



**FINDING GOD  
IN A GALAXY  
FAR, FAR AWAY**

A Spiritual Exploration of the Star Wars Saga

**TIMOTHY PAUL JONES**

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For my big sister, Shyre.  
Remember when I drew Luke Skywalker on your term paper  
*before* you turned it in?  
And when I chattered about *Star Wars* until your ears ached?  
This book is what I was trying to say then,  
but didn't know how until now.  
Thanks for listening.  
You lit up my life.

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# A Long Time Ago, Not Far from Here...

*A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...*

OPENING LINE OF EACH *STAR WARS* FILM

**T**his book's genesis can be traced to a drive-in theater in southern Missouri, nearly thirty years ago. I was only five years old when I took my first steps into the *Star Wars* galaxy, but I decided then and there that I would someday write about this epic space opera.

The early drafts were not promising—they consisted primarily of crayon and ink-pen portrayals of Luke Skywalker and Han Solo. These sketches appeared on pretty much any piece of paper I could find around the house, including my older sister's junior term paper.

In the years following, I became fluent in more sophisticated forms of communication—not quite six million, mind you, but I *did* learn how to pull a few books together. So as the release of *Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith* approached,

my longings to write a book on this subject were revived, along with my penchant for throwing a fit in the aisle of Wal-Mart when I'm not allowed to purchase my favorite action figure.

Special thanks to David Webb and the fine folk at Multnomah Publishers for their work on this manuscript. Thanks to my most magnificent friends Deby Nottingham and Laura Franklin for their comments on the early drafts of the book—each of you is quite clever, for a human being. Thanks also to the members of First Baptist Church of Rolling Hills who graciously granted me a flexible schedule to complete this book and who patiently listened to several of these chapters in the form of Bible studies and sermons.

*Finding God in a Galaxy Far, Far Away* was written at Panera Bread Company on Forty-first Street in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and at Mojo's Famous Bar-B-Q on Historic Route 66 in Catoosa, Oklahoma. Thanks to the staff at both restaurants for fueling this project with copious quantities of Asiago cheese bagels and barbecued hot links.

Finally, for their tireless patience while I worked on this book, my wife, Rayann, and daughter, Hannah, deserve more thanks than I can possibly express in a single manuscript. Like the sun and moon, the two of you fill my life with light every day and every night. You are the most precious gifts that God has given to me, and I stand in awe of the glory I see in you.

If it's been awhile since you watched the *Star Wars* movies, you may want to read the appendix, "A Whirlwind Guide to the *Star Wars* Saga," before proceeding. Otherwise, begin with chapter 1—and may the Force be with you!

*Timothy Paul Jones*



## Every Journey Has a First Step

*Every generation has a legend.*

*Every saga has a beginning.*

*Every journey has a first step.*

TRAILER FOR *STAR WARS: EPISODE I—THE PHANTOM MENACE*

*We have come from God... [so] inevitably the myths woven by us, though they contain error, reflect a splintered fragment of the true light, the eternal truth that is with God.*<sup>1</sup>

J. R. R. TOLKIEN

**A** sluggish breeze meanders down the northern footings of the Ozark Mountains, barely rustling the scrubby walnuts and stately pines. The wind whispers through the jagged rows of automobiles gathered in the graveled lot, but the occupants do not hear its voice. They are waiting for the time-between-the-times, for the mystical moment when the last shimmers of sunlight wither from the western sky. In that moment, the rhythmic stutter of the film projector behind them will begin, and the white panel before them—now nothing more than a towering wall of cracking wood and peeling white paint—will become their window into a larger world. Many of them already know the words that will herald the genesis of their journey.

*A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...*

No one has anticipated this moment with more zeal than a certain five-year-old boy, seated in the third row of vehicles. Well, perhaps “seated” isn’t quite the right word. The backseat of his parents’ Ford Pinto gave up on containing the boy’s ecstasy nearly an hour ago, quietly resigning itself to being prematurely frayed by a perpetually squiggling posterior. The Dr. Pepper—clashed in a cup in his hands—has not helped.

The boy is here to see a space adventure. Starfighters and battle stations, spaceships and blaster guns—these are the plot components that have compelled this child to plead with his parents for this moment. What he does not know is that he is about to experience more than a space opera; his perception of reality is about to undergo exponential expansion. For here, in this least likely of places, he will, for the first time, experience *awe*.

