks like us, thinks like us, and, yes, even votes like us. But when we filter our theology through our history, personality, or politics, it's called idolatry.

Part of us wants a God we can manage. Better yet, micromanage. But when you attempt to box God in, you actually box God out of transforming your perspective and your priorities. There's no room for mystery, no room for miracles. You end up with a downsized version of God—a flannelgraph god. That god isn't big enough to overcome our shortcomings. That god isn't good enough to sustain us in the midst of pain and suffering. That god doesn't even graduate high school science. This is when and where many people lose faith.

At some point, many of us experience a crisis of faith because we outgrow our elementary understanding of God. That can be scary, but it's a necessary stage in spiritual growth. It's the chrysalis whereby a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. This book is about rediscovering a million little miracles, but it starts with reimagining the God of miracles.

“My thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are my ways your ways,”

declares the LORD.

“As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.”²⁹

Last time I checked, the co-moving distance from one side of the universe to the other is ninety-three billion light-years. God likens the difference between our thoughts and His thoughts to the distance from one side of the universe to the other.³⁰ That means that your best thought on your best day is ninety-three billion light-years short of how great and how good God really is! Simply put, your god is too small.

All of us have problems—health problems, relationship problems, money problems. And as the Notorious B.I.G. noted, “Mo Money Mo Problems.” I don’t say this to negate the size of your problems, but our biggest problem is our small view of God. “The low view of God entertained almost universally among Christians is the cause of a hundred lesser evils,” said A. W. Tozer.³¹ The smaller your God, the bigger your problems! A high view of God, on the other hand, is the solution to “ten thousand temporal problems.”³²

I know God can seem so distant sometimes—a million miles away. I know our experience of God can betray our expectations. When we feel let down by God, what do we do with the doubt, the disappointment, the disillusionment? Some people throw the baby out with the bathwater. My advice? Deconstruct the man-made box you’ve put God in. Then reconstruct your faith by reimagining the God who is bigger than big, closer than close, and gooder than good. In the process, you’ll rediscover a million little miracles!

“How much happier you would be, how much more of you there would be,” said G. K. Chesterton, “if the hammer of a higher God could smash your small cosmos.”³³

HEAVEN IN A WILDFLOWER

The Nobel Prize–winning physicist Richard Feynman once described the relationship between art and science by holding up a flower to a friend who was an artist. “Look how beautiful it is,” said Feynman. Then he made an interesting distinction. As an artist, his friend viewed the flower aesthetically, outside in. Feynman viewed it scientifically, inside out.

“I see much more about the flower than he sees,” argued Feynman. “I could imagine the cells in there, the complicated actions inside, which also have a beauty.”³⁴ In the pages that follow, we will explore microscopic and macroscopic miracles. We will look at them aesthetically and scientifically—outside in and inside out. We will approach the miracles and mysteries of life as both art and science.

“The fact that the colors in the flower evolved in order to attract insects to pollinate it is interesting,” noted Feynman. “A science knowledge only adds to the excitement, the mystery and the awe of a flower.”³⁵

Jesus gave a curious command in the Sermon on the Mount: “Consider the lilies.”³⁶ It’s not as widely known as the Golden Rule. It’s not as popular as the Lord’s Prayer. It’s not as quoted as the beatitudes. But it’s no less imperative than any of these. It’s an invitation to study, to research, to explore, to discover, to enjoy God’s creation. “To see a World in a Grain of Sand /

And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,” as the poet William Blake said.³⁷

A single grain of sand.

A single flower.

A single cell.

A single breath.

A single heartbeat.

A single drop of water.

None of these are as simple as they seem. All are more miraculous, more mysterious than what meets the eye. We live in a strange and mysterious world. Our bodies and brains are fearfully and wonderfully

made. And there is a God who is ninety-three billion light-years beyond anything we can ask or imagine.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ABOUT YOU

I love the story about the little boy who was drawing a picture. When his father asked him what he was sketching, he replied, "I'm drawing a picture of God." The father said with a smile, "Son, no one knows what God looks like." The little boy declared, "They will when I'm done!"

None of us is capable of drawing a portrait of God, but I love this little boy's determination to try. By curating a holy curiosity toward the world around us, we add dimensionality to our theology. In this process, called progressive revelation, we'll rediscover the God who is bigger than big, closer than close, and gooder than good. The technical terms are *transcendence*, *immanence*, and *benevolence*. He is God Most High, God Most Nigh, and God Most Good.

In part 1, we'll go outside, look up, and count the stars. We'll pull out our telescopes and do some stargazing. We'll start with a two-foot field trip that takes our manmade ceilings off Almighty God. The goal is rediscovering the God who is bigger than your biggest problem, bigger than your biggest mistake, and bigger than your biggest dream. Even when you feel like you're a day late and a dollar short, it's never too little and it's never too late. God is always writing a bigger story.

God is great not just because nothing is too big but also because nothing is too small. In part 2, we'll trade the telescope for a microscope. We'll lean into that curious command: "Consider the lilies." In so doing, we'll rediscover the God who is closer than close. He knows the number of hairs on your head. Your name is tattooed on the palms of His hands. Your tears are so precious to God that He counts them and collects them in a bottle. Simply put, you are seen, heard, and loved by God.

In part 3, we'll chase butterflies. We'll pull out a stethoscope and hear the heart of God. Many people are deconstructing their faith

these days, which is normal and natural if done right. But some of those who deconstruct fail to reconstruct their faith. They give up on God altogether. The result is nostalgia for God—a holy homesickness. The good news? God has not given up and will not give up on us! We may run away from God, but the Hound of Heaven runs after us. If we turn around, we'll discover the heavenly Father with arms wide open. Part 3 is an invitation to come back home—to rediscover the God who is gooder than good.

