



OUR AWESOME GOD

Willesborough Baptist Church
Small Group Study Notes - Studies 1-6
September to November 2011

OUR AWESOME GOD

STUDY 1: AWESOME IN CREATION.

It is as we share in this brief study series on God that we will soon discover that there could be a whole series for each week's subject! ! It is going to be really difficult to do justice to these great and crucial themes. I hope though, that even with such limitations, we would be able to grow in our knowledge and understanding of God as we pursue these grand biblical themes.

A useful prayer at the beginning of this series is the one that Moses prays in Exodus 33:13 ***"If you are pleased with me teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favour with you."***

Take some time within your group to **CELEBRATE CREATION**. It might be by sharing some photographs of the wonders of creation, taking a passage of scripture like Psalm 8 or Psalm 19 that affirms the delight in our omnipotent Creator.

- Jesus said (Matt 6:28) *'Consider the lilies of the field'*. What do you find in life that causes you to marvel at the majesty of creation?

Play the DVD

- Why do you think it is important that we celebrate creation?
- In what ways can our worship be enhanced and God further glorified through the worship expressed by creation itself (Ps 148), let alone humankind in its acknowledgement of the Creator?
- Take a verse like Isaiah 40:26. What is declared about God as Creator?

Alan in the DVD took the first five words of Genesis 1 ***IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED.***

Alan indicated that these five words are the most important words that give sense and meaning to the world in which we are living.

Martin Luther described this opening statement to scripture as *'certainly the foundation of the whole of Scripture.'*

- Why do you think that these words are so important?

There will not be time to look in depth at every point that is raised in the DVD

but pick out several that really help you to have a greater appreciation of our awesome Creator.

In the beginning GOD created.

We need to realise that the creative power of God indicates that God is **PERSONAL**. It is wonderfully assuring to know that a personal God is at the heart of the universe. This is the God of relationship and therefore such a truth imparts the understanding that life is not without purpose or meaning. Genesis 1 is not about impersonal laws of the universe but the infinite personal God who is great in his faithfulness, love, grace, wisdom and power. We are personal beings made in the image of God.

- How do you think we can express this value of a personal Creator? For instance - what about the value of saying 'grace' before a meal and the recognition that we are dependent not only on producers but the Creator.

There is the other aspect that Alan mentioned of God being **PLURAL**. Here in the first sentence of the Bible we have a plural noun and a singular verb – that may be grammatically wrong but gloriously correct theologically!

God – in overall supervision.

Spirit – moving over the face of the waters (Gen 1:2)...the Spirit who gives life to all things.

Son – active within creation, John 1:1, Col 1:16.

Note how there is the celebration in Isaiah 6:3 with the three fold affirmation of our holy God. ***'Holy holy holy Lord God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory.'***

- Dig a little into Col 1:16. What does this verse declare about creation and the Creator?
- God is not just present in creation - he sustains it. He is the cohesive power that glues everything together. How do we understand the work of Jesus in this area? How does this help you as you wake up to a new day?

In the BEGINNING God created.

We are taken to the edge of eternity in this opening statement. Before there was space, time and all that is appreciated in the created order – there is God who is **ETERNAL** and **UNCREATED**.

- How would you try to explain the fact that God is eternal to an un-churched person?
- In Acts 17:24-28 Paul is talking to the Athenians and he endeavours to bridge the communication gap through talking about creation - ***the God who made the world and everything in it...in Him we live and move and have our being.*** Does this guide us as we communicate the Good News of Jesus?

In the beginning God **CREATED**.

God created ***out of nothing*** is a particular Christian understanding of God unlike many of the other religions in the world. It is a truth that further underlines our awareness of God as **POWERFUL** and **PURPOSEFUL**.

- When we hear how God spoke and creation came into being, what does this indicate to us concerning the power of God today to speak words that are astonishing in their power and purpose?
- In what way does Faith play a crucial role in our celebration of creation? Have a look at Hebrews 11:3.
- Recently **Stephen Hawking** released his book *The Grand Design* in which he asserts that the laws of physics were behind the creation of the universe and not God. How do you explain to someone who quotes someone like Hawking that we cannot do away with God?

