

Lessons From The Animals

What Can Animals Teach Us?

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I am sure that everybody has heard of the fires that have taken place out in southern California. There was a great deal of destruction to houses, I believe three people were killed, and billions of dollars worth of damage, according to the last news report that my wife and I heard before we left Charlotte.

One of the interesting sidelights of that disaster is the story of a British film director living in the Malibu area who remembered his cat while the fire was burning. He went back to his home in an attempt to save the cat's life, and in so doing, lost his own life. The cat was later found singed but none the worse for the wear, and just as much alive as it had been before; but the owner of the pet lost his life.

I do not know how you feel about that particular act that man did, whether it was a justifiable act, whether he really should have given his life for the cat or not. In a way it is beside the point because it has already occurred, but I am sure that you had your thoughts about whether it was a wise act that he did.

I think that all of us understand that we can get close to animals, but most of the time the animals that we get close to are either a cat or a dog. I do not see many people running around with rattlesnakes or skunks or other types of animals. But I feel generally that those of us who live in cities have an inclination to either forget or take for granted the animal life with which we share this creation—that is, except for dogs and cats—and that, at the very least, we are not nearly as acutely aware of animals as our forebears who lived out in the country. Even if they were not farmers, they were familiar with animals in a way that we are not.

Today I want us to think about our relationship to animals. We are going to explore what the Bible has to say about that. It is important because we were given dominion over them and, as we are going to see, there is a responsibility that we have as children of God toward animal life on this creation. We are going to look at a couple of verses in Genesis, because this seems to be the beginning of just about everything in the Bible.

Genesis 1:20-21 Then God said, "Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens." So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their

kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good."

Genesis 1:24 Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind."

Please pay attention to the way that this is stated. God did not do anything without purpose, and He says that the earth brought forth the living creature. Now we will find in verse 26, the creation of man, where it says:

Genesis 1:26-27 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

I think that part of the purpose of showing the creation in the way that God did is to show that there is something that we and the animals have in common. We could have gone on and read further, but all of us have come out of the earth. Man was created out of the earth. It very distinctly said that about the animals, "Let the earth bring forth . . . its kind."

We share with them a mortality. We are earthy in that respect. They too, are earthy. However, the way that this is worded also shows that there is a difference between us and the other living creatures, and that difference was made very clear in that man was created after the God-kind. We are created in the image of God. And, in addition to that, there is no sexual orientation made in respect to animals. We, of course, know that there is a sexual orientation, but God made sure that was emphasized, "male and female created He them." This will have a more importance later.

So we see three things that God establishes as being different between us and the animals: mankind is in His image, mankind is in male and female, and mankind has dominion.

There is a well-known, right-wing radio personality who says that animals have no rights. That is not a true statement biblically, though what he says is essentially true, and I agree with him whenever he gives his position in regard to animals. What he says

is essentially correct in a broad, general way.

But animals do have rights. We are going to look at one of them later. And though we are not going to go into it deeply, it is very clear that they have a right from God, right now (we are seeing it already established), to share this creation with us; but we have dominion over them.

This man's explanation, as I said, has much in it that is right, but it is also lacking in that he fails to show that mankind has a responsibility toward animals. That is what the dominion was given for: to carry out the responsibility. You might look upon dominion as being authority. Man was given authority over the animals, but whenever God gives authority to do something, it also carries with it a responsibility to act towards that over which he has been given authority, in the way that God Himself would act.

Within God's creation that means to act out of love, or, we might say, to act out of concern; not to use and abuse, but to act for the well-being of the governed. In this case we are talking about animals.

In the second chapter of Genesis, it puts it a little bit differently. We are to dress and keep. That applies to the animals as well, not just to vegetation. We are to embellish, in a sense, their environment. We are to preserve their environment, because animals were part of the Eden, part of the environment that God created for Adam and Eve.

They are still a part of our environment, even though our consciousness of animals has generally diminished from when we had more daily contact with them. Whenever we were forced to interact with them, then we were very well aware of animals and our responsibility toward them.

I would say that, in a general way, mankind's attitude toward animals is more or less detached, except for cats and dogs. There are some exceptions to this rule, of course. There are people who like skunks. But nonetheless, I think that in a general way our attitude toward animals is more or less detached.

We find that the very first act the newly-formed, created Adam did was in carrying out a responsibility toward animals. This was the first thing that he did.

