

DIVINE REFLECTIONS IN LIVING THINGS



EVA PECK

A Reader's Dossier to *Divine Reflections in Living Things*

by Eva Peck

Prepared for The Literary Exchange Goodreads
Community

Prepared by: Daniel Smith, Literary Specialist

Date: OCT. 2026

Table of Contents

- I. Welcome & How to Use This Dossier
- II. The Book at a Glance
- III. Book Overview: Central Ideas, Approach & Purpose
- IV. Reading the Book on Its Own Terms
- V. Chapter-by-Chapter Guide (Chapters 1–10)
- VI. Major Themes
- VII. Life Cycles at a Glance: A Quick-Reference Guide
- VIII. Reflection & Discussion Questions for the Whole Book
- IX. Practical Activities: A Field Guide
- X. A 10-Day Reading Plan (and How to Join Midway)
- XI. Essential Terms & Concepts
- XII. Closing Reflection

I. Welcome & How to Use This Dossier

In her Preface, Eva Peck describes the aim of this book simply: to take a fresh look at living things and to see each creature and process as if for the first time. A goanna that vanishes against the ground, a pool full of tadpoles, a handful of seeds on a kitchen counter: the book keeps asking what such small things might say about life and about God. That kind of reading rewards a slow pace, so this dossier is built to travel beside the book, not to stand in for it.

You can use it in three ways:

- **Before you read.** Skim Sections II to IV to get your bearings and see how the book is built.
- **While you read.** Open the chapter guide that matches where you are. Each guide gives an opening scene, a summary, key ideas, observations worth noticing, Scripture passages the author cites, and reflection questions drawn from that chapter's actual content.
- **After you read.** Return to the themes, the life-cycles table and the activities when you want to revisit an idea or try something hands-on.

The questions are open-ended on purpose. Eva writes that these are her own perceptions, and that other writers have expressed the same idea in their own ways. Her note About the Author adds that many faith-related questions can be understood in more than one way. So there are no right answers here.

II. The Book at a Glance

- **Title:** *Divine Reflections in Living Things*
- **Author:** Eva Peck, with photography by Alexander Peck
- **Published:** 2013
- **Subjects:** Biology and religion; nature and religion; spiritual formation; spiritual life
- **Place in a series:** The third book of the *Divine Reflections* trilogy, alongside *Divine Reflections in Times and Seasons* and *Divine Reflections in Natural Phenomena*
- **Scripture:** Bible verses are from the New International Version, with references in footnotes

- **Structure:** A Preface, an Introduction and ten chapters. The chapters are unnumbered in the book, so this dossier numbers them 1 to 10 in the order they appear.

#	Chapter	Pages
1	Camouflage	15–23
2	Birth	24–36
3	Of Cats, Humans and God	37–47
4	Pigeons	48–60
5	Insights from Frogs	61–68
6	Butterfly Metamorphosis	69–77
7	Emperor Penguins	78–88
8	The Amazing Date Palm	89–95
9	Pond Flowers	96–99
10	Growing Cherry Tomatoes	100–107

How the chapters are built. Most open with a short scene from the author's own life: a goanna on a pond tree, a tomcat named Ginger outside a block of flats, pigeons fighting over a balcony, small blue butterflies over a cycad. She then describes the creature's life in some detail, from the biology, and draws spiritual parallels with Scripture references in the footnotes. The opening chapter, Camouflage, is a little different. It sets out how to perceive the divine, and the creature chapters put that perceiving into practice.

III. Book Overview: Central Ideas, Approach & Purpose

The central idea. The Introduction proposes that the Divine can be glimpsed in ordinary experiences, and that all of life is sacred and teaches us about God. An immanent aspect of the Divine is said to pervade all living things, enabling us to see traces of the transcendent. The Introduction also stresses the unity and interconnection of all things, which it calls “inter-being”: animals depend on plants for oxygen, plants on insects for pollination, and all life on sun and water.

The approach. Each chapter combines three kinds of material:

1. **A personal scene.** A short narrative from the author’s life across several countries.
2. **Close observation.** The creature’s life cycle or way of life, drawn from the author’s training in biological sciences.
3. **Spiritual parallels.** Comparisons with biblical teaching about new birth, growth, endurance, community, fruitfulness and future hope. The Preface adds that Scripture references in the footnotes are there for readers who want to trace the biblical basis for each conclusion.

The purpose. The Preface says the book hopes to help readers see in the natural world “beautiful divine qualities such as love, wisdom, peace and joy.” The Introduction frames it as an act of opening our eyes. It borrows the blind man’s request to Jesus, “Lord, I want to see,” as its epigraph.

The arc. The book moves roughly like this:

- **Learning to perceive** (Chapter 1): God is present but camouflaged, and perception takes practice.
- **New life** (Chapter 2): physical birth as a window onto spiritual birth.
- **Relationships and the inner life** (Chapters 3 to 5): trust, patience, love for all kinds of people, and the battle over our thoughts.
- **Transformation and resurrection** (Chapters 5 and 6): the frog and the butterfly as pictures of gradual change and of life beyond death.
- **Endurance and community** (Chapter 7): the emperor penguin.
- **Fruitfulness and hope** (Chapters 8 to 10): the palm, the pond flower and the tomato plant, ending on patience and the promise of a glorious harvest.

V. Reading the Book on Its Own Terms

A few of the author's own statements will help you read the book as she intends.

- **Creation and evolution held together.** In the Preface, Eva explains that she once rejected evolution and believed in a six-day creation, but came to see substantial evidence for an evolutionary origin of life. She concludes that two things may need to be held in tension: a Mind behind all things, and natural and evolutionary processes ultimately accomplishing a divine purpose.
- **Scripture as more than science or history.** She says she does not insist on a literal interpretation of every biblical account, because the Scriptures are not intended as strictly scientific or historical works. She describes the Bible as revealing God's deeds in human history and pointing to unseen realities, often in symbolic language, with poetry and metaphor sometimes the best vehicle.
- **God and pronouns.** She writes that the Divine is neither male nor female and uses "he" only because "it" seems inappropriate.
- **A personal perspective.** The Preface calls these her perceptions, based on her experience and understanding. The About the Author page says she refers to biblical passages the way she has come to understand them, and recognizes that many faith-related issues can be understood in more than one way.
- **A more explicitly Christian vocabulary.** Compared with a general nature book, this one speaks directly in Christian terms: being born again, the Holy Spirit, the resurrection at Christ's return. Readers from other backgrounds can read the nature observations and analogies on their own terms.
- **Where particular positions appear.** A few passages offer the author's own reading of debated questions, such as a first resurrection of believers and a later offer of salvation to those who never heard the gospel (Chapter 2), the influence of Satan "until the return of Jesus" (Chapters 3 and 4), and the reading of Ephesians 5 on marriage (Chapter 7). She also says in Chapter 5 that all analogies are imperfect and limited. Notice how she frames each of these as her understanding.

You don't need to agree with every conclusion to benefit from the book's central invitation, which is simply to look again.

V. Chapter-by-Chapter Guide

Chapter 1: Camouflage (pp. 15–23)

Opening scene. A goanna crosses the author's path, its colouring matching the ground. It slips into a pond, waits with only its head showing among the *Salvinia* leaves, then climbs a tree and sits motionless against the trunk.

Summary. The chapter begins with camouflage as a familiar survival strategy in nature: brown grasshoppers and caterpillars, parrots blending into foliage, hares that turn white in winter, chameleons that change colour at short notice. Eva then suggests that God also uses a kind of camouflage. The presence of the Divine is not obvious. She refers to Pascal's idea that faith has enough light for those who want to believe and enough shadow for those who don't. She says God's existence cannot be irrevocably proven or disproven, though in her view strong evidence suggests a mind behind all things. She notes that suffering leads many to ask whether God exists, and that some theologians have written about God's hiddenness.

The chapter also says that all religions agree the ultimate Reality is beyond human comprehension, so anything we say about God is a symbol, analogy or metaphor, and that whatever we see is not God. Perception is individual and relative. A cynic and an optimist see the same world differently.

