

# Pleasant Springs Church

Discipleship Study · Feynman and the Glory of God

## Feynman and the Glory of God

*A biblical case for the realities a Nobel-laureate physicist saw when he looked at the natural world for sixty years*

with Richard P. Feynman (1918–1988) — Nobel laureate, Caltech professor, Manhattan Project veteran, Challenger commissioner  
Septuagint (LXX) & ESV side-by-side

### THE BIG IDEA

Richard Feynman was not a Christian. He was a relentlessly honest agnostic who looked at the natural world harder than almost anyone in his generation. This study is not a posthumous baptism. It is something more careful: we ask whether what Feynman *saw* when he looked at creation — its order, beauty, honesty-demanding integrity, inexhaustible depth, and intelligible mystery — is the kind of world scripture says we will find. **Romans 1:20** claims creation is a witness. We let Feynman take the witness stand and we read his testimony alongside the testimony of the book that named the Author.

### KEY TEXTS

Romans 1:20 · Proverbs 25:2 · Proverbs 9:10 · Proverbs 3:5 · Ecclesiastes 3:11 · Psalm 19:1 · Psalm 8:3–4 · Psalm 139:13–14 · Wisdom of Solomon 11:20 · Job 38:4–7 · Job 42:3 · Jeremiah 17:9 · Jeremiah 29:13 · Isaiah 55:8–9 · Deuteronomy 29:29 · Numbers 32:23 · Matthew 6:28–29 · Matthew 10:30 · Luke 12:2 · John 1:3 · John 17:3 · Acts 17:11 · Romans 11:33 · 1 Corinthians 1:25 · 1 Corinthians 8:1 · 1 Corinthians 13:12 · Galatians 6:7 · Colossians 1:16–17 · 1 Thessalonians 5:21 · 2 Timothy 3:5 · Hebrews 1:3 · 1 John 4:7–8

### FOUNDATIONAL SCRIPTURE

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The whole study rests on a single Pauline claim: that the structure of created reality is itself a witness about the Creator, and that the witness is legible to anyone who looks carefully — including those who never sign the creed.

## Romans 1:20 · Creation as Witness

### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

τὰ γὰρ ἀόρατα αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου τοῖς ποιήμασιν νοούμενα καθορᾶται, ἢ τε ἄδιος αὐτοῦ δύναμις καὶ θεϊότης, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτοῦς ἀναπολογήτους.

### English Standard Version

For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

Paul's verb καθορᾶται (*kathorātai*) is technical: *to be clearly seen, perceived down through*. The created order is not a vague hint. It *communicates* specific information about *specific divine attributes*. Feynman spent sixty years looking at exactly the things Paul says are doing the communicating — the *poiēmasin*, the made things. We want to know what the made things told him, and whether scripture predicts what he heard.

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MAP

## The Twelve Canonical Feynman Sources

*What we read and where to find it*

1. ***The Pleasure of Finding Things Out*** — BBC Horizon interview, 1981. Internet Archive; Tim Ferriss transcript.
2. ***Cargo Cult Science*** — Caltech commencement address, 1974. [calteches.library.caltech.edu/51/2/CargoCult.pdf](http://calteches.library.caltech.edu/51/2/CargoCult.pdf)
3. ***Ode to a Flower*** — BBC monologue, 1981. Animated by Reid Gower; transcribed at The Marginalian.
4. ***Magnets / 'Why?' Questions*** — BBC *Fun to Imagine*, Episode 4, 1983. LessWrong transcript.
5. ***The Feynman Lectures on Physics, Vol. I, Ch. 1, 'Atoms in Motion'*** — Caltech 1963. [feynmanlectures.caltech.edu/I\\_01.html](http://feynmanlectures.caltech.edu/I_01.html)
6. ***There's Plenty of Room at the Bottom*** — Caltech APS address, Dec. 29, 1959. [zyvex.com/nanotech/feynman.html](http://zyvex.com/nanotech/feynman.html)
7. ***The Character of Physical Law*** — Messenger Lectures, Cornell University, 1964. Seven public lectures, recorded by the BBC. [feynmanlectures.caltech.edu/messenger.html](http://feynmanlectures.caltech.edu/messenger.html)
8. ***Probability and Uncertainty*** — Messenger Lecture VI, on doubt as the prerequisite for real knowledge.
9. ***QED: The Strange Theory of Light and Matter*** — Sir Douglas Robb Lectures, University of Auckland, 1979. Princeton University Press.
10. **Appendix F to the Rogers Commission Report on Challenger** — 1986. NASA history archives.
11. **'What is Science?' (NSTA address)** — 1966; reprinted in *The Physics Teacher*. Contains the father-and-the-bird story.
12. ***Take the World from Another Point of View*** — Yorkshire TV interview, 1972.

What follows is one section per source, each ending with the biblical case for the reality Feynman described.

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## PART I

### The Pleasure of Finding Things Out

BBC Horizon, 1981 — and Proverbs 25:2

In the 1981 BBC *Horizon* interview that gave the book its title, Feynman tried to articulate why he did physics at all. The answer was not glory, not money, not even applications. It was *pleasure* — the unforced, almost childlike delight of working something out for the first time.

#### RICHARD P. FEYNMAN

"I don't know anything, but I know that everything is interesting if you go into it deeply enough."

*The Pleasure of Finding Things Out, BBC, 1981*

He told the story of his father walking him through the woods as a boy, refusing to tell him the *name* of a bird in five languages and instead asking him to *watch what the bird does*. The lesson stuck for sixty years: the *finding out* is the thing.

