

EXCERPT

ivp
Academic

Embracing Evolution

How Understanding Science Can Strengthen Your Christian Life

June 16, 2020 | \$20, 155 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5283-2

Matthew Nelson Hill (PhD, Durham University) is assistant professor of philosophy in the department of theology at Spring Arbor University. He is an ordained elder in the Free Methodist Church.

Seeing the World Through Different Lenses

When I was a pastor, I would get questions about difficult Bible passages. And maybe it was my lack of confidence or maybe it was my seminary training (or probably a little of both), but I would always defer to church tradition for the answer—either my own Free Methodist tradition or the early church fathers and councils. Who am I to disagree with *them*? Currently, I teach theology and philosophy at a Christian university, and I am surrounded by intelligent and godly Bible professors. So now, when students come to me with complicated Bible questions, I get to defer to my colleagues, which is quite a relief. I've found that my colleagues answer our students in much the same way as I counseled my parishioners—in deference to our faith, pointing them to what church tradition says about the passage while using their reason and their personal experience with God as their guide.

Reading the Bible is complicated. It's not often straightforward, and many people suggest various methods of interpretation. The purpose of this chapter is not to propose some new method for reading Scripture. Nor in it do I propose to elucidate all the intricate biblical passages that have been troubling scholars and clergy for generations. Instead, what I hope to express is how, by leaning on the practices established in the church over the last two thousand years, we can come to a robust and historical way of reading Scripture.

When approaching any book that purports to speak on Christian ideas, the critical and careful reader ought to pay attention to how the author views Scripture. And so, to be forthright with my readers, I've placed this chapter immediately following the introductory chapter. It's important to me for readers to know that I'm orthodox in my theology, steadfast about the authority of Scripture as interpreted through Christian tradition, and an advocate for the place of reason and personal experience with God when reading the Bible. In this way I'm both Wesleyan and little orthodox. Thus, I believe this book is for the majority of practicing Christians, from mainline Protestants to evangelicals, from Roman Catholics to Eastern Orthodox.

All humans see the world upside down. We view an image in the world, the light passes through the lens in our eyes, and then the image is flipped on its head. The brain takes those upside-down images from each eye and does something marvelous: it combines the images, flips them right-side up, and makes sense of the world. It's an amazing process that exhibits how remarkable the human body is.

George Stratton was one of the world's first experimental psychologists conducting experiments in the early twentieth century. He was so fascinated by what was happening within the eye that he created an elaborate experiment. So, if you're keeping track, the image enters our eyes, gets flipped by them, and then gets flipped another time by our brain. Stratton, however, wanted to flip that image *again* using a set of special goggles he developed in order to test whether or not the brain could adapt and flip the image right-side up one more time. If the experiment worked, he would have proof that we get comfortable seeing the world a certain way after a while.

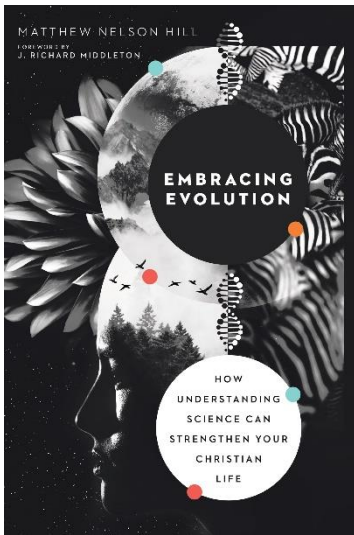
Stratton wore these goggles for a full week. At first, he was nauseous and disoriented. He fell repeatedly, and it was as if



Karin DeHaven, academic publicist
800.843.4587 ext. 4096 or kdehaven@ivpress.com

ivp

ivpress.com/media



EXCERPT



Embracing Evolution *How Understanding Science Can Strengthen Your Christian Life*

June 16, 2020 | \$20, 155 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5283-2

Matthew Nelson Hill (PhD, Durham University) is assistant professor of philosophy in the department of theology at Spring Arbor University. He is an ordained elder in the Free Methodist Church.

his body wasn't his own. The first few days were full of falls and sickness. But after the fourth day, he began to adapt, and after only seven days of wearing the upside-down glasses, Stratton was able to see the world right-side up again—his eyes had adjusted to a new normal. Through this experiment Stratton proved that over time he was less aware of his goggles and how they shaped the way he saw the world.

In a philosophical sense, Stratton's experiment applies to the ways we variously experience the world; we are all looking at the world through lenses—and we're so comfortable with them that we often don't know we're wearing them. We're conditioned by our surroundings and habits to think and see in certain ways. The same can be said for how we see and read Scripture—nobody reads Scripture without wearing certain lenses; it's impossible not to do so. But that's not necessarily a bad thing, especially since it's a basic reality of our creatureliness. We must, however, acknowledge that there are lenses that distort the truth of Scripture and those that clarify it. In many ways, doing theology is the practice of working out in community which lenses we ought to put on and which we ought to take off.

Everyone is shaped to read Scripture in particular ways whether we realize it or not; in much the same way that worldviews are formed, our approach to reading Scripture is often initially formed in a pretheoretical fashion—that is, it is formed before our awareness of such. Just as Stratton's brain adjusted to the effects of his special goggles, so we often come to look at Scripture through lenses we're unaware have been placed on us. These lenses we don as we read Scripture are like a prism that splinters a ray of light; God's truth is the pure beam of light, and we desire to work our way back toward that pure light. Yet we see that light through a glass darkly, so it comes to us splintered in greens, blues, reds, and yellows—beautiful though imperfect. Because we do not yet see that light clearly, we must work carefully and diligently to avoid heresy and heterodoxy. The way almost all orthodox Christians accomplish such interpretive and theological work is through an approach that appeals to Scripture, tradition, reason, and personal experience with God. These four points are like the splintered light—they are all necessary parts of the pure beam, and though we come to them separately, they work in union. Indeed, various Christian traditions differ on the order of importance placed on each point; in fact, some say there are only three points—some say separating the points is unnecessary. But for the purposes of this discussion, we're appealing equally to the four points, a common practice among orthodox Christians. And while there is a place for debates about the order and importance of each point—e.g., my own Wesleyan tradition places the greatest emphasis on Scripture—this book is not it. What's important for our discussion is that in one way or another all Christians see and interpret their faith through these four points.

And so, when we read and interpret Scripture, we do well to acknowledge that we do so from a particular perspective. Whether we realize it or not, we read Scripture out of church tradition, reason, and our personal experiences. It's nearly impossible, and probably dangerous, to read Scripture in isolation from these. For example, when we read the words "God the Father," we aren't expected to ignore the connotations that God is like our own earthly father. But very quickly we understand how reading this appellation out of only our own personal experiences is inadequate. Some of us have had great earthly fathers; and for us, when we read "God the Father," we understand God to be endearing, full of love, supportive, selfless, and so on. For others, coming across proclamations of God as *Father* in Scripture might conjure childhood trauma, past neglect or abuses, or simply distance and abandonment. Whether we're aware of this or not, we read these sacred words of Scripture through the lens of our own experiences.

—Taken from chapter two, "Reading Scripture Faithfully"



Karin DeHaven, academic publicist
800.843.4587 ext. 4096 or kdehaven@ivpress.com



ivpress.com/media