"Perceiving the Camouflaged God" offers four places to look, adapted from Denis Edwards's *Human Experience of God*:

1. **In what surrounds us:** a sunrise, a butterfly, kittens at play, a starry sky, creativity in music and art, even food on the table.
2. **In human behaviour:** love between partners, a mother's tenderness, the tireless service of aid workers, volunteers rallying after disasters.
3. **In our own experiences, often in hindsight:** tragedies seen in a new light, chance meetings, a miraculous escape, inspiration in creative work, the grace to forgive, and help felt in our darkest hours.
4. **In sacred writings:** the Bible's account of God at work in history, its wisdom, its prophecy, and its portrait of Jesus. After Jesus, the Holy Spirit makes perception of God increase.

It ends with the image of God speaking in quiet whispers rather than dramatic ways, so that noticing is a matter of awareness, discernment and perception.

Key ideas.

- The Divine can be present without being obvious.
- Evidence is offered as pointing toward God, not as final proof.
- Perception depends on the person perceiving.
- There are four places to look: nature, human behaviour, personal experience and sacred writings.
- God more often communicates quietly than dramatically.

Observations worth noticing.

- The chapter spends as much time on how we perceive as on what we perceive. Notice how often it returns to attitude, mood and openness.
- It speaks openly about doubt and admits there is room for other explanations before it states its own view.
- The third place to look, our own experience, is the one the author says we usually notice only in retrospect.
- She says the Old Testament history is “somewhat based on historical reality, but is also metaphorical,” a statement that matches the Preface’s approach to Scripture.

Scripture touchpoints (from the footnotes). Psalm 19:1-6; Acts 14:15-17; Romans 1:19-23; 1 Kings 19:11-13; Acts 17:27.

Reflection questions.

1. The goanna is nearly invisible until someone points it out. Who or what has helped you notice something you would otherwise have missed?
2. Eva refers to Pascal’s idea that faith offers enough light for believers and enough shadow for doubters. How does that sit with you?
3. Of the four places to look (surroundings, human behaviour, personal experience, sacred writings), which comes most naturally to you and which is hardest?
4. Think of something that looked like a loss at the time and looks different now. What changed your view?

5. The chapter says perception depends on disposition, experience and mood. How aware are you of the lens you bring when you read nature, news or people?

Chapter 2: Birth (pp. 24–36)

Opening scene. Two couples who longed for children after years of waiting. One rejoices at a daughter's birth. The other has a loss before later welcoming two sons. Both are described as feeling blessed. (The stories touch on infertility and loss, which some readers may find tender.)

Summary. “Prenatal Development” describes how two cells unite to form an embryo carrying 46 chromosomes. Eva calls the embryo a blueprint, builder and house combined. She describes the protective sac, the placenta and umbilical cord, the hormones that trigger labour, and how head, limbs and organs are formed by the second month. She notes that Psalm 139 expresses the awe of a writer who did not understand prenatal development as we do.

“Spiritual Parallels” is the longest section. The Scriptures speak of a spirit birth that leads to never-ending life, as in Jesus' words to Nicodemus (John 3). Eva draws comparisons:

- An unfertilized egg lives only about 12 hours, like the natural human being who, without divine intervention, faces death. The Holy Spirit imparts a new life combining human and divine nature.
- The unborn baby has no say in its conception, just as the spiritually begotten child has “nothing to boast about.” The process is God's doing through love and grace.
- As a child grows to resemble its parents, God's children gradually take on the Father's character, shown in the fruit of the Spirit. Their full glory appears at the resurrection.
- The unborn child grows inside the mother's body, as believers grow within the body of Christ, the universal church. Each must also be individually connected to Christ. The placenta's nourishing and cleansing is compared to Scripture and the Spirit.
- An unborn child is unaware of the large world just beyond the womb, as we are largely unaware of a nearby dimension of God's kingdom.
- The breaking of the waters is compared to baptism, symbolizing death of the old self and emergence into new life. A newborn is innocent, and a

person born again is forgiven and begins a lifelong process of sanctification.

“Special Births” looks at miraculous births in Scripture (Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samson, Samuel, John the Baptist, and Jesus conceived by the Holy Spirit). Eva suggests that Jesus now “comes in the flesh” in an ongoing way as the Spirit plants his nature in human hearts, with conversion as a special divine begetting. Believers are also described as being in a kind of pregnancy, with Christ being formed in them, and as quietly bringing Christ’s kingdom into the world like leaven.

“The Firstborn” traces the biblical theme from birthright to the Passover. Believers become firstborn children and heirs, and are promised a “first resurrection.” Eva adds that since God desires all to be saved, others will follow. In her reading of Scripture, the “rest of the dead” are raised later and, including those who never had the chance to know Christ, will be offered salvation. Her view is that their destiny may be less glorious than that of the firstborn.

Key ideas.

- Physical birth and development give insight into spiritual birth.
- Spiritual birth is God’s doing.
- Growth into the Father’s likeness is gradual and shown in the fruit of the Spirit.
- Believers grow within the body of Christ and need personal connection to him.
- The visible world is preparation for a nearby, largely unseen realm.
- The firstborn theme shapes the book’s picture of resurrection and God’s wider purposes.

Observations worth noticing.

- This is the foundational chapter for the transformation theme. The frog and butterfly chapters rework many of its ideas.
- The first three-quarters of the chapter moves from biology to analogy, and the last two sections rely mainly on Scripture. Notice that shift.
- Eva says in her note About the Author that many faith-related questions can be understood in more than one way. The last section of this chapter is one place where she gives her own reading on a debated question.

- She adds that the universal church is “not any particular denomination.”

Scripture touchpoints (from the footnotes). John 1:12-13; 3:3-8; Titus 3:5-7; Romans 8:9, 29; Psalm 139:14-16; 1 Corinthians 15:42-44; Revelation 20:4-6; 21:1-7.

Reflection questions.

1. None of us chose our parents or the time of our birth, and the chapter compares this with spiritual birth being God’s doing. How do you respond to that comparison?
2. Eva calls the embryo a blueprint, builder and house at once. What does that suggest to you about growth that happens from the inside?
3. She compares our unawareness of a nearby spiritual realm to an unborn child’s unawareness of the world outside the womb. Does the image console, puzzle, or both?
4. Baptism here pictures the death of the old self and rising to new life. What symbols mark fresh starts in your own life or tradition?
5. The last section gives the author’s view that some will be offered salvation after this life. How do you weigh a view like this against what you have encountered elsewhere?

Chapter 3: Of Cats, Humans and God (pp. 37–47)

Opening scene. In a Saudi Arabian block of flats, a sand-coloured tabby named Ginger appears whenever the author returns from shopping, having learned that kindness and cheese follow. A family of cats near a school runs to meet her at a round stone seat, and Ginger later moves into the garden park across the street.

Summary. In “Insights from Desert Cats,” Eva explains that most of these cats descend from house cats left behind by embassy families. They are independent and shy, and some learn to trust, usually because they were shown kindness first. She compares us to cats fending for ourselves in the “deserts of Satan’s world,” sustained by God’s universal goodness even without realizing it. Those who respond to God’s calling find their hearts changed by the Holy Spirit, and independence is gradually tamed, though like a house cat that disappears for days, we may stray and return. She cites Psalm 42, where a deer pants for water, as an image of longing for God.

“Individual Differences” describes the personalities of the cat family: a wanderer called White-tip, quiet affectionate siblings, an active kitten named after a boy, a kitten that started life on shaky ground, a shy thin cat who was pushed out by her siblings, and two visitors named Whitey and Blackie. Ginger and one kitten later disappeared.

“Loving All Kinds” draws the parallel between the variety among cats and people. God knows each of us intimately and embraces even those we find obnoxious. Eva adds that because we have all strayed, none of us is particularly likable, yet Christ died for the just and the unjust, the lovable and the unlovable. God takes pleasure in our growth and grieves with our suffering, and, since he is aware of every falling bird, knows what happened to Ginger and Fluffy. She contrasts kittens’ play-fighting with human quarrels, which wound, and looks ahead to a world with no war, no tears and no killing among animals.

