



Theme: The Ark – God and the Animals

“Animal Variety and Beauty”

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Weekly Memory Verse:

²⁵ God made every kind of wildlife, every kind of livestock, and every kind of creature that crawls on the ground. God saw how good it was. – Genesis 1:25

Meditation Moments for Monday, August 24 – Read **Genesis 1:20-25**. The Genesis creation stories come from a time when there was no such thing as Google or really any way for society to organize the world. The Hebrew Bible was written when there was a need to identify animals. It was a pragmatic need to answer basic questions about them. Can they be eaten? Do they pose a danger to people? Do they harm crops? How do we identify them? These basic needs led to a different perspective on animals that was very different from ours. The irony is that Genesis did better than our culture often does in showing God as the loving creator of animals as well as humans.



Genesis didn't have the terms that modern biology uses to classify animals. God divides the animal world into three categories; the creatures of the sea, the birds of the air, and animals on land. These three categories are used by Israel's priests (pastors) to classify animals when they make distinctions between clean which are seen as edible, and unclean seen as inedible, animals in [Leviticus 11:1-19](#). How did Genesis' care to reflect their day's grasp of details show God's regard for animals?



Genesis 1:26 said God made humans “so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth.” Genesis 1 reflects a profound idea that humans represent

God's work in creation. The idea of "taking charge" can be understood as exercising the same kind of authority God would exercise in the natural world. Would God favor abusing or exploiting either humans or animals that God created? What does that mean of us as stewards of God's creation?

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for the gift of our abundant earth, and for entrusting it to my care. Help me be a faithful steward, always mindful of my choices and their impact on your world. Amen.*

Tuesday, August 25 – Read **Genesis 2:15-20**. It's important to note that we have two creation stories in Genesis, each with a different purpose. The second Genesis creation story pictured God creating animals **after** the first human to be "helpers" for him. That difference does not spoil the creation stories but instead deepens their central message. These two different images of the human as ruler, and then as servant, point to an important truth and paradox. Humanity has the unique power to alter the world, but we are ultimately dependent on the earth and its life for survival.



Genesis 2:7 tells us that God created the animals from the same fertile land out of which the first human was made. During the time of the Bible, the animals God created were literally helpers on the Israelite farm, much like we have seen throughout history. All those first animals were unique and not compatible with the first human. In other words, none were suitable partners to begin the human family. How does Genesis 2's picture of creation show different dimensions of God's care for both humans and animals?



Scholar John Goldingay offered a vital insight into how to read the Genesis creation stories. He noted in his commentary that it is a "superficial difference that in Genesis 1 God makes the animals before the human beings; here God makes them afterward. Evidently Israelites could happily accept both stories and not panic about their being contradictory. Parables don't have to be consistent in that way." How can fixating on the creation stories' details obscure rather than clarify their central message? What do you think are the "big picture" truths in Genesis 1 and 2.

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, make me ever more aware of the ways in which my choices affect the people, the other forms of life, and even the life-sustaining earth around me. Amen.*

Wednesday, August 26 – Read **Genesis 7:1-4 and 14-16**. As with the creation stories in Genesis 1-2, Genesis 6-8 blended two accounts of a great flood. In the second story, [Genesis 8:20](#), seven pairs of clean animals and birds are needed because clean animals are suitable for food during the flood and for sacrifice afterward. The first story speaks of just one pair of animals in [Genesis 6:19-20; 7:9, 15](#), because the writer believes that people did not eat meat or make sacrifices until later. But both versions of the story showed God's concern for animals as well as people to survive.



The flood stories are meant to tell us important things about God. They show us how we humans make mistakes and cause damage. We also see that God gets

angry and then responds with divine grace, which leads to human faithfulness. How did the Flood stories show God's grace and Noah's faithful response? What do you think this means for our lives today?



Reading this story as children, we are often drawn to God's character as revealed in God's concern for the animals. The ark was not only meant to save humanity; it was meant to save the animals too. The point of the ancient stories preserved in Genesis is to teach us about God, ourselves, and God's will for our lives. How can God's concern for animals assure you that God also cares for you? Do you tend to focus on the part of this story where God gets angry, or where God offers mercy and kindness to humans and the animals? Why?

