

Sunday school lessons from DEEP DARK: A BEDTIME TALE

Week 1: The ultimate unknown (Death) and our fear of it

Week 2: Vicarious living: The Wise Old Squid

Week 3: Facebook, Jellyfish

Week 4: Keep swimming, Bob the Blobfish

Week 5: Faithlessness, Stargazer

Week 1: The ultimate unknown and our fear of it

DEEP DARK: A BEDTIME TALE is about a family of Hatchetfish that lives, along with a lot of other creatures, in the deep dark of the sea floor.

No light from the sun goes deeper than 656 feet. The creatures that live deeper either live in total darkness, or they carry their own light with them.

The Hatchetfish is one of these creatures that carries its own light.

It creates light from the rows of structures under its belly.

The creatures that live in the deep dark are both fascinated and terrified by the bright world above them. Everything they have comes from above, the food falls from above and their eyes are actually designed to look upward more than horizontally to their body. In the story, mysterious relics, like the sand bucket and sunglasses, also fall from above and these fuel their interest even more.

They live in the dark, but are fascinated and they are sustained by the world above them that they cannot see.

Hatch's children are afraid of the bright world above them, they've heard that anyone that goes up there will be blinded and never return. He's also afraid and like all the other creatures in the deep dark he has spent his whole life being afraid, so he doesn't want that for his children.

He sets out to find someone that can reassure them about the bright world above, someone that could speak with authority and take away their fears.

All the creatures he meets along the way at no help at all. (Illustration: Wise Ones story in rocks) "Thank you for the story wise one," says Hatch. "I wanted my children to not be afraid. Now they are more afraid. I think I must go and see the bright world myself to make our fear go away."

Hatch and his family meet different creatures and he learns lessons from each of them as he makes his way to the tallest of their undersea mountains, the cold vent stack.

Hatch goes to the bright world above, with the help of a pair of children's sunglasses that sunk below the waves. He sees the beautiful sights above and then comes back to tell the others about them and to take away the fear of his family and all the creatures in the deep dark.

Relating the DEEP DARK to our world

We live in the deep dark and we are both fascinated and afraid of the bright world above. We're surrounded by people that want to tell us what comes after we leave this world, but none of the people can reassure us – in fact, really everything they say only makes us more afraid, because we know they don't know either – not from experience.

There is only faith, either their faith in other people's opinions, like science, or they know from the one person that has gone there and come back. Jesus left our dark world, crossed over and came back and only Jesus can speak with full authority because he has been where we will go.

Putt-Putt

We're made to be curious. We look always for something new. We are natural explorers of the worlds that God made for us. We are always on the go, exploring either in person or through the experiences that others share on shows. We sniff and taste life every chance we get.

I saw a video where a cat was talking disdainfully about the way dogs test to see if something is ok to eat by putting it in their mouth. They find out if it tastes good, or if it doesn't, but of course at that point it's always too late to avoid tasting the bad.

Our approach might not be as different as we think. How many times have you gone to a restaurant that was no good, stayed at a hotel that you decided never to go back to again? We experience and learn, but we hardly ever learn without experience.

We are always exploring and our minds are curious about everything. Try to think of a place that you wouldn't be interested in seeing if there was no risk in going there.

It's hard for me to think of a place without any potential interest to me, where there would be nothing to sustain even a little of my interest.

We're also curious about what happens at the transition between what we know, what's become familiar to us and what we don't know. In fact, of all the things we're curious about, this might be the biggest.

I'm sure that everyone has played Putt-Putt golf, right?

Everyone's enjoying the challenges of hitting the cups through corners, under tunnels and through the spinning windmill blades. When you're playing with children, they are always running ahead to the next hole anxious to see the octopus, pirate or dinosaur that's waiting there.

Everyone's enjoying themselves until they start counting back from 18 and realize they are getting closer to the last hole all the time.

And then the excitement is slowly replaced by anxiety. We feel that, even in Putt Putt, the game – not the metaphor, when we're parents and we're starting to look forward to finishing because by the end, we're usually just ready to move on.

That last hole starts to feel threatening because you know when the ball goes in there, it won't come back; there won't be any holes after that one. Instead of running around and excitedly trying to figure out the best path to reach the hole, now we're even extra careful to hold onto our little pink or green balls for fear that we might accidentally drop them into the hole as we look down into it. You've noticed that, right? How careful you become not to drop your ball once you get to the last hole, where there's no bottom in the little cup.

Faith not in Jesus

My own faith has, so far, come easily to me. I don't feel like I've done anything to earn it – I haven't and that's the truth, it's a pure gift from God. It's easy for me to believe, even since I was young that God, Jesus and Heaven are absolutely real. The doubts I've had are brief like flickers in the power and then there's always something that I see that makes it so much more impossible not to believe in God, that it's almost been a continuous belief since I became aware of Him.

