

I stand amazed in the presence
Of Jesus the Nazarene,
And wonder how He could love me,
A sinner, condemned, unclean.

Charles H. Gabriel

I STAND
Amazed

Words, today, have been sapped of much of their primal substance and energy. Only one example need be cited to make the point.

To wit, “awesome.” Is there any concept or word-picture less awesome than the current use of the word “awesome”? With what word shall we describe a powerful experience such as standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon, or at the foot of the Grand Tetons, when “awesome” is the word of choice to describe a teenager’s favorite tune or movie?

Words are supposed to mean something, they are supposed to have clarity and purpose. No matter our language, the words we use to make a point are to have specificity, value. Sadly, today, more often than not the opposite is true. Words are bandied about even in polite society with the careless disregard of a used car salesman trying to unload a rusted ‘57 Chevy. They have been rendered meaningless and flat, cheap—even tawdry.

There are times when our choice of words is sincere and well-considered, but evolves innocently into misuse, or blunted accuracy. Take, for example, our response to God answering prayer.



It is not uncommon for the typical believer to register one form or another of surprise when God answers a specific prayer in the affirmative. The respondent's subsequent report to a friend might go something like this: "Yes, I prayed that God would bring my husband back to me—and the very next day, He did! Isn't it *amazing?*"

The more mature friend might point out—quite accurately—that she should not be so surprised that God answered her prayer as He did. After all, doesn't the psalmist say,

I sought the Lord, and He answered me,
And delivered me from all my fears.

Psalm 34:4

and didn't Jesus Himself say,

"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

John 15:7

It is true that we should not be surprised ("Isn't it amazing!") when the Lord does what He said He would. The venerable believer understands

that surprise is a hallmark of shallow faith. We are, instead, to take God at His word; that is what it means to be a “believer.” Our God is an attentive sovereign who cares about the well-being of His people. We believe that He is, and that’s that.

Therefore the Lord longs to be gracious to you,
And therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you.
For the Lord is a God of justice;
How blessed are all those who long for Him.
O people in Zion, inhabitant in Jerusalem, you will weep no longer.
He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you.

Isaiah 30:18-19



Humans, however, have the annoying habit of taking a good thing too far. When we so thoroughly inculcate the idea that we should not be surprised when God behaves in a manner true to His character, we run the risk of losing, as A. W. Tozer describes it, “the ‘Oh!’ from our hearts.”

When I am in need, and I present that need before the throne, I should not be surprised, taken aback, befuddled, or shocked when the Lord answers my entreaty with a pleasant response. After all, He is just being God. When

a man kisses his wife good morning, he is not shocked when she kisses him back. When we subscribe to a newspaper or magazine, we are not surprised when they arrive on our doorstep or in our mailbox. All these responses are perfectly natural, and it would be rather odd if a recipient of any of them exclaimed, "Isn't it amazing!"

Still, when we become too blasé about God's favorable response to our situation, we are perilously close to *expecting* it. Without question, God hears and answers every prayer; but we should never become so unimpressed by His response that we imagine we have the right to specify it in our prayers. After all, He is God—and we are not. It is presumption in the extreme to imagine that we can tell God how and when to answer our prayer.

There is, in the Christian prayer life, a more healthy and righteous form of "amazement." The believer should never lose the sense of amazement over God's willingness to condescend to our needs. Already, at the cross, He did more than we can ever deserve. The gift of Christ's sacrificial love is light years beyond anything for which we might have hoped. If, after nailing Jesus to the tree for our sins, God the Father had announced, "All right, I've done my part: I've arranged for your salvation and eternal life in heaven; now, until you die, you're on your own," then we could not have expected more.

The salvation found at the cross was already far more than we deserved. But our heavenly Father went far beyond the cross, promising always to be near to us, helping us along the way, listening to our needs, and answering our call for His help.

We should never be surprised when God fulfills His promise, but— isn't it amazing that He does!