Ready or not, here we go.

PART ONE

GOD MOST HIGH



ON NOVEMBER 11, 1572, a Danish astronomer, Tycho Brahe, was staying at his uncle's castle in Denmark. That castle, Herrevad Abbey, functioned as both a religious monastery and a scientific laboratory. It was there that Brahe established the first glassworks in Denmark.¹ He also practiced spiritual disciplines, such as prayer and meditation. Like double-helix DNA, science and spirituality were interwoven. "Those who study the stars," said Brahe, "have God for a teacher."²

That combination—monastery and laboratory—is a metaphor for the pages that follow. "What is the difference between a cathedral and a physics lab?" asked Annie Dillard. "Are they not both saying: Hello?"³

"The Religion that is afraid of science," said Ralph Waldo Emerson, "dishonours God [and] commits suicide."⁴ Simply put, science is our friend. Albert Einstein said it this way: "Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind."⁵

The sad reality is that many of those who deconstruct their faith do so because they can't reconcile what they've heard in church with what they've been taught in a science classroom. How did we get here? The short answer is Pope Urban VIII. In 1633, an Italian astronomer named Galileo was accused of heresy for challenging the Catholic Church's belief that the earth was the center of the universe.⁶ It's a classic case of cognitive entrenchment. The powers that be got scared, got defensive. The pope turned allies into enemies. The net result? A bitter divorce between science and the church. Pope John Paul II apologized for this on October 31, 1992.⁷ But that was a little late, wouldn't you say?

If all truth is God's truth—and I believe it is—then dividing things

into sacred and secular is a false dichotomy. Every ology is a branch of theology! The apostle Paul said it this way in his letter to the Romans:

Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.⁸

On a cloudless November night in 1572, Tycho Brahe observed an unusually bright star in the northern sky that suddenly appeared in the constellation Cassiopeia. It had been assumed since antiquity that anything beyond the moon's orbit was eternally immutable. That star, SN 1572, is now classified as a supernova that is 7,500 light-years from Earth.⁹

By 1592, Tycho Brahe had cataloged 777 stars. His mapping of those fixed stars blazed a trail for his protégé, Johannes Kepler, to discover the laws that govern planetary motion. Several centuries later, it was a telescope named in Kepler's honor—the Kepler space telescope—that would catalog 530,506 stars and discover 2,662 exoplanets.¹⁰

Tycho Brahe is widely regarded as “the greatest observer of the skies who had ever lived,”¹¹ but even Brahe couldn't have imagined the existence of half a million stars. And that's the tip of the iceberg. Astronomers now estimate the existence of more than two trillion galaxies, only two of which are visible from the Northern Hemisphere—the Milky Way and Andromeda. Each of those two trillion galaxies has an average of one hundred billion stars. Do the math, and that adds up to two hundred sextillion stars in the observable universe.¹² That's twenty-five trillion stars per person on planet Earth! That is a lot of stars to wish upon!

My point? Creation is much larger than any of us can imagine! And the same goes for the Creator. Like Tycho Brahe, some of us are quite content with our catalog of 777 stars. We think that's all there is. We've settled for a god we can measure and manage—the flannel-graph god. If that's you, your god is too small.

Our frame of reference, when it comes to God, always falls short. It's a cognitive bias called narrow framing, and all of us are guilty as charged. I might sound like a Luddite, but the television screens, computer screens, and smartphone screens that we stare at all day, every day, aren't helping! Smartphones aren't making us smarter. All too often, those digital devices are distraction devices. Most of us spend more time gazing at screens than we do stargazing, and then we wonder why we've lost touch with the Creator.

Many years ago, I was driving down the George Washington Parkway with my family when our youngest child, Josiah, asked one of those quantum questions that only kids can ask: "Dad, God is bigger than cars, right?" I answered in the affirmative, but evidently, the issue wasn't settled. Josiah upped the ante: "Dad, God is bigger than trees, right?" I assured Josiah that God was bigger than giant sequoias. Then Josiah must have thought of the biggest thing he could think of: "Dad, God is bigger than Target, right?" I, of course, asked a clarifying question: "Target or Super Target, son?"

Josiah was doing what we all do instinctively; he was sizing God up. The challenge with that is this: All of us underestimate God by at least ninety-three billion light-years. God doesn't fit within the four dimensions of spacetime He created, much less the logical constraints of our left brain.

Is your God getting bigger?

Or is your god getting smaller?

The answer to those questions is one of the best barometers of spiritual growth. And, I might add, mental health. Is your understanding of God's power expanding or contracting? How about God's love? His grace?

A low view of God results in a narrow framing of His power, love, and grace. A high view of God, however, puts things in proper perspective. What things? Everything! How might a bigger view of God change your perspective on your biggest problems? Or your biggest dreams? Show me the size of your dream, and I'll show you the size of

your God. Please don't dismiss that as a Jedi mind trick. I've realized that, for me, the bigger God gets, the less anxious I become. The bigger God gets, the more holy confidence I have.

A high view of God doesn't just change what we believe. It changes who we are. You are more than a conqueror! Even when you don't feel like it, it doesn't change your identity in Christ. You can overcome trauma. You can overcome divorce. You can overcome a difficult diagnosis. You can overcome the mistakes that haunt you, that taunt you. How do I know this? Because Jesus overcame!

The psalmist said, "Magnify the LORD with me; let us exalt His name together."¹³ How do we do that? We have to leave room for unknowable mysteries. We have to allow for irresolvable paradoxes. We have to take into account impossible miracles.

