

The Fish Run

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED what makes some kinds of fish swim back up the streams and tributaries to where they were spawned and hatched? The technical term for fish that do that is “adfluvial.”

You can find adfluvial fish no matter where you live. Many species run from the oceans into fresh water to spawn. Probably the most famous are the salmon species—those fish that make spectacular leaps over rapids and dams as they make their way back to their spawning waters. This might be news to some, but the salmon we find in the Midwest, including the Great Lakes, are not native. They all come from Atlantic or Pacific Ocean stock fish that were brought to inland waters. Though native to the oceans, salmon are famous for their powerful runs up rivers, streams, and tributaries so they can lay eggs in the same waters where they were hatched. These are the fish you probably think of when you see grizzly bears and brown bears along streams and tributaries waiting to catch fish during the fall salmon run.


Adfluvial fish don't run only in the fall, though; many species of adfluvial fish also run in the spring. Northern pike, walleye, and steelhead trout are some species of adfluvial fish that spawn in the spring. In West Michigan, where I grew up, one of the great adfluvial runs my friends and I always

looked forward to was the run of the white suckers up our local rivers and streams. We would fish them in the bigger rivers, and we would hunt for them in streams at night with lanterns and spears, hoping to come back with dozens of them in the feed bags we had modified to carry over our shoulders. We would often then salt them and smoke them the next day before eating them.

People have wondered for a long time how adfluvial fish know how to return to the same streams where they were hatched. Most scientists believe it has to do with the scents in the streams—subtle clues that remind a fish of where they came from and where they are going. Each stream has a uniqueness to it based on the trees, plants, rocks, and soil where it lies. Each stream has unique flavors and telltale signs that let the fish know where they belong.

This can be much like our walk of faith. God speaks to us in many ways, and, in my experience, often subtle ones. In my 53 years, I have never specifically heard God's voice (I think that would be rather shocking!), but God has spoken to me regularly.

The trick is to develop the spiritual habit of listening—to look for those telltale cues from God, to begin to hear God's voice through people, events, and, yes, even thoughts we have when we focus on God. The more we spend time focusing on God and God's Word, the more God directs us in our streams of life.

Be adfluvial—follow God! 



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