The background is a vibrant, colorful illustration of an underwater scene. It features various types of coral in shades of purple, blue, and pink, along with green seaweed and other marine plants. The water is a deep, clear blue. The title 'UNDER THE SEA' is prominently displayed in the upper half, with 'SEA' being significantly larger and containing a small black fish icon. Below the title, the word 'devotional' is written in a clean, white, sans-serif font.

UNDER THE SEA

devotional

***"The Lord will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the Lord your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom."
Deuteronomy 28:13 NIV***

Every year, Shark Week sneaks up on us. There they are on our televisions, these simply stunning creatures lurking in the ocean's depths. No matter if it is a hammerhead, a bull shark, a tiger shark or a goblin shark, one thing is clear: this is a sea creature that commands respect. Seriously, would you want to be swimming nearby a shark? No, thank you!

There's something more we can learn about sharks as we study them this week. For example, sharks are the top of the food chain, and swim around with absolute authority. Think of the speed, the strength – and those teeth!

But consider a moment where you stand: On this earth, we are children of the living God, and have been given authority to be all things through Christ who strengthens us. The Bible is filled with scriptures that have some teeth!

Like a shark, you just have to keep moving forward. The great white shark has to keep moving forward in the water – or it will die. That's how it breathes, believe it or not, pushing water through its gills. And similarly, if we don't keep moving forward, we too can die. We must keep pressing on, not stopping or giving up. We must keep pushing forward!

One final thing about the shark: have you ever noticed all those brave fish that like to hang around the shark? These are pilot fish, which follow the lead shark wherever it goes. They serve and help, as the shark breaks through the water and leads the way.

That's just how it is – we need to take the lead! Like those pilot fish that seem to follow sharks around, you've got people in your wake. So lead a path and set the example to follow.

If the ocean is one big aquarium, you can be king of the Shark Tank!



"Do not put any other gods in place of me." Exodus 20:3 NIRV

His name was Dagon, and he was just a statue – and a weird one at that. He had a human head and arms, but a great big fish tail instead of legs. A long time ago, the Philistines created this statue because that was the image of their god. They had fallen for this fish tale for many years, but Dagon was about to fall himself when put in the presence of the one true God!

You see, the Philistines had captured the Ark of the Covenant from the Israelites. The Ark, of course, was the presence of God that was carried with the Israelites wherever they went. Now, it was in the Philistines' hands, who left it in Dagon's Temple right next to the fish god.

There's only one God, and we can never have anything larger in our lives than the one true God, and these Philistines found that out the hard way. They marched into their temple the next day and something was fishy: Dagon had fallen over, flat on the ground before the Ark of the Covenant. You'd think the Philistines would have gotten the big picture then and there. Every knee shall bow before God!

Yet they propped up their poor little fish god and put him back in place. What kind of god are you serving if you have to help him around? But once Dagon, the Mermaid Man, was put back into place, the same thing happened all over again: the statue fell over before the presence of God, this time breaking off Dagon's head and hands.

The Philistines tried to send it elsewhere in their land, but curse after curse rained down upon them until one day they decided they'd had enough. They strapped the Ark to a cart with some cows and pushed it off away from their country. Funny, even the Philistines' cows knew who the real God was. They took that Ark right back to the Israelites where it belonged.

It should have been clear to the Philistines who the real God was. In fact, anything else is just fishy.



**"He said to them, 'Go into all the world. Preach the good news to everyone.'
Mark 16:15 NIRV**

The largest animal on the planet is one that doesn't walk – it swims deep under the sea. The blue whale is a most amazing animal, around a hundred feet long and simply beautiful to see. This is a creature mentioned created by God in Genesis 1:21, a scripture that ends with these words: "God saw that it was good."

Do you speak whale? Hopefully so! As we look into our Bibles, the most remarkable story to take place under the sea would have to be the one about Jonah. The other main character in this is: a whale, of course! Now, Marine biologists know a few things about whales, but there are a few things we can learn from whales as well.

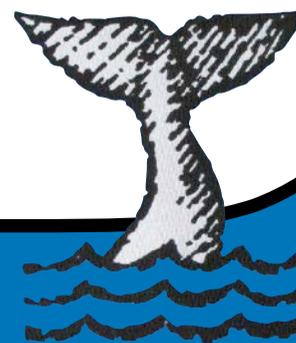
For example, whales obey. Looking back, we can see that Jonah did *not* obey. It's a good thing the whale listened and obeyed God, otherwise Jonah would have perished. Trust God. If He is asking you to do something, there's a very good reason you should obey. Through reading His word and with prayer, you'll know how to avoid situations like the one Jonah was hurled into.

Another thing that whales famously do is sing. And despite everything going on, deep in the body of a whale, Jonah sang a song of thanksgiving. No matter your circumstances, be thankful for what you have been given. Focus on the positive, and see God continue to bless you. Sing a song of thanks, no matter where you are.

Finally, whales carry. What do they carry, you ask? In the book of Jonah, that whale was carrying inside him a message of salvation for more than 120,000 people! And yet you yourself have that same message inside of you, the hope and light of the world. Don't take that lightly.

Some have pointed out that it could have been a *whale shark* that rescued Jonah. They miss the point, which is this: we can all learn from the whales when we obey, sing songs of praise, and remember to deliver that message of salvation deep inside.

Do you speak whale? Of course you do!



"God's grace has saved you because of your faith in Christ. Your salvation doesn't come from anything you do. It is God's gift." Ephesians 2:8 NIRV

God has a crush on you – He thinks you so totally rock! If you have any doubts, check out all He's done for us. First He was like "whoa," and then we were like "whoa," and then He was like, "whoa!"

Hold it – kill the motor. You might be a bit confused in your noggin. Let me lay it all out for you, showing you all God has done for you.

Firstly, you're totally righteous! Seriously. But it isn't anything you've done – it's all about what Jesus did for us. See what I'm saying? God sent Jesus for all of us, so we don't have to float through life all bummed out about our gnarly past. But don't take that grace for granted – Jesus paid a pretty awful price, so we all can be righteous.

The other thing God did was give us a Friend, to help as we float through life. Hope you have some serious thrill issues, because the Holy Spirit is a companion and friend who will help you in every area of your life. First, find that exit buddy. Do you have your exit buddy? Of course you do – He's with you always. Totally sweet!

Get that awesome info in your noggin, and coo-coo-cachoo, you'll be on your way. Your Heavenly Father will be like "You so totally rocked! Give me some fin! Dude!"

Yeah, He probably doesn't speak like that. But like any good father, there is no mistaking the joy and pride He has when seeing you succeed when you fly solo.

So grab shell and get ready to rip it, roll it, and punch it for a wild ride in the big ol' blue. Just don't forget that exit buddy, and hold on tight. It's going to be totally righteous!

Oh, and hey, no hurling on the shell dude, okay? Just waxed it.



"Let us not give up meeting together. Some are in the habit of doing this. Instead, let us cheer each other up with words of hope. Let us do it all the more as you see the day coming when Christ will return."
Hebrews 10:25 NIRV

Why are fish so smart? Because they live in schools! You know something? That's not a bad idea. Jesus wants us to be fishers of men, so it's only natural to look to the fish a moment to learn a thing or two.

For example, they stick together. That's lesson number one: Don't get schooled! As Christians, we fish need to swim together! In the deep blue sea, there is safety in numbers, and it really confuses the enemy. Predators can't focus, and rather than seeing a small fish, they instead see something much bigger, a massive swirl they'd rather just stay away from!