‘In the beginning God created’- Five words that are not simply a grand poetic statement but the powerful affirmation of our awesome Creator God and it is this that makes sense of this world.

- Share some of the ways in which we can enjoy creation. 1 Tim 4:4 says that *‘everything God created is good.....received with thanksgiving.’*

As you close your group meeting - return to the sense of wonder and appreciation for all that God is as Creator and take a few moments to worship.

Revelation 4:11 *"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."*

2. AWESOME IN HOLINESS

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the Church. Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, "What comes into your mind when you think about God?" we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man. Were we able to know exactly what our most influential religious leaders think of God today, we might be able with some precision to foretell where the Church will stand tomorrow.

A god begotten in the shadows of a fallen heart will quite naturally be no true likeness of the true God. Surely this must be a serious affront to the Most High God before whom cherubim and seraphim continually do cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth." Let us beware lest we in our pride accept the erroneous notion that idolatry consists only in kneeling before visible objects of adoration, and that civilized peoples are therefore free from it. The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him. Perverted notions about God soon rot the religion in which they appear. So necessary to the Church is a lofty concept of God that when that concept in any measure declines, the Church with her worship and her moral standards declines along with it. The first step down for any church is taken when it surrenders its high opinion of God.

Before the Christian Church goes into eclipse anywhere there must first be a corrupting of her simply basic theology. She simply gets a wrong answer to the question, "What is God like?" and goes on from there. The heaviest obligation lying upon the Church today is to purify and elevate her concept of God until it is once more worthy of Him – and of her.

From "The Knowledge of the Holy" by A. W. Tozer

DISCUSS In your Group, answer Tozer's question, "What comes into your mind when you think about God?" "What is God like?"

READ Isaiah chapter 6 v 1 – 8

Revelation chapter 1 v 10 – 20

Luke chapter 9 v 28 – 36

Play the DVD

1. How would you define “Holiness”? What does the word Holiness mean to you - is it something distant and remote from your normal life; do you feel that it is an attribute that is unobtainable as far as us mere mortals are concerned? Is Holiness simply a quality of Deity and has no place in the world as we know it?
2. Has any of your group had an experience of the Holiness of Jesus? Spend some time telling each other of any personal incident you may have had. How difficult do you think it would be to slip back into normal life after such a happening?
3. At His transfiguration Jesus’ visage changed; He became filled with light. Can you recall anyone else who has had this happen to them? Can you name anyone, within the Bible or otherwise, whose face has glowed with light?
4. The disciples found it very difficult to “come back down to earth” after their mountain top experience. Yet it was essential that they return to normal as quickly as possible. Moses and Elijah were not so reticent; they spoke with Jesus about His “exodus” (the word used in the original). They understood that Christ and His disciples mustn’t stay on the mountain top, and that, without the humiliation and sacrifice of the cross down in the valley, God’s plan of redemption for the whole of mankind could not be completed. We too need to accept that the lives we live here and now are an essential part of this overall plan. We will witness, and live eternally in, the glory of God’s holiness when we go to be with Him. In the meantime we live in the valley with just glimpses of that Holiness. Discuss this concept within your group.
5. In the DVD, Mavis said, *“The way to heaven – and Holiness – is not via the mountain top but through the valley, along a winding road to another hill, where a cross awaits. Glorious mountain top experiences are there to give strength for all that lies ahead. The path to Holiness is the daily toil, the faithful service and the self-sacrificing love played out here on earth.”* Does recognising this fact help us as we learn to live lives of self-sacrificing love ourselves while here on earth?
6. Nothing that Jesus ever did or said was intended to cause any kind of separation between God and us. His life, His words, all His actions were lived out to bring us ever closer to God. It, therefore, follows that even the Holiness of His transfiguration, and the amazing visions that Isaiah and John had, were given to help us get closer to God. (Incidentally Isaiah’s vision in chapter 6 could be said to be of Jesus, see John 12 v 37 - 41!) Do we need to reassess our thinking about these episodes in order to understand the “drawing power” that they possess? How have you viewed these Scripture passages in the past?
7. In the DVD Mavis said, *“Didn’t John teach that ‘when we see Him we shall be like*

