

# Nature's Neurology:

## How Awe Inspires Lifelong Vitality

Ana Hernandez, Wellness Program Manager  
The Solutions Group



# Today's Awespiration

01 The Neuroscience  
of Awe

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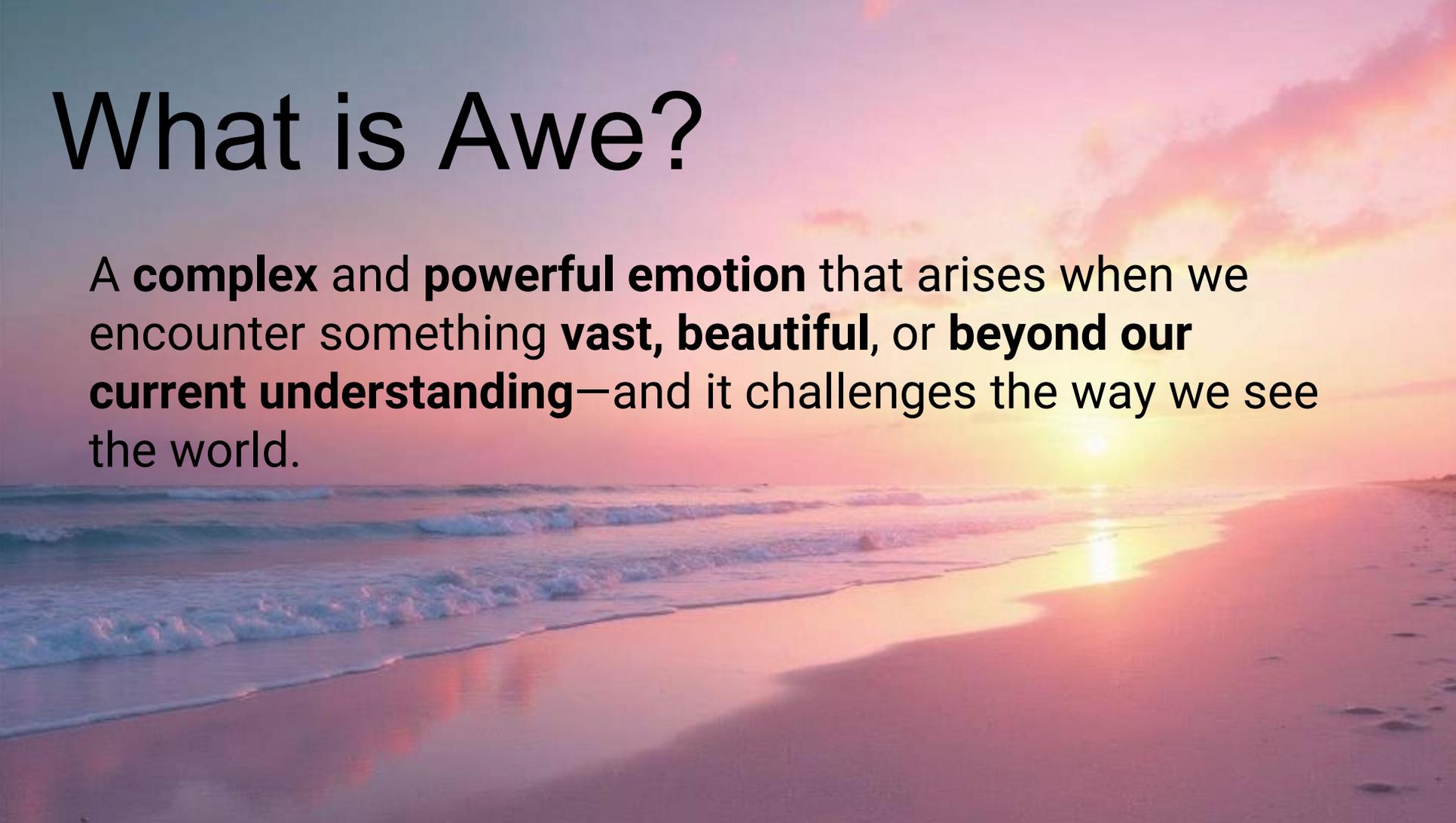
04 Cultivating Awe in  
Daily Life



***“Wonder is the beginning of wisdom.”***  
— Socrates

# What is Awe?

A **complex** and **powerful emotion** that arises when we encounter something **vast, beautiful, or beyond our current understanding**—and it challenges the way we see the world.