“Virtue of Stillness and Patience” watches Mum the cat waiting calmly while an impatient kitten grabs the food. Eva suggests we can be impatient too, even angry with God when his timing differs from ours. The biblical call to be still and wait on God means relinquishing burdens to him, though not becoming passive. Patience and trust bring peace, and she closes with Moses’ words at the Red Sea about standing firm and being still.

Key ideas.

- Trust grows when kindness comes first, in cats and in our response to God.
- We can survive alone, but communion with God offers a fuller life.
- God’s love extends to every individual, including the “unlovable.”
- Variety among individuals is part of the design.
- Stillness and patience bring peace, though they do not mean passivity.

Observations worth noticing.

- This is the most animal-centred and personal chapter so far, with named cats and real anecdotes. The spiritual parallels draw on them more gently than in the biological chapters.
- The chapter balances affection and honesty. It says God delights in us and also says none of us is particularly likable on our own. Notice how the argument turns on grace.

- The phrase “deserts of Satan’s world” reflects the book’s view of a spiritual adversary, a theme that returns in the Pigeons chapter.
- The chapter’s final turn is a practical one: patience as a spiritual practice.

Scripture touchpoints (from the footnotes). Matthew 5:45; 1 John 4:10, 19; Luke 15:11-24; Psalm 42; Revelation 22:1-3; Isaiah 11:6-9; Psalm 46:10; Exodus 14:13-14.

Reflection questions.

1. The cats trusted people who showed kindness first. Who showed you kindness first, and what did it change?
2. Eva describes drifting back to independence like a cat gone for days. What does that pull look like in your life, and what draws you back?
3. She argues that God’s love includes those we find hard to like, and that none of us is likable by our own merit. How do you hear that: challenging, freeing, or something else?
4. Mum waits calmly while Jacob grabs. Which of them are you more like right now?
5. The chapter says waiting on God does not mean doing nothing. How do you tell patient trust from passivity?

Chapter 4: Pigeons (pp. 48–60)

Opening scene. A small, shaded balcony under the author’s window becomes a battleground when two pairs of pigeons, one grey and one white, both want it for a nest. The grey pair arrives first and builds an elaborate nest. The white pair manages only a few sticks, and their eggs are eventually broken and their nest dismantled. The grey pair’s eggs hatch after about 18 days, and both parents feed the squabs with “pigeon milk.”

Summary. “Of Birds and Thoughts” starts from a saying: we can’t stop birds flying over our heads, but we can stop them nesting in our hair. Thoughts bombard us all day, and Eva says Scripture shows that wrong thoughts and desires, unless rejected, become the seeds of sin, shaping what we do and become. She compares the two kinds of pigeons to two kinds of thoughts: those from an “invisible, but real enemy” (Satan, the father of lies, who she says has been allowed to influence the earth until Christ’s return) and those from God

through the Holy Spirit. False beliefs can become strongholds. Drawing partly on Joyce Meyer's *Battlefield of the Mind*, she offers steps:

- Realize that Christ's truth sets us free.
- Take responsibility instead of blaming.
- Accept that change takes courage.
- Build a daily habit of prayer, Bible study and meditation.
- Claim the promise of wisdom.
- Be patient and don't give up.
- Stay faith-filled and positive.

She adds that we should learn to tell thoughts that lure us from God, which leave us desolate, from those that lead to faith, hope and love, which bring comfort.

"A New Generation of Pigeons" follows a later brood. A white pigeon and a grey one share the nest, sitting in shifts and fighting intruders so fiercely that blood is drawn. The white pigeon, whose feathers lack pigment, looks dirty and bloodied after the fights. The parents sit patiently through rain, though a smaller nest once drowned an earlier generation. One rainy day a single chick sits alone. Later it takes its first flight, returns after about four hours, and is gradually weaned until the family leaves.

"Other Analogies" reads white as righteousness, so the dirty white pigeon pictures our struggle with wrong thoughts and choices, with the Holy Spirit comforting us and Christ's blood cleansing us. The earlier victory of the grey pair is a reminder that evil sometimes prevails for a time, but she says this is not the end of the story, because Christ's return will bring evil's removal. Waiting does not mean passivity. When God seems to leave us alone "in the cold and rain," like the parent birds, he is still near, and a "dark night of the soul" can help develop a purer faith. She cites the saying that having looked at the end of the book, "we win."

Key ideas.

- Thoughts are not neutral. They shape experience and character.
- The mind is described as a battlefield between competing influences.
- Practical steps can help us resist harmful thought patterns.
- Patience and protection are modelled by pigeon parents.

- Evil may seem to win for a time, but the chapter holds that it will not have the last word.
- God’s silence can be a way of developing faith.

Observations worth noticing.

- This is one of the book's most practical chapters, with a list of steps. Some of the ideas are adapted from another author (see the footnote).
- Eva uses the pigeons in two ways: two pairs as opposing influences on the mind, and one family as a picture of patience and letting go. Watch which one she is using.
- The analogy shifts roles. Grey stands “symbolically” for evil, yet she urges readers to be *like* the grey birds, determined and vigilant, in fighting wrong thinking.
- The chapter takes the idea of a spiritual adversary seriously. This is her reading and recurs in the cat and frog chapters.

Scripture touchpoints (from the footnotes). James 1:13-15; John 8:31-32, 44-45; Ephesians 6:10-18; 2 Corinthians 10:4-5; Romans 12:2; Philippians 1:6; 4:8; John 14:16-18, 26; 1 John 1:7; 1 Corinthians 15:51-57.

Reflection questions.

1. Which thoughts “nest” in your own mind, and which just fly over?
2. Eva says our thoughts and desires determine what we do and become. Where does that match your experience, and where might it be too simple?
3. Of the steps she lists (truth, responsibility, courage, daily habits, patience, positivity), which would be hardest for you?
4. The pigeon parents leave their chick alone for stretches of time and then return. How does that image speak to times when God seems silent?
5. The chapter admits that evil sometimes prevails for a time yet holds that hope remains. How do you hold present disappointment and long-term hope together?

Chapter 5: Insights from Frogs (pp. 61–68)

Opening scene. A shallow pool teems with hundreds of black tadpoles, the smaller ones clinging to the bottom or to plants, the larger swimming by their

tails. Soon they will grow back legs, then front legs, and lungs, lose their tails and look like adult frogs, all within 14 to 16 weeks.

Summary. The frog's life cycle begins with thousands of eggs laid in still water, or above it, so the tadpoles are not carried off by currents. Only a few are fertilized, hatch, survive and develop. Fertilization imparts life, and an unfertilized egg stays alive only briefly. The hatchling lives off its yolk, then feeds on algae, plants and dead insects, and joins schools by about four weeks. The change is a gradual metamorphosis, "imperceptible from day to day, but clearly visible over a period of time." The tadpole stage lasts three to four months, while the adult frog lives for several years.

In "Spiritual Parallels," Eva compares:

- the many eggs that never develop with "many are called, but few are chosen" and the parable of the sower, where not all seed bears fruit;
- the short-lived unfertilized egg with the human life that ends in death, and fertilization with the germ of eternal life imparted by the Holy Spirit as it unites with the human spirit;
- the yolk with the Spirit working first internally, changing our perspective and making us receptive to the things of God;
- the tadpole's algae-to-plants diet with the new believer's need for "milk" before solid food, and the school with the fellowship of the church;
- the still water in which eggs are laid with the calm God provides through the church, while the world brings trouble.

"The Transformation" stresses that change is often unnoticed until we look back. Tadpoles are restricted to water, as we are to Earth, but Jesus, as firstborn from the dead, has transcended earthly existence, and believers are promised bodies with similar abilities. The maturing tadpole has both tadpole and frog traits, as Christians possess both a human and a divine nature, which may conflict. The adult frog lives in two worlds, as we live physically on Earth, where Satan still exerts considerable influence, while having spiritual access to "heavenly places" in prayer. We are in the world but not of it. The tadpole stage is short compared with the frog's adult life, as earthly life is short compared with eternity. She closes by noting that all analogies are imperfect and limited, but can help us visualize reality.