Prayer: *O God, sometimes I feel so small and helpless in the face of illness, job loss, a big problem for one of my children or the advancing frailty of my parents. Let the Flood stories remind me of your care for me (and all living things) even in the face of catastrophe. Amen.*

Thursday, August 27 – Read **Psalm 104:1-3, 10-18 and 24-28**. Psalm 104 echoed the shorter [Psalm 8](#) in offering praise to God for nearly all parts of creation. Verses 13-18 offered charming poetic images as we read about God sitting in the heavens with a watering can, watering the slopes where trees and crops grow. The psalm notes how the ecology of the world works. Plants, trees, animals, and human beings are all part of one whole, created and cared for by God. The psalmist saw God as a caring, attentive creator, not an abstract, distant God.



This psalm is like a prayer, giving praise directly to God. The writer's attention is always on God. Different realms of creation come into view in relation to God, such as the heavens in verses 1-4, the earth in verses 5-13, people and creatures in verses 14-23, and all God's works in verses 24-30. Why not plan a quiet prayer time with your Bible (or screen) open to [Psalm 104](#)? Pray each section as your own offering of praise and worship to the God of all creation.



Verse 3 saying "you make the clouds your chariot" asserts God's superiority to a Canaanite god Baal, who was known as the cloud-rider. Baal caused the rain to fall, but God now assumes this position in Psalm 104. What "deities" in your culture and world do you need to replace with God the great Creator, who truly fills the roles we mistakenly attribute to false deities?

Prayer: *Creator God, how awesome you are! I see your glory, not in self-serving, self-promoting acts, but in the intricate ways you designed all Your creation (including me) for mutual support. Amen.*

Friday, August 28 – Read **Luke 14:1-5**. Jesus' challenge subtly added a key Biblical idea about animal treatment that was part of Hebrew culture but many discarded or forgot about. Animals deserved to be well treated. Like people, we read that animals deserve rest in [Exodus 23:12](#); [Deuteronomy 5:14](#) and water in [Luke 13:15](#). We are to help an ox in trouble in [Deuteronomy 22:4](#), even if it is your enemy's as we read in [Exodus 23:4](#). Jesus heals on the Sabbath because **any decent person** would help an

animal on that day. Our world often treats animals as unfeeling objects. Have you ever realized Jesus cares about such attitudes?

 The religious leaders present at the meal in today's passage were silent when Jesus asked the question in verse 3. For them, healing, or treating illness or injury, counted as work. [Luke 13:14](#) reminds us that some in the Jewish community believed such work should be avoided on the Sabbath unless a person's life was at stake. Jesus believed helping people and animals took precedence over any rules about what was or wasn't work. Was he a dreamer, or was he right?

 John Wesley, Methodism's founder, believed cruelty to animals should pain every Christian heart. He based his sermon "The Great Deliverance" on [Romans 8:19-22](#). He believed that following Jesus linked a person's heart to God's character of love and compassion, expressed toward animals as well as people. How might God's concern for both human and animal welfare reflected by Jesus and other Bible writers, lead you to rethink the ways you think about and treat animals?

Prayer: *Lord God, I know that cruelty toward other humans breaks your heart. Teach me how to remember that you also created all other life and sensitize me to how to avoid cruelty in all areas of life. Amen.*

Saturday, August 29 – Read **Matthew 6:25-34**. Most of us know today's reading's basic message. We can miss the point and spend energy worrying about whether we worry too much! It's easy to ignore Jesus' advice to learn from birds or flowers, parts of our world we may shrug off as "just natural." He had watched the birds flying high up on the currents of air in the Galilean hills where he would go to pray. They simply enjoyed being alive. Jesus had figured out that they never seemed to do the sort of work that humans did, and yet they mostly stayed alive and well. He had watched a thousand different kinds of flowers growing in the fertile soil in Galilee. The word translated as "lily" includes several different plants, such as the autumn crocus, the anemone and the gladiolus. Their fragile beauty touched the heart of Jesus. Where did this beauty come from? They didn't go shopping in the market for fine clothes. Each flower was just itself. They were glorious, God-given, and beautiful.

 Scholar William Barclay in his commentary on Matthew writes, "It is not ordinary, prudent foresight... that Jesus forbids; it is worry. Jesus is not advocating a shiftless, thriftless, reckless, thoughtless... attitude to life; he is forbidding a care-worn, worried fear, which takes all the joy out of life." How can you, in good times or bad, learn from the birds (and other animals) and flowers to avoid being anxious?

 Jesus' audience would have been ordinary peasants who worried daily about their next meal, yet Jesus tells them not to worry about anything. He asks them instead to view the world with new eyes, to see all around them evidence of God's care and provision. How does God's eternal provision reach beyond the challenges of this earthly life?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you modeled a life of peace and trust. Help me to keep learning how to live a life in which my energy can focus on your purposes rather than my fears. Amen*