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Seeing Spots

CREATURE FEATURE • BY CHRISTA C. HOGAN



Long ago, when the Greeks threw logs onto a fire and saw lizard-like creatures scurry out of the flames, they called them “salamanders” or “fire lizards.” Some thought the lizards caused the fire or that they were made from fire. Today we know the salamanders were only escaping the burning logs where they lived!

We also know that salamanders, like the spotted salamander on the cover, aren't lizards at all. Lizards are reptiles with dry, scaly skin, but salamanders are amphibians with damp skin that actually helps them breathe! The spotted salamander's skin also helps it survive in the wild—it secretes a milky toxin that discourages animals from eating it. The bright yellow markings that give the spotted salamander its name are a warning to predators: I taste bad!

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Spotted salamanders are common in forests along the eastern part of North America. They grow to be six to nine inches long and live an average of 20 years. But don't feel bad if you've never seen one. Since they're not very fast or fierce and need to keep their bodies at a steady temperature, they burrow under rocks, dirt, rotting logs, and fallen leaves. They're also nocturnal, which means they only come out at night to hunt and feed. So despite their name, they can be hard to spot!

Spotted salamanders survive by making it hard for other creatures to spot them. Should we be like them and do our best to blend in? Not so fast. Jesus calls believers to be like a candle that gives light to others, more like those fire lizards. As Christians, our goal should be to live bright, shining lives that point others to God. So go be a light and make it easy for others to spot you! ♥