Psychologists

But that's not the way it is for everyone. I read about a psychologist that had an appendectomy. It caused him to bleed half his blood volume into his stomach when he went home and they rushed him back to be admitted into the hospital. Weeks later, after he'd recovered, he went on a trip to Mexico and had a blood clot in his lungs. While recovering he had several gastro issues. We don't need to go into detail on them, other than to say they were life-threatening and horrible the way all gastro issues are.

He had so many back-to-back, life-threatening problems that he developed PTSD from the experiences and became anxious and afraid of death. I know what you're thinking. I know exactly what you're thinking, because as Christians, we all expect the next part of this story to be how he found faith like ours and overcame his fears.

He didn't.

He said he believes that when he dies that's the end and he's trying to cope with his anxieties over it. He shares the story for other atheists to somehow take courage from this shared experience. I don't know how that's supposed to work.

Atheist

I read about an atheist that tried to describe the difference in a living body and a dead one. They say that they have run tests to determine there is no change in the weight of the body when a person dies and therefore no soul to have left it. One atheist I read said that dying is a transition. That it is like removing cracked pieces from a vase, one after another. At some point when you remove enough of the pieces, what you have is no longer a vase and they believe at some point a body is no longer a person. He says we're just collections of something making a person, like the vase was. I'm amazed by the faith of scientists when they come to the end of what they can work out and just say that's the end when it's obvious they haven't finished their equations and that there is no answer on the board they've been working on so furiously.

The Friendly Atheist web site

He says that to understand what death is like, we need to consider what it felt like before we were born. We felt nothing before we were born, we weren't there –

that's what he says we will feel when we die. The best we can hope for is that people will remember us.

They believe living this life in anticipation of the next one is a mistake.

I think we can agree with that - at least in the aspect that we should really live this life AND still anticipate the next one.

If you follow the atheist logic in everything you do, you wouldn't study because you could spend your immediate time doing something more pleasurable. You wouldn't practice basketball, you'd just enjoy yourself until game day and show up for that. You'd never focus on anything but drawing the most pleasure from this moment.

Here's a posted question for the atheist to answer...

Dear Darrel,

I have recently decided that I am an atheist. The problem is that I am now much more anxious about my own mortality, and the mortality of the people I care about. It is scary to suddenly feel like there isn't a God looking out for us, and that there will just be nothing after we die. Also I can't help being afraid that if I am wrong I will go to Hell. How should I cope with these fears?

You can feel the growing desperation in even this brief question can't you? You can just feel the hole inside him, that's the hole inside all of us. You can feel his desperation to find some belief that fits this hole.

But, not to worry, the atheist has an answer...

Living life without religion means we have to cherish the time we have now with those we love. We aren't going to see them after they die, so we need to make amends sooner, love more and live so that we have no regrets later.

As adults, we can hear this advice and we can agree that loving people, making amends and having no regrets is good. Those are all good things.

How would you feel sharing this response with a little child that's come to you after someone has passed away, asking for reassurance?

Would it be reassuring, or would they still be paralyzed with fear? Would they be able to enjoy this life, the way the atheist says they should with fear hanging above their head night and day like an anvil on a cord?

What we have instead

Atheists are choosing to believe in a view of death that they develop from their view of the information available. Essentially, that's not much different than we are doing. We and atheists look at the world, see the wonders and the terrible aspects, we learn from other people and we choose the direction of our faith.

So if we and atheists are choosing a faith, what's the value of choosing one that doesn't sound like what we have in the Bible?

Should we listen to all the people who have never been to a place to understand what it is like or someone that has been there and come back to tell us about it?

Here is what we have. It is poetry and truth and when you hear it, it fills a hole in you that nothing else can.

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. (1 Corinthians 2:9-10)

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14)

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:54-55)

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26)

The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death. (Isaiah 57:1-2)

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2 Corinthians 5:1-5)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. (1 Peter 1:3-6)

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. (Revelation 21:4)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. (Philippians 4:6-8)

When atheists look at us, they are like the blind man holding an elephant's tail and saying, "why of course, this is a snake".

What they see us denying ourselves looks like pleasure to them, when we know there is always a price to pay for it. They say what fools we are to push away any of life's pleasures to hold ourselves to the standard Jesus set. They shake their heads at us and believe we are choosing to miss out on pleasures when there is nothing after, no better place than this and no judgment for what we've done whether good or bad. Standing there holding the elephant's tail, they don't see that underneath everything else – through even the pain and hardship that we might face in life, underneath everything for us is peace and underneath everything for them is uncertainty.

Could it be that one of the greatest ironies in this world is that the people who say this is all there is and therefore it should be thoroughly enjoyed, deny for themselves the fullest enjoyment of it?

How could we enjoy today when we fear tomorrow?

As we get closer to the 18th hole, we enjoy the little windmills less, we are distracted from the winding designs of the little stream crossing the green. In the same way, we are not able to enjoy anything fully today when we fear tomorrow.

That is one, only one, of the gifts that our God, the one we choose to believe in has given to us. We can enjoy all the beautiful things in the world around us without living in fear for tomorrow.

We will go on playing after the 18th hole. For us, it's more like a birthday, we're going on past it and there are many more.