



Ngā Here: The Many Connections

[Ngā Here - The Many Connections | Eco Church Aotearoa](#)

Exploring the many connections that exist between creation, the bible, and living in Aotearoa.

Haerenga Tuatahi Discussion Questions

Episode 1: The Departure

1. James mentions several questions that Christians in Aotearoa have about the health of our environment and the people that live here:

Questions such as what our faith and the bible have to say about the way that we live and how we can care for creation?

How can we connect more deeply with the world around us and with each other?

Why does the church seem so useless when it comes to caring for God's creation?

Or how can Māori and Pākehā learn from each other and grow together?

- a. Which of these questions do you most resonate with?
 - b. What other questions do you have about the health of our environment?
2. Unlike in Te Ao Māori, Pākehā culture has largely banned conversations about spirituality, such that we don't know how to have them. Even Christians struggle to have deep and genuine conversations about faith and spiritual matters.
 - a. How have you been affected by western culture's removal of spirituality from our day-to-day life?
 3. James, Andrew and Waiora express how they feel when they enter a place like Pūtaringamotu (Dean's bush), the last piece of remnant bush in Waitaha that is indicative of how the whole area would have looked a few hundred years ago.

Andrew expresses how it's like walking into a living cathedral – a place of life, history, and faithfulness – and that he experiences wonder, joy, and participation.

James feels the sacredness and mystery of the place, and expresses sadness that so much bush like this was cut down; the way things were for thousands and thousands of years has been denuded.

Wairoa reflects on how Māori understand themselves in relation to the land, and if this is how the land looked, then of course Māori lived and thought and told stories like they did, with a deep sense of connectedness to the environment and other people.

- a. What pieces of native bush are in your area? Could you plan a trip to one this month?
 - b. How do you feel when you step inside native bush? Consider the sounds, smells, temperature, biodiversity...
4. Andrew mentions that we often think of ourselves as the only worshipping creatures. Yet Revelation has this beautiful image of all created creatures standing before the throne room, worshipping God. Although this is an image for the future, it's also an image for the present. When we do what we're created to do, we give honour and glory and praise to our Creator. When we denude things, and rob them of their life, then they cease giving their praises.
 - a. How do you envision this scene in Revelation 5:13 of all created creatures worshipping God? What would that look like in our world now?
 - b. What role can we play in enabling creation to worship God?
5. The Dean brothers stewarded or protected Pūtaringamotu from being cut down and turned into farmland, so that it remained a beautiful bush.
 - a. What does good stewardship of our environment look like to you? Perhaps you know a story of good stewardship in your area that you'd like to share.
6. *Ngā Here* means lots of connections. Although we often think of forests as individual trees, increasingly we're discovering that trees are interconnected. Via their roots, trees pass messages and nutrients to one another. James thinks it's a tragedy that our framing stories often prioritise large-scale productivity over living in balance. We've become atomised individuals, disconnected from our environment and place, despite the promise of connection of social media and other aspects of modern society.

- a. What would it look like to see ourselves as *ngā here* – connected to everything – rather than as individuals?
- b. How would this change the way we live?

Finish by reading Psalm 8 together, just like the *Ngā Here* team does in this episode. We pray, Lord, may we live up to the responsibility you've given us.

Episode 2: The Problem

1. The trio lament that, until recently, the Christian church has been largely disconnected from and unaware of the state of the world. It seems hypocritical for Christianity to claim what's true and real about the world, yet not engage with real issues for our world, such as climate change, in a tangible way. As a result, many young people have become disillusioned with Christianity.
 - a. How have you observed the disconnect between Christianity and global issues, such as climate change?
 - b. How have you experienced that and how does it make you feel?
2. Rubbish is a problem. From the top of the world to the bottom, there is the presence of humans in the form of waste. Much of this will never degrade.
 - a. Where have you noticed rubbish recently?
 - b. What can we do about it?
3. Another problem is the "user problem". Although humans are good, we are also sinful – we have a tendency for violence, hatred, and selfishness; we have competitive instincts and a desire for profit; we automatically scapegoat others.
 - a. How can we lament the effects of human sinfulness on the state of our world? How can we sit with the brokenness and discomfort? Perhaps you could acknowledge a way in which you have personally contributed to environmental degradation.
4. In the Bible, we read about God loving the world (John 3:16). Andrew helps us understand that the word "world" is translated from the original Greek word *cosmos*, which means the whole universe, the totality of everything. From the

moment that God created (Genesis 1 and 2), God declares that all of creation is good; God cares about all matter.

- a. What difference would it make if you were to understand that God loves the whole world – not just humans, but also every plant and living creature?

5. As human beings, we are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27). We have tremendous capacity for creativity, ingenuity, collaboration, and for bringing about true, good, and beautiful things in the world. Brian McLaren, author of *Life after Doom*, says that if we're going to overcome the doom facing our environment, then we need "great creativity, imagination, collaboration, cohesion, character and courage" – we need to exercise our God-given good capacities.
 - a. What creative and imaginative ideas have you encountered to tackle the climate crisis?

