



In the 1971 film version of the Roald Dahl’s children’s classic, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (the film was titled *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*), we watch as five children are allowed entry into the place of any child’s dreams—a wonderland of sugary treats, delicious chocolates, and delectable innovations. As the golden ticket winners get a peek behind the scenes of Willy Wonka’s secret wonderworks, they are continually warned about the dangers of not listening to Mr. Wonka’s instructions and are made to sign an extensive contract promising not to sample or take any of the creative confections. Subsequently, each child is tempted by a treat or activity that appears uniquely designed to prey upon that child’s greatest weakness. And in the end the viewers realize that all the temptations were part of Wonka’s plan to weed out the weak links and find a child—Charlie Bucket—who was honest enough to become his heir, inheriting his entire business.

Though the film was considered something of a flop during its original release, since then it has been seen by millions through repeated televised airings and has become a cult classic. Certainly most children of the 70s know it well—even as I write this several childhood nightmares featuring the weird and wonderful Oompa-Loompas come vividly to mind.

Part of the story and movie’s dark appeal comes from the sense of not knowing for certain what is real and what is not—what actually happened to the children who succumbed to temptation and disappeared in seemingly horrible circumstances? The film’s star, Gene Wilder (who passed away just this week at the age of 83), understood this quality of the script well—he accepted the role only on the condition that he be allowed to add a unique scene toward the beginning, when Wonka first greets the golden ticket winners and appears hobbling on a cane, then proceeds to leap into a beautiful somersault. “From then on, no one will know if I’m lying or telling the truth,” Wilder said (Will Perkins, “Gene Wilder’s Willy Wonka Demands Revealed,” Yahoo.com).

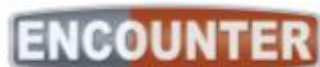
*As students arrive, give each of them a copy of the above article to read. If you have time, you might want to show a clip of the film as well! Then discuss it in this way:*

**The child characters in this movie are led to wonder what is real and what isn’t. They are challenged with understanding their own boundaries and those of the mysterious Mr. Wonka. Have you ever been in a situation where it was hard to know what was really true, or have you ever known people who made it hard to know when they were telling the truth? What was that like?**

**The inside of Mr. Wonka’s factory was certainly the stuff of a child’s wildest dreams. Have you experienced something or seen something that was more than you had ever imagined it would be? Describe that experience. What made it stand out to you? (Think of seeing an ocean sunset for the first time, or winning a tournament, or riding on a roller coaster, or some other such experience.)**

**Gene Wilder is known to many children as Willy Wonka, but he acted in many films and received awards and nominations for his excellent work. In his memoir, *Kiss Me Like a Stranger*, he wrote, “I think to be believed, onstage or onscreen, is the one hope that all actors share.” How do you decide whether or not a person is believable?**

**Distinguishing true messages from false ones is especially important when we consider Christianity. Let’s look at three differences Paul pointed out between Christianity and empty religious beliefs.**



MEETING GOD FACE-TO-FACE

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