

Life Lessons From Dragonflies

Helping us face the inevitable end of life issues



By Dr. Don Eisenhower, ACC



Life Lessons From Dragonflies



How do you feel about dragonflies?

If you saw a dragonfly near you, would you allow it to land on your arm? Would you be scared to do so?

Why are they called dragonflies? They don't look like dragons!

And what is it with their eyes? They're so big!

Have you given much thought to what dragonflies can teach you? (No! I'm not joking!)

I love dragonflies! I am always on the lookout for them. I've started to collect dragonfly memorabilia.

If you look on top of this Bereavement Management Group web page you will find a dragonfly...

The logo of the Bereavement Management Group includes the picture of a dragonfly...

On the cover of my book, *Coaching at End of Life* (www.coachingatendoflife.com), there is a picture of a dragonfly...

Why All The Dragonflies?

Why all the dragonflies? **Because dragonflies teach us some important life lessons** -- life lessons that help us in facing the inevitable end of life issues. Change, death, grief, searching for hope - these are issues that are inescapable for most of us. It is important that we listen to the dragonflies.

Dragonfly Symbolism

I am not alone in my fascination with dragonflies. Dragonfly symbolism plays a role in many cultures in the world. In different times and places, the dragonfly has been associated with both good and evil.

In Japan, the dragonfly is shown great respect and admiration. It is a symbol of strength, victory and power. The Chinese consider the dragonfly a symbol of good luck, harmony and prosperity. In Native America, it signifies happiness and purity, and is often viewed as the actual soul or spirit of a deceased love one who has come back to see them.

While the symbolism above is positive and uplifting, the Europeans often took the symbolism in a far different direction. Romanian folklore states that the dragonfly was a horse that was possessed by the devil. In Norway dragonflies are called "eye pokers." In some cultures the dragonfly was viewed as an agent of the devil whose mission was to punish wicked or badly behaving children as they slept.

My guess is that these cultures never took the time to truly examine this insect - to see what it really was and all that it could do. Personally, I find it hard to imagine dragonfly symbolism as being anything but positive.

Why Are They Called Dragonflies?

Let's begin with the basic question I asked at the start. Why are dragonflies called "dragonflies?" Many believe that the dragonfly dates back to Prehistoric times. Some claim that there is fossil evidence confirming that dragonflies date back over 300 million years, before the dinosaurs (<http://www.motherearthnews.com/Nature-Community/2006-08-01/Dazzling-Dragonflies.aspx>). At this time, it is claimed, dragonflies were large flying insects, in the shape of a dragon. They had wingspans of nearly two and a half feet!

Do Dragonflies Bite or Sting?

A dragonfly looks intimidating. Close up pictures reveal that it has a big mouth - one which, it appears, could deliver a painful bite. Knowing the scientific name for the dragonfly doesn't help either. "Odonata" is derived from the Greek word for tooth, because dragonflies appear to have quite large teeth.

The truth of the matter is that dragonflies do not have teeth. They have strong mandibles that they use to crush their prey. Humans have nothing to fear from the mouth of the dragonfly. Dragonflies do not bite!

But do they sting? Dragonflies appear to have huge stingers extending out the back of them - even larger than bee stingers! The appendage is a clasper, not a stinger. It is associated with the dragonflies' reproductive process. They do not sting.

As far as the dragonfly is concerned, we have nothing to fear. They can actually be quite helpful for us. Do you know one of the dragonflies' favorite pastimes? Eating mosquitoes!

There is a life lesson in this. Not everything that first appears threatening really is so. Did you ever find that to be true? Did you ever hear a sound in the middle of the night? The thing we fear is often part of the normal functioning of our homes.

What brings you fear? Doing something for the first time? Like going to a new school? Or starting a new job? Or entering into a Nursing facility? Does getting older scare you? Or waiting for a test result or a doctor's diagnosis? Is it the economic situation that brings you fear? Is it entering a trusting relationship with someone? Or losing a relationship you've had for years? Do you have a fear of dying? Or what will happen after you die? Answer for yourself this question: what brings you fear?

Allow me to ask another question. What happens when you focus on your fears? Most of the time when we focus on our fears, we get even more fearful. As we

think about all the things that could possibly go wrong, our fears are amplified. Our fear turns into worry. Our worry turns into panic. It doesn't take long until our fears - sometimes totally unrealistic fears, such as a dragonfly biting or stinging us - can have us totally out of control. We can learn how to handle our fears by taking lessons from the dragonfly.

