



Theme: The Ark – God and the Animals

“Animal Waywardness”

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Weekly Memory Verse:

16 I will search for my lost ones who strayed away, and I will bring them safely home again. I will bandage the injured and strengthen the weak. But I will destroy those who are fat and powerful. I will feed them, yes—feed them justice! – Ezekiel 34:16

Meditation Moments for Monday, August 31 – Read **2 Samuel 12:1-10 and 13**. Israel's King David had fallen, step by step, into an ugly set of moral failures. If you don't know the story, it's in [2 Samuel 11](#). The prophet Nathan faced the challenge, on God's behalf, of convincing his friend David away from his destructive course. It's important to note that the idea of pets is rare in ancient literature. Nathan's parable of the poor man's one female lamb hints that not all animals were treated as objects for consumption or to be used. The story moved David's heart and opened his eyes.

 People living in David's time mainly viewed animals in a purely functional way, the same way we usually see tractors or kitchen appliances today. Yet the king did not brush off Nathan's brilliant parable. He had lost sight of the flagrant injustice as well as the gross immorality of his self-serving choices. How can seeing David's inner response to the parable about the little lamb move you to let the feelings animals trigger in you awaken you to important life issues?

 Nathan's brave confrontation with King David, who was an absolute monarch with all the power, led the king to face what he had done. David offered no excuses, but frankly owned up to his reckless, deadly course. He couldn't undo Uriah's death. All he could do was honestly seek God's forgiveness. We are

reminded not to pretend to seek forgiveness if we are not serious. The kind of half-hearted apologies we sometimes offer don't work. Phrases like, "I GUESS I'm sorry. I'm sorry YOU were offended, etc." Cause more damage. Is there anything you need to honestly face, apologize for, and turn away from?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, it took a simple story about a little lamb to wake David up to his need for you. Send me conviction, not condemnation, about anything I need to own up to and turn away from. Amen.*

Tuesday, September 1 – Read **Matthew 15:21-28**. The regions of Tyre and Sidon were Gentile territory, beyond Jewish lands' northern borders, in what is modern day Syria. That may have shaped the woman's clever response to Jesus in verse 27. People who were not Jewish and lived up north sometimes raised dogs as pets. They could clean up scraps of food left by the family as their main source of sustenance. The woman is not offended but humbles herself to seize any opportunity for healing. Those surroundings seem to have made the disciples nervous. But it seems Jesus went there, at least in part, to teach them a lesson.



Written words can't show tone of voice or expression. If verses 24 and 26 showed Jesus' true beliefs about this desperate mother, his action and words in verse 28 don't make sense. Might the story make more sense if we imagine Jesus with an ironic edge to his voice, and a bit of a twinkle in his eye, parodying the disciples' attitude? Clearly, in the end, Jesus honored the mother's plea. How might his behavior have changed the disciples' outlook from verse 23?



Matthew's gospel seems to have spoken particularly to Christians of Jewish background; some of whom struggled to accept Gentiles in the church like in [Acts 15](#). How would this story have spoken to the ethnic, cultural and gender divisions the early church faced? How does it speak to divisions today, including between those who wish to silence and "send away" women who've faced abuse and those who demand we take them seriously?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you weren't about to let ethnic, or gender barriers keep you from responding to this mother's heartfelt plea. Give me a willingness to do all I can to respond to pleas for help, even from beyond my comfort zone. Amen.*

Wednesday, September 2 – Read **Ezekiel 34:11-16**. Ezekiel was a prophet who lived about 600 years before the time of Jesus. He lived in a politically volatile time when the northern part of Israel had been destroyed and the southern area which included Jerusalem survived only a few more decades before many of the people, along with Ezekiel, were carried off in a wave of exiles to Babylon. Ezekiel seems to have a message of imminent doom but it turns to ultimate hope in the end as we find God acting as the shepherd who reaches out to find lost sheep and who brings judgment on those who harm innocent sheep.



People are compared to sheep in many places in the scripture and God is the shepherd, like the famous Psalm 23 which many of us know, "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures and he

leads me beside still waters." These images are meant to bring us comfort when we feel lost or alone or isolated. When you feel lost, do you feel like God is searching for you? Can you remember in those difficult moments when there are days of clouds and darkness that God is the one who longs to rescue us and bring us a sense of peace? Why or why not?