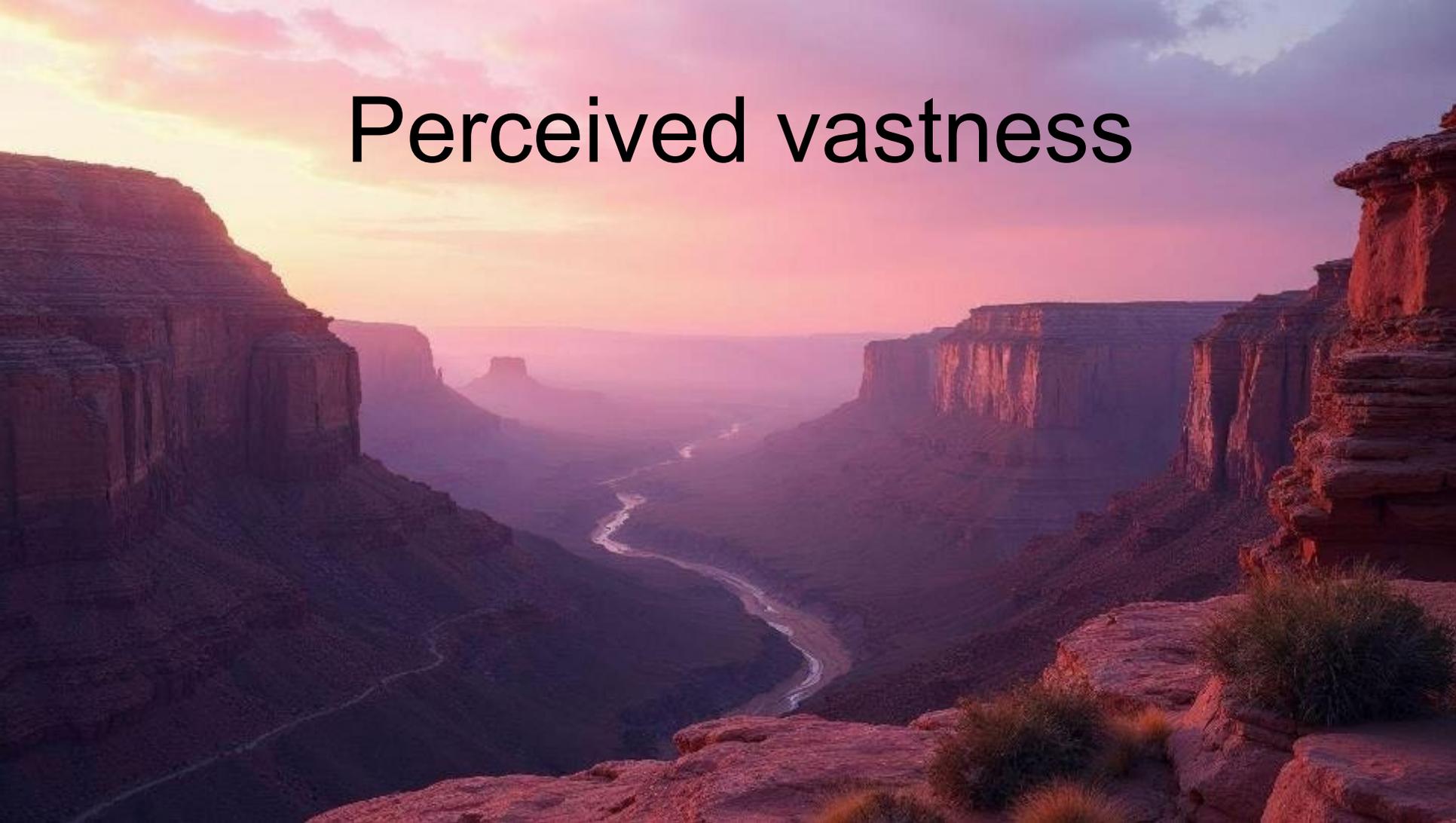


# Brief History of the Science of Awe

For centuries, philosophers and poets described awe as a gateway to the divine—a moment when we feel both humbled and uplifted.