## THE BIBLICAL CASE

Scripture says explicitly that the universe is rigged for this kind of pleasure. God hid things on purpose, so that searching them out would be a kind of royal dignity:

### Proverbs 25:2 · The Glory of Searching Out

#### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

Δόξα Θεοῦ κρύπτει λόγον, δόξα δὲ βασιλέως  
τιμῆ πράγματα.

#### English Standard Version

It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the  
glory of kings is to search things out.

Two glories are in play here, and they are *complementary*, not in tension. God's glory is to conceal; the king's (and by extension, every image-bearer's) glory is to search out. Concealment is not stinginess; it is the precondition of the joy of discovery. A universe whose secrets were all sitting on the surface would be a universe in which Feynman's pleasure would be impossible. The created order is built like a

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treasure map *because* the Creator wanted his image-bearers to feel the rush of finding the treasure.

## Ecclesiastes 3:11 · Eternity in the Heart

### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

σὺν τὰ πάντα ἐποίησε καλὰ ἐν καιρῷ αὐτοῦ, καὶ  
γε σὺν τὸν αἰῶνα ἔδωκεν ἐν καρδίᾳ αὐτῶν,  
ὅπως μὴ εὕρη ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὸ ποίημα, ὃ ἐποίησεν  
ὁ Θεός, ἀπ' ἀρχῆς καὶ μέχρι τέλους.

### English Standard Version

He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

### THE CONVERGENCE

The Hebrew Preacher and the Caltech physicist describe the same fact from two angles: the human mind has been built with a hunger for the depths of things, and the depths are real, and they are inexhaustible. Feynman called it *the pleasure of finding things out*. Scripture calls it *the glory of kings*. The two phrases name the same created reality.

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## PART II

### Cargo Cult Science

*Caltech, 1974 — and the heart that deceives itself*

In his 1974 Caltech commencement address, Feynman warned the graduating class about what he called *cargo cult science*: research that copies the surface forms of scientific practice — lab coats, statistics, peer review — without the underlying discipline of honesty. The metaphor came from the Pacific islanders who, after WWII, built bamboo runways and wore wooden headphones, faithfully reproducing the *form* of what they had seen the soldiers do, expecting cargo planes to land. The cargo never came, because the form was empty.

#### RICHARD P. FEYNMAN

*"The first principle is that you must not fool yourself — and you are the easiest person to fool."*

**Cargo Cult Science, Caltech commencement, 1974**

He went further: a real scientist has an obligation, when publishing a result, to mention not only the data that supports the conclusion but everything they know that might cast doubt on it. Anything less is a kind of advertising, not science.

## THE BIBLICAL CASE

The New Testament names this exact failure mode in religious life:

### 2 Timothy 3:5 · Form Without Power

#### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

ἔχοντες μὀρφωσιν εὐσεβείας τὴν δὲ δύναμιν  
αὐτῆς ἡρνημένοι· καὶ τούτους ἀποτρέπου.

#### English Standard Version

...having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

The word μὀρφωσιν (*morphōsin*) is the same root from which we get *morphology* — the outward shape, the form. Paul is describing religious cargo cult: the runways are built, the headphones are on,

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the language is correct, but the power is denied. Feynman saw the same disease in physics; Paul saw it in piety. The remedy in both cases is the same: ruthless honesty about whether the substance is really there.

Scripture goes further and makes self-deception the foundational human peril:

Jeremiah 17:9 · The Heart's Deception	
<b>Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament</b> <i>βαθεῖα ἡ καρδία παρὰ πάντα, καὶ ἄνθρωπος ἐστὶ· καὶ τίς γινώσεται αὐτόν;</i>	<b>English Standard Version</b> The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Feynman's "you are the easiest person to fool" is Jeremiah 17:9 rephrased for the laboratory. And the apostolic prescription is exactly Feynman's prescription, transposed into the key of discipleship:

1 Thessalonians 5:21 · Test Everything	
<b>Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament</b> <i>πάντα δοκιμάζετε, τὸ καλὸν κατέχετε.</i>	<b>English Standard Version</b> Test everything; hold fast what is good.

Acts 17:11 · The Bereans Checked the Data	
<b>Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament</b> <i>οὗτοι δὲ ἦσαν εὐγενέστεροι τῶν ἐν Θεσσαλονίκη, οἵτινες ἐδέξαντο τὸν λόγον μετὰ πάσης προθυμίας, καθ' ἡμέραν ἀνακρίνοντες τὰς γραφάς, εἰ ἔχοι ταῦτα οὕτως.</i>	<b>English Standard Version</b> Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

## THE CONVERGENCE

The Bereans were Feynman's kind of audience. They received Paul's preaching *with all eagerness* — and then they checked the data. They tested. They did not fool themselves into believing something just because an apostle said it. Paul *commends* them. The integrity Feynman demanded of science is the same integrity scripture demands of disciples.

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## PART III

### Ode to a Flower

BBC, 1981 — *beauty that knowledge does not diminish*

In another fragment from the 1981 BBC interview (later animated as *Ode to a Flower*), Feynman pushed back against his friend, the artist Jerry Zorthian, who held up a flower and accused the scientist of *taking it apart* and reducing its beauty. Feynman's reply has become famous:

#### RICHARD P. FEYNMAN

*"I can appreciate the beauty of a flower. At the same time, I see much more about the flower than he sees. I could imagine the cells in there, the complicated actions inside, which also have a beauty. It's not just beauty at this dimension of one centimeter — there is also beauty at smaller dimensions. All kinds of interesting questions which a science knowledge only adds to the excitement and mystery and the awe of a flower. It only adds. I don't understand how it subtracts."*

*Ode to a Flower, BBC, 1981*

Knowledge does not flatten beauty. It opens floor after floor of it.

