*Blackfish*

[*Blackfish*](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2545118/); CNN Films, 2013; Directed by Gabriela Cowperthwaite; PG-13. [Watch the trailer](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLOeH-Oq_1Y).

Summary:

On February 24, 2010 at SeaWorld in Orlando, Florida, senior trainer Dawn Brancheau was killed by an orca named Tilikum. Over Tillikum’s time with SeaWorld, he has been responsible for two other deaths. He continues to perform today. *Blackfish* follows the life of this whale and looks at the larger ethical issues surrounding the capture and captivity of killer whales. The documentary accuses SeaWorld of a cover-up and of disseminating misleading information. SeaWorld responded to the film with an open letter, saying, “*Blackfish* ... is inaccurate and misleading and, regrettably, exploits a tragedy.” As a result of this documentary, trainers at SeaWorld can no longer perform in the tank with the whales, the tanks are under construction to double in size, and attendance has dropped at SeaWorld’s three parks.

Themes/Subjects:

* Animal rights and animal personhood. The film emphasizes many qualities of Tilikum that overlap with those of humans: childhood, giving birth, separation from parents, heightened neurological activity, happiness, anger, depression, and kinship.
* Marine parks. Parks across the world capture and breed animals like killer whales for public appearances. SeaWorld differs from a zoo in that they do not primarily display animals in habitats; rather, SeaWorld provides animal-themed rides and animal performances.
* Honesty. The film questions whether SeaWorld was truthful in its response to Dawn Brancheau’s death as well as the park’s treatment of its animals.
* Animal aggression. Tilikum is said to have experienced a high degree of aggression resulting from a psychotic break because of his captivity conditions.

Discussion Questions:

1. In one of SeaWorld’s many responses to the documentary, it said that the film “exploits a tragedy.” Is this true? ([SeaWorld’s response](http://seaworldparks.com/en/corporatesites/truth/home/truth-about-blackfish/?from=Top_Nav).)
2. Was the film misleading and manipulative? If so, is this justifiable?
3. What is the Christian obligation to animals? Does man’s dominion over animals (Gen 1:26) apply here?
4. Whales have hundreds of advocacy and rights organizations regarding their captivity and use for science, while animals such as rats have few, if any. Is this a double standard? Why are we comfortable with this discrepancy?
5. Is there a single Christian response to *Blackfish*? If so, what is it?