Him? (1 John chapter 3 v 2), and that's the same John that witnessed His transfiguration and also saw Him in glory in the Book of Revelation. In old age, an ordinary earthly John recognised that the Holiness of Jesus was never intended to separate us from Him. Allowing earthly human beings to witness such holiness was never supposed to scare us off; the vision was to draw us on; to enable people like you and me to face whatever the world throws at us and to encourage us to consider the pain and toil of taking up our cross and following Him as nothing compared to the glory that He has set before us."

Does knowing that "When we see Him, we shall be like Him" help you to really be prepared to "take up your cross and follow Him"? And, what does "taking up your cross" mean to you? Is it: -

1. Being prepared to die for Christ?
2. Living a life of drudgery and despair?
3. Simply accepting the life God has given you, and living it – with Holy Spirit help – in the best way you can?
4. Daily committing all you are and all you have into Jesus' care and living as you believe He would want you to?

Or would you describe it as something other than any of these?

FOR YOUR PERSONAL QUIET TIME

1. Ask Jesus to give you some small understanding of His Holiness. Spend time reading the Scriptures through again, and meditating on them. Begin to really recognise what an amazing thing it was for the Son of God to leave all His power and glory, to come to earth and to die so humiliatingly – and all for you! We can never truly comprehend all of this wonderful mystery, but the more you meditate and think about it the more you will appreciate your Lord.
2. Then try to accept that some, just some, of that glory is waiting for you when you see Him face to face! And that's another amazing mystery! Make a point of telling yourself each morning that, "When I see Him, then I shall be like Him", and begin to allow the glorious Holiness of your God to draw you daily closer to the human being that He has always intended you should be. Allow His Holiness to become the magnet that calls you ever Christ-ward.
3. May I suggest that you try to get hold of a copy of the book (an excerpt of which is at the head of the study) "The Knowledge of the Holy" by A. W. Tozer. ISBN 0 903843 45 Once you really get to know the works of Tozer you will probably want to read them all. Great stuff!!

3: AWESOME IN FAITHFULNESS

The words of a hymn written by George Matheson start like this:

O Love that wilt not let me go
I rest my weary soul in Thee
I give Thee back the life I owe
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be

A love that will not let us go, as God's people, is a faithful love of the God of faithfulness.

No wonder the **Psalmist** cried

*"I will sing of the Lord's great love forever
with my mouth I will make YOUR FAITHFULNESS known through
all generations
I will declare that your love stands firm forever
That you ESTABLISHED YOUR FAITHFULNESS IN HEAVEN ITSELF"*

There is always more to discover of the nature of the amazing God we worship and serve and His faithfulness is no exception. There are those moments, are there not, when we see a truth afresh and we are for a while almost stunned as we think 'can this be true?'. We must never stop discovering as the Holy Spirit seeks to draw us closer and show us more of the beauty of the depths of the nature of God who has become our Father in heaven. The more we learn the more we love Him, the more we are caused to enjoy (yes, that's not a typing error), Enjoy Him.

His Faithfulness is an amazing thing, is it not?

No wonder T. O Chisholm wrote:

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father
There is no shadow of turning with Thee
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness Lord unto me.

His constant faithfulness to us pours out into blessings in our lives because He loves us so much.

He pledged on the honour of His Name and His faithfulness that He would send a Saviour to deliver us from sin and death and bring us to glory. In the Garden of Eden the promise came and in the Garden of Gethsemane we see the Faithful Son of God surrender to the Father's will and faithfully go to the cross for us.

Our heavenly Father has pledged Himself to provide all we need for life and godliness through the Lord Jesus Christ and to never leave us nor forsake us. God's faithfulness will see this through to the end. No opt out clauses in God's word here.