Genesis 2:19-20 Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every

beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.

This assignment from God was a way God showed Adam his dominion. The primary purpose of this was undoubtedly to show Adam that there was not one among the animals with whom he could be intimately at one with. But it also served to introduce to Adam his responsibility toward animals. It showed him that not only could he not be one with them, but it also showed him the vast difference between him and the other living creatures.

Now he alone, among all the created beings on earth, was intelligent. Therefore, it was his responsibility, in his dominion, to take care of them. The animals were dumb; that is, they could not communicate with him on his level, and they could not think spatially or invent things the way he could.

I think that God made it clear to Adam that his responsibility was to take care of them. And though Adam was monarch of everything that he surveyed, it was clear to him (because of the conclusion at the end of verse 20, the conclusion that Adam reached) that he was created as a social being. He was created for fellowship. He was created for service. He was not created for power. And he understood that he could have comradeship with the animals, but he could not have fellowship.

That is why it says there was no helper comparable to him. That is why Adam made the jubilant response that he did when Eve was created, in verse 23. He said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." He could see that this was somebody that he could fellowship with! This was somebody who was his equal. This was someone with whom there could be communication. He could be one with this person and he was jubilant about it.

Unfortunately, the relationship between man and animals unraveled. God created them friendly and compatible to mankind, but we find that after the Flood the relationship is anything but compatible.

Genesis 9:1-2 So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand."

The Flood marked the end of an age. Here God is using the relationship between man and animals to show that now life is going to be dominated by fear. I want you to think about that. It is not just the relationship between man and animals (that is just an illustration), but now life is going to be dominated by fear—and not only that—by a measure of force that God never intended was going to have to be required to exercise man's dominion. The dominion is still there. But the relationship has changed.

There is a little aside here that we should get to before we go past it, but it will not take long. When these verses are combined with Genesis 1:28-29 and Genesis 4:1-5, it shows that this is not mankind's introduction into eating animal flesh. You can read verse 3 in chapter 9. But in Genesis 1, what God is doing is showing that all life, animal and human, ultimately depends on vegetation: "I have given you all the green herbs to eat." And that is true.

Remember Genesis 4:1-5. Abel brought to God an animal sacrifice. That shows us that God had already showed them that their dominion over animals extended to the place that they were able to take an animal's life. God was well pleased with Abel's animal sacrifice. He was so well pleased that it is recorded back in Hebrews 11 that it still witnesses. So God was not overly concerned about the killing of an animal, but what we need to understand is that they understood about sacrificing, and some of the sacrifices had to be eaten. That was a requirement of God. The sin offering was to be eaten, part of it anyway, and the peace offering was to be eaten.

God's bringing of the animals to Adam to see what he would name them also implies that Adam was to become acquainted with them. It says He brought them to see what he would name them. Now how would Adam do that? Did not Adam then have to use his intelligence? Did he not have to use his powers of observation? And from the personality or characteristics of the animals he was observing and that were passing before him, he then pronounced names upon them. The naming was the result of his observation of the characteristics of every beast.

Now there is instruction here. Turn to another place in God's Word, in the book of Job. I want you to see the sense of the essence of what Job is saying here.

Job 12:1-2 Then Job answered and said: "No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you! But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you. Indeed, who does not know such things as these?"

The subject here is acquiring wisdom. If we would go through the whole chapter, we

would begin to see what Job was pointing out here is that the kind of wisdom he is talking about is not godly wisdom in the sense of us examining the Word of God, but rather wisdom in the sense of common sense, a person being wise through the powers of observation. What he is going to do is say that God has shown us these things and that God has created things so that we will have common sense. Now look at verse 7.

Job 12:7 Now ask the beasts [You cannot ask a beast literally, can you? They are dumb. They cannot talk.] and they will teach you . . .

How is the beast going to teach you? It is going to be through your powers of observation, just like Adam named the animals through his powers of observation. He looked at the characteristics that God created in the animals, and there is wisdom there. It is wisdom from God, but it is the kind of wisdom that we would call common sense.

Job 12:7-8 . . . and the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you . . .

The earth cannot talk to you, but you can ask questions of the earth, by your mind looking at it and asking, "Why is that thing the way it is? I think I'll study that and see why that is the way it is." And so you study aspects of the creation, whether in botany, biology, geology, archaeology, you name it. It brings us a measure of learning about God by observing the things that He has made.