Pray along with James, that we would learn from Jesus how to be the people we were created to be, so that we can partner with God to represent heaven on earth instead of hell, even though we represent both all the time.

Episode 3: Myths and Braided Rivers

1. In the past few hundred years, many have perceived faith and science to be in a battle against each other. For instance, some consider the scientific theory of evolution by natural selection (that requires the earth to be billions of years old) as incompatible with the Genesis creation narratives.
 - a. How have you experienced the relationship between faith and science?
 - b. What has most influenced your understanding?

2. The scientific method has deep roots in the Christian faith. Science methodology (formulation of hypothesis, testing hypothesis, revising hypothesis, proposing a theory) was an expression of worship because it was a way of understanding the created world.

Andrew discusses how science communicates assumptions about:

- (i) the nature of the world – that there is regularity about it;
- (ii) the nature of humans – our ability to know something; and

- (iii) the nature of God – that as we look at the world, the fingerprints of the creator are evident of it.
- a.** What is your response to the assumptions communicated by science that Andrew identifies? For instance, have you considered these before, and do they sit well with you or make you uncomfortable? Why?
 - b.** What other assumptions do you think science communicates?

 - 3.** Consider that if everything true is God’s truth, then everything we discover is God’s truth. Rather than setting cultural and religious stories against each other, consider how they can converge and offer richness to each other, and where they don’t converge and are incoherent to each other. The *Ngā Here* team suggest that perhaps Christians need to have a broader understanding of what we mean by truth, and therefore not see ourselves as in a battle about truth.
 - a.** How can we broaden our understanding of truth?
 - b.** In an age where “alternative facts” are used to confuse and misrepresent truths, we need to protect ourselves from being gullible. How can we rigorously test what is true?

 - 4.** Indigenous cultures often use stories to communicate truth, such as the origin of the earth or explanation of weather patterns. Westerners often discount these myths and legends as not real. Andrew implores us to consider myths as embedded truth; while not necessarily factual, they communicate deeper truths about the way the world works (e.g. how and why the world came into being, who we are, and our role in the world).
 - a.** What does the word “myth” or “legend” communicate to you?
 - b.** In Te Ao Māori, there are many legends about how our world works. Choose one and discuss what embedded truths it might communicate.

 - 5.** The episode talks about “braided rivers” as a way to understand how we can hold multiple truths together. In a braided river, water runs down multiple ‘braids’ that may join and then converge again, but all end up going to the ocean. Consider the braids of a river as the different stories and ways of talking about why we are here and what it means to be human. The braids can have big gravel banks, so as you’re paddling down your braid of the river you may not be able to see any other braids unless you park up your waka and climb up the gravel bank. You may assume that your braid is the only braid (i.e. this *is* the river), until you run out of water and have to go looking for another way to interpret the world. Yet there is wisdom to be

gained from looking at multiple braids and seeing where they add meaning to each other.

The trio talk about a moment that, for them, was their braid running out of water:

James became disillusioned with the vision of life that was being sold to him in high school;

Waiora had connected God, church, and whānau, so when one thing wasn't good, that brought into question everything else;

Andrew realised the Christian world he was in was shallow and he needed more depth to stay in that braid.

- a. What is your equivalent of when the water runs out? In other words, what would it take to compel you to consider and accept the truth of another worldview?
- b. For some people, an encounter with God in a tangible way is what compels them to get out of their braid and into a new river. Have you experienced such an encounter?

Episode 4: The Human Calling

1. The trio discuss how the creation account in Genesis 1 can be interpreted as describing a temple. The land and sea and skies form the foundation of the temple, and then it is filled with every living creature. For Israel, temples represented the richness and wonder and glory of God. They came to the temple to worship God. So, this creation account climaxes on Day 7 with all of creation worshipping the creator.
 - a. Considering creation as a temple gives a different focus from historical western accounts which consider the creation of humans as the climax of creation. How does that sit with you?
 - b. Humans are one of the many living creatures that fill this temple. What does it mean to be responsible to play our part in the cosmic choir?
2. Andrew explains that often there are multiple levels of meaning that can all be true. For example, birds sing because they communicate with each other and attract mates; birds also sing because they're offering their praise back to God.
 - a. Read Genesis 1 again. What other things might this creation narrative communicate?

3. There are many words we use to describe humans. This episode mentions: tangata whenua (people in relationship with the land); homo sapien (wise creature); human (from the humus, fallen forest leaves that break down soil); adam (earth creature, made from the earth).
 - a. What terms are most familiar to you?
 - b. How have these shaped your understanding of the identity and vocation of humans?

4. Our worldviews shape the way we as humans relate to the earth. Many western worldviews consider humans as better than other animals, and therefore created to rule over them; whereas indigenous cultures look to learn from animals and plants, knowing that we need each other.
 - a. What indigenous practices are you aware of that we could learn from in taking care of the environment?

5. James opened this episode by telling the story of how he was confronted by the polystyrene letters on the stage at his church.
 - a. Consider your church, home and other contexts. What do you notice about the use of single-use items?