In part 1, my hope is that you will have a renewed appreciation for the God who hung the stars in the sky. Permission to speak frankly? Most of us pray like God is omnipotent, but we act like God is impotent. We believe God can heal—until we get sick. We believe God can reconcile—until we're faced with irreconcilable differences. We believe God can deliver—until the addiction has our name on it. If we believe God is omnipotent, let's live like it.

To the infinite, all finites are equal.

There are no degrees of difficulty.

There is no impossible.

It's time to take the eight-foot ceiling off God.

It's time to rediscover the God who is bigger than big.

CHAPTER I
COUNT THE STARS

I have four pictures that hang behind my desk in my office—my personal Mount Rushmore. All of the people pictured died long before I was born, but each of them has had a profound impact on my life.

The first picture is Albert Einstein with his puppy-dog eyes, unkempt hair, and wrinkled forehead. Remember the 878-page biography on Einstein? Five words on page 755 changed the trajectory of my life: “Never lose a holy curiosity.” There was something about the juxtaposition of those two words—*holy* and *curiosity*—that captured my imagination. It’s almost like holy curiosity was conceived in my soul right then. My prayer is that this book would conceive that same holy curiosity in you! Curiosity about what? About everything! About everyone! About the million little miracles that are all around us all the time!

The second picture is the man, the myth, the legend—George Washington Carver. Few people embodied holy curiosity like Carver. Born a slave, Carver would become one of the greatest chemists and agronomists the world has ever known. His curriculum vitae includes three hundred uses for the peanut. His life verse was Job 12:8: “Speak to the earth, and it will teach you.” That’s precisely what Carver did during his daily prayer walks through the woods at four o’clock in the morning.

The third picture is Teddy Roosevelt riding a moose through a river. Who *does* that? The same guy who navigated uncharted portions of the Amazon, scaled the Matterhorn in the Alps, and flew in a Wright Brothers’ airplane.¹ Part of my affinity for Roosevelt is the fact that he

overcame a crippling case of asthma, as did I. Roosevelt's love of books was legendary. He somehow managed to read five hundred books a year as a sitting president. I know that seems unbelievable, but remember, he wasn't distracted by television screens, computer screens, and smartphone screens. Few people on the planet have possessed a holy curiosity on par with our twenty-sixth president.

The fourth and final picture is of John Muir standing atop Glacier Point in Yosemite National Park, the park that he and Roosevelt helped protect for posterity. Muir believed in baptism by water and baptism by fire, but he also believed in baptism by nature. His mission was "saving the American soul from total surrender to materialism."² Muir once charged a bear to study its running gait, which is almost as crazy as chasing a lion into a pit on a snowy day!³ Not only did he study sixty-five glaciers in the Alaska territory; he even sledged down several of them.⁴ But one moment stands above the rest in his résumé and serves as both a metaphor and a manifesto.

CLIMB THE TREE

In December 1874, John Muir was staying at a cabin nestled in the Sierra Nevada when a storm whipped through the valley. Instead of seeking shelter, Muir sought adventure. He located the tallest cluster of Douglas fir trees he could find, climbed one of those trees to the very top, and held on for dear life. "On such occasions, nature always has something rare to show us," he said. "The danger to life and limb is hardly greater than one would experience crouching deprecatingly beneath a roof."⁵

Can you picture John Muir hugging a hundred-foot-tall tree as it swayed? It may seem like Muir was tempting death, but that's how he came to life. He feasted his senses on the sights, sounds, and smells of earth, wind, and snow. Eugene Peterson referenced that moment as an icon of Christian spirituality. He called it "a standing rebuke against becoming a mere spectator to life, preferring creature comforts to Cre-

ator confrontations.”⁶

Are you a mere spectator to life?

Do you prefer creature comforts to Creator confrontations?

Are you settling for creation or seeking the Creator Himself?

This book is an exhortation to brave the storm and climb the tree. That’s where the miracles are hiding! Like most people, I appreciate the roof over my head. I appreciate air-conditioning, running water, indoor plumbing, high-speed internet, and hundreds of other luxuries that technology affords us. I prefer glamping to camping. I once hiked the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu, but I brought along an inflatable mattress. Did I feel less manly than the other guys in our group? Yes, I did. Did I regret it? Not for a single second of sleep!

I’m grateful for the comfort and convenience of modern life, but there is a hidden tax. When we lose touch with nature, we lose touch with nature’s God. Edison’s lightbulb is a gift to early birds and night owls, but it fundamentally altered the built-in rhythms of sunrise and sunset. Refrigeration allows us to enjoy exotic foods from faraway places, but farm-to-table is lost in the mix. If we aren’t careful, we’ll fall victim to the numbing effect that Robert Michael Pyle called the “extinction of experience.”⁷ We’ll stop climbing trees. We’ll become mere spectators to life. We’ll settle for creature comforts.

Leonardo da Vinci, “the most curious man who ever lived,”⁸ was a self-proclaimed *discepolo della esperienza*—“disciple of experience.”⁹ I don’t know if he ever climbed a tree like Muir, but his lust for life is evidenced by twenty-eight thousand pages of journal notes.¹⁰ It was who once observed that the average human “looks without seeing, listens without hearing, touches without feeling, eats without tasting . . . inhales without awareness of odour.”¹¹

Looking without seeing is the symptom of a deeper problem that psychologists call inattention blindness.¹² It’s missing the forest for the trees. It’s failing to see what is hidden in plain sight. We are as blind to beauty as Bartimaeus. We are as unaware of the presence of God as Jacob before Bethel. We are as oblivious to mysteries and mir-

acles as Moses before the burning bush.

“The less we see, and hear and smell,” said Michelle Derusha, “the less we are able to see, and hear and smell.”¹³ We turn a blind eye to the everyday miracles that surround us. It’s not intentional, but that doesn’t make it any less harmful. The miracle of life is lost on us. So is the God of miracles.

