

**LITTLE BEASTS**  
**Proverbs 30:24-28**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Psychology has identified a pattern of thinking that has been given the label “*egocentric illusion*”. Egocentric illusion is a pattern of thinking in which we erroneously assume that all events that take place are to be interpreted from a viewpoint that puts us as the central focus. In other words, these people really think the world revolves around them. Some people would be surprised to learn that it doesn’t.

Carly Simon recorded the anthem of the egocentric illusionists when she sang, “*You’re so vain you probably think this song is about you.*” If you used to lay awake at night and wonder if it was, you are.

By the way, in case you think you may suffer from egocentric illusion, let me give you a little test. To screw in a light bulb do you stand there with the bulb in the socket and wait while the world revolves around you?

We probably all have traces of egocentric illusion. We probably all have to fight the tendency to believe it’s all about us. But we cheat ourselves from a lot of blessings if we think that way. There is much we can learn if we will become humble enough to learn it. We can even learn from some lowly creatures if we are willing to.

In Proverbs 30:24, Solomon writes:

<sup>24</sup> *“Four things on earth are small,  
yet they are extremely wise:*

Let’s humble ourselves enough to learn life lessons from four lowly creatures.

**I. FROM THE ANT, LEARN THE IMPORTANCE OF PREPARATION**

First of all, Solomon urges us to learn from the ants.

<sup>25</sup> *Ants are creatures of little strength,  
yet they store up their food in the summer;*

The little lesson from the lowly ant is the importance of preparation.

Ants are nearly ubiquitous. They are found on all of the continents except Antarctica (isn’t that odd? There are no ants on Ant-arctica?!?). And interestingly, there are no ants on a few large islands including Iceland, Greenland and the Hawaiian Islands.

Over 12,500 distinct species of ant have been identified but entomologists acknowledge there are many thousands more ants to classify. Estimates range as high as 22,000 different varieties of ants.

Ants are distinctive for their extremely narrow waists and the elbow in their antennae. They are also known for their advanced socialization. Ants live in colonies and delegate the work. There are only a few ants that reproduce. Most of the members of the colony are worker ants or soldier ants and they are always females. (That is one thing we can learn from the ants: let the women do all the work.)

But the lesson Solomon wants us to learn from the ants is the importance of preparation. You see, during the warm weather when ants are active, they not only gather food to eat and to bring back to the queens and the drones, they also gather food to store so they can have something to eat during the bad weather.

Leafcutter ants, for instance, feed exclusively on a fungus that grows only in their colony. The worker ants continually collect leaves that are taken into their colonies, are cut into tiny pieces and are then placed in their fungal gardens where the pieces decompose and produce the fungus that supports the lives of the members of the colony.

Gathering and storing food is common to all species of ant, not just the leafcutter. It is instinct to ants to prepare so they always have a supply of food to eat.

Solomon says we can learn from the little ants. And we need to. While ants may not have invented all the tools and conveniences that humans have, don't dismiss them as dumb. Ants have enough sense to prepare for the future. But many people don't.

- Many people spend all of their money as soon as they get it and do not save for the future. To them, Solomon would say, "learn from the ant and prepare."
- Some people never develop deep relationships with others when they have opportunity. Then, when a calamity befalls them and they need people to support and encourage them, they have no friends to call on and lean on. To those who have no time for other people, Solomon would say, "learn from the ant and prepare."
- Then there are those who have no time for the Lord or the church...until there is a crisis and then they cry out to the Lord and expect Him to respond. They neglect the Lord in the good times and expect Him in the bad times. To those who neglect the Lord except in a storm, Solomon would say, "learn from the ant and prepare."

In a wide variety of ways, we need to learn from the ants the importance of preparation. Solomon also says that we should learn from the coney, the importance of protection.

## II. FROM THE CONEY, LEARN THE IMPORTANCE OF PROTECTION

Do you know what a coney is? I thought I did. But it turns out that a coney is NOT a chili dog with onions. “Coney” is an old term for an adult rabbit. Years ago, the word “rabbit” only referred to the young or baby of the species, much the way we use the word “bunny” today.

Now, depending on the translation of the Bible you are using, the Hebrew term שָׁפָן (shah-pahn) may be rendered “coney” or “hyrax” or “rock badger”. There are problems with each of these terms.

- A coney, if it means an adult rabbit, is probably a poor translation because we think of rabbits as little animals with long ears and cottontails that live in burrows in the fields. The animal that Solomon is writing about doesn't have long ears and doesn't live in fields.
- To be honest, I didn't know any more about a hyrax than I did about a coney.
- And when I hear the word “badger”, I think about the mean meat-eating weasels for which the University of Wisconsin sports teams are named.

Rabbits don't look much like badgers and who knows what a hyrax looks like? But, you see, the animal referred to is not the badger that we know. It is a ROCK badger, which looks a little like a rabbit with short ears. It turns out that the short-eared coney, the hyrax and the rock badger are all the same varmint – a mammal that is closely associated with the guinea pig.

One of the characteristics of the coney is that it lives in rocky places and hides in the clefts or crevices of the rocks.

Now coneys don't live in the rocks because they can't appreciate pastures, meadows and fields. They live in the rocks for protection. Coneys don't have any defenses against predators so they hide in the shelter of the rocks.

