

# The Wisdom of Small Creatures

Introduction: I grew up in Colorado my whole life, but my grandparents lived in Ohio and California. So as I was growing up, one of the yearly rituals in my family was the long, arduous car ride slash vacation to visit my grandparents. And we always had a great time with my grandparents because my parents would carve out special events for us like visiting Disneyland and Sea World if we were in California or King's Island Amusement Park and a Cincinnati Red's baseball game if we were in Ohio. So I always loved these vacations and many of them are really memorable for me.

One year, while we were in California, my dad took us to the beach. I can't remember exactly how old I was, but I remember that experience vividly because it was the first time I had ever been to the beach or the ocean. Like I said earlier, I lived in Colorado, so I was a total landlubber. The most dramatic water I had been in was a swimming pool, water slide or wave pool at a local water park. So I had really no idea what the ocean would be like. In my mind's eye, I thought it was going to be like a giant swimming pool and since I really loved to swim and since I swam all the time, the ocean sounded really fun.

And it was fun until we actually got to the ocean. As I stood looking at the ocean, I couldn't see the other side where the ocean ended. As I stood thinking about the depth of the ocean, I realized that there was no way that I could swim along the bottom of the ocean except near the beach. As I stood there thinking about the size of the ocean, I realized that there were enormous and giant creatures like sharks and whales in it that swim freely and unhindered. As I stood in thigh deep water, I realized and experienced that even the smallest Pacific waves could knock me over like a house of cards.

And I got scared, really scared because I realized how small and weak and vulnerable I was in comparison to the Pacific Ocean. I came face to face with my weakness and smallness and vulnerability. Have you ever had that kind of experience where you have come face to face with your weakness, your smallness and your vulnerability? Have you ever or do you ever feel small and weak and vulnerable in our world?

For me as I've gotten older, that experience of smallness hasn't really stopped. It has only moved into different areas of my life and I suspect the same is true for you.

You know, there is that nagging pain you've been experiencing that suddenly appeared without cause or warning. And as it lingers, you decide to go to the doctor and in the back of your mind is the thought, "**What if there is something more serious going on here that is simply out of my control?**" In those kinds of moments, we feel weak and vulnerable because we realize our bodies are not as impervious as we thought.

Or you hear that the interest rate is on the rise. And that tiny shift of something as minute as the interest rate alters our 401 (k), raises the payments on our adjustable rate mortgage and the cost of living rises with the increase cost to businesses. In those kinds of moments, we feel weak and vulnerable because we realize that what we have depends on forces outside of our understanding and control.

Or it is the middle of the night and you hear a noise in the house that wakes you up in a panic. "**Someone's in the house,**" you think in a panic. So if you're married you wake your spouse up to verify your worst fear. And of course, one of the spouses is sent out of the bedroom as a sacrificial lamb wearing underwear to see whether there is anyone else in the house. In those kinds of moments, we feel weak and vulnerable because we realize that we don't know the first thing about fighting off an intruder.

As disturbing as those moments can be, I think they are moments of clarity for us because we come to grips with our size in relation to the size of our world. We come face to face with the strength of our bodies in relation to the power of the universe and its muscle. And we notice the depth of our understanding and knowledge in relation to incomprehensible and mysterious forces that shape our lives.

You see, for all of our abilities and for all our strengths, the simple reality is we are weak and small and vulnerable in our world, at our jobs, in our futures, with our health, and with our family's health.

So what do we do? How do we live with our weakness?

We could cower in the fetal position in some corner. Or we could ignore our weakness figuring ignorance is bliss. Or we could learn from creatures that are familiar with weakness and have learned to compensate for their weaknesses.

In fact, that's exactly what Proverbs does for us. I heard Haddon Robinson preach on the wisdom of little creatures a few years back from a little section near the end of the book. And in it, they look at some of God's littlest creatures for the biggest wisdom because all of God's creation, even the littlest creature, speaks about God.

So if you have your Bibles with you, I'd like you to turn with me to that little section in Proverbs 30:24. This is the last week of our series on Proverbs that we've called LifeWorks where we have been talking about living different areas of our life with wisdom so that we are and become the kinds of people who don't just talk about faith in Jesus but also live it out in wisdom.

The Ant's Diligence: READ PROVERBS 30:24-28. Agur's sayings, Agur's proverbs here involve four creatures, small creatures, creatures of severe limitation. These limitations don't just hinder their potential. These limitations threaten their very lives. These creatures are all too familiar with being on the bottom of the pile in the animal kingdom. They know what it is to live on the bottom ring of the food chain.

