

The Subtle War for Our Awe



Last week we noted how people are created with a need for Awe. According to the Bible it is God who is the worthy recipient of our Awe and also the only being which can truly satisfy the depth of our need for Awe.

Today I want to look at accounts from God's Word where people lost focus of their awe of God.

In the Beginning:

The Bible begins with the story of creation and following the creation account we read about the fall in Genesis 3:1-7.

Genesis 3:1-7

[1] Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.

He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" [2] And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, [3] but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" [4] But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. [5] For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." [6] So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. [7] Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. (ESV)

What is the relationship between the serpent's temptation and Adam and Eve's awe?

The serpent appeals to Adam and Eve's opportunity to be like God. They had relationship with God. Their lives were full of good things from God. God gave them the good world He created. God gave them a job, naming the animals. God gave Adam and helpmate in Eve. They were living in the garden of Eden. They had everything they needed.

Yet Satan makes his appeal to them to be like God. Sin enters the world through a desire to be like God.

Our awe it seems is a double edged sword. Our awe shaped hole becomes both the problem and the solution. Adam and Eve wanted to be as Awesome as God was. Satan introduced the idea that rather than God being the one who could satisfy their God-given desire for awe that they could satisfy themselves if they were more like God.

In Genesis 3 Adam and Eve push over the first domino in a chain of dominos that has since then struggled with this same failure. We are constantly replacing our awe of God with a desire to be in awe of ourselves. We want to be awesome. We want to be like God.

Throughout God's Story:

What are some stories from the Bible that you can recall where man replaced awe of God with a desire to be in awe of themselves in some way?

Cain and Abel – Abel's Offering seems to be consistent with a proper view of God, firstborn and fat portions. (The best) While Cain's offering was not pleasing to the Lord. Something about Cain's offering seems to have been self-centered while Abel's was whole hearted and righteous.

Tower of Babel - Genesis 11:4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." (ESV) Let us make a name for ourselves. Not to different from Adam and Eve's temptation, you can be like God.

Promised Land – Israelites had been protected from the plagues, then from Pharaoh, parting through the Red Sea. Moses meets with God up on a mountain and gives them the ten commandments. But upon sending them into the promised land they get cold feet. They lose faith in God, they fear the people in the land, they are in awe of others and they trust their reason more than they trust God's promises. This is an Awe problem. Awe and faith go hand in hand as does our sin.

Share this Example:

Israelite Kings – Then later we read where Israel wants a king because they want to be like all the other Nations. They have God but they want others to see them as normal, respectable. God says they have rejected him.

1 Samuel 8:7–8

[7] And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. [8] According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. (ESV)

Israel & Goliath

1 Samuel 17:31–37

[31] When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul, and he sent for him. [32] And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." [33] And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth." [34] But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, [35] I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. [36] Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God." [37] And David said, "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you!" (ESV)

How was the Israelites issue an awe issue?

They were afraid. The size of the man changed their willingness to fight. So either God was too small or their real hope was rooted in their own physical capabilities to overcome their opponent. Either way these are major awe problems.

What was David's hope rooted in?

I love these stories of David's. David has fought lions and bears and come out victorious. Somehow He didn't conclude that he was some great animal killer but rather that God was a great protector who gave him victory. David's awe was in the right place.

Why do we at time lose our awe of God?

What impact does this loss have?

We fail to move forward. We fail to see the fruits of trusting God.

Nebuchadnezzar is another of the great examples of misplaced awe.

Daniel 4:28–37

[28] All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. [29] At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, [30] and the king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" [31] While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, [32] and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." [33] Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from

among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws.

[34] At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever,

for his dominion is an everlasting dominion,

and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;

[35] all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,

and he does according to his will among the host of heaven

and among the inhabitants of the earth;

and none can stay his hand

or say to him, "What have you done?"

[36] At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. [37] Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble. (ESV)

In what ways are we tempted to think like Nebuchadnezzar?

See the blessings in our lives as a product of our worth rather than God's grace.

How does Nebuchadnezzar's experience change his view of his circumstances?

Pride and awe are set as opposites. When we are experiencing pride we are committing larceny. We are stealing the credit that does not belong to us. This is so clearly what Nebuchadnezzar does. In the end Nebuchadnezzar still has a great kingdom, but now he sees the great kingdom as coming from God's greatness not his own.

Our Worthless Exchange:

Romans 1:18–32

[18] For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. [19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] 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. [21] For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were

darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

[24] Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, [25] because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

[26] For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; [27] and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

[28] And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. [29] They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, [30] slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, [31] foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. [32] Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. (ESV)

What did the people in this passage exchange?

Acknowledging God.

If this passage was (re)written to describe people who did not suppress truth (v18) / acknowledge God (v28) how might it, describe them?

See God's attributes. See God in creation. People who honor and thank God. Living out holy sexuality. Righteous living.

Romans 1 describes misplaced awe. They didn't see God as He is, that failure caused a whole cascade of negative results in their life. God gave them up to their debased minds.

Awe in many senses is the missing element in our perspective that allows us to sin. Sin has the freedom to occur only when we are not thinking about God as He is. When we lose our grasp of who He is.

This is why our awe of God is such an important thing to cultivate. By having and maintaining an accurately awesome view of God we inoculate ourselves from sin.

The Practical Implications:

Awe wrongedness causes you to feel unable, alone, unprepared, and afraid, while awe of God produces, courage, hope, and forthright action. This really is the war of wars. Too many of us, no matter what our theological persuasion, live in a functional state of AWN, and so we are timid, anxious, defeated, and struggling to hold onto the shreds of hope that we have left. Our problem is not the size or difficulty of the things we face. No, our problem is AWN and the havoc it wreaks on our daily living. AWN will cause you to fear things that you need to defeat. AWN will cause you to deny reality because you are afraid to face what is true. AWN will cause you to fret over people and situations. AWN will cause you to attempt to control what you cannot control because you think it is out of control. AWN will never lead you anywhere good.

Paul Tripp, Awe Why It Matter For Everything We Think, Say, & Do

The reason I believe this quote is accurate is that it speaks of the results of a person who fails to believe that God can deliver on the promises that He has given in His word. That is a lack of awe.

So next week I want to spend more time thinking about how we can cultivate our awe of God. How do we think about God more accurately and more often? But for now I want to think about God's awesomeness in a particular characteristic.

God is "Awe" mazing:

God's Grace:

Who I am.

Dust. (Gen 2:7, Ps 103:14)

Dead (Eph 2)

What I've done. / Failed to do.

What it cost.

Romans 8:31–39

[31] What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? [32] He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? [33] Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. [34] Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. [35] Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? [36] As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

[37] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. [38] For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (ESV)

My continued failure.

Prodigal Son/God

Luke 15

99/1 Sheep

Matthew 18:10–14

[10] “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. [12] What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? [13] And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. [14] So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. (ESV)

“I’ve given him so many reasons not to love me, and he has rejected them all.”
– Matt Peebles

His patience.

Exodus 34:6–7

[6] The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, [7] keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” (ESV)

My Promised Hope