Key ideas.

- Real transformation is gradual and often invisible day to day.
- The Holy Spirit's work begins internally, in heart and mind.
- Believers live between two natures and two worlds.
- Spiritual growth needs nourishment and community.
- Earthly life is brief against eternity.
- Analogies are helpful but limited.

Observations worth noticing.

- This is the book's clearest statement of the "unnoticed change" idea, which returns in the tomato chapter, where roots grow before shoots appear.
- The tadpole-and-frog picture of two natures at once echoes the "old heart and new heart" idea and the "two natures" in the pigeon chapter.
- Her closing line on the limits of analogy is a useful key for reading the whole book. Notice which comparisons feel illuminating and which stretch.
- The tadpole numbers are paired with the parable of the sower, where not all seed germinates. She presents this as a comparison, not a full explanation.

Scripture touchpoints (from the footnotes). Matthew 13:18-23; 20:16; 22:14; James 4:13-15; Romans 8:9-16; John 6:44, 65; 1 Corinthians 2:9-14; 1 Peter 2:1-3; Hebrews 5:12-14; John 16:33; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Romans 7:18-25; Philippians 3:20-21; 1 John 3:1-2.

Reflection questions.

1. Eva says transformation is imperceptible from day to day but visible over time. Where have you seen that kind of change in yourself?
2. The tadpole shows both tadpole and frog traits at once. What does living between two natures look like for you?
3. The chapter says we live in two worlds, being in the world but not of it. What does that mean in your ordinary week?
4. She ends by saying that all analogies are imperfect and limited. Which comparison in this chapter helped you most, and which stretched furthest?

5. The “still water” in which the eggs are laid stands for calm provided by community. Where do you find still water?

Chapter 6: Butterfly Metamorphosis (pp. 69–77)

Opening scene. Small blue butterflies hover over the young shoots of a cycad. The author knows what this means for the plant: the caterpillars hatched from their eggs soon devour the tender shoots. She notes that the transformation of an unsightly caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly has long been read in spiritual terms, such as a symbol of the soul’s transfiguration at death.

Summary. The life cycle has four stages: egg, caterpillar (larva), pupa (chrysalis) and adult. Only a small percentage of eggs become butterflies. During mating the male passes the female a “nuptial gift,” a package of sperm and nutrients that can be up to half the butterfly’s weight. The female finds a suitable host plant and lays eggs on it, and the caterpillars emerge in about five days. They grow almost exponentially, gaining over 3,000 times their original weight, shedding their skin repeatedly (the periods between molts are called instars). In the pupa the caterpillar’s body is dissolved and a butterfly’s body is assembled from undifferentiated cells. The adult must pump fluid into its wings and let them dry before it can fly. It does not grow, but pollinates and reproduces. The chapter notes more than 18,000 species and that the ancients saw butterflies as symbols of the soul, resurrection and purity.

In “Physical and Spiritual Parallels,” Eva maps the stages onto human life:

- The nuptial gift is likened to the gift of the Holy Spirit at conversion, a provision and a guarantee of future resurrection, or “butterfly emergence.”
- The egg stage resembles conception and birth.
- The caterpillar’s instars resemble the stages of earthly life from infancy to old age. Caterpillars can delay moving to the next stage (diapause), as we can resist change we are led to.
- The destructive caterpillar recalls human greed toward the environment.
- Its survival strategies (camouflage, warning colours, a silken thread to drop from a leaf) are compared with our defences: wisdom, the Holy Spirit, the “armour of God,” and a promised way of escape, “a spiritual version of the silken thread.”

- Unlike butterflies, humans are not programmed by instinct but given free will, with responsibility toward others and the environment.
- The pre-pupal stage is likened to aging and the pupal stage to physical death, ending in dust.

She then turns to hope. Scripture speaks of resurrection to a new, eternal life, and Jesus, the pioneer of salvation, shows what it will be like: a glorious body that can appear and disappear, pass through barriers and shine, and a character free of selfishness and destruction. The chapter closes by quoting butterfly researcher Jo Brewer on the science of butterflies as a mystery whose ending is unknown until the last page, and says the same is true of life.

Key ideas.

- The butterfly's life cycle gives a detailed map of human life and death.
- The caterpillar's destructive stage is acknowledged, not ignored.
- Free will brings responsibility toward creatures and the environment.
- Death is likened to the pupal stage, with resurrection as emergence.
- Jesus' resurrection body offers a glimpse of what believers are promised.

Observations worth noticing.

- The chapter's opening shows beauty and harm together, and the later comparison to human greed picks up that tension.
- The pupa-as-death comparison is vivid, and also exactly the kind of analogy the frog chapter says is imperfect and limited. Read the two together.
- Notice where the author marks the limits of the analogy herself, as with instinct versus free will, and what she draws from that difference.

Scripture touchpoints (from the footnotes). John 14:20; 17:23; Romans 8:11, 26; Colossians 1:27; 2 Peter 3:18; Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 6:11-18; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:43-44; Luke 24:13-43; Revelation 1:12-18; 1 John 3:2; Philippians 2:12-16.

Reflection questions.

1. The chapter opens with butterflies whose offspring devour the cycad. How does that tension between beauty and harm shape what follows?

2. Eva maps the caterpillar's growing and feeding onto the stages of earthly life. Which stage of your own life most resembles that?
3. Caterpillars can delay their next stage, and she compares this to resisting change we are led to. What change have you delayed?
4. The "silken thread" stands for a way of escape. When has an unexpected way out appeared for you?
5. The pupa pictures death and the butterfly resurrection. How do you receive an image like that: consoling, too neat, or something else?

Chapter 7: Emperor Penguins (pp. 78–88)

Opening scene. Unlike most chapters, this one begins not with a personal encounter but with the setting itself: Antarctica in its long winter, six dark months without sun, temperatures down to minus 40 to 60 degrees Centigrade, winds up to 200 kilometres an hour. Yet life thrives. The emperor penguin's year is described as a story of communal living, partner cooperation, bearing one another's burdens, sacrifice and patient endurance.

Summary. At the end of summer the penguins walk or slide on their bellies 50 to 120 kilometres inland to breeding grounds. Each male has a unique call to attract a female. The female lays a single egg and transfers it to the male, who balances it on his feet under a brood pouch. She then returns to the sea to feed. The males huddle in a turtle-shaped formation, taking turns inside and outside, standing for 65 days without eating through gale-force winds. When the sun returns, so do the females, who recognize their mates' calls. The father provides a first meal from a throat sac, then passes the chick to the mother's pouch and heads to the sea. When the chicks are strong enough they are left in crèches while the adults feed. In December the ice breaks up, and the penguins dive 150 to 250 metres, holding their breath for up to 20 minutes. Then the cycle begins again. They are the only animals that remain in Antarctica in winter and breed on the open ice.

"Spiritual Parallels" compares:

- the penguins' journey with the Christian pilgrimage, the exodus pattern of good seasons and adversity;
- the male's call with Jesus calling those the Father is drawing, who recognize his voice, and with the call at Christ's return;
- the huddle with the church, where we bear one another's burdens;

- the partnership of parents with good marriages, where she reads Ephesians 5 as the husband typifying Christ in loving service and the wife willingly submitting to his servant leadership, with both parents setting an example of mutual love, respect and submission, and notes that, unlike penguins, humans must learn cooperation;
- the return to the sea for food with our need for spiritual nourishment (“man does not live on bread alone”) and the penguins’ milk for chicks with spiritual milk for new disciples versus deeper study for the mature;
- the short summer with the brevity of life, urging us to make the most of opportunities;
- help arriving just in time with the saying that God is seldom early but never late, and with Daniel and his friends;
- the internal clock that drives the trek with God leading us to seemingly impossible tasks, as the Spirit led Jesus into the desert.