## THE BIBLICAL CASE

Scripture not only allows this; it *commands* it. The Psalmist sees the heavens and reads them as a text:

### Psalm 18:2 LXX (= Psalm 19:1) · The Heavens Narrate Glory

#### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

*οἱ οὐρανοὶ διηγούνται δόξαν Θεοῦ, ποιήσιν δὲ  
χειρῶν αὐτοῦ ἀναγγέλλει τὸ στερέωμα·*

#### English Standard Version

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky  
above proclaims his handiwork.

The verb διηγούνται means *to narrate, to recount in detail*. The sky is not just decorative; it is talking. And the more carefully you listen — the more layers of structure you uncover — the more it has to say. Feynman heard the cells in the flower; the Psalmist heard the firmament. Same posture, same outcome:

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knowledge *adds* to awe.

Jesus does the same with botany:

## Matthew 6:28–29 · Consider the Lilies

### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

καταμάθετε τὰ κρίνα τοῦ ἀγροῦ πῶς  
αὐξάνουσιν· οὐ κοπιῶσιν οὐδὲ νήθουσιν· λέγω δὲ  
ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐδὲ Σολομῶν ἐν πάσῃ τῇ δόξῃ αὐτοῦ  
περιεβάλετο ὡς ἐν τούτων.

### English Standard Version

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow:  
they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even  
Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one  
of these.

The verb καταμάθετε (*katamáthete*) is *not* a casual glance. It is *to study thoroughly, to learn down to the root* — the same κατά- intensifier that gives us *katascopy*, looking *through and through*. Jesus is asking for Feynman-grade attention: examine the lily as if you wanted to understand the spinning of its threads. The reward is not disenchantment. The reward is finding that Solomon's robes were *less glorious* than the architecture of one wildflower. Knowledge added; it never subtracted.

### THE CONVERGENCE

Feynman's monologue is, in this exact sense, an unwitting commentary on Matthew 6. Both the Psalmist and the physicist found that paying more attention to a created thing yielded *more awe*, not less. Scripture said this would happen. Creation performed it on cue.

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## PART IV

### Magnets and 'Why?' Questions

*BBC Fun to Imagine, 1983 — and the limits of explanation*

In the 1983 BBC series *Fun to Imagine* (Episode 4), the interviewer asked Feynman a deceptively simple question: when you push two magnets together and feel the force, *what is happening between them?* Feynman refused to give a tidy answer.

#### RICHARD P. FEYNMAN

*"I can't explain that attraction in terms of anything else that's familiar to you. For example, if I said the magnets attract like as if they were connected by rubber bands, I would be cheating you. Because they're not connected by rubber bands ... and if you were curious enough, you'd ask me why rubber bands tend to pull back together again, and I would end up explaining that in terms of electrical forces, which are the very things that I'm trying to use the rubber bands to explain."*

**BBC Fun to Imagine, Episode 4, 1983**

He went on to explain that *why* questions form an infinite regress. Every answer raises a new why. At some point, the honest scientist says: this is just how it is. We can describe with extraordinary precision what magnetic force *does*; we cannot say why magnetism *is*. The universe has a bottom that science does not reach.

## THE BIBLICAL CASE

This is precisely what scripture reports. The reality Feynman bumped into is not a limit of his discipline — it is a limit of creaturely knowing as such. Paul, who reasoned with philosophers in Athens and was no stranger to careful thought, reaches the same wall and bursts into doxology:

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## Romans 11:33 · Unsearchable Judgments

### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

Ὡς βάθος πλούτου καὶ σοφίας καὶ γνώσεως Θεοῦ·  
ὡς ἀνεξεραύνητα τὰ κρίματα αὐτοῦ καὶ  
ἀνεξιχνίαστοι αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτοῦ.

### English Standard Version

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

The two adjectives are precise: ἀνεξεραύνητα — *not able to be tracked out* — and ἀνεξιχνίαστοι — *not able to be footprinted*. Paul is saying the bottom of God's reasons is not accessible to the creature. Feynman is saying the bottom of why magnets attract is not accessible to physics. Both are reporting the same *shape* of reality: the world is genuinely intelligible at the level we can reach, and genuinely inexhaustible below that level.

Moses said the same thing to Israel before they crossed the Jordan:

## Deuteronomy 29:29 · Secret and Revealed

### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

τὰ κρυπτὰ Κυρίῳ τῷ Θεῷ ἡμῶν, τὰ δὲ φανερά  
ἡμῖν καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις ἡμῶν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ποιεῖν  
πάντα τὰ ῥήματα τοῦ νόμου τούτου.

### English Standard Version

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

The structure Moses describes is *exactly* the structure Feynman described to the BBC interviewer. There is a public level — τὰ φανερά, what is openly disclosed, what physics can in fact characterize — and there is a hidden level — τὰ κρυπτὰ, what belongs to God alone. The infinite regress of *why* terminates not in absurdity but in the divine intellect. Feynman could not say why magnets attract because the answer is among τὰ κρυπτὰ. He was, without knowing it, illustrating Moses.

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## Isaiah 55:8–9 · Higher Than Our Ways

### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

οὐ γάρ εἰσιν αἱ βουλαί μου ὡσπερ αἱ βουλαὶ  
ὑμῶν, οὐδὲ ὡσπερ αἱ ὁδοὶ ὑμῶν αἱ ὁδοί μου,  
λέγει Κύριος· ἀλλ' ὡς ἀπέχει ὁ οὐρανὸς ἀπὸ τῆς  
γῆς, οὕτως ἀπέχει ἡ ὁδός μου ἀπὸ τῶν ὁδῶν  
ὑμῶν καὶ τὰ διανοήματά μου ἀπὸ τῆς διανοίας  
ὑμῶν.

