

## **Awe at Work at Work**

What fills you with awe? What makes you awe struck? I'm almost afraid to answer these questions since I think they reveal much about what I value and thus who I am. Even more challenging is the questions, "What do you do with your awe? How does it affect you?"

For the record, at this stage of my life, my first, quick response is sunsets, those flaming, painted sky moments toward day's end as well as those final twinkles of light as darkness takes over the sky. Reflecting on the first questions above I recognize that there have been many moments of awe in my life. At the time of my marriage there was awe at realizing the commitment my parents had lived out and were continuing to live out in raising their many children. At the birth of my children, there was awe in the total dependence of the newborn and at their growth in knowledge and abilities as they strove to master their bodies and their environment. As a teacher there was awe in the moments when my students "got it" and glowed with excitement at their accomplishments. As a traveler there were and are numerous moments of awe in viewing sights of the majesty of nature in woods, forests, deserts, mountain ranges, and valleys—so many awe inspiring sights. There are also moments of awe in viewing great works of art in museums and of construction over the centuries throughout the world.

Pondering the second set of questions led me to a different view of awe. Awe can be just an emotion, a sense of wonderment at some occurrence or thing. But how can it be a faith-based value, too? I think Paul Pearsall (*Awe: The Delights and Dangers of Our Eleventh Emotion*) offers a way. Taken only as an emotion, awe stays within us as we are; it does not change us. When we allow the emotion to open ourselves up, to change us, to move us from our current imperfect state toward perfection, then it is a value.

Opening up to the awe of the newborn deepened, gave fuller meaning to, altruistic love in my life. Seeing the joy in students' "ah-ha" moments moved me to work toward improving my performance as a teacher. Viewing the work of nature, from the Hubble telescope pictures to the vegetables and flowers in my garden, has brought home to me how much I need to cooperate with God and others in all that I seek to do.

Practicing awe at work does not mean looking for the extremely striking moments like magnificent sunsets or artistic masterpieces of the ages. Rather it can be found in "sensitivity to the subtle," as Pearsall puts it. It takes humility to recognize the superior work that someone else has done, to be in awe of it, and to strive to learn or be motivated by it to do our own work better. It takes humility and gratitude to recognize a loving attitude toward people in another and to allow ourselves to be in awe and to be inspired by that awe to grow in that direction, also.

"Awesome" may have become a trite word in the 90's but being awed is not trite. Looking for and finding the good in others never wears out, particularly when we are humble enough to acknowledge we can learn from them. When we search for the awesome in others with an openness toward transforming ourselves, we, too, become awesome.

## **AWE — A Faith Based Value at Work**

1. What does applying the faith-based value of awe in your workplace mean to you? What do you think it would mean to those with whom you work? How does its meaning change for your different workplaces, for example, home or where you volunteer?
2. Why is it important to gain an understanding of awe in the workplace and how to apply that understanding?
3. How do/could you apply the concept of awe in your workplace(s)?
4. What would happen in your workplace if you took and actively applied the value of faith-based awe in your workplace(s)? How would the workplace sound different? Look different? Feel different?
5. What first step are you willing to take this week?