She adds that hardship can bring out our finest qualities, and notes that the church has thrived in adversity and done less well in prosperity. The chapter concludes that penguins are programmed to do what they do, while we need to develop community, cooperation, endurance and resourcefulness consciously, and that God who equipped the penguins also supplies our needs.

Key ideas.

- Survival depends on community and shared burden-bearing.
- Endurance is a central virtue, along with making the most of limited time.
- Help often arrives at the last moment, according to the chapter’s saying.
- Hardship can refine character.
- Humans must learn what penguins know by instinct.

Observations worth noticing.

- This chapter turns most clearly from individual spiritual growth to the community. Compare it with the huddle’s role of shared protection.
- The marriage section reflects the author’s reading of Ephesians 5. The note About the Author says many faith-related questions can be understood in more than one way, and readers may hold different views here.
- The claim that the church thrives in adversity is a general observation she offers without detailed argument, a good point for discussion.

Scripture touchpoints (from the footnotes). Psalm 78:12-41; Philippians 3:7-14; Hebrews 12:1-3; John 10:11-16, 27; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; John 17:20-23; Galatians 6:1-2; Hebrews 10:23-25; Ecclesiastes 4:9; Ephesians 5:22-33; Matthew 4:4; John 9:4; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Daniel 3:12-29; Hebrews 13:5.

Reflection questions.

1. The male penguins survive by huddling and taking turns in the wind. Who has taken a turn in the wind for you, and when have you taken yours?
2. The chapter says the summer of abundance is short and urges making the most of it. How do you hold urgency and rest together?
3. Eva cites the saying that God is seldom early but never late. What has your experience been of waiting for help?
4. She observes that the church has thrived in adversity more than in prosperity. Does that match what you have seen?
5. The marriage section reads Ephesians 5 in a particular way and emphasizes mutual love, respect and submission. How do you read those passages, and what does the penguin partnership suggest about shared responsibility?

Chapter 8: The Amazing Date Palm (pp. 89–95)

Opening scene. Date palms stand in the park opposite the author's flat, each with a crown of large green fronds. The topmost fronds stretch toward heaven, "reminiscent of praying arms," while the lower ones reach sideways toward their neighbours or hang downward. The palms give shade by day, a perch for birds, and a setting for couples under a full moon. Workers use fronds as brooms, and sprinklers water each tree once or twice a day.

Summary. The chapter begins with the palm's history. It goes back almost to the start of civilization in Mesopotamia, Egypt and north-east Africa. Oases and wadis with palms enabled people to live in remote regions and cross deserts. The fruit is easy to transport, high in energy and self-preserving, and the trunk and fronds supplied building materials, so every part of the tree was used.

Under "Growth of Palm Trees," Eva explains that the palm needs a warm to hot climate and plenty of water. It withstands heat of 50 degrees Celsius or more if

irrigated. It has only one growth point at the top, where old fronds insulate the tender young shoots, and an internal cooling system that draws water up from the roots to evaporate from the fronds. It thrives on all kinds of soil, including sandy or salty ground, can live over 100 years and grow to 24 metres. Palms are dioecious, so a female tree needs pollen from a male to bear fruit.

“Fruit of the Palm” describes clusters thinned during a 200-day cycle so each date grows larger. The fruit can be harvested at three of its five stages, which carry Arabic names: *hababauk*, *kimri*, *khalaal*, *rutab* and *tamr*. “Palms in the Bible” notes the tree is mentioned 23 times. Palm branches were used at the Feast of Tabernacles and to welcome Jesus into Jerusalem, and carved palms covered the walls of Solomon’s temple and appear in Ezekiel’s vision of a future temple, alongside flowers and cherubim that recall the lost Paradise.

“Spiritual Parallels” draws these comparisons:

- The Bible compares a virtuous person to a fruit-bearing tree planted by water, possibly a palm. Water pictures the Holy Spirit, and as the palm needs water, the just person needs a steady supply of the Spirit.
- Fronds reaching upward and sideways picture the Spirit-led person reaching toward God and outward to neighbour, the two great commandments.
- The palm is fruitful even in poor soil if watered, and we can be productive whatever the circumstances if watered from within by the Spirit.
- Pruning pictures the Father’s loving discipline, which brings destructive habits to our attention so fruitfulness can resume.
- The palm’s internal cooling pictures God’s presence and comfort in trials, so that we can comfort others who suffer.

The chapter closes by saying we too are desert wanderers in a spiritually barren world, and hopes our lives will be as productive as the palm, bearing love, peace and kindness.

Key ideas.

- A tree thriving in desert heat becomes a picture of life sustained from within.
- Water pictures the Holy Spirit, as it does elsewhere in the trilogy.

- Fruitfulness depends on a steady supply of water, not on favourable conditions.
- Pruning is presented as discipline given out of love.
- Comfort received in hardship equips us to comfort others.

Observations worth noticing.

- This chapter contains the most reference-style information in the book, from the five fruit stages to the tree's biology. Notice how the opening image of the "praying arms" returns in the parallel about reaching upward and outward.
- It echoes the Birth chapter's fruit of the Spirit and anticipates the tomato chapter's emphasis on fruit.
- The pruning parallel is one of the book's more challenging images. Notice that the author frames it as coming from love and for our good.
- It is one of the shorter chapters.

Scripture touchpoints (from the footnotes). Psalm 1:3; 92:12-14; John 4:10-14; 7:38-39; 15:1-8; Mark 12:29-33; Hebrews 12:5-13; Luke 13:6-9; 2 Corinthians 1:3-6; Galatians 5:22-25; Leviticus 23:40; John 12:12-15; 1 Kings 6:29-7:36.

Reflection questions.

1. The palm reaches upward and sideways. How do you balance reaching toward God and reaching toward other people in an ordinary week?
2. The palm is fruitful even in poor soil as long as it has water. What "water" sustains you when conditions are poor?
3. Eva presents pruning as a loving discipline. How do you respond to that image when you think of a difficult season?
4. The palm is cooled by water drawn up from within while it endures desert heat. What helps you stay steady under pressure?
5. Palms appear in temples, festivals and Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Does knowing that change how you see them?

Chapter 9: Pond Flowers (pp. 96–99)

Opening scene. Large water-lily-type leaves cover a pond, but instead of the usual lily flowers there are dozens of small, white, fringed flowers with yellow centres. The author kneels to pick one near the shore and finds that what looked

like a single flower is a cluster of stalked buds attached to a large leaf. She later learns it is a water snowflake (*Nymphoides indica*), a relative of the water lily. She takes it home and places it in a bowl of water by the kitchen window. For about ten days the flowers open, sometimes one a day, sometimes two or three, appearing overnight on a taller stalk. Each is open by around ten in the morning, beautiful until mid-afternoon, closing by about four, and finished by sunset. The leaf itself dies in a little over a week, probably because it could not root in the bowl.

Summary. The experience brings to mind the Bible's use of flowers as a symbol of life's brevity. Under "Flowers as a Life Metaphor," Eva sees human life as starting like a bud, growing and maturing, reaching full bloom in youth, and then gradually waning with age. She acknowledges that some people become discouraged at the thought of their physical decline, but says the Bible holds out hope. Those indwelt by the Holy Spirit experience an internal renewal. As the outward person perishes, the inner one becomes more attractive, and growth in wisdom and virtue matters more than physical beauty.

The water snowflake's leaf needed to stay attached to the rhizome in the soil, and the child of God needs to be rooted in Christ. Without that connection there is no future beyond a declining physical existence. The glory we admire now, in a flower or a person in her prime, will grow dim beside the future glory of resurrection, when corruption becomes incorruption, weakness becomes power, the natural body becomes a spiritual body, and temporary existence becomes eternal life. She ends by saying that if the created world awes us now, how much more is there to look forward to in the new heaven and new earth.

Key ideas.

- The shortness of life is acknowledged plainly.
- Outer decline and inner renewal can go together.
- Staying rooted in Christ is pictured as the difference between a leaf that thrives and one that dies.
- Resurrection hope reframes both beauty and aging.

Observations worth noticing.

- This is the shortest chapter, just four pages, and the only one built around something that lasts a single day.