### English Standard Version

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither  
are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as  
the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my  
ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than  
your thoughts.

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## PART V

### The Atomic Hypothesis

*Feynman Lectures, Vol. I, Ch. 1 — Hebrews 1:3 in lab coat*

In the opening chapter of the *Lectures on Physics* (Vol. I, Ch. 1), Feynman posed a thought experiment: if a cataclysm wiped out all scientific knowledge and only *one sentence* could be passed to the next civilization, which sentence would contain the most information in the fewest words?

#### RICHARD P. FEYNMAN

*"I believe it is the atomic hypothesis (or the atomic fact, or whatever you wish to call it) that all things are made of atoms — little particles that move around in perpetual motion, attracting each other when they are a little distance apart, but repelling upon being squeezed into one another."*

*The Feynman Lectures on Physics, Vol. I, Ch. 1, 1963*

Everything visible — your hand, the chair, the stars — is one substrate, in motion, held together by forces of attraction at distance and repulsion at proximity. *All things* sit on one fabric, sustained moment by moment.

## THE BIBLICAL CASE

Scripture says this in three places with startling agreement:

### Hebrews 1:3 · Upholding by the Word

#### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

ὁς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ...

#### English Standard Version

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power...

The verb φέρων is a present active participle — *continuously carrying*. The cosmos is not a wind-up toy that ran since Genesis 1 on its own momentum. It is being *carried*, moment by moment, by the Logos.

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Feynman's "perpetual motion" of atoms is, on the biblical account, *sustained* motion — held in being by an active divine word.

## Colossians 1:16–17 · All Things Hold Together

### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, τὰ ὄρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα... καὶ αὐτός ἐστι πρὸ πάντων καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν.

### English Standard Version

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible... And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

The verb συνέστηκεν (*synestēken*) is in the perfect tense — *has been and continues to be holding together*. The exact problem Feynman names as the deepest fact of physics — that atoms *attract each other when they are a little distance apart, but repel upon being squeezed into one another*, producing a delicate, stable cosmos — is given a metaphysical account in Colossians 1:17. The cohesion of matter is grounded in the cohesive activity of the Son.

## John 1:3 · All Things Through Him

### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν ὃ γέγονεν.

### English Standard Version

All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

### THE CONVERGENCE

Feynman wanted one sentence for the next civilization. The New Testament also offers one sentence for the next civilization, and it claims to ground *his* sentence: **“All things hold together in him.”** (Col 1:17). The two sentences are not in competition. Feynman's sentence describes the structure; the biblical sentence names the *Holder* of the structure.

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## PART VI

### There's Plenty of Room at the Bottom

Caltech APS address, 1959 — scale and the numbering of hairs

On December 29, 1959, at the APS meeting at Caltech, Feynman delivered the talk now credited as the founding moment of nanotechnology. *There's Plenty of Room at the Bottom* asked: how small can we go? He pointed out that the entire *Encyclopaedia Britannica* could in principle be written on the head of a pin, that biology already manipulates matter atom by atom (the ribosome being his prime example), and that there is, as far as physical law forbids, *no fundamental limit* on how small functional structures can be made. The universe has *room at the bottom* — vast cathedrals of order at scales the unaided eye cannot reach.

## THE BIBLICAL CASE

The Psalmist already knew the opposite end of this scale produced worship; Feynman extended the observation downward. The result is the same:

### Psalm 8:4–5 LXX (= Psalm 8:3–4) · The Work of Your Fingers

#### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

ὅτι ὄψομαι τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, ἔργα τῶν δακτύλων σου, σελήνην καὶ ἀστέρας ἃ σὺ ἐθεμελίωσας· τί ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος ὅτι μνησθήσῃ αὐτοῦ, ἢ υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ὅτι ἐπισκέπτη αὐτόν;

#### English Standard Version

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

David is overwhelmed by the *up*. Feynman was overwhelmed by the *down*. The same God made both, with care, *to the digit*.

Jesus then collapses scale into intimacy:

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## Matthew 10:30 · Hairs Numbered

### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

ὕμῶν δὲ καὶ αἱ τρίχες τῆς κεφαλῆς πᾶσαι  
ἠριθμημένοι εἰσίν.

### English Standard Version

But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.

If the cosmos has *plenty of room at the bottom*, then divine attention has *plenty of room at the bottom*. The hair on your head is not below God's resolution. The molecular composition of the keratin in that hair is not below God's resolution. The vibrational state of the atoms making up that keratin is not below God's resolution. Feynman opened the door to a basement of scales humans had never inhabited; scripture had already said the Lord lives all the way down there too.

## Psalms 138:13–14 LXX (= Psalm 139:13–14) · Knitted in the Womb

### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

ὅτι σὺ ἐκτήσω τοὺς νεφρούς μου, ἀντέλαβου μου  
ἐκ γαστρὸς μητρός μου. ἔξομολογήσομαί σοι, ὅτι  
φοβερῶς ἐθαυμαστώθην· θαυμάσια τὰ ἔργα  
σου, καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ μου γινώσκει σφόδρα.

### English Standard Version

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me  
together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I  
am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are  
your works; my soul knows it very well.

### THE CONVERGENCE

The verbs ἐκτήσω (acquired, possessed) and ἀντέλαβου (took hold of, assisted) are domestic, bodily verbs. The God of Psalm 139 is doing molecular biology in the womb. Feynman would have recognized the action, even if he could not have named the actor.

