

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM NATURE'S WORLD PART XII

The National *Oceanic* and Atmospheric Administration tells us that the ocean covers 71 percent of the Earth's surface and contains 97 percent of the planet's water, yet more than 95 percent of the underwater world remains unexplored.

For today's visit with members of the animal kingdom I want to center our attention to three of those creatures that inhabit the great oceans of our world. Lets start our visit to see what we can learn from them by observing the



Starfish are interesting animals that live mainly along the beaches. Starfish are many different colors. Here are just a few facts about these interesting creatures God has placed on earth for us to observe, enjoy, and learn from.

Even though the word "fish" is part of its name and they live underwater, a starfish is not a fish. It is instead related to the sea lily, sea urchin, and sand dollar. Starfish do not have gills, scales, or fins like fish do and they move quite differently from fish. While fish propel themselves with their tails, sea stars have tiny tube feet to help them move along

There are thousands of sea star or starfish species. Actually, there are about 2,000 species of sea stars, as they are sometimes called. Not all sea stars have 5 arms. While the five-armed varieties of sea star are the most well known, not all sea stars have 5 arms. Some have many more. Take the sun star for instance, which has up to 40 arms! Amazingly, sea stars can regenerate lost arms. This is useful if the sea star is threatened by a predator - it can drop an arm, get away and grow a new arm.

Most of Sea stars vital organs are in their arms, so some can even regenerate an entirely new sea star from just one arm and a portion of the star's central disc. It won't happen too quickly since it takes about a year for an arm to grow back.

Sea stars or starfish are protected by a type of armor. Depending on the species, a sea star's skin may feel leathery, or slightly prickly. Sea stars have a tough covering on their upper side, which is made up of plates of calcium carbonate with tiny spines on their surface. A sea star's spines are used for protection from predators, which include birds, fish and sea otters.

Sea stars do not have blood. Instead of blood, sea stars have a water vascular system, in which the sea star pumps sea water through its sieve plate, into its tube feet to extend them. They move using hundreds of these tube feet, which are located on their underside. Sea stars can move more quickly than one might expect. The sea star's tube feet also help the sea star hold its prey, which includes bivalves like clams and mussels.

Amazingly enough, sea stars eat with their stomachs inside-out. A sea star's mouth is on its underside. They wrap their arms around the animal's shell and pull it open just enough to feed. It then pushes its stomach through its mouth and into the bivalve's shell. Once it digests the animal, it slides its stomach back into its own body. This unique feeding mechanism allows the sea star to eat larger prey than it would otherwise be able to fit into its tiny mouth.

Sea stars have eyes. While they can't see as well as we humans do, sea stars have an eye spot at the end of each arm. This is a very simple eye that looks like a red spot. The eye doesn't see much detail, but can sense light and dark.

Well as we see, the sea star or starfish is quite a unique creation and from this little fellow I believe there are some spiritual lessons we can draw from them.

A. First considering the fact that they can regenerate new limbs on its body.

Thinking about the church as the body of Christ (or corporate life) there is a need for regeneration, or church growth. Like the arms of the star fish, people break off from the body of the church. Some die, they leave the area, and a variety of other things happen in church life and the local church population begins to dry up and it can result in the church dying so there is a need for constant regeneration or church growth.

Part of this regeneration process is new professions of faith or, people being saved. You see, inviting and including new believers into the life of the church is as necessary to the church as a new limb is to the starfish if it is to be able to survive

Then thinking about the church as the body of Christ, and our individual Chr. lives we need to lose or break off such things as bad attitudes, bad habits, bad actions etc and replace them with good ones. Losing the bad things and regenerating new desires or replacing them with the new, is one way of not sinning any longer, thanks to a simple lesson from the starfish

One last little note is found in the fact that I read where the starfish usually move away from a bright light. In our case we need to come closer to the real and bright light of Jesus so he can guide us to victory through his Word.

Yes, the starfish is unique and so are we as humans but I believe there are some helpful things we can learn from these fascinating creatures



Porpoise or Dolphin

The porpoise, or dolphin as we normally refer to them, is an aquatic mammal related to the whale. The porpoise is referred to in the bible some 14 times although the dolphin is not mentioned. Never the less they are very closely related.

We know them more as dolphins so that is how I am going to refer to them. Dolphins are very social, traveling in groups called **pods** of up to 1,000 animals. As we see from television documentaries about them, they are playful and energetic, they do flips and somersaults, leaping completely out of the water, sometimes as a group.

They love to ride on the waves created by their fellow swimmers, ships, or very large whales. They sleep with one eye always open, closing one for 5 to 10 minutes, then the other, a fact that I want think more about in a moment.

Dolphins are intelligent animals and use vocalization to communicate with each other. They are affectionate creatures and they form lasting friendships with one another. Dolphins will even use their fins to help keep an ailing dolphin afloat so that sick one can breathe.