This book is meant to be a wake-up call. The good news? You don’t have to go far to find a million little miracles. All it takes is a two-foot field trip. All you have to do is go outside, look up, and count the stars.

THE SKY IS THE LIMIT

There are decades when nothing happens.

There are days when decades happen.

It had been twenty-years of frustration, disappointment, and heart-break. God had promised to make Abram into a great nation, but Sarai couldn’t get pregnant. At their age, it was too late. Hundred-year-old men don’t get ninety-year-old women pregnant. The window of opportunity had closed. Not gonna happen. But God.

After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision:

“Do not be afraid, Abram.
I am your shield,
your very great reward.”

But Abram said, “Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless? . . . You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”¹⁴

God had blessed Abram in a thousand ways, but Abram was fixated on the one thing God had *not* done. This is a function of the negativity bias, which I believe is one by-product of the curse. Like Abram, we

have a tendency to complain about what God hasn't done rather than thank Him for what He has done. Abram played the blame game with God: "What can you give me since I remain childless?" Is it just me, or does that sound passive-aggressive? *It's not Your fault—but it is.* Abram was throwing a pity party inside his tent when God invited him outside. God took Abram on a two-foot field trip that changed the trajectory of his life.

The LORD took Abram outside and said to him, "Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That's how many descendants you will have!"¹⁵

It's easy to read right over what happened here, but this was a defining moment. Notice Abram was inside the tent one minute and outside the next. What difference did that make? As long as Abram was inside his tent, he was staring at an eight-foot ceiling. The second he stepped outside? The sky was the limit. God was saying, in no uncertain terms, "Quit putting an eight-foot ceiling on what I can do! Quit putting manmade ceilings on My sovereignty! It's never too little, and it's never too late."

THE THREE-DAY EFFECT

There is a phenomenon in science called the three-day effect. It takes three days in the wild to reset your brain. According to cognitive neuroscientist David Strayer, after three days in the wild, our ability to problem-solve escalates.¹⁶ So does inductive reasoning. When we get outside the tent, it's easier to think outside the box. We start noticing everyday miracles.

One measure of creativity is something called a RAT—Remote Associates Test. It's about connecting the dots creatively. For instance, what connects *cream*, *skate*, and *water*? The answer is *ice*—*ice cream*, *ice skate*, and *ice water*. How about *age*, *mile*, and *sand*? The answer is

stone—*Stone Age*, *milestone*, and *sandstone*. What about *manners*, *round*, and *tennis*? The answer is *table*—*table manners*, *roundtable*, and *table tennis*.

David Strayer administered a RAT to one set of subjects *before* going on an Outward Bound Adventure. He then administered the same test to another set of subjects *after* going on that adventure. Those who tested on day three of that Outward Bound Adventure scored 50 percent higher. Not only did creativity skyrocket, but stress levels also plummeted.¹⁷

In a similar study, a twenty-minute walk through a city park produced feelings of calm and a sharper focus with one curious caveat. “People who used their cellphone on the walk,” noted researcher Rachel Hopman, “saw none of those benefits.”¹⁸

I have yet to meet the doctor who writes “twenty-minute walk, three times a week” on a prescription pad, even though it might be more effective than popping a pill.

Fun fact? Wild animals have larger brains than their domesticated counterparts! The brains of wild boars are 35 percent larger than those of domesticated pigs. The brains of domesticated cats are 30 percent smaller than the brains of feral cats.¹⁹ The question, of course, is, Why? The short answer is pretty simple. When you’re a domesticated animal, your food is provided for you. You don’t have to use your brain to track or hunt. The old axiom “Use it or lose it” applies to pets as well as people.

What does any of this have to do with Abram? God was taking him on an Outward Bound Adventure, and Abram wasn’t the only one. Moses encountered God at a burning bush on the backside of the desert. David hid from Saul in the crags of the wild goats. Elijah heard the still small voice of God in a cave on Mount Horeb. John the Baptist lived off the grid, west of the Jordan. Even Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness.

Go thou and do likewise!

If your life has become a little too routine, maybe it’s time for a

reset. And there's no better way to do it than a two-foot field trip.

Go outside.

Look up.

Count the stars.

REWILDING

One of the most unforgettable weeks of my life was spent in one of the most undomesticated places on the planet, the Galápagos. Hundreds of miles off the coast of Ecuador, the archipelago of islands may be the closest thing to Eden left on Earth.

We watched pelicans that looked like prehistoric pterodactyls dive-bomb into the ocean and come back up with breakfast in their beaks. We went snorkeling and saw exotic fish every bit as beautiful as Nemo, Dory, and Bubbles. *Where did God come up with those color schemes?* We encountered enormous iguanas and two-hundred-year-old tortugas in their natural habitat. We even went swimming with sea lions, which I later learned isn't altogether safe!

A few weeks after returning home, we took our kids to the National Zoo. While it's an amazing zoo, it's not the same seeing a caged animal. It's too safe, too tame, too predictable. We were walking through the Great Ape House looking at four-hundred-pound gorillas behind Plexiglas when a thought fired across my synapses: *I wonder if churches do to people what zoos do to animals?* We try to tame people, in the name of Christ. We try to remove the risk and mitigate the danger. We think we're discipling people, but all we're doing is domesticating them. It's more behavior modification than it is true transformation. When did we start believing that God has called us to safe places to do easy things with nice people? Part of taking up our cross is taking risks for the right reasons.

There is a concept in ecology called rewilding. It's letting nature take care of itself by not overcontrolling it or overprotecting it. Jesus said, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves."²⁰ That doesn't

sound safe, does it? News flash: The will of God isn't an insurance plan; it's a dangerous plan. Jesus didn't die just to keep us safe; He died to make us dangerous. Discipleship, I daresay, is a form of rewilding.

