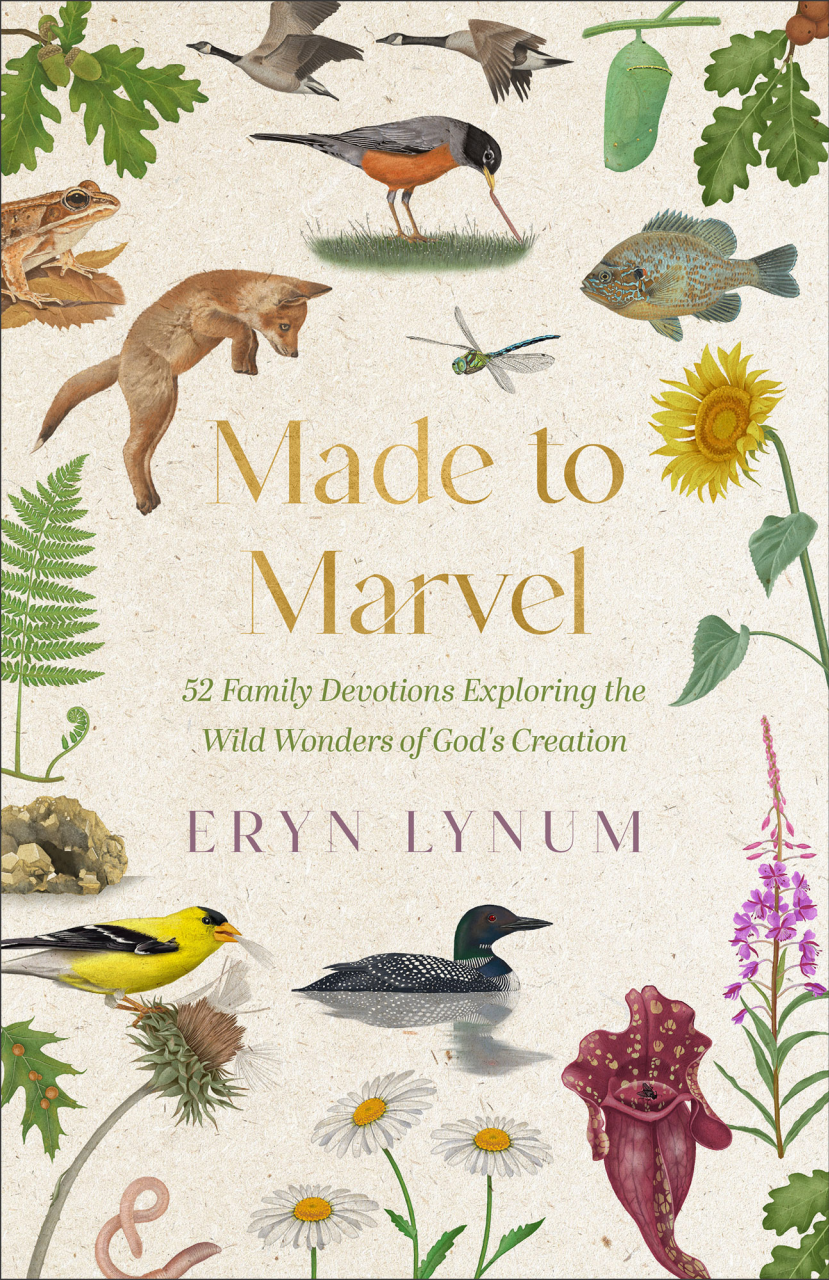

Made to Marvel

52 Family Devotions Exploring the Wild Wonders of God's Creation

ERYN LYNUM

Made to Marvel

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Revell
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For my dad, Alan Fiebig
April 12, 1960–December 5, 2025
To whom I'm forever grateful for pointing me
to the truth of God's Word
and the marvels of his creation

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You Were Made to Marvel

Do you know what it means to *marvel*?

Marvel can be both a thing and an action.

