

Believing in the future

Everything I learn about science fills me with spiritual wonder.

by [Yolanda Pierce](#) in the [January 2023](#) issue



(Century illustration)

My only thought as I sat in rush hour traffic once again: *I was promised flying cars*. I grew up watching *The Jetsons*, the reboot that aired in the 1980s. The Saturday morning cartoon embodied everything that I thought the future would hold: there would be flying cars, colonies in outer space, robots who did all the cleaning, and good-paying jobs that consisted of pressing buttons all day. I couldn't wait to experience an entire meal by popping a single tablet into my mouth, just like they did on the show.

For a child, it was not such a leap of the imagination to think that all of these things would be a reality in the 21st century. By the time I was born, man had already been to the moon. So in my mind, surely a flying car was a reasonable expectation.

So as I once again surveyed the packed highway from my earthbound vehicle, I lamented the lack of flying cars. And also the lack of robotic cleaners.

The world has certainly seen scientific advances beyond our wildest dreams since *The Jetsons* aired. We've mapped the human genome and created immunotherapy treatments to cure the previously incurable. We've discovered new, habitable worlds and put rovers with cameras on Mars. Mere children now have cell phones with enough computational power to reach the ends of the earth. Recently, NASA's James Webb Space Telescope captured images of the Pillars of Creation, the birthplace of new stars emerging from dense clouds of gas and dust.

We may very well be on the verge of peering into the origins of the universe. And while we may not see flying cars in this lifetime, we will continue to behold wonders—wonders that inspire awe, reverence, and continued exploration.

Because no matter the technology or the latest scientific advances and breakthroughs, our hearts yearn for something more: for a deeper understanding, for more wisdom and knowledge, for even a slight glimpse into the previously unknown. We are built for discovery and exploration, for curiosity and examination. And I believe that part of this yearning is only fulfilled in our quest to know God and to experience the mystery of the Divine in our lives. We cannot, we must not, lose the awe and the awesomeness that is the center of our faith.

Everything that I learn about science fills me with spiritual wonder at the Creator who set a universe into motion. Everything I learn about the Creator fills me with spiritual longing to know more and to love more. These quests—the sacred and the scientific—are intertwined, not at odds with each other. To be able to peer through the Hubble telescope and to see across time and space is to experience the magnificence of a God who was there at the beginning, is now present with us, and forever more shall be. To think about DNA and the building blocks of life is to be reminded that of one blood we have all been created in God's image and likeness. To ponder the sun, moon, and stars in their courses above is to be witness to the greatness of God's faithfulness. Wonders upon wonders.

I work in higher education, where there are often sharp distinctions between different fields of study, explicit and implicit lines drawn between the work of humanists and that of scientists. But I am convinced that we need each other to grasp the grandeur and mystery of our faith. And we certainly need each other for the care of humanity and for all of creation. The astronomer needs the words of the poet; the cancer surgeon needs the pastoral care of the chaplain; the engineer needs the wisdom of the ethicist; the environmentalist needs the courage of the preacher. The pairing of diverse gifts and talents reflects its own mystery: how each of us is made a little bit better and a little more whole in community and dialogue with one another.

“For we know in part,” Paul admonishes in 1 Corinthians 13:9. Our knowledge of the world is incomplete; we are just now scratching the surface of the vastness of our own galaxy, one among an infinite number. Our knowledge of God is incomplete; we only have human words and metaphors, along with inexpressible groanings, to explain that which exists outside language and speech. Our knowledge of each other is incomplete; we unintentionally hurt those we love the most and often neglect the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves. In all ways, we only know in part the most fundamental things of life.

But just as the quest to know the material world keeps us exploring, learning, and reaching to the edges of space, the quest to know God should be the same: a commitment to reading, praying, worshiping, and listening to the still, small, divine voice.

I continue to hope for the flying car, and not just to avoid traffic. The flying car is my reminder to keep believing that the future holds many more wonders and many more mysteries. I long for more incredible scientific discoveries along with more spiritual revelations. I celebrate what is at the heart of this divine mystery: a God whose splendor and majesty are beyond my human comprehension, yet who is still close enough and loving enough to walk daily with me.