Sometimes praising God together makes no sense at all to the outside world, but where two or more are gathered, there He is amongst them. And that's where you can find safety, refuge, and hope for the hopeless. Every fish has a wish, and that's to stay cool with the school!

But you can find more than just safety with other Christians: there is a lot to learn with the school. There are always more fish in the sea, and always someone who knows more about something. In fact, each time you gather together with others, you'll learn more about God and His plan for you. It's a good idea to make sure you stay teachable; otherwise you'll never learn anything at all! Don't be a fool - stay with the school!

One last thing you do together is find your porpoise. Or rather, your purpose. Seriously, one fish you don't want to be is a *selfish*. That's a fish that thinks only of himself! We join together for encouragement and safety, but we also join together with purpose, to serve others. A reef only works when all the sea creatures there do what God designed them to do, and then that reef grows and grows! So find that thing God wants you to do, and plug in to your calling!

So once more, why are fish so smart? Because they follow God's flow, something you can do too. Just stay teachable, and don't be a selfish. Oh, and make sure you are always heading back to school!



"Do not follow the crowd when they do what is wrong." Exodus 23:2 NIRV

A Christian doing the wrong thing is like a fish out of water. We never want to get hooked by sin. Yet sometimes we get tempted, don't we?

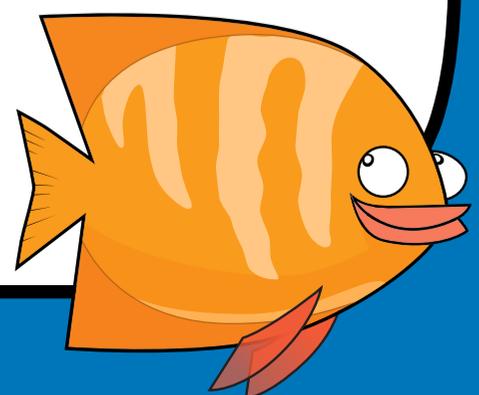
Samson was a mighty man of God, yet he hung around something he knew he shouldn't have. Her name was Delilah, and she was nothing but trouble. She was just bait and Samson fell for her hook, line and sinker.

He didn't get into any trouble at first, but sin is like that. It hangs there like bait, and we're tempted to nibble at it at first. Sometimes nothing happens immediately, so we nibble some more. And more! And that's when we suddenly find ourselves like Samson, hooked and reeling!

Samson didn't listen to God. He listened to Delilah. When we don't listen to God, we're listening to others and what they think is best. But our peers don't have all the answers. If a fish sees a whole bunch of fish underneath a pier where it is dark and shady, that doesn't mean it is a good place to go. No, that's where all the hooks are! So don't give into pier pressure!

As Christians, we were designed to go against the flow. God told the clown fish to hang out with the sea anemone, a creature that eats fish. And yet it works out! The clown fish has protection. Trust Him. If God's Word tells us to do something, there's a good reason for it. If there's a rising tide of temptation, act like a flying fish and rise above it all, trusting God in all things.

We are designed to swim free as fish in the ocean. So ask God for help to go against the flow, watch out for pier pressure, and by all means... don't get lured in!



***"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him."
Romans 8:28 NIRV***

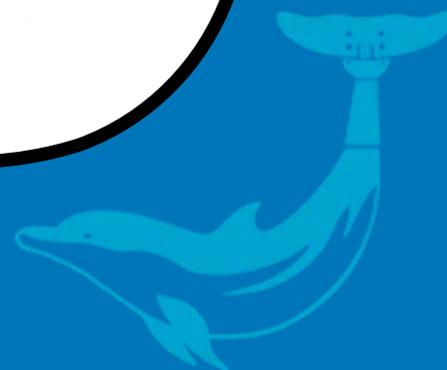
"*Dolphin Tale*" is on the surface a story of a wounded animal, struggling to survive. But deeper within is a moving story that has encouraged and motivated millions all over the world. The dolphin's name is Winter, and her story has given hope to the hopeless, as well as three simple lessons that have inspired us all.

Lesson number one: It's everyone's job to *rescue*. In the story of "*Dolphin Tale*," Winter was rescued by a young boy named Sawyer, and some caring people who understood the importance of helping one another. Like Sawyer, when you see a need, offer to help. We are all a part of a family, designed by God to help one another through life's challenges. At the care center, dolphins need to be in the pool with other dolphins – it's somewhat of a law. We can learn from those dolphins: we're supposed to be there for one another, together. Family is forever.

Lesson number two: We can overcome. Just because you're hurting doesn't mean you're broken. God can heal, restore, fix and make things better than before. But you've got to change your attitude from that of defeat to that of an overcomer, just like Winter did, and just like Sawyer does when he finds purpose in life. Once he discovers his purpose, he is transformed from a depressed and lonely kid to a major action hero! With God's help, you can be an overcomer too!

Lesson number three: We will inspire! Disabled children and adults are inspired by Winter's remarkable true story, traveling many miles just to see this wonderful dolphin. The very thing that was meant for harm was something that helped encourage millions of others around the world. Just like Winter, choose today to set an example, and be an inspiration. You've got a story that will help others, so why not share it with the world?

The most wonderful thing about the movie "*Dolphin Tale*" is that it is based on a true story. To this day, Winter lives at the Clearwater Marine Aquarium in Florida. She's an amazing animal. This dolphin's tale is unlike any other, and yet it is what God wants us all to do: rescue, overcome, and inspire!



“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a trader who was looking for fine pearls. He found one that was very valuable. So he went away and sold everything he had. And he bought that pearl.” Matthew 13:45-46 NIRV

Deep into the ocean the pearl divers plunge, looking for just the right treasure: the perfect pearl. It’s something that has been done for centuries – even Jesus spoke of a pearl at one point, a pearl of great price.

Pearls are beautiful to look at, but did you know that they are made because of something irritating inside? It is an annoying bit of sand caught in the oyster, which is covered year after year by layer after layer of white calcium carbonate. Over time, that becomes the beautiful pearl, a treasure in the ocean. But remember: it all started out with an irritant.

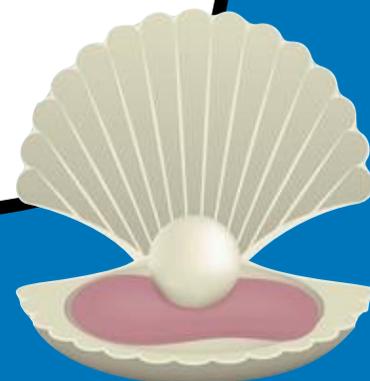
In life, we have a lot of irritants we need to endure, don’t we? When things happen that you don’t want or understand, remember the pearl. Trust God to use your circumstance, and turn that irritation into something wonderful. Turn the test into a testimony, trial into triumph, and the tragedy into a trophy of grace.

How do we do that? Jesus told us how in many ways, even bringing up pearls again. He told us not to throw them before pigs. This makes sense, of course. Why would you want something so beautiful thrown into the mud with a bunch of pigs? A pearl gets its color, luster – and value – from the water it is growing in. It needs to stay in the right environment, otherwise it will lose its luster. A pig pen is not a good place for pearls.

Of course, the same can be said for us. Don’t spend time in the wrong environment, as it can drag you down. Pearls don’t belong in the mud, and you don’t belong where God doesn’t want you.

When Jesus spoke of pearls, He told us, “The kingdom of heaven is like a trader who was looking for fine pearls. He found one that was very valuable. So he went away and sold everything he had. And he bought that pearl.”