"The people who hanged Christ never, to do them justice, accused him of being a bore," said Dorothy Sayers. "On the contrary, they thought him too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround him with an atmosphere of tedium. We have very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified him 'meek and mild,'" and recommended him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies."²¹

Do you remember what Jesus did after His baptism? I'll give you a hint: He didn't go to seminary. "The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan." Then the gospel writer added this little nuance: "He was with the wild animals."²²

We could afford some religious rewilding, could we not? I'm not saying we have to go on a safari, but I wouldn't advise against it. Our alienation from the Garden of Eden began what Chellis Glendinning called "our disconnection from the earth."²³ It is our original trauma—detachment from the presence of God. It's alienation from Creator and creation, and part of our soul is amputated in the process. The solution is doing what Jesus did—He walked beaches, climbed mountains, and withdrew to the wilderness with a degree of regularity. The wilderness is where many of God's greatest miracles are on full display. Maybe that's why Jesus spent so much time in solitary places.

When we stare at two-dimensional screens all day, when we retreat to our manufactured environments, there is a loss of sensual knowledge. Most of us can't get anywhere without GPS because we've lost our internal sense of direction. The result is a feeling of lostness, a feeling of homelessness. We aren't at home in our bodies. We aren't at home in our homes. We aren't at home in nature. Honestly, we aren't at home anywhere. In the words of Henry David Thoreau, "We know not where we are."²⁴

Did you know that kids spend 50 percent less time outdoors these days?²⁵ Why go outside when you have virtual reality at your fingertips? But that's how we lose our childlike sense of wonder! When we lose touch with nature, we lose touch with human nature.

BAPTISM BY NATURE

Remember John Muir?

He was a student of Scripture and a student of nature. Muir memorized the entire New Testament. Yes, you read that right. He also enrolled in what he called the “University of Wilderness.”²⁶ If all truth is God’s truth, then all of nature is God’s classroom. “Climb the mountains,” exhorted Muir. “Nature’s peace will flow into you as sunshine into trees.”²⁷

My friend and filmmaker, Phil Cunningham, grew up in Zimbabwe. He didn’t watch television or see his first film until he was fourteen years old. Pretty funny that he now makes movies for a living! He didn’t go to film school, but he did enroll in the University of Wilderness. “I fell in love with God,” said Phil, “on the Zambezi river.”²⁸ And it’s that intimate knowledge of creation that fuels the animation studio he founded and the films he produces.²⁹

The Old Testament tabernacle and New Testament church are referred to as the house of God. “I was glad when they said unto me,” said King David, “Let us go into the house of the LORD.”³⁰ As a pastor, I can profess that there is a supernatural synergy when God’s people gather to worship. That said, the first sanctuary wasn’t brick and mortar. There were no walls or ceilings. It was an open-air cathedral.

There is a principle in hermeneutics called the law of first mention. The first mention sets precedent. As such, it carries a little extra weight. The first mention establishes a baseline and a trendline. What is the first reference to the house of God? It was an open heaven in the middle of nowhere—a campsite near the ancient city of Luz. That’s where Jacob went to sleep and woke up to a million little miracles.

“Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it,” said

Jacob. “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God.”³¹

Most of us are like Jacob, pre-Bethel. We sleepwalk our way through life, unaware of the macroscopic and microscopic miracles all around us all the time. The good news? All we have to do is go outside. When? Whenever. Where? Wherever.

THE LAW OF REQUISITE VARIETY

The key to spiritual growth is routine. We call them spiritual disciplines. But once the routine becomes routine, we have to change the routine. It’s the law of requisite variety. If you do the same set of exercises in the same sequence every time you go to the gym, it loses effectiveness. Why? Because your muscles adapt to the routine. You have to confuse your muscles by changing the routine, and the same is true of spiritual muscles.

That’s why I read different translations of the Bible every year.

That’s why I pray in different postures.

That’s why a change of scenery can be so transformative.

“Change is endlessly fascinating to brains,” said Will Storr in his book *The Science of Storytelling*. And neuroscientist Sophie Scott said, “Almost all perception is based on the detection of change.”³²

According to psychologist Daniel Berlyne, the arousal potential of stimuli is a result of complexity. It has to involve some degree of ambiguity, incongruity, or novelty.³³ This is why new revelations tend to happen when we change our routine. A small change can make a big difference! I live by a little formula:

Change of pace + change of place = change of perspective

I’m not suggesting that the grass is greener on the other side. The grass is greener over the septic tank! That said, a change in scenery can work wonders. “Methinks that the moment my legs move,” said Henry

David Thoreau, “my thoughts begin to flow.”³⁴

I get some of my best ideas when I’m hiking or biking or running. Why is that? Scientific studies suggest that exercise intensifies brain-wave amplitude and frequency. It also improves slow-wave sleep, which reduces brain fog.³⁵ Even something as simple as a change in posture can shift your perspective. When I kneel, that body posture affects my heart posture. I also close my eyes to open them!

Did you know that when you exercise, your muscles secrete chemicals into the bloodstream called myokines? Known as hope molecules, myokines are so small they pass through the blood-brain barrier and function as an antidepressant.³⁶ Your muscles are a built-in pharmacy, and exercise fills the prescription. According to a UCLA study, those who exercise regularly experience a 40 percent drop in poor mental health days!³⁷

If you want to experience miracles, sometimes it’s as simple as introducing a change of pace or a change of place. Go on a silent retreat. Establish a Sabbath ritual. Do a social media fast. Pick up a copy of *Draw the Circle*, and take the forty-day prayer challenge.³⁸ You do you, but do it differently than you’ve done it.