The Apostle John writes that " if we are faithless He REMAINS FAITHFUL for HE CANNOT DENY HIMSELF". His nature is FAITHFULNESS and God cannot be anything else but faithful. How AWESOME is that!!!! HE will never be anything else but faithful.

He has proved it in the past. He is the same today and forever.

His faithfulness is renowned on earth

His faithfulness is revered in heaven

His faithfulness is the fear and dread of the devil, and the devil and all hell's resources cannot do anything about it. Great, isn't it!!!!

As we think about God's awesome faithfulness and how that affects our daily lives may the Holy Spirit give us another glimpse and make it real to us.

Play the DVD

Questions for thought and discussion.

1. God revealed to Moses in Exodus 34 v36 some aspects of His nature and one of those was God's faithfulness. He revealed this so that they and we could know Him better.
Is it possible to know about His faithfulness but miss out knowing it in a personal way? If so why do you think this happens? How can it be remedied?
2. In 2 Peter 1 v 3-4 we are told that He has given " great and precious promises that we may participate in the Divine nature and escape from the corruption that is in the world".
He gives promises that are backed by His faithfulness to fulfil them. Do we find it hard to take hold of these promises? If so why do you think we find it hard - is it that we doubt His faithfulness sometimes or is it something else?
3. Read Hebrews 11 v11-12.
It says in Heb 11 v 11 of Abraham that despite the obstacles "he considered the Lord faithful Who had promised"
What are the biggest kind of obstacles in our lives today, if any, that can hold us back from trusting in God's faithfulness...or is it not like that at all?
4. What difference do you think it might make if we were able to start each day with asserting and believing the words of Ecclesiastes 3 v 22b-23?
5. Read Hebrews 10 v19-24
Many Christians pass through times of struggle and doubt. How can God's faithfulness help us?
6. What aspect of God's faithfulness surprises, inspires or has helped you?
Read the benediction in 1 Thessalonians 5: 23-24 as a blessing to others and yourself, especially verse 24.

4. AWESOME IN LOVE

The great proclamation that **'God is love'** comes from the apostle who was known as the 'Apostle of love'. He spoke extensively about how 'God is love'. It is important that we do not get such a statement confused with another statement that some people make that 'Love is God'. This is not what he is stating, for love can never be a substitute for God. It is because we know that God is love and experience his love in our lives that we can express love to God and to one another. The theologian Emil Brunner spoke of the 'God is love' phrase as being the 'most daring statement that there has ever been in human language.'

Use John's words in **1 John 4:7-21** as an opening celebration of God's awesome love.

The attribute of love is the essential revelation that we have of divine nature. There are many different angles that we could take regarding the love of God but in focusing on Hosea we are particularly looking at **God the greatest lover**. God is a giving God and this attribute of love reflects the activity of God's involvement as He gives himself in selfless ways to others.

As we highlight the experience of Hosea, one of the Old Testament prophets, we will discover that he was one who particularly learned through his own personal experience the nature of God as the divine lover.

The preacher theologian **Peter Lewis** says, 'In Hosea's prophecy and Hosea's pain we are going to discover the secret heart of God; his innermost feelings, his profound sorrow and his sovereign grace. Not until the Word becomes flesh will God appear so tender and so vulnerable as in the book of Hosea.'

Play the DVD

God entered into a covenant relationship with Israel. This commitment was sealed at Mount Sinai where there was the giving of the Ten Commandments. God wanted the people to be his faithful lovers. The history of Israel is replete with numerous occasions when as a people they were unfaithful in their marriage to Yahweh.

- Try to recall a couple of incidents recorded in the Bible of Israel being unfaithful to God? What were the implications?

Prophets had a huge responsibility to convey the Word of God to the people of God. There were times when they had to come with a tough message. There was frequently the call for the people to repent and return to God. It was in Hosea's life that God decided to grant him a deeper understanding of his heart that reaches out to his people - the heart of a lover.

- Why do you think God decided to give Hosea a taste of a broken heart? In what way would the experience ultimately make Hosea a more effective communicator as a prophet?