Jesus compared salvation, and the Kingdom of Heaven, to a pearl of great price. It is something worth chasing and giving up everything to have. In the very next sentence, he spoke of good fish, and bad fish. In your life, use your time wisely, and seek after what is best. Don’t be a bad fish that is only thrown away, but instead be something good and useful to the Lord. In other words, seek the Pearl of Great Price.



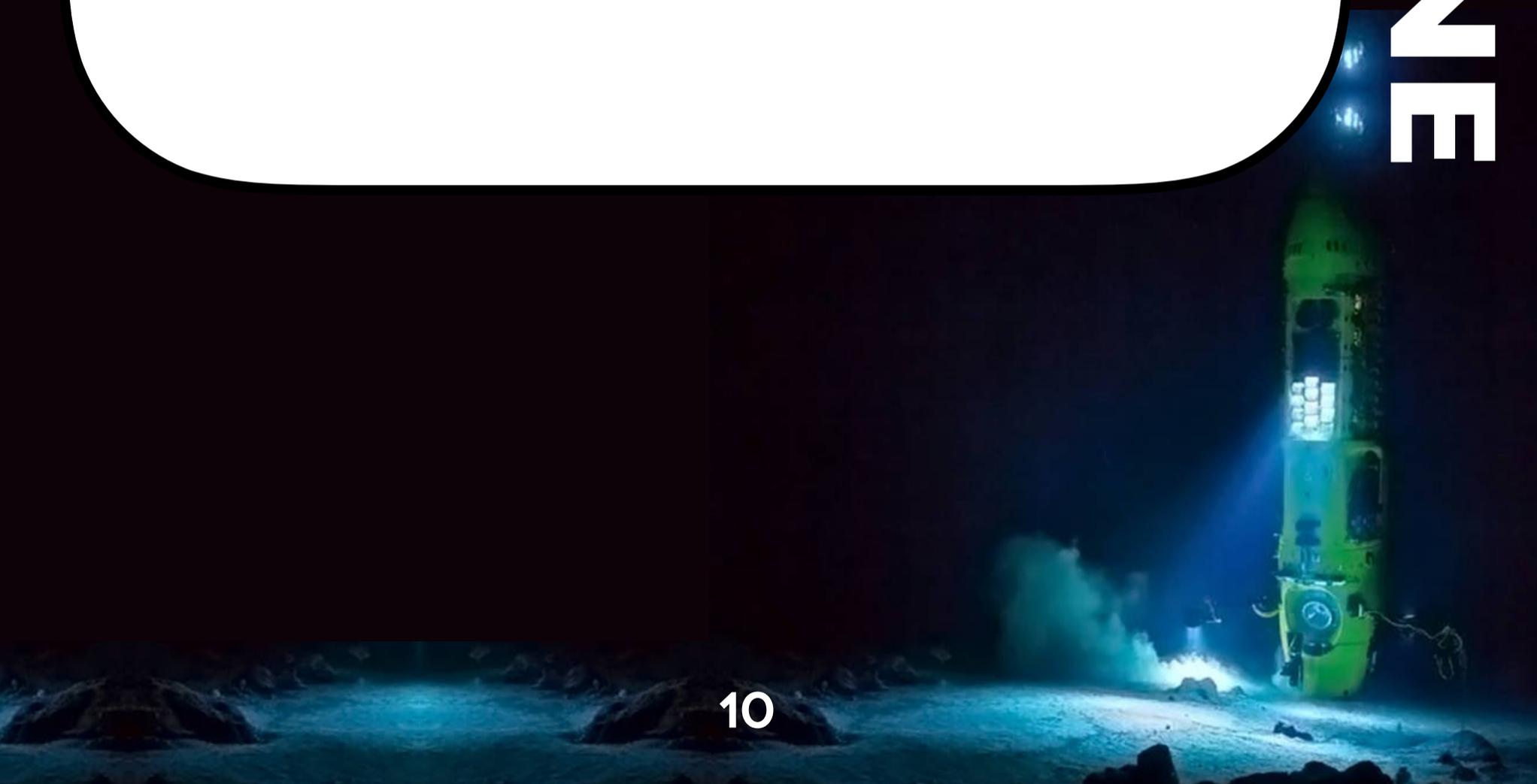
"Once again You will show loving concern for us... You will throw all of our sins into the bottom of the sea." Micah 7:19 NIRV

Are you looking to go deeper? How about to a place called Challenger Deep? It is the lowest, deepest known point in the ocean, located at the southern end of Mariana Trench in the Pacific Ocean. It's 35,756 feet down – that's nearly seven miles straight down. Throughout our entire history, only three people have made it that deep – the most recent visit in 2012, for about two and a half hours. If you want to know where the bottom of the sea is, look no further.

It is a place on this earth that no one goes, where no light reaches and the temperature plummets to extreme lows. It's hard to imagine surviving down here, and yet God has created life that not only survives, but also thrives.

One thing does not survive though. In the book of Micah, it is written that God tosses our sins to the bottom of the sea. We are very happy to report that recent explorations of Challenger Deep didn't discover any of our sins piled up for all to see.

And that's because they are gone forever. When God was saying He'd throw our sins to the bottom of the sea, He was simply making this point: they are going to a dark place where they will die, and be gone forever. Nobody will remember them ever again, because of God's loving concern for us, and a love that's even deeper.



“Or speak to the earth. It will teach you. Or let the fish in the ocean educate you. Are there any of these creatures that don’t know what the powerful hand of the Lord has done? He holds the life of every creature in His hand. He controls the breath of every human being.”

Job 12:8-10 NIRV

During the height of the Victorian era, author Jules Verne published perhaps his most famous novel. The story is an amazing adventure our heroes take to some place – for that time – altogether new. And although we’ve seen it in movies, pictures and in person, it’s still certainly a place filled with wonder: “20,000 Leagues Under the Sea.”

Walking into something new called a submarine, Captain Nemo invites his “guests” aboard to see a place of wonder people could rarely see: a world deep beneath the surface of the ocean. It is a world God has created for us, and they are indeed astonished and stupefied!

But it doesn’t take going too far for us to see this amazing planet that God has crafted for you and I. Take time to go outside, and see for yourself! Thank and worship our Heavenly Father, who has designed and made this marvelous world for all of us.

Unfortunately, it doesn’t take long to see that Captain Nemo is a bitter man. He has not forgiven the world for some awful things that have happened to him. And because of that, he calls himself an avenger. In the story of “20,000 Leagues Under the Sea,” he takes it upon himself to punish the world for crimes of war, and worse.

But that’s not our job, is it? As Christians, our job is to pray for the world, and not avenge it. Our assignment is to be the hope of the world. We’ve been forgiven of so much. In fact, when we ask for forgiveness from God and repent, our Bibles tell us that God has promised to forget all our sins, and cast them to the bottom of the ocean. There are plenty of wondrous things to be found beneath the surface of the water, but don’t go back and revisit those that God has vowed to forget about.

Ultimately, the story is about forgiveness. In doing all he did, Captain Nemo is escaping from the world that hurt him, and still inside, he will not forgive. Our captive heroes enter the story to show him once again what it is like to be human, to show compassion and yes, forgiveness. Will they succeed? The answer can only be found somewhere deep within “20,000 Leagues Under the Sea.”



