

Truths from the Tiniest of Teachers

In Living Color, Part 6

Selected Scripture

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

Creation points to the glory of God and reminds us that God has a perfect design for our lives.

Discussion Points:

Creation declares amazing truths about our creative God.

- When we look at the world around us, how does Creation deepen our appreciation for our creative God?
- Do we make too much of creation? Or too little? What is the connection between the handiwork and the hand of God?
- Did God create the honeybee or the flower first? Why?

The common ant proclaims the wisdom of God.

- Why do you think humanity requires so much supervision and oversight in our workplaces?
- What is our driving motivation to get up in the morning and go to work?
- How can something simple, like changing diapers, bring lasting fruit and glory to God?
- Do you ever get frustrated when it seems like your hard work isn't accomplishing much? What is the relationship between persevering and trusting in God?

The ant demonstrates divinely created design in the body of Christ.

- What are some of the spiritual gifts and roles God gives to the church?
- Does God emphasize the gift or the use of the gift?
- What gifts has God given you to serve the body of Christ? How are you using them now?
- Do you ever feel like you are not important in the grand scheme of things? How does the ant encourage you?

Discussion Guide Cont.

Gospel Connection:

God uses humble beginnings and overlooked servants to proclaim his wisdom. His ways are much higher than our ways and his creation points to this fact. The same God who created a tiny scavenger sent his Son to die a humiliating death on a cross to ransom a people for himself. God is so gracious that every creature, big or small, has a purpose in his grand design. We praise Jesus for giving meaning and hope for our lives. We thank him for reconciling us to God and allowing us to freely live out the lives that we were meant to live.

Practical Implications:

Think: Do you ever think that you are unimportant to God's task? Do Mondays feel dreary to you rather than full of hope?

Pray: Ask God to remind you of the purpose you have in Christ. Ask him to strengthen your heart, your head, and your hands to work hard for the Lord and not for man.

Do: Work hard that others may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

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Selected Scripture

A revival which would sweep through the early American colonies during the 1700s, became known as the Great Awakening.

One of the leading pastors in that movement by the name of Jonathan Edwards shaped the movement with his prolific writing and powerful preaching.

In his most famous sermon, Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God, Edwards used the imagery of a spider hanging from its web by a single strand, to illustrate an unbelieving soul hanging by a slender thread, over the mouth of Hell. He urged the unbeliever not to trust that flimsy thread, but run to the mercy of God instead and trust in Him for salvation.

That analogy of sinners trusting in spider webs wasn't a throw-away analogy. Jonathan Edwards had spent hours and hours studying spiders as they swung from tree branches to shrubs in order to spin their webs.

As we began this series of studies where we've added binoculars to our Bibles, a man in our congregation loaned me a book by Jonathan Edwards entitled, Basic Writings.

In it, Jonathan Edwards spent pages at a time commenting on the work of spiders and the amazing art of spider webs; it included his own drawings of different kinds of strands used in the spider web. He wrote, "I wanted to find out the mysteries of these astonishing works."ⁱ

That's a clue about him in that statement by the way; how many of us have seen a spider web and thought – man, what an astonishing marvel. And that's because we saw it, but we didn't really look at it . . . long enough to marvel at it.

In this little book I was loaned, Edwards wrote extensively on subjects ranging from the spider to flying insects to the colors of the rainbow.

All of nature was a classroom where the gospel could be illustrated and the Christian edified and the unbeliever warned and the glory of Creator God revealed.

I wanted to share this paragraph with you today. In his personal testimony, following his conversion Jonathan Edwards walked around in a nearby pasture to contemplate the gospel and he would later write;

As I was walking there, and looking upon the sky and clouds, there came into my mind a sweet sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God. After this [my conversion] the appearance of everything was altered; there seemed to be divine glory in almost everything; God's excellency, His wisdom, His purity and love, seemed to appear in everything; in the sun, moon and stars; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water and all of nature . . . to see the lightning play and hear the majestic voice of God's thunder, leads me to sweet contemplations of my great and glorious God; oftentimes I will sing in a low voice my thoughts to my Creator and Redeemer.

—Jonathan Edwardsⁱⁱ

He wasn't just looking . . . he was seeing, listening, savoring, learning, applying, living, singing – ultimately – worshipping his Creator and Redeemer.

One of our problems as Christians is not that we make too much of nature – our problem is that we make too little of it. And we are not the better for it.

In our last session, we observed how the suffering of Job and the silence of God ended with a personal tour by God as he showed Job the largest animals He'd ever created – the Leviathan in the sea and the Dinosaur on the land.

The sight of those massive creatures . . . and God's personal description of them and His

control over them, brought Job back from hopelessness to hope.

One author made this statement for any despairing or lonely or discouraged believer, that –

When we observe the Creator’s handiwork, we often begin to feel, once again, the touch of the Creator’s hand.