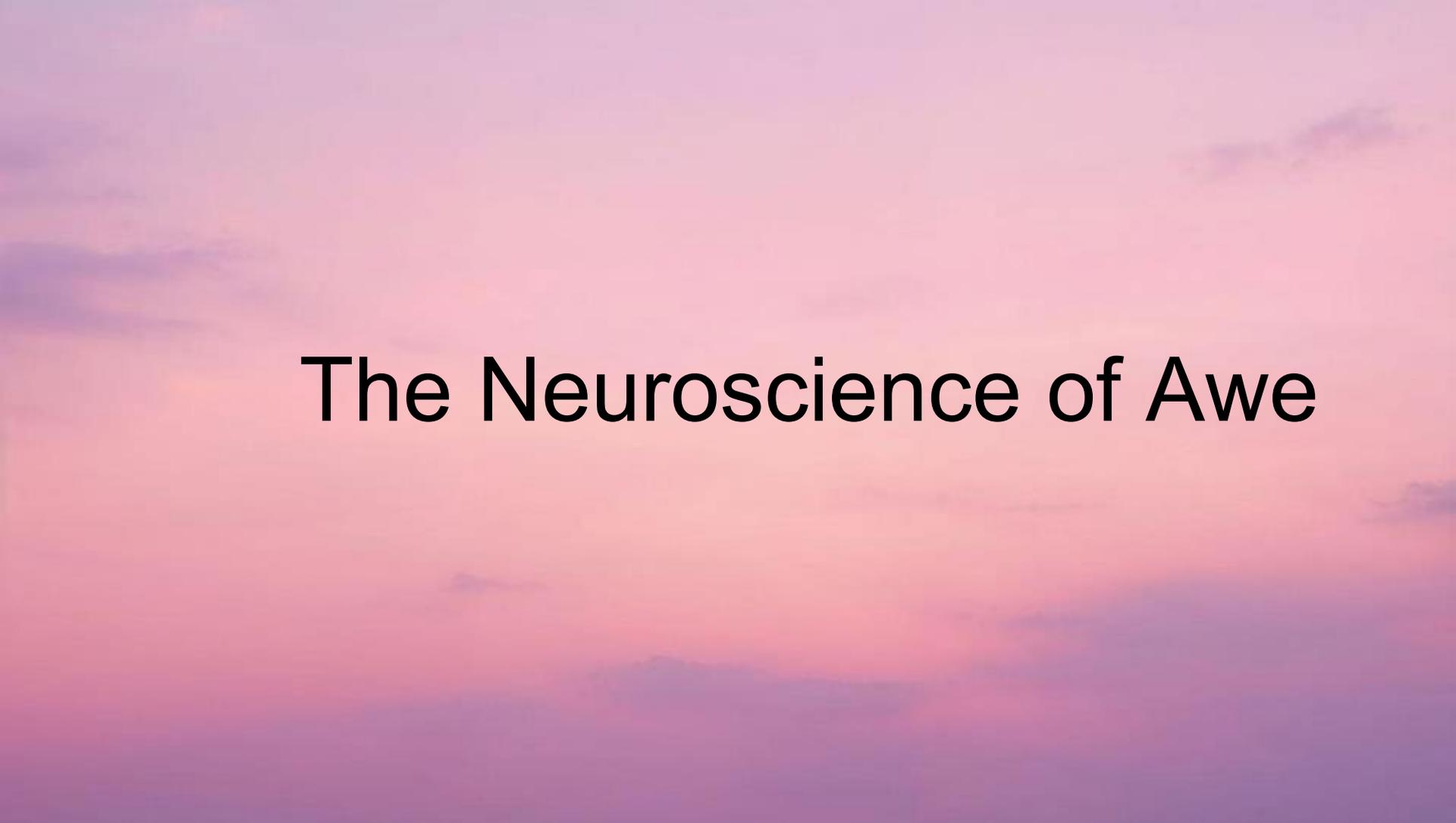
In the early 2000s psychologists began to study **AWE** as a distinct and powerful emotion.

# Perceived vastness



# Need for accommodation

It forces your brain to adjust or expand its mental frameworks because what you're experiencing doesn't quite fit with what you previously knew.



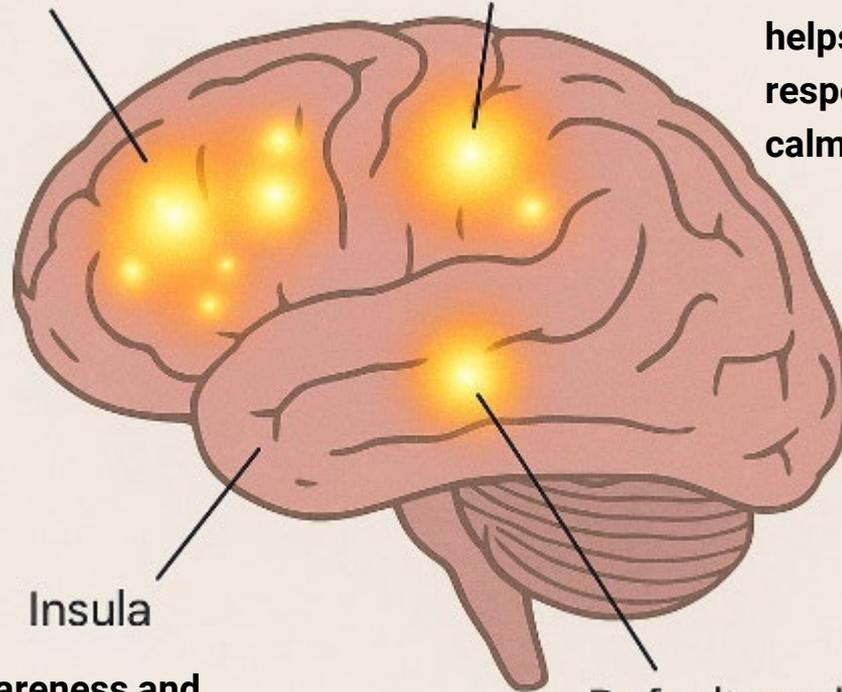
# The Neuroscience of Awe

**Helps us process the significance of what we are witnessing and integrate it into our understanding of the world.**

Prefrontal cortex

Anterior cingulate cortex

**During moments of awe, the ACC helps modulate our emotional response, fostering a sense of calm and wonder.**



Insula

Default mode network

**Insula is linked to bodily awareness and pain pathways, creating a profound connection between our physical sensations and emotional experiences.**