**“Don’t let anyone fool you. ‘Bad companions make a good person bad.’”
I Corinthians 15:33 NIRV**

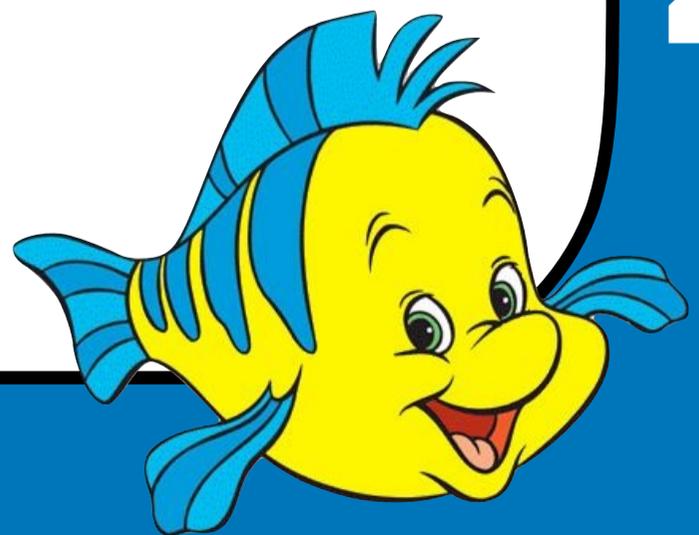
It’s obvious that Princess Ariel has plenty of issues. She never shows up for rehearsals, she’s disobeying her father, she’s convincing her friends to sneak off and do something wrong, and worst of all, she’s willing to make a deal with the sea witch, Ursula.

In her defense, she’s young and has a lot to learn. In fact, by the time the story of “The Little Mermaid” is over with, it’s safe to say she’s learned quite a few things the hard way. If only she listened to Sebastian the crab, and Flounder the ... fish. We’re not sure what kind of fish Flounder is, but we’re really sure he’s not a flounder.

The point is, God put friends in our lives to help us. If you listen to your friends’ advice, perhaps you can avoid troubles. But if you ignore it, you’re destined to make the wrong kind of waves. To quote Sebastian, “the human world is a mess!”

But what about this deal with Ursula? It’s a trick, of course. Ursula is only using her to get back at Ariel’s father, King Triton. In our lives, there’s a devil that wants to see us disobey our Heavenly Father, and possibly bring others down with us. That’s why we have to be careful who we listen to. There are true friends in our lives, ones who care and will never flounder. If they leave you feeling miserable, lonely and depressed, even pathetic, then you’re listening to the wrong kinds of people.

Don’t go running away from God. You’re not a poor, unfortunate soul. You’re a King’s kid, and you know something? God wants to be part of your world. So repent, see the light and make a switch. Life with Him is better than anything they got out there. Such wonderful things all around you, what else are you looking for?



**“Run away from the evil things that young people long for. Try hard to do what is right. Have faith, love and peace. Do these things together with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”
2 Timothy 2:22 NIRV**

Here’s a fun fact: the fastest fish in the world is the sailfish. And before you start thinking you could beat this fish in a race, you should probably read this amazing statistic: a sailfish can swim an astounding sixty-eight miles per hour!

That’s right, if you tried to race a sailfish through town, you’d most likely wind up getting a speeding ticket!

You can recognize the sailfish rather easily. It has a lengthy pointed bill on its nose, sharp and long like a needle. It also has a fin on its back that stretches from front to the tail, one that looks just like a sail.

This fish is a masterpiece of speed. Sharks swim at about twenty-five miles an hour, with short bursts of quickness that go up to thirty-five miles an hour. Sailfish? They can swim twice as fast as that!

When dangerous situations show up, the sailfish knows what to do. It gets out of there, and pretty fast! That’s probably some really great advice for each of us too. The Bible has a great tip for when we become tempted to do things God isn’t happy with. There are times in life we may find ourselves in a place of trouble. Maybe others nearby are listening to songs you know you shouldn’t. Perhaps some are watching something on television you know God wouldn’t be happy with you seeing. Or maybe there’s something even more troublesome going on, and you’re hearing a warning voice inside your head.

When that kind of thing happens, don’t stick around. Don’t linger. No, the best thing to do is speed right out of there – just like a sailfish!



“I push myself forward toward the goal to win the prize. God has appointed me to win it.” Philippians 3:12 NIRV

The young sea turtle has a deep hole to climb out of. There at the shoreline, he struggles along in the sand, and in the face of obstacles as well. He is programmed by God to do one thing: survive. There are predators along the way, dangers left and right. But the sea turtle does not have time for that. He must keep moving forward to his own Promised Land.

Some time ago, the Israelites were struggling in the sand as well. Forty years before, they had found themselves stuck in this hole called 'the wilderness.' And now, it was time to get out. Many dangers loomed before them, predators who would have loved nothing more than to rid the world of God's chosen people. But under Joshua's leadership, they kept moving forward. It's what the book of Joshua is all about: determination, and victory.

There is a Promised Land waiting for you. Sure, there are dangers, obstacles, and setbacks too. In fact, you may be so deep in a hole now that there is just only the faintest glimmer of hope left. But the key to survival - and success - is determination. Make it a part of the foundation of your character today. Even if you are struggling to move forward just one step at a time, at least you're going in the right direction! Like that young sea turtle, it is what you are made to do: keep moving forward!



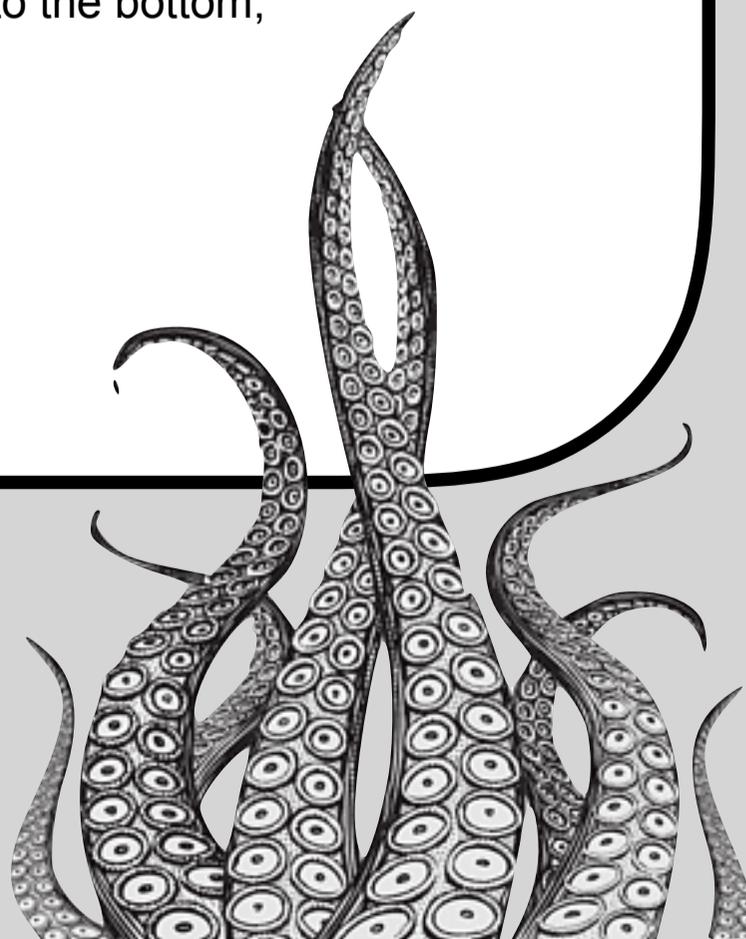
"Ships sail back and forth on it. The leviathan, the sea monster you made, plays in it." Psalm 104:26

Do you know what a leviathan is? Some think it may have been a dinosaur, while others believe it may be something like the Kraken, a huge sea monster that emerges from fathoms below the ocean to prey on unsuspecting pirate ships. For many years, pirates feared this slithering beastie that lurked beneath the murky waters, lying in wait to usher an entire pirate crew into the depths, and Davy Jones' locker.

