**Our Awesome God**

I want to speak today of a concept that seems to have gone out of vogue in English language lately and that word is “awe”

We sing:

“Our God Is an Awesome God

He Reigns from Heaven Above

With Wisdom Power and Love

Our God Is an Awesome God”

but what does the word “awe” in there mean?

It is not used in the slang meaning of “awesome” meaning something favourable or agreeable. “How was your weekend? Awesome!”

It is not the “aww” used to express approval of something particularly attractive and pleasant, like “Aww, look at how cute that lamb is!”

The Dictionary tells us that Awe is a feeling of great respect sometimes mixed with fear or surprise. It is an overwhelming feeling of reverence, admiration, fear, produced by that which is grand, sublime, extremely powerful.

The word “awesome” in Scripture is reserved for the majesty, holiness, and power of God alone. It describes His greatness in a way that demands reverence, worship and respect.

The biblical use of awesome is not a casual compliment but a recognition of God’s greatness, majesty, and unmatched glory that inspires reverent fear and worship.

The Baptist pastor and author John Piper bemoans the fact that the childlike wonder and awe of God seems to have died. The scenery and poetry and music of the majesty of God has dried up like a forgotten peach at the back of the refrigerator,[[1]](#footnote-1) he writes.

It is time to reclaim the “awe and awesomeness of God.”

God alone possesses the attributes that evoke holy reverence and wonder. His power, justice, holiness, and mighty acts in creation and redemption make Him uniquely deserving of the term.

We sing the hymn by Bob Gaither:

Majesty, worship his majesty

Unto Jesus be all glory, honour, and praise

Majesty, kingdom authority

Flow from his throne, unto his own, his anthem raise

So, exalt, lift up on high the name of Jesus

Magnify, come glorify Christ Jesus, the King

Jesus being the second of the Triune God.

Majesty and awe go together.

Psalm 33:8 tells us: *Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.*

When we come to God, we must remember two things: who he is and who we are. We must tremble before our God. He is still holy. Our trembling is the tremor of awe and veneration, not the trembling of the coward or pagan frightened by the rustling of a leaf[[2]](#footnote-2) or of the wrath of an angry god.

The proper response to recognizing God’s awesomeness is worship, humility, reverent fear and obedience.

Think on how people in Scripture responded to the presence of God.

Remember Moses on seeing God in the burning bush, and approaching it, heard:

Exodus 3:5-6 *“Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.*

Think of the Israelites coming from Egypt and travelling through the desert to the Promised Land. They had seen the miracles of the plagues, of the parting of the Red Sea, of daily manna from heaven, of the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire leading them, yet when God gave Moses the 10 Commandments on Mt Sinai, they were in awe and fear and trembling.

Exodus 20:18 *When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, and said to Moses, ‘You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die.’*

Seventy men at that time were appointed to serve God. In those days, these men approached God for worship; however, they were not allowed to get too close. God made it clear that it was an awesome thing to enter his holy presence. Most of the people were not allowed to go up the mountain at all. Their priests and elders were allowed to go partway up, but even they had limited access. God told them to keep their distance. Only Moses, the mediator, was permitted to draw near. By setting these boundaries God was teaching his people to honour his holiness. He is a great and awesome God, perfect in righteousness.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In Exodus 34:29 it says that *when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD.* He had been before the awesomeness of God and the sunburn of the reflected glory showed on his face.

The Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and later the Temple contained only the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of Israel’s special relationship with God. The Holy of Holies was accessible only to the Jewish high priest. Once a year, on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the high priest was permitted to enter the small, windowless enclosure to burn incense and sprinkle the blood of a sacrificial animal on the mercy seat of the Ark.

Tradition says that he had a rope tied to his ankle, so that if he died in the presence of the Lord, his body could be dragged out. Such was the awesomeness and majesty of God.

Such was the power of God that the people recognised, such was the awe of God that they saw.

Think of the prophet Isaiah on seeing God in a vision

Isaiah 6:5 *“Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”*

This was the God of awe that the prophet Habakkuk could write of:

Habakkuk 3:10-19 NRSV The *mountains saw you and writhed; a torrent of water swept by; the deep gave forth its voice. The sun raised high its hands; the moon stood still in its exalted place, at the light of your arrows speeding by, at the gleam of your flashing spear. In fury you trod the earth, in anger you trampled nations. You came forth to save your people, to save your anointed. You crushed the head of the wicked house, laying it bare from foundation to roof. You pierced with their own arrows the head of his warriors, who came like a whirlwind to scatter us, gloating as if ready to devour the poor who were in hiding. You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the mighty waters. I hear, and I tremble within; my lips quiver at the sound.*

In C S Lewis’ book ‘The Lion, the witch and the wardrobe” there is a conversation between the children and the beavers about the lion Aslan. The book is a Christian allegory, and the picture is that Aslan is Christ. Let me read it to you.