**Reduced activity in the (DMN), linked to daydreaming and mind-wandering. Makes us feel more connected to something greater than ourselves.**

# Other Awesome brain stuff

**Releases dopamine ( a brain hormone)**

pleasure

joy

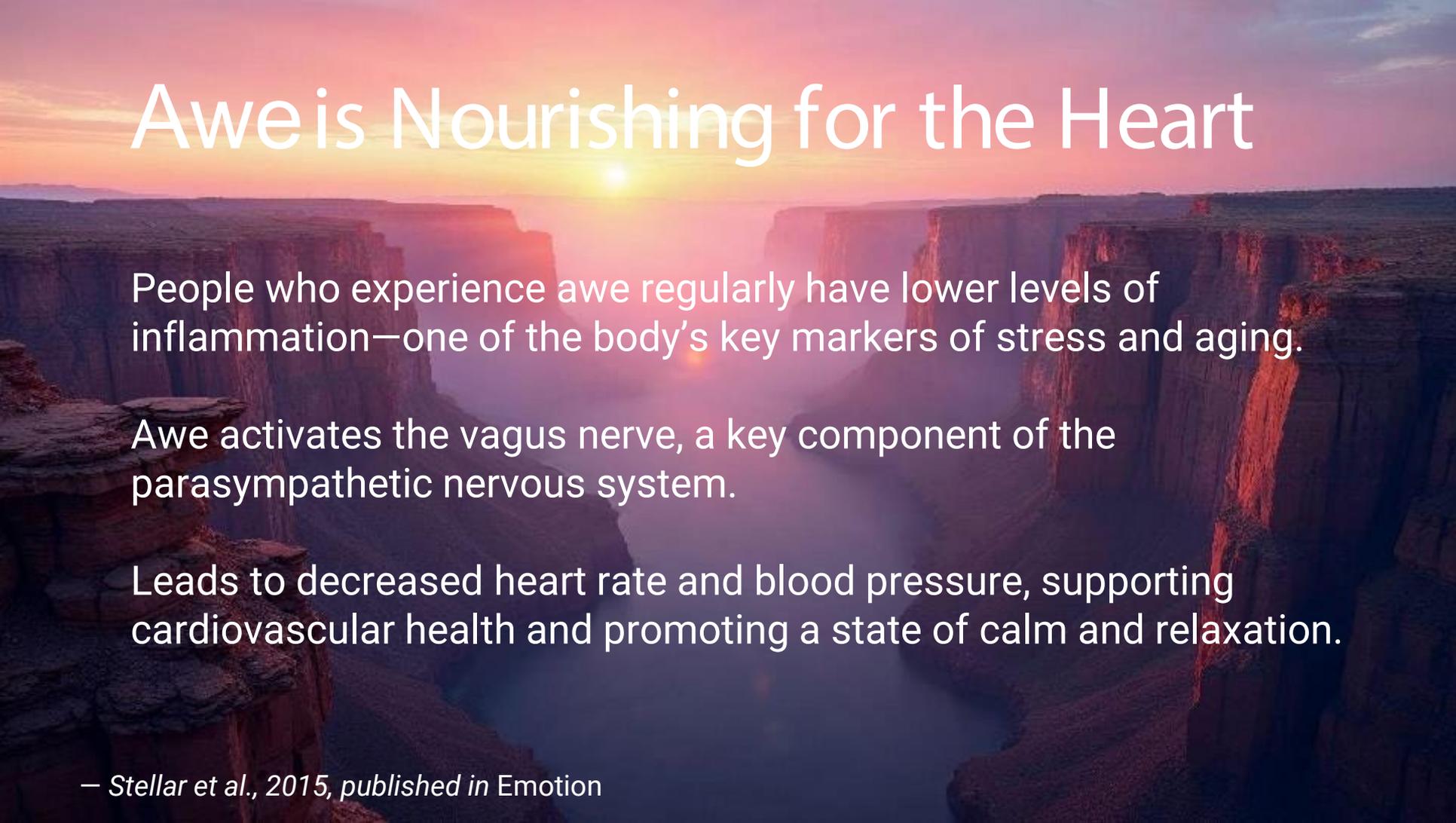
motivation

satisfaction



# Awe's Impact on Health and Aging

# Awe is Nourishing for the Heart



People who experience awe regularly have lower levels of inflammation—one of the body's key markers of stress and aging.

