

Cosmic Curiosity

Interview with Ben Ridley

Have you ever looked up at the night sky and wondered how everything came to be? Is it all just a random series of events, or is there really a creator behind it all? Where do you turn when you're looking for answers to the questions of the universe?

"Science gives us this information of what things are, how they come to be, but it doesn't explain why the universe was created and that's where I find faith fills the gap."



The Aurora Australis, November 2025, by Ben Ridley

Ben Ridley grew up watching documentaries with his dad about space and the stars, which instilled in him a lifelong curiosity – a curiosity which led him to study astrophysics at university. Today, Liam chats to Ben about where that curiosity comes from and where his faith fits into the big questions of life and the universe

Introduction

Liam: I'm Liam, and I'm sitting down today with Ben Ridley. Ben is an astrophysicist, and he's here today to talk with us a bit about science, faith, and the universe. Let's start at the top of things, what is astrophysics?

Ben: So astrophysics, if you wanna break it down into two things, you've got astronomy, so things in space, the stars, the universe; and physics, which is kinda how things work, how things interact, how things move. So, astrophysics is looking at how that all happens off of Earth, out in space, out in the vastness of the universe.

Liam: Do you remember the first time you noticed that there was a whole universe out there waiting to be explored?

Ben: I remember, just one night out, well away from the city, and it was the first time I'd really just like put my head the whole way back and taken in the enormity of what was right above me. So often, we just look a little bit above the horizon at the stars, but really just tipping my head the whole way back, and stars was all I could see, and I could see the Milky Way, and it was just profound. And I was like, "Wow, that's really cool." So that's kinda how I came to love it.

Navigating Science and Faith Beliefs

Liam: You grew up in a Christian household. What does an experience like looking up at the stars, what effect does that have on Christian part of you?

Ben: It's an interesting relationship between the two, and one that I really wrestled with for a long time.

Yeah, so I grew up in a Christian household. I'm the youngest of four boys. I've been in church my whole life. So I always had a very strong deeply rooted faith, and so I've kinda always had this understanding of God and the Creator and how the world came to be, which I suppose starts to get a little more murky when, as you're learning science, it's like, well, these things don't quite seem like they necessarily line up. But I've certainly gotten to a point where science and faith do go hand-in-hand for me - they're not contrary at all. They're actually complementary to one another for telling the story.

Liam: How have you navigated times when you doubt one or the other?

Ben: It's tricky. On one hand believing that God created the universe, how it was, and we read in scripture, in Genesis the creation story over seven days, so, you've got that on one hand. And then on the other side, you hear about the Big Bang and evolution and these things that have been going on for...well the age of the universe is close to 14 billion years old, as far as we can tell at the moment. And simple logic says, okay, seven days is not 14 billion years. How does that kind of work? Which was honestly one of the first major wrestling points that I had was: how do these things coexist?

And I remember one night at a youth event, we had a pastor come and talk about science versus faith, and that kind of sparked a lot of thoughts and was very thought-provoking. And he presented it as this idea that they don't actually work against each other; that **science is a tool for us that God's given us to actually explore and learn about his creation.**

And an analogy that over years I've come to find a lot of value in for this very thing is: picture the situation that I've walked up and knocked on your door at home, and I'm just holding a cake. You can see by opening the door that I've got a cake. You know what's probably gone into the cake. It'd be flour and eggs and whatever flavour that's gone into it. So, you can know what the cake is, how it's made, but you don't know *why* I made it. And so, science gives us this information of what things are, how they come to be, but it doesn't give us a *why*. It doesn't give us purpose. It doesn't explain why the universe was created in the context of astrophysics. **And that's where I find faith fills the gap, it covers up that piece of the puzzle and puts it in, because it gives purpose to the creation, purpose to the things that we experience around us, that we see in the night sky, that we live alongside and observe. It gives us a why.** That, yeah, God gave those things purpose.

Seeking the 'Why'

Liam: Do you find that as you've moved further into your field of study or your field of work, that you've pressed in more on the 'why'? Or that that's been something that's been a motivating factor in you wanting to learn more or understand more?