A marvel is something that is wonderful. We might react to one, saying, "Wow! That sunset is a marvel."

When we marvel, we're overwhelmed by how wonderful something is. It might fill our heart with joy and curiosity at the same time. This happens a lot when we're out exploring God's wild and wonderful world. We might say, "I marvel at this beetle. It's so neat!"

God created you to marvel at his marvelous creation, to "stop and consider God's wonders" (Job 37:14 NIV).

This book is an adventure through God's creation. In it, we'll discover his detailed designs in creatures, plants, and other natural wonders you might have right around where you live. As we uncover creation's details, we'll also unearth important truths about God, our great Creator. We'll be learning from his two books—Scripture and creation—together.

Many mysteries of nature are tucked in these pages that, once solved, can make us laugh, smile, delight in, and worship God. You might be surprised by what you learn about "common" things. Even natural things that seem simple are not simple at all but have been masterfully engineered to work well and to cause us to marvel. As you venture through these pages, highlight or draw a star next to everything that amazes you or that you didn't expect.

Are you ready to marvel? Let's hit the trail!

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How to Use This Book

A great way to use this book is to set it down often.

As you read about and discover God's handiwork in nature, may it inspire you to step outside, explore, and marvel at his creation right where you live—and then come back to these pages for more.

There are fifty-two chapters in this book, one for each week of the year. Each chapter includes an illustration, a deep dive into God's designs, and truth from God's Word. You can adventure through each chapter in order or skip ahead to learn about something you have recently seen or are curious about. If you'd like to explore chapters by topic, use the Explore by Topic guide in the back of the book to study mammals, birds, insects, reptiles, amphibians, fish, invertebrates (creatures without backbones), plants, earth science, and geology.

As you enjoy a chapter, take that week to learn more about and perhaps even find the creature, plant, or other thing in nature. The Time to Explore activity in each chapter offers inspiration for exploring God's wild and wonderful world. Throughout each devotion you will find some scientific words in italics that we might not use every day. You can find simple definitions of those words in the glossary at the end of the book.

Adventure at your own pace and in your own direction. There are no rules to this book so long as it draws you deeper into God's creation and causes you to marvel at all he's made.

You can explore further with my family's podcast for families: *Nat Theo: Nature Lessons Rooted in the Bible*. Find us at TheNaturalTheologyProject.com/nattheo. Listen on our website or on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or Amazon Music, or watch on YouTube.

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Organizing God's Creation

God designed more creatures than we will ever know about. Some have gone extinct, while others are still being discovered. Psalm 104:24 says,

> How many are your works, LORD!
> In wisdom you made them all;
> the earth is full of your creatures. (NIV)

We can see God's artistic style throughout nature. Some creatures share certain features, yet each one is unique. To help us understand the living things God has made, scientists have sorted them into groups. This human-made system of organization is called taxonomy.

Throughout this book, we'll mention some of these categories, so it will help to understand the seven main levels of taxonomy. The seven levels, in order, are kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, species.

Each level becomes more specific as you go. Kingdom is a very broad category. For example, the animal kingdom includes all the animals God has made—flying, swimming, crawling, creeping, and more (including insects). As you move down through the levels, the groups become more specific. Species is the most specific category of taxonomy, and it tells us exactly what a creature or plant is.

Remember, God did not create these categories, and they do not limit his creativity. Some creatures surprise us and don't fit neatly into a category (like the platypus!). Taxonomy is simply a system people made to better understand the details of what God has created.