Hosea is called to marry Gomer (1:2-3).

- What do you make of God calling Hosea to *'go take to yourself an adulterous wife...'*?

As Alan indicated there is a divided understanding among Bible scholars regarding whether Gomer was already an adulterous woman when he married her. Or was it a case that she eventually became one when she was married?

Children are born to Gomer and this is where the question of unfaithfulness is highlighted in the name **Jezreel** which means 'God scatters' and perhaps an indication of a rebellious spirit; then there is **Lo-Ruhamah** meaning 'not pitied' and a possible indication that he did not receive love or affection from his mother who may have returned to her old ways. The third child is named **Lo Ammi** meaning 'you are not my people' and particularly this child's name highlights Hosea's question over the paternity of the child.

In many ways the names of the children were prophetic names that indicated how God felt towards Israel.

Hosea was discovering the broken heart of God in the powerful emotions that are shared with him as a prophet who was to feel something of what God feels.

The scene continues of personal betrayal as Gomer leaves the marital home.

There is the promise of **restoration**. Again the heart of God reaching out to a people that he longs would return to a relationship of integrity and faithfulness.

- Note the message of hope in 2:14-15. In what way does God spell out a new way forward through several images historically from Israel's history that are mentioned?

It is as we move into Ch 3 that Hosea is called to reach out to Gomer and love her again.

- How do you think Hosea coped with being a prophet and going down to the market place and buying back his wife? It must have been very humiliating for him to obey God in this way, let alone make his action real.

The greatest lover is involved in redeeming love, restoring love, reviving love.

- Alan mentioned the pathos of words expressed in 11:1-8 & 14:4 - read them again and feel the strength of emotion that pours out from these words of hope.

Let's move into the New Testament where we are encouraged to realise the dimensions of God's love as, for instance, expressed in **Ephesians 3:18-19**.

Love is understood by action, that love is active. This is where we come to the cross as the highest demonstration of God's love. Jesus came and laid his life down in order that he would bear the penalty for our own sinful disobedience. It is the door of hope for our forgiveness and reconciliation to a holy and righteous heavenly Father.

Billy Graham once put it like this 'Don't make the mistake of thinking because God is love everything is going to be sweet, beautiful and happy, and that no-one will be punished for his sins. God's holiness demands that all sin must be punished, but God's love provided the cross of Jesus by which man can have forgiveness and cleansing.'

To put it in the words of Paul - ***'God commends his love towards us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.'***

5: AWESOME IN COMMITMENT

INTRODUCTION

When we sing the worship song “Our God is an Awesome God” we actually miss out all the verses. Not many people know that. It’s one of those songs where people have really connected with the chorus, but the verses didn’t quite make it. The first verse starts like this:

When he rolls up his sleeves he ain't just putting on the ritz,
There's thunder in his footsteps and lightning in his fists.

Mmm ... perhaps not everybody’s first choice of rhyming couplet, and possibly not the best for congregational singing, but that apart ... the verses paint a great picture of some of the aspects of the awesomeness of God. Sadly, nothing about his awesomeness in commitment, but no matter - I thought I would mention it anyway.

COMMITMENT

Take some time as a group to discuss your ideas on the word “commitment”. There are several meanings of the word, but talk about it in the sense of “making a commitment to” something or someone. What are some of the biggest commitments you have made? How might the idea of making a commitment apply to God?

In our study, we’re going to learn about how big God’s sense of commitment really is – in fact, we’ll discover he’s just as awesome in this as he is in the many other aspects we’ve covered in this series.

Now’s the time to have a look at the DVD.

(You might also like to put it in the player and watch it.)

THE AWESOME COMMITMENT OF GOD THE FATHER

God is a God of sure and certain promises. He makes amazing statements in his word, and he delivers on them. His dialogue with Abram (Abraham) shows us how absolutely committed he is to the things he says.

Read Genesis 15: 1-18.