Ben: Absolutely. I think it's a core part of our human experience to be curious and to ask those questions and ponder. And I think it's a wonderful thing that God's let us do and made us to do.

Cause I think the world would be pretty boring if we all just knew how everything was. Like, it'd make a lot of things redundant. You would just kind of end up being a bit robotic and have a routine. And what are we trying to actually achieve here if we already knew and understood everything? So, **I think the fact that God made us to be curious and ask questions, I think is, it's a beautiful thing that he's given us this big mystery for us to go and solve and figure out and learn. We haven't run out of questions to ask, you know? We kinda answer one, and it asks five more.**

Liam: Have you ever found yourself coming up against one of those questions and being really at a loss to find common ground between what the science might say and what faithful heart might ... lead you to believe?

Ben: Yes, absolutely. I think probably one of the most common questions that I have been asked as someone that's studied space and astrophysics is the whole discussion around extraterrestrial life; are we the only complex life in the universe? Which is a really interesting question, because, statistically speaking, what we have here is incredibly improbable, right? Incredibly improbable that we can have complex life on Earth which is a planet in just the right space from its host star to exist. It's not too close to the sun that all the water evaporates off and things are too hot. It's not too far away that it's frozen and that life wouldn't be able to be sustainable. So, it's this nice middle ground. Like the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, it's just right. And so yeah, even within our solar system, for Earth to have formed how it has is such a profoundly small chance of things happening the way they need to. And we're just one star with one set of planets. We're a part of a galaxy that's got to be somewhere between 100 billion and 400 billion stars that could have their own planets similar, and in the observable universe, we estimate that there's probably 100 trillion galaxies, which is just a profound number. My brain can't even comprehend that many galaxies, let alone each of those having a billion stars amongst it.

And one question that physicist Enrico Fermi asked is, "where's everybody else?" Because of these statistical improbabilities, there's enough opportunity that we should see others, and this question of, okay, well, if there's enough opportunity for there to be other life, and we're not seeing it, what does that then mean? And it's really led me to probably one of the most comforting, yet like cosmic scale, like mind-blowing realisations of I'm not actually fussed either way whether there is other life or whether there isn't. Because if there is, how amazing that God's made a universe and made such complexities. But if there isn't, how awesome is it that we have a whole universe that God's made just to point to how amazing and powerful he is, just so that he could make us and put us in the middle of it!

Liam: That's a pretty mind-blowing way to look at the universe everything in it: we're on this tiny blue marble in a sea of literally trillions of other marbles, and for some reason we're all here. It really does point to something deliberate.

Ben: Yeah.

Liam: In all of the random statistical analysis that you could do to calculate the odds of it happening, the fact is that it happened, we're living it right now. And what does that say about the case for creation?

Ben: Yeah, and there's countless lists of historical physicists and mathematicians and scientists that have all had faith and wondered these same questions, and been drawn to investigate and learn and be curious about it. Which, again, I think science being a tool, it's a way we actually can draw near to God in his creation. It's a way we can dig into and investigate and learn about just how precise he is, and the time he spent to carefully put everything into place into the way that we see it arranged and interacting, that all of that was done with meticulous detail.

And the more people kinda look into things, the more it points back to this couldn't have just been random chance. There's too many things that have happened in particular ways for it to have just been left to chance.

I appreciate and enjoy watching society as a whole figure these things out, and see more things kinda pointing back to this idea that there's gotta be someone that's behind this. Like it's a fun little journey of watching the world discover God.

Liam: I love that you've equated a lot of scientific disciplines to an episode Scooby-Doo where we're sort of in a place where we're trying to unpack a mystery constantly. And as we go through the motions of unpacking that mystery, we draw closer to a conclusion that things aren't as random as perhaps we yeah want them to be.

Ben: Yeah.

A relationship with the Creator

Liam: So clearly you're of the opinion that there is a creator of the universe, and creator is God.

Ben: Yeah.

Liam: What do love most love about the idea of God as a creator of the universe? What, in all that mystery and wonder, do you marvel at most?

Ben: I think kinda building off of the picture I painted before of, we're this tiny, tiny point in this enormous creation of the universe, and I think what I find most powerful and impacting is that out of all of that, even out of the eight billion people on this planet, God sees me, and God sees you, and wants to know us intimately.