What Is It With The Dragonflies' Eyes?

Almost 80 % of a dragonfly's brain power is dedicated to one thing - its sight. A dragonfly's head is almost all eyes - two enormous, bulging eyes. And they are compound eyes. As human beings, we have just one lens in each eye. A dragonfly has many lenses in each eye - actually, some 20,000 - 30,000 lenses. In a sense, a dragonfly really has 20,000 - 30,000 eyes! A dragonfly sees through all these eyes at once, and as a result it can see all 360 degrees around it. Can you imagine looking at things with eyes like a dragonfly's?

The life lesson the dragonfly teaches us in this instance is that we need to look at our fears with new eyes - with a broader perspective. Rather than narrowly focusing on the fear itself, magnifying it and allowing it to paralyze us, we can look at our fears as opportunities. Fear can be an opportunity for safety. Sometimes our fears cause us to move away from a harmful situation. Sometimes our fears lead to new growth. We can become stronger and healthier when we learn to face our fears and look at them with new eyes. Sometimes our fears can deepen our trust. Psalm 27:1 says "*The Lord is my Light and my Salvation. Whom shall I fear or dread? The Lord is the Refuge and Stronghold of my life - of whom shall I be afraid?*" If our fears lead us to put deeper trust in the Living God, then our fears serve a positive purpose. If our fear of dying causes us to examine our lives, to seek out God's forgiveness, and to receive His gift of heaven (that He made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ) then our fears have resulted in our gain for all of eternity. When we look at fear with new eyes, our fears can actually be a means to bring about change for the good.

Why So Many Wings?

Let's go back to our dragonflies. Did you notice how many wings a dragonfly has? It has four wings - two pairs that operate independently. The dragonfly is the planet's fastest flying insect, with a top speed between 35 and 45 mph. Dragonflies can move in all six directions - forward, backward, left, right, up, and down. They can hover like a helicopter, corkscrew, turn 180 degrees, and stop on a dime. And they do all this with complete elegance and grace. Amazing!

What do you do well? There is no doubt that you do some things well. Do you know what those things are? Do you ever tell others what you are able to do well? I am not speaking of boasting about what you can do. I am speaking of taking a realistic assessment. I am referring to recognizing the talents and gifts and abilities that God has given to you. A poster I once had hanging in my office said it this way: *"I'm special, because God don't make no junk!"* The psalmist said it like this: *"For You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made."* (Psalm 139:13-14)

I suggest that you take a moment right now to pull out a piece of paper and jot down 3 or 4 things that you do well. Then find someone with whom you can share these things. Let them know how grateful you are that you are "fearfully and wonderfully made."

This life lesson from the dragonfly is important, because people tend to face the end of their life better when they have a clear sense of the difference or impact they have made in their life here on earth. As people are dying, they often perform what is called a "life review." They think back through their whole life, and evaluate what difference they have made. The dragonfly reminds us to not wait until we are dying to carry out this review.

Are All Dragonflies Alike?

As amazing as dragonflies are, it is important to note that when it comes to dragonflies, there is great diversity. Scientists tell us that there are more than 5,500 species of dragonflies worldwide, with about 450 species in America alone. Their size can range from three-fourths of an inch long to over four inches. Their eyes, as with humans, can be different colors. They may be green, black, copper, red, blue, or some combination thereof. Some dragonflies have bodies that are fat, while some are skinny. Many dragonflies are patterned, with dots or dashes or other shapes. Dragonflies are found in every climate and in every state on every continent (except Antarctica).

As human beings we are quite diverse as well. We must also learn what is special and unique about us. Our calling is not to do what everyone else is doing. Our task is to seek out what God has prepared for us to do, and then to do that with all our might. Do you feel comfortable being yourself, or do you feel like you need to pretend? My encouragement is that you take this life lesson from the dragonfly, and be YOU!

Skimming Across The Water

All dragonflies require the presence of water. That is why many of the ponds, creeks, rivers, swamps, etc. have dragonflies. A common scene is to observe dragonflies skimming across the surface of the water. Many cultures see this act as being symbolic. As the dragonfly skims the water, making the water ripple and move with the slightest touch, it is symbolic of the deep thoughts in our subconscious mind coming to the surface.