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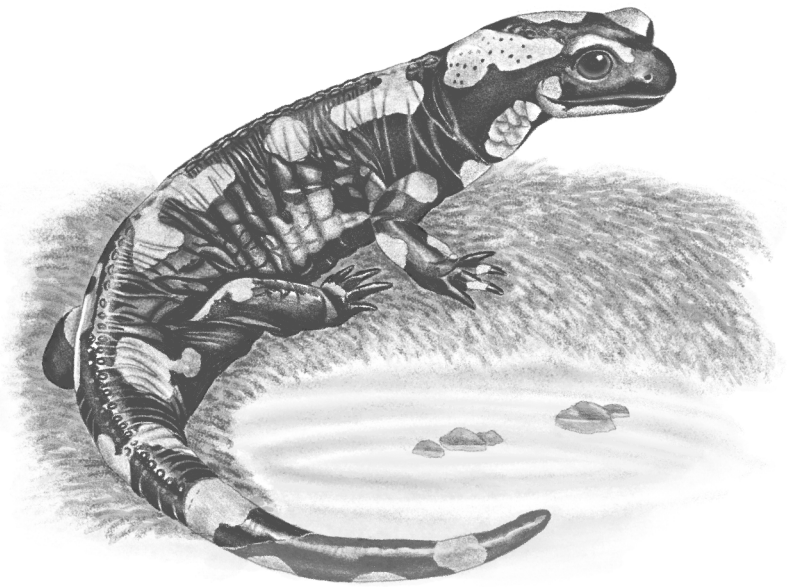
1

Salamander

Everything from Nothing



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Raining Salamanders

Have you ever heard someone say that it's raining cats and dogs? This is a silly saying that means it is raining very hard outside. When people say this, they don't actually mean cats and dogs are falling from the sky. But long ago, people believed salamanders *did* rain down on the land. This, of course, sounds ridiculous to us. Still, it was their best explanation for how salamanders appeared, seemingly out of nowhere, after it rained. We now understand that salamanders appear after rain because they need moisture. They are more active after rainfall than in dry times, because they can easily dry out if they spend too much time in the sunshine without access to water.

Salamanders might look like lizards, but they are not. Lizards are reptiles with dry scales. Salamanders, on the other hand, are a type of amphibian with smooth, wet skin. They are more like frogs and toads (which are also amphibians) than lizards. Many types of salamanders breathe through their skin, a process known as ***cutaneous respiration***, which is how they get the oxygen they need to survive. If their skin is too dry, they cannot breathe well.

Vernal Pond Life

Salamanders sometimes come out after rainfall to find a place to lay their eggs. Salamanders lay eggs in ***vernal ponds***. A vernal pond is a temporary pond that contains water for only part of the year. Because vernal ponds are sometimes dry, fish do not live there, which gives a salamander's eggs a better chance of surviving. But what happens to the eggs that survive?

Salamander eggs hatch into babies called ***larvae***. Like toad and frog babies (called tadpoles), salamander babies spend their first stage of life in the water. They have fins and gills to help with swimming and breathing. As they grow older, they go through a big change called ***metamorphosis***, when they grow into their adult form. As adults, most species can come up on land, although a few species spend their whole lives in streams, rivers, lakes, and ponds.

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Appearing Act

Once scientists discovered how salamanders lay eggs in vernal ponds and why they emerge after rainfall, the mystery of this curious amphibian was solved. The idea of salamanders raining from the sky sounds silly now. However, there have been many ideas like this throughout history.

Before scientists had the technology and knowledge to understand where some creatures came from, they thought they came out of nowhere. This idea is called ***spontaneous generation***, and it is the opposite of a disappearing act—it's an appearing act!

Another example of the spontaneous generation theory is with flies. Scientists noticed flies and baby flies (maggots) on rotting food or garbage. They believed the maggots and flies must have come from the waste itself, appearing like magic. Fly eggs were too small to see without a microscope, and they did not understand that flies often lay eggs on rotting meat or other garbage, which then hatch into maggots that grow into adult flies.

As science has advanced and new technologies have been developed, we've discovered so much more about the wonderful ways God designed living things.

Time to Explore

Go on a nature walk and look for a vernal pond, or ask an adult for help researching if there are some near where you live. Vernal ponds can be in the forest, where water pools after rainfall. They can also be found in rock depressions, like a pocket in a boulder. If it's spring or summer, a vernal pond might have amphibian eggs or other creatures inside, like freshwater shrimp. See how many creatures you can find. Can you identify any of them?

