

Q&A with Sally Clarkson, author of *Awaking Wonder: Opening Your Child's Heart to the Beauty of Learning*

What is Wonder?

Wonder is the engine that drives curiosity and shapes a robust intellect. Wonder is the vehicle that nurtures spiritual formation by engaging in the miraculous, the sacred, the intricacy of our world around us. We ponder the personality, inspiration, breadth of the One who crafted all of the sublime natural art we behold. We respond in awe and worship.

A child fashioned by a wonder-filled life will cultivate inner strength, an inner confidence in his own ability to think, evaluate, know. But those who influence children must fight to make time for the imagination to have space to work, to have time to engage.

How does wonder impact learning?

To give a child the gift of time to imagine, to dream, to create, to engage, and to wonder is to allow time and space for his heart to be touched by the surrounding beauty, for his mind to have room to grow strong with a feast for imagination, and for his emotions to bathe in the tranquility of a peaceful life in an unhurried rhythm. Then we offer a feast of theology, math, story, literature, virtue, faith, science, nature, art, music, and culture, upon which to apply their wondering and wonderful minds. It is to give them beauty and strength of imagination and the strong pleasure of learning and acquiring knowledge over a lifetime. Wonder is the catalyst in shaping a powerful, engaged intellect.

Is *Awaking Wonder* a memoir, a parenting guide or your philosophy of education?

Awaking Wonder is my story, my memory of how our vision worked itself out in and through the lives of our four children. Perhaps it might be considered a parenting book, as we certainly employed lots of vision and ways of seeing children that guided the way we treated and nurtured them. Some will consider this a book of a philosophy of education and the ways to inspire children to a fulfilling life of a wonder-filled intellect. I am not seeking so much to give a formula or to give advice. I tell our story as an encouragement to all, especially parents and educators, who want to create wonder-filled environments.

Clay and I believed that children raised in a wonder-filled environment could flourish in all areas of life and move into adulthood with a sense of well-being, a sense of purpose, a sense of centeredness, a well of deep faith. We are the parents of four very different children who grew up within the idealism of our philosophy and are flourishing as adults

I wrote *Awaking Wonder* to help parents understand how to nurture children in a humane, authentic way that prepares them to flourish in life. But mostly this book shows the way *we* did it, the story of *our* family's faith and risk.

Why did you choose to educate your children at home?

Years ago, my husband and I stepped out in faith to create a way of raising our four children other than having them in classes all day long, 180 days a year. Longing for our children to grow deeply into their capacity of learning, we chose to educate them at home instead of in a classroom. Our choice was unorthodox at the time.

We wanted them to develop a passion and joy for learning and growing intellectually through the engine of wonder. The goal of our wonder-filled learning methods was to inspire a love for learning for a lifetime by igniting the spark within each child that is waiting to be lit with inspiration. Believing that the real person is inside the “heart,” we sought to engage at a heart level of inspiration, not just a mind level of cognitive gathering.

Our second goal was intentional spiritual formation and cultivation of a love for God. Hoping to pass on a personal relationship with Him was also at the conception of our desire to pass on a wonder-filled life in which our children could experience His love and imagine it by feeling it in real relationship. Employing wonder in faith formation based on stories, words of truth, tales of faith, and ways to love and reach out to others amidst the natural rhythms of the day seemed a more authentic way to pass on heartfelt belief. We believed faith would emerge from longing in their own hearts to become a part of something bigger than themselves and to become one with their maker.

Can wonder be awakened in other educational settings?

Time has taught us that the principles of engaging wonder as a tool for learning can be applied in any home, any classroom. Children in public classrooms, private schools, cottage schools, will all benefit from the principles I share in *Awaking Wonder*, because they cooperate with the way all children were made to learn. It is my hope that this book will become food for thought for anyone who desires to shape the thinking and creativity as well as the emotional, spiritual, and educational processes of children.

I hope this book will help teachers, parents, and anyone who works with children. I hope my story might inspire and encourage parents and teachers to look at the children they influence with a new or renewed vision for how to give children the best opportunity to flourish. Respect for children and their potential strength paves the way to understanding how to engage their hidden internal motivation to become strong intellectually, spiritually, emotionally. There are many principles shared that can be applied to many different kinds of parenting and educational models. My main desire is to encourage, come alongside, and inspire parents and teachers who are so deeply committed to raising children well.

Do you have a favorite family memory of awaking wonder?

One particular evening stands out to my family as a sort of mysteriously sacred shared event. I had decided we should sleep out under the stars. I had not seen such a cloudless, clear view of the night skies in very a long time. Thousands of stars shone above us like diamonds on a velvet cloak and beckoned to us to stop, to enter into their reality. At 7,300 feet in elevation, our little rustic home was tucked away at the foot of towering Rockies, bordering 25,000 acres of national forest.

Here, away from the lights of the city, the whole world of sky sparkled with movement and flashes as though elegantly parading in the heavens, in sync with the pine trees. Our magical night world was awash with mystery and whimsy.

Four-year-old Joy plopped in my lap as I eased onto our old wooden bench. Her older brothers, Joel, twelve, and Nathan, ten, ran wildly up and down our deck, yelling, punching, giggling, and pointing to a shooting star here and the Milky Way there.

Sarah, at 15, now fully into her teen years, was wrapped in a warm quilt, slightly hidden away in a dreamland of her own making in a dark corner as she watched the beauty in the safe comfort of her private imaginations.

Clay, my husband, turned up soft acoustic music from inside the house so a symphony of haunting melodies accompanied this evening of delight. The night sky darkened and marked the time for us to cuddle for warmth in a pile under the sleeping bags. We all lay flat on the creaky deck, looking up into the showcase of myriad glimmering lights. In this auditorium of splendor, we all marveled. An almost sacred hush fell over us and gave calm and peace to our previously distracted souls.

The six of us were invisibly joined together as the threads of our hearts were woven through the unspoken sharing. As we sat in reverie of the grandeur, we were enveloped with the sense of an artist greater than us, and with an awareness of being small but hidden in our Creator's magnificence. ***We were captured in the wonder of it all, together.***

No lecture was necessary, no command for everyone to "pay attention" or to look. Our stargazing, admiration, imagination, wondering, and dreaming was a natural response to the beauty we willingly entered. The night sky provided food for our imaginations, but each of us experienced personal, unique responses. Discoveries were already waiting to be unearthed.

Each of us had a different response and diverse thoughts because we experienced the night with unique personalities, at various ages and levels of maturity (described further in my book). Conformity of thinking didn't even enter my expectations. Instead, I wanted to orchestrate an evening when we would all be under the spell cast by myriad stars and the vast expanse of the heavens.

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Sally Clarkson is the podcast host of "At Home with Sally," which has earned more than ten million downloads. Sally has inspired thousands of women through Whole Heart Ministries and Mom Heart conferences as she champions women to live into their full potential. She is the author of more than 20 books, and her latest is *Awaking Wonder: Opening Your Child's Heart to the Wonder of Learning*.

**This article is available for reprint, upon request, as 1440 words or 945 words
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Awaking Wonder: Opening Your Child's Heart to the Beauty of Learning

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www.SallyClarkson.com

Available from Bethany House, August 2020

Hardcover: ISBN 978-0-7642-3588-7, \$24.99, 244 pages

E-Book: ISBN 978-1-4934-2492-4, \$24.99

Guided Workbook: ISBN 978-0-76423608-2, \$10.99, trade paper