Job 12:8-11 . . . and the fish of the sea will explain to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this, in whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind? Does not the ear test words . . .

What is the context? The "words" are the instruction that come from God's creation. The words are actually in your own mind, but they are formulated by the thought you are having about what you are observing in God's creation. "Doesn't the ear test words?" You turn it over in your mind and you reach conclusions about it.

Job 12:11-12 . . . and the mouth taste its food? Wisdom is with aged men . . .

In other words, he is saying that this accumulation of wisdom is something that we come about through experience, the experiences of life, and we usually have a bit of age on us before it actually begins to really hit us.

Job 12:12 . . . and with length of days, understanding.

What Job is saying is that there is deliberate instruction from the Creator in the world around us so that we are without excuse if we say we have no models or examples about things. It is saying that God intends that we use the senses to observe what He has made and derive wisdom from it.

You might recall Romans 1:18-20 and paraphrase what it is saying there, that the unrighteous suppress knowledge of God and that what may be known of Him is clearly seen by the things He has made. Thus it is with animals. God created them with certain traits that we need to study, observe, watch, question into, and then derive wisdom from, and either emulate it, copy it, or eliminate it from our character. God says in Matthew 4:4 and Luke 4:4 that we are to live by every word of God. We just read a part of it that says there is wisdom about God in observing animals.

I have no idea how many kinds of animals there are, but I do know there are in excess of fifty of them named in the Bible. There are the ant, the adder, the antelope, the ape, the asp, the ass, the badger, the bat, the bear, birds, behemoth, camel, chameleon, chamois, chickens, cockatrice, coney, deer, dog, dragon, dromedary, and elephant.

Let us stop with the dog for just a second. Dog is man's best friend now, but in the Bible a dog is really looked down on as a derogatory, lowly animal. How things change.

There is the ferret, fish, frog, goat, greyhound, hare, hart, hind, hippopotamus, hornet, horse, kine, leopard, leviathan (who knows what that is?), lion, lizard, mole, mouse, pygarg (everybody knows what a pygarg is), ram, roe, scorpion, serpent, sheep, swine, unicorn (unicorn?), viper, weasel, whale, wolf, and the lowly worm—fifty-three in all. Now there may be a few more, and if you have a modern Bible, the names may have been changed to protect the innocent.

Deuteronomy 11:13-15 "And it shall be that if you diligently obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the Lord your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil. And I will send grass

[Genesis 1:28-29, all of life ultimately depends upon vegetation] in your fields for your livestock, that you may eat and be filled."

I think that these verses clearly establish that animals' well-being is directly tied to man's exercise of his free moral agency. If a man chooses to obey, God will bless both animals and man. As the animals are blessed, so is man; as man is blessed, so are the animals. If a man's livestock is not eating, then it is pretty certain that the wild things are not eating either.

It is interesting to note the sequence here, especially in verse 15. Much of man's sense of physical well-being is usually illustrated in the Bible by a full stomach. It is an illustration that God uses that if your stomach is full, you feel that things are all right in the world. What He is saying is this: if you look at the sequence, that the animals must first be blessed before the blessing accrues to man.

By using this verse, anciently the rabbis (I am talking about that period that began roughly a couple of hundred years before Christ, maybe three or four hundred years before Christ, in that period of time), decided that they were going to build a fence around the law and that they were going to protect the law from being broken. So they began to come up with all kinds of laws to teach the people so that they would not break the law of God. But the rabbis deduced, during this period of time, that man, being the superior being in terms of gifts from God, including his dominion over them, must feed his animals before himself. Think about that.

I am not saying that I necessarily agree, but that is what they wrote. You think about that man who died in California—he put the life of his cat above his own life, and he sacrificed it for the life of that cat. The rabbis said that because of the sequence in which God wrote this, that it is necessary for animals to be blessed before man can really be blessed, that we are all part of the makeup of God's creation. There is an interdependence to all God's living creatures.

They deduced that a man must feed his animals before himself. And so, in doing it this way, he was showing his concern for the fearful (Genesis 9:1-2), the weak, the helpless, and the dependent. Let us begin to pursue this.

Proverbs 12:10 A righteous man regards the life of his animal, but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.

