Bringing AWEsome Back

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How frequently do we stop and recognise the beauty, the complexity or the mystery of something in our life?
Whether it's the weather or something in nature.
The complexity of science, joy of laughter with friends or wonder at story, song or myth.
Do you take a break in your days and recognise everything that surrounds you?

We are surrounded by so many incredible things -seen or unseen - every day, but we don't often spot it. Instead, we spot minor inconveniences, the problems, fears and dangers. So, as society feels like it gets faster and faster, our news feeds get scarier and scarier, and the daily routine feels more mundane and greyer in these rainy and dark months; we really need a focus - a reminder - to spot the beauty, complexity and mystery.
To feel in awe of something new.

It seems that for us (as youth workers) and for the young people we work with, the 24-hour news cycle is having a BIG impact on our mental health. And it makes sense.
- Social media makes it easier to get updates on ALL the news, ALL the time (bringing some GREAT positives but also a constant barrage of updates).
- The news seems to have taken a negative turn - with BBC monitoring reports plunging into a negative tone compared to news reported before 2000.
- And our brains are GOOD at spotting danger (even when it's not there)!

But I don't think the solution is to turn off the news, ignore the difficult conversations with our young people or to even stop social media use.
Instead, I think we need to shift focus, hold space for the sad and painful news while also looking out for the miraculous, beautiful things in the world around us.
Seeing the Light in everyone and the Spirit everywhere.

<u>It's because of all of this that I want to bring Awesome Back</u>
Not like some mid-00s alt kid who wants to feel cool or like a surfer, but to really dig into the meaning of the word and think about what makes something AWE-some.

So, how can we as youth workers for ourselves, and with the young people we work with, spot the Awesome.
Feel in awe of beauty or goodness or the Spirit around us?

<u>Well, I think step one is to notice the little things.</u>
Like Moses noticing the Burning Bush, Quakers listening for the nudge of the Spirit or the disciples trying to unpick the pieces of gold from Jesus' parables. How can we focus on the small positives, the small bits of beauty and love in the world around us?

Maybe by savouring a moment of peace before the day gets busy.
Spotting the art, architecture, graffiti and beauty in our area.
Noticing the little things that make us or someone else smile.
Or by reflecting on the ways, we felt God or experienced love in our day.

Let's focus on seeing how beautiful humans can be and celebrating the ways we can see the Spirit of God in the world around us.

<u>Next - we should spend time in Nature</u>

It may not be our favourite thing as it gets colder. But heading outside with our youth groups and spending time in nature can remind us of the cosmic beauty and complexity of the world we live in. It can bring a sense of awe, of power, as we reflect on the God that made this world and our call to care for the Creation!

So, whether it's climbing a mountain (or probably a big hill) with our youth groups, so we can stare at the view and how big that hill is.
Being surrounded by and focussing on the busyness of the nature near us.
Working as a youth group to care for our creation.
Or looking up at the stars as the nights come earlier.

Let's slow down and be impressed by the world around us. Be in Awe of the creation we are part of.

<u>Finally, seek good news and joy where you are</u>

The phrase Good News is nothing new to you Youth Pastors or Church Youth Workers - but remembering it's root, and thinking about what it means can help us here.
Good News comes from a Greek word (euangelion) and was a phrase used in wartime, and then in everyday life, to point out and share the good stories that were going on.

When the war was won and people's families were safe, messengers would bring 'good news' home. When good things happened in people's lives, they would share the 'good news' with those around them. And when we talk about the Good News of Jesus, we mean the message of Hope, Peace and Love that Jesus brought. So, this final idea of how to find Awe and Beauty around us, is to pay attention to, shout about and seek to bring Good News where you are.

This may be through small acts of kindness with your youth group.
Making space for someone to share about something they love.
Thanking the person who always seems to do the jobs no one notices.
Bringing joy and hope through shared meals, warmth and gifts.

Or through bringing joy, love and hope through conversation and action to our youth groups and those around us.

By doing these things we aren't ignoring the difficult news stories or sugarcoating the days that are difficult. We're remembering that there's beauty in the difficulty, spotting God at work in times where it feels God isn't moving and bringing a sense of Awe back into our lives.