Allowing the deep thoughts and hidden feelings of our minds to surface is crucial. I am talking about the painful feelings: the grief we feel when a loved one dies, the memories of shattered dreams or unfulfilled expectations, the fears that I talked about earlier. Our natural tendency is to stuff these feelings down so we

don't have to face them and deal with them. It is the easiest way we know to escape the pain. But it is not healthy. Whatever we stuff down inside will eventually come back up and out again. When those thoughts and feelings come out on their own they are rarely pretty. Grief and pain and fears will often emerge as anger, or depression, or physical illness, or addictions, or other uncontrolled behaviors.

The secret is to learn the life lesson the dragonfly teaches us as it skims across the water. We must allow the deep thoughts and feelings to come to the surface. We must pay attention to them. We must face them and deal with them and work through them. The dragonfly reminds us to not look at anything from merely the surface, but to go deeper. When we face these painful feelings - the grief, the memories, the fears - we turn them into great opportunities for growth and learning.

Understanding this life lesson is key for us in our personal lives, and key for those who care for others who are grieving. This is the philosophy by which *Coaching at End of Life* and *The Bereavement Management Group* operate. Our desire is to provide all the training and resources needed to equip and support those who care for individuals in grief. We want to help you to help others bring their grief to the surface and deal with it as an opportunity for growth.

The Lifespan Of A Dragonfly

Talking about dying and grieving, do you know how long a dragonfly lives? The lifespan of a dragonfly is short. When someone dies at an early age, we comment on the brevity of their life. The lifespan of a dragonfly is only one to two months. In the form of a dragonfly, this is the extent of its existence. Because their time on earth is so short, they use it wisely.

Dragonflies remind us that we need to make the most of every single day that we have on this earth. Life is too short to waste time. Life is too short to hold grudges. Life is too short to spend it trying to be someone or something that we are not.

Do you want to learn how to make the most of every single day? Do you want to learn how to live fully, so that when the end of your life approaches, you don't look back on it with sorrow and regret? One way to learn comes from spending time with those who are dying. The dying teach us how to live. For an in-depth study on this topic, see my upcoming book, *Dying to Live: Lessons Learned from the Dying*. It will be available soon at www.coachingatendoflife.com.

Experiencing The Change

Allow me to share one more life lesson. Before a dragonfly exists as a dragonfly, it starts off in another form. We learn about metamorphosis in elementary science class. The word metamorphosis literally means "change." Examples of metamorphosis include a tadpole changing into a bullfrog, or a caterpillar changing into a butterfly. Did you know that a dragonfly experiences the same kind of metamorphosis? Before it is changed into a dragonfly, it exists as a nymph (or "water bug.")

The nymph lives for one to three years under water. It is an ugly insect who bites and stings its prey. It is both mean and ugly! Eventually, after a few years in this condition, the nymph finds itself climbing up the stalk of a lily pad. Before long it experiences a change. The ugly, mean, underwater nymph is transformed into a beautiful, free flying dragonfly.

In every way imaginable, what takes place is a change for the better. There are no comparisons between what the nymph was and what the dragonfly becomes. But just imagine what that change must be like for the nymph. The nymph knows nothing else besides his underwater home and his ugly body. To suddenly find himself changing, and moving from an existence in the water to a new existence in the air, must be terrifying.

When my daughter was 9 years old, we moved about 5 miles, from one home into another. The first home was old and small. It was set right by the edge of a busy street, and there were no other children in the neighborhood. The house we moved into was brand new. We had it built to our specifications. It was on a

cul-de-sac street, set on a lot complete with woods and a stream. It was a young neighborhood filled with lots of children. When it came time to move we couldn't find my daughter. She was sitting in her closet crying hysterically. She did not want to leave her old, familiar home, to go to this new home which was unknown.

Many feel the same way when they approach the end of their life. They know a change is coming and they are scared. They are angry, because they do not want to make this change. Even though the body they are in is sick, or old, or falling apart, it is familiar to them. It is all they know.

They might even have been told what is to come. They might be aware of the Christian hope, that there is something far better in store for them. The Bible describes heaven by saying *"Look! God is making his home with men and women! They're his people, he's their God. He'll wipe every tear from their eyes. Death is gone for good—tears gone, crying gone, pain gone!"* (Revelation 21:3-4, The Message Translation) Moving from a sick body to the place described here is certainly a change for the better! Yet the change can be scary.

The symbolism of the dragonfly's story gives us hope in the midst of this change. It gives us hope that in spite of our fears; in spite of our lack of understanding; there is something far better to come. It gives us hope to know that when we accept what Jesus has done for us, our old "ugly" bodies will one day be transformed into new bodies that are beautiful and perfect and free. When that time comes, we can let go, and allow the metamorphosis to occur.