Everything from Nothing

Salamanders come from eggs that are laid underwater. But at one time, salamanders really did come from nothing besides God's word. God created all the creatures from the power of his word. The Latin phrase ***ex nihilo*** (pronounced *ex NEE-huh-low*) is often used in theology, which is the study of God and the Bible. *Ex nihilo* means that something was made from nothing.

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When God created all the creatures, he designed everything through the creative power of his word rather than by using existing materials.

When we create a painting, we first gather materials such as paintbrushes, paints, a canvas or piece of paper, and water. When we make a cake, we need ingredients like flour, sugar, eggs, and oil. But God created everything from nothing, using no existing materials or ingredients. As he spoke all of nature into reality, he invented all the colors, textures, shapes, and the math needed for all the creature designs. Hebrews 11:3 says, "It is by faith we understand that the whole world was made by God's command so what we see was made by something that cannot be seen."

Think about how God created salamanders. As he did, he made them able to reproduce by laying eggs in vernal ponds to hatch into new salamanders. It took humans thousands of years to discover where salamanders come from, but God has known all along, for he designed this amazing process at the beginning of creation. Science and the study of nature take a while to catch up with God's designs, but what a fun and rewarding experience it is to discover things God made long ago!

Dear God, thank you for designing so much life in temporary vernal ponds, including salamanders. We love discovering your creativity in nature. Your word is so powerful, and by it you spoke all the creatures into being so we can marvel at the wonders you've made. Amen.

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2

Skunk

The Least of These

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What's That Smell?

Have you ever been riding in a car or on a bike and smelled something . . . not pleasant? Maybe you thought right away, *That's a skunk!* Skunks are well-known for their smelliness. But despite their reputation, they are magnificent creatures that God designed for meaningful work. Before we look at a skunk's job, let's explore how and why they smell.

Skunks do not always smell bad. They only spray foul smells when they feel threatened. The smelly substance comes from two ***glands***, like pockets, near the base of their tail. When they sense danger, they will lift their tail, point their rear end toward their predator, and spray—but not before giving a warning. Skunks typically resort to using their spray only if their warning signs of stomping their feet, lifting their tail, and hissing are not heeded.

Skunks are part of a large group of mammals called ***Musteloidea***, which also includes weasels, mink, and otters. Many animals in this group have scent glands that they use to communicate. Some also use scent for defense, like the skunk.

Keeping Tidy

Even though skunks are often thought of as smelly, they are exceptionally clean animals. They regularly groom themselves and can be litter-trained like a cat. In the wild, skunks prefer to use one area as their restroom. They also keep a tidy home underground, called a burrow. Appreciating their cleanliness can help us adopt a new attitude toward these fantastic creatures.

A Fine Tuxedo

It's not wise to observe a skunk closely in the wild, but have you ever seen a picture or video of one? Skunks are handsome animals. With their sleek black-and-white coats of fur, they look as though they are dressed up in a tuxedo, always ready for a fancy event. Their tails are a plume of beautiful, long, black and white hairs. We should work to see past a skunk's smelly reputation to the beautiful ways God has clothed it.

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Keeping Nature in Balance

Skunks are not only tidy and handsome but they also keep God's creation in balance. God designed everything in nature to work together in perfect harmony. However, when sin's curse broke the world, nature became off-balance. One example of this is when insects devour too many crops that farmers work hard to grow as food for animals and humans.

Revelation 21:5 promises that God is making all things new. One day, his creation will be in perfect balance, and it will be more wonderful than we can imagine. But what about right now? God designed many creatures to help restore and protect balance, including skunks.

Skunks eat many insects that would otherwise destroy crops. They feast on grasshoppers, grubs, caterpillars, and beetles. Skunks are active and hunt at night, when insects are cold and become slower, making it easier for skunks to prey on them. Skunks are one of the most helpful mammals for keeping insect populations in balance. They also eat mice, further protecting farmers' crops and stored grains as well as keeping barns and homes mice-free. Skunks will snack on chicken eggs when they have the opportunity, but this is a small price to pay for all their helpful pest control.

