

# Mary's Weapon

## How to Wonder & Ponder Your Way to Everyday Joy

December 19, 2015 // Trevor Atwood // Luke 2:8-20, Isaiah 9:6 // Christmas

Today, on the last Sunday before Christmas. I have a gift for you. I'm going to share with you what I consider one of the most important practices in my life. In fact, it's a weapon. It's an art. It's a discipline.

It's something I use nearly everyday of my life and when I use it, it keeps me from sin. When I use it, it also helps me to enjoy God, life, and people more. When I don't use it, I complain. When I don't use it, I'm short tempered, and I tend to give myself to all sorts of evil.

It rescued my marriage and it keeps me from losing my mind on a regular basis. It smashes anxiety and sometimes leaves me in tears of joy. It's often the difference between me cursing or blessing someone.

Today, I'm inviting you to begin this practice in your own life and see what happens in 2016 when you use it. I'm going to warn you. It's not easy. There's a learning curve, but anyone can do it.

And no, I'm not just talking about "reading your Bible" though that plays an important role in it. Do you know where I learned this? I learned it from Mary and the shepherds. But it wasn't until a few weeks ago, that I saw it in Jesus. You know what I call it? The Force. Just kidding, I saw Star Wars last night. I call it Wondering & Pondering.

### **Luke 2:8-20**

**And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,**

**"Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"**

**When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.**

**Isaiah 9:6**

**For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor.**

Today I want to you show you how you have a relationship with Jesus as the Wonderful Counselor and you can't do it without wondering & pondering.

**1) If Christ is a wonderful counselor, then Christians should love Wonder and Wisdom.**

Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would be called the Wonderful Counselor. That implies two things about him.

**The first is the word “wonderful”.** It means that there is something about Jesus that is amazing. Awe inspiring. It's jaw-dropping. It gets deep down to your emotions and even without thinking. You can, well, worship. Honestly, that's what wonder is. It's worship. It's praise that springs up from seeing or experiencing something out of this world.

**The second word is “counselor”.** It means that Jesus is someone who is full of wisdom, and he's generous with it. It's one thing to have wisdom. It's another to dole it out. That's what a counselor does.

But wisdom is different from Wonder. Think about wisdom for a second. You know what the difference between a smart person and wise person is? A smart person is somebody you want with you on the game show, Jeopardy. A wise person is someone you want with you when your life is in jeopardy.

Knowledge is retaining information, but Wisdom is the working of what you know into how you live. Wisdom takes the academic and turns it practical. Wisdom takes theology and turns it into loving your neighbor. Wisdom is the way you take what you have learned about God and use it to worship him, by acting on what you know. And that's what makes this name for Jesus so remarkable.

**On one hand Jesus is full of supernatural wonder.** A virgin birth. The fulfillment of an old prophecy of a messiah. An army of Angels in the sky heralding his arrival. The Son of God.

In other words, there is so much about who Jesus is that makes you go, WHOA, because you instantly know there is something special about him! Something other-worldly.

**On the other hand, Jesus is full of wisdom.** He's God, but he's born into everyday life. He's not just theology, he's practice. He's the truth, delivered in love. He's not just supernatural, he's human. He went to school. Learned a trade. He did the ordinary. He wasn't just Son of God, he was Son of Man, and he was son of Joseph and Mary.

In a very literal sense, Jesus is the great Truth about God applied to everyday situation of humans. He is Wisdom. See, wonder knocks you off your feet. It's all of a sudden. It starts with your heart, your emotions, your spirit. It makes you laugh and cry and shout "WOOOO!" It's angels in the heavens and a star over a stable.

**But if you only have wonder without wisdom,** you'll end up constantly finding yourself searching for the next spiritual high. You'll dismiss simple obedience to God to do whatever it takes to grab a hold of the wonder. You'll bounce around from church to church, bible study to bible study, conference to conference trying to find that feeling.

Every church service will be evaluated based on how deeply your emotions were stirred, instead of on the truth that was presented to you. And honestly, you'll probably end up missing Jesus, because he's more than wonder, he's also wisdom.

**But, if you only have wisdom without wonder,** you'll end up simply thinking thoughts about God and never stopping to actually consider who it is that you are dealing with.

Sure you may know theology and even how to practice it but your soul will never be stirred. You'll serve a Grand Canyon God like he's a gas station.

You'll read your bible to figure out how to apply it to your life, but you'll be so concerned about your life, you'll never stop to consider that the Bible really isn't about you at all. It's about the God who wrote it.

Wonder is what the Bible calls "the Fear of the LORD" In a book of the bible that is filled with wisdom, the practical working out of theology into everyday life, Solomon writes "The Fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom."

