SCRIPTURE:
And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split.—Matthew 27:50–51

MEDITATION:
When reading about the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, we could overlook a significant detail: the curtain of the temple in Jerusalem was torn from top to bottom. The Gospel of Matthew says that there was an earthquake, so maybe that was a logical consequence. Things break in earthquakes, so that could be why the temple's curtain (veil in other translations) broke.

The curtain had a vital significance not only in Matthew, but also in two other gospels (Mark 15:38 and Luke 23:45). So, it seems that the writers assumed their audiences knew about the meaning of the curtain in the temple.

The worship system in the Old Testament was highly centralized in a temple. The temple had different sections, and the most important one was the most holy place where the presence of God was assumed to be. However, nobody could enter there except the High Priest, and then, only on special occasions. If a person wanted to be forgiven by God or have a special relationship with God, the person needed to bring an offering: either their best animal or, if the person were poor, a pair of doves or two young pigeons (Luke 2:24). Payment was required for the priests to ensure that you would be forgiven.

When Jesus died, as we read in Hebrews 9:11–14, he became our high priest and entered the most holy place by sacrificing his own blood. That curtain torn from top to bottom was when Jesus secured our direct entrance to God's presence. There is no more need for animal sacrifices. Jesus paid our debt; we have access to the Father by his blood shed on the cross.

REFLECTION:
I teach introductory biology to undergraduate university students. In the chapter about cell features, we discuss membranes. Membranes are not just the cell’s borders; they are also a complex system that limits what can enter the cell. Some molecules can get through, and some can’t unless they pass scrutinization by the different sorts of proteins that guard the cell.

What I like about teaching in a Christian university is that my students and I can be open about our faith. During classes, we do more than pray before exams;
we look at the inner details of creation and exclaim, “Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (Ps. 8:1). However, there are moments when the complexity of biology is overwhelming. So many new names and concepts foreign to freshmen cause much confusion. It is challenging to connect membrane permeability to polar molecules with something familiar. In moments like that, I try to relate faith and learning. Jesus did that when teaching about the kingdom of God:

*Then Jesus asked, “What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches.”*

*Again he asked, “What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.”* (Luke 13:18–21)

I explained the importance of the cell membrane to my freshmen biology class using the incident of the curtain of the temple. As the cell membrane blocks “non-worthy” molecules from entering the cell, so the temple curtain separates us from entering God’s presence. The expression on my students’ faces was priceless. Connecting Jesus’s sacrifice and a direct entrance to the presence of God with the chapter on cell membranes was a valuable teaching experience. It is also a blessing to me when I look for ways to understand God’s creation with his holy scriptures.

We, academics, tend to compartmentalize our faith and academic discipline so that sometimes there is no connection at all. Look how Jesus used analogies from typical activities in his context. Can you explain a complex scientific concept using mustard seeds or yeast? Can you see God’s goodness in the song of a bird, in a rocky landscape, or in a prepared wet mount through a microscope? Do you thank God for showing his presence in your live in the church or the lab? If you teach and have the freedom to proclaim your faith, do you show your students that God is sovereign in every aspect of creation?

**PRAYER:**

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the sacrifice of Jesus and for the entrance that we have to your throne. You are not behind a curtain anymore, and Jesus, our Holy Priest, paid the price so we can enter your presence and be redeemed. We also worship and exclaim, “How great thou art!” as we understand your beautiful creation everywhere we look, either inside the cell or surveying any natural landscape.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Oscar Gonzalez (PhD, University of Florida) is a biologist, currently working as an associate professor of biology and coordinator of the environmental science program at Anderson University, South Carolina. He is a Peruvian native and loves to integrate faith and science positively. He spends his time between the United States, teaching several courses to biology majors, and Peru, researching avian ecology. He is a member of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Peru and the Franklin Springs Pentecostal Church in Georgia.