- Look again at the awesome promises of God to Abram in verse 5 (about his descendants), verse 7 (about his dwelling place), and verse 15 (about his death).
- Look again at verse 8. Abram asks God, “How can I know you mean what you say?”
- Look again at verse 18. God answered Abram’s question by making a covenant – tangibly demonstrating the awesome commitment he made to keeping his promises.

Covenant: A contract or agreement between two parties. In the Old Testament the word meant a "cutting", referring to the cutting or dividing of animals into two parts and the contracting parties passing between them. The symbolism was “May this cutting up happen to me if I fail to keep the commitment I am entering into.” (See Jeremiah 34: 18-20)

- In verses 12-16 God makes bold statements about the future of Abram’s descendants, the people of Israel. How were these fulfilled? (see Genesis 47:27; Exodus 1: 1-14)
- God confirmed all the promises he had made to Abram by entering into the covenant ceremony himself (verses 17-18).
 - ◇ What was the “smoking brazier and blazing torch” (v17)?
 - ◇ Think for a moment about how amazing it is that God himself should demonstrate his commitment in this way.
 - ◇ Abram was in a deep sleep at the time, in thick and dreadful darkness (v12). Why was the covenant only one sided?
 - ◇ What encouragement is there in this for us when we are experiencing times of darkness?

There are many Old Testament examples of the covenant-keeping nature of God. God is committed not just to his word but to his people. See his promise to Noah (Genesis 9: 8-17), to Abraham (Genesis 17: 1-14), and to Moses at Sinai (Exodus 34: 27-28).

God is a promise-keeping God. He will fulfil everything he has committed to, absolutely and without fail. Read Hebrews 10:23; 2 Peter 1: 3-4.

- Share with the group some of the promises of God that are particularly encouraging to you, and say why.

THE AWESOME COMMITMENT OF GOD THE SON

As with God the Father, Jesus is entirely committed to fulfilling every promise he makes. And also like his Father, he is entirely committed to the people he makes those promises to.

The great thing is though, because of his human dimension, he doesn't need to convey his commitment in symbolic manifestations like that to Abram. Instead we have his whole life set before us, which visibly shows us exactly who and what he is committed to – and the extent of his commitment.

We'll take time to look at just one commitment he made - his primary goal, to secure salvation for each of us by absolute obedience to his Father's will.

Discuss the following verses:

- Philippians 2: 5-8 Jesus' obedience, sacrifice and commitment started long before his coming into the world.
- Luke 22: 39-44 If ever there was a time for giving up, this was it.
- Matthew 26: 49-54 Rather than face arrest, Jesus could have ended it there.
- Luke 23: 35-39 Taunts to show his power and save himself would have been easy to give in to.
- Hebrews 12:2 He kept going. What was the joy that Jesus had before him? (see also Isaiah 53: 11-12)
- Romans 8: 38-39 This is the end result of all that he achieved – his ongoing eternal commitment to us, no matter what.

Jesus displayed utter and absolute commitment to what he had come to do. The way of the cross was an awful path to tread, but the driver was obedience to his Father's will

and the prospect of securing eternal salvation for a body of believers that would become his Bride.

- Share with the group what it means to you that Jesus never gave up.
- What does his commitment in securing our salvation tell us about his commitment to us even now? How do we experience that practically today?
- What does it tell us about the promises he has made for the future? List some of them. What are you looking to Jesus to fulfil for you?

THE AWESOME COMMITMENT OF GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

Not to be left out, God the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives today in a way that will never ever leave us abandoned, helpless, alone - no matter what our situation. For some of us who know ourselves only too well, sticking with us is in itself a major commitment.

When he had fully completed his work down here, Jesus went back to his Father but with the promise to his followers that “Surely I will be with you always, even to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

He showed his commitment to that by not abandoning us as orphans, but sending his Spirit to not just be with us but to be in us – forever.

