

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM NATURE'S WORLD PART X

During this series we have looked at a variety of creatures from the heart and hand of God. They have been interesting and they are great teachers. Each one has some special spiritual lessons to share with us, their human counterparts. Today lets visit three more of our animal friends and see what we can learn and apply to our lives and to the life of the church to help us become all God wants us to be. Thanks for joining us today.



The Mute Swan

The name swan suggests - grace, balance, innocence, faithfulness, solitude, retreat, poetry, sincerity. Few creatures inspire such images of romance and elegance as a mute swan gliding across a watery surface. There is nothing pretty, however, about the havoc they wreaks. Don't forget, looks can be deceiving. The mute swan, while one of the most beautiful, is one of the world's most aggressive species of waterfowl.

In Maryland as well as other places, mute swan pairs have become a nuisance, driving people away from shorelines where swans vigorously defend their nest during the breeding season. Seven Atlantic coastal states, including New York and Rhode Island, have been overrun with these regal birds. They have also begun to thrive in some areas around the Great Lakes.

The swan's generally aggressive behavior has also led to the displacement of native birds from nesting and feeding areas. **The lesson** here is, don't let other believers aggressive attitudes, drive off the endangered species known as fellow believers when they come to church to feed on God's word

God created the swan with a long neck, enabling it to graze deeper in the water than other water birds. The exotic swan however tends to destroy a pond's plant life and drive away native waterfowl. It has been known to create as much havoc in its environment as does the gypsy moth, the starling, or the English sparrow.

In the Chesapeake Bay area for example, if nothing is done about the swan, native water birds and waterfowl would suffer, and the many aquatic species that depend upon the Bay's wild grass beds to survive; crabs, seahorses, rockfish, and many more; would lose their homes.

The lesson here is without keeping an eye on nice, but aggressive church members, and those who feed deeply on troublemaking under the surface where they cannot be detected, will lead to the destruction of other members and a safe home for them to live.

I read where one study made on Cape Cod revealed that eight pairs of the thirty-pound swans completely devastated a bog of fifty-six acres of cranberries. This incident pictures how dangerous it is to let sin run unchecked in our lives. Sin can seem attractive and harmless to the eyes, but sin's ways, like the mute swan's habits, lead to destruction. Before Eve sinned by disobeying God, she thought the forbidden fruit was "good for food" and "pleasant to the eyes" (Genesis 3:6).

The mute swan's beautiful exterior may mislead those unfamiliar with it in regard to the damage it can cause to the environment. This should be a reminder that sin may appear beautiful but is destructive.

The lesson, without dealing with problem species in the church, no matter how pretty or popular, can do nothing to help the church remain viable in our world.



The Snail

Snails are slow and slimy little creatures. God designed them to secrete mucus as they use a muscular "foot" to pull themselves along the ground.

The mucus makes the path slippery and helps protect the snail from debris and rough spots in its path. A thin silvery trail in your garden or on your sidewalk is a sign that a snail has paid you a visit.

More than sixty thousand species of snails have been identified. The tiniest snails are smaller than a pinhead; the largest is the Australian trumpet snail, which grows to be two and a half feet long. After hatching, it takes about two years for a snail to fully mature.

A snail never outgrows its shell, for the body and shell grow at the same rate so that the snail can stay inside the shell for protection from predators.

Most snails have two retractable tentacles that grow out of the top front of their heads although some species have four of them. Snails have an eye at the end of each tentacle.

Snails also have a long, flat tongue called a radula and is covered with tiny, sharp teeth. It is an organ much like a rough, raspy file. The snail rubs its tongue on a plant, piece of fruit, or small animal to loosen pieces of food and to pull the food into its mouth. Its favorite foods being tomatoes and strawberries.

One might conclude after a superficial look thus far at snails that they are of little significance in our world; yet they are important because God created them and they do have a role to fulfill in His creation.

God can use both large and small things. Whether we are young or old, God wants us to be willing to serve Him. Each of us has a unique talent that can be put to use to further God's kingdom.

So let's think about some possible spiritual lessons to consider from the life of the slow moving, slimy snail. Remember: God designed them to secrete mucus as they use a muscular "foot" to pull themselves along the ground. Again, this mucus makes the path slippery and helps protect the snail from debris and rough spots in its path.

Now for some possible spiritual applications

Suggested Lesson # 1

From this slime trail that we often see on the sidewalk and that they use for mobility let's be sure our tracks in life lead to good works, good words, good examples for the youth that follow us, good places, as well as good friendships and relationships.

Don't forget You can't leave footprints in the sands of time if you're just sitting and not on the move through life. Just be careful of the direction you are moving in.