In other words, wisdom without wonder is wisdom without a foundation and any house without a solid foundation crumbles as soon as it encounters a storm. See, if your wisdom isn't based on wonder, the fear of the LORD, when suffering comes into your life, you'll throw away your life-application Bible. You want to know what the life of someone who knows the wonderful counselor is like?

I always go with the late great Jim Valvano, the legendary Basketball coach and humanitarian who said, **“If you laugh, you think, and you cry, that’s a full day. That’s a heck of a day. You do that seven days a week, you’re going to have something special.”**

When you are both struck by the supernatural divinity of Jesus, in awe over his sovereignty, his creativity, his deep love, at the same time you are ridiculously practical about applying his teachings, obeying his commands, and living as he lived, **I assure you will both laugh and cry in wonder, and you’ll think in wisdom.** You do that seven days a week, and you’re going to have something special.

Now, let me show you how this works. Let me show you how,

## **2) Wonder should always lead to Pondering & Pondering should always lead to Wonder.**

Last night, I saw the new Star Wars movie. When I watch really good movies, and this was a really good movie, I always take it in two stages.

The first one is usually the experience. I’ll see the movie, make mental notes about the plot and the theme, but I try as best I can to become immersed in the experience that the writer and the director want me to have. I try not to evaluate or overthink what I’m watching. And if it’s a really good movie, I’ll have a bit of wonder.

I won’t really notice the intricacies of the plot twists or the subtleties of camera angles, but I will laugh and cry and identify with characters. I’ll empathize. I’ll cheer. I’ll celebrate everything that’s beautiful and mourn everything ugly. **I’m wondering.**

But, afterwards, usually for the next couple of days, **I’m pondering.** I’m thinking through what the movie was teaching me. I’m thinking about whether it’s a good depiction of my life experience and what God says about humanity and creation.

That’s wondering and pondering. Wondering has you immersed in an experience. Pondering has you thinking it down into your life. In fact, sometimes I’ll watch a movie and not be particularly moved by it, but after I think it through, I actually come to believe it’s a beautiful film.

On the flip side, sometimes I’m moved by a film, and afterward I think it through and find I’m celebrating something God doesn’t celebrate or that the whole film was telling me a lie, and then I hate the movie.

But when I find a movie that I both am deeply moved by when I experience it and then as I think it through, I’m also delighted by what it is teaching me, it becomes one of my all time favorites.

Jesus is that way. He must be wondered at, because he's wonderful. And he must be pondered, because he's a counselor full of wisdom. If not, you'll never get all of Jesus.

Take a look at the shepherds' reaction on the night Jesus was born in verses 16-18 and 20. The angels leave, and the shepherds get excited. They go searching, probably door to door, trying to match the description the angels gave them with a baby somewhere in Bethlehem. They didn't get latitude and longitude or an angelic GPS, just a city and a set of clues.

Knock, knock.  
Do you have a baby?  
Yes.  
Is he in a manger?  
No.  
Ok.  
Knock. Knock.

Then they laid eyes on Him. There he was. The hope of all people. All their joy, all their peace with God, wrapped up in a feeding trough.

Can you imagine these shepherds? For all their lives they had been on the outside. Because of their poverty and status in society they were told they were unclean, unapproachable, unable to come into the temple. By all religious standards, they had to stand at the back on their tiptoes to see what God was doing. But now, they had been invited by angels to a front row seat to God in human form. And their response was to tell everyone what they had just heard and seen with their own eyes. And why not? The message of the gospel is amazing. You are nothing, sinful, rebellious, dead in your sin, a child of wrath and disobedience destined for eternal separation from God. You were an outsider, BUT GOD, sent his son as a human, to take your place, to live the life you were supposed to live, and die the death apart from God you deserve, so that you can finally come close to God. Those Shepherds were staring at something wonderful, so they wondered. No doubt they laughed and they cried.

But, with Jesus, there has to be more than wonder. See, Because Jesus is also a counselor, we have to Ponder him too. So now lets take a look at Mary. Verse 19 says that Mary "Treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart."

This is what I'm doing when I'm watching a movie, I'm treasuring up the plot so later I can think it through into real life. Now, we know Mary wondered. We know she was amazed. Because she was there when the shepherds delivered the angels' message. She was one of the ones who heard the Shepherds testimony and "all who heard it wondered" But Mary takes it a step further. You see that in **verse 19** starts with "but".

Apparently everyone else there that heard the Shepherds message simply wondered, they were amazed by the message. But they didn't treasure it, and ponder it quite like Mary did. You know what that word treasure means? It is the same word that means to keep something in your memory. To memorize. And what about "ponder?" Ponder means to converse, to have a conversation.

So here's the picture we get. The proper response to the Christmas message, the gospel, is both amazement at who God is and what he has done on our behalf, but also memorizing it, treasuring it, taking it in, then "having" a conversation about in your heart until you work it into your everyday life.