At last, twilight enshrouds the drive-in theater in shadows. Even through the tiny speaker that dangles above the Pinto’s dashboard, the movie’s initial fanfare heralds the advent of something extraordinary. It is John the Baptist bellowing in the Judean desert, Paul Revere plunging through the brick alleys of Boston, the Beatles cranking out the opening chords of “I Saw Her Standing There.” It is an announcement that the world is about to change.

The separation between sky and screen is no longer discernible. It is as if the stars from a galaxy far, far away have become the native stars of *this* sky, strewn across *this* horizon. The opening text is not projected upon a screen; it is flung upon the firmament.

The boy cannot read all of the words that crawl from the bottom of the screen and vanish into the distance. But he is aware that there is a vastness depicted here that he has never

known, a cosmic conflict beyond what he has ever imagined. And it is not far away; it is here, in this place.

For the first time, the boy is experiencing awe.

By the time the Imperial Star Destroyer roars over the roof of the little Pinto, hot on the trail of a Rebel blockade runner, the child is transfixed, seized by this sense of awe—so transfixed, in fact, that his cup of Dr. Pepper slips from his hands. The carpet of that 1977 Ford Pinto was probably never the same after that night.

But then again, neither was I.

Is “the Force” the same as God? No. Even George Lucas has said, “I would hesitate to call ‘the Force’ God.”<sup>2</sup> God, as described in the Scriptures, is a personal, spiritual being, capable of receiving love and worship (see Deuteronomy 6:4–9; John 4:24). The Force of *Star Wars* is an impersonal energy. Even so, the concept of the Force in *Star Wars* pulls together universal themes of sacrifice, self-denial, and infinite mystery—themes that flow from the longing for eternity that is present in every human heart.

## The Universal Yearning

Although I couldn’t put it into words at the time, I discovered a vital truth in the backseat of that Pinto: *I was created with a longing for awe.*

So were you.

According to the Scriptures, “[God] has...set eternity in the hearts of men” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Another translation puts it this way: “He has put thoughts of the forever in man’s mind” (NIV). There is, in every one of us, a longing to touch “the forever,” to sense the magnitude of the vastness in which we live.<sup>3</sup> This awareness may occasionally include fear, but fear alone cannot satisfy our souls’ deepest longings. What each of us craves is that mystical moment in which our amazement at all that stands beyond us unites in passionate embrace with our fear of all that is still lacking within us.

The religious researcher Rudolf Otto referred to this inner hunger as a longing for *mysterium fascinans et tremendum*—for the “mystery that fascinates and yet terrifies.”<sup>4</sup> William James described it as a yearning for the state of mind “in which the will to assert ourselves and hold our own has been displaced by a willingness to close our mouths and be as nothing in the floods and waterspouts of God.”<sup>5</sup> Put in simpler terms, every human soul desperately desires to experience *awe*.<sup>6</sup>

This universal longing explains why we ride roller coasters, tell scary stories, and gaze into the Grand Canyon’s gaping expanse. In each of these experiences, our awareness of our own smallness in a vast and mysterious cosmos rubs shoulders with sheer amazement.<sup>7</sup> This universal longing for awe also explains why, after nearly thirty years, the popularity of the *Star Wars* saga shows no sign of subsiding. Somehow, these twin trilogies have conveyed to millions of viewers a sense of awe—and it isn’t only the spectacle of the films’ opening seconds that conveys this sense.

At the heart of George Lucas’s space opera is a world that is full of wonders. An invisible Force binds the universe together, and an impetuous farm boy is able to tap into its power. An undersized green alien with backward syntax and bushy ears is

the wisest warrior of them all. And deep within the villain's sinister armor is a grown-up child who aches for his mother and whose dying wish is to see his son with his own eyes.

In a world that is glutted with glitz, gorged with superficial pleasures, and yet starving for authentic awe, sagas of this sort stimulate the imagination anew. These stories seize the space in every human soul that still longs to see exceptional beauty and power in the most improbable places. They stir our latent longings for awe—just like our favorite stories from the Bible.