It's not just a, "Yep, here's my people that I've put there. I'll leave them there for a while." No, he wants to know what I'm doing today. He wants to know how I'm feeling about it. He cares. And the fact that he doesn't have to. **We're witnessing the majesty of what he can create, yet he still chooses to zoom into this tiny little spinning ball of rock that has some people on it, and care, and go to the lengths that he's done to restore that relationship that we severed.**

I often think about it like the relation that a small child has with the father if they're walking along on a path, holding dad's hands and dad's watching them have fun and just enjoy the world and be curious and figure things out. That's the sort of kinda interaction that I feel with God and this wonderful creation. There's a lot of stuff that we're still figuring out, and we are comparatively incredibly small and insignificant to the scope of the universe. But he's right there watching us figure it out with a big smile on his face as we find joy in what he's made for us.

Liam: And I guess the extension is that we're not insignificant.

Ben: Yeah. 100%.

Liam: So, we're maybe insignificant next to the scale of something of that enormitude. But I guess what you've described there is that God cares about us on the same scale.

Ben: Yeah.

Liam: And, that in makes us not small in his eyes.

Responding to the 'is God real?' question

Liam: What do you think people struggle with most when they're wrestling with that question: 'Is God real? Is there some big creator of the universe?' Clearly, you've got an opinion that's of the affirmative. But what do you think holds people back the most from exploring that as a possibility?

Ben: It's something that I've encountered a lot through my studies and particularly getting university where all of a sudden I'm the minority in the room of a lot of scientists, and their perspective on the world differed to mine. And I think the thing that I found the most common that would lead people to struggle was this attempt to rationalise. I think it's really easy to want to understand and want to have an explanation for things. And the scientific method kinda tells us that's what we should be doing. You observe something, you try and figure out why that happened and then take that forward into other things. But I don't think you can necessarily do that for God. It's written a lot in scripture, there's things that we just don't understand about him and his nature and how he does things.

And I think it's a bit of a catch-22 in science with trying to understand things. A lot of the forefathers of physics, the further they delved, the more it pointed them back to the fact there had to be something else going on. So, in this attempt to rationalise and understand and explain things, they realised more and more that maybe we can't. This couldn't have just come to be. And you know, Albert Einstein, Galileo Galilei, Isaac Newton, Kepler, Heisenberg, like these massive names, Niels Bohr – massive names in the science community – were all devout Christians, and all deeply questioned why things happen and had this pursuit of why is this happening? Why do we observe things like this?

And so I think there's almost like a crossover point where a lot of people get caught up in trying to understand it, but if they actually just dig deeper, there's amazing revelation that they might be just on the brink of finding.

Every person's individual and their own journey with the Father is their own. I believe in a God that's calling his people back to him and working through things like that. And there's countless stories of people that have delved into various aspects of science, or even, a common book, *The Case for Christ*, a famous one about a strong atheist who was trying to disprove that Jesus Christ existed, and in trying to do that, came to faith. Like the same sort of dynamic I think I've seen time and time again. And I think a lot of people get caught up in the early stage of that, they're still trying to figure it all out for themselves. **But I think there comes a point where rationality doesn't necessarily always give us the answer that we want.** And some people find it harder to accept that than others, I suppose.

Struggling with the questions of 'Why'?

Liam: I guess the big infinite question of 'why' has been a bit of a theme in the way we've been talking. Where do you go when you struggle with the why? Where do you go when you're in a state of, "I'm not sure," or- "I'm doubtful," or, "I can't see God in this specific thing, and that worries me."

Ben: I think throughout my journey of coming to be where I am at with my studies and science and my passion for that and reconciling that with my faith, there's definitely been times where it has been a little off-putting or caught me off guard of "Ooh, I hadn't thought about that. How does, how does that kinda sit?" And I think, if I was talking to myself in the past and giving myself advice on what to do in times like that, the thing I would probably say is, "Don't stop searching. Don't settle for an answer. Keep asking questions."