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## PART VII

### The Character of Physical Law

*Messenger Lectures, Cornell, 1964 — measure, number, weight*

The Messenger Lectures at Cornell (1964) were Feynman's most sustained meditation on what physics *is*, delivered to an audience of non-physicists. Across seven lectures he insisted on two facts that go together:

- Nature obeys mathematical law to an *astounding* precision. The equations are not approximations imposed by us; they describe how the world actually behaves.
- The fact that nature is mathematically describable is itself *mysterious*. There is no a priori reason it had to be so. The world could have been a chaos. It isn't.

In Lecture II (“The Relation of Mathematics and Physics”) he asked why mathematics works on the world at all, and gave no final answer — only the report that it does, magnificently. He called math “the language in which God talks,” using the phrase rhetorically; we suspect he was more right than he knew.

## THE BIBLICAL CASE

The deuterocanonical Wisdom of Solomon — read as scripture by the early church and quoted in the LXX-using New Testament world — states the principle directly:

### Wisdom of Solomon 11:20 · Measure, Number, Weight

#### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

ἀλλὰ πάντα μέτρῳ καὶ ἀριθμῷ καὶ σταθμῷ  
διέταξας.

#### English Standard Version

But you have arranged all things by measure and number and weight.

This single verse is, in many medieval and Reformation theologians, the textual root of *natural science* as a Christian vocation. Augustine cited it constantly. Newton wrote in this tradition: the world was created by measure, number, and weight, and is therefore *susceptible to measurement, counting, and weighing*. The fact that Feynman could write down differential equations that the world obeys is

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grounded in the fact that the Creator structured the world by μέτρον, ἀριθμός, and σταθμός. The mathematical describability of nature is a corollary of the doctrine of creation.

When God interrogates Job out of the whirlwind, the questions are not poetic vagueness; they are engineering:

## Job 38:4–5 · Who Determined the Measurements?

### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

ποῦ ἦς ἐν τῷ θεμελιοῦν με τὴν γῆν; ἀπάγγελον  
δέ μοι, εἰ ἐπίστασαι σύνεσιν. τίς ἔθετο τὰ μέτρα  
αὐτῆς, εἰ οἶδας; ἢ τίς ὁ ἐπαγαγὼν σπαρτίον ἐπ'  
αὐτῆς;

### English Standard Version

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements — surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?

### THE CONVERGENCE

The Creator-as-surveyor uses three terms of measurement (foundations, μέτρα, σπαρτίον — the line) in three lines. The earth has measurements because the One who made it is the One who set them. Feynman's lifetime project — discovering, by patient experiment, what those measurements *are* — is a respectful late-arriving response to Job 38:5.

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## PART VIII

### Probability and Uncertainty

Messenger Lecture VI, 1964 — *doubt as a spiritual virtue*

The sixth Messenger Lecture, “Probability and Uncertainty: the quantum mechanical view of nature,” and a related 1955 talk often called “The Value of Science,” contain Feynman’s most extended defense of *doubt* — not skepticism for its own sake, but the disciplined willingness to hold conclusions provisionally, in proportion to evidence.

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*“I think that when we know that we actually do live in uncertainty, then we ought to admit it; it is of great value to realize that we do not know the answers to different questions. This attitude of mind — this attitude of uncertainty — is vital to the scientist, and it is this attitude of mind which the student must first acquire.”*

*The Value of Science, 1955; cf. Messenger Lecture VI, 1964*

For Feynman, the willingness to say *I don’t know* was a prerequisite for ever truly *knowing* anything. False certainty closes the door on inquiry; honest doubt keeps it open.

## THE BIBLICAL CASE

Scripture distinguishes carefully between two kinds of doubt: the doubt of the double-souled man (δίψυχος, James 1:8), which is *unwillingness to trust where trust is owed*, and the humility of the creature who knows he is not God. The latter — Feynman’s kind — is praised.

### Proverbs 9:10 · The Beginning of Wisdom

#### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

ἀρχὴ σοφίας φόβος Κυρίου, καὶ βουλή ἀγίων  
σύνεσις· τὸ γὰρ γνῶναι νόμον διανοίας ἐστὶν  
ἀγαθῆς.

#### English Standard Version

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,  
and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

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The *fear of the LORD* is, in its first movement, the awareness that one is a creature — small, contingent, knowing only in part. That awareness is the *beginning* (ἀρχή) of wisdom. False certainty is the death of wisdom; humility is its birth canal. Feynman demanded the same posture of his students.

Paul, who knew more theology than any of his contemporaries, said this of his own knowledge:

## 1 Corinthians 13:12 · We Know in Part

### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δι' ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι,  
τότε δὲ πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον· ἄρτι  
γινώσκω ἐκ μέρους, τότε δὲ ἐπιγνώσομαι καθὼς  
καὶ ἐπεγνώσθη.

### English Standard Version

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

Ἐκ μέρους — *in part*. Paul, holding the keys of the kingdom, says he knows *in part*. The greatest theologian of the apostolic age and the greatest physicist of the twentieth century make the same epistemic confession. Neither is paralyzed by it. Both *act* on what they know; both refuse to claim what they don't.