While all that makes for a fantastic story, it's more likely that the leviathan of the Bible is any large sea creature, such as a whale. While intimidating in appearance simply because of their size, these peaceful sea creatures like to eat tiny krill, and won't chase after pirate ships unless provoked.

The sea still has its mysteries, as more and more discoveries are being made each day. No Kraken has been discovered, but it is simply astonishing what can be found within the great big ocean that God has made. Ships sail back and forth on it. Every creature of the sea plays in it.

The ocean is a masterpiece of creation, just one way He shows us His awesome strength and creativity. Yet it is tiny when compared to the fathomless love God has shown for us. He loves us so much that when we ask Him for forgiveness, He casts the memory of those sins we've done into a sea of forgetfulness where they'll sink to the bottom, never to be remembered again.



**“If any of you needs wisdom, you should ask God for it. He will give it to you. God gives freely to everyone and doesn’t find fault.”
James 1:5 NIRV**

You may have seen an octopus named Hank in the movie “Finding Dory.” From the first moment Dory met him, this octopus was out of his tank, and trying to escape to freedom. As unbelievable as his trip may seem, you should hear about the real-life adventure of Inky, an octopus that used to live in a national aquarium in New Zealand. We say “used to” live there, because one night, someone left the lid of his aquarium tank not tightened down. So, in the middle of the night while no one was looking, Inky made a great escape: this octopus climbed to the top of the aquarium tank and slid down to the floor outside. Sensing freedom, Inky made a break for it! This super smart octopus slid a little over eleven feet across the floor and found a drainage pipe and followed it one hundred and sixty-four feet until he was able to find the sweet freedom of the sea.

Yes, an octopus is extremely clever. They’re famous escape artists, and have been known to twist off the lids of jars to get out of tight jams. If there’s an octopus in your aquarium, you’d best be on guard! Aquarium owners have a hard time keeping them from escaping!

Our Bible has a few famous people in it that have something in common with Inky. Paul, Silas, and Peter were captured and confined in a small jail cell, falsely accused and stuck in a jam. But each one of them was extremely clever, and it wasn’t long before they were once again swimming free. Of course, they were clever in a different way from the octopus, and here’s the bottom line: they were smart because they obeyed and listened to God, and He helped them get loose.

That’s a good word for you as well. We’re not saying you’re ever going to be falsely accused of something and thrown into jail. And you’re certainly not going to be dumped into an aquarium tank. At least we hope not. But you might find yourself stuck in a situation that you didn’t intend to be in. You might even feel trapped there. When that happens, the best thing to do is the clever thing: ask God for wisdom, and obey.

Our Bibles tell us plainly that if we ask God for wisdom, He’ll give it to us. So ask, and most importantly, obey. When we do that, He can help us out of many a tight situation. Just like Inky. No drainage pipes required.

**"I pray that He will use His glorious riches to make you strong. May His Holy Spirit give you His power deep down inside you."
Ephesians 3:16 NIRV**

Have you met Miguel Wattson? If you have, you know he's got quite an electric personality. If you haven't, we'll just say you're in for a shock! Miguel is the name given to a special electric eel that's currently swimming along inside a tank at the Chattanooga Aquarium in Tennessee. He's got quite a following online, because his tank is actually hooked up to a social media account. Whenever he releases an electric charge that's big enough inside his tank, he's actually sending out a tweet!

Miguel is really charged up about Christmas too! The staff at the aquarium actually set up a Christmas tree that's attached to the tank, and yes, every time he releases a zap of electricity, the nearby Christmas tree lights up!

Isn't God amazing? He created this very unique creature that is pretty safe from predators. I mean seriously, anyone who tries to eat an electric eel is in for a world of "hertz." If I were a predator, I'd bolt right out of there!

What's amazing is that God has given each of us a power deep inside us, and that is the Holy Spirit. Jesus gave us the Great Commission, to be a light in this darkened world. But in order to shine brightly, we've got to have that power from the Holy Spirit, who leads us, helps us, protects us, and guides us. The Holy Spirit empowers us, and makes us strong, and yes, we'll go ahead and say it: He makes us totally lit!



“Or speak to the earth. It will teach you. Or let the fish in the ocean educate you. Are there any of these creatures that don’t know what the powerful hand of the Lord has done?” Job 12:8-9 NIRV

A sand dollar is worth much more than a dollar. This flat, disc-shaped creature lives along the shoreline in shallow waters. Occasionally you’ll see one on the beach, washed up there and bleached by the sun. They are a remarkable shell to discover! They look like an old coin, although a larger one. This is how it got its name, of course.

But somewhere along the line, something amazing was discovered about the sand dollar. Each one tells a story of God’s wonderful and unfailing love!

Take a look at one and see for yourself! Every sand dollar has some easily found symbolism right there on each shell. Consider this: on top of the shell, one of the easiest things to spot is a star shape at the very center. The star represents the Star of Bethlehem, the one that led the Wise Men to the manger where Jesus was born. Around that star, you can also see the large shape of an Easter lily, a flower that reminds us of when Jesus resurrected from the dead.

But that’s not all. There are four holes towards the edge of the shell, and one more at the bottom center. These are said to remind us of the holes in Jesus’ feet, His hands, and the center hole is there to remind us of the wound in His heart.

There’s more though: if you turn the sand dollar over to the other side, you’ll see the outline of a poinsettia, a flower that reminds us of Christmas. And lastly, if you break open the sand dollar, you’ll see five small objects inside, each one shaped like a dove. Every sand dollar has five doves inside.

It’s amazing to see one of these on the beach, and the next time you see one, perhaps you too will be reminded of all this and more. Because everything in nature is a work of beauty designed to remind us of our awesome Creator. And everything on earth and in the oceans sings praise to our Heavenly Father. Join them today in praise, and like the sand dollar, tell others about God’s wonderful and unfailing love.



“Say with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord.’ Believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. Then you will be saved.” Romans 10:9 NIRV

Many people have asked this question: could Paul really see the future? Now before we go on, we’re not talking about Paul from the Bible. We’re talking about Paul, the octopus. For a few years, there was an octopus at the Sea Life Centre in Oberhausen, Germany, and just for kicks, the people that ran the aquarium decided to have some fun with him. They placed two identical boxes in front of him, the only difference being the flag of a country playing in the World Cup. Inside each box was something for him to eat. Whichever box Paul chose would be the flag of the country that would win the world cup. And amazingly, Paul picked the winner! Instantly, a star was born! In fact, time and again, Paul kept picking the winner – in his entire career, he had twelve correct predictions! Paul became world famous, as everyone looked to him before every big game, wondering who it was this little octopus would choose to win.