That phrase, "regards the life," literally means "knows the soul." That is what the Hebrew literally says. The righteous man knows the soul of his animal. This word "knows" in that clause there is the same word that is used of humans. It means intimacy that can extend all the way to sexual intercourse. The righteous man knows the soul of his animal. *The Keil-Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament* translates that first clause this way: "The righteous knows how his cattle feel." Now is he observing them? Is he aware of what is going on in their unintelligent minds? Is he as intimate with them as he can possibly be? Those are all possibilities.

Obviously, God is implying here that the righteous person will be very closely observing his animals in order that they are taken care of. With the righteous there is a concern, to make this practical, not to exploit the weak and the defenseless. Animals are very easily taken advantage of. God put us here to serve them. We are allowed by Him to use, but not to abuse. In fact, we are going to see that He is going to show us that we have to go out of our way to take care of them, to be kind to them.

In Proverbs 22 is a principle applied to human beings. I want you to think of this in relation to our relationship with animals.

Proverbs 22:22-23 Do not rob the poor because he is poor, nor oppress the afflicted at the gate; for the Lord will plead their cause, and plunder the soul of those who plunder them.

God helps those who cannot help themselves. We have the cliché, "God helps those who help themselves." But the Bible says that God helps those who cannot help themselves: the poor, the weak, the downtrodden, the alien, the widow. God comes to their defense. He says, "the Lord will plead their cause." The picture is the court of the law, and you have going for you (if you happen to pick the category of being the poor and the weak) that your attorney is none other than God Himself, that He will plead your cause. God helps those who cannot help themselves, and when human beings are exploited, an affront against God has been committed. Do you know why?—because He has made them to serve a purpose, and they are not to be abused.

Abraham Lincoln says, "God must love the poor people because he made so many of them." There is a measure of truth in that. God puts poor people around. Let me insert something here. I have explained this to you before that the word "poor" in the Bible does not necessarily mean "without money." It does not mean the person is in poverty. It means the person is weak. He is powerless or defenseless before the forces of society, the law courts, whatever it might happen to be.

Let me change the wording here. "Do not rob the weak because they are weak." His is giving instruction to those who are strong, those who are in authority, those who have dominion, those who have more intelligence than others, they are not to take advantage of others simply because others are not gifted or have not been given what they have been given.

Now apply this to animals. I have my own little scale of the weak things of the earth. I think the Bible shows that among human beings, generally the weakest group of all are children. They have no power. They are on the bottom rung of the ladder. Right above them in having maybe just a little bit more power are the elderly.

Where do animals fit in? They would probably be at the bottom, under children. They are the easiest as a general group to take advantage of because, after all, they are just dumb animals.

You know the Scriptures. You know the prophecy. I think you know that God is going to give animals their revenge. At the time of the end the animals are going to increase and they are going to be a plague to human beings. God is going to plead their cause. People will be afraid to go out of their homes whenever God gives animals that power to strike back at mankind. That time is coming.

Let us go back to the main subject. We have a responsibility to animals. Psalm 104 is a paean of praise to God for what He is like, what He does, and how much He supplies for His earth. It overflows with His goodness in taking care of things.

Psalm 104:14 He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the service of man . . . [remember Deuteronomy 11:15]

Psalm 104:24-29 O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions—this great and wide sea, in which are innumerable teeming things, living things both small and great. There the ships sail about; there is that Leviathan which You have made to play there. These all wait for You, that You may give them their food in due season. What You give them they gather in; You open Your hand, they are filled with good. You hide Your face, they are troubled . . .

This is, of course, a description of the activity of God caring for His creation. We are to become God, and that process of becoming like God is exercised by us acting like God, by copying Him within the scope of our responsibilities, within the scope of our activities.

Now some people like bird-feeders—a little piece of land, put up a board, maybe a little covering over it, put seeds on top of it, and it gives them a measure of pleasure to know that they are taking care of the birds, giving them a little bit to eat. Now there is nothing wrong with that. I am not making fun of it at all. It is an enjoyable diversion for them, and they are doing their best to take care of a bit of God's creation. I can guarantee you on the authority of God's Word that if you do, those birds will pay that person back in spades in doing things for the well-being of that human being that is taking care of them. Those birds serve the Creator in taking care of human beings.