Remember the story of Moses? Wandering through a barren wilderness, the hot-tempered shepherd watched a desert bush erupt with the fire of God, and his life was never the same again (see Exodus 3). Remember Isaiah? Walking into the temple, the prophet heard the song of the seraphs and, suddenly, found himself flat on his face before the splendor of pure holiness (see Isaiah 6). How about Peter, James, and John? Three fishermen scrambled up a hill, following their teacher, and saw the flesh of a Galilean carpenter transformed into blazing light, terrifying in its intensity (see Mark 9). In each instance, the spectators found themselves amazed at the immensity of all that was beyond them and yet frightened by their own shortcomings. They experienced *awe*.

*The most beautiful and most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical... The one to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead.*<sup>8</sup>

ALBERT EINSTEIN

awe *n.* The point at which our amazement at the immensity of all that is beyond us and our fear of our own smallness unite in passionate embrace.

## Learning to Live in Awe

Contemporary people have, however, missed a vital truth about awe: God created us not only to *long for* awe but also to *live in* awe. There's a phrase in the ancient Hebrew that captures the outlook that God expects from us: "Stand in awe" (Psalm 22:23, NASB; see also Psalm 33:8; 65:8; 119:120). In other words, *live with an attitude of awe*. This expectation persisted even after Jesus arrived on Earth. In the presence of Jesus, all sorts of people—publicans and Pharisees, centurions and slaves—were "filled with awe" (Matthew 27:54; Luke 5:17–26). "Do not become proud," the apostle Paul charged the Romans, "but stand in awe" (Romans 11:20, ESV). The author of Hebrews echoed Paul's command, calling his hearers to serve God "with reverence and awe" (Hebrews 12:28). Perhaps most important of all is the clause that the physician Luke selected to characterize the earliest congregation of believers: "Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe" (Acts 2:43, NASB).

Do you see the pattern? Awe isn't supposed to be a sporadic feeling that we acknowledge from a distance, reflected on a screen of silver or recorded in the pages of Scripture. *God longs to weave awe into the daily fabric of our lives.*

In light of this divine longing, I suppose it disturbs me somewhat that the first place I experienced awe was not in a church sanctuary or in a Sunday school class but at a drive-in theater. I had witnessed *excitement* in the community of faith. I

had felt *love*. I had even sensed *guilt*. But never before had I experienced this immense impression of my own minuteness within an immeasurably vast cosmos. I had felt much in church that might compel me to walk down the aisle during an invitation, but I had never felt anything that could cause me to drop my Dr. Pepper.

So how can contemporary believers learn to live in awe? More to the point, how do we learn to experience awe not only in the shadow of a mere movie but also in the presence of the God from whose fingertips this wonder-filled world has fallen? The answer is simple—not *easy*, mind you, but simple.

*We must learn to see that nothing in our lives is ordinary.*

That's it.

Yes, really.

Every aspect of your life is permeated with the presence and the plan of an extraordinary God; therefore, nothing in your life is ordinary. “In him,” the apostle Paul proclaimed to the citizens of Athens, “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Did you catch that? Every aspect of your life is “in him”—in God. If every aspect of your life occurs in God, there are no ordinary people in your life, there is no ordinary time, and there are no ordinary events. Everything in your life is *extraordinary*. Even the events that happen over and over—sunrises and sunsets, for instance—are not monotonous matters. They are extraordinary affairs. G. K. Chesterton put it this way:

[Suppose that] the sun rises regularly because he never gets tired of rising. His routine might be due, not to a lifelessness, but to a rush of life... A child kicks his legs rhythmically through excess, not absence, of life. Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in

spirit fierce and free...they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, "Do it again"; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead, for grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, "Do it again" to the sun; and every evening, "Do it again" to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy... The repetition in Nature may not be a mere recurrence; it may be a theatrical encore.<sup>9</sup>

### Living as If Everything Is Extraordinary

When I live as if everything in my life is extraordinary, I recognize that the blueness of the sky this morning is no mere meteorological fluke. The sky is blue today because God is wild about the color blue, and at some point in eternity past, God lovingly crafted this specific shade of blue for this specific sky on this specific day.

When I remember that everything in my life is extraordinary, my daughter's unrelenting giggle in the backseat of my car is no annoyance. Hannah's laughter is an echo from eternity, a reflection of the very joy of God, and she is a gift from heaven itself.

