

# Sunday 19th October 2025 - How To Read The Bible: All Things Bright And Beautiful

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're continuing with our series on how to read the Bible. And this morning we're looking at all things bright and beautiful.!

And I don't know if you've ever thought of this. And I've got lots of hard and difficult questions for you this morning. All designed to make your brain hurt.

So I'm very glad you came. So here's one for starters. Have you ever wondered what people knew about God before the Bible was written?

The Bible didn't suddenly appear on a Sunday morning. There was no Bible study groups for Abraham, Isaac, Jacob or Moses. Well, the answer to all this depends on what you believe.

Do you believe that God only ever speaks through the Bible? Most people believe that God can speak and does speak to us in a number of ways through the power of his Holy Spirit.

[ 1 : 23 ] And one of those ways is through the world around us. Mother Nature or God's creation, to give it a few names.

So far, so good. But it might just be a bit more complicated than that. Any guesses what's going on here?

We're trying to do a bit of language like Yorkshire. Actually, it's Cheshire, but never mind. Any suggestions? Sorry? God speaking.

Oh, no, I think that might be a bit powerful. A-up. A-up. A-up. Well, when I was a young lad, on hearing this call, 80 cows would begin walking from their field to follow me back to the farm, ready to be milked.

That's all it took. A-up. And they knew what to do. They followed me through field after field, and sometimes across a busy road, all the way back to the farm.

[ 2 : 52 ] This is Ernie, the dog that moved into our house and has taken charge.

Let's have a quick shot. How many of you got dogs at home? Oh, not as many as I thought. Okay. Any names? Shout out some names and breeds.

Alfie Whippet. Alfie the Whippet. Any others? Laura's Takodil. Oh, Lauren's the Poodle. Any others? Max or Jack Russell. Okay. Max or Jack Russell.

Border Collie. Border Collie. Okay. Brilliant. Come on. Any cats at home?

Oh, a few cats. Names, please. Garfield. Garfield. I like that one, right? And Moodie. Moodie. Oh, that says a lot. Moodie. And Jack.

[ 3 : 52 ] Okay. Any others? Cleo. Cleo. Elsa. Elsa. Okay. We used to have 21 on the farm and they all had names as well.

21 cats. Yeah. Any other pets we've got? Any snakes? No. Goldfish? Goldfish.

Okay. Got a name, the goldfish? Sharky and George. Okay. Any others? Oh, a great parrot. Okay. Yeah.

A grandson has a bearded dragon called Derek. Of course. A bearded dragon called Derek. Okay. Okay. So, we've got quite a bit of pets.

And how many of you like to do a spot of gardening? Any gardeners here? Oh, more. That's really popular. Nothing beats getting out into the garden. What do you grow?

[ 4 : 53 ] Any suggestions of what we grow? Weeds. Yeah. But very popular, those. Anything else? Tomatoes.

Runner beans. Runner beans. Dahlia. Dahlia. Oh, I like the dahlia. Hmm? Oranges. Oranges. Oh, that's impressive. Okay. Well, we'll come back.

We'll come back to these pets and gardens in a few minutes. Okay. But I'd just like you to know that those were the easy questions. Okay. Those were the easy questions.

Let's do a few hard ones. All right. So, what do you believe? Do you believe in anthropocentrism? Or do you believe in panentheism?

Any offers? Do you? We'll have words with you after. Okay. Right. So, it's not panentheism.

[ 5 : 53 ] It's panentheism. We'll come to that later. Okay. Right. Let's start with the first one then. Do you believe in anthropocentrism? It's certainly got a ring to it, hasn't it?

It's the belief in humans and their existence as the most important and central fact in the universe. So, God created humans in his own image and put them in charge of everything.

Okay. And many Christians believe something like this. And I do apologize here because I'm trying to summarize briefly what is actually a very complicated and complex thing.

But many Christians believe something like this. That God created our world and everything in it. And God now resides in heaven and is outside the universe and looks down on us.

So, God has set everything in motion and it's set to work just a bit like clockwork. Everything carries on, the seasons and everything like that.

[ 7 : 01 ] And God has given us responsibility for looking after this earth. Humans are in charge and are responsible for running the place.

However, because of our sinful nature, we've basically made a complete mess of it. And then this sort of thinking gets all terribly mixed up with other things.

So, other verses are then often plucked out of different Bible passages to complete the process as how we relate to the world around us. And again, please bear with me because I'm trying to summarize something that's quite complex.

So, to sort this out, the thinking goes, God has devised an evacuation plan. Right? God's got an evacuation plan. And all you need to do is believe that God has sent his son Jesus to save us.

And then we can be part of this evacuation plan and be welcomed up into heaven in order to escape all the mess. Yeah? And then a new heavens and a new earth will be created.