Rather than seeing skunks as stinky creatures, many farmers welcome them, knowing the important role they play in balancing nature and protecting crops.

Time to Explore

Can you draw a skunk's fancy coat of hair? With permission from a trusted adult, find a photo of a skunk online or in a book. See if you can draw the skunk's body with its special striped tuxedo.

The Least of These

Have you ever seen someone treated wrongly? When Jesus was on earth, he often spent time with outcasts and people others looked down on. Jesus doesn't see like we often do. Instead, he sees the true value of every person because they are made in the image of God.

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First Samuel 16:7 says, "God does not see the same way people see. People look at the outside of a person, but the LORD looks at the heart."

Consider how many people view skunks as stinky pests, while farmers see them as helpful coworkers. Similarly, Jesus gives us an example of caring for those who are looked down upon and suggests we look for their true God-given value. In Matthew 25:35–40, he says:

> I was hungry, and you gave me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. I was alone and away from home, and you invited me into your house. I was without clothes, and you gave me something to wear. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.
>
> Then the good people will answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and give you food, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you alone and away from home and invite you into our house? When did we see you without clothes and give you something to wear? When did we see you sick or in prison and care for you?"
>
> Then the King will answer, "I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me."

While we shouldn't invite a skunk into our home, we can look for ways to care for people who are in need or who are looked down on. As we do so, we are serving God. Consider ways you can bless someone today through a smile, a kind word, or a helping hand.

Dear God, thank you for creating skunks in amazing ways that help keep nature in balance. You created us for good works also. Help us to serve those in need. Amen.

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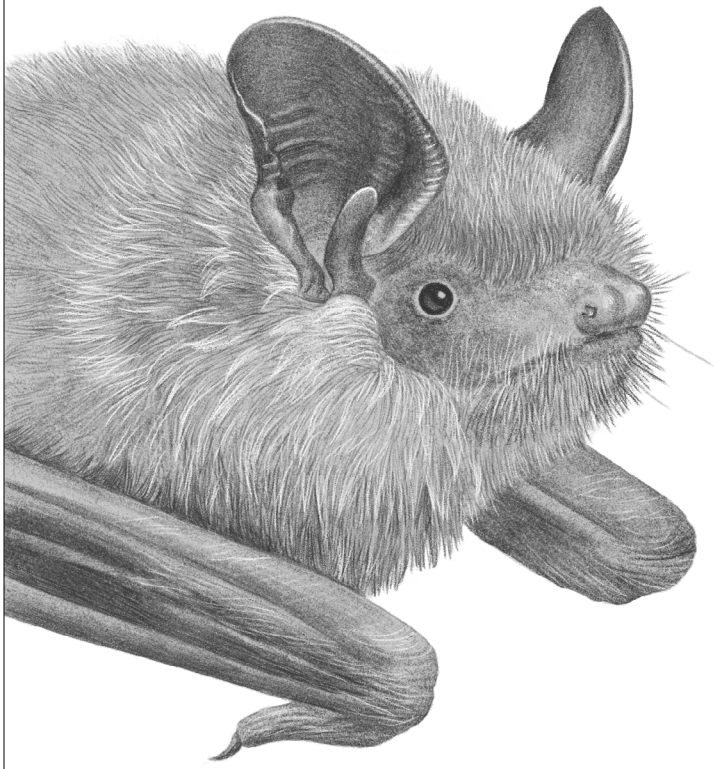
3

Bat

Turn Your Ear



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One of a Kind

Bats are often misunderstood. Many people find bats frightening and strange, but they are wonderfully created and have an important role in God's creation. God created bats to be gardeners. Some bats visit flowers to drink sweet nectar, and as they do, they spread pollen so more plants can grow. Other bats eat fruit and, later, they deposit it somewhere else, leaving behind seeds that can grow into new plants.