And the climactic scene of the book of Job, after thirty-seven chapters of philosophical argument, ends with God refusing to give Job his explanation and Job repenting precisely of having *demand*ed one:

## Job 42:3 · I Uttered What I Did Not Understand

### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

τίς γάρ ἐστιν ὁ κρύπτων σε βουλήν; φειδόμενος  
δὲ ῥημάτων καὶ σὲ οἶεται κρύπτειν; τίς δὲ  
ἀναγγελεῖ μοι ἃ οὐκ ᾔδειν, μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά  
ἃ οὐκ ἠπιστάμην;

### English Standard Version

Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

### THE CONVERGENCE

Job's repentance is Feynman's first principle in liturgical form: *I uttered what I did not understand*. I claimed certainty I did not have. Honest uncertainty is repented certainty, and it is the only soil in which real knowledge grows. Scripture and the physicist agree.

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## PART IX

### QED — Nature Is Absurd

Auckland, 1979 — and the foolishness of God

In the 1979 Sir Douglas Robb Lectures at Auckland — published as *QED: The Strange Theory of Light and Matter* — Feynman delivered the most accessible explanation ever given of quantum electrodynamics, the theory for which he had shared the Nobel Prize. He warned his audience repeatedly: do not look for *common sense*. Photons take all possible paths. Probability amplitudes interfere. The theory predicts experimental results to twelve decimal places, and the picture of reality it implies is *not* the picture our senses formed from rolling balls and falling apples.

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*"The theory of quantum electrodynamics describes Nature as absurd from the point of view of common sense. And it agrees fully with experiment. So I hope you can accept Nature as She is — absurd."*

QED, Sir Douglas Robb Lectures, Auckland, 1979

"Absurd" was Feynman's deliberate, technical word. He did not mean *meaningless*; he meant *not what unaided human intuition would have predicted*.

## THE BIBLICAL CASE

Paul anticipates this exact word — that the deepest reality of the world will *appear absurd* to common sense, and yet *be wiser than common sense* — and he applies it to the cross:

### 1 Corinthians 1:25 · The Foolishness of God

#### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

ὅτι τὸ μωρὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ σοφώτερον τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐστί, καὶ τὸ ἀσθενὲς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἰσχυρότερον τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐστίν.

#### English Standard Version

For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

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*Μωρός* — the word from which we get *moron* — is Paul's actual word for the gospel as the world receives it. It *looks* foolish; it *is in fact* wiser than any human philosophy. Feynman said exactly this about quantum electrodynamics: it *looks* absurd; it *is in fact* the deepest description of light and matter we have.

## THE CONVERGENCE

The structural point is identical: the deeper one penetrates reality — physical or theological — the more the description departs from naïve intuition, *and the more accurate it becomes*. Reality at the bottom is not what common sense would have written. It is what the Author actually wrote. This is true of QED at the level of photons, and it is true of the cross at the level of God's reconciling work in the world.

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## PART X

### Challenger — Reality Must Take Precedence Over Public Relations

Appendix F to the Rogers Commission Report, 1986

After the *Challenger* explosion on January 28, 1986, Feynman served on the Rogers Commission. In Appendix F to the report — which he insisted on writing himself, against political resistance, and which was nearly suppressed — he closed with one of the most quoted sentences in twentieth-century engineering:

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*"For a successful technology, reality must take precedence over public relations, for Nature cannot be fooled."*

Appendix F, Rogers Commission Report, June 6, 1986

The shuttle had been launched in a temperature regime where the O-rings could not function. Engineers knew. Managers minimized. Nature did not negotiate. Seven astronauts died because public relations was allowed to outrank reality.

## THE BIBLICAL CASE

Paul wrote, in language that could have been Feynman's epigraph:

### Galatians 6:7 · God Is Not Mocked

#### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

*Μὴ πλανᾶσθε· Θεὸς οὐ μυκτηρίζεται· ὁ γὰρ ἐὰν σπεύρῃ ἄνθρωπος, τοῦτο καὶ θερίσει.*

#### English Standard Version

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

The verb *μυκτηρίζω* means literally *to turn up the nose at, to sneer at* — the gesture of pretending the rules don't apply. Paul says: God is not mockable in that way. Reality answers to him, not to our preferences, our reputations, our quarterly forecasts. Feynman's "Nature cannot be fooled" is Galatians

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6:7 in engineering register.

## Numbers 32:23 · Your Sin Will Find You Out

### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

*καὶ ἀκούσεσθε τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ὑμῶν, ὅταν καταλάβῃ ὑμᾶς τὰ κακά.*

### English Standard Version

...and be sure your sin will find you out.

A defective O-ring “finds you out” at 31° F whether or not the press release acknowledged the cold front. A failure of integrity “finds you out” because the universe is morally consistent in the same way it is physically consistent. **The same God made both consistencies.** Feynman was insisting on the physical consistency. Scripture insists that the physical consistency is a sign of, and grounded in, the moral consistency of God. You cannot mock either one.

## Luke 12:2 · Nothing Hidden Will Not Be Revealed

### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

*οὐδὲν δὲ συγκεκαλυμμένον ἐστὶν ὃ οὐκ ἀποκαλυφθήσεται, καὶ κρυπτὸν ὃ οὐ γνωσθήσεται.*

### English Standard Version

Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.

### THE CONVERGENCE

Reality is eventually disclosed. NASA learned this on a Tuesday morning over Florida. Scripture says it is true universally and eternally. Feynman's Appendix F is a chapter from the doctrine of judgment.

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## PART XI

### The Father and the Bird

*What is Science? NSTA address, 1966 — knowing the name vs. knowing the thing*

In a 1966 address to the National Science Teachers Association, later printed in *The Physics Teacher* under the title “What is Science?”, Feynman told the story he had already alluded to in the BBC interview. As a boy, walking with his father, he asked the name of a particular bird. His father said:

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*“See that bird? It's a brown-throated thrush, but in Germany it's called a Halzenfugel, and in Chinese they call it a Chung Ling, and even if you know all those names for it, you still know nothing about the bird. You only know something about people; what they call the bird. Now that thrush sings, and teaches its young to fly, and flies so many miles away during the summer across the country, and nobody knows how it finds its way.”*

Melville Feynman, recounted by his son in “What is Science?”, 1966

The young Feynman learned the difference between *knowing the name of something* and *knowing something*. Naming is not knowing.