[ 8 : 11 ] And this old one will just go up to burn up and get rid of the mess we've created. And this verse is often quoted. The day of the Lord will come like a thief and then the heavens will pass away with a roar and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved.

And the earth and the works that are done in it will be exposed. So, I could talk about this until the cows come home.

And there's so much to unpack. So, most of it, I'm afraid we'll have to leave to another time. Okay? So, if you come tomorrow, we'll carry on. But I really don't understand this line of thinking.

Let's just take the common sense approach. If God really just wants us to escape this earth, to join him in heaven, then the whole of creation seems to be an enormous waste of time.

It's just a selfish approach. It's all about me. I'll be all right and escape the burning earth. It's just tough luck for those who live in other parts of the world suffering now because of the effects of climate change.

[ 9 : 25 ] And it's also tough luck for our children and grandchildren. They'll just have to live with the consequences of the damage we've created. Is this really what God intends?

Is this really the God who spent so much time creating this world? Is this really the God we see in the Bible? Is this really the reason God sent Jesus to get us out of here in some evacuation plan?

If we look at Genesis, we get to the heart of the problem. Then God said, Over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.

So, those verses are really part of our problem. Excuse me. So, let's have a look.

I don't want you further this gentleman, John Calvin. He was a key figure in the Protestant Reformation. And his interpretation of these passages was that humanity is the pinnacle of creation, that everything else was made for our benefit.

[ 11 : 09 ] We are created in the image of God and so are the most important. Everything in nature exists just to benefit human beings. So, we can justifiably exploit nature for our own gain.

And that's what you might call anthropocentrism. Okay. Okay. But it is the meaning of dominion or ruling over which is the problem here.

Calvin's understanding of ruling is very different. He lived in a time when most countries were still ruled by kings and queens, who ideally had total control over nations and ruled by force.

So, this kind of rule over means having power and privilege. Human beings, as rulers over creation, have superior dignity and are free to enjoy and exploit everything they rule over for their own benefit.

Now, that kind of thinking is not just Christians. It's pretty dominant in our whole society. But I want to suggest to you that stewardship is perhaps a better word for us today.

[ 12 : 26 ] A steward is a person who is approached to rule in place of the rightful ruler. So, when God tells humans to rule over the earth, what he's saying is rule in my place, God entrusts us to treat his kingdom as he would.

As he would. Christians read scripture in light and the character of the teachings of Jesus. If we read it in light of how Jesus teaches us to live, it's impossible to see dominion or rule over creation as anything less than the responsibility for its well-being.

And that's the total opposite of what Calvin was saying. God's ruling over is never domination. God's ruling over always aims for life-giving benefits for all creation.

Jesus calls us to serve in all dimensions of life and to work for the flourishing of every part of the created order.

We're called to be servants, not masters, of life. We're called to take care of, not to rule over. But there's also this in Genesis 1.

[ 14 : 01 ] God sees his creation as good. So, in Genesis chapter 1, he says creation is good six times, ending with it as very good.

Why would God want to destroy it? The goodness of God's creation is repeatedly celebrated throughout the Bible. So, in Timothy we get, For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.

In Isaiah, you will go out in joy and be led forth in peace. The mountains and the hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the fields will clap their hands.

God cares about all creation. And in Matthew, But there's more to it than this as well.

Because Jesus is at the very heart of creation. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

[ 15 : 16 ] He was with God in the beginning. Through him, all things were made. Without him, nothing was made that has been made.

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. And so, what about all this business of everything's going to burn up? Yeah?

Well, before the year 2000, Christians were often heavily focused on the thought of the end times. Yeah? Still today, there are plenty of disaster movies with images of nuclear annihilation or environmental catastrophe.

You know, it's all out there. And the book of Revelation is sometimes called the Apocalypse of John. An apocalypse we see as doom and gloom. Yeah?

This, however, is emphatically not the Bible's vision of the end. The Bible's picture of the end is beautiful. The end of the book of Revelation is actually a picture of beauty.

[ 16 : 17 ] A city, a city the Bible calls the New Jerusalem. And this fundamental image of the end is, God is with us. Behold, I am making all things new.

And even more to the point, John's image of the end purposely evokes all sorts of images from the Garden of Eden. So, we are to be renewed and transformed.

A up. A up. A up. If I took you down the fields with me.

Down the fields, that's a good Cheshire expression. Okay? If I took you down the fields with me and got you to shout, A up, what would happen? Nothing.

Right. Correct. They just look at you and think, Who are you? Yeah? They ignore you. Why? Because there's no relationship there between you and those cows.

[ 17 : 21 ] And I am assuming that you don't keep a dog, Just so the dog can bark at things and be your guard dog. I am assuming you don't keep a cat, Just so it will keep your house free from mice.

They are indeed roles that animals can perform, But most often the real reason is more relational. Yeah? We keep them because we like them.

