

# SMALL WONDERS

## Learn from the Little | #wisdom (Part 2)

Text: Proverbs 30:24-28

We began our study of Proverbs last week by exploring why it is so important for us to seek greater wisdom than we have. I touched on a few practical ways for us to do that and put out there for you a simple definition of wisdom. Wisdom, I said, is the capacity to see things as they really are, to understand how things happen or work, and to know what to do in response to those circumstances. Some of you liked the even simpler way that Gerhard Von Rad puts it: "Wisdom is becoming competent with regard to the realities of life."

Today, I want to further develop this concept by reflecting on a five-verse passage in Proverbs that names some places in our lives where wisdom is truly needed, and acknowledge my debt to Haddon Robinson for his helpful insight on this text. Hear the Word of God as it comes to us from Proverbs 30:24 -- "**Four things on earth are small, yet they are extremely wise** (Prov 30:24).

Now, let me pause right there and observe that this is a counter-cultural text, isn't it, especially given our fascination with everything BIG? From large vertically-integrated companies in business, to huge datasets in scientific research, to massive open online courses in education, to giant buildings and summer blockbusters, everybody's looking UP at the behemoth-sized stuff. But Proverbs teaches that, sometimes, the wisdom needed to make the best of life is found by looking DOWN at SMALL things.

Consider the ant, Proverbs says. **Ants are creatures of little strength...** They are among the tiniest beings on earth. They are so squashable, so vulnerable, **YET...** they have at least one attribute we ought to go to school on... **they store up their food in the summer** (Prov 30:25). When it is summer time, ants work very hard. They barely sleep. They are constantly on the move, scavenging and storing up food supplies. Why? Because they see things as they really are -- that food is in plentiful supply right NOW. Somehow, they understand how stuff works -- that winter will be a season when moving around or finding food will be hard. They will only have in winter what they manage to store up now. And so, they do the right thing in response. They collect lots of food and fill their storehouse with it.

Contrast the ant with the proverbial grasshopper. You know that story, don't you? You've heard how the grasshopper spends the summer fiddling around and then wonders why, when the winter comes, he is so hungry. The Bible has a word for a creature like this. It uses this word on 64 separate occasions, and 41 times in the Book of Proverbs alone. The word is "**Fool.**" A fool might be a very nice and entertaining creature. A fool might be an otherwise bright or well-educated person. But, somehow, a fool doesn't see things as they are, or grasp how stuff works, or do the appropriate thing when it is the season to do it. Fools frequently repeat their mistakes, failing to learn from experience. Fools tend to blame others for their problems or expect others to bail them out. Do you know people like that? Ever been a person like that?

Don't be a grasshopper, the Bible teaches; be an ant. Ants know what season they are in. So, I suppose the question for each of us is: "Do I know what season I am in?" Am I doing now with my family, my friends, my finances, my physical or spiritual health what I won't be able to do later? What are the shared experiences, the deep relationships, the conferral of values, the scriptural truths, the generous contributions, the true treasures on earth or in heaven that I am storing up? Because here's a wise word for us all: Winter IS coming.

Or, learn from the wisdom of the hyrax, Proverbs says. **Hyraxes are creatures of little power, yet they make their home in the crags** (Prov 30:26). Now, I confess that this verse stumped me at first, largely because I had no idea what a hyrax even was! Sounds like a mythical creature found only in Dr. Seuss or Harry Potter books. I did a little digging, however, and discovered that in the ancient world, hyrax was the word used for a "rock badger." They are these pint-sized prairie dog creatures whose grayish coat helps them blend in well with the rocky hills that are their natural habitat, and blending is especially good for them because another word for hyrax, at least in the dialect of wolves, coyotes, and lions is "tasty."

And, so, every mature hyrax had figured out this one thing: "If I want to remain secure, I need to stay close to the rock. No matter how muscular, speedy, or experienced I am, I'm a fool to wander far from the rock." Here's the takeaway: Hyraxes know where their security is found. Do you? Sooner or later, every wise person realizes that no matter how gifted they are, they can't outrun death. They will not earn salvation by climbing to the moral mountaintop. But the wise ones realize that though they have little power, there is a place they can make their home. An old hymn puts it well: "Rock of ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee... Let the water and the blood, From Thy riven side which flowed, Be of sin the double cure, Cleanse me from its guilt and pow'r." If you've never done it before, say to God right now: "I am coming home to you, Father. I am laying myself down in the cleft of the Rock. Thank you, Jesus, that in you, I am now and always secure."

Ants know what season they are in. Hyraxes know where their security is found. But what about the third small creature? Verse 27 reads: **Locusts have no king, yet they advance together in ranks** (Prov 30:27). It's a fascinating observation, if you think about it. A locust is not a particularly formidable creature on its own. If you find one, you can easily step on it or pull off its wings. I'm not recommending that, just saying that this is how vulnerable a single locust is. But when locusts advance together in ranks, as one army, they form a force that is unstoppable. The desert locust (found in the Middle East and Africa) has been known to form a swarm up to 460 square miles in size and to travel together up to 8000 miles. When it descends to feed, the swarm can pack up to 80 million locusts into less than half a square mile, consuming absolutely every plant in its path.

As Proverbs says, locusts don't have a king to organize them, but by instinct Locusts know the power of community. Working together, they can overrun and conquer kingdoms. I'm told of a man who visited an asylum for the criminally insane and was shocked to discover that there were only three guards overseeing 100 inmates. "Aren't you afraid that the inmates will unite, overcome you, and escape?" the man asked. "Not

at all," said the guard, "Lunatics never unite." Locusts do. Christians should. Being bound together regularly with other believers is the secret to the power of the Christian life. If we're not making it a priority to be in corporate worship weekly, or to grow our faith in a group, or to use our gifts on a ministry or mission team... if we think we can stand up to the forces of this world or influence it substantially all by ourselves... then we don't have the good sense of a bug.

There's a lot we can learn from the small wonders God has created. Ants know what season they are in. Hyraxes know where their security is found. Locusts know the power of community. And finally, there is the lesson of the lizard. **A lizard can be caught with the hand, yet it is found in kings' palaces.** Have you ever caught a lizard in your hand? Vacationing in Bermuda as a boy I used to catch lizards all the time. That cute gecko from Geico aside, most lizards are pretty creepy creatures. They've got these bulbous eyes and sticky fingers and scaly or slimy bodies. They move in this herky-jerky way that makes you want them OUT of your hand, never to be picked up again. And yet, the Bible tells us, the lizard is found in the palace of the king.

There is a theological word for this incongruity. The word is "grace." Lizards know the gift of grace. Ugly and awkward as they are, they get to walk the halls of majesty and scamper around the throne. Do you realize that is true of the people around you too? It's even true of you and me. A lot of us aren't much to look at. On the outside or the inside, we've got our lizard-like aspects. But the amazing grace is that we've been forgiven of that. We've been allowed into the King's presence. God actually delights in us. And, as C.S. Lewis observes, one day He is going to transform us into beings so beautiful that those who see us will be tempted to fall down in worship. How might you treat differently the lizards in your world, if you really believed that this was their destiny? How might you walk from here if you really believed it was yours?

As we come to the King's Table today, make a personal commitment to live out the lessons these small creatures teach us. Like the ant, decide that you will do what this season commends, because winter is coming. Like the hyrax, ground your security in God. Like the locust, resolve to do your life in community. And, like the lizard, take joy in the grace that surrounds your life. For these things aren't just good ideas. Living like this is the way of **wisdom**.