## THE BIBLICAL CASE

Jesus defined eternal life this way:

### John 17:3 · Eternal Life Is to Know God

#### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

αὕτη δέ ἐστιν ἡ αἰώνιος ζωὴ, ἵνα γινώσκωσι σὲ τὸν μόνον ἀληθινὸν Θεὸν καὶ ὃν ἀπέστειλας Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν.

#### English Standard Version

And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

The verb is γινώσκωσιν — present subjunctive of γινώσκω, which in biblical Greek (following the Hebrew *yāda*) means *to know by encounter, by relationship, by experience* — not merely *to be able to*

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*recite the name of.* Eternal life is not a stockpile of correct theological labels. It is *acquaintance with the living God*. Feynman's father had drilled the same distinction into him about a bird. The Father in heaven says the same about himself.

John makes it explicit:

## 1 John 4:7–8 · Whoever Loves Knows God

### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

Ἀγαπητοί, ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐστὶ, καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ γεγέννηται καὶ γινώσκει τὸν Θεόν. ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν οὐκ ἔγνω τὸν Θεόν, ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστὶ.

### English Standard Version

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Knowing the name *God* is nothing if one has not *loved* — because *God is love*, and the only honest way to *know* love is to participate in it. Feynman's father said: don't tell me the bird's name; tell me what the bird does and how it lives. John says: don't tell me you know God; tell me whom you have loved. Same shape of knowing, lifted to the highest object.

## 1 Corinthians 8:1 · Knowledge Puffs Up; Love Builds Up

### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

ἡ γνώσις φουσιῶι, ἡ δὲ ἀγάπη οἰκοδομεῖ.

### English Standard Version

...knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

### THE CONVERGENCE

The *knowledge* Paul warns against is the labels-only kind — the kind that can recite *Halzenfugel* but has never watched the bird fly. The Christian, no less than the physicist, is called to the harder, slower, more honest discipline of actually *knowing* the thing.

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## PART XII

### Take the World from Another Point of View

Yorkshire TV, 1972 — mystery, humility, and the religious question

In a 1972 Yorkshire TV interview, "Take the World from Another Point of View," Feynman was asked about religion. His answer was characteristically honest. He was not a believer; he could not honestly say he was; but he refused to take refuge in the cheap certainty of the militant atheist, either. He spoke of the universe as inducing in him a kind of awe that resembled religious feeling, and he would not pretend it didn't.

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*"I'd rather have questions that can't be answered than answers that can't be questioned."*

**Widely attributed to Feynman; characteristic of the Yorkshire TV interview, 1972**

This was not vague spirituality. It was the report of an honest man who had spent his life pressed against the bottom of reality, and who knew the bottom was deeper than he could reach.

## THE BIBLICAL CASE

Scripture treats this exact posture as the doorway, not the obstacle. Proverbs offers the procedural advice:

### Proverbs 3:5 · Do Not Lean on Your Own Understanding

#### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

*ἴσθι πεποιθῶς ἐν ὅλῃ καρδίᾳ ἐπὶ Θεῷ, ἐπὶ δὲ σῆ  
σοφίᾳ μὴ ἐπαίρου.*

#### English Standard Version

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

The negative command is precise: do not *lean* — do not put your weight on — your own understanding *as if it were the bottom*. There is a bottom; it is not you. Feynman knew it was not him; he had spent decades discovering exactly how *not* him it was. The next step the Proverb commends —

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trusting the Lord with all your heart — was a step Feynman did not take. We do not pretend he did. But the floor he walked up to *is* the threshold of the Proverb. He stood at it and reported what he saw. Scripture says: there is a Person on the other side of that door.

## Jeremiah 36:13 LXX (= Jeremiah 29:13) · Seek and Find

### Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

καὶ ζητήσετέ με, καὶ εὐρήσετέ με, ὅτι ζητήσετέ με ἐν ὅλῃ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν.

### English Standard Version

You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.

### THE CONVERGENCE

The God of scripture is not hidden from honest seekers. Feynman's posture — the refusal to claim more than he knew, the willingness to admit awe — was not enmity. It was the soil in which a kind of seeking could happen. Whether it did happen, in his case, only the Lord knows. What we *can* say is this: the world Feynman so accurately described is the world scripture says is here.

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## SYNTHESIS

### One World, Two Books

What Feynman observed · What scripture predicts

The medieval tradition spoke of *two books*: the book of nature and the book of scripture, both written by the same God. Read carefully, the two books do not contradict; they corroborate.