The greatest threat to most dolphins is accidental death in fishing nets. International efforts are underway to reduce the number of dolphins killed each year in nets called (gill nets). Many scientists and fishermen are experimenting with ways to make these gill nets more detectable to porpoises. One strategy is to develop acoustic alarms that are attached to nets to warn dolphins away. So from the dolphin lets think about some suggested spiritual applications

The spiritual lessons I see in a nutshell are, Like the dolphin lets be sure to stay together in the pod or church

Worship together, work together, keeping one another up when another believer is sick, play together. Communicate with one another in the pod instead of about others in the pod, and fish together for the unsaved which will lead to church and heaven growth.

Finally, sleep with one eye open lest the enemy slip up on us, or another unsuspecting dolphin in the pod.

God has given Christian believers many warnings in His Word about being caught in the gill net of sin. Just as they are working on acoustic alarms for the dolphins, we have acoustic alarms on the gill nets of the spiritual life.

Ecclesiastes 9:12 says, *"None of us know when we might fall victim to a sudden disaster and find ourselves like fish in a net or birds in a trap."* So to avoid nets of sin stay close to one another in the pod or church, stay close to God, and His Word!

Never forget, the greatest danger to the pod or church is not from the outside but from within. The greatest danger is from other dolphins or Christians in the pod who do not want to work, play, or be submissive to one another as a pod but instead want to be loners in action and deed.

Being alone allows us to be in greater danger from the net of pride, selfishness, and the other things that can destroy us. Well, the dolphin as an interesting creature and we should think carefully about what we can learn from watching them.



The Walrus

Some people might consider the walrus to be one of the ugliest creatures in the world. It is almost hairless, and its wrinkled body is huge and clumsy. Its small eyes and nostrils are pushed up on the top of its earless head. Its long yellowish tusks, however, which drop from the corners of its mouth, seem to give this animal sort of an air of respectability.

The walrus's scientific name, is Latin for 'tooth-walking sea-horse'. When the walrus uses its very prominent tusks to pull its huge body out of the ocean and up onto pack ice, the process looks like the walrus is walking on its tusks, hence it got that name.

God designed the walrus to be extremely fat as a protection against the cold waters. The blubber is so efficient that even if a walrus remains submerged in the cold water for twelve hours after death, the carcass still remains very warm. Did you know that a walrus can remain under water for up to 30 minutes before coming up for air.

The walrus' whiskers are not hairs, but are actually extremely sensitive organs, much like a cat's whiskers. The walrus uses these whiskers to help find food. The walrus' skin is very wrinkly. These wrinkles are like armor and protect the walrus when they "fight" with other males. Their thick skin also

helps protect them from all predators except the orca, or killer whale, polar bear, and of course man.

Walrus are extremely noisy and very social creatures, cramming onto beaches and ice floes by the thousands. They have very defined hierarchies - males, females and females with calves - and they quickly come to each other's rescue when they are attacked.

Walrus feed on clams, mussels, krill, crabs, worms and snails. It will also eat octopus and fish and may also attack seals. They can dive down 300 feet to retrieve their favorite food, clams, from the sea bottom. A walrus can eat 4,000 clams in one feeding! Walrus can live up to 20-30 years old in the wild

The walrus is one of the most important marine animals of the Eskimo economy. From the hides, they make lines, boats, and clothing. They use the blubber for fuel and feed the meat to their dogs. They receive additional income from the ivory tusks, which can be carved into small decorative objects.

I read where in the past native mothers would use the walrus blubber as a pacifier for her baby. She would take a chunk of blubber, put a stick through it sideways and let her baby suck on it.

In thinking about the walrus and spiritual applications that might be drawn from these creatures, I think of a couple and you might even think of others

A. We learned that the walrus has a very thick skin and the lesson here is simple, develop a thick skin and work at not whining when some things happens that we don't like. In other words, don't pout when someone says something that hurts our feelings. Instead remember that we all do or say things that hurt other people so the development of a thicker hide is a good thing for us to strive for in the Christian life.

B. Just as the walrus has tusk for protection, food gathering, and assistance in getting out of the water, and a heavy fat layer to help protect from the cold, we as Christians, have various abilities that we can use in our spiritual ministries and which contribute to our growth in the Lord. So lets be aware of how much we have been blessed and, use what we have been blessed with, so we can be a blessing to others and in the process we can be a blessing to the Lord

C. There is one final thing about the walrus that I want us to think about and that is that they are among the most sociable creatures in the animal world.

They exhibit social behavior all year and congregate by the hundreds and even thousands. These groups are called herds or pods. We need to be social creatures with other believers which is best displayed in regular church or pod attendance. When one person misses a service then the rest of the family suffers.

So remember your value to the family or pod and be sure to do all you can to attend services to strengthen the social bonds so we will know how act when we get to heaven.

But on the other side of it We also need to socialize with pods of non believers. If we only hang out with other Christian pods then there will be no one to take the message of salvation. Many people say we should not hang out with unbelievers and stick only with other Christian walruses but what about Jesus. Was that the way he operated? I read where He spent time with the pods, for example, that hung out in the bars and other place on the wrong side of the ice flows .

So lets remember to be social with both pods so that the non Christian pod members will want to come and visit with, or join our pod with us.

Yes the walrus is a very interesting creature and I trust that you are able to use part of these simple suggested lessons we can learn from their peculiar habits and makeup