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Science 101: Speaking in Tongues and Sights Unseen

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Science 101: Speaking in Tongues and Sights Unseen

Abstract

"For me, science isn't only about hearing and seeing, it's also about responding; about being in dialogue."

Posting about looking for meaning in the physical world from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/science-101-speaking-in-tongues-and-sights-unseen/>

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Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Science 101: Speaking in Tongues and Sights Unseen

 allthings.org/science-101-speaking-in-tongues-and-sights-unseen/

September 19, 2016

Jeff Ploegstra

I sometimes wonder how I ended up as a translator.

Biology definitely has its own language, terminology, and culture, but that isn't really what I am talking about. When we experience the world there are all kinds of stimuli that we ignore (check out this test for [inattention blindness](#)-you might be surprised at how much you miss) mostly because it doesn't have any apparent meaning for us. It doesn't pay off for us to pay attention to it. Like the babble of foreigners at the international terminal, it is all just background noise.

But it isn't.

There is meaning if we know how to interpret it. That's one way of thinking about what a scientist is: someone who knows how to look for meaning in the physical creation in a particular way and make it comprehensible.

I do research, I present at conferences, and I publish in peer reviewed journals. That is only part of my work as a translator. Most of my time and energy are spent working with students. Really, even my research serves this purpose – to make the meaning in the physical world comprehensible for my students and to help them learn how to make it comprehensible themselves. My role is to help them be perceiving and not just looking; understanding, not just hearing.

In the natural sciences, we often need to acquire new eyes and ears to see and hear the creation in new ways. In some cases, this is a new theoretical lens, and in other cases it is a new tool or piece of equipment. A microscope gives us new vision, but so does an awareness of relationships. In my research, I use the ears of genetics to listen to how human activity shapes the landscape.

The research questions I pursue are individually interesting and important, but they grow out of a bigger question for me. God gave us scripture, a written word, in our language, to help us understand the story of our Creator's love for us. But what would scripture look like for the rest of creation? For the birds, for the trees, what language would God use to speak them? For the rocks, what patterns or symbols? Would God inspire men and women to write it on paper and cast it into the ocean for the fish?

What if it was *us*?

What if we are meant to be a *living* scripture to the whole of creation? What if we were gifted with the responsibility for speaking God's love and bringing the story of redemption to all that was made? This is the other half of the conversation. For me, science isn't only about hearing and seeing, it's also about responding; about being in dialogue.

The way that we value things shapes the way that we pay attention to the world. The creation has many values associated with it, but in today's society, we primarily value it as a resource – for food production, recreation, clean water, and for a beautiful view to inspire us. In Christian circles, we might broadly value it as life support while we strive to glorify our Creator. That all sounds pretty good and true.

But what if God made us *for* the creation in much the same way that we think the rest of creation is *for* us? What if we are meant to view the rest of creation as partners rather than merely resources?

How would it shape the questions we ask and how we listen to the world?

Maybe it sounds overly flowery or pretentious, but in large part, I see science as an endeavor to learn the language needed to convey God's love to the rest of His good creation. To know how to listen and speak, that we might partner with all creation to glorify our Creator. That we might be a revelation.

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. Romans 8:19-21