

THE ANTS VERSUS THE LAZYBONES!

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If you will think back to some of the sermons you have heard in the past, you probably will remember that the men who delivered those sermons sometimes used illustrations to get their points across. For example, one preacher might have told a story about something that had happened to him personally. Another preacher may have related an account about something that had happened to someone he knew. Or, perhaps a preacher used a fictional story to help people better understand his message. It is not unusual for speakers or writers to use various types of illustrations to clarify or emphasize what they are saying. In fact, good speakers and writers do such things quite often.

It should not surprise us to learn, then, that the Bible writers did exactly the same thing. In fact, they frequently used a variety of illustrations to help them get across the important points they were making. For example, Old Testament prophets sometimes used common, everyday items to teach people. That is exactly what Elijah did in 1 Kings 18 when he mocked the false prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, and asked them if Baal was unable to ignite their altar because he was on a long journey or because he was too busy using the bathroom. Or, consider how Christ used parables to teach people. In those parables, Jesus talked about such things as a shepherd finding a lost sheep, a wayward son who finally returned to his father, the different attitudes of two men who went to the temple to pray, and so on. Good speakers and writers commonly strengthen their points through the use of appropriate illustrations.

But it is interesting to note that in the Bible, some of the most fascinating illustrations come from **nature**—or, to be more specific, they come from **animals** found in nature. For instance, in Proverbs 6:6-11 Solomon wrote:

“Go to the ant, you lazybones; consider its ways, and be wise. Without having any chief or officer or ruler, it prepares its food in summer and gathers its sustenance in harvest. How long will you lie there, O lazybones? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want, like an armed warrior.”

It is amazing, is it not, that King Solomon would use a creature as seemingly insignificant as an **ant** to make such an important point about how we are to be wise, work hard, and get our priorities in life straight? Yet that is **exactly** what he did. Solomon said that if we want to be truly wise, then we will take a long, hard look at the lowly ant and “consider its ways.” So what, specifically, did Solomon want us to learn from the humble ant?

First, he wanted us to notice that it is a very hard worker. Ants do not require any “chief, or officer, or ruler” to force them to carry out their jobs. They “just do them.” They gather food, carry it to their burrows, and store it away for times when food will be scarce. They do not waste time sleeping too much.

Nor are they content to sit back and think that they have “done enough.” Instead, they “gather sustenance in harvest.” In other words, there is no such thing as a “lazy ant.” It is not by accident that scientists refer to most of the ants in a colony as “worker ants”—because that is exactly what they are: **workers!**

But what was Solomon’s point when he wrote, “Go to the ant, you lazybones; consider its ways, and be wise. How long will you lie there, O lazybones? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber”? First, Solomon was saying that there is **never** a time when God’s people can afford to be lazy **because there is *always* much work to do**. In another book of the Bible that Solomon wrote, he said, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going” (Ecclesiastes 9:10). Our time on Earth is short, and we need to be busy working for the Lord.

Second, Solomon was teaching us that we have a God-given responsibility to support ourselves and to provide for the needs of our families so that poverty will not “come upon us like a robber.” In the New Testament, the apostle Paul made exactly the same point when he wrote in 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, “If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.... We command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that people work in quietness and eat their own bread.” **God’s people should be *workers*, not *slackers!***

Third, when Solomon said of the tiny ant, “Consider its ways and be wise,” he also reminded us of the fact that ants are social insects—which means that **they work together as a team**. Each ant has a task to perform, and goes about performing that task to the best of its ability for the good of the whole colony. There are soldier ants, worker ants, caretaker ants, and so on—and each one looks out for the others. This is the same principle that Paul discussed in Ephesians 4:11-13 when he said that Christ “gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” Ants are hard workers whose goal is a strong, unified family unit. Should that not be our goal as Christians as well?

In 1 Timothy 6:17-19, Paul told Timothy to encourage Christians to “do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (1 Timothy 6:17-19). Ants work just to store up food. Our work as Christians, however, has a much loftier goal—being able to “store up a good foundation” so that we can “lay hold on eternal life.” Plus, we are not to be concerned only about ourselves or our own families, but instead we are to “preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Ants are not made “in the image and likeness of God” (Genesis 1:26)—**but we are!** No wonder Solomon wanted us to “be wise.” Unlike the lowly ant, we will have much for which to answer on the Day of Judgment, will we not?