

# Worship Experience for Those Who Connect Through Intellectual & Contemplative

Start this time by reading the following pieces about the construct of awe. The first is a *New York Times* article on the social psychology of awe. The second is the citation and abstract of the peer reviewed study discussed in the *Times* article. And the third is a portion of scripture from Acts 2, which chronicles the early Church.

As you read, focus your mind's attention and your heart's affection on the Lord, even as you read secular data. Consider the way that secular studies on awe reflect God's design for worship. After reading, consider and contemplate the questions on the final page of this booklet.

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## Why Do We Experience Awe?

By PAUL PIFF and DACHER KELTNER MAY 22, 2015 NEW YORK TIMES

HERE'S a curious fact about goose bumps. In many nonhuman mammals, goose bumps — that physiological reaction in which the muscles surrounding hair follicles contract — occur when individuals, along with other members of their species, face a threat. We humans, by contrast, can get goose bumps when we experience awe, that often-positive feeling of being in the presence of something vast that transcends our understanding of the world.



Why do humans experience awe? Years ago, one of us, Professor Keltner, [argued](#) (along with the psychologist Jonathan Haidt) that awe is the ultimate “collective” emotion, for it motivates people to do things that enhance the greater good. Through many activities that give us goose bumps — collective rituals, celebration, music and dance, religious gatherings and worship — awe might help shift our focus from our narrow self-interest to the interests of the group to which we belong.

Now, [recent research of ours](#), to be published in next month's issue of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, provides strong empirical support for this claim. We found that awe helps bind us to others, motivating us to act in collaborative ways that enable strong groups and cohesive communities.

For example, in one study we asked more than 1,500 individuals across the United States a series of questions to assess how much awe, among other emotions, they experienced on a regular basis. In an ostensibly unrelated part of the study, we gave each person 10 lottery tickets that would be entered in his (or her) name for a cash prize drawing. We told each person that the tickets were his to keep, but that if he wanted to, he could share a portion of them with

another unidentified individual in the study who had not received any tickets.

We found that participants who reported experiencing more awe in their lives, who felt more regular wonder and beauty in the world around them, were more generous to the stranger. They gave approximately 40 percent more of their tickets away than did participants who were awe-deprived.

Some of this research was conducted on the campus of the University of California, Berkeley, which has a spectacular grove of Tasmanian blue gum eucalyptus trees, some with heights exceeding 200 feet — a potent source of everyday awe for anyone who walks by. So we took participants there and had them either look up into the trees or look at the facade of a nearby science building, for one minute. Then, a minor “accident” occurred (actually a planned part of the experiment): A person stumbled and dropped a handful of pens. Participants who had spent the minute looking up at the tall trees — not long, but long enough, we found, to be filled with awe — picked up more pens to help the other person.

In other experiments, we evoked feelings of awe in the lab, for example by having participants recall and write about a past experience of awe or watch a five-minute video of sublime scenes of nature. Participants experiencing awe, more so than those participants experiencing emotions like pride or amusement, cooperated more, shared more resources and sacrificed more for others — all of which are behaviors necessary for our collective life.

In still other studies, we have sought to understand why awe arouses altruism of different kinds. One answer is that awe imbues people with a different sense of themselves, one that is smaller, more humble and part of something larger. Our research finds that even brief experiences of awe, such as being amid beautiful tall trees, lead people to feel less narcissistic and entitled and more attuned to the common humanity people share with one another. In the great balancing act of our social lives, between the gratification of self-interest and a concern for others, fleeting experiences of awe redefine the self in terms of the collective, and orient our actions toward the needs of those around us.

You could make the case that our culture today is awe-deprived. Adults spend more and more time working and commuting and less time outdoors and with other people. Camping trips, picnics and midnight skies are forgone in favor of working weekends and late at night. Attendance at arts events — live music, theater, museums and galleries — has [dropped over the years](#). This goes for children, too: Arts and music programs in schools are being dismantled in lieu of programs better suited to standardized testing; time outdoors and for novel, unbounded exploration are sacrificed for résumé-building activities.

We believe that awe deprivation has had a hand in a broad societal shift that has been widely observed over the past 50 years: People have become more individualistic, more self-focused, more materialistic and less connected to others. To reverse this trend, we suggest that people insist on experiencing more everyday awe, to actively seek out what gives them goosebumps, be it in looking at trees, night skies, patterns of wind on water or the quotidian nobility of others — the teenage punk who gives up his seat on public transportation, the young child who explores the world in a state of wonder, the person who presses on against all odds.

All of us will be better off for it.

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### Article Citation

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### Article Abstract

Awe is an emotional response to perceptually vast stimuli that transcend current frames of reference. Guided by conceptual analyses of awe as a collective emotion, across 5 studies (N = 2,078) we tested the hypothesis that awe can result in a diminishment of the individual self and its concerns, and increase prosocial behavior. In a representative national sample (Study 1), dispositional tendencies to experience awe predicted greater generosity in an economic game above and beyond other prosocial emotions (e.g., compassion). In follow-up experiments, inductions of awe (relative to various control states) increased ethical decision-making (Study 2), generosity (Study 3), and prosocial values (Study 4). Finally, a naturalistic induction of awe in which participants stood in a grove of towering trees enhanced prosocial helping behavior and decreased entitlement compared to participants in a control condition (Study 5). Mediation data demonstrate that the effects of awe on prosociality are explained, in part, by feelings of a small self. These findings indicate that awe may help situate individuals within broader social contexts and enhance collective concern.

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### Scripture: Acts 2:42-47 (ESV)

#### *The Fellowship of the Believers*

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

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**Consider the following questions as you process and contemplate the readings.**

1. What role did awe play in the secular studies referenced? What behavior did it motivate?
2. What role did awe play in the early Church? What behavior did it motivate?
3. How do awe and prosocial behaviors exhibit the true worship that Melanie taught about tonight?
4. To what degree is our culture awe deprived? To what degree is my life awe-deprived? Lord, how are you calling me to change that?
5. How should my intellectual awe of God motivate me into the collective life of the Church? Lord, please give me your wisdom here about my next step.