And that is a great way to describe what we should do with God's revelation of himself to us. We talk it over. With each other, yes. But we consider its implications for our lives. We constantly ask ourselves "If it is true that God became man to die my death and give me his reward, then rose up out of the grave, what difference does that make in every sector of my life?"

How does that wonderful news counsel me? How does the wonder of God put on flesh in my everyday life as a Husband, Dad, Pastor, Son, Brother, Friend, Employee, Employer.

See, wondering is responding to the wonder of God with your heart. Pondering is responding to the wisdom of God with your head and hands.

It's asking yourself, "If the gospel of Jesus is true...  
How does that change my marriage?  
How does that change how I go about my job?  
How does that change the way I study and read?  
How does that change the way I parent?"

When you ponder, you are thinking the beautiful truth of God's salvation down into your life. You are letting the gospel counsel you. You are bringing the wonder of God into the everyday, kind of like Christmas.

This happens all over the place in the Bible. First, there is treasuring or memorizing the word of God. Then there is pondering or having a conversation with your soul about what it means.

Take the Psalms for example. All over the place you have the Psalmist having a conversation with himself based on a truth he knows about God. Look at this in Psalm 43:5.

**Why are you cast down, O my soul...**(see that's the conversation)  
**Why are you in turmoil within me?**

Now, he brings in what he has memorized, what he has treasured to battle the lies in his soul. He says "Soul, you gotta Hope in God, he's my salvation and my God."

And do you notice something about this Psalm? It doesn't start with Wonder, does it? He's not in wonder at all. The Psalmist is not on a spiritual high. His soul is downcast.

See, sometimes you have to ponder to get to wonder. You have to memorize Scripture and have a conversation with your soul to get to a point of praising God, which is exactly what happens here.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul calls this "Taking your thoughts captive" In 2nd Corinthians 10:4-5, Paul calls pondering a weapon of warfare. Because when you use it, you destroy the lies that are keeping you from knowing the depth of Joy that comes from knowing Christ.

See, Paul is saying, when you are thinking something contrary to the word of God that you have memorized, that you have treasured and stored up, you pull out that truth and go to war with yourself. And once you beat that lie into submission with the truth, you begin to make your thoughts obey Christ. You take them captive.

Once again, this is not someone who is in this moment of exulting in the glories of God, like the shepherds. This is a picture of a warrior who is beaten down, feeling condemned to death, then draws out a sword and totally turns things around.

See, on one hand, when you see the wonder of Jesus, the amazing truth of his salvation, you can't just respond emotionally, you have to ponder it down for it to take hold in your life and produce the deep joy that Jesus is supposed to produce in you.

Some of you need to hear that today, because I watch you wonder every Sunday. I watch you sit on the edge of your seat when I get to the "Jesus" part of the message. Some of you weep. When you hear about the grace of God, it brings tears to your eyes. You really worship in here, but you never ponder. So you leave here, and your day to day life isn't very different. Because you can't just let the grace of God delight your soul, it has to train you, **like Yoda trained Luke.**

Look at Titus 2:11-12. Verse 11 is the wonder- the grace of God has appeared! Bringing Salvation, I'm forgiven! Glory to God in the highest! Peace on Earth. Good will toward men.

But then look at verse 12. It's pondering that grace is now training me to renounce sin and worldly passions, to live with self-control and godliness. But I have to let the grace of God train me. I have to listen to what its telling me. It's not the laws about God that trains me, it's the glory of his forgiveness of my breaking those laws that trains me.

On the other hand, sometimes I start with Pondering. Sometimes I pick up my Bible because it's a discipline, not because I'm super-excited about God. Sometimes I pray and ask God to help me want to pray. Some days I start by getting upset with my wife and kids, or complaining about my job, or making excuses for my sin, and I go to Scripture I've memorized to talk myself into wondering. To slay those lies of entitlement and pride, and tell my soul the truth that I have way more than I deserve simply because God himself became flesh and took my punishment on a cross and now allows me to represent him to the world.

So sometimes you ponder to get to wonder. And sometimes you have to take the wonder of God and ponder it down into real thoughts and actions. Let me give you a couple of examples of how this works, with anxiety and with relationships.

**You know the angels said that because of Jesus, there is peace on earth among those with whom God is pleased.** The only people with whom God is pleased are those who get their righteousness from Jesus and not themselves. In other words, Jesus took my place. I get credit for his perfect life while, on a cross he takes the rap for my sin. That's a wonderful message. I can sing about it. It does move me. It's beautiful.