—David Atkinsonⁱⁱⁱ

In our last session we took a look at the largest creature God put on the planet and the hope that brought back to Job.

Today, I want to change directions and look at some of the tiniest creatures God put on the planet – and these aren’t extinct . . . in fact, scientists are still discovering some pretty amazing things about them.

I want to briefly comment first on the honeybee . . . and also admit to you that another church leader, Charles Spurgeon, the great pastor/communicator from the 19th century preached many sermons on the subject of the honey-bee and the honeycomb – which I discovered this week in my study on this creature. Spurgeon made all kinds of amazing analogies. It made me curious, and I did a word search through all my sermon manuscripts. I typed in the word honey and honey bee and I am clearly not in the same league as Charles Spurgeon. I never once preached on the honey bee or on the subject of honey . . . a couple of times I mentioned dipping my chicken tenders into honey mustard, but that’s as close as I got.

So let me correct the direction of my ministry by making mention of the honey bee – and it is amazingly true that they happen to be one of the tiniest teachers created by God for us to observe and study and apply.

A 16 ounce jar of honey – and I’ve brought one along with me – is the result of hard work over the course of the 6 weeks of honey-making season.

During a 6 week period – in order to produce this one jar of honey, several thousand bees will have had to fly a combined 100,000 miles in a relentless pursuit of nectar which they will have

gathered from 4.5 million flowers. To make this one jar of honey.

One author wrote, every taste of honey is a condensed garden in your mouth.^{iv}

Now according to *Genesis chapter 1*, God created plants and flowering trees and vegetation on the third day of Creation week.

Then, two days later, He created the animals which – primarily swarm in flight – insects, locusts, birds and bees, created on day five.

Which means, God ingeniously created the flowers first – already blooming – already designed with their colors to appear attractive to the bees He would create 48 hours later, so that the flowers would be pollinated by the bees and reproduce; and the bees would gain the nectar which they would convert to honey and eat.

In fact, scientists are now able to understand how bees see color – and they’ve realized that flower petals which might look solid yellow to our eyes, to the bee, the petals look white with a red bullseye in the middle.

Science has now discovered that flowering plants and trees all seem to have petals designed to draw the bee to the center opening as if it were painted with a bullseye.

None of this was the result of random mutations over millions of years, but an immediate relationship and syncretism designed by Creator God.

If bees and flowers and trees, for that matter, had evolved at a distance of several seasons or even a few years, they all would have been doomed to die. Flowers and fruit need the bees and so do we, and bees need the nectar to live.

And what do you know . . . God ingeniously created on day three – an immediately mature, flowering food source and 48 hours later He created the honey bee ready to harvest nectar and pollinate the crops and the trees – and everything was able to thrive.

Which also means that Adam and Eve would have known how honey was made and within a few months they would have known how good it tasted . . . this is the original organic sweetener.

And this jar of honey is going to go back home with me today, and tomorrow morning I'll put two generous spoonful's into my large cup of coffee – because I'm not just drinking coffee, I am enjoying creation! No wonder coffee and devotions go together so well.

I came across the writings of one former atheistic scientist who was converted to Christ following his study of the honeybee. He wrote that this knowledge forever changed his life.

He learned how young bees make the wax for the honeycomb. Tiny wax flakes appear on their abdomens, produced by small glands. The youngsters scrape off the wax with their forelegs, chew it into a soft pliable ball and lay it on a foundation sheet which was designed by other bees.

Then crews of bees worked together forming hexagonal cells – which is the strongest engineering design for using the minimum product while obtaining the maximum strength – what a coincidence.

When did they figure out the hexagon cell structure of the honeycomb? I wonder how many times they tried a circle or a square or a triangle and the hive collapsed until one of them said, "Let's try a hexagon."

They got it right the first time, by means of the complex genetic code implanted in them by their Creator.

How did each individual bee know to fly some 500 miles each, carrying nectar back to the hive where other bees knew how to process it and then place the nectar into those hexagonal cells.

How did they know, at night, to gather at the hive entrance and begin beating their wings; one half of the colony on one side fanning air into the hive and the other half of the colony on the other side, fanning the air out of the hive, creating a breeze that would increase the rate of evaporation of water from the nectar, converting nectar to honey.

How did the specialist bees know when it was the perfect time and temperature to cap off each hexagonal cell, now filled with nourishing

food for their winter months? How'd they know?

This former evolutionary scientist wrote, "It was all too much for me; I was confronted with complex genetic information, and if information requires intelligence, then chance processes over millions of years could not possibly account for the origin of the first honey bee. The honey bee became to me – sweet revelation."^v

Solomon connected the dots in a remarkable analogy when he wrote that;

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge but fools despise wisdom and understanding . . . My son, eat honey for it is good, yes, the honey from the comb is sweet to your taste . . . this is wisdom for your soul.