- It contrasts with the frog and butterfly chapters, which stress gradual change. Here the emphasis is on brevity and what endures.
- The chapter speaks plainly about youthful beauty and aging, and readers may react differently to how it frames them. Notice where the emphasis falls: on inner renewal and future glory.
- The picture of a detached leaf is a close cousin of the palm's need for water, and of the "withering branch" image in the Birth chapter.

Scripture touchpoints (from the footnotes). Job 14:1-2; Psalm 103:15; Isaiah 40:6-8; James 1:9-11; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; John 15:5-6; 1 Corinthians 15:42-44; Revelation 21:1-7; 22:1-5.

Reflection questions.

1. These flowers open by ten, are lovely until mid-afternoon and are finished by sunset. How does such a short bloom change the way you look at it?
2. Eva contrasts outward aging with inward renewal. What does inner renewal look like to you, in yourself or in someone you know?
3. The cut leaf died because it could not root. What are you rooted in?
4. The chapter says wisdom and virtue matter more than physical beauty. How does that sit alongside the value many cultures place on youth?
5. She asks readers to look forward to a glory greater than any they admire now. What would you most want that to include?

Chapter 10: Growing Cherry Tomatoes (pp. 100–107)

Opening scene. On a late spring morning in Brisbane, the author admires a neighbour's vegetable patch and says her own cherry tomato seeds had failed to grow. The neighbour picks a tomato and tells her to plant it. She plants half the seeds in the soil and half in a small pot. A week later, shoots appear. Something disturbs the pot overnight, so she moves it to the kitchen counter, where the seedlings keep turning toward the light, even when she turns them back. After replanting, the kitchen group lags behind until she adds blood and bone fertilizer. About six weeks after germination the first buds appear, then yellow flowers, then tiny green fruit. By the time she writes, there are around twenty-five clusters, each with four to six tomatoes, and she is waiting for the first one to ripen.

Summary. “Lessons for Life” begins with the seed’s potential. A single tomato has given rise to ten plants, each with the potential for perhaps fifty tomatoes, a thousandfold gain, and the new seeds could be planted again. Humans, too, are like seeds with divine potential. Created in God’s image, we are destined to take on the glorified image of Christ. Since we are destined for that glory, our responsibility is to develop our gifts and use them for the benefit of others, including other living beings. She says that humans were given charge of other creatures but have abused it. All life is special and sacred, and those who destroy the earth will ultimately face consequences.

The seed also carries the programming for the timing of the plant’s life, which she takes as evidence of innate intelligence, and our own lives follow a comparable rhythm: leaves in childhood, bloom in youth, fruit in our thirties and after, and shedding in later years. Within that, we also have a part to play. The Scriptures speak of two seeds: sowing to the Spirit, which yields the fruit of the Spirit and leads to eternal life, or sowing to the ego, which produces the works of the flesh and leads in the end to eternal death. A universal law of cause and effect means we reap what we sow, usually later and in greater measure. Results can be delayed, as with artists who work for years before a breakthrough, and some wrongdoing seems to go unanswered, as with a lifelong smoker who is diagnosed decades later or war criminals who die in comfort. Eva admits that life is a mystery in many ways and suggests that “perhaps there is more to the story.”

Plants need water, sun and soil, and we need spiritual nourishment too: the bread of life, the living water of the Holy Spirit and the light of Christ, the “Sun of righteousness.” The seeds grew roots before any shoot was visible, as changes happen in our hearts before we notice them, often seen first in hindsight or by those close to us. A tomato plant with only leaves is of little value. Fruit is how we act toward others, showing whether we are moved by the Spirit or by ego. Fruit also takes time. Strawberries and apples blossom together but ripen at different speeds, as people mature at different rates, so we should be patient with ourselves and others, trusting a glorious harvest in the divine kingdom.

Key ideas.

- Small beginnings carry great potential, in seeds and in people.
- We are responsible for developing our potential and for how we treat other living things.

- Two kinds of sowing lead to two kinds of harvest.
- Results often come late, and some questions stay open.
- Growth happens below the surface before it shows.
- Fruit, meaning how we treat others, is what counts, and it takes time.

Observations worth noticing.

- This is the final chapter, and it gathers many of the book's threads: gradual unseen change from the frog chapter, fruit of the Spirit from the Birth and palm chapters, patience from the cat and pigeon chapters, and the call to stewardship from the butterfly chapter.
- The book ends on patience and harvest, not on a grand summary.
- Notice how Eva handles the unanswered questions about delayed justice, offering a possibility ("perhaps there is more to the story") instead of a firm conclusion.
- The seedlings' behaviour (turning toward the light, lagging until fed) is a personal observation, and the chapter treats it as a lesson only lightly.

Scripture touchpoints (from the footnotes). Acts 17:28-29; Romans 8:29; Genesis 1:26-31; Revelation 11:18; Galatians 5:16-26; 6:7-8; Romans 6:22-23; Psalm 37:7-40; Jeremiah 12:1-17; Matthew 4:4; Malachi 4:2; John 6:35; 7:37-39; Matthew 7:16-20; John 15:2-8; James 5:7-8.

Reflection questions.

1. One tomato became ten plants and a thousandfold gain. Where in your life have small beginnings grown beyond what you expected?
2. Eva calls humans seeds with divine potential and says we are responsible for developing it. What potential do you feel called to develop?
3. She describes two kinds of sowing, to the Spirit or to the ego. What have you been sowing lately?
4. The chapter says harvests are often delayed, and that wrongdoing sometimes seems to go unanswered. How do you keep patience when results are slow or justice seems late?
5. The seedlings grew roots before any shoot appeared. What might be growing in you that hasn't yet shown?

VI. Major Themes

These ideas recur across several chapters. Use them to connect what the book treats one creature at a time.

1. The hidden God and the practice of noticing.

The Introduction says “camouflaged divinity” lies in every nook and cranny of creation, and Chapter 1 builds on the goanna to show how perception works. The idea returns in Chapter 3, where the cats are themselves camouflaged in the desert, and in Chapter 4, where God can seem silent yet remains near. *Notice:* how often the book asks you to look more slowly before it interprets.

2. Life cycles as maps of spiritual growth.

Birth, the pigeon’s nest, the frog, the butterfly, the penguin’s year, the palm’s fruit stages, a flower’s day and a tomato from seed each give the author a sequence to read against spiritual development (Chapters 2 and 4 to 10). *Notice:* which stages she treats as parallels to conversion, to growth, to death and to resurrection.

3. Gradual, unseen change.

The embryo develops before anyone sees it (Chapter 2). The tadpole changes imperceptibly from day to day (Chapter 5). The inner person is renewed as the outer fades (Chapter 9). Roots grow before shoots show, and fruit takes time (Chapter 10). *Notice:* the recurring advice to look back and see how far you’ve come.

4. Two natures and the inner struggle.

The book speaks of human and divine natures that may conflict (Chapters 2 and 5), the battle over our thoughts (Chapter 4), and two kinds of sowing, to the Spirit or to the ego (Chapter 10). *Notice:* that the struggle is described as ongoing, with help promised.

5. Patience, waiting and stillness.

Mum the cat waits calmly (Chapter 3). The pigeon parents sit through the rain, and we are urged to wait for Christ’s return without passivity (Chapter 4). The penguins endure (Chapter 7). Fruit takes time (Chapter 10). *Notice:* the repeated point that waiting does not mean doing nothing.

6. Community and shared burdens.

Believers grow within the body of Christ (Chapter 2). Tadpoles join schools

and new believers need fellowship (Chapter 5). The male penguins survive by huddling and taking turns (Chapter 7). The palm reaches outward to the neighbour (Chapter 8). *Notice*: how often survival and growth are described as shared.

7. Endurance and adversity as formative.

Antarctic winter shows endurance (Chapter 7). The palm endures desert heat and pruning (Chapter 8). The caterpillar faces many dangers (Chapter 6), and the pigeon chapter admits evil sometimes prevails for a time (Chapter 4).