When I remember that everything in my life is extraordinary, I discern the goodness of God in the yeasty aroma of a well-baked bagel, in the soft sweetness of my wife's skin, even in the few moments of silence that descend upon me when I find myself gridlocked in morning traffic. When I recognize that



there are no ordinary events, my soul is able to sense the halo along the edge of every earthly thing. Then, and only then, do I find myself able to *live in awe*.

That's why the earliest followers of Jesus "kept feeling a sense of awe." They didn't look for God's presence only in the "wonders and miraculous signs." They also embraced the presence of God in events as apparently monotonous as eating, drinking, and simply being together (Acts 2:43–46).

That's why David could compose psalms that were so suffused with awe. He noticed the presence of an extraordinary God in earth and sky, dusk and dawn, storm and sea—even in silence:

Silence is praise to you,  
Zion-Dwelling God...  
Earth-Tamer, Ocean-Pourer,  
Mountain-Maker, Hill-Dresser,  
Muzzler of sea storm  
    and wave crash,  
of mobs in noisy riot—  
Far and wide they'll come to a stop,  
they'll stare in awe, in wonder.  
Dawn and dusk take turns  
calling, "Come and worship"...  
Creation was made for this!  
(Psalm 65:1, 5–9, *The Message*)

*The kingdom of  
God is not some  
marbleized  
Jerusalem we  
build 'out there'  
somewhere. The  
kingdom of God  
is among us,  
around us, and  
within us. Look  
at the world of a  
flower. Look at a  
loaf of bread.  
Life's magic,  
miracle, passion,  
and promise are  
gifts that fall  
right in our laps  
and find their  
way right into  
our hands.*<sup>10</sup>

LEONARD SWEET

That's also why the *Star Wars* saga has provoked a sense of awe in millions of viewers: Over and over, creatures that seem to be ordinary turn out to be extraordinary participants in this sweeping epic. A Corellian pirate named Han Solo and a farm boy known as Luke, a slave-child called Anakin and even the bothersome Gungan named Jar-Jar Binks...all of them seem ordinary—even less than ordinary—at first. Yet each of them plays a vital role in the redemption of a fallen galaxy.

*All happenings,  
great and small,  
are parables  
whereby God  
speaks. The art  
of life is to get  
the message.*<sup>11</sup>

MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE

Awe becomes possible only when we recognize that nothing in our lives is ordinary. Every person and every event that seems ordinary is simply a signpost pointing to an extraordinary possibility. “Luminous beings are we,” Yoda informs Luke during the young Jedi’s training, “not this crude matter.” Our lives are, in other words, far more than movements of flesh and blood that others see. Even when we fail to sense it, we are engulfed in wonder. We are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14), and our lives are extraordinary events.

## A Splintered Fragment of the True Light

I do not pretend that George Lucas intended his trilogies to lead anyone into a life of divine awe. When asked about the theological aspects of *Star Wars*, Lucas replied:

I see *Star Wars* as taking all the issues that religion represents and trying to distill them down into a more

modern and easily accessible construct... I put the Force into the movie in order to try to awaken a certain kind of spirituality in young people... I wanted to make it so that young people would begin to ask questions about the mystery.<sup>12</sup>

Yet in a world where God's extraordinary presence fills even the most ordinary aspects of life, whenever persons begin "to ask questions about the mystery," their stories tend to stumble across some truth—maybe incomplete, maybe misconstrued, but truth nonetheless. J. R. R. Tolkien, author of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, put it this way: "We have come from God...[so] inevitably the myths woven by us, though they contain error, reflect a splintered fragment of the true light, the eternal truth that is with God. Myths may be misguided, but they steer however shakily toward the true harbor."

You know the timeless tales that Tolkien was talking about: tales of Jason and the golden fleece, of the Holy Grail and King Arthur, of Belle and the hideous Beast, of the four children who stumbled through a wardrobe into Narnia's enchanted wood, of two plucky hobbits whose determination to destroy the One Ring led to the downfall of the dark lord, and a host of other myths that will be told and retold throughout time because they do indeed "reflect a splintered fragment of the true light."