Remember Deuteronomy 11. Our well-being is directly tied to the animals. If you happen to be one who feeds the birds and you also have a garden, it is very likely that the birds are going to take care of most of the insects that ever come into that garden to eat up your produce. They will pay you back in spades, because that is the way that God's creation works. It responds in kind. Whatever we sow, the chances are extremely great that we are going to reap a great deal more out of what we sow, more than what we sow. You will be amply blessed in taking care of those who are weak.

Let us go back to Exodus 20. In the Sabbath commandment, it says:

Exodus 20:10 but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates.

I know of no higher authority than this to show what our responsibility toward animals is. God's special concern is for those animals that He created for man's well-being in the sense of livestock or in the sense of being food for him. In a major way we can see from what God has shown that they are to be treated pretty much as if they were an employee, a human employee. They are to be extended the same privilege of being free on the Sabbath from not working.

Exodus 23:4-5 If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it.

This law is primarily intended to show us that personal enmity and grudges should not

stand in the way of helping a person who is in a measure of trouble, but it also shows an act of mercy for the working animal as well. If it has been overloaded so that it has fallen under its burden, you do a service to the animal by making sure it gets back on its feet once again, and maybe lightening its burden or shifting the load around so it is not so likely to fall again.

Deuteronomy 25:4 You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.

Here is one of those rights that animals have. There is a Lawgiver who has given them the right to eat, to be rewarded, while they labor on your behalf. God legislated this and He gave this command to man and He is here pleading the cause of the weak. The laborer is worthy of his hire. He is not only worthy of his hire, he is to be given the Sabbath off, too, because they need a break from their labors. They might be dumb in that they cannot communicate, but they are physical beings as we are and they need a day of rest as well.

It is very easy to take advantage of them. They cannot complain as we can. They cannot rebel the way that we can. But they, nonetheless, have a right from God to rest on the Sabbath. They have a right from God to be rewarded for what they do—to be paid.

Deuteronomy 22:4 You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fall down along the road, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely help him lift them up again.

Deuteronomy 22:6-7 If a bird's nest happens to be before you along the way, in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs, with the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young; you shall surely let the mother go, and take the young for yourself, that it may be well with you and that you may prolong your days.

Is God pleading the cause of the weak? It would be very easy to take the whole kit and caboodle, would it not? God says, "Oh no, you can't do that. You shouldn't do it. You can take the young, but you can't take the mother." There might be several reasons for that. One might be to be sure that the species is preserved, so that the breed, or whatever, it is not wiped out and that reproduction will surely follow.

There is also the possible implication that the adult animal, the mother, has known only

a life as living free, and that it should not be brought into captivity. That is an interesting one to pursue. Does an animal have feelings? The proverb indicates it. "He knows his animal's feelings." They feel a sense of being deprived of liberty. Do they have a feeling of frustration, or are they capable of the feeling of frustration at being caged in when they have only known being free?

I cannot feel like an animal can feel, but God gives me enough of an indication to know that there is some ability to feel those things that we are so familiar with, and that they are weak, they are able to be taken advantage of, and God says, "Don't you dare," because He is going to plead their cause. They cannot fight back the way we can fight back.

Deuteronomy 22:9-10 You shall not sow your vineyard with different kinds of seed, lest the yield of the seed which you have sown and the fruit of your vineyard be defiled. You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together.

The aim here seems to be not to work animals together who have a natural aversion for each other. That it is not fair to either one to link them together side by side. God uses this principle when He says, "Do not be unequally yoked together with an unbeliever. Do not marry somebody who is different from you." There is wisdom.

You do not work animals together who are, let us say, of different capacities. In that case, one does all the work and the other goes along for the ride, and not as much work is accomplished as when you put two of a kind together. You see there is wisdom in these things. We will not go into it, but God intends that we study these things so that we will learn principles of right living and be able to get the best out of life.

Animals may not seem very important to us city-dwellers, but Jesus said that God is even aware of the sparrows that fall. God is aware of what is going on in His creation. That may seem like a small and an unimportant thing to you, but I once read a story that I want to pass on to you that I think illustrates an important point. This story was told by a Scottish minister and it went something like this:

He dreamt that he died and went to heaven. He was very happy about the fact that he was rising up and that he was going to go to heaven; and he stood before the pearly gates. And sure enough there was Peter there waiting for him to come in. I guess he expected to just walk right in, unchallenged.