Robert Madu, who pastors Social Dallas, recently spoke at our annual revival at National Community Church. He mentioned that he did a twenty-one-day water-only fast prior to planting the church. When I asked why, he said that the still small voice of the Spirit whispered, “Your current level of discipline won’t sustain what I want to do.”

Many of us want God to do a new thing while we keep doing the same old same old. Can I speak the truth in love? Your system is perfectly designed for the results you’re getting. More of the same doesn’t always get us where we want to go. If you want a different outcome, change the input. You tell me the last time you got outside your comfort zone—outside the tent—and I’ll tell you the last time you grew!

THE MYSTERY OF THE PEANUT

George Washington Carver ranks as one of the greatest scientific minds of the twentieth century. Along with teaching at Tuskegee University for forty-seven years, Carver is credited with saving the agricultural economy of the South by introducing the concept of crop rotation.

Carver encouraged the farmers to plant peanuts, which replenished the soil. But there was no market for peanuts, so the farmers complained to Carver. What did Carver do? He did what he had always done. He went for long prayer walks through the woods early in the morning.

Ask the animals, and they will teach you,
or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you;
or speak to the earth, and it will teach you.³⁹

That was George Washington Carver's life verse, and he took it literally. There is no greater classroom than God's green earth, and Carver enrolled every morning around four o'clock.

"To me," said Carver, "Nature . . . is the little window through which God permits me to commune with Him, and to see much of His glory, by simply lifting the curtain and looking in. I love to think of Nature as wireless telegraph stations through which God speaks to us every day, every hour, and every moment of our lives."⁴⁰

On January 20, 1921, George Washington Carver testified before the House Ways and Means Committee on behalf of the United Peanut Association of America. The chairman, Joseph Fordney of Michigan, granted him ten minutes. An hour and forty minutes later, the committee told Carver he could come back anytime and have as much time as he wanted. Carver had captivated that committee by demonstrating dozens of uses for the peanut—glue and fertilizer, shaving cream and soap, insecticides and cosmetics, wood stains and linoleum.

"Anything will give up its secrets if you love it enough," said George

Washington Carver. “Not only have I found that when I talk to the little flower or to the little peanut they will give up their secrets, but I have found that when I silently commune with people they give up their secrets also—if you love them enough.”⁴¹

I used to feel tremendous social pressure to be *interesting*. I have since discovered, that’s not how you win friends and influence people. The key is to be *interested*. You have to cultivate a non-anxious curiosity about other people, and the master key is questions.

If you had a personal Mount Rushmore, like the four photographs that hang in my office, whose pictures would you hang? Who left their fingerprints on your soul? Who believed in you more than you believed in yourself?

People will give up their secrets if you love them enough.

Does that challenge you as much as it does me? The only limit is love! That is the secret to life and to leadership. It’s love that unlocks a million little miracles!

STARDUST

When God took Abram on that two-foot field trip, He told him to look up and count the stars. In a sense, Abram was looking back in time.⁴² Many of the stars we see in the sky don’t even exist anymore. Some of them died before Abram was born, but they are so far away that their light is still traveling toward us.

When Abram looked up, he was also looking in a mirror. When stars explode, it’s called a supernova. Those exploding stars eject most of their mass, which is where elements on the periodic table come from.⁴³ It’s also where you come from.⁴⁴ You aren’t just dust; you are stardust, which is way cooler! Chemically speaking, you are 65 percent oxygen, 18.5 percent carbon, 9.5 percent hydrogen, and 3.3 percent nitrogen.⁴⁵ And, I might add, 100 percent awesome.

Can we have a little fun with this? Nearly a century ago, it was estimated that the chemicals in the human body were collectively

worth ninety-eight cents.⁴⁶ Of course, that estimate has fluctuated over the years.

A few years ago, *Wired* magazine conducted a reassessment. Patrick Di Justo did a market valuation of fifty chemicals and components contained within the human body. Your body contains \$7.12 worth of phosphorus and \$5.95 worth of potassium. According to Di Justo, your heart is worth \$57,000, while your kidneys would fetch \$91,400. Your DNA is valued at \$9 million. Your most valuable asset? Your bone marrow is worth \$23 million. Your total market value is \$45,618,575.82.⁴⁷ That ought to make you feel like a million bucks—or maybe I should say, forty-six million!

Count the stars if you can.⁴⁸

Taken literally, this would rank as the hardest command in Scripture. Remember, there are two hundred sextillion stars in the observable universe. If Abram counted one star per second for five thousand years, he'd only be on 157,680,000,000. Besides that, an estimated 275 million new stars are born every single day!⁴⁹ So Abram would be further behind than when he started. I know these numbers seem ridiculous, but that's the point. God is "able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine."⁵⁰ And not by a little, but by a lot.

"Men can always be blind to a thing so long as it is big enough," said G. K. Chesterton. "A thing can be hid by being big."⁵¹ That's how we miss the forest for the trees. That's how we miss the Creator for His creation.

The largest organ in the human body is the recently discovered interstitium, and many people have never even heard of it. Why? Because it was hiding a few millimeters beneath the surface of the skin. How did we miss millions of microscopic channels that move interstitial fluid? It was hiding in plain sight, like a million other little miracles!⁵²

No matter how wide-angled we look at the world, God is bigger

still. Whether we're looking through a microscope or telescope, we can't not narrow-frame God.

Looking up into the night sky had to rank as the most existential moment of Abram's life. It bordered on an out-of-body experience. "The sublime is limitless," said Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, "so that the mind in the presence of the sublime . . . has pain in the failure but pleasure in contemplating the immensity of the attempt."⁵³ That comes awfully close to what Abram must have experienced—"pleasure in contemplating the immensity of the attempt."

