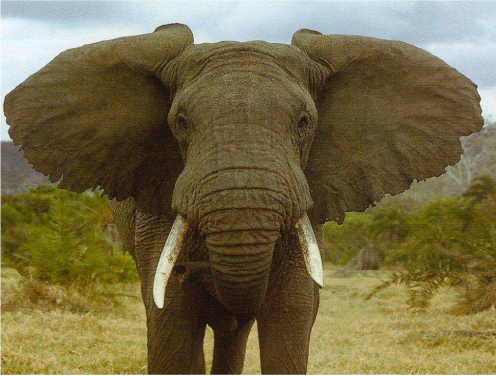


Spiritual Lessons from Nature's World Part IV



The Elephant

Intro: Elephants are fascinating creatures and most people love to look at them and watch them in zoos, circuses, or in the wild, that is unless you are plagued with Pachydermophobia. However what is there that we can learn from this largest of all land mammals?

They are large: Males can weigh up to 15,000 pounds; and females can weigh up to 8,000 pounds

They are wonderfully made The elephants trunk is the most sensitive part of the body with upwards of about **100,000 muscles** in it and it holds about 4 liters of water. Elephants cannot run or jump but instead they just shuffle along when in a hurry.

Elephants ears and feet are both like fingerprints that can be used to recognize them. The ears are also their radiators. They use them to cool off because of the large blood vessels that lie close to the skin so that when they are fanned, the air cools the blood. But they are also used to warn of danger.

Elephants have up to six sets of molars that keep moving forward as the old ones wear out from chewing on rough bark and when the last set is worn out the elephant dies because they can no longer eat. As an elephant only digests some 40 percent of what it eats, it needs tremendous amounts of vegetation (approximately 5 percent of its body weight per day) and about 30 to 50 gallons of water.

They are complex creatures even to the point of mourning. The complex nature of elephant social structure is extended into the mourning behavior for deceased companions. When elephants come to a sick and dying elephant they have been known to try and lift the fallen one in hopes it can go on. When they come across deceased remains of other elephants, a silent pause is taken, as the remains are touched with their trunks. Occasionally tusks or bones are carried with them, as the herd continues to travel.

They also spend a lot of time in the mud to cool off and cover their skin with water and mud to keep insects off. Did you ever wonder how an elephant could walk in the deep mud without getting stuck since they are so big? This is because, as they walk and their foot is at the bottom of the step it expands from its weight. When it picks up its foot to step, the foot and leg get smaller and it comes out of the mud much easier, thus they don't get stuck.

Lets look at, and think about some possible spiritual applications from this special animal

A. **From their size**, lets learn from them not to use our size or position in the church family or the church as a way of control over others.

James 4:6 and I Peter 5:5 both warn us that "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

B. **From their ears**, lets remember to avoid anger by flapping our ears instead of our tongue and in so doing we can cool off before others are hurt

Lets take the challenge of Ephesians 4:31 instead. *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.*

C. From their food consumption and appetite needs, remember to develop a huge appetite for service in the kingdom.

I am reminded of this scripture in Matthew 9:37,38 *"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."*

D. From their complex idea of their mourning remember to Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

And when the burdens of our fellowman seem to get them down don't forget Galatians 6:2 *Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.*

E. From their habit of **walking in the mud** lets remember that, while the elephant can walk in the mud and spend a lot of time there we need to do just the opposite.

Lets avoid wallowing in the muddy bogs of sin, tense and trying relationships, the muddy mess of discouragement, pride, procrastination and finely the mud of anger

So lets not forget the lesson about the mud. Lets pick up our feet and take the pressure off our walk and we may make it out of some sticky situations much easier.



The Koala or pouched bear'.

KOALAS look like teddy bears, but they are not even related to bears. Like the kangaroo, the koala is a marsupial. Koalas are found only on the east coast of Australia. Current population estimates suggest the figure could be anywhere between 40,000 and 100,000. These bundles of fur weigh about 30 pounds and on average grow to be 2 feet tall and live to an average of 13-18 years.

Koalas live in eastern Australia, where the eucalyptus trees they love are most plentiful. In fact, they rarely leave these trees. During the day they doze, tucked into forks or nooks in the trees, sleeping for up to 18 hours.

Eucalyptus leaves are poisonous to most animals, but koalas have a special digestion system that breaks down fibers and cleans out the poison. Each animal eats a tremendous amount for its size will eat about three pounds of eucalyptus leaves a day, reaping an added benefit from his diet. The strong-smelling oils in the leaves give the koala a rather unpleasant odor that keeps fleas and parasites out of his beautiful soft fur.