Proverbs 1:7; 24:13-14

Don't miss some amazing truths from one of God's tiniest of teachers.

Let me point out another tiniest of teachers. It's a little animal my wife and I battled most of September. I'm not sure what changed, but after living in our home for 20 years, we evidently became the place where they wanted to move in, and clean out. We finally got rid of them.

While none of us want ants inside our homes, they have some lessons to teach our hearts.

Take your collection of Solomon's Proverbs and turn to chapter 6.

There are only two animals in scripture we are specifically told to take note of – the birds in a New Testament sermon from the Lord (Matthew 6) – and the ant, here in Proverbs. And for good reason.

Notice what he says in chapter 6 and verse 6; Go to the ant, O sluggard, observe her ways and be wise.

Proverbs 6:6

The reason even the sluggard can learn from the ant is that the average person, without a microscope or a science degree, can easily discern that the ant is persistent, fearless, organized and hardworking.

In fact, the sluggard doesn't even have to get out of bed in order to watch the ants carrying away his leftover food.

And here's what we can observe – *notice verse 7*; Which having no chief, officer or ruler, prepares her food in the summer and gathers her provision in the harvest.

Proverbs 6:7-8

Evidently Solomon had spent some time studying the ant. He couldn't have ordered one of those plastic ant colonies where you can watch the colony from any direction. We did that when our kids were little.

The average ant can lift 40 times its weight, which means that if you personally had that level of strength, instead of having to learn how to parallel park – and possibly flunk your driver's license road test – you could just get out, pick up your car and place it in that parking spot.

We also know that ant colonies can grow as large as 4 million ants. They build a home with elaborate tunnel systems connecting various chambers.

They develop and operate an incredibly complex organization with building projects, site managers, construction systems, food services, home management systems and exploration teams designed for everything from finding raw materials as well as food for surviving.

Imagine being able to build and operate a colony of ants whose population is more than Delaware, Alaska, Vermont and Wyoming combined. Combined!

This is what amazed Solomon. And he makes the specific observation that the ant colony runs without three operatives.

Notice again – Which having no chief, officer or ruler, prepares her food in the summer . . .

Proverbs 6:7

They don't have a chief.

The word *chief*, in the Hebrew language can be translated, judge. There are no judges in the ant colony. Ants have never had to appoint a Supreme Court Justice. They've never had that assignment because ants don't need judges –

and that's because nothing ever needs to be adjudicated.

Which means there are no disputes . . . nobody's suing anybody in the ant colony . . . there are no courtrooms and no juries and no bailiffs and no lawyers for that matter. It must be a perfect world. Imagine Delaware, Alaska, Vermont and Wyoming shutting down their court system and releasing all their judges because nobody needed them anymore.

Go to the ant . . . and learn to be wise.

Secondly, Solomon writes, they have no need of officers.

The word *officer* carries the nuance of someone who writes something down. It has a negative or a punitive nuance to it.

Who writes something down in a punitive or negative manner? Well, you can think immediately of driving like you're supposed to drive because an officer might pull you over and he's going to write something down in a punitive manner. It's called a ticket. I've actually seen one of those . . . but this is not about me.

Beloved, can you imagine a society of people getting along, fulfilling their tasks, getting along with millions of other residents . . . without speed limits and right-of-ways and rule books and never needing a police officer?

Delaware, Alaska, Vermont and Wyoming combined, employ around 7,000 policemen to help us keep the rules. Add to that nearly 200 state and local politicians, members of Congress along with a truckload of civic officials.

We are surrounded by rules and laws and ordinances and all the necessary officials to keep us in line. My neighborhood even has a Home Owners Association rule book with volunteer officials to make sure, among other things, that nobody parks their boat in the front yard or paints their house purple.

No ant is ever in need of a reminder of how to get along without a rule book.

Third, Solomon mentions here that ants don't need a ruler.

This could be translated **supervisor**, one Old Testament scholar wrote, a supervisor in the sense of challenging them to work or praising them when they did.^{vi}

There are no supervisors in the ant colony. Imagine, ants do what they do without a boss either negatively challenging them or positively praising them.

In other words, they don't have to be watched to do their job. And they get their job done . . . and on time – Solomon specifically mentions that they meet their summer deadline and their autumn/harvest deadline. Imagine getting your work done well . . . and on time.

I came across an article of a guy who went to the home he'd lived in, 20 years earlier. He knocked on the door and asked the owner if he could just walk through his old house and they said, "Sure."

When he got up in the attic, he found his old jacket. He tried it on and then reached into the pocket and found a receipt from a shoe repair shop. He'd taken a pair of shoes there 20 years earlier and had forgotten to pick them up.

On a whim, and just for fun, he decided to go to the shoe shop and he walked in, handed the guy the receipt and with a straight face asked the guy, "Are my shoes ready?"