Suggested Lesson # 2

Unlike the slow moving snail, be quick to forgive, Ephesians 4:26 Explains *Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, be quick to serve, be quick to listen James 1:19 This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger*

Suggested Lesson # 3

Watch our tongue because like the tongue of the snail which is like a file, we can scrape ugly wounds in the hearts and minds of other believers or people in general. Like the favorite foods of the snail ripe strawberries and tomatoes, both with soft skins a Christian, or people in general, may talk and act like they are tough skinned but because we are all weak we need to be

careful not to use our rough tongue on the tender skin of another person's heart and leave them bleeding, damaged, discouraged, and disappointed

Just a word or two from the Lord on this aspect of the snail

Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

And James 3:10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

Suggested Lesson # 4

On the other hand like the slow moving snail

1. Be slow to anger because James 1:19-20 says *Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God*

2. Be slow to retaliate because retaliation or "Vengeance is actually a monster of appetite, forever bloodthirsty and never filled."

3. Be slow to become proud because I Peter 5:5 says *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

Well just a few thoughts from the slow moving snail. I trust they will help you grow spiritually.



The Zebra

We see them in the zoo and in documentaries of African wildlife and they are beautiful creatures. But what do we actually know about zebras? Lets look at some interesting facts about them. There are 3 basic kinds of zebras The Grevey's, Mountain, and Plains varieties.

Zebra's are best known for their stripes and those stripes are actually part of their defense along with their speed and their very powerful kick which alone can kill a lion. God has designed them so their stripes blend together when they graze or when they run and this causes confusion in the predators eyes and senses. Zebras can be trained to harness and they suffer the same equine diseases as do our domestic stock. And zebras are used for food and for their hides.

Well, lets look at the 3 basic varieties first,

- The Grevey's

These zebras do not live in herds and are essentially found only in the semi arid areas of Northern Kenya. Their foals do not drink water until about 3 months of age and these foals are the result of a 13 month gestation period.

The stripes on this variety are very narrow, evenly spaced and they have a white belly. This species is the largest of all the species and can weigh up to almost 900 lbs. And they bray much like our domestic donkey

There are only about 6,000 left. This species was named after French President Jules Grevey

- The second is the Plains species which is the most plentiful of all the zebras and is found throughout tropical East Africa and extends to South Africa as well.

This variety weighs less than the Grevey's but is much more stout and unlike the Grevey's which brays, this one uses more of a bark to communicate. The stripes on this type, are broad and vertical on the side but bend on the flanks to become horizontal and then fade across the rump.

There are only about 300,000 left while of the extinct sub species the Burchell's last one died in 1918 and the last zoo specimen died in 1883

- The third species is the mountain variety which is the smallest of the three. They have a square dewlap on their throat, esp. in the males.

A sub species here is known as the Hartmann's zebra and it has broad black stripes on an off white body. Their stripes extend down the leg to narrow hooves but do not meet on the belly. This variety is on the endangered list as of 1973 because there are only about 7,000 remaining.

Another sub species is the Cape Mountain zebra which is the smallest of all and stands only 47" in height. This animal has Broad black stripes on a pure white body. The population of this variety was only 140 in the late 1960s; by 1979 it had grown to 200, and by 1984 was at 400

So we have seen a great variety among the zebra species and now what is the lesson for us?

A. One thing, if not the main thing, we learn is the uniqueness of God's creation. Just as no two zebras have the same stripe pattern, so no two people are the same and no two snowflakes are the same.

Thought: God delights in new things and he throws the mold away after creating each one.

Just think, there have probably been some 10-12 billion people that have crossed the earth since Adam, and no two have been exactly alike. We can also see snow on the ground piled 6 ft. high and we can know that God has created each flake different.

□ So what should we do with this knowledge?

Praise God for his great creative ability and desire to use it. Psalm. 148 - Psalm 150 All talk about praising the Lord Praise God that each of us is unique Jeremiah 1:4, 5 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you Also Galatians 1:15

Stop trying to be someone else and just be who you are created to be and then enjoy the uniqueness of others, knowing that there will never be another just like them.

Then we can learn from this, that God wants us to avoid the rut of sameness. He wants us to enjoy the sense of discovery and wonder in a marvelous world he has made for us to enjoy. He wants us to be open to change because He is constantly creating new things.

So lets look at life as though it were filled with zebras, all unique and different and remember that they point us to the great creator. The only stripe markings in which we are all the same is at the foot of the cross

- All the unsaved coming to the cross in their uniqueness but still lost, undone, and without hope
- All the saved leaving the foot of the cross saved in their uniqueness and ready for glory

But other than this one place, the foot of the cross, we are people of many different stripes. PTL!!