**But now I need to ponder that down into my life. Here's how that goes:** When I get anxious, I've lost my wonder. I'm believing that there is something that is happening that I need to get control of and if I don't, something bad is going to happen to me. So I have to ponder. I have to have a conversation with my soul. I have to take my thought captive and bring it into obedience. So I start with the truth that I've treasured, that I've memorized:

### **Romans 8:32**

**He who did not spare his only son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things.**

This verse reminds me that because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection that I'm at peace with God, and the biggest problem I have has been solved. So, why shouldn't I then expect God to solve all the others I have.

Think about what that does to my anxious thought. Once I am sure that God has made a way for me to be saved, why would I not trust him to care for me in every other area of my life. What's left to be anxious about?

With that treasured truth, I've just taken my anxious thought captive. Or let me give you one that happened two weeks ago. Keva and I got in a fight.

She pulled out of the driveway, angry at me. I walked around the neighborhood, listening to my angry soul. "You didn't do anything wrong. She's the one who broke your plans. You tried to serve her all morning long, and she didn't even appreciate it." About halfway through the walk, I started pondering. I started talking to my soul.

"I told my soul, you sinned infinitely against God. You broke your promise to him, yet he died to save you. He forgave you. How now, oh my soul, can you hold a grudge against your wife. Oh yeah, dear soul, perhaps you aren't as innocent as you think you are. After all, didn't you tell her that phone call was going to last 5 minutes, and it actually lasted 15 minutes? Perhaps you are as much of a promise breaker as she is. Perhaps you owe her an apology."

### **Psalm 43:5**

**"But fear not! Both your sin and her sin is covered. So Why are you downcast, O my soul, Why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God, because he is your salvation and your wife's as well. So go repent and forgive and praise the God that makes it possible."**

You know what that led to? I walked in the door and she'd been doing the same thing. I walked in and she approached me with an apology, a hug, and some donuts, and that was truly a moment of wonder in ordinary life, and not just because of the donuts. Because in that moment, I saw the inward peace in my soul, and the outward peace among men, that was promised in Jesus and once again, right there in my house, I worshipped Christ.

Listen, if you only come in and out of church worship services, or conversations with friends, just letting the wonder of God kind of spike your feels every now and then, but never bothering to have the discipline to think through why it matters on Monday morning to your co-workers that the gospel is true, never bothering to memorize and meditate on Scripture, you aren't pondering, and you'll likely abandon the faith when you can't find the feels anymore or when the only thing you feel in life is pain.

Every time you are amazed at who God is and what he's done, think it through and ask, "Now that I see who you are, Jesus, who do want me to be?" Every time you wonder, PONDER.

On the other hand, if all you ever do is read scripture, come up with action plans about how to avoid sin and do good things for others. If you are consumed with academic theology, but it never moves you to laugh with joy at your salvation, or cry at the beauty of his sacrifice for you, then you are Pondering without wonder and that is a dangerous thing.

**If you only wonder, you miss the gospel's implications. If you only ponder, you miss it's beauty.**

But if you know Jesus Christ, the Wonderful Counselor, full of wonder, full wisdom, then you will find yourself in an eternal cycle of being blown away by his beauty, while you take every thought captive.

You'll not only worship when the sermon reaches a climax or when the worship song crescendos, you'll do it on an ordinary Monday morning, when you wake up and say "Oh my soul Why are you downcast?" I bring you good tidings, Christ lived, Christ died, Christ resurrected, and don't you know Oh Soul, you are resurrecting too.

**You'll laugh, you'll think, you'll cry. You do that seven days a week, You're gonna have something special.**

There is a rhythm that we have developed here at City Church. Often, what we do in here on the weekend is wonder. I don't preach behavior to you, I preach Christ crucified, resurrected, and coming again, and often, we are moved to wonder in here when the Scripture shows us Jesus.

Then, every month we have a fighter verse. We ask you to treasure it, memorize it, and we ask you to ponder it, meditate on it, and then we ask you to have a conversation with your soul about it, and have a conversation with another person about it. Where you believe it and where you don't. That's why we call it a fighter verse, because it's a weapon to take your thoughts captive.

This month that verse is **Romans 11:33-36**.

See, here's the thing about Jesus. When you actually consider the wisdom of God, it moves you to worship him. That's what this verse is doing. You can't counsel God. He has to counsel you. He's the wonderful counselor. I can't give God a gift, he has given me a gift in his son, Jesus. He's rescued me from the darkness and transferred me into the kingdom of light.

And once I consider the depth of that wisdom, that backwards messed up wisdom where God himself puts on flesh and dies for my sin and I get a reward I don't deserve where the Son of God is born in a feeding trough and crucified as a criminal...

Once I consider that he resurrected and simply by trusting him, by believing that truth that I will resurrect too that I'll know God forever...

Once I ponder his wisdom, I'm led to wonder. All glory be to Christ.