Discuss the following verses:

- John 14: 16-18 The Holy Spirit is the ongoing sign of Jesus’ commitment to each of us.
- John 16: 13-14 The Spirit of God shows us the truth of God and reminds us of the things of Christ. How does he do that?
- 2 Corinthians 1: 20-22 A great picture of the Trinity at work: all God’s promises are Yes in Christ, and they are guaranteed by the Spirit in our hearts. Talk about the Spirit as God’s deposit – his engagement ring, declaring his eternal commitment to us.

HAVE WE CAUGHT A GLIMPSE YET?

In a sense, this study has been a little theoretical. We've looked at the awesome commitment of God the Father to his promises, God the Son to his life's mission and God the Spirit to the ongoing support of believers this side of Heaven. These are important truths to study and know and understand – but the key to really grasping the awesomeness of God's commitment is to realise that all these things are just demonstrations of one vital underlying fact: **GOD'S AWESOME COMMITMENT TO US!**

I'll admit to struggling to convey the awesomeness of that in the format of a DVD study. For me, it's something that is easier to preach than to write. To make sure we don't miss the major truth in all of this, can I ask you – no matter how much or little of the study you complete – to read the following text word for word, and pray its message into your hearts and lives.

Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalm 23:6 NLT)

The word 'pursue' means to search for eagerly, to track down, to hunt for someone with relentless abandon. The word has an intensity and passion. It is the same word used when a predator hunts its prey. It is not a half-hearted effort, but has boundless energy and conviction behind the pursuit.

Do you know what relentlessly pursues us and chases after us with a fathomless passion? God's goodness and his unfailing love! Think about that for a moment and it will take your breath away. It's so awesome and mind-boggling that every single day, no matter where we are, God Almighty with boundless energy and conviction runs after us and tracks us down with his abundant goodness and faithful love. God wants you to understand and experience his goodness and love every day of your life.

The word translated 'unfailing love' is the Hebrew word 'chesed', which is so full of meaning that no single English word can capture it. Its essence is a robust love that never fades or falters; this love is completely reliable and constant; this love is strong and steadfast. It is an eternal and committed devotion. It is unfailing and absolutely faithful. It is a committed love that only exists in a covenant relationship. This covenant is God's solemn oath and unbreakable commitment; his fierce loyalty and his undying pledge to you as his child, every second of the day. It is the highest and most committed relationship possible. This covenant represents an unqualified total commitment of God to us as his children - unconditionally, completely and eternally.

You can be absolutely assured that God's covenant unfailing love, mercy, kindness, loyalty and grace will always relentlessly pursue and chase after you all the days of your life. You cannot hide from it. You cannot outrun it. You cannot avoid it. It will never leave or forsake you. It will not abandon you. When you are troubled, down or discouraged his amazing love, grace and goodness are right there to help, encourage, comfort and support. No person, no economic policy, no world order, no satanic power, no troubling or overwhelming circumstance can separate you from God's goodness and unfailing love. This is God's solemn promise and unbreakable commitment to his children.

From "The Magnificent Goodness of God and How It Will Transform Your Life" by Tim Rowe (abridged)

6. AWESOME IN SOVEREIGNTY

The BBC reported - on the 2 August 2010. Two-and-a-half miles below the surface of the Arctic's frozen waters a strange ritual is taking place. A Russian flag is planted on the seabed. This event was, unsurprisingly, given extensive coverage on Russian television and hailed as hugely significant. The flag ceremony was seen in Moscow as a way of furthering their claim to an enormous swathe of territory in the Arctic. The 'flag planting' involved a nuclear powered icebreaker, a research vessel and two mini submarines. Other nations like Canada mocked the action and were outraged by the claim.

Why should this flag (made of titanium) provoke such an outrage? The answer simply put is 'sovereignty'!

Sovereignty is a word that is used in many different contexts but we are looking at **divine sovereignty**, not national sovereignty. God is the one who reigns over all the nations of the world no matter what claims they may make.

In the **DVD** we are going to hear about Daniel and the pagan King, Nebuchadnezzar, who had such an experience of encountering God that he made a proclamation regarding divine sovereignty.