But as he started to walk by, Peter said, "Whoa! Wait a minute there. Who are you?" He said, "Identify yourself." He said, "I am so-and-so." Peter shrugged his shoulders. "What does that mean to me? Tell me what you have done." So then the man told Peter about all the wonderful sermons that he had given, all these many years, taking care of his flock.

Peter said, "We didn't hear one of them up here. Tell me something else about yourself." "Oh," he said, "I did all kinds of wonderful works for the city." And he said, "I not only gave these sermons, but I also really took care of the flock. You know, I was always there when they were sick and so forth." Peter said, "Well, we did not see any of that going on either."

By this time the man was really frustrated, because here were all these wonderful works that he did and he was not even recognized. His works were not recognized. His sermons were not recognized. And so, with a great sigh, he turned to walk away, sure that he was consigned to hell.

But as he turned, Peter reached out and he said, "Hey, weren't you the fellow who fed the sparrows?" And he said, "Yeah, what does that have to do with this?" And he said "Well, come on in. The Master wants to see you and thank you."

The story teaches us something: that great services only reveal our capacities for our talents and our application of our gifts from God, but small services illustrate the depth and the range of our sanctification.

Undoubtedly, the way that God has most effectively used animals is in illustration of human characteristics. In some cases, the association with human personality is subtle and gentle, but in other cases the characteristic is so strongly drawn as to be a caricature. We are going to look at some of these as the sermon comes to a close here.

I am going to begin with one that we are very familiar with so that you understand the principle that is involved here, and that maybe it will prove to be something that you can look into. When you run across an animal named in the Bible, you have to question, "Why did God use that animal to illustrate this? Is there something that I can learn about me? About my character? About my personality? And if He used that animal, what is there about that animal that can give me wisdom?"

The first one we are going to look at is in Proverbs 6.

Proverbs 6:6-9 Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise [Job 12. Learn from the animals. Ask them questions. Listen to their response.], which, having no captain, overseer, or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest. How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep?

And on it goes. Here is an insect that shows many desirable traits which should be emulated. We have a saying, "busy as a bee." But a bee is much harder to observe and, besides, one might get stung while they are watching.

"Consider her ways and be wise." Look at the lessons here. The ant is self-motivated—"which having no captain"—no one has to force it to go to work. Each ant strenuously pursues its own duties in a disciplined, organized way. They take care of matters when they need taking care of, without procrastination. They do not put it off until the next day. When the time comes to do it, they do it.

There is no putting it off. Not like the sluggard who says, "Aw, there's a lion in the street. It's cold outside. It's so comfortable here. It can wait until tomorrow. There's no rush. There's no reason why I have to do it now." Nobody has to beat the ant with a whip. When the ant sees a job that needs to be done, it does it.

In addition to that, they are a diligent, social insect. That is important. Just as we are social (we are not insects, but we are social), they are concerned about the welfare of the colony. And in addition to this, if you watch them, they devote the utmost of care to their young. The amazing thing about all this is that they do it without a leader.

The overall lesson of the ant is for us to avoid indolence. The lazy person falls into poverty. It matters not whether the indolence is expressed in physical or spiritual areas, indolence will not produce prosperity. God is saying, if you watch the ant, the wisdom will be that prosperity is not the result of wishes, but of work.

There is an additional lesson and it is this: the indolent person may not actually destroy, but if he refuses to create wealth, he is just like the person who does destroy! Not producing has the same effect as demolishing something if one leaves something undone that should have been done.

What this means spiritually and socially is that there is no such thing as standing still. Please get the point here. Have you ever seen an ant stand still? They are always on the move. I wonder if they sleep. There is no such thing as standing still. If one is

standing still, one is in reality going backwards. That is a hard thing to grasp, because time is going on. Time waits for no one. And if we are "standing still," we are actually losing ground.

Now please understand that the action, the work, does not have to be desperate. It only needs to be consistent, diligent, and disciplined. God is not asking for what we cannot do. He only wants us to keep at it and be consistent, diligent, and disciplined.

There is a lot of wisdom there, just from a little bug. God created those characteristics in that little bug so that we would learn what He respects in a human being. That pleases Him. Please remember it does not have to be desperate. We just need to be consistent and keep at it.

Psalm 140 is about the effects of slander, the effects of gossip.

Psalm 140:3 They sharpen their tongues like a serpent; the poison of asps is under their lips . . .