Feynman did not believe in the Author. But he read the book of nature for sixty years with extraordinary attention, and the report he filed describes a cosmos that looks remarkably like the one scripture predicts a careful observer would find:

FEYNMAN OBSERVED	SCRIPTURE PREDICTS
Reality rewards searching out	God <i>conceals</i> so that searching is glorious (Prov 25:2)
Self-deception is the chief enemy of truth	The heart is deceitful (Jer 17:9); test everything (1 Thess 5:21)
Knowledge <i>amplifies</i> beauty	The heavens <i>narrate</i> glory (Ps 19:1); study the lilies (Matt 6:28)
“Why?” questions terminate beyond science	Secret things belong to the LORD (Deut 29:29; Rom 11:33)
All things on one substrate, held by attraction/repulsion	All things hold together in him (Col 1:17; Heb 1:3)
Plenty of room at the bottom — order at every scale	The hairs of your head are numbered (Matt 10:30; Ps 139:13)
Nature is mathematically describable	All things by measure, number, weight (Wis 11:20; Job 38:5)
Honest doubt prerequisite for real knowledge	Fear of LORD is beginning of wisdom (Prov 9:10); we know in part (1 Cor 13:12)
Reality at depth is ‘absurd’ — and exactly correct	God’s foolishness wiser than men (1 Cor 1:25; Isa 55:8)
Nature cannot be fooled	God is not mocked (Gal 6:7); your sin will find you out (Num 32:23)
Knowing the <i>name</i> is not knowing the <i>thing</i>	Eternal life is to <i>know</i> God (John 17:3; 1 John 4:8)

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**Honest awe is better than false certainty**

Do not lean on your own understanding (Prov 3:5; Jer 29:13)

The pattern is too consistent to be coincidence. Scripture *predicts* the kind of world that an unflinchingly honest physicist would describe. Feynman *described* the kind of world scripture said would be there. He did not draw the theological conclusion. We do.

## THE CONCLUSION

The God who arranged all things by measure and number and weight is the God who hides the bird and asks the boy to watch it fly. He is the God who upholds the universe by the word of his power, who set the foundations of the earth by line, who numbers the hairs and the photons alike, who will not be mocked by O-rings or by liars, whose ways are higher than our ways and whose *foolishness* is wiser than our wisdom. And his Son, by whom and for whom all things were made, walked through the wheat fields of Galilee and said: "*Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow.*" Feynman considered them, for sixty years. We invite you to consider them too — and to consider, then, the One who made them.

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## DISCUSSION & REFLECTION

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1. Feynman called doing physics “the pleasure of finding things out.” Proverbs 25:2 says it is the glory of kings to search things out. What in your own life — practical, intellectual, or spiritual — is something God has hidden on purpose so you would have the joy of looking for it?
2. Where in *your* life — in your work, your speech, your prayers, your self-presentation — are you most tempted to build the runways and wear the wooden headphones of a cargo cult? What would 1 Thessalonians 5:21 look like applied there?
3. Have you ever found that knowing more about something — a passage of scripture, a friend, the natural world — made you love it *more* rather than less? Tell the story to someone this week.
4. Feynman could not say *why* magnets attract. Moses said the secret things belong to the LORD. Name one question in your own life or theology that you have been pressing for an answer that may belong, for now, on the secret side of Deuteronomy 29:29. Can you be at peace there?
5. Hebrews 1:3 says Christ is *continuously upholding* the universe. The atoms in your chair are being held in formation, right now, by the Word of God. Sit with that for one minute in silence. What changes about how you walk through the next hour?
6. “The hairs of your head are all numbered” (Matt 10:30) sounded like hyperbole until physics found genuine, intelligible order at the level of single atoms. What in your own life — what you carry as small, hidden, or unimportant — may God be numbering and tending more carefully than you have realized?
7. Wisdom 11:20 says God arranged all things by measure, number, and weight. How does this verse change the way you think about scientific work, or the work of any Christian in a math-dependent profession (engineering, medicine, accounting, carpentry, agriculture)?
8. Job 42:3 — “I uttered what I did not understand.” Where do you need to *repent of false certainty* this week? What would Feynman's first principle — *you must not fool yourself* — look like applied to your spiritual life?
9. “Nature is absurd,” Feynman said. “The foolishness of God is wiser than men,” Paul said. Where do you see this same pattern — surface absurdity, underlying wisdom — in the gospel itself?
10. “Nature cannot be fooled.” Apply this to one decision you are tempted to make this month where you think you can manage the appearances. What would Galatians 6:7 say?

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**11.** Feynman's father said: don't tell me the bird's name; tell me what the bird does. Are you more often a name-knower of God or a thing-knower? What practice could move you from one to the other?

**12.** Feynman stood at the door of awe and would not pretend he didn't. He also would not open the door. Pray for one honest, careful, awe-prone person you know who has not yet walked through that door. Ask the Lord to draw them. Trust that the same God who made the photons can make himself known.

## CLOSING PRAYER

*Father of glory, you made the heavens and the smallest unseen atom, by measure and number and weight. You hid your works on purpose, that searching them out would be our joy. You arranged your universe so that the more carefully it is examined the louder it sings of you. We thank you for every honest seeker, named or unnamed, Christian or not, who has paid your creation the respect of careful attention. Forgive us when we have settled for the names of things and not the things themselves — when we have settled for the name of Jesus and not for Jesus himself. Give us the integrity Feynman demanded of his students and Paul demanded of the Bereans. Make us creatures who do not fool ourselves, who test everything, who hold fast what is good. And, by your Spirit, lead every honest awe in our day toward the Door whose name is Christ. We ask it through Jesus, the Logos in whom all things hold together. **Amen.***

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- English text: *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Crossway Bibles.
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## **Related Pleasant Springs studies:**

- *Malachi to Revelation* series (12 lessons) — [ps-church.com/discipleship/malachi-to-revelation](https://ps-church.com/discipleship/malachi-to-revelation)
- *What Does God Want?* series (after Heiser) — [ps-church.com/discipleship/what-does-god-want](https://ps-church.com/discipleship/what-does-god-want)
- *The Soul, Hell, and the Supreme Ethic of Love* — [ps-church.com/discipleship/soul-and-hell](https://ps-church.com/discipleship/soul-and-hell)
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