

I had a plan for what I would share with you this evening, but somehow, that plan, my “perfect” plan – changed – and 3 or 4 drafts later it ended up in that old circular file. So, I struggled with what God’s plan for tonight was, and in the course of that struggle, I ended up last weekend attending a CS Lewis Institute Seminar that my husband was just dying to experience. I really didn’t want to go, but I knew that Jim wanted my company. So there I was, waiting to listen to what I viewed as a pseudo-intellectual approach to defending the faith (the big word – apologetics).

Well, it was definitely God-ordained that I was there. The speaker was a man named Ravi Zacharias. His topic was about comparing Islam and other faiths to Christianity and then defining why Jesus was the only way.

Jim was taking all the facts into that brain of his that never forgets anything, whereas, my brain needs notes (lots of notes) in order to remember. He looks at details while I look at “where does this fit in the big picture – what is the concept or idea?”

However, in the middle of Ravi speaking, what really hit me was one word “passion”. He had a passion for those of all faiths and beliefs and wanted to direct them to the truth and He had a passion for sharing with us how to do that. He was totally and absolutely driven by his passion.

And I began to think – what is my passion?

And I concluded that my passion is you --- the ladies I love and minister to – and growing in myself and you a passion for the life we live with Jesus.

And as I minister to you and you to me, I concluded that we must have the passion to learn how to play as well as pray, how to laugh as well as to cry, how to be serious about life but not take ourselves too seriously. The gospel is a life and death matter, but we don't have to act as if we're dead.

There is a book entitled “Recapture the Wonder” that I purchased at the book table this past weekend by Ravi Zacharias – What a great title – “Recapture the Wonder” --

That's the key – the wonder, the joy of our faith, the passion – even in the midst of the worse of situations

Ravi says, “How does one live in such a way that the mundane blends with the dramatic so that the whole story remains sensational? How does one take the emotional high points and successfully balance them with the sharp edges of sorrow that are also part of life? How do we live so that we avoid becoming, at the end of life, the proverbial cynic or the “grumpy old person”? ... Like the wedding at Cana of Galilee, can the best not be saved for the last?”

Many of us are dealing with loss of dreams, we feel crushed, in despair, alone, frustrated, -- maybe we have been betrayed—or dealing with

illnesses – death – divorce – bankruptcy – bill collectors, broken relationships – so many issues –

One young woman once said to me that she was so burdened with the things in her life that she often felt like a 200 pound bridge carrying a 500 pound truck – what a vivid picture

We are weighed down, tired, in the staleness of routine – going through the motions – we want to run away – but we need to run to Jesus and capture the joy and passion and wonder once more.

How do we avoid letting the troubles in life, or just the mundaneness and sameness of routine rob us of joy and wonder?

Why do we trade in the miraculous for the mundane?

Shouldn't life be an adventure?

What about childlike faith?

When I was a little girl, I dreamed of being Miss America. Every year I would watch the Miss America pageant and dream of walking down that runway with Burt Parks singing, “there she is, Miss America”.

I would put on grand productions in our basement recreation room and invite the kids from the neighborhood to pay a nickel to see me dance around the room, making up steps as I turned in all my dress up clothes. The kids would ooh and aah in wonder. I can still see their faces.

What do we ooh and aah about now?

Is it about tv shows, movies, fashion? Success, money, achievements?

Will they sustain the ooh and the aah?

I think CS Lewis saw the oohs and the aahs of wonder in his own emotions when he wrote the Chronicles of Narnia, wonderful allegories for both children and adults alike.

Beaver is talking to the 4 children:

“They say Aslan is on the move – perhaps has already landed. And now a very curious thing happened. None of the children knew who Aslan was any more than you do; but the moment the Beaver had spoken these words everyone felt quite different. Perhaps it has sometimes happened to you in a dream that someone says something which you don’t understand but in the dream it feels as if it had some enormous meaning – either a terrifying one which turns the whole dream into a nightmare or else a lovely meaning too lovely to put into words, which makes the dream so beautiful that you remember it all your life and are always wishing you could get into that dream again. It was like that now. At the name of Aslan each one of the children felt something jump in his inside. Edmund felt a sensation of mysterious horror. Peter felt suddenly brave and adventurous. Susan felt as if some delicious smell or some delightful strain of music had just floated by her. And Lucy got the feeling you have when you wake up in the morning and realize that it is the beginning of the holidays or the beginning of summer.”

