

What Animals Teach Us (Selected Examples)

Note: The Bible uses animals to teach us in several ways: as word pictures of human traits and as living proverbs by their characteristics and actions. The following are a few we can learn from. Add your own insights to those listed below, and look for other examples

"But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this" (Job 12:7-9)

- o Each of these realms (air, land, sea) teaches of God's sovereignty and purpose
- o These lessons of God are all around us if we would just look for them

"Here is the fate God allots to the wicked,...The house he builds is like a moth's cocoon, like a hut made by a watchman. He lies down wealthy, but will do so no more; when he opens his eyes, all is gone" (Job 27:13,18-19)

- o Just as the caterpillar dies and a moth results, so a man in his wealth, when he dies is changed forever
- o Though a cocoon provides security for awhile, it will not forestall the inevitable

"The wings of the ostrich flap joyfully, but they cannot compare with pinions and feathers of the stork. She lays her eggs on the ground and lets them warm in the sand, unmindful that a foot may crush them, that some wild animal may trample them. She treats her young harshly, as if they were not hers; she cares not that her labor was in vain, for God did not endow her with wisdom or give her a share of good sense. Yet when she spreads her feathers to run, she laughs at horse and rider" (Job 39:13-18)

- o Each animal is gifted in its own unique ways, just as men have different talents and abilities
- o Unless God gives us wisdom, we also would be laughable in many of our traits or pursuits
- o Even an animal with so many ridiculous traits and obvious lack of wisdom can have its own dignity

"My son, if you have put up security for your neighbor,...Allow no sleep to your eyes, no slumber to your eyelids. Free yourself, like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, like a bird from the snare of the fowler" (Prov 6:1,4-5)

- o Indebtedness to others is a trap, and is to be avoided and resisted just as an animal fights for freedom
- o Even if caught, the gazelle and bird still have a possibility of freedom and do not give up
- o It is never too late to continue to struggle (free oneself) - God may yet give deliverance

"Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest" (Prov 6:6-8)

- o Industry, planning, initiative are obviously good traits, and will be rewarded at the proper time
- o If we won't work when we are supposed to, we will not eat

"With persuasive words she lead him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk. All at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose till an arrow pierces his liver, like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it will cost him his life" (Prov 7:21-23)

- o Be wary and cautious, do not be lead astray, small sins can easily grow into destructive ones
- o Look ahead at the consequences of our decisions, unlike animals we can anticipate them
- o A fool, no matter how talented, loses the advantage of his skills when he allows himself to be enticed

"A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel" (Prov 12:10)

- o A righteous man has a proper heart in caring for his animal - a concern for its welfare
- o A wicked man taking care of an animals needs, does so only if it is for his own benefit

"Where there are no ox, the manger is empty, but from the strength of an ox comes an abundant harvest" (Prov 14:4)

- o God provides animals to partner with, and benefit man to increase his productivity
- o Interdependence and use of wisdom and strength brings great yield

"Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than a fool in his folly" (Prov 17:12)

- o As frightening as a mother bear can be, it is not as dangerous as a foolish man
- o Better to face known physical threats than a deceptive, sinful one

"A king's rage is like the roar of a lion, but his favor is like dew on the grass" (Prov 19:12; 20:2)

- o Just as the king of beasts loudly displays his displeasure, so does a king's rage warn all around him
- o As a lion's roar instills fear the the weak, so a king's anger terrifies this subjects

"Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper" (Prov 23:31-32; Matt 3:7)

- o Fascination (or craving) of something can lead to ones own destruction, beware of appearances
- o Just like playing with a snake may be enjoyable for awhile, so with sin, in the end you will be bitten

"A whip for the horse, a halter for the donkey, and a rod for the backs of fools" (Prov 26:3)

- o Just as dumb animals need to be controlled, corrected and trained, a fool needs appropriate persuasion
- o Just as working animals are punished if not obedient, so will we if not diligent (foolish) in our duties

"Like one who seizes a dog by the ears is a passer-by who meddles in a quarrel not his own" (Prov 26:17)

- o Just as a dog's natural reaction to being seized by the ears is to attack the grabber, so others turn and attack an unwelcome intruder in a personal affair

"The leech has two daughters, 'Give! Give!' they cry" (Prov 30:15)