Awe activates the vagus nerve, a key component of the parasympathetic nervous system.

Leads to decreased heart rate and blood pressure, supporting cardiovascular health and promoting a state of calm and relaxation.

Awe activates the vagus nerve, a key component of the parasympathetic nervous system.

### Sympathetic nervous system

- Heart rate increases
- Respiration accelerates
- Muscles tense up
- Digestion is inhibited

### Parasympathetic nervous system

- Heart rate decreases
- Respiration slows
- Muscles relax
- Digestion is stimulated

# Awe Supports Mental Health

Reduces self-focus and enhances connection.

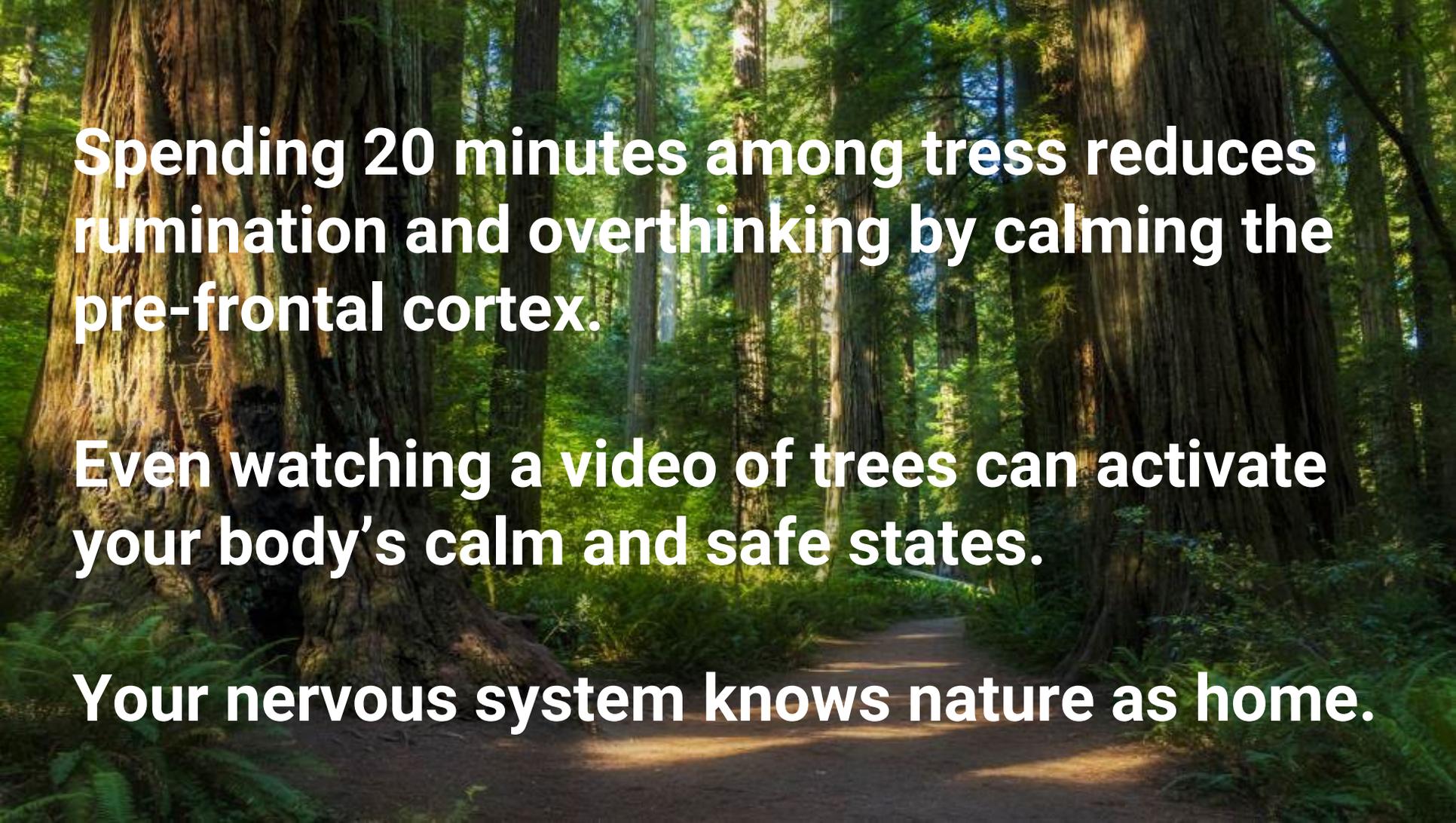
Restores our sense of belonging in the grand story of life

Grows our compassion and gratitude

It activates a state of “**small self**,” where our concerns and stresses are momentarily set aside.

# Awe Walks Study

52 older adults who took weekly 15-minute “**awe walks**” for eight weeks reported increased positive emotions and less distress in their daily lives.