There is a common thread that ties these timeless tales together: Ordinary creatures embrace extraordinary quests and, in the midst of their quests, it becomes clear that these creatures may not have been quite as ordinary as they seemed. And the readers of these tales? They find themselves filled with awe, for they have recognized—if only for a moment—that, deep inside, they too may be extraordinary creatures. A

splintered fragment of true light has pricked their souls.

The *Star Wars* trilogies do not provoke awe because of their stunning cinematography or the astonishing special effects. They certainly do not provoke awe because of flawless casting or faultless scripts. No, the *Star Wars* saga is awe-inspiring because it stands in the timeless tradition of tales that are saturated with fragments of the true light.

## The Quest for Awe

I have not written this book from the perspective of a professional theologian. So if you picked up this book hoping for a tedious theological treatise, prepare yourself to be disappointed. I have certainly not written this text from the perspective of a film critic or moviemaker. So if you are looking for salacious behind-the-scenes details from the *Star Wars* films, these pages probably won't satisfy you either.

The perspective from which I've written this book is that of an impatient little boy in the backseat of a Ford Pinto. Oh, he's grown several years older since that night and, once in a while, he's even a bit wiser. But he caught a glimpse of awe in that movie, and it set him on a quest that still continues today. This book is his attempt to share one portion of his quest with you.

The goal for the quest is simply this—to find the fragments of light in the *Star Wars* saga and to see in each fragment a reflection of “the eternal truth that is with God.” As we embrace the unique contours of each fragment, may you sense the extraordinary in the midst of the ordinary, the magnificent in the midst of the mundane, the hidden halo along the edge of every earthly event.

Before our quest reaches its conclusion, I hope that you dis-

cover something else too: Every instance of awe in this world is merely a distant reflection of the Source of Awe, of the True Light whose glory is too vast to be captured on a DVD and too dazzling to be projected through celluloid. This Force is not an energy-field; He is the one whose fingers first formed energy. This Force is not formless power; He is a personal being and, in a manger in Bethlehem, it was this Force that “became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14).

### Let the Quest Begin

Well, the previews are over now; it's time for the featured presentation. So raid the fridge for something to drink and toss some popcorn in the microwave. Slide your favorite *Star Wars* movie into the DVD player, and sit back in your most comfortable chair. Then turn the page, relax, and let the quest begin!

Oh, and don't drop your Dr. Pepper.

*Why are people  
who analyze and  
study Star Wars  
called loser-geeks  
with no life  
while people  
who analyze  
and study  
Shakespeare are  
called educated  
scholars? And  
don't tell me to  
get a life, or I'll  
tell you to get an  
imagination.*

ANONYMOUS POSTING ON  
STARWARS.COM FORUM

**Padawan** *n.* In the *Star Wars* saga, someone who has been designated the disciple of a Jedi Master.

## Learn to Live in Awe...

...by remembering that everything in your life is extraordinary.

### **SPIRITUAL EXERCISES FOR THE SERIOUS PADAWAN**

#### *Be Mindful of the True Force*

Plan a day to begin your quest to live in awe. At the beginning of the day, study Psalm 65:5–13. Notice how the psalmist views ordinary events as signs of God's extraordinary power. List the ordinary tasks that you will undertake today—driving to work, running errands, doing chores, even mopping the kitchen floor. Pray about each task, specifically asking God to help you to sense His presence in each one. Locate an appropriate song to mark the beginning of your quest—perhaps “When Will I Ever Learn to Live in God?” by Van Morrison or “Meant to Live” by Switchfoot.

At the end of the day, review your list. Ask yourself, *How did my desire to look for God's presence in each apparently ordinary task help me to see that nothing in my life is ordinary?* Locate a song of praise that focuses on the awe of God. Listen carefully to the song's lyrics as you reread Psalm 65 and meditate on the awe-inspiring presence of God in every aspect of your life.

*Meditate on the True Force*

*My Master and my God,  
I wanted my life to be extraordinary.  
Yet I must confess...  
I thought the only way  
    to have a remarkable life  
    was through my own efforts.  
But my efforts have made me  
    miserable,  
    irritable,  
    everything but remarkable.*

*Help me to see that a remarkable life  
    is not a goal that I can achieve—  
it is a gift that I simply receive  
    by recognizing that You have  
    already made my life an  
    extraordinary event.  
Teach me to live in awe  
    by teaching me to live in You.*