



## EXCERPT



### **The Gift of Wonder** *Creative Practices for Delighting in God*

March 26, 2019 | \$16, 224 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4653-5

*"For many, the term spiritual disciplines conjures thoughts of monotonous practices performed alone and by rote, but not for Christine Aroney-Sine. With her usually exuberant style she reimagines the spiritual practices as communal activities that restore the intense joy and unbridled enthusiasm God wants for all followers. The Gift of Wonder is indeed a gift for anyone wanting to explore more creative approaches to the spiritual disciplines. The exercises and prayers are worth the price of admission alone."*

**Michael Frost**, author of *Surprise the World* and *Keep Christianity Weird*

## Choose Joy

My understanding of spiritual disciplines has changed dramatically over the last few years. It continues to change as I delve into the characteristics of childlikeness and rediscover the joy of play and curiosity and awe.

It all began when I asked people, "What makes you feel close to God?" They responded with stories of sitting by the sea, playing with kids, turning the compost pile, washing the dishes, and walking in the local park. Even taking a shower got a mention. Hardly anyone talked about church or Bible study. Most people connect to God through nature, interaction with children, around the dinner table, or in their daily activities. However, they rarely identify these as spiritual practices.

These revelations started me on a journey. Encouraged by contemplative friends, I dived into the liturgical calendar and explored a range of ancient practices like lectio divina and labyrinth walking, which greatly enriched my faith and drew me closer to God. I wrote breathing prayers and liturgies to enhance my personal intimacy with the eternal One. A new depth of delight in God began to emerge. Some of these ideas I shared in my previous book *Return to Our Senses: Reimagining How We Pray*, but my horizons continued to expand.

When I started asking "What do you enjoy about God?" and "What about you gives God joy?" I ventured out beyond the bounds of these ancient but traditional practices to explore creative approaches to prayer, like rock painting and doodling, that stirred my imagination and connected my everyday activities to my relationship with my Creator. I planted prayer gardens and sketched colorful designs as meditative exercises. I had fun with my spiritual practices and invited others to join me on the journey. My inner child was stirring and my soul came alive in ways I never anticipated. I watched friends bubble over with this same enthusiasm for God while engaged in creative activities unlike the traditional practices we grew up with.

The more these practices increased my love for God, the more I wanted to understand what brings joy to God's heart. I incorporated my questions What do you enjoy about God? and What are you choosing that gives God joy? into my Sunday devotions, where I reflect back on my week and realized that now I needed to reshape my spiritual practices in response to these prompts.

Much to my surprise, many people I talk with are hungry for answers to these same questions yet rarely ask them. Some confess they are not sure anything gives God joy. They see God as a distant, judgmental figure constantly accusing and punishing them for their mistakes. To believe that God is full of joy and enjoys both them and creation is a totally foreign concept. Yet it makes them light up with delight when they begin to understand.

So much of what we learn about spirituality is negative. We believe more in a God of judgment and condemnation than of love, joy, and delight. Following God is about adhering to a long list of things we don't do—no smoking, drinking,



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**The Gift of Wonder**  
*Creative Practices for Delighting in God*

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*"Refreshing and helpful, The Gift of Wonder soothed my oft-weary spirit. In our polarized, driven, and consumer-obsessed culture, this book is an invitation into God's creative freedom. Christine not only encourages us to wonder again like a little child, she also gives us practical ways to experience God's delight. From the childlike characteristic of playfulness to trust, she leads us into a rare and grace-filled space of choosing joy."*

**MaryKate Morse**, author and professor

dancing, wearing jewelry, or sex before marriage. Alternatively, it is a list of rules that encourage us to color inside the lines and live inside our religious boxes. We live in dread of displeasing God or taking a wrong step that means we can never find God's best for our lives. That God delights in who we are and what we do now is a wonderful but startlingly revelation for many of us.

Psalm 18:19 tells us we are rescued because God delights in us, and Psalm 147:11 affirms that the eternal One takes pleasure in those who put their hope in God's unfailing love. Even the Westminster Shorter Catechism states that the chief purpose of humanity is "to glorify God and to *enjoy him forever*."

What if finding joy in the divine presence is the greatest way to glorify God and become who God created us to be? What if becoming like a child is the pathway, and what if we reshape our spiritual practices with this in mind?

—Taken from the introduction



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## **The Gift of Wonder** *Creative Practices for Delighting in God*

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**Christine Aroney-Sine** is the founder and facilitator for Godspace, an online community that grew out of her passion for creative spirituality, gardening, and sustainability. She and her husband, Tom, are cofounders of Mustard Seed Associates. Her books include *Rest in the Moment*, *Return to Our Senses*, *GodSpace*, and *Tales of a Seasick Doctor*.

Follow her on Twitter: @ChristineSine.

# Welcoming God with Childlike Wonder

**How has your view of wonder changed over the years and how did that lead to writing *The Gift of Wonder*?**

**Christine Aroney-Sine:** Can you imagine a God who dances with shouts of joy, laughs when you laugh, loves to play, enjoys life, and invites us to join the fun? I couldn't until recently. I grew up with a serious, workaholic type of God who chastised me for not keeping busy. I couldn't be bothered with frivolous practices where play and laughter disrupted my routines. Gasping in awe and wonder at an opening blossom or a slow-moving caterpillar seemed like a waste of time.

Then one day I was transfixed by Jesus' statement "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14 ESV). "What are the childlike characteristics that make us fit for the kingdom of God?" I wondered. I asked my Facebook friends and was surprised at the response: playfulness, curiosity, imagination, awe and wonder and many more qualities were suggested.

Do we take our faith too seriously?

Have we dismissed the child within us and lost the joy of life and the delight in God that emerges when we play and laugh and marvel at the world around us?

It was grappling with these questions that led to the writing of this book.

**How important is wonder to growing in our faith?**

**Christine:** It's my growing conviction that to become good followers of Christ we don't need to spend more time in prayer, Bible study, or theological pursuits. We need to unleash our inner child and regain the characteristics of childhood. We live in a world of play deprivation, nature deficit disorder, compassion fatigue, and a loss of awe and wonder. I think we suffer from God deprivation as a result.

**What do you hope readers take away from *The Gift of Wonder*?**

**Christine:**

- When we welcome the gifts of the child within all of us we welcome God. Children teach us how to honor our imaginations as a pathway to God. They invite us to ask hard and risky questions as an exploration of God and encourage us to trust God's abundance because they just don't understand the concept of scarcity. More than anything kids show us what divine power is really like—vulnerable, dependent on others, and often overlooked.



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*"Spiritual practice is designed to awaken us to God's presence, but it need not be boring. Aroney-Sine has produced a brave work here, inviting spiritual seekers to become like children—playful, curious, and trusting. With Aroney-Sine's guidance and support you will discover the God who delights in you and unlock a wellspring of joy."*

**Phileena Heuertz**, founding partner of Gravity, a Center for Contemplative Activism, author of *Mindful Silence*

- Rediscovering our inner child is essential for our spiritual health. Nothing lights up the brain like play, says Dr. Stuart Brown, who has dedicated his life to the study of play. To become fully alive we need to unleash the childlike potential hidden deep within all of us.
- Awe and wonder walks, joy-spot sightings, nostalgia trips, compassion games, and playdate adventures—the delights of childhood—strengthen relationships and bring new depth and vibrancy to our love for the God revealed in Jesus Christ.



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