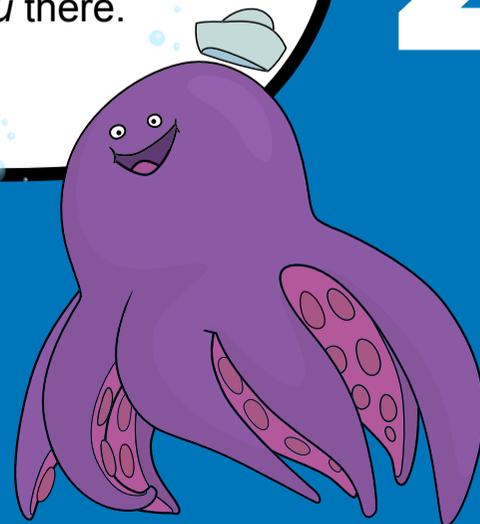
In our Bibles, there was a guy named Paul. He was not an octopus. But he did give several prophecies. A prophecy is something that will come true in the future. Paul never made a prophecy about sports, nor did he get a nice lunch for making a prophecy. But along with other famous names in the Bible, Paul told us of important things to come, much more important things than any sporting event.

Throughout the Bible, prophets told us that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem, and take on the sins of the world, and reign as King of kings. And Paul wrote down that Jesus would return, and take us all to a place called heaven, where there would be no more sadness, no more death, and no more pain.

By the end of his career, Paul the Octopus got it wrong only two times. He was right about 85.7% of the time. That’s a pretty amazing statistic! But the prophets in the Bible have been right 100% of the time so far, and there are still many prophecies just waiting to come to pass.

One of those prophecies is told by many in the Bible, including Paul. He told us that Jesus *is* coming back. Are you 100% sure that you’re ready for that moment? We hope so. If not, do just what Paul tells us to do in the book of Romans: “Say with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord.’ Believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. Then you will be saved.”

Paul told us Jesus is coming back to take us all to heaven, and that’s probably the most exciting prediction ever made. I’m not entirely sure if there are octopuses in heaven, but I do know this: Jesus really wants to see *you* there.



"Wounds from a friend can be trusted." Proverbs 27:6 NIRV

In the movie "Finding Nemo," there's a scary looking trench that Dory and Marlin swim up to. And Dory was just told moments before that they should swim through it, not over it. Now, we all know Dory has a short term memory. Still, she can't help but have a really strong feeling about that trench when she gets closer.

"Whoa, whoa partner," Dory tells her friend Marlin. "Little red flag going up. Something's telling me we should swim through it. Not over it."

Marlin can't believe she's even thinking that! He says, "Are you even looking at this thing? It's got death written all over it!"

Dory is pretty certain though. She tells Marlin, "I'm sorry, but I really, really, really think we should swim through."

Marlin is tired with this conversation. He tells her, "And I'm really, really done talking about this. Over we go!"

But Dory makes one more try, and says, "Come on, trust me on this."

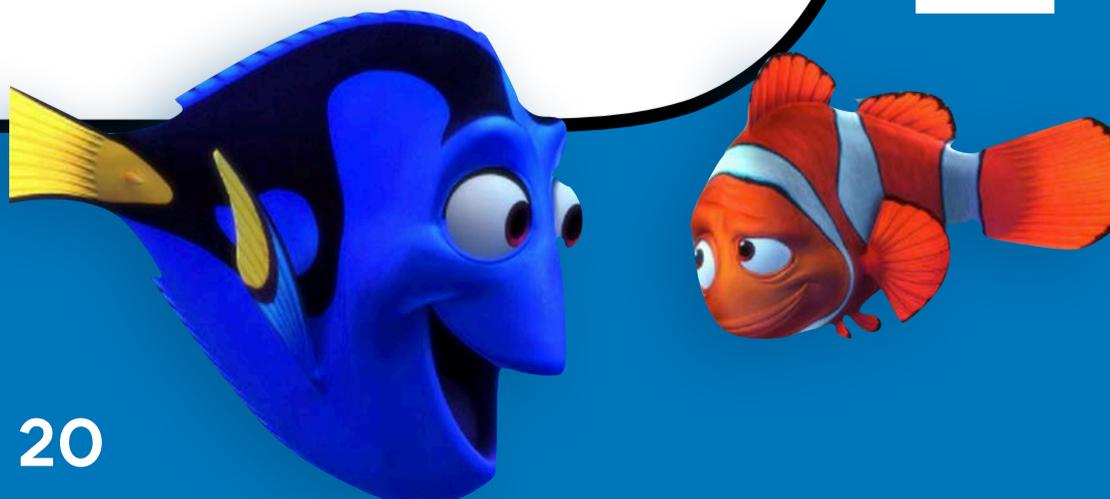
"Trust you?"

"Yes, trust. It's what friends do."

Of course, we all know that Dory is right. We knew that from before, and we know it afterwards too, when Marlin has to learn the hard way. He should have trusted Dory, but instead he was determined to do things the way he thought were best. In other words, no matter what, he was going to do things the wrong way.

It's so good to have a friend like Dory, isn't it? God has placed certain friends in our lives, and sometimes they can see things that we just can't. Sometimes they know the better way to go. Yet there are times we ignore their advice, and yes, there are times that we're just like Marlin, and have to learn things the hard way.

It can sure seem annoying if you have a friend that's telling you you're going the wrong way. Especially when they're right, and you know it! Oh my. We all get prideful sometimes, don't we? Do you have a friend that's willing to risk you getting mad at them, just because they want to help you out? That's a real friend there, just like Dory. That's someone you can trust. Because it's what friends do.



“In the same way, let your light shine so others can see it. Then they will see the good things you do. And they will bring glory to your Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 5:16 NIRV

We wanted to write something about a narwhal here, and we looked up all this fascinating stuff about how the narwhal’s horn is really a tusk, and it is used to sense the change in sea conditions or detect the presence of food.

But really, all we can think is that this is the amazing unicorn of the seas! I mean, look at it! It’s got a great spiraling big horn on its head! In the movie, “Elf,” we see a narwhal, and though he’s only there for less than a minute, Mr. Narwhal is such a fun part of the movie, rising up and pointing to the sky.

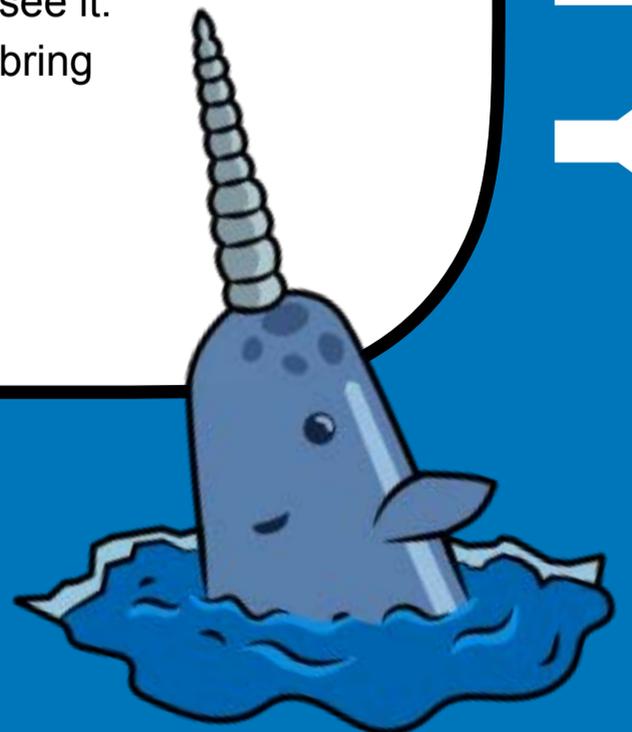
Can you believe that people used to think the horn of a narwhal had mystical powers? Yeah, that’s crazy!