Even though bats fly, they are not birds. Bats are a type of ***mammal***. Mammals are animals that have hair or fur, are warm-blooded, and have a backbone. Most give birth to their live young and nurse their babies with milk. God created bats one of a kind because they are the only mammal that can fly.

Expert Aviators

One of my family's favorite summertime activities is sitting on our back deck after dusk and watching bats fly through our backyard. In some ways, bats fly better than birds. Unlike a bird's wing, which mostly stays the same shape, a bat's wing is its hand, which also means it is more flexible. Just as you can bend your fingers and close your hand, a bat can change the shape of its wing to bend and twist, helping the bat make tight turns when flying. God engineered bats as expert aviators that can twist, dive, and even somersault in the air to catch insects while flying. Some types of bats catch insects in their wings while flying like you might capture insects in a net. Some will also use the thin skin membrane between their hind legs and tail (called an ***uropatagium*** or ***interfemoral membrane***) as an insect net while flying.

Listen with Care

Has anyone ever said you are a good listener? Bats are excellent listeners because their lives depend on their ability to hear. Bats have to navigate dark skies and find insects to eat, and they do this primarily by using sound.

God designed bats to use ***echolocation***, a process of sending out chirping sounds that are so high in pitch that we humans cannot hear them. (If we

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could, we might go deaf!) The sounds help the bat locate prey by bouncing off its target, such as an insect. The echo returns to the bat's ear and brings with it a lot of helpful information.

God dialed in a bat's echolocation so well that echoes can help a bat know the

- size of its prey;
- shape of its prey; and
- direction in which its prey is moving.

To help his creations echolocate well, God designed bats with incredible listening skills. A bat's ear is designed with a special piece called a ***tragus***. Humans also have a tragus. It is the small bump in front of the opening of your ear. While our tragus helps our ears collect sound, a bat's tragus is designed specifically for echolocation so it can use its sense of hearing to "see" the world around it.

The tragus is not the only way God designed bats to listen carefully. The shape of a bat's ear is molded just right to collect sounds. Some species can even reshape their ears to hear best in different conditions. Bats also turn their ears in rapid and precise movements to locate exactly where sounds are coming from.

With perfectly shaped ears and the ability to reshape and turn them, bats listen with care and thrive in God's design.

Time to Explore

Go outside after dusk and see if you can spot bats twisting and diving through the air. How many can you see? Bats are most active in warm months when there are plenty of insects to eat. They sleep during the day and are active at night. The best time to watch them is after the sun has gone down, when the sky is quite dark but still light enough to spot their dark shapes flying rapidly against the sky. You might also spot them over a pond, lake, or pool as they swoop down to skim the water's surface for a drink while flying.

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Turn Your Ear

Bats must turn their ears carefully to echolocate well and find what they need. God wants us to listen closely to find what we need too: not insects but wisdom.

Proverbs is a book in the Bible that is full of wise sayings and teachings. Proverbs 2:2 encourages us to turn our ears toward wisdom. Can you think of ways to do that? Here are some ideas:

- Surround yourself with wise people who follow God and know his Word.
- Avoid books, movies, or music that talk about foolish things or things that go against God.
- Listen to Bible lessons at church so you become more familiar with God's truth.
- Hide God's Word in your heart by memorizing Scripture.

Deuteronomy 30:20 says to listen to God's voice and hold fast to him. Do you think bats become better insect hunters with more practice? It makes sense that they improve as they listen for insects and find them in the night sky. In the same way, we can practice listening for truth and wisdom. God's Holy Spirit helps us with this. As you turn your ear toward wisdom, you will recognize it quicker, like a bat fine-tuning its listening skills.

If you see bats hunting insects, picture their ears rapidly turning to gather the information they need. Remember that God wants you to turn your ear toward wisdom and his truth so you can find what you need in life.

Dear God, thank you for making bats to help spread pollen and seeds. Help us to turn our ears to your wisdom each day. Train our ears to listen to your words in the Bible. Amen.

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