- o Just as the offspring of a leech thirsts after blood and are never satisfied, so a selfish man raises offspring that want for themselves only

"There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas; and the way of a man with a maiden" (Prov 30:18-19)

- o Just as eagles can't control the wind but use it to their advantage, so do ships on the seas
- o Snakes are shrewd, cunning, enticing, powerful and deadly - such as an immoral man
- o Each also speaks to the easy mastery of the element they are familiar with (wind, rock, sea, maiden)
- o Each illustrates truths that take deep concentration to understand

"Four things on earth are small, yet they are extremely wise: Ants are creatures of little strength, yet they store up their food in the summer; coney are creatures of little power, yet they make their home in the crags; locusts have no king, yet they advance together in ranks; a lizard can be caught with the hand, yet it is found in kings' palaces" (Prov 30:24-28)

- o Even the weak (ants) can accomplish much by diligence and working over a long time (provision)
- o Coneys adapt themselves to rugged crags, not changing them, but letting it work for them (sanctuary)
- o Much can be done with no leader and a common purpose (brings order) - both good or destructive
- o Even though we ourselves may be weak (like a lizard), we may accompany the mighty (audacity)
- o Power and might do not necessarily equate to wisdom

"There are three things that are stately in their stride, four that move with stately bearing: a lion, mighty among beasts, who retreats before nothing; a strutting rooster, a he-goat, and a king with his army around him" (Prov 30:29-31)

- o With great position (amongst ones own community) comes great presence and appearance
- o Power breeds a manner of carrying oneself
- o Even among animals there is a pre-eminence that shows itself within its arena

"Do not give to dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet and then turn and tear you to pieces" (Matt 7:6)

- o Dogs and swine cannot differentiate the noble from the profane, so too ungodly men
- o Pick your fights well, so that you are not destroyed

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (Matt 7:15)

- o Appearance is not everything, the fruit of a person's life reflects the inner man
- o Like vicious wolves, false prophets will try and destroy you

"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Matt 8:20)

- o Each animal has a home to rest, peculiar to its need, but Christ's home is not in this world

"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt 9:36; 10:5)

- o Sheep are defenseless and aimless without protection and a leader, just like we are without Christ

"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matt 10:16)

- o Just as sheep stand no chance before wolves, we have no chance in the world without God's protection
- o Snakes know their surroundings and trust no one, doves do not inflict injury or entertain harm to others

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father...So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (Matt 10:29; 12:11-12)

- o Even if birds are of little value to men, they exist for reasons known to God and according to his will
- o If birds are of importance to God, how much more so His children?

"Again I tell you the truth, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matt 19:24)

- o Just as it is obvious a camel is physically incapable of passing through a needle, so a man's riches can be an obvious stumbling block to his seeking God's kingdom
- o It is impossible for a man to buy his way into heaven

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees,...You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel" (Matt 23:24)

- o Don't be self righteous over the insignificant and ignore our own major sins (camels were unclean!)
- o Though all things exist for a purpose, we must distinguish between the minor and crucial
- o This major contrast illustrates the depth of the blindness of our own sin

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing" (Matt 23:37)

- o Even young chicks have the sense to seek their mother's protection, unlike the unwise and unregenerate
- o As a hen desires her chicks to be safe, so God desires that none should perish and gathers to Himself those that are His

"Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain" (1 Cor 6:6; 1 Tim 5:18; Deut 25:4)

- o Just as it is right for an animal to share in the product of its labor, so should men benefit from theirs
- o Just as muzzling an ox makes its work futile for itself, so hampering a man from benefitting from his labor is cruel to him

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8)

- o A lion is unpredictable in when and where he may strike, so be prepared and vigilant at all times
- o A lion after prey is powerful and overwhelming if we are not adequately equipped to fight him

"But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish" (2 Peter 2:12)

- o The hostile, unregenerate, non-elect are driven by their own selfish desires and like brute beasts are irrational and without restraint - they serve God's purpose then perish

"Of them the proverbs are true: 'A dog returns to its vomit,' and, 'A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.'" (2 Peter 2:22; Prov 26:11)

- o Just as a dog and sow cannot change their own natures, so a man cannot change his
- o Just as animals will not strive for noble purposes but will seek their own lowest level, so a man left to himself will become more depraved