Do you know what the Inuit people called this creature? They called it a *Qilalugag*. And as hard to pronounce as that word is, at least it has a nice translation. The word “Qilalugag” means “the one that points to the sky.”

Maybe that’s why we love this animal so much. He’s a living testimony, a creature of grace and beauty, and he’s pointing upwards to the One who created him.

That’s our job too, of course. We don’t have a horn on our heads, but there are a lot of other ways that we can point the way so others can see our Heavenly Father. The words we speak and the actions we take are simple ways we show others God’s love, as are the things we do with our church to help the ministry.

So be like a narwhal, or a Qilalugag. Point the way, and show others the goodness of God. Let your light shine so others can see it. Then they will see the good things you do. And they will bring glory to your Father who is in heaven.



“The harvest is huge, but the workers are few. So ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest field.” Luke 10:2 NIRV

Have you heard the parable of the starfish? One morning, Nerdo was walking along the seashore, and he saw many, many starfish that had washed up along the beach there. He was concerned because he knew they would be stuck there in the sun, and they’d dry up and die. That’s why he started picking them up, one by one, and tossing them into a deeper part of the water where they’d be safe.

A fisherman had watched this all happen, and walked up to him, asking him, “What are you doing?”

Nerdo held a starfish up in his hand and said, “Don’t worry! I’m saving this little guy! Once he gets back to the water he’ll be safe!”

The fisherman shook his head and laughed. He gestured to the whole beach and said, “You can’t possibly save all the starfish that washed up on shore. Look around you! There are so many that you can’t even count them. What difference can you possibly make?”

As an answer, Nerdo took the starfish in his hands, and tossed it deep into a safe part of the ocean. He then told the fisherman, “Well, I made a whole lot of difference to *that* one!”

In this story, we see two different types of people. Both see the problem, but only one is willing to do the work. One sees things as hopeless, or doesn’t even care. The other decides to do something, and work to save others from perishing.

Some time ago, Jesus told us that the harvest was huge, but the workers were few. What that means is simply this: there are so many people out there that are Christians, and they know there are a lot of people in the world that need to hear the Good News of Jesus. Yet while many like going to church, not as many take the time to help out. The workers are few.

Is there something that you can do today to help out, to help the church reach the lost? There are a lot of people out there, and it might even be something small that you find yourself doing to help. But just like Nerdo said, even if it is something small, it will make a whole lot of difference to *someone*.



**"Be watchful and control yourselves. Your enemy the devil is like a roaring lion. He prowls around looking for someone to swallow up."
I Peter 5:8 NIRV**

One of the more unique fish that is found deep within the sea is something called the angler fish. Have you ever seen one? If you've seen the movie "*Finding Nemo*," you've met a hungry one down deep in some of the darkest parts of the ocean.

Angler fish are famous for the little antenna that dangles right in front of their mouth. You know the one. Right at the end of that antenna is an object that looks like something an unsuspecting fish might even want to check out. Sometimes it looks like a bit of fluff, a floating worm, or even in the darkest parts of the ocean, a small glowing creature. That's what Dory and Marlin encountered, and it drew them dangerously closer.

Yes, it's all a trap, of course. The angler fish draws in its prey, waving that lure around. And what about any fish that comes by to check out that cute thing waving around? They quickly become lunch. Good feeling's gone!

Let's be thankful for the angler fish a moment. I know that most think they are terribly ugly little monsters that might even cause nightmares. But if ever there was an illustration about being careful around temptation, God created one with the angler fish. Often in life, we feel tempted to do things we shouldn't. That temptation is just right there, waving in front of us. Maybe we want to get back at someone. Or perhaps we are tempted to listen to or watch something on our screens that we know we shouldn't. Or maybe we're tempted to take something that isn't ours, or say something about someone we know we shouldn't. The list of temptations goes on and on. Like the angler fish, there are all kinds of different lures that draw in fish just like us. We all experience a temptation of some sort, don't we?

And we never see that big ugly mouth nearby, do we? The truth is that many times we never see the consequences of falling into temptation until it is too late. Our Bibles tell us that the devil is looking to see who he might devour. But here's the deal: like the angler fish, he can't do anything to you if you stay away from that tempting sin. That's why the Bible tells us to flee temptation. Dory and Marlin flee pretty quickly, and they go on to become heroes in their own adventure. You can do the same when you flee from temptation. Stay away from that lure, and stay away from that big ugly mouth!



"The word of God is alive and active. It is sharper than any sword that has two edges." Hebrews 4:12 NIRV

The swordfish got its name from something fairly obvious: the long sword on its snout. These fish are fast, and can get fairly large too. Most sharks won't even tangle with an adult swordfish! The reason for this, of course, is a fast and sharp sword, several feet long. Any predator wanting to take a stab at eating a swordfish is about to get the point here, and not in a good way!

Our Bibles tell us that we have a sword too, and no, it's not one stuck to our nose. It's the Word of God. We have so many scriptures and promises from God that we can be ready for anything, slicing away at any temptation that swims our way. When trouble comes sneaking up on us, trying to eat us up, we can be confident, because the Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword.

But consider this: we must be careful how we use that sword. When speaking with others, we have to use God's Word with love, rather than simply cut everyone down. A sharp tongue and a razor wit are no good if there is no love at all to be found within.

Did you know that the swordfish has a heart that is three times the size of many other fish? It's true. And yes, our hearts are important too, and they should be filled with the love of God for others.

God's Word is a wonderful, powerful tool, one that takes years and years to master. Open up your Bibles today, and you'll find yourself sharper and sharper each time you read. And sure, you might find yourself just a bit more like that amazing swordfish: quicker, sharper, and with a great big heart.



“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” 1 Thessalonians 4:17 NKJV

Sailing across the ocean, you just might catch a glimpse of something wonderful that could fill you with joy: flying fish. If you haven't seen them before, they are a sight to behold, these fish just fluttering along there above the surface of the water.

Fish don't belong there, of course. They're stuck in the water, unless they jump up and out where gravity will send them back down with a PLOP! You've possibly seen that happen before, as a fish will jump up and out of the water. There'll be something up there, above the surface of the water that looks irresistible to eat. Then suddenly the fish soars through the air, only to fall straight back into the water. It happens all the time. Even the flying fish have to come down some time, though their journey through the air is much more graceful.

Of course, we've got that same problem with gravity too. None of us can fly on our own. But Paul writes in the book of 1 Thessalonians that one day we'll get some serious air time. We ourselves will see something above that will be very irresistible: the Lord himself coming down from heaven with a shout. That's when we'll take a pretty good leap upwards, and at that moment, we'll be just like those flying fish. Only this time, we won't have to worry about coming down. We'll forget to PLOP!

We'll meet the Lord in the clouds, and be with Him forever. And that, friends, is no fish tale.