Just 'cause something feels uncomfortable or doesn't quite align or make sense, again, keep asking that question of 'why?' Talk to people about it. Get other people's perspectives.

I've been really lucky to have a lot of really strong faithful friends around me and people to kinda keep me on the right path in other aspects of life that that's then let me have the freedom to be curious on this and not have it really rock my faith and my foundations in that regard.

So yeah, I think the biggest thing that I've found helpful is just not settling for, "if this is what this thing says, I guess that must be true, and I guess I'll go about my day with that being it." No, I wanna go "okay, if this conflicts with something that I believe, what about it is it conflicting with? Is there actually an answer? Are there, things in scripture that I haven't dug into? Are there, people I could talk to that might have more information or might be able to point me in the right path?"

Yeah, I just think stopping still and being stagnant is kinda where it's really easy to fall off the train 'cause then you're actually not delving into finding out an answer that works for you and aligns with your own beliefs and thoughts. I think it puts yourself in a box a bit to do that, which in the world of science, everything's kinda think outside the box. So, the scientist in me is saying, "Don't do that. Don't sit in the box. Keep being inquisitive and ask questions, and wrestle with things," particularly when it comes to faith.

It's okay to wrestle with that. It's okay for there to be differing opinions and thoughts on things. Whether you think that the Earth is 6,000 years old or if you think that the universe has been going around for 13.8 billion years. I know people in both categories, both camps that are both faithful people. And so yeah, I think keep wrestling with things. Keep asking people, keep asking scientists, keep asking people in the church. Ask pastors, ask your friends. Broaden your own kinda horizons of worldview and perspectives on things and be okay with the tumultuous rocky waters. It's okay. It's a good thing, 'cause I think that's actually where you kinda learn what's important to you, where do you sit with things.

Finding Hope for the Future

Liam: As someone who works in science, science is often concerned with looking to the future. What gives you most hope moving forward, that keeps you curious about faith, that keeps you searching for more answers in the God mystery of all?

Ben: An interesting question. Unfortunately, the reality we kind of face on Earth at the moment is pretty bleak, even if you look at the element of how we look after the earth and the environment and the trajectory we're on is a bit dicey.

I think that's fairly commonly understood, and yet I think in the midst of that, it makes me lean in more to the hope and faith that I have in God, who's a good God, who wants good things for his children. That despite the circumstances we might find ourselves in, that he's actually the one in control and that what's happening to us and the perhaps the route that we're on doesn't matter because God's actually right there with us, and is well aware of everything that, we're seeing and we're experiencing and is coming. He already knows the things that are going to happen before we do.

So I think that gives me a lot of hope that we're not just abandoned to our own doom, to say. We're not left to the consequences of our actions, that we've got a God that loves us and draws near to us all the more in those times.

Chasing Auroras

Ben: I've recently, in the last couple of years, become a very passionate aurora chaser, which I've found to be a really powerful kind of moment of visibly seeing God working and putting on a light show and a display in the sky. Which, even understanding the complexities of how that comes to be so that we get the pretty lights in the sky blows my mind and is so much more fascinating than the lights themselves. But I think the thing that it reminds me of is like the rainbow that he gave Noah on the ark and that this will be a sign to you. 'Cause in the auroras we get this marvellous display of colours. And it just makes me think about the parallels of God putting on a physical display with light the thing he spoke in to being. Which I've really found quite cool going out into the dark cold night all over the place, looking at these things and just sitting there marvelling while God's doing his thing and putting on this display. It just blows my mind. The more I've looked into what has to happen in order for us to see the auroras and see these pretty lights, it's kinda mind-boggling. All the things that are involved and the complexities of the maths and the physics, and the timing for things, there's a lot that goes into it. And so when you do see these pretty lights, they're not very common themselves. And when it's charged up and it's happening, you just sit there in awe and just be still, and you take it all in. You take in the colours, take in how widely across the horizon line you're seeing it. It just makes you stop and go, "Wow." And you just don't wanna leave. And it's sad when it stops, because I could sit out there all night and watch it. It just kinda leaves me in awe of the fact that God's brought all of this into being, and I just get to have a front row seat to ask the questions of 'how?'

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