And although they are animals with severe limitations, they are extremely wise. They are exceedingly wise. They are experts, masters if you will in certain skills that enable them to overcome the severity of their weaknesses, their smallnesses and their vulnerabilities. And Agur points out their mastery to us for our wisdom so that we can compensate for our own weaknesses and vulnerabilities.

The first creature is the ant. There are literally thousands of species of ants that live all over the planet. But maybe Agur had in mind an ant like this one [SHOW PICTURE].

The ant is severely limited by its physical strength. Oh yes, I know that the ant is physically strong for its size. But even though the ant is physically strong for its size, it is pint size. I imagine that the ant was one of the smallest creatures that Agur had ever seen. And as such, the ant is physically weak in relation to virtually every other creature on the face of the earth.

**Illustration** – That's why as kids, we burned ants using a magnifying glass and sunlight. Okay, maybe I should just speak for myself. But we knew we could do that because they were unable to get any meaningful revenge on us. We knew we could bully them with no consequences to ourselves because they are weak. In an arm wrestling match, an ant would be crushed by virtually every other insect and animal on the face of the planet.

So the ant's strength, its lack of physical strength makes it vulnerable to being overwhelmed by virtually every other creature on the face of the earth. Even a rainstorm dooms an ant because drops of water have more power than an ant.

So what does the weakling ant do? The weakling ant masters diligence for survival. The ant is industrious, hard working, and painstakingly persistent in its work ethic. Day in and day out the ant works hard. Industry is the ant's calling card. Diligence is the ant's fallback position.

When the weather is cold and miserable, what is the ant doing? Working. When the weather is hot and sunny, what is the ant doing? Working. When it is the worst of times, what is the ant doing? Working. When it is the best of times, what is the ant doing? Working.

And make no mistake about it. That diligence has served the ant well because not only has the ant survived, it has also thrived on virtually every landmass on the planet. The ant lives by the hundreds of billions due in large part to its diligence.

Agur points to the ant with all of its limitations for our wisdom to compensate for our own weaknesses and vulnerabilities. He points out the ant as a master of diligence, an expert of work ethic and tells us, “**Seek out that kind of diligence.**” To compensate for our weakness and vulnerability, seek out the diligence of the ant.

Hard work compensates for many of our shortcomings. Think about Larry Bird for a second here. Maybe you've heard of him around here. He's not what I would call the most naturally gifted athlete of all time in the NBA. But he did work hard and that hard work more than compensated for his shortcomings.

**Illustration** – In fact, former NBA player Mark Pope told a story about an interview he heard with Larry Bird. This is what Mark Pope said: “**I was in high school when I heard Bird interviewed about why he made so many game-winning shots. He said, ‘I take a thousand more jumpers than anybody else on my team every day. I deserve to take the game-winning shot, and it should go in.’**”

But it isn't just in the NBA and sports in general where diligence can compensate for weaknesses and shortcomings. Diligence and hard work carries many people with a little ability way past others who may have a ton of ability but don't work at it. It happens in jobs, at schools, in the arts and in relationships. A strong work ethic compensates for your shortcomings, for my weaknesses.

So seek diligence in life. Work hard with the abilities God has given you. Learn diligence and patterns of diligence at your job, in your home at school and in your relationships because God will honor your diligence there.

When you're in the upswing of success at the job or school, continue working hard, trying to do it a little bit better each day. When you're in a dry spot at work or school, keep working hard, trying to help yourself snap out of it.

When you're in a relationship and things are going great, stay diligent in your communication with them. When you're in a rocky patch of a relationship, stay diligent in your communication and conflict management with the hope that the relationship will be refreshed one day.

Seek diligence in life. To compensate for our weaknesses and vulnerability, seek out the ant's diligence. But Agur points to a second small creature for our wisdom in verse 26. Let's revisit that verse for a bit here.

The Coney's Knowledge of Security Lies: READ PROVERBS 30:26. The second creature is the coney. Do any of you know what a coney is? Maybe Agur had a coney in his mind like this one [SHOW PICTURE].

Kind of cute, isn't he? The coney is yellow and brown. It is about the size of a rabbit with a short tail but with shorter ears. Groups of coney live in rocks near fields all over Israel from Mount Hermon in the north to the Dead Sea in the south. In fact, they lay on the rocks to sun themselves.

That's why it is also called a rock badger. But don't let that name fool you. Coney is nothing like a badger because they dwell at the bottom of the food chain. They mainly eat grass and some fruits to be food for other animals. They are familiar with being a bottom of the barrel creature, the bottom ring of the food chain. And that is the severe limitation of the coney. It is dinner for wolves, lions, vultures and eagles because it isn't strong enough to defend itself from these predators. The coney doesn't possess any natural defense mechanism to ward off any predator.