Without saying a word, the guy headed back to the workroom and was back there for a few minutes, then came back to the counter and said, "Come back a week from Thursday."^{vii}

If I could put the work ethic of an ant into principle form it would be this: Ants work without external pressures, ordinances or incentives.

- In other words, they work without needing some other ant to make them do it (a bigger ant, or an ant wearing a uniform) . . . they work without needing another ant to make them do it;
- And they work without needing other ants to praise them for doing it.

Imagine that kind of work ethic. No incentive necessary. No threat . . . no rule book . . . no supervisor . . . no judge.

There's another principle to observe here: Ants are highly focused on communication and cooperation . . . working together to bring in the harvest.

As I studied the resources I had on this amazing little teacher, what I learned is that their communication systems are literally staggering.

For instance, when a foraging ant follows a path marked earlier by another ant, if it decides to veer off the trail and blaze a new path, it releases a complex mixture of chemicals to mark the path at the intersection where it veered off. That tells other ants they're welcome to follow along.

If however, that ant doesn't find any food, it tracks back to that same intersection and releases another chemical scent that communicates, "This is a dead end". And no other ant wastes it's time on that path.^{viii}

But then, if it decides to blaze another trail and finds a caterpillar that's too big to handle, the ant fires off chemicals into the air that alerts other ants to join it.

And here's the amazing thing – when other ants arrive, they already knew, by the chemicals in the air, what tools were needed and how many ants were required to carry that caterpillar back to the colony. Scientists are discovering 80 different chemical messages used for communication.

Let me give you another truth from this tiny teacher. Ants serve according to their divinely created design.

In other words, ants are created and begin working and serving the colony as worker ants, soldier ants, a queen ant or scout ants. And they evidently do their job without trying to move up the ladder. There are no promotions or competition.

In other words, there's no scout ant out their wishing they were the queen ant who gets to eat all day long and doesn't do anything . . . well, other than lay 3,000 eggs a day . . . I mean, how hard can that be?!

God designed each of them to play a role, much like he designed you and me within the Body of Christ, called the church, to play our role in utilizing the service gifts and/or speaking gifts.

The Apostle Peter writes, As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God; whoever speaks . . . whoever serves . . . by the strength which God supplies.

1 Peter 4:10-11

You notice in this text that the main thing isn't the gift you've been given, but the gift you use for the benefit of others.

Peter doesn't write here, *as each of has received a special gift, turn it into a trophy and put it on the mantle and admire it every time you walk by*. No . . . the point is . . . use it, for the sake of others. And that flies in the face of our nature and our culture where the important thing is all about "I, me and mine." We happen to live in a selfie world of "look what I'm doing now."

Someone sent me this a few days ago – and this sort of sums up our self-centered culture . . . the news article reported that there are 93 million selfies taken every day; 1,000 selfies are posted to Instagram every 10 seconds. We are absorbed in our own lives . . . it's all about us.

Let me offer one more principle from this tiniest of teachers. Ants refuse to give in, give up, or just get by.

I came across an interesting article entitled, Intercepting Entropy; the pastor/author pointed out the law of entropy – that fundamental law in physics where everything has a tendency to deteriorate.

He made this spiritual analogy to this law – that we as Christians have a natural tendency to become apathetic or complacent; that we settle for the path of least resistance in some area of life. We learn how to live with a measure of mediocrity.^{ix}

That's true, isn't it? Instead of pushing forward we hit auto pilot. Instead of pursuing excellence, we settle for what's least expected.

Have you ever thought about the fact that the sluggard here in Proverbs 6 can include somebody who simply decided to get by? Instead of pursuing priority, he settled for mediocrity. His motto in life would read something like, "Easy is better . . . don't sweat the details."

Solomon would say, Go to the ant . . . and learn to be wise. He would later write in ***Ecclesiastes 9:10, whatever you hand finds to do, do it, with all your might.***

Which is another way of saying, never give in; never give up and never settle for just getting by.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/07/2018 by Stephen Davey.

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- i Jonathan Edwards, Basic Writings, Selected and edited by Ola Winslow (New American Library, 1966), p. 33
- ii Edited portions from Edwards, p. 85
- iii Adapted from David Atkinson, The Message of Job (IV Press, 1991), p. 147
- iv Eric Miller, “*Shock and Awe*” Books and Culture (September/October 2006), p. 22
- v Edited from Tom Hennigan, “*A Sweet Revelation*” Creation Magazine, September/1999, p. 48
- vi Bruce Waltke, Commentary on the Book of Proverbs (Eerdmans, 2004), p. 337
- vii John Ortberg, “Intercepting Entropy”, Preachingtoday.com/audio issue #295
- viii Tom Hennigan, *Ants – Millimeter Messengers*, Creation Magazine, September 2, 2014
- ix Ortberg, Intercepting Entropy