Episode 5: The Response

1. Genesis 1 and 2 talks about humans having *dominion, ruling* over creation and *subduing* the earth (Gen 1:28; Gen 2:15). These verses have a coercive sense about them, implying a hierarchy, and thus many Christians have interpreted these verses as permission for humans to dominate creation. The *Ngā Here* team suggest that, within the larger biblical narrative, the way that we should understand rule and authority is to look at Jesus. Jesus lived out his rule and authority with a life of service, love, and sacrifice.
 - a. What interpretations of words like 'dominion' or 'rule' or 'subdue' have you heard in the past?
 - b. In light of the life of Jesus, how should we 'rule' over creation?
 - c. Te Paipera Tapu translates the word dominion as rangatira - how is rangatiratanga different from dominion?

2. James and Waiora discuss the Māori whakatauki, “Ko au te awa, ko te awa ko au”, which means “I am the river, and the river is me.” Māori recognise that how we treat the river is entirely connected to our own water and wellbeing. Humans are approximately 70% water, and our brains are an even higher percentage, yet most of us don’t have a genuine connection with any water outside of our bodies.
 - a. Why do you think we have become disconnected from water?
 - b. How can we be more aware of, and help cultivate, the health of our waterways?

3. When the word “to know” is used in the bible, it’s not a head concept, it’s an experience and linked to ethical action. To really know something means you embody it. A “head knowledge” makes no sense in the biblical idea where: Belief leads to transformation which leads to action. The team ponders what active knowledge looks like when applied to caring for creation. Here is the same question for us:
 - a. If we read Genesis 1 in a way that sees humans as a distinct part of creation with a vocation and a calling, but not separate from the rest of creation, and if we *know* that in a way that leads to action, what does that look like?

4. The team brainstorms several practical examples of what it could look like to be good stewards of God’s creation, such as planting community gardens, no more single-use plastic, sustainable transport, and sustainable building choices.
 - a. What could your church community do to care for the environment?

5. When considering what they’re taking away from this conversation, **James** is challenged – he feels disconnected from the world even though he is knowledgeable about it; **Waiora** is encouraged – the answers exist. She loves being Māori because indigenous ways of living have so much to offer this conversation.
 - a. What are you taking away from this conversation?

[Episode 6: The Return](#)

This episode revisits the themes and questions that this season has discussed. Use these questions as a chance to revisit the conversations of the previous weeks. What has changed for you?

James begins the episode by reading an excerpt from Henri Nouwen's book, *With Burning Hearts*, about the disciples' interaction with the risen Jesus on the road of Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). Here is the excerpt:

"The biggest difference lay in the story teller. A stranger appearing from nowhere, and yet one who somehow seems closer than anyone who had ever told that story. The loss, the grief, the guilt, the fear, the glimpses of hope, and the many unanswered questions that battled for attention in their restless minds. All of these were lifted up by this stranger and placed in the context of a story much larger than their own. What seemed so confusing began to offer new horizons. What had seemed so oppressive began to feel liberating, what had seemed so extremely sad began to take on the quality of joy. As he talked to them, they gradually came to know that their little lives weren't as little as they'd thought, but part of a great mystery that not only embraced many generations but stretched itself out from eternity to eternity. The stranger didn't say that there was no reason for sadness, but that their sadness was part of a larger sadness in which joy was hidden. The stranger didn't say that the death they were mourning wasn't real, but that it was a death that inaugurated more life, real life. The stranger didn't say that they hadn't lost a friend who had given them new courage and new hope, but that this loss would create the way to a relationship far beyond any friendship that they had ever experienced. Never did the stranger deny what they told him. To the contrary, he affirmed it as a much larger event in which they were allowed to play a unique role."

1. When the disciples met Jesus on the road to Emmaus, he opened the scriptures to them and re-narrated the story. It was a story they knew well - they'd just lived through it - but Jesus reframes it for them. In this season of *Ngā Here*, we've been reframing the story of Genesis. For instance, rather than considering humans as the centre of the cosmic story, we've reframed it to see that God is the centre of the story, a priest in his temple. Therefore, humans find their meaning as part of a bigger story. Our unique role is to be part of the cosmic choir.
 - a. How can we help the other voices of the cosmic choir to sing?
 - b. What environmental projects are already happening in your area that you can get involved with?

2. Another reframing we've made is the shift of human's relationship to the environment from domination to *kaitiaki*. Rather than treating the environment however we want because we're better than it; *kaitiaki* communicates a care for the environment, a desire to give it back in a better condition than when we found it, just like we would do when looking after someone else's child.

- a. What could being *kaitiaki* of our environment mean for you and your church community?
 - b. *Kaitiaki* also communicates a relationship with the environment. If we want our relationship with the *whenua* to shift something in us, helping us to become better people, how can we put in the *mahi* to cultivate a deeper relationship?

3. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus affirmed the loss, the grief, the fear, and the many unanswered questions of the disciples. Just like the disciples, we probably have many unanswered questions about climate change and the future of this earth.
 - a. Take a moment to write down some of the questions you have for God about his creation.
 - b. What difference does it make that Jesus affirms the reality of our environmental crisis and the emotions that come with that?