"Mystery is not the absence of meaning, but the presence of more meaning than we can comprehend."⁵⁴ Mystery is immeasurable beauty. Mystery is inexhaustible grace. Mystery is incalculable love.

Why did God tell Abram to count the stars? God was messing with his mind, in a good way. God was sanctifying his expectations by supersizing them. He was giving Abram a nightlight—a visual reminder of both his history and his destiny. The same God who hung the stars in the sky can give you descendants. The same God who keeps the planets in orbit can reconcile broken relationships and heal broken bodies. The same God who created the universe can help you conceive.

There is a calculus to theology that defies conventional logic. What we believe isn't logical or illogical. It's theological. Faith adds God to every equation. When you do that, five loaves plus two fish equals all-you-can-eat for five thousand people. And there is more left over than you started with!

THE FOURTH DRIVE

Yann Martel grew up an atheist but came to believe in God while writing his award-winning novel, *Life of Pi*. "Reason is very empowering," noted Martel. "Our entire Western Democracies are a meticulous result of reason. Reason is just a tool and it doesn't in and of itself give you a reason to use it." What prompted Martel's soul-searching? "I was

sick to death of being reasonable.”⁵⁵

Biologists suggest that, along with food, sex, and shelter, there is a fourth drive that makes us uniquely human: curiosity.⁵⁶ Porcupines don't ponder the purpose of life. Butterflies, as beautiful as they are, don't study the stars. There is something unique about humankind, and it's called the *imago Dei*. We may have much of the same DNA as the animal kingdom, but the *imago Dei* is the difference maker. “Those who run to the apes to explain our behavior,” said W. H. Auden, “are chuckleheads too dumb to know their arse from a hole in the ground.”⁵⁷ Tell us what you really think, W. H. Auden!

Creation is God's cabinet of curiosities. It's full of mysteries and miracles. Astrophysicists recently discovered a doughnut-shaped galaxy called Hoag's Object that has stellar rings surrounding its Boston cream center. Some observers call it a “cosmic turducken.”⁵⁸ Either way, it makes me hungry! What is so strange and mysterious about Hoag's Object? Inside this galaxy is another miniature galaxy. So-called ring galaxies represent less than one-tenth of a percent of galaxies. That galaxy within a galaxy is a rare beauty. It's one of a million *big* miracles—so big that it's easily overlooked.

Reason is a gift from God, but reasonableness doesn't ring the bell. It's revelation, not reason, that reveals our *raison d'être*. Reason can't explain suffering or beauty or love. It can't even make a kiss make sense.

GOOSEBUMPS

Remember your first kiss?

Biologically speaking, you exchanged eighty million bacteria with whoever it is you kissed.⁵⁹ That number is much higher in France, if you know what I mean. My point? Reason can suck the romance right out of life! There is more to life than the conscious mind can compute. Meaning isn't mechanical or computational; it's mysterious and miraculous.

Few things are more magical or miraculous than a first kiss. All right, it can be a little awkward too. But that first kiss produces a tingly sensation that goes by a few names—neuropathic tingle, aesthetic chills, psychogenic shivers, or good old-fashioned goosebumps. Regardless of which name you prefer, it's one of a million little miracles that make life worth living.

We have about five million body hairs that on occasion will stand at attention like soldiers saluting an officer. That physiological response is a somatic marker that stamps memory. And I'm pretty sure that's what Abram experienced when he counted the stars. Simply put, he got goosebumps while stargazing.

Did you know there are different types of goosebumps? A researcher at Columbia University, Matthew Sachs, has created a formula for musical goosebumps. Taking lyrics, melodies, and harmonics into account: $P_{\text{goosebumps}} = CF (Sc + Id + Ap)$.⁶⁰

I recently heard Tori Kelly cover Leonard Cohen's all-time classic, "Hallelujah." It's the same song she sang as Meena, the elephant in the movie *Sing*. I got goosebumps! I get goosebumps when I hear "It Is Well with My Soul," the song we sang at my father-in-law's graveside service. I also get goosebumps when I hear "Sirius," the song used to introduce the Chicago Bulls during the Michael Jordan era.

What songs give you goosebumps? Go ahead and applaud the musical artist, but don't forget to praise the God of music. Every melody echoes the original song of creation. There are only twelve notes in Western music—C, D, E, F, G, A, and B, plus flats and sharps.⁶¹ So few notes yet so many songs! The last time I checked, there were more than one hundred million songs on Spotify.⁶²

Goosebumps can be produced by kissing and by music, but the most common type of goosebumps are those caused by wonder. According to Mitchell Colver of Utah State University, wonder goosebumps are triggered by the time lag between the emotional and intellectual parts of our brain.⁶³ Thoughts travel at five hundred milliseconds per second, while emotions travel a few hundred milliseconds faster.⁶⁴

Fun fact? We can read facial expressions in two hundred milliseconds flat.⁶⁵ That's pretty impressive given the fact that we are capable of seven thousand different expressions!⁶⁶ According to Colver, the emotion of wonder gives us goosebumps before the intellectual part of the brain can rationalize away what's happening. This is also how we get gut feelings—but let's get back to kissing.

There are health benefits to kissing. It increases the flow of saliva, which keeps your teeth and gums healthy. Studies have shown that kissing boosts immunity, lowers anxiety, and burns calories. It even relieves headaches, reduces cholesterol, and lowers blood pressure. But none of those explain why we kiss. There are reasons beyond reason, and one of them is called romance.⁶⁷

"We can study the scientific nature of love," said Monica Parker. "It can't capture reveling in the mystery and marvel of love at first sight, the birth of a child, a strain of music heard in a darkened concert hall that is so beautiful and pure it brings tears to your eyes."⁶⁸

The biology, chemistry, and neurology of kissing is one of a million little miracles.