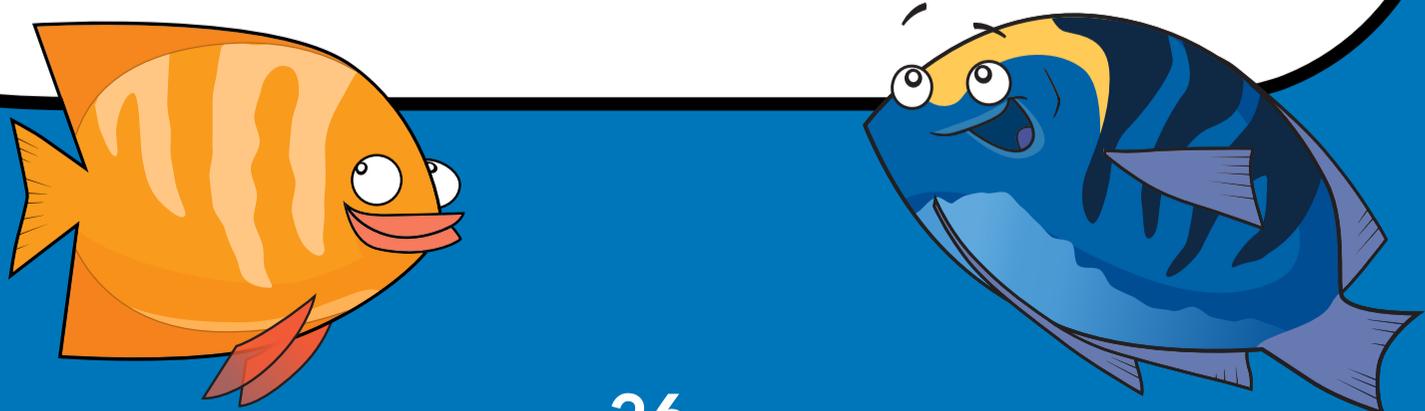


"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:16 NKJV

Have you ever wondered why some fish have a white belly? Some of you may know this, but the white belly helps to make it difficult for other predators to see that fish from below. If you happened to be deep in the water and looking up, you'd see that things look brighter upwards and it might be hard to see a fish with a white bottom. Also, if you were in the water looking downward, you might have a similar challenge. The top of the fish is a darker color from that angle. You may have seen how sometimes it looks just the same color as sand. Or perhaps it is just the same color as the bottom of the bay or the ocean. In water, it's just plain harder to see certain fish because of all these skin colors. It's called camouflage, and some creatures in the ocean are masters at hiding. Octopuses can change colors quickly. The flounder and certain stingrays are nearly impossible to spot along the ocean floor. And watch out for those angler fish.

There are a lot of Christians that seem to do the same thing. They blend in with their environment and disappear so no one can tell who they are. Don't let that be you. Fish that want to hide sometimes even go underneath piers, where they can disappear in the darkness. But that's also where fishermen know where to look. So don't give in to pier pressure. When others are pressuring you to do something you know you shouldn't do, remember that Jesus wants you to be a light in the darkness. He wants you to stand out, and not blend in with the others.

Camouflage might be good for fish who don't want to be eaten, but I don't think that's something you need to worry about here. You're a pretty bright one, so stand out, and let your light shine for everyone to see!



“Then David said to the Philistine, ‘You come to me with a sword , with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.’” I Samuel 17:45 NKJV

Have you ever seen those little pilot fish just hanging around a big old shark? These small fish can swim along right beside this massive shark, and the shark never eats them! What’s up with that? Actually, the answer is simple. It is part of God’s design for these fish. The smaller fish help clean the shark and in return the shark provides protection and doesn’t eat them. Everybody gets something. The shark gets clean and the smaller fish even get food too. Yummy!

Still, it’s funny to see a little fish there, and just behind it is a great big shark with rows and rows of sharp teeth. The little fish has a lot of protection behind him, wouldn’t you agree? Wouldn’t it be silly for any hungry fish to come up to the smaller fish when there’s a ginormous shark right there behind him?

The story of David and Goliath is somewhat similar. No, we’re not saying David had a man-eating shark to help him out there. But he did have something pretty big behind him. Really, really big. It was God. If Goliath could only have seen this, he would have realized that he was just a larger-sized fish messing with a tiny fish, that just so happened to have a great big shark behind him!

David was a little fish with a great big friend. But God is your friend too, one that sticks closer than a brother. He’s right behind you, no matter what. And as you stay close to Him, you’ll find yourself swimming with something bigger than any problem in this world could ever fathom!



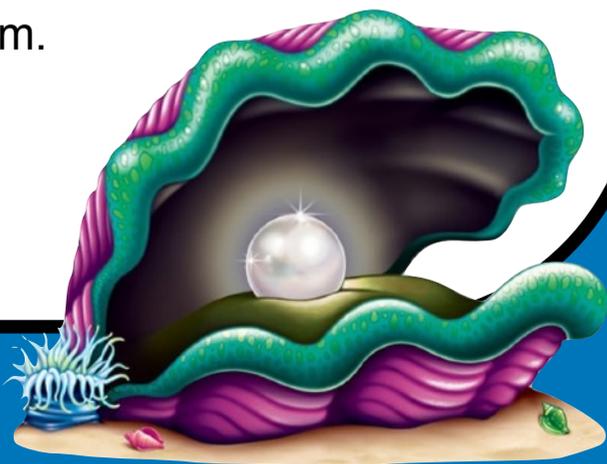
**“So if the Son of Man sets you free, you will really be free.”
John 8:36 NIRV**

Many sailors from long ago believed in many dangerous sea creatures lurking in the ocean deep. Some were true, and others perhaps exaggerated a bit. For example, in times past, it was told that there crept along the ocean’s floor a killer clam, a dreaded man-eating clam responsible for claiming the lives of many sailors who dared venture across the oceans.

The truth might not be that exciting. Though there really is a giant clam, it isn’t the kind that is going to attack you. Still, you should be careful around the giant clam, that way its giant grasp can’t hold on to you and not let go.

One such incident happened a while ago when a diver found himself in the grasp of the giant clam. He had been reaching for an unfathomable treasure, the largest pearl in existence. It weighed over fourteen pounds, and was over five inches wide, and this man gave everything to get to it. When it was eventually discovered, some tried to offer millions for the pearl. But truthfully, a jewel like that is worth more than mere money.

In your Bible, Jesus said a similar thing about heaven as he compared it to a pearl. He explained that you can’t let anything get in between you and heaven, especially something as simple as money. Indeed, Jesus told us the merchant gave *all he had* to go after that pearl. Why would he do that? The answer is obvious. He did it to get to heaven, salvation, and freedom.



“I have not yet received all these things. I have not yet reached my goal. Christ Jesus took hold of me so that I could reach that goal. So I keep pushing myself forward to reach it.” Philippians 3:12 NIRV

When life gets you down, do you wanna know what you’ve gotta do? Do what Dory says, “Just keep swimming!” Whenever there’s anything stressful going on, this famous blue tang fish sings this song to herself, and it helps her calm down. Her parents Charlie and Jenny taught Dory this song, and even though she’s pretty forgetful, this song stays with her, always: “Just keep swimming!”

In fact, she gives this great advice to her stressed out friend Marlin, and then later Hank the sepiopus.

You know something? It’s pretty good advice. All these characters, even though they’re worried, just keep swimming. And soon enough, they swim out of trouble and to just the place they need to be.

Many times we find ourselves a bit overwhelmed. We’re stressed, or perhaps even fearful. And it’s okay to have those feelings. Marlin had them, Hank had them, and even Dory felt them. We all feel a little nervous about things. But when that happens, we shouldn’t stop trying, and shouldn’t give in to fear. God is with us, and He has promised to never leave us or forsake us. If God is for us, nothing can be against us, and we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. He has made us the head and not the tail, above and not beneath, blessed coming and going.

You’re a child of the living God, and you don’t have to be afraid. So remember all this, and don’t stay there frozen in fear. Just take Dory’s advice, and *just keep swimming, just keep swimming...*