A photograph of a forest with large, ancient-looking trees. Sunlight filters through the dense canopy, creating dappled light on the forest floor. The trees are tall and slender, with thick, textured bark. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

**Spending 20 minutes among trees reduces rumination and overthinking by calming the pre-frontal cortex.**

**Even watching a video of trees can activate your body's calm and safe states.**

**Your nervous system knows nature as home.**

# A Journey of AWE



**Albuquerque, NM**



Redwood Forest



**Sagrada Familia, Barcelona**



**Northern Lights**



# Sandia Mountains

fineart  
america



**Fanal Forest  
Madiera Portugal**



Petra, Jordan





**Washington, D. C.**



**Organ Mountains, Las Cruces**



# Witness Tree, South Carolina



**Whale Shark**



**Crested Butte, Colorado**



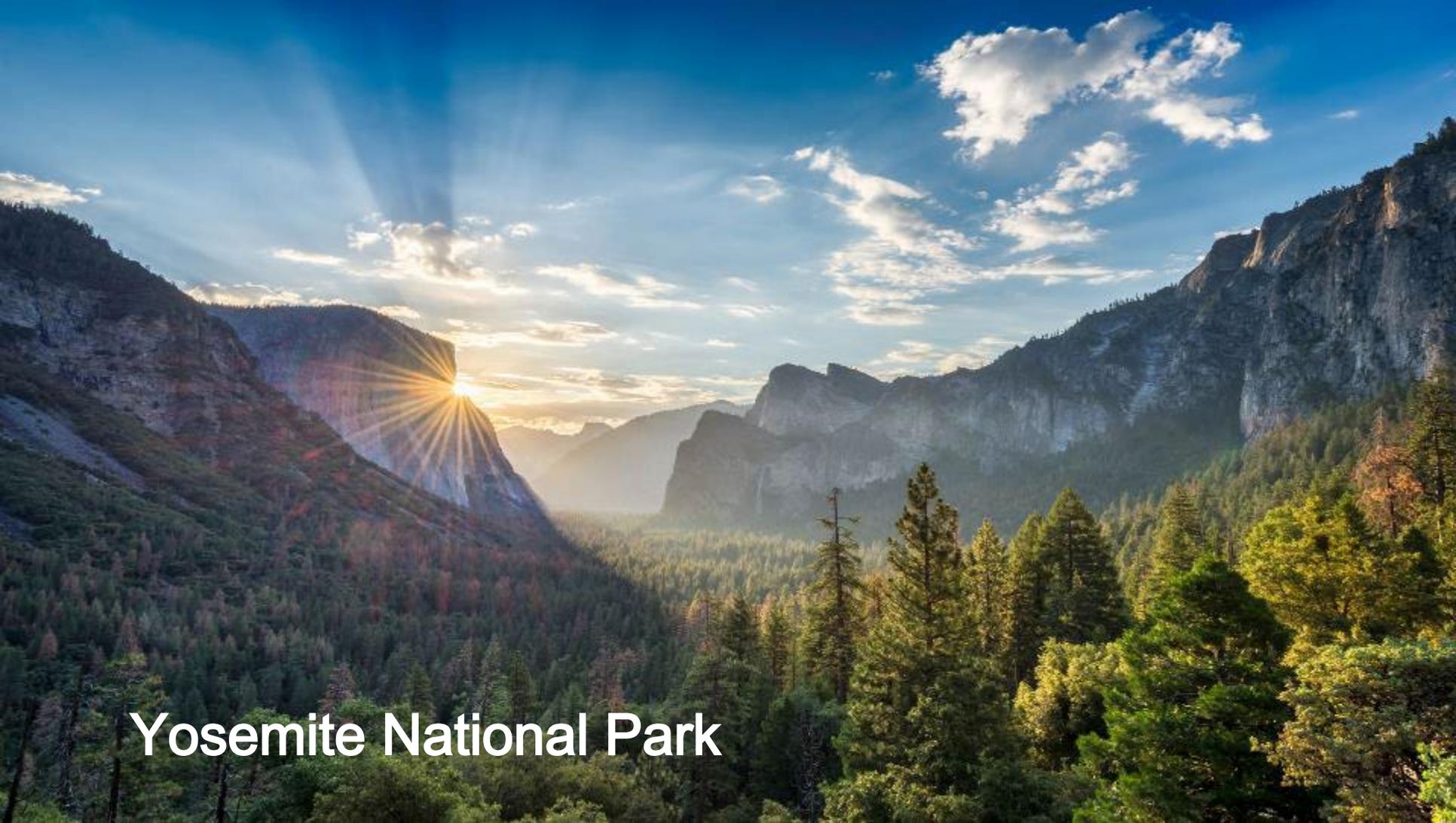
**Banff National Park, Canada**



Napali Coast, Hawaii