There is a recognition that the sheep are experiencing darkness because of things that evil people are doing to them. Have you ever experienced pain or hardship at the hands of someone who is cruel? Have you seen people being cruel to others that are supposed to be in their care? How might you respond in those situations given what Ezekiel encourages in this chapter?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you are my shepherd. Help me to follow your lead and trust that you care for me even when life takes me to the places that feel dark. When I see others who are being mistreated or feel lost, give me the strength to reach out and offer them not just my hand but your love so that we might find peace together. Amen.*

Thursday, September 3 – Read **Psalm 50:9-12**. Large sections of Israel's laws laid out detailed prescriptions for the sacrifices Israelite worshipers could bring to God. Unfortunately, it was all too easy for the Israelites to think that God **needed** the sacrifices, that their offerings put God in their debt. Psalm 50 addressed that issue directly. As we are learning during this series on God and animals, God created and cares for not just humans, but all living things. Ultimately, they all belong to God as much as we do.



Psalm 50 reinforced a core Israelite conviction: because God owns everything, none of it truly "belongs to me." Jesus also taught that principle. He described what he called "worldly wealth" in [Luke 16:11-12](#) as "someone else's property." Ask yourself, would you drive God's car the same way you do "yours"? Would you watch different things on God's TV or computer? Would you spend God's money any differently than you do "yours"?



We remind you often in worship that God does not need our money. God refuses to go looking for "a bull from your house" or "goats" or cash or bitcoin. Verse 10 reminds us that God owns all the beasts in the "forest" and "the cattle on a thousand hills," and every Savings and Loan. God "knows," the Hebrew means "is in relationship with," all "the birds of the mountains" and "the wild beasts of the field." Offerings are given not for God's sake but for us, and for our hearts, so we keep things in the right order and perspective. How do you benefit from treating people, animals and possessions as truly belonging to God?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me keep growing in the sense of responsibility I bring to stewarding the portions of your creation that you entrust to my care. Amen.*

Friday, September 4 – Read **Romans 8:19-22**. For much of human history, most people thought of the earth as something that would not change. People assumed that the air or the rivers and lakes would remain clean no matter what we put into them. But

2000 years ago, the apostle Paul understood that not just human beings but “the whole creation” was suffering from the effects of departing from God’s path. Knowing this, Paul still didn’t write in despair. His phrase “breathless with anticipation” was meant to be a profound image of hope.



Economic and political factors have created heated debates about the causes of more intense storms, higher temperatures and disastrous wildfires that seem to grow larger each season here in our area, and now in many parts of the world. No matter how we understand the causes, it’s hard to deny that these conditions and others fit Paul’s view that not just people, but “the whole creation is groaning together.” How can God’s people be actively involved in relieving the suffering, animal as well as human, in our world?



Paul’s hope drew on the long history of God’s actions for God’s people. Exodus tells us how God freed his children from slavery, leading them by a cloud of glory by day and a pillar of fire by night. The Gospel promise is that God will in the future liberate us along with all creation. One regular theme in the Bible, especially in Jesus’ story, is that of setting captives free. In what particular ways does it appeal to you to imagine not just yourself, but all of creation, “set free” by the power of God’s love?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me to care about your creation the way you do. Show me how I can better care for your world and help me encourage the people in my life to do the same. Amen.*

Saturday, September 5 – Read **Luke 15:1-32**. Luke 15 may be one of the most important scriptures if we want to be Jesus Christ to the world as we hear Jesus tell three stories, parables, that in essence make up a three-part sermon. The chapter begins with a familiar charge being leveled at Jesus by religious leaders: “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” With sinners and tax collectors gathering around to listen to him, Jesus could hardly deny it—and he didn’t want to. He embraced the accusation with three vivid stories in which finding a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost boy set off big celebrations. To the last story, he pointedly added an older son who didn’t want to welcome the lost boy home.



The Pharisees labeled people “good” or “bad,” and saw “bad people” as unlikely to change. Jesus saw people much more as “lost” (like the sheep, coin or boy), and what’s lost can be found. When have you lost your way spiritually and needed finding? Jesus pictured God rejoicing each time a heart responds to God’s love. Whose model has most helped you see God as more eager to find a lost person than to punish a bad person?



Jesus left the older son’s story open-ended on purpose. The last we hear is the father beseeching his resentful older boy: “We had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found.” We know most of the “older brothers” in Jesus’ day wandered away into the night rather than welcome the prodigal home. If you’ve been at the party of faith for a while, how do you respond to the God’s appeal to welcome home the lost who are found?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, it's true—you always had friends in low places. But you were always seeking to draw them to higher ground. Give me the heart and the wisdom to live out both parts of your example. Amen.