Notice: the repeated claim that hardship can refine character, balanced by admissions of mystery.

8. Fruitfulness.

The fruit of the Spirit appears in the Birth chapter, the palm bears fruit even in poor soil (Chapter 8), and in the tomato chapter fruit is how we act toward others (Chapter 10). *Notice*: that fruit is always tied to a source: the Spirit, water, or abiding in Christ.

9. Water, nourishment and the Spirit.

Baptism and the placenta's nourishing (Chapter 2), milk and solid food (Chapters 5 and 7), the palm's water (Chapter 8), and water, sun and soil (Chapter 10) all draw on the image the trilogy develops most fully in *Natural Phenomena*. *Notice*: how nourishment is both physical and spiritual.

10. Resurrection hope and the sacredness of life.

The book's hope runs through Chapters 2 (the redemption of the body), 5 (bodies like Christ's), 6 (emergence), 7 (the call at Christ's return) and 9 (incorruption). Alongside it runs a conviction that all life is sacred (Introduction), with responsibility toward other creatures and the earth (Chapters 6 and 10) and the hope of a world at peace (Chapter 3). *Notice*: how the hope for resurrection and the care for creation sit side by side.

VII. Life Cycles at a Glance: A Quick-Reference Guide

A summary of the creatures and processes the book follows, the stages it describes, and the spiritual picture it draws from each. This is a map of the author's observations, not a set of fixed meanings.

Ch.	Subject	Stages or features described	What the book draws from it
1	Goanna and camouflage	Blending in, hiding, revealing	God is present but not obvious; perception takes practice
2	Human birth	Conception, embryo, foetus, birth	Spiritual new birth, growth into the Father's likeness, and the firstborn
3	Desert cats	Trust, independence, individual personalities, stillness	Kindness first, loving all kinds, patience
4	Pigeons	Nesting, eggs, hatching, fledging, weaning	The battle for the mind, patience, God near when silent
5	Frogs	Eggs, tadpole, legs and lungs, adult	Gradual transformation, two natures, two worlds
6	Butterfly	Egg, caterpillar (instars), pupa, adult	Stages of life, death and resurrection

7	Emperor penguin	March inland, pairing, incubation, chick, crèche, sea	Pilgrimage, community, endurance
8	Date palm	Growth, pollination, five fruit stages, pruning	Fruitfulness through the Spirit, discipline, comfort
9	Water snowflake	Bud, open bloom, closing, death within a day	Brevity of life, inner renewal, rootedness
10	Cherry tomato	Seed, sprout, leaves, flowers, fruit, ripening	Potential, sowing and reaping, patience

Pairs worth reading together.

- **Frogs and butterfly (Chapters 5 and 6):** two accounts of transformation, one gradual and one dramatic.
- **Birth and tomatoes (Chapters 2 and 10):** beginnings and potential, at either end of the book.
- **Pigeons and penguins (Chapters 4 and 7):** parenting, endurance, and what patience requires.
- **Palm and tomato (Chapters 8 and 10):** fruitfulness and what it depends on.
- **Camouflage and cats (Chapters 1 and 3):** the hidden God, and trust that grows from kindness.

VIII. Reflection & Discussion Questions for the Whole Book

Each chapter guide has its own questions. These ones span the whole book. They fall into three groups (critical, personal and contemplative), so use them all or pick the ones that suit you.

Thinking critically

1. The book's method is to describe a creature's life closely and then draw spiritual parallels. In Chapter 5, Eva herself says all analogies are imperfect and limited. Which parallels worked best for you, and which stretched furthest? What makes a comparison convincing?
2. The Preface holds together a Mind behind all things and natural, evolutionary processes accomplishing a divine purpose. How does that framing shape the way you read the life cycles in the book?
3. Chapter 1 says God's existence cannot be irrevocably proven or disproven, though strong evidence suggests a mind behind all things. Do the later chapters keep that tone, or speak with more certainty?
4. The penguins, pigeons and butterflies act largely by instinct, while the book says humans have free will and must learn consciously (Chapters 6 and 7). Does that difference strengthen the analogies or complicate them?
5. Several chapters give the author's own readings of debated questions: a first resurrection followed by a later offer of salvation (Chapter 2), the influence of Satan until Christ's return (Chapters 4 and 5), and the reading of Ephesians 5 on marriage (Chapter 7). Which did you find most persuasive, and how do you read passages like these when you see them differently?
6. The Preface says the author does not insist on a literal reading of every biblical account. Yet she draws on stories such as the Exodus and Daniel's friends as examples. How do you understand her use of these stories?

Reflecting personally

7. Which opening scene stayed with you most: the goanna, Ginger, the pigeons on the balcony, the tadpole pool, the butterflies over the cycad, Antarctica, the palms, the pond flowers or the tomato seeds? Why?
8. Which creature or plant have you noticed differently since reading?
9. Which life cycle best matches the season of life you are in now?

10. The book keeps returning to gradual, unseen change. What has changed in you slowly, in a way you only recognized looking back?
11. The penguins survive by huddling and taking turns in the wind. Who is in your huddle, and whose turn in the wind could you take?
12. What small thing in your daily surroundings do you think you pass without really seeing?

Contemplating

13. The Introduction says all of life is sacred. What changes in how you treat a creature or a plant if you take that seriously?
14. Many chapters end on patience, hope or a promised future. How do you hold present difficulty and that hope together?
15. The book asks us to see each living thing as if for the first time. What would help you keep that practice going after you finish reading?
16. If you wrote your own reflection in the book's pattern of scene, observation and parallel, which creature or plant would you choose?

If you'd like to ask the author (optional)

- How did you choose the creatures in this book?
- Which creature surprised you most when you found a spiritual parallel in it?
- You note that analogies are imperfect. How do you decide where a comparison should stop?
- What would you hope a reader does after turning the last page?

IX. Practical Activities: A Field Guide

These exercises take the book's invitation literally. None needs equipment, and all can be done outdoors or at a window. Observe wildlife from a respectful distance, and adapt each activity to your ability and the weather.

1. **Find the Hidden One** (Chapter 1). Spend ten minutes looking for something camouflaged: an insect on bark, a bird in foliage, a lizard on a wall. When you find it, note what helped you see it. Then list one example from each of the chapter's four places to perceive the divine: surroundings, human behaviour, your own experience, and something you have read.

2. **Watch a Beginning** (Chapter 2). Sprout a bean or seed in a clear jar with damp paper. Sketch it each day for a week and note what you can see and what stays hidden.
3. **Still and Kind** (Chapter 3). Put out a bowl of water for birds or insects, then sit still for ten minutes and watch who comes. Notice where you feel impatient, and what helps you wait. Then do one unprompted kindness for someone who may be wary of you.
4. **Thought Watching** (Chapter 4). For one day, jot down the thoughts that keep returning. Mark which ones “fly over” and which “nest.” Choose one to replace with a truer or kinder thought.
5. **A Slow Change Journal** (Chapter 5). Choose something that changes slowly, such as a seedling, a tree’s buds, a pond or a habit of your own. Sketch or photograph it weekly. After a month, compare. (If tadpoles are nearby, watch them without removing them.)
6. **Four Stages** (Chapter 6). Draw the butterfly’s four stages in a row. Under each, write one line about a season of your own life.
7. **The Huddle** (Chapter 7). List the people who share your cold winds. Write a note to one of them, and think of someone for whom you could take a turn at the outside of the huddle.
8. **Upward and Outward** (Chapter 8). Notice the trees or plants near you and what waters each. Name one thing that “waters” you, and one way you could reach out to a neighbour this week.
9. **A Day-Long Bloom** (Chapter 9). Find a flower that opens in the morning and closes later in the day. Check it at three times of day and sketch it. Write one line on what lasts.
10. **Plant Something** (Chapter 10). Plant seeds such as herbs or tomatoes. Record when roots, shoots, flowers and fruit appear, and note what waiting felt like.
11. **One Small Act of Care** (Chapters 6 and 10). The book says all life is sacred and that humans have been given charge of other creatures. Choose one practical act this week that cares for an animal, a plant or a place.
12. **A Reflection of Your Own** (whole book). In about 200 words, write a reflection in the book’s pattern: a scene, an observation, a spiritual parallel, and a note of hope.