The coney can't scare a flea with its physical strength no matter how much it works out with a personal trainer. Its bite could only annoy would be predators and that's the best the coney's got in and of itself. The coney is literally dead meat for scores of predators.

So what does the defenseless and vulnerable coney do? They live among the cracks and the crevices of rocks. When a lion or wolf comes to attack the coney, they scurry into the rock crevices, the crag of a rock. If a vulture or eagle is flying around and spies the coney sunning itself and decides to swoop in for a quick bite, the coney dives into a crack between the rocks. If any predator wants to get to a coney, they have to dislodge a mountain to do so.

The coney has mastered the art of knowing where its security lies. The coney is an expert of knowing where their true safety lies.

It is no stretch to say that Agur points out the wisdom of the coney to point us to the security of God himself. David says in Psalm 18:1-2 writes, **"I love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge."**

When life gets a bit dangerous, when predators surround you and me, when we are afraid, anxious or nervous, the wisdom of the coney teaches us to know where our security lies and that it lies in the security of God himself through Jesus Christ.

**Illustration** – In Colorado, there was a military installation built into Cheyenne Mountain that housed NORAD. It was built during the cold war. And this installation is built 2000 feet underground and underneath this mountain. In the event of a nuclear attack, NORAD was designed to be self-sufficient to the point of being able to withstand a 5-megaton blast from a nuclear bomb just 3 miles away. Now, I'm not much of a military guy, but that sounds pretty safe and secure.

But being with God through Jesus Christ is still safer than NORAD. Anything else is a house of cards in comparison. When we ask Jesus Christ to come into our lives to forgive us of our sin and to lead us, God takes our life and he hides our lives in Jesus Christ.

So that whatever life may deal us, whatever circumstances we may face, whatever difficulties we may encounter, whatever situations come up at the job or in school, whatever health crisis we face in our own lives or our family's life, God has hid our life in Jesus Christ and he will never let go of us.

He will take hold of our lives and walk with us through all of the ugliness of life and through death itself and on into eternity where we will live in safety and security in his presence forever and ever. God keeps our lives safer than NORAD ever could, so know where your security lies.

Dive into him as your security for the first time by asking Christ into your life to forgive you of your sin and to lead you in life. Keep diving back into him through prayer as your security when life gets dangerous because he will never let go of you and he will walk with you on into eternity. Know where your security lies.

To compensate for our weaknesses and vulnerability, seek out not only the ant's diligence but also the coney's knowledge of where security lies. Agur points us to the extreme wisdom of another little creature in verse 27. Look there with me.

The Locust's Unity: READ PROVERBS 30:27. The third creature is the locust. There are many different kinds of locusts, but maybe Agur had one like this one in mind [SHOW PICTURE].

The locust here is only a glorified grasshopper. The locust is a small creature weighing only about 2 grams. That's a little bit less than what a penny weighs. And each day a locust will eat its body weight. A random locust here or there really scares no one. One locust isn't even a nuisance. One locust is just a minor irritation.

**Illustration** – Suppose here for a bit that you were to get a locust in your checking account for an entire year. Remember a locust eats its body weight each day, so that translates to that locust eating a penny per day in your checking account. So one random locust in your checking account for an entire year would only eat \$3.65. That's less than some ATM fees. One random locust here and there is nothing.

The locust is severely limited in that the locust has no one to lead a group of them. The locust has no king or dictator to bring them together and to get them organized for the most effective swarm. The locust has no organizing figure to get a bunch of locusts together and to work with each other.

So what does the leaderless locust do? The locust has mastered the art of unity. Without a visible leader, each locust brings themselves to be with other locusts. Each locust adds their strengths and abilities to that of other locusts. By instinct the locusts unite and work in community and when they do that they terrorize people and bring entire nations and continents to their knees.

**Illustration** – In 2003, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization got wind about an increase in locust breeding in West and North Africa. And by 2004 the locust plague emerged, creating one of the largest locust swarms since 1989. Even though they spent \$60 million dollars on fighting the locust swarms and plagues, these locusts caused \$2.5 billion dollars of damage in crop damage and that has had disastrous effects on the food security in West Africa. Why? Because the locust has mastered the art of unity.

And Agur points to the wisdom of the locust for our wisdom. And the wisdom of the locust tells us we need community with one another. We unite with each other because we need each other. Alone is where we get into trouble.

Decisions made alone are where some really bad decisions are made. Struggling alone with our sin is where some real dark, agony happens. Success experienced alone is where some really empty celebrations occur. Ministry done alone is where some really big burn out and discouragement happens.