**Havasupai Falls, Arizona**



# Yosemite National Park



Antelope Canyon Arizona



**Northern Lights in Albuquerque, NM**



**Grand Prismatic Spring  
Yellowstone National Park**



Balloon Fiesta

# Madiera Island, Portugal





**Carlsbad Caverns**



Path to Santuario de Chimayo



star-forming nebula in the constellation Orion



Ho Rainforest, Olympic National Park



Santiago de Compostela Basilica, Spain



Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado



Albuquerque, NM



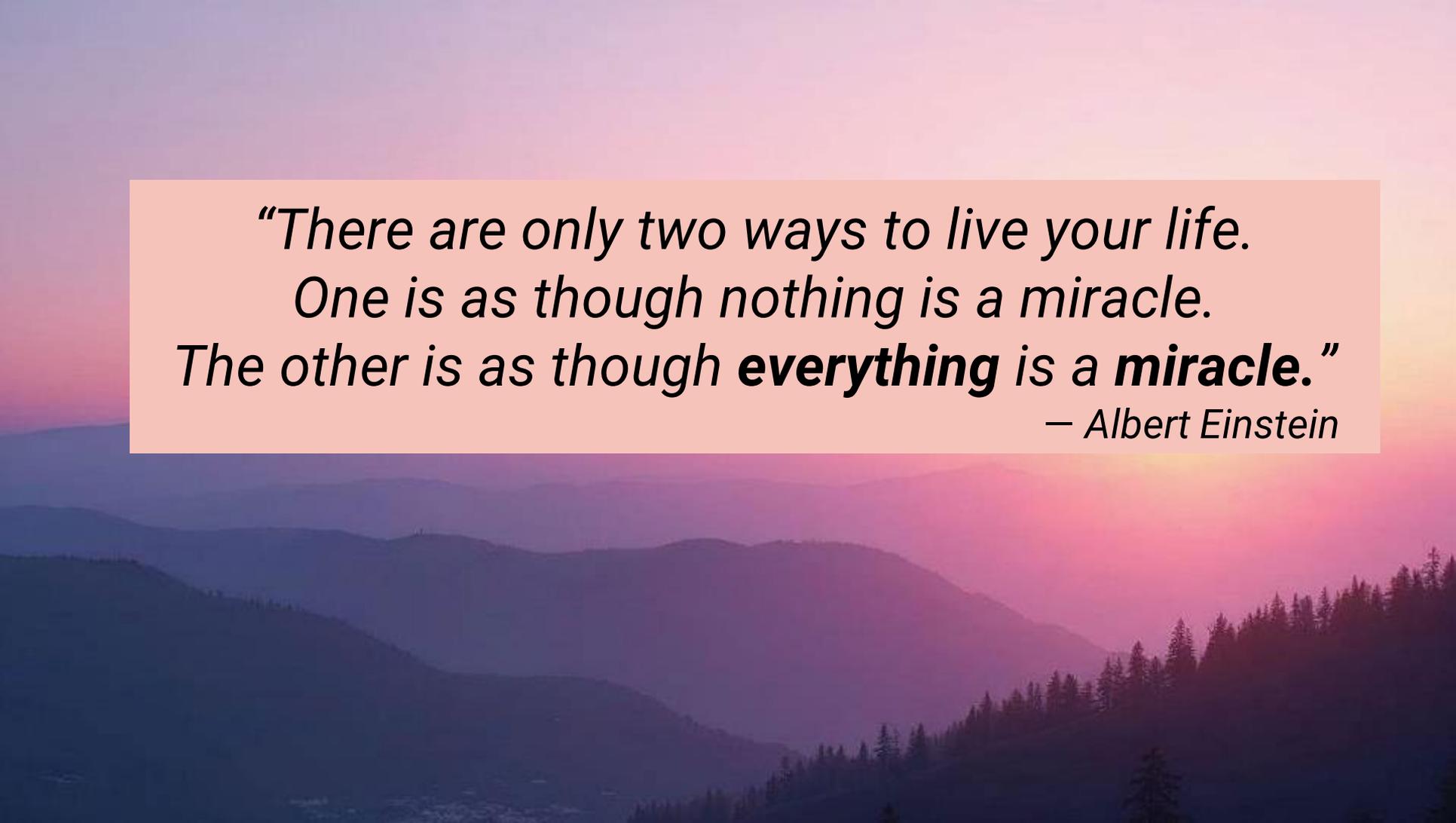
Katmai National Park, Alaska



Mikaila's baby boy



# Cultivating Awe in Daily Life



*“There are only two ways to live your life.  
One is as though nothing is a miracle.  
The other is as though **everything** is a **miracle.**”*

*— Albert Einstein*

# Taking an Awe Walk

## Set your Intention

Begin with a deep breath.  
Remind yourself:  
“I’m here to **notice** beauty and wonder.