X. A 10-Day Reading Plan (and How to Join Midway)

The book has ten chapters, so it fits a ten-day schedule naturally. Treat this as a map, not a deadline. If you are a day or two behind or ahead, the chapter guides work in any order you need them.

Day	Reading	Pages	Focus for the day	Passages to look up
1	Preface, Introduction & Camouflage	8–23	Learning to notice	Psalm 19:1-6; Acts 17:27-28; 1 Kings 19:11-13
2	Birth	24–36	Beginnings and new life	John 3:3-8; Psalm 139:14-16; Titus 3:5-7
3	Of Cats, Humans and God	37–47	Trust, variety and stillness	Matthew 5:45; Psalm 42; Exodus 14:13-14
4	Pigeons	48–60	The mind and patience	James 1:13-15; Ephesians 6:13-18; Philippians 4:8
5	Insights from Frogs	61–68	Gradual change	Matthew 13:18-23; Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18
6	Butterfly Metamorphosis	69–77	Death and emergence	1 Corinthians 15:42-44; Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:2

7	Emperor Penguins	78–88	Community and endurance	Hebrews 10:23-25; Galatians 6:1-2; 1 Corinthians 10:13
8	The Amazing Date Palm	89–95	Fruitfulness and discipline	Psalms 1:3; Psalm 92:12-14; John 15:1-8
9	Pond Flowers	96–99	Brevity and inner renewal	Isaiah 40:6-8; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Revelation 21:1-7
10	Growing Cherry Tomatoes	100–107	Sowing, reaping and patience	Galatians 6:7-8; Psalm 37:7; James 5:7-8

The passages come from the book's own footnotes. Day 1 is the heaviest in page count, so split it across two sittings if you need to. Day 9 is only four pages, so it leaves room to catch up or to do one of the activities.

Joining midway. Start where you are. Read Sections III and IV for the book's approach, skim the Major Themes (Section VI), then use the guide for your current chapter. Later chapters lean on ideas from earlier ones, especially spiritual birth (Chapter 2) and the fruit of the Spirit. The life-cycles table in Section VII will catch you up.

Short on time. A path through the backbone of the book is the Introduction, Camouflage, Birth, Insights from Frogs, Emperor Penguins and Growing Cherry Tomatoes, with the table in Section VII to fill the gaps.

After the feature. The plan can run at any pace. Many readers may prefer one chapter a week, with one activity from Section IX alongside it.

XI. Essential Terms & Concepts

Definitions follow how the book itself uses each term.

Faith vocabulary

Immanent / Transcendent. The Introduction describes God as transcendent (beyond creation), personal through Jesus Christ, and immanent (present within and through all things). The book emphasizes the immanent while saying it offers glimpses of the transcendent.

The camouflaged God. The book's image for the idea that the Divine is real but not obvious, so that noticing takes attention (Chapter 1).

Inter-being. The Introduction's word for the unity and interconnection of all things.

Born again / spirit birth. The book's phrase, based on John 3 and elsewhere, for receiving new spiritual life through the Holy Spirit (Chapter 2).

Begotten / begettal. The book's word, also used in some Bible translations in passages like 1 Peter 1:3, for being given spiritual life by God, as a child is begotten by a parent. Eva calls conversion a special divine begettal (Chapter 2).

Sanctification. The lifelong process of being transformed into the image of God by the Holy Spirit (Chapter 2).

Imputed righteousness. The idea that Christ's righteousness is counted as belonging to those who are in him (Chapters 2 and 4).

Fruit of the Spirit. The qualities listed in Galatians 5:22-23. The Birth chapter and the Galatians passage name the spiritual fruit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control

Works of the flesh / ego. A biblical phrase (Galatians 5) for self-centred conduct. Chapter 10 speaks of sowing "to the ego" as opposed to sowing to the Spirit.

Body of Christ. The universal church, which the book says is "not any particular denomination" (Chapter 2).

Firstborn / first resurrection. Biblical themes the book applies to believers, who are described as firstborn children of God and promised a first resurrection (Chapter 2).

The rest of the dead. A phrase from Revelation 20:5. In Chapter 2, Eva understands it to mean a later resurrection in which people are offered salvation, including those who never had the chance to know Christ.

Resurrection. In the book, based on 1 Corinthians 15, being raised to life with an incorruptible body at Christ's return.

Universal grace. God's general goodness toward everyone, as in Matthew 5:45 (Chapter 3).

Grieving the Holy Spirit. A biblical phrase from Ephesians 4. In Chapter 3 it describes being out of touch with God after drifting into independence.

Dark night of the soul. A time when God seems silent, which the book says can help develop a purer faith, trust and patience (Chapter 4).

Armour of God. The imagery of spiritual defence in Ephesians 6 (Chapters 4 and 6).

A way of escape. The promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that God provides a way out when testing becomes too hard (Chapters 4 to 6).

Two natures. The human and the divine nature, which the book says exist side by side in a believer and may conflict (Chapter 5).

In the world but not of it. A phrase based on John 17. The book uses it for living in the world while no longer sharing its values (Chapters 4 and 5).

Sun of righteousness. A biblical image (Malachi 4:2) for Christ, used in Chapter 10 alongside the "bread of life" and "living water."

Nature vocabulary

Gamete, embryo, foetus. In Chapter 2, a gamete is one of the two cells that unite at conception (the word comes from the Greek for marriage partners), the embryo is the new life that results, and the foetus is the name used from the second month.

Metamorphosis. A transformation of form during development, as in the frog (gradual) and the butterfly (dramatic).

Instar. The period between a caterpillar's molts (Chapter 6).

Diapause. A caterpillar's ability to slow or delay moving to its next stage (Chapter 6).

Pupa (chrysalis). The stage in which the caterpillar's body is dissolved and a butterfly's body is assembled (Chapter 6).

Nuptial gift. The package of sperm and nutrients a male butterfly gives the female during mating (Chapter 6).

Brood pouch. The flap of skin above a penguin's feet that keeps an egg or chick from freezing (Chapter 7).

Crèche. A colony in which penguin chicks are left together while the adults feed (Chapter 7).

Dioecious. Having separate male and female plants, as the date palm does (Chapter 8).

Rhizome. An underground stem that anchors a plant such as the water snowflake (Chapter 9).

XII. Closing Reflection

At its heart, *Divine Reflections in Living Things* asks for something small and difficult: to look again. Eva Peck's own scenes are modest. A lizard against a tree trunk, a cat at a garden bench, pigeons on a balcony, tadpoles in a puddle, seeds on a kitchen counter. In each she finds something worth pausing over, and she invites her readers to find the same.

You may have finished the book agreeing with all of it, some of it, or little of it. Whichever it is, you have practised something the book hopes for, which is to pay attention to ordinary life as if for the first time. A tadpole changes imperceptibly from day to day, and so does a reader. A chapter you skimmed may now have more to say, and a question you set aside may be ready to be picked up again.

So let the practice continue after the last page. Watch for the next creature that blends into its background. Notice the thing you always walk past. Let a slow change in your own life be a reason for patience, not worry. The book ends with fruit, which takes time, and with a promise of a glorious harvest for those who continue. Whatever you make of that promise, the invitation is simple: keep looking, and keep wondering.

Continue the journey. *Divine Reflections in Living Things* is the third book of a trilogy that also includes *Divine Reflections in Times and Seasons* and *Divine Reflections in Natural Phenomena*. Pathway Publishing (www.pathway-publishing.org) lists the author's other titles, and Truth & Beauty (www.truth-and-beauty.org), another of the author's sites, offers galleries of nature images.

Prepared by: Daniel Smith, Literary Specialist

This Reader Dossier was prepared exclusively for the Reader Discussion of The Literary Exchange Goodreads Community.

© 2026 Daniel Smith. All rights reserved.

Goodreads Community:

<https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/7272670-the-literary-exchange>