

John Bigham shares, “My wife, Amy, loves new experiences. In 2017 she convinced our family that we needed to travel five hours from Provo to eastern Idaho to see the full solar eclipse in person. We got organized and took off driving to the nearest zone of totality, the ideal place to observe a solar eclipse. We drove in bumper-to-bumper traffic along what are usually empty roads. We found what I am sure was the last parking spot in all of Idaho and then herded the kids past revelers who looked like they had been camped there for days or weeks. All I could think was “Is this really worth it? We could have watched this online!”

We found a place to sit and squinted through our overpriced cardboard glasses as the partial eclipse began. Initially, I have to admit that I was pretty underwhelmed. But I watched and waited. Suddenly the light around us began to change rapidly. The birds stopped chirping. The temperature dropped. The laughter, music, and talking all around us quieted. “It’s happening!” people started to say out loud. The darkness deepened. We took off our cardboard glasses and stared upward, looking directly at the sun that was not there.

It is hard to describe what we saw. Even the most detailed pictures do not do it justice. What is more difficult to express is how I felt. I got goosebumps and found myself getting choked up. I stood there in the quiet darkness with my wife, my kids, and hundreds of onlookers, our eyes fixed on the sky and marveled in awe at this remarkable heavenly expression. For 1 minute and 45 seconds we stared in silent, reverent wonder.

I experienced something during this eclipse experience that I did not anticipate: a spiritual surprise, an unexpected connection to the divine.”

One reaction we might have to an experience like this is “Awesome!” We can use that word a lot to describe the taste of food, to acknowledge a gift or an act of service, or to affirm that we are willing to do something. Some people think everything is awesome!

The root of the word “*awesome*”—*awe*—is actually quite inspiring. Awe is profound reverence, a personal and unexpected reaction to seeing God at work. It is seeing or witnessing something inspiring and feeling the Spirit touch our hearts to confirm truth, expand knowledge, or reaffirm heavenly love. It is the divine surprise we feel for those 105 seconds as we stand in the zone of totality of the solar eclipse.

Lauren Daigle, writer/ music artist, shares her awe for God in her song “How Can It Be”.

*Over and over again she pours out her heart- “You plead my cause, you right my wrongs... You break my chains, you overcome... You gave your life, to give me mine... You say that I am free... How can it be?”*

*And why does she pour out her heart in this way? She is bold to say, “I am guilty... Ashamed of what I've done, what I've become... These hands are dirty... I dare not lift them up to the Holy One... I've been hiding... Afraid I've let you down... Inside I doubt, that you still love me... Inside I doubt, that you could love me... Though I fall, you can make me new... From this death, I will rise with you,... Oh, the grace reaching out for me, ... How can it be?”*

God, how awesome it is! I don't know how you do it, but you do... *“Only your grace stands... you plead my cause, you right my wrongs, you break my chains, you overcome... You gave your life, to give me mine... You say that I am free... God, How Can It Be?”*

Maybe you remember feeling “awe,” a bit of God's magnificence. At the reception of an undeserving gift of forgiveness, being freed from a temptation or addiction, when you experienced a piece of heart-stopping art, when you looked into a microscope or a telescope and saw new worlds, when you came to a critical point in a breathtaking piece of music, or when you finally grasped a complex idea with a flash of understanding.

These moments of awe are manifestations of God's love for us. They are ways that God both connects with and nourishes us.

My expression of awe towards God, which is often, can be followed up with a question, like Daigle's, “How can it be?” God's majesty and glory are so great: beyond words and beyond feelings and beyond any comprehension. How could this possibly be? I ask. Truth is, I ask it in wonder, but do I really want to know? Am I ready to know? Or is it best for me to just trust that God has got this, that God has got me?

It appears to me Isaiah 43 is answering, “How can it be?”

I am in over my head, the waters are rising, I just can't take it anymore. How can I possibly make it through all the crap? The hits just keep on coming.

**When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you.**

When Moses was leading the Israelites out of Egypt to begin their journey home to God, and they came to an impasse at the water's edge, I am sure they thought, "How can this be? Did you not think of this God?" How can it be that you called us out here only to leave us to die at the water's edge. And what did God do? God parted the waters and provided a safe pass. Now, on the other side, with all the soldiers and arrows drowned at sea, I am sure they thought in a very different way, with awe this time, "How can it be?", that we made it.

I am living on the edge, the fall at this point is fatal, I have nowhere to turn. The pressure is paralyzing, the smoke is like a wall, I can't breathe and I can't see. How can I possibly survive the impossible? The dial just keeps getting turned up.

**When you walk through the fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you.**

When Daniel was thrown into the Lion's Den and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were thrown into the firing furnace to face what was for sure their death, they thought, "How can it be?" How can it be, God, that I have done what I have done for you, gone where you have led, and faced the powers that be because you have told me to, only to be eaten by a lion and burned like a torch. And what did God do? The Lion remained tame and an angel of the Lord put a blanket around them to keep them from burning. Now, out of the den and out of the furnace, with all the powers that be in awe, I am sure the only question remaining was, "What a minute, how can it be?", they are still alive.

I could not feel more alone, so far from those I love, there is no way the distance can be bridged. How can I possibly go another day without being with them? How can I possibly go another minute without hearing from them?

**I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you;  
I will say to the north, "Give them up," and to the south, "Do not withhold;"**

Not only are those who are ripped apart from exile or excommunication or war to be restored, but all God's children scattered all over the earth will be restored. **"For they will come from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, to sit at table with me in the Kingdom of Heaven."** (Luke 13:29) How glorious, but how can it be?

How can it be? **“Do not fear, for I am with you,” says the Lord. Because you are precious in my sight. You are honored. You are loved. I, God, have redeemed you, I have called you by name- I created you for my glory, I, God, formed and made you- you are mine!”**

But wait, what about the spiritually blind and deaf? What about those religious societies that have deemed people too far gone?

Isaiah’s prophecy from God continues to include God’s invitation to the unthinkable... **“Bring forth those who are blind... and those who are deaf”**... I will make it so they, all those who are blind, see my glory over all the other idols and, all those who are deaf, hear my voice over all the other gods... and all my children will know my “glory!”

How can it be? God’s power and God love.

God’s power and God’s love can do marvelous and majestic things; things far beyond our capacity to imagine or dream or think possible. When we get to a point of thinking “no way”, God says “this way.” When we get to a point of thinking “no more”, God says “one more.” When we get to a point of thinking “no how”, God says “here is how.”

God’s love for God’s people, you and me, is such a strong, motivational force that there is no limit to the power God is able or willing to enact on our behalf.

How does it come to be for us? Faith. We must believe in God. We must relentlessly lean on God and pursue God and trust God. In Psalm 29, which we will read together in a few moments as an Affirmation of Faith, the psalmist performs a glorious crescendo. “Ascribe to the Lord” repeats in the opening three times. Seven times “the voice of the Lord” thunders forth and declares God’s power. Why? So that in God’s temple all will cry, “Glory!”