

- **WHO?**

David Attenborough speaks as an agnostic. That means he doesn't believe we can truly know about God. But he does speak as someone who *thinks* about God. He thinks about all the different beliefs in the world about a creator. And he talks in that video about the way Christians and others understand the origins of creation. He's **listened** to the stories of different religions, and he's **thought** about what they mean. But none of them make sense to him at the moment.

But what he is reflecting on in this video is the question of "HOW". But there's a better question to ask of God, especially as we read Genesis 1.

But let me encourage us to focus differently here today. Instead of focussing on HOW, God calls us in Genesis 1 to focus on...

- WHO

As Christians, we know that we are dealing with a God who seeks a relationship with his creation. A God who even came to this earth in the person of Jesus to have a personal relationship with us. A God who sent his Holy Spirit so he could live IN us – we have a relational God. Genesis 1 starts us on the journey of understanding WHO God is. This is an exploration of relationship. Not of science or cosmology.

And that idea will come up a lot over these next 6 weeks. Because our relationship with God is what sets humans apart from the rest of creation. Throughout this Genesis series, I want to encourage you to not be distracted – but to do what we always must do in God's word –

- **Focus on strengthening your relationship with God.**

Because this is what Genesis is about. Actually, it's what the whole Bible is about!

There's a lot of history in Genesis. But these opening chapters are not an eyewitness account. No one apart from God was actually there when the universe was created. Genesis 1 is God's way of explaining to us WHO began everything.

So let's have a look at the way Genesis 1 is written. First of all, there's a poetic pattern to Genesis 1 – and these phrases come up again and again:

- *And God said*
- *Let there be*
- *And it was so*
- *God saw that it was good*
- *God called*
- *And there was evening and morning, day "x"*

- For example: verse 3:

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

The writing is poetic in **language** and **structure**.

Words are used poetically. Like the Hebrew use of the word we translate as “day” – it’s not a word that means a set “day”. It simply means “a period of time”. And this same Hebrews word is translated 3 different ways just in verses 1:5 and 2:4. But why?

- **Defining Love**

If you asked me about my relationship with my wife, it would be difficult for me to define that relationship. I could use words like marriage and love. I could tell you we’ve been married for 22 ½ years. That we have 3 children. That we met at church. But those things don’t **describe** our love. To describe how we feel about each other, how we relate to each other – that is difficult. What many people have done throughout history to describe love is to write poetically in a way that speaks to generations.

Like John Donne’s famous love poem to his wife: “The Sun Rising”, where he writes:
“She’s all states, and all princes, I,
Nothing else is.”

Poetry expresses what simple words cannot express in a way that is timeless.

When I was in year 5, my class put on a short production of Shakespeare’s Hamlet. I had the role of Lord Polonius. My death scene was spectacular. But one of my big speeches was to my son Laertes. And part of it went like this:

“Yet here Laertes, aboard, aboard for shame! The wind sits in the shoulder of your sail, and you are stay’d for.”

To be honest, when I was 11, that really didn’t make much sense. It still doesn’t make much sense today, to be honest. But those of you who have studied this literature – I’m sure it makes sense to you.

Poetic and creative language can express complex ideas like “love” which we cannot describe with statements of fact or eyewitness accounts. Just think: If you created the universe, how would you explain it to Moses and the Israelites, 3000 years ago, with language and concepts they will understand?

When it comes to the language and context of Genesis, the difficulty is that many educated people have come to many different conclusions about the interpretation. Christians disagree on the interpretation. And I believe that this happens when we take on too much - when we try to make the text say more than it does. When I read this text, for the thousandth time, when I study the context, when I look at the original Hebrew text and study the sources and the translations and the commentaries, I might STILL come to a different conclusion to other pastors and teachers.

But Genesis has spoken to generations of humans, for thousands of years. There were generations before us who believed that the earth was flat and who thought that the sun rotated around the earth. But Genesis didn’t speak to challenge **scientific** observations. Genesis speaks to us about creation as a **relationship**. God aims to tell us in Genesis 1 that he is a God of **relationship**. Let me highlight two things about Genesis 1:

1. God is the creator of all that exists. He created everything out of nothing, by his command. He speaks and it comes into existence.

Listen to the opening words:

- *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

There **was** a beginning. And **only** God was there. And **everything** came from him. How much does that affect your life? **Everything** comes from God. When you give of your time or your money or your gifts in ministry – you’re giving out of what God gave you! Because **everything** comes from God. That’s a principle to live by.

When I was in year 9 at school, I made this Cold Chisel. I’m pretty proud of this chisel. I made it out of a rusty old rod of steel. But I didn’t make the steel!

In year 10 at school I made a step ladder out of timber. I’m proud of that. But I didn’t make the timber!

God made all that he made out of **nothing**. **All** things come from God.

That’s IMPORTANT for our relationship with God. You can argue a lot about the principles of Genesis 1, but this is the indisputable fact for the Christian – God did it. God is sovereign. God is in command from the very beginning.

We might have different opinions on the science of Genesis, and I have heard many Christians argue differently on matters like evolution. But let me suggest this: that is not the *purpose* of Genesis. Genesis is about our **relationship with God**, who is sovereign over all things and created all things by his command.

The second thing is this:

2. Creation fulfils God’s purpose – creation is to be understood and enjoyed according to God’s purpose.

God gives us an account of Creation that shows us **order**. It doesn’t just say he created everything. It says he created “this” **then** “this”, **then** “this” **then** “this”.

- Have a look at the order here:

Day 1: light

Day 2: water and sky

Day 3: Land and vegetation

THEN

Day 4: The Luminaries – the sun, moon and stars.

Day 5: Fish and Birds

Day 6: Beasts and Humans

What Genesis 1 gives us is an **order** of creation with purpose. This is not random. You can even see the way the days match up:

Day 1 is light. Day 4 is sun, moon and stars – the luminaries that light our earth.

Day 2 is water and sky. Day 5 is fish and birds to inhabit the water and sky.

Day 3 is land and vegetation. Day 6 is beasts and humans to live on the land and eat the vegetation.

Again, we're drawn into a poetic storytelling of relationships. I don't read Genesis as 6 literal 24 hour days. I know some **do** read it like that. I read Genesis as a poetic account of an event that is BEYOND human comprehension. And God has given us minds and hearts to seek answers. But the answers we actually NEED for a relationship with God are the answers he DOES give us in Genesis 1: WHO and WHY.

- The WHO is God.
- The WHY is relationship.

God created a universe for a relationship with us.

The third big thing about this chapter we will look at next week

3. Human beings are the crown of God's creation 1:26-31 (next week)

So what is the importance of Genesis 1 for us today?

Let me ask you - Are there times you doubt yourself? Do you question "Am I worth anything? Am I good enough? Does God care about me? Do I have a purpose in this universe?"

Genesis 1 says that from the very beginning, God was there. All things come from him. And he cares about a relationship with us. Genesis is God's first love poem to us. God gave us Genesis 1 because he wants us to **know** him. He wants us to know where it all began. He wants us to know that he thought about creation and that it wasn't random. He planned it and it was good. He planned every part of it to be good. And you are a part of that good creation.

This is Genesis 1: It all comes from God. It all has a purpose and design. And that includes you. But most importantly – God wants a relationship with you. That is WHY he created you.