God puts several animals together here because you will see them used with various names, but they all belong to the same basic families: the adder, the asp, the cockatrice, and then (from the snake family) the viper. All four of these are used to illustrate one human trait.

The theme of this psalm is the malicious intrigue of slanderous gossip. What we need to understand is this: that none of these animals' bites (whether adder, asp, cockatrice, or viper), are necessarily lethal. In other words, it does not always kill, but it is always poisonous.

It is always poisonous and it brings with it (Just think if you were bitten by an adder or an asp. What would immediately rush through your mind?)—anguish! "Oh, no!" Fear! "I'm going to die!" Pain! "It burns like crazy!" Sometimes what occurs is partial paralysis of where the bite occurs. Sometimes the people recover from that paralysis and sometimes they do not. We are not talking about something that necessarily brings death, but it always has a very painful effect.

What happens when a person's reputation begins to be attacked through slanderous gossip? What happens when that person begins to hear about it? "Oh, no! What's happening to my reputation, my name? I worked so hard to build it up and now somebody is out there beginning to cut it down."

Now it may not be lethal. It may not destroy the person entirely. But all the while that is going on, that person is being infiltrated by a poison that is bringing him anguish and pain and bitterness, and you can believe me that it partially paralyzes that person from acting, too. In many cases their lives are pretty much devastated for quite a period of time until some repentance takes place.

Proverbs 23:32 adds that "wine is like an adder's sting." And what it adds to the meaning is that it is something whose effects sneaks up on a person and destroys their ability to function effectively. The Bible illustrates an adder's bite as being similar to the effect of gossip.

This is a nice proverb:

Proverbs 5:19-20 As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love. For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, and be embraced in the arms of a seductress?

He is talking about the wife of our youth. If you have the King James Version, rather than using "a deer" it will probably use "a hind" or "a hart." The hind is the female and the hart is the male of the deer family. We have here two very interesting similes and they are used frequently. At least one time "hart" is used of Christ.

The hind is used to express much of what femininity is. Now think of a female deer. Think of Bambi. Think of Faline, the mother. She was full-grown. I think that they really portray this well in the Bambi movie.

Think of her: graceful, charm, beauty, almost delicate, timid, gentle, tender, vulnerable, certainly not violent, aggressive, or pushy. She is sure-footed, alert, watchful, and protective. It gives a pretty good picture, does it not, of what God expects that a mother should be.

Now let us look at the hart. Let us go to Song of Solomon, because here is where Christ is called a hart.

Song of Solomon 2:9 My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, he stands behind our wall; He is looking through the windows, gazing through the lattice.

Okay, let us think about Bambi's father, a great stag, and then later on, of Bambi himself. What do you see there? Dignity of bearing, stateliness, sure-footedness, swiftness to act, clear of sight, quick to hear. Again there is a very protective element in looking out for their social group.

In many ways, the deer appears to be a weak animal. But in the rutting season, stags will fight violently for the female deer. Now if the female deer represents the church, what kind of a picture does that put Christ in?—fighting valiantly with all His being for the sake of His church.

I never knew this until I was preparing this sermon, but deer are hard on snakes. They almost actually seek them out to destroy them with their hooves. Again, think of that in terms of Christ and Satan the serpent.

But there is a picture there of what (at least of part of what) God expects of the man: dignity of bearing (he is not silly), serious of demeanor, stately, sure-footed in his way; he does not go off the path, but he leads his family in the right direction. Clear of sight, he has a vision of the World Tomorrow and he is leading his family in that direction. He is quick to hear, to protect his family from heresy. He is quick to hear instruction that comes so that he can lead in the right way. It is not a complete picture, but there is enough there that you get the idea of what God intends.

Genesis 16:11-12 And the Angel of the Lord said to her: "Behold, you are with child, and you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has heard your affliction. He shall be a wild man; his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren."

You see that phrase, "He shall be a wild man"? It does not say that in the Hebrew. What it says in the Hebrew is that he will be "a wild ass of a man." Ishmael is compared to a wild ass. Now we are going to look to see what the Bible says about wild asses.

Job 24:5 Indeed, like wild donkeys in the desert, they go out to their work, searching for food. The wilderness yields food for them and for their children.

If we took the time to look at this in the context, he is talking about people who take advantage of others. He is talking about wicked people who prey on other people. Some

will move a landmark or two; some seize flocks violently. When he gets to verse 5, they are like wild asses.