And I am assuming that you just don't get into your garden And tip a bag of fertiliser over it and hope for the best. I think not.

We all know that plants need really good care and attention If they'll be able to flourish. Okay. So, our second question, Do you believe in panentheism?

So, everything is in some way a part of God. Panentheism is that there is a divine element in all things. In other words, Everything is in some way a part of God And consequently something divine.

[ 18 : 31 ] That can be found in everything. But importantly, This view does not hold that everything is divine. If you can follow that. And everything is simply God.

So, it is not, for example, All about tree hugging. Okay? It's not that. Let's hug a tree and all will be well. And it's not that. That's called pantheism.

There's an entheism here. The belief, This pantheism is the belief that nature is God. It's not that. No, pantheism is altogether different.

So, we're saying panentheism. So, we see God both inside and outside his creation. And again, back to Genesis.

Now, the Lord God had formed out of the ground All the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them. And whatever the man called each living creature, That was its name.

[ 19 : 32 ] The man gave names to all the livestock, The birds in the sky and all the other wild animals. God calls us to be part of his creation. To be in relationship with all living things.

And this all makes sense as God is a relational God. God relates to all of his creation. We will have a very stunted relationship with God If we too don't have a relationship with creation.

The Bible is absolutely full of pictures, stories, and examples Of God working with creation. And I could talk about that till the cows come home.

Our modern lives have become so detached from the world around us That we no longer consider nature to be part of our lives.

We can easily take for granted what we have. It's just another blessing. And ask no questions. But does the way we live our lives have consequences?

[ 20 : 43 ] Is this really the good stewardship that God has entrusted us with? The condition of the world around us Clearly tells us differently.

We seem to be making a very good job Of damaging what God has created. Many Christians just shrug their shoulders And use the classic line God will sort it out.

Unfortunately, this is just another selfish way of thinking. It simply requires nothing from us personally. How convenient. Again, that's something else I could talk about Till the cows come home.

This recently published report Religion, Theology, and Climate Change Is a three-year study From the Lincoln Theological Institute The University of Manchester Laudato Si' and the University of Oxford And it's partnered with CAFOD, Christian Climate Action The C of E Diocese of Manchester and Oxford Operation Noah And the Roman Catholic Diocese of Manchester And it shows the current state of thinking in the UK So Panentheism gets an 8.2 score out of 10 So God is embodied in the world and universe Rather than separate from it Whereas 4.3 out of 10 is the score For humans have domination Over God's creation So that gives you an idea of how people think The report has 12 recommendations On how to develop Our eco-theology and practice The trouble is

We've made creation An insignificant backdrop To our Christian faith Rather than the fact that the creator God Is centre stage God restoring all things Verse after verse Testify to the glory of God's creation Holding up God's beauty Is what gives us hope Are we to walk away from God's creation?

[ 22 : 54 ] If we abandon creation We diminish ourselves We diminish our lives And the lives of all God's people What kind of a world Are we creating for our grandchildren And their children?

What will they make of us With the way we read the Bible? We're privileged people We know enough We're educated enough To know That we're not caring for creation As we should In fact We're damaging it How can we claim That we're honouring God?

Can we really claim To know the person of God If we detach God From his creation? Why do we insist On expelling ourselves All over again From the Garden of Eden?

So here's your homework Go away and work out Do you believe in Anthropocentrism Or do you believe in Panentheism? It really does Make a difference To the way you live And here's some reading For your homework So the middle book there Reading Genesis By Marilyn Robison Says this God created everything And in creation He said it was good God created mankind In his own image Why would God want mankind To exploit creation And destroy it?

Destroying creation Is actually sin Because that's what happens After the Garden of Eden Man destroys not only himself But the world around him Richard Rohr In the book Just This Says In the end There'll only be Christ Loving himself St. Paul says God will be All in all Creation Is coming Full circle The eternal one Has come And taken on Form And manifestation On the whole Of creation Humans Animals Animals Plants Elements The galaxies And all the Endless forms And faces That have come Forth from God Can you see God's inherent Beauty and goodness?

[ 25 : 22 ] This is not A wait until Heaven Because if you look God is in everything You see Now And then the Most important book The Secret Life Of Cows Rosamund Young Says this Cows Are as varied As people They can be Highly intelligent Or slow To understand Friendly Considerate Aggressive Docile Inventive Dull Proud Or shy Animals And people Can appear To lose Their identities Or become Become Institutionalized If forced To live In unnatural Crowded Featureless Regimented Or boring Conditions Cows And all Animals Are to be Treated As uniquely Created Individuals You see

All I know I really Did learn From the Cows God's Creation Is truly Moveless I hope You feel Motivated To do Some serious Thinking And don't Be cowed By life's Challenges Just move Forward Thank you And don't