Why All The Dragonflies?

I love dragonflies!

I don't know how often you notice dragonflies in the midst of your day to day routines, but perhaps now you will be more aware of them. My guess is that you

encounter far more dragonflies than you ever realized. You most certainly will encounter them if you use the *Bereavement Management System* to help care for those who are experiencing grief. You will also encounter them every time you pick your copy of *Coaching at End of Life*.

So I ask again, "Why all the dragonflies?" **Because dragonflies teach us some important life lessons** -- life lessons that help us in facing the inevitable end of life issues.

I would love to hear your dragonfly stories. What experiences have you had with dragonflies? What life lessons have you learned? You can write me at contactbms@bereavementmanagement.com or at don@coachingatendoflife.com



WHO WE ARE

THE BEREAVEMENT MANAGEMENT GROUP

The Bereavement Management Group was formed to create and provide the resources to equip and support those who care for individuals in grief.

Our Mission

We live in a culture that is uneasy with end of life issues. Yet death is the one reality we must all face. All will die, and all will experience grief. Our mission is to create and provide the resources necessary to equip and support those who care for individuals in grief. Whether you are a hospice organization, a faith community, a funeral home, a health care business (or any business or company) you have individuals who are in the midst of grief. Through software, training, support, and off site management, we want to make it possible for grieving individuals under your leadership to feel supported by you.

Why Bereavement Management System

Many leaders sincerely desire to provide ongoing support to those who are grieving. However, the task of managing such follow up is overwhelming. There is a clear disconnect between what needs to be done, and what is nearly impossible for most people to do on their own. As a result, this software program has been developed. BMS is a comprehensive, easy to use software program that will help you care for those who are grieving in a timely and affordable way. It is customizable to your organization, and will be tailored to your needs.

BMS allows an organization to create personalized cards, letters and newsletters. The cards are automatically created and ready to be sent out at the time of death, on the deceased's birthday, at the holidays, and at the anniversary of the death. Letters are created immediately following the death, and again after the first year of care. Twelve editions of a grief newsletter are created monthly. Monthly phone lists are created for those who desire to do telephone follow-up. Extensive records and statistics are automatically kept up to date, and are accessible at any time. The Community and Corporate Editions of BMS provide ongoing yearly birthday, holiday and anniversary cards, phone call reminders, additional letters, newsletters, and miscellaneous cards that can be designed and created when needed.

Email - contactbms@bereavementmanagement.com
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WHO WE ARE

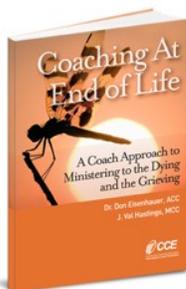
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COACHING AT END OF LIFE

"A Coach Approach to Ministering to the Dying and the Grieving"

Coaching at End of Life is a training program connected with Coaching4Clergy
(www.coaching4clergy.com)

This class, divided into 3 modules, will focus on the spiritual leader who wants to use a coach approach to minister to the dying and the grieving. Participants will take away practical skills and behaviors that will equip them to effectively minister as an end of life coach, both to individuals and to groups. In addition to the 8 Building Blocks of coaching, class members will learn 8 Supporting Building Blocks for coaching the dying, and 8 Supporting Building Blocks for coaching the grieving. Practical tools for follow up will be introduced. Those participating will be given the opportunity to examine their own views on death, dying and grieving, and will practice end of life coaching.



The three modules will be taught in different formats at different times - teleclass, online LIVE learning classroom, and onsite training.

MODULE ONE	MODULE TWO	MODULE THREE
COACHING THE DYING	COACHING THE GRIEVING	EFFECTIVE GROUP COACHING AT END OF LIFE
Where Am I With Dying	Where Am I With Grieving	Why Group Coaching For Grief?
The Last Chapter	Riding The Roller Coaster With Them	Group Coaching Demonstration
Sharing The Five Things	Am I Going Crazy?	The Top 10 Groups For The Grieving
Dying To Live	Be The Student, Not The Expert	An End of Life Safe Church
Coaching Demonstration	Coaching Demonstration	Group Coaching Practice Lab 1
Encourage Them To Hold Onto Hope	Help Them Discover Their New Normal	Group Coaching Practice Lab 2
Following Up The Dying	Following Up The Grieving	Group Coaching Practice Lab 3

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