## Slow Down and Look Up

Walk slowly.  
Notice details – the sky, trees, light, sounds. Let curiosity lead.  
Find the **unusual!**

## Let Yourself Feel Small and Connected

Pause. Sense how you're part of something bigger.  
Let **awe** fill you.

# AWE

The New Science of  
Everyday Wonder and How  
It Can Transform Your Life

Dacher Keltner





# THE AWE COLLECTIVE

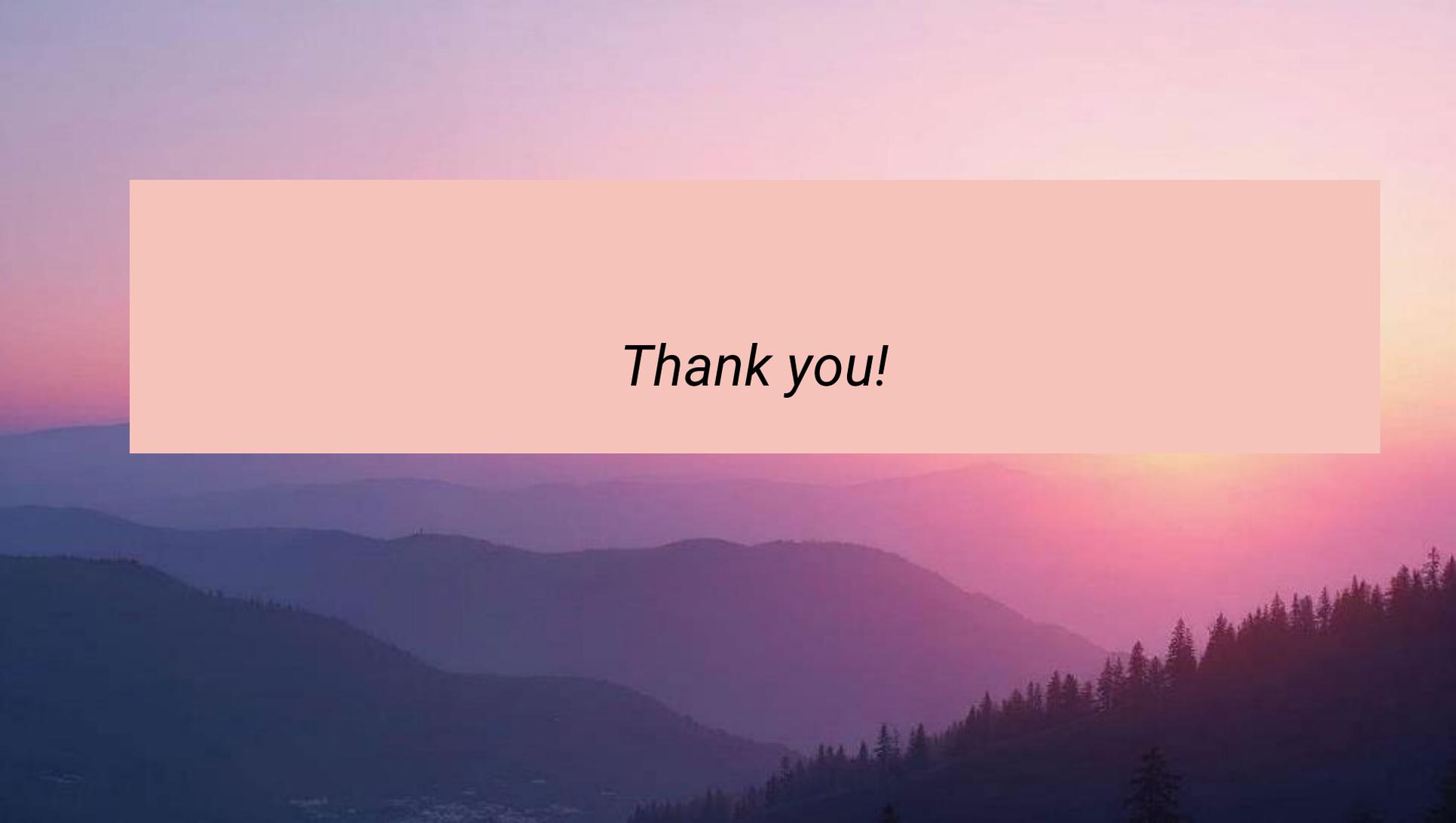
Awe is a positive emotion, akin to childlike wonder, that emerges in the presence of things we don't immediately understand





Treat your AWE Walks as a ritual of renewal.

Let awe be your companion and guide you home to yourself.

A scenic landscape of rolling mountains and a forest at sunset. The sky is a mix of soft pinks, purples, and oranges, with the sun low on the horizon to the right, casting a warm glow. The foreground shows a dense forest of evergreen trees on a hillside, leading up to several layers of misty, blue-toned mountain ranges in the distance. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is centered horizontally and vertically, containing the text "Thank you!".

*Thank you!*