Eleven times, the psalmist calls God his rock. God is his rock and his foundation. God is his rock and his refuge. God is his rock and his fortress. God is his rock and his salvation. In a variety of ways, the psalmist describes God as his rock of protection.

Have you come to find protection in the Lord? As I have reminded you so often, you have an enemy. The enemy of your soul is out to destroy and devour you.

Your enemy is a dangerous and powerful foe and against him, you have no defenses that are sufficient to defeat him. But, as the psalmist learned,

when you have no weapons that are sufficient, you rely on your protection. Your protection is to hide yourself in the Rock of your Salvation.

To hide yourself in the Rock of your Salvation is to let the Lord be your protection.

- When Satan comes against you, don't rely on your own reason: rely on the will of God.
- When the devil is attacking you, don't rely on your own responses: rely on the Word of God.
- When your enemy is assaulting you, don't rely on your own route to safety: rely on the way of God.

If we would humble ourselves enough to learn from a common creature, we could learn a lesson from the coney. We could learn the importance of protection.

### III. **FROM THE LOCUST, LEARN THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTNERSHIP**

And from the locust, we could learn the importance of partnership.

Locusts, by nature, are gregarious and migratory. That is, they band together and they swarm about from place to place. A single locust will usually eat about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of its body weight in vegetation every day. Because an individual locust doesn't weigh all that very much, that means a locust will eat about  $\frac{1}{14}$  of an ounce of vegetation per day.

That wouldn't seem too significant except that during certain times of the year, locusts swarm. They travel in massive clouds that can cover acres of ground at a time with a densely packed blanket of the insects. When the swarm is large, the sound of their grazing can be almost deafening. And the effect of their grazing can be most devastating. A swarm of locusts covering an acre can actually consume as much as 5 tons of plant life in a single day! It is no wonder that the ancients regarded a swarm of locusts as a plague.

While not condoning the devastation caused by a swarm of locusts, Solomon does draw our attention to all that the locusts can accomplish when they work together. And, perhaps the most puzzling feature of these creatures is that they have no king. Bees have a queen bee. Ants have a queen. Most other insects that live in colonies have a defined leader. But not the locusts. As Solomon noted:

<sup>27</sup> *Locusts have no king,  
yet they advance together in ranks;*

It is a bit of a mystery how the swarm stays together and advances as a unit when there is no readily identifiable leader. There must be something instinct to them that lets them know they need to stick together. On their

own and individually, locusts are easy prey to predators like birds that eat insects. But as a swarm, the prey devours the predators.

People, we need to stick together. God made us for Himself and for one another. He intends that we will be social so we can support one another and so we can accomplish much.

I wonder just how much more we might achieve if we didn't worry about which one of us is in charge and who is going to get the credit. Think of what might happen if each of us bonded to the rest of us and we all responded to the Lord's will for all of us. Consider the locusts: they have no king yet they advance together in ranks. From the humble locust, we can learn the importance of partnership.

#### IV. FROM THE LIZARD, LEARN THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSPECTIVE

And from the lizard, we can learn the importance of perspective.

<sup>28</sup> *a lizard can be caught with the hand,  
yet it is found in kings' palaces.*

Lizards are pretty adaptable. They can live in the hovel of a pauper or in the house of a prince. And they don't much care. In fact, there is no reason to believe that a lizard even knows the difference between a pit and a palace.

Like these indiscriminate reptiles, we ought not to be too impressed by the outward signs and symbols of success. Opulence is no substitute for character or refinement.

Several years ago, while living on Long Island, a man in the church offered us tickets to a political fundraising dinner. I don't remember which presidential candidate it was and it doesn't matter. But Sandy and I had never been to a \$200/plate dinner before and we were pretty nervous about how to act. It turns out we needn't have been.

We were seated at a very large table with some people whose boss had made a major political contribution to the coffers of this candidate and, in return, he got a bunch of tickets, which he gave to some of his workers. These folk must not have been accustomed to swanky dining, either.

There were a few empty places at the tables and when the waiters came around to take our orders, some of these guys claimed that friends of theirs were sitting at those places and had stepped out to the restroom. They said this so they could eat two meals instead of just one. After the meal, some of the women wrapped up pieces of meat in their cloth napkins and dropped them in their purses so they could take it home. Most of these people excused themselves to the restrooms after the meal and then just slipped out and went home before the speeches.

Clearly being able to attend a \$200/plate meal does not make a person refined or polished. And lizards are perceptive enough to know that great wealth or dire poverty doesn't make any difference in what kind of a home a person has. A lizard is not impressed by sumptuousness. From the lowly lizard, we could also learn the importance of perspective and realize that money really doesn't make the man nor does wealth make the woman.

**CONCLUSION:**

In verse 24, Solomon pointed out that all four of these creatures are small yet extremely wise. You may not think that you are a very important person but that doesn't matter, you can still be very wise...if you will learn from these little animals. Conversely, you may think that you **are** a very important person. Well, you are not so great that God can't teach you some large lessons from little beasts. But you have to be humble enough to learn from them

The fact is that we really only gain wisdom when we begin to realize just how small we are...and how great God is.

**INVITATION:**        #147 – *“How Great Thou Art”*