Play the DVD

Alan introduced us to the experience of **Daniel** who had been taken from Jerusalem as a teenager and exiled as a captive by the conquering super-power of Babylon. He ended up 700 miles away and was never to return to the city of his birth.

It is remarkable how God was able to use Daniel from his teenage years onwards. There was remarkable consistency throughout his life and the powerful quality of integrity stood the test of time.

By the time we come to **Daniel ch 4**, Daniel already has a track record of being in touch with the living God who is sovereign over all. God was sovereign even when his life was turned upside down when he was exiled to Babylon.

- We are introduced to him as a teenager in Ch 1 and then, in Ch 6, the Persians have taken over as the power in the land and Daniel is still

serving when he is over 90 years of age.

What do you think enabled Daniel to live with such consistency over so many years?

In 4:2-3 there is **THE DECREE**. *'It is my pleasure to tell you....His kingdom is an eternal kingdom and his dominion endures from generation to generation...'*

- Imagine if such a decree was issued today. In many ways the response today in the 21st century would be little different from the 5th century BC.
- Note the emphasis (v.34-37) on HIS...dominion, kingdom, will, works and ways.

Nebuchadnezzar is calling his subjects to worship the Most High God declaring his greatness, majesty, eternal kingdom and dominion. The King is declaring that there is a greater king and greater kingdom than his reign and his empire. God is in charge of the whole earth and that includes Babylon.

The usual action of Nebuchadnezzar would be to strut across his palace balcony with its amazing views of all the building projects that had been constructed and were still being constructed saying *'Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty.'*

Nebuchadnezzar would regularly brag of his achievements, and undoubtedly they were significant.

- How does this contrast to the final statement that we have in the Lord's Prayer - *'Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory.'*?

THE DREAM - an unforgettable dream distressed the King. It was about a tree that was large and its spreading branches offered a sanctuary for many people and animals. Yet the tree is cut down and the stump is preserved for there was some measure of hope.

- Where does the hope come from for Nebuchadnezzar?
- How does he respond to the message of the prophet? In what way is Nebuchadnezzar's response no different to so many today?

- In what way do we see the sovereignty of God being expressed in the continuing narrative that declares how Nebuchadnezzar ignores God's warning and continues his old ways and refuses to change?
- When we think about the sovereignty of God - how are we going to apply it to our own lives?

There is a great doxology of the prophet in Romans 11:33 ***'Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgements and his paths beyond tracing out.'***

The challenge to us in this whole area of sovereignty is: who is in charge of our lives? So often when things go wrong we end up struggling with faith and it is generally because we do not have an adequate grasp of God - awesome in sovereignty.

There is huge mystery in this area of God's sovereignty. This is where we have to accept the truth of God's sovereignty by faith, trusting that in all things - he is the one who knows best and he does what is right.

Charles Swindoll - answers the question regarding what characteristics God must possess in order to be sovereign.

'Whoever is sovereign must have total, clear perspective. He must see the end from the beginning. He must have no match on earth or in heaven. He must entertain no fears, no ignorance, and have no needs. He must have no limitations and always know what is best. He must never make a mistake. He must possess the ability to bring everything to a purposeful conclusion and an ultimate goal. He must be invincible, immutable, infinite, and self-sufficient. His judgements must be unsearchable and His ways unfathomable. He must be able to create rather than invent, to direct rather than wish, to control rather than hope, to guide rather than guess, to fulfil rather than dream. Who qualifies? Certainly not you or me. Only God can fill this job description.'

Our Awesome God

The DVD introduction to the study series together with these study notes is brought to you by Mike Haywood, Mavis Gibbs, Alan Dinnie and Laurie Martin.

Study 1	Awesome in Creation	Alan
Study 2	Awesome in Holiness	Mavis
Study 3	Awesome in Faithfulness	Laurie
Study 4	Awesome in Love	Alan
Study 5	Awesome in Commitment	Mike
Study 6	Awesome in Sovereignty	Alan

The series is complemented by the Sunday Sermons that Alan will be preaching in a series on Isaiah 6

If you missed a particular Sunday you can always listen to the message or download the message from the Church website

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