Job 24:7-8 They spend the night naked, without clothing, and have no covering in the cold. They are wet with the showers . . .

He is still describing the animal. We will not go into that too far, but let us go to chapter 39 in Job.

Job 39:5-8 Who set the wild donkey free? Who loosed the bonds of the onager, whose home I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwelling? He scorns the tumult of the city; [Are you getting a picture of a Bedouin here?] He does not heed the shouts of the driver. [Why? Because he cannot be tamed.] The range of the mountains is his pasture, and he searches after every green thing.

Let us go back to Jeremiah 2, to pick up one more reference to them.

Jeremiah 2:24 A wild donkey used to the wilderness, that sniffs at the wind in her desire; in her time of mating, who can turn her away?

Go back to Ishmael. He is a wild ass of a man. That did not portend good for Ishmael. When God pronounced that upon Hagar's child, it was more like a curse than it was a blessing. Now what it indicates is a person who is promiscuous, indiscriminate, intractable, aimless, independent, stupidly and stubbornly wandering around with wild abandon, living life without goals or purpose, exploiting those who are weaker and living life at the expense of others—someone who simply cannot be tamed, domesticated, not a very social person at all, and not the kind of person that you would want to have as your neighbor.

I do not think that we will go any further with these. I was going to go on to the ostrich. The ostrich is a symbol of a mother who will not take care of her children. She just lets them grow up.

The fox is a weak creature that is stealthy. It is a creature that survives on cunning and craft. It is a subtle creature who rarely walks in a straight line for very long. It is a destroyer of innocent creatures. Thus, it depicts a flattering and fawning persecutor, a

cunning and subtle seducer that corrupts the simplicity that is in Christ, disturbs the order (You have heard of the fox in the henhouse. You know everything is in disorder.), creates confusion and disunity. A fox is a heretic.

How about a goat? It is a clean animal, acceptable to us to be used as a sacrifice and thus as a type of Christ. But it is a clean animal with quite a number of disagreeable qualities, as well as good ones. If a goat is put together with sheep, it will almost invariably become their leader. But that causes problems, because the goat is normally pretty foul-smelling, they are aggressive and of a contrary nature. And God uses it to depict hypocritical people among His people.

They are clean, but they do have problems. They are people who seem to love associating with the people of God, but they are really making a pretense of religion. They seem to have zeal. They are aggressive people. But, in reality, by their zeal they hurt many in the congregation through their pride, stubbornness, and aggressiveness.

They are people who are constantly restless and always, it seems, either involved in a serious sin or skirting the edge of the temptation to sin. They cannot seem to get one foot out of the world. They contribute very little to the church's well-being. They are clean. You know what Christ does in Matthew 25; He separates the goats away from the sheep.

The worm is a lowly creature, among the lowliest of creatures. But even though it is useful to mankind, the Bible depicts it as something that is vile and contemptible. Because what God does is He groups together not just the earthworms, but things like maggots as well. And they are just generally called "worms." It has no natural beauty. It can make no resistance to attack. It is easily squashed by people tramping on them, and they inhabit sometimes, the worst of places—dunghills. They are underground.

Christ, in Psalm 22:6, called Himself a worm. He did this while He was hanging on the stake and He was in an extremely debased state. All the sins of mankind had been put on Him, and all the foulness of those sins that were put on Him made Him into the worst, the most vile and contemptible of all God's creation: a worm. Probably, technically, He was referring to a maggot. Something that mankind would view with extreme contempt.

What I have given here is just the start. There are fifty-some more animals that you can look into. It would make a very interesting study for anyone who wants to take the time and effort to find the places in the Bible where God might actually describe some of these things like he did with the wild ass, so that we really do not have to look around

too much.

The chances of us ever seeing a wild ass are very remote because they tend to live out on the edge of the desert, out in the wilderness. They cannot be tamed. But even if somebody catches one, they are forever wild; they are independent. And we would never learn very much, except that God gives us, in His Word, a little bit about them.

There are many other animals, but there are resources that we can turn to and find out a great deal about them, and learn a great deal about ourselves. I think that it would make interesting and profitable study because of the insight that they give to our understanding of God's instruction as to what He wants us to be like, or what He wants us to avoid.

I hope that you found this a little bit of a relief from the heavy sermons that I have been giving to you lately and something that you can use that will be helpful to you in the future.