In the story, the character Aslan turns out to be the picture of Jesus and the children each react differently to Him – awe – joy – wonder – what a picture!!

Who is Jesus and why did He come?

We know the story of his death, burial and resurrection – for all of humanity – the John 3:16 – For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

But remember what Jesus said:

John 10:10 – I am come that they might have life, and have it abundantly.

Abundant – full and meaningful – the awe, joy, wonder – that is what He wants for us. He wants a relationship. Christianity is so much more than an entrance to Heaven. It is an entrance into a relationship that meets our deepest needs.

He didn't say that we should have that abundant life only when things were going well in life. He meant it for us all the time.

In Christ, we have hope.

God's Word says to let hope take root in your heart.

We are not to live a hopeless life.

Hal Lindsay – Man can live about 40 days without food, about 3 days without water, about 8 minutes without air, but not one second without hope.

Prov 13:12 – Hope deferred makes the heart sick.

Habakkuk 3:17-18 – Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail; and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

THIS IS HOPE!

So, how do we have this hope in difficult times? How do we embrace God and have joy and awe?

We must fill our minds with truth – John 17:17 – thy word is truth

Ravi in Recapture the Wonder reminded me:

“The Bible is a book of simple clarity but also of intentional mystery; both are indispensable aspects of wonder.”

You know the saying – you are what you eat

In the same way, you are what you think and experience. Do you think about truth?

If you want to know what truth is, go to God’s Word. Experience His Word and the stories in His Word.

God’s word has many promises for us.

We need to know God’s promises, but the knowledge must really be from the inside out, not just head knowledge, not just trying to understand God’s Word, but experiencing it. It’s like trying to understand snow versus experiencing snow, its feeling, its wonder, its taste.

Sometimes I think there is a fear to step out and really grab God’s promises – the status quo, the known is comfortable in an uncomfortable way.

We need to be uncomfortable sometimes – to live passionate lives - Seizing God and His Word and not letting go.

In last weeks SS lesson, what did Jacob do as he struggled with God? He would not let go unless God would bless Him. We need to hang on, not let go – to capture the passion.

The Awe comes as we read His word and look at the world of nature around us. The psalms describe God's creations.

How awesome is it that the God who made us and all of creation wants a relationship with us?

Do we really understand the significance that God loves us?

Just as we are – should this not stir our heart with emotion?

Remember the woman who poured perfume on Jesus' feet. She grasped that God loved her. She did not care what anyone thought of her. Her heart and eyes were only for Jesus. What He had done for her, how He loved her, that He had forgiven her.

Has sin become so acceptable that we fail to recognize the depth of God's love against the depth of what sinful beings we are?

When we look at the world around us – do we see beauty or terror?

When you walk out into a misty evening –do you see God? The God who made the mist, the light and the dark – the God who walks beside you.

The amazing thing is that despite what we do, how we act and how we run from God, Jesus can take what we have done with our lives and turn our

lives around, using them for good. Yes, we do suffer the consequences of our actions, but we also experience grace and mercy in the midst of those consequences.

Jesus said – I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it abundantly.

Don't choose to replace the abundant life with the dreams of this world, dreams that can never satisfy. Jesus wants us to have abundant life. He came for that purpose, not just an entrance into heaven but a life that is worth living, with joy and passion, here on this earth, despite the circumstances of our lives.

Is Jesus the foundation that takes you through the hard times? Or do you just feel like you are going through the motions day by day? Are you in pain, filled with worry and fears, stressed by the burdens of this world, filled with memories that hurt, heartbreak that doesn't seem to heal, expectations that remain unfulfilled, loneliness, addictions, overwhelming responsibilities, sorrow? Do you have the urge to run away?

Run to Jesus – in tennis shoes, barefoot, in pain, brokenhearted –
Your life depends on it.

Cry on His Shoulder.

Make Him your shelter.

He loves you so.

He is the ONLY answer.

He said – Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Run to Jesus. He will meet you just where you are. Embrace Him during the difficult times because He can fill your every need. He is the One who can be there so that your life is not just about surviving, but thriving.

Experience the abundant life. Experience the passion – the passion to follow Jesus.

Remember the song:

I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back. No turning back.

If you don't know Jesus as your Savior, now is the time. Turn to Him. Ask Him to come into your life and give you life.

If you know Jesus and desire passion and the abundant life, then Run to Jesus again, like your first love.

If you know Jesus and are living the abundant and passionate life, praises God and go share what you know and are experiencing with others.

God bless you all.

It has been a joy to share with you this evening.