… Mr. Beaver:” I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. Don’t you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion—the Lion, the great Lion.”

“Ooh!” said Susan. “I’d thought he was a man. Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”

“That you will, dearie, and no mistake,” said Mrs. Beaver, “if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.”

“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver. “Don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ’Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”

“I’m longing to see him,” said Peter, “even if I do feel frightened when it comes to the point”

Can you see how CS Lewis was showing us the picture of the awesomeness of God.

How about this from Annie Dillard:

Does anyone have the foggiest idea of what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews.

Can you imagine being lashed into your pews in expectation of the appearance of God, of our knees knocking?

I like the attitude of the writer of Psalms.

Psalm 22:23 *You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!*

Psalm 5:7 *I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house, I will bow down toward your holy temple in awe of you.*

I want to suggest that how I think we approach God: it should be with reverence and awe.

What about the Awesomeness of God in the New Testament. I think we see that in the transfiguration, when Jesus and his tight 3 disciples went up the mountain and where Jesus met with Moses and Elijah and God spoke.

Matthew 17:1-8 *Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”  While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”  When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear.  But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.”  And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.*

What was the response of Peter to this: (1) falling down in front of the Lord in fear and trembling and (2) the need to do something for the Lord – I must build houses,

Our attitude toward God reflects in our commitment to serving him.

When we remember that our God is far above anything that we understand or know and when we recognise that greatness of God and our privilege of becoming His children, then we like Peter worshipping and becoming sincerely motivated, effective followers of God and workers with him.

We will want to serve this awesome God.

Exodus 15:11 (NRSV) “*Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendour, doing wonders?*

I want us to reclaim that sense of awe and majesty.

The Jews will not even speak the name of God for fear of blaspheming him. They will not write his name.

The Muslims revere their prophet Mohammed so much that they will kill those who blaspheme his name. Think of the Danish cartoonist who because of his derogatory depiction of Mohammed 12 people at the magazine he worked at died and a death threat was over his head for the rest of his life. Such is the passion for their awe and majesty for their prophet.

Muslims and Jews pray 5 times a day.

In our so called Christian western world, God’s name often an expletive, Jesus Christ’s name is often an expletive. How have we lost that sense of the awesomeness of God?

We live at a time when many ideas about God are unworthy of his majesty. People think of God—if they think about him at all—as some kind of cosmic force or as a kindly old grandpa, “the man upstairs,” or as a heavenly Father Christmas giving us stuff. God is not honoured as the totally awesome God who revealed his glory at Mount Sinai. But we may be sure that when the Israelites stood at the foot of Mount Sinai, they did not entertain any trivial notions about God. [[4]](#footnote-4)

We suffer if we do not recognise the awesomeness of God.

Scott Walker tells us that the essence of God has always escaped people’s rational grasp; he is far too vast to be confined to a test tube.[[5]](#footnote-5) Is that some of the problem that we find God too big for our minds?

If the world will not reverence God’s name or treat it with awe, then surely, we as his followers must.

The more we know God, the more awesome he becomes to us.

If God is awesome and can do all things – he created the universe by his word only, he created each of us in our mother’s womb, he saves us from sin, he takes us into his heavenly kingdom – then our attitude toward him should be one of respectful admiration and fear, with a grateful heart.

Rend your heart

As the prophet Joel proclaimed: Joel 2:12-13 “*Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.*

Out of reverence in our hearts come our words and our actions of worship and service

How do we do that?

Speak out his name in adoration

2 Samuel 22:50 *I will extol you, Yahweh, among the nations! I will sing praises to your name!*

Sing praises to our God

Psalm 150 *Praise the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with timbrel and dancing, praise him with the strings and pipe, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.*

We should worship God not only with our lips but with our whole heart and mind and bodies.

Bow the knee

As the Psalmist wrote: Psalm 95:6-7 *O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.*

Prostrate yourself before God

Matthew 2:11 The Wise Men: *After coming into the house, they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him.*

Lift your hands to the Lord

Psalm 134:2 *Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord!*

Fall to your knees

As Paul told the church at Ephesus: Ephesians 3:14-15 *… I fall on my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth receives its character.*

And for something outside the box and extrovert, we could be like David and dance before the Lord.

2 Samuel 6:14-15 *David danced before the Lord with all his might, wearing a priestly garment. So, David and all the people of Israel brought up the Ark of the Lord with shouts of joy and the blowing of rams’ horns.*

These are just some of the ways to express worship to our awesome God, from our changed hearts of reverence and awe to our King

We serve an awesome God who deserves all praise and honour, from all our heart and soul and mind.

Praise God.

1. John Piper *Desiring God* 78 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. R C Sproul *The Holiness of God* 154 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ryken, P. G., & Hughes, R. K. (2005). *Exodus: saved for God’s glory* 778 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ryken, P. G., & Hughes, R. K. *Exodus: saved for God’s glory* 514 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Scott Walker *Where the Rivers Flow* 136 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)