**Illustration** – Haddon Robinson tells the story about a man who visited an asylum for the criminally insane. He was a bit surprised to find that there were three guards to take care of one hundred inmates. So he asked one of the guards, **“Aren't you afraid that the inmates will unite, overcome you, and escape?”** The guard said, **“Lunatics never unite.”**

The locust has mastered it. As followers of Christ, we should because the wisdom of the locusts teaches us that if we unite with one another, we might topple kingdoms.

If we take our strengths and our abilities and add them to one another here at GracePoint, God will take us and amplify our lives and topple kingdoms with it.

If we add ourselves to one another, God will take our voices and lives and bring people into a relationship with Jesus Christ.

If we add ourselves to be in one of our small groups here called *Life Communities*, God will our faith and character and deepen them as we work them out with one another.

If we add ourselves to be on one of the ministry teams here at GracePoint, God will multiply our efforts and we'll see his kingdom move forward in our very midst.

To compensate for our weakness and vulnerability, seek out the ant's diligence, the coney's knowledge of where security lies and the locust's unity. There's one more little creature Agur points out for our wisdom in verse 28. Let's look there again.

The Lizard's Boldness: READ PROVERBS 30:28. The last creature is the lizard. There are all kinds of different lizards in the world, but many believe Agur probably had this gecko in mind [SHOW PICTURE].

This lizard, the gecko is well known in Israel because the lizard works its way into houses and lives there eating insects in the house. They have really unique toe pads that are like suction cups that enable them to scurry on flat surfaces like ceilings and walls with ease.

But this gecko, this lizard is seriously flawed because it is easily caught and controlled. The lizard is so small and so vulnerable that anyone can catch it with two hands. The gecko isn't strong enough to break out of the grasp of its would-be captors. The gecko isn't quick enough and fast enough and elusive enough to avoid capture.

So what does the powerless Gecko do? The gecko masters boldness. The lizard has mastered the art of audacity. Though lacking power and speed to be respected, the gecko, the lizard boldly lives in a spacious and cavernous palace of the most powerful in the land. Though the gecko lacks outright power, its boldness allows the lizard lives extravagantly in the most power place in the land. The gecko is the expert of boldness.

So Agur points out the wisdom of the lizard that compensates for their own powerlessness with boldness for our wisdom. You see, to compensate for our weakness and vulnerability, seek the lizard's boldness.

It's amazing how boldness and audacity compensates for a lack of ability and opportunity. Despite how we might be weak, practicing boldness yields surprising results.

**Illustration** – I ran across a story that Ed Rowell told about a bus driver. One day this bus driver was driving along his usual route. He didn't encounter any problems for the first few stops. A few got on, a few got off and things went generally well. At one stop, however, a big hulk of a man got on. He was 6'8" tall, built like a wrestler and his arms hung down to the ground. He glared at the driver and told him, "**Big John doesn't pay!**" Then this man sat down at the back of the bus. The driver was 5'3" tall and built like me, so he didn't argue with Big John. But he wasn't happy about it.

The next day, the same thing happened. Big John got on again, made a big show of refusing to pay and sat down. It happened the next day, and again the day after that. The bud driver began to lost sleep over the way Big John was taking advantage of him.

Finally, he could stand it no longer and decided to power up. So he signed up for body building courses, karate, judo and a class on finding your self-esteem. But the end of the summer, the bus driver had become quite strong and felt really good about himself.

The next Monday Big John entered the bus and again declared, “**Big John doesn’t pay!**” Enraged, the bus driver stood up, glared back at Big John, and bellowed, “**And why not?!**” With a surprised look on his face, Big John replied, “**Big John has a bus pass.**”

Though that bus driver was weak and vulnerable, he learned the boldness of the lizard and it compensated for his obvious deficit. Seek out the lizard’s boldness.

How much would we learn if we only were bold enough to ask questions to experts of areas where we are clueless?

How much help would we gain if we were only bold enough to ask for it from others?

How many conflicts would be resolved if only we were bold enough to speak the truth in love to resolve the issue?

How much more would God do in our lives if we only boldly asked him to do so?

Conclusion: To compensate for our weakness and vulnerability, seek out the ant’s diligence, the coney’s knowledge of where security lies, the locust’s unity and the lizard’s boldness.

And if we will do that, we’ll discover that our weaknesses and vulnerabilities will no longer define us and ultimately undo us. We’ll discover that God will honor us by amplifying our voices and lives to topple kingdoms and to advance his kingdom in our midst. So embrace the wisdom of little creatures.