A newborn koala is only the size of a jelly bean thus needing a lot of protection to help them get started in life Completely blind at birth, he crawls into his mother's pouch to drink her milk and grow. The mother raises her Joey by herself. She teaches him, most importantly, to choose the right trees for feeding. Just as the Joey depends solely on his mother for a good start in life, so we have the promise that we can rely on our heavenly Father, who has promised that He will meet all our needs. Jesus said, in John 15:5 *"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing"*

Secondly, Koalas are slow moving and the spiritual lesson I see is we should be slow moving before jumping on any band wagon that comes along by way of the world. They are the only non-primate with distinct and unique fingerprints. Here I do not think so much of the Koala as I do about us **and a way of being spiritually encouraged**. We can have God's finger prints on our

lives as he holds us up and helps us grow. Isaiah 49:16 says *Behold I have inscribed you on the palm of my hand.* As Brian Bell notes, Inscribed you - not just your name...**but you!** Your person, your image, your case, your circumstances, your sins, your temptations, your weaknesses, your wants, your works, all your concerns. God says I have them engraved there!

Now one last spiritual thought from this special creature. Koalas are generally regarded as being very quiet animals as they are seldom heard to utter any sound as they sit in their tree feeding. We need to be still once in a while. Sometimes as believers we are quick to let our opinions be known but we seldom stop to think of the hurt our harsh words can cause in another person's life.

Job 40:4 says "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to Thee? I lay my hand on my mouth. Like the koala we sometime need to watch our mouths remembering instead, who **we** are, how **we** act, and how **we** like to be treated and talked to. Then go and do likewise



The Peacock

You have all probably heard them. I am sure you have seen them. The peacock is a beautiful bird to look at but he does have one thing that, **for me at least**, really detracts from his beauty, that is his voice. His terrible voice, to me, detracts from his beauty and I wonder if sometimes our voice detracts from our true beauty as children of the Lord?

Speaking of the beauty and this bird, lets think a moment about the peacock to get us started. The peacock actually belongs to the pheasant family. They live an average of about 15 years but can live to be 25 years or more. These birds can become stressed and their stress level actually affects their egg laying capabilities. The peacock requires about 32% protein so they often eat cat food, white bread, cheese, grains and have even been known to eat Styrofoam.

They are a beautiful bird with a wingspread of up to 6 feet. The male's tail feathers are the most brilliant of about any bird living. When he fans his tail out to attract a mate, he actually shuffles his tail feathers in order for them to lay smoothly and evenly. The peacock, because of its tail, is sometimes known as the bird with one hundred eyes.

Peacocks are actually pretty worthless for anything except for show. They can hardly fly, generally only about twenty feet before crash landing. They would be defenseless if attacked and they are so dumb that over ninety percent their young starve to death right in front of food.

From the peacock I would like to learn, or think about, some spiritual applications. **Our words or voices, and our tails feathers.** Like I said earlier, no matter how beautiful he might be, his raucous, loud, and jarring voice is a major distraction. What is there about our voices and tail feathers that get us into trouble making us unlovely, and what can we do to keep this from happening. First,

I. Our voices

A. We sometimes sow seeds of discord and strife with our mouths.

Proverbs 6:16-19 does say however *There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers.* The Lord hates strife among the brethren and yet we spread that very thing, if we use words that grate on others ears and hearts.

Ephesians 4:29 reminds us to, *Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.* So if our voices and words can get us into trouble spiritually, what can we do to change this?

B. How to sow seeds of growth and health

Instead of using our voice to grate on another person, or in a situation, lets use words that help and heal. Lets use words of hope, encouragement, and peace **rather than** words of defeat, discouragement, and confusion.

Ephesians 4:31, 32 reminds us to *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

So lets remember when it comes to our voices and words to be careful. Be careful what we say and how we say it Colossians 4:6 *Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.* In other words when it come to our speech lets remember, be careful to whom we say it, **what we say**, and about whom

we say it. And above all be careful why we say it. Do we say it to make ourselves look good, or do we say it to help another in their quest of becoming good

II. Our tail feathers

Most of you are probably familiar with the phrase "proud as a peacock." But is pride really good for our tail feathers? Augustine noted that, *It was pride that changed angels into devils; it is humility that makes men as angels.* Pride is not the best thing we can express is it??

Instead lets remember and practice looking out for others before ourselves. Philippians 2:3,4 *Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.*

Secondly if you are in the mood to strut your tail feathers, remember to strut another's good points and not your own. Proverbs 27:2 *Don't praise yourself. Let someone else do it. Let the praise come from a stranger and not from your own mouth.*

Like the peacock we are to be beautiful and be a good advertisement for the Lord. A peacock is a graceful looking bird. Let us be graceful in our dealing with others

- Graceful with believers to help them grow.
- Graceful with unbelievers to win them to the one who can provide eternal life and give them real beauty in a dark and dismal world.

Sometimes we become proud and spread out our tail feathers and when we mix that with a bad mouth we often mess things up. We are often a lot like the peacock, in that we can put on a beautiful display for all to see, but we need to be sure that our voice and inner beauty doesn't detract from the beauty we are trying to display. Lets be beautiful in both word and deed, and even tail feathers!

The next time we are tempted to spread our tail feathers to try and look important in the church, lets stop and think about how annoying we actually might be to those who are around us.

Well again I trust that these simple lessons are ones that will help us grow in our walk and work in our personal live, as well as the life of our church