Butterfly kisses.

Air kisses.

Angel kisses.

When was the last time you thanked God for good old-fashioned goosebumps?

Don't take those goosebumps for granted. Take them for gratitude. While you're at it, put together a playlist that produces those goosebumps! I have very different playlists for running and writing, but music helps put me in the right mood or the right mode. I write instrumental music so I'm not distracted by words. My running playlist, which might reveal my age, has lots of power ballads from the eighties!

THE SCIENCE OF AWE

The feeling of awe is one of God's greatest gifts and comes in lots of shapes and sizes. For some, it's climbing a Douglas fir during a winter storm or taking long walks through the woods in the wee hours of the morning. For others, it's canoeing a river or counting stars on a cloudless night.

"Awe is the feeling of being in the presence of something vast that transcends your current understanding of the world," said professor of psychology Dacher Keltner.⁶⁹ It's a paradigm shift. It's a feeling of smallness in the presence of greatness. That feeling can be triggered by things large and small. The medieval mystic Julian of Norwich saw the universe reflected in a hazelnut.⁷⁰ The same is true of an acorn that turns into a giant oak tree, is it not?

What gives you goosebumps?

When and where do you feel most alive?

What experiences produce feelings of awe?

For Dacher Keltner, it was room 837 at the Louvre in Paris. He was staring at a painting by the seventeenth-century Dutch artist Pieter de Hooch called *La Buveuse* when he was captivated by its stillness. "Standing in front of the painting," said Keltner, "was like a psychedelic experience."⁷¹ Henri Nouwen had the same kind of epiphany the first time he saw *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by the Dutch artist Rembrandt.⁷²

By definition, awe defies definition. We don't have words for awe, but it's unmistakable when we experience it. It's holding your newborn baby for the first time and seeing your reflection in the pupils of their eyes. It's witnessing the northern lights or Great Barrier Reef. It's looking up at El Capitan or Glacier Point or Half Dome from the floor of the Yosemite Valley.

Speaking of Half Dome, a study on tourists who had hiked Half Dome found them to be kinder and more generous after having done so. Like the three-day effect, perhaps there is a five-thousand-foot

effect? What I find fascinating about that study is that those tourists, when asked to draw a self-portrait, pictured themselves as small. There's something about nature that acts as an antidote to narcissism.

Where do we find awe? The answer is, anywhere! I love art galleries and national parks, but that may not be your jam. Awe is more of a mindset than a circumstance. It might have more to do with pace than place. The psalmist said, "Be still, and know that I am God."⁷³ Notice the change of pace prescribed by the psalmist. The slower you go, the more you notice! There is something about awe, no matter when or where we experience it, that deactivates the default mode network in the brain.⁷⁴ This is how heaven invades earth.

FULLY ALIVE

Many years ago, Dr. Tony Campolo was teaching a class at the University of Pennsylvania when an ordinary lecture turned into an unforgettable life lesson. He asked an unsuspecting student, "Young man, how long have you lived?" The student answered his age, as most of us would, but that isn't what Dr. Campolo was asking. "That's how long your heart has been pumping," he said. "That's not how long you have lived."

That's when Tony Campolo told the class about one of the most memorable moments of his life—a fourth-grade field trip to the top of the Empire State Building. Rising 1,250 feet, it was the world's tallest building in 1944. When nine-year-old Tony got off the elevator and stepped onto the observation deck overlooking New York City, time stood still. "In one mystical, magical moment I took in the city," he said. "If I live a million years, that moment will still be part of my consciousness, because I was fully alive when I lived it."⁷⁵

Looking back on your life, what are the moments when you were most alive? Most present? Most filled with awe? When were you overcome by childlike wonder or holy curiosity? Where did heaven invade earth? What experiences will be part of your consciousness forever?

I'll never forget the day I got my first glimpse of the Grand Canyon. Time stood still as the sunset painted those canyon walls majestic pinks and magnificent purples. *Awe-inspiring* is an understatement. Then I hiked the Grand Canyon from rim to rim with my son Parker. That field trip may be the most memorable 23.2 miles I've ever walked. That kind of experience can turn you into a different person.

In his book *Against an Infinite Horizon*, Ronald Rolheiser told a story about a retired couple traveling the globe. "Of all the things you've seen on earth," asked Rolheiser, "what was the most impressive?" The old man responded,

This will sound strange, but it's true! Of all the things we've seen, what impressed me the most was the stones at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. They're only stones! But, as we were standing on the floor of the Grand Canyon, I was reading the tourist brochure and it said: "The stones you are standing on are 2 billion years old." Two billion years! When I think of my life in relationship to that, it isn't even as long as a snap of my fingers. I believe in eternal life, and so two billion years from now we are all going to still be alive. Putting life against that background kind of puts us into perspective now, doesn't it?

Rolheiser concluded, "When we live in depression or obsession we have lost perspective. We have forgotten how young we are, how understanding God is, and how old are the stones at the bottom of the Grand Canyon."⁷⁶

"One of the secrets to faith," said Karl Rahner, "is to always see your life *against an infinite horizon*."⁷⁷ How do we do that? Go outside, look up, and count the stars!

Have you put an eight-foot ceiling on God?

It's time to come out of your tent and take a two-foot field trip.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning said,

Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.⁷⁸

There are a million little miracles right under your feet.
All you have to do is take off your shoes!

REDISCOVER THE GOD WHO IS
BIGGER THAN BIG, CLOSER THAN CLOSE,
AND GOODER THAN GOOD

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