



# THE FOREST FOR THE TREES

Over the years, more than one visitor to our property has remarked to us that we really should have a big dog.

It is indeed the customary practice of those living out in the countryside to have a substantial canine in residence, someone to run free and joyous in the extra space afforded by the country acreage or farm. And it is true that a black lab or German shepherd, or even an outsized mongrel can be a real asset to a home in the country. In addition to their adoring companionship, they can be good security—on both the alarm *and* enforcement sides—and they can protect the establishment from many of the nastier critters that frequent the wilds.

And that is precisely the point I raise when explaining to the inquisitive visitor why we choose *not* to have a large dog on the premises. A dog would not restrict his energetic pursuit to the unfriendly man or beast, but include many of the indigenous

wildlife we have come to welcome and love. With a dog in residence we would have fewer deer, far fewer wild turkeys, rabbits and possums, and no squirrels or chipmunks at all. Thus our domesticated outside animals have always been accidental—coming out of the woods to make their home with us—and of the smaller and somewhat less destructive feline type: first Angel, then Thornton.

Not too long ago we lost our beloved Thornton to cancer, and though we miss him terribly, we have been pleasantly surprised by the changes that have taken place on our property as a result. We have learned that even a respectfully smaller cat can dramatically alter the constitution of the local wildlife.

Not surprisingly, since Thornton's passing we have experienced a population explosion in the smaller beasts of the field. There

Reflections  
by the Pond

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As long as we live  
we must be scholars  
in Christ's school  
and sit at His feet;  
but we should aim  
to be head-scholars  
and to get into the  
highest form.

Matthew Henry

are many more rabbits on the property, and squirrels now scamper and play nearer to the house, even peeking in the library window near my desk. And without the competing presence (as well as liberally distributed scent) of a resident male cat, a groundhog recently took up residence under our deck. We have enjoyed watching the rotund marmot play around the trees behind the house and make himself at home on our deck.

We never would have purposely exchanged our Thornton for any of these critters, but without him we have experienced new and abundant blessings from the wild.

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We all know that sin in our life can erect a barrier that may blockade the flow of God's rich blessings. Every one of us can recall at least one time—and, to our shame, often many more—when we willingly took an exit off His straight and narrow path.

But the same result can occur when we focus too tightly on even good things in our life. What is standing in the way of *better* things coming into my life? Am I enjoying one blessing to the exclusion of the rest?

Am I so busy enjoying my high standard of living, that I miss out on the blessedness of trust in God?

"Two things I ask of you, O Lord;  
do not refuse me before I die:  
Keep falsehood and lies far from me;  
give me neither poverty nor riches,  
but give me only my daily bread.  
Otherwise, I may have too much and  
disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?'  
Or I may become poor and steal, and so  
dishonor the name of my God."

Proverbs 30:7-9 NIV

Am I so pleased with the *one* thing I do for the Lord, that I fail to exercise the many other abilities He has given me with which to serve Him?

From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.

Luke 12:48b

Am I so pleased with myself for the pittance I give back to the Lord in my Sunday offering, that I fail to realize the blessings that come from acknowledging that everything is His to begin with?

Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; as it is written, "He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, His righteousness endures forever."

2 Corinthians 9:6-9

Am I so content with the mediocre relationship I have with Christ, that I miss out on the profound blessings that come from a deeper walk of uninterrupted communion with Him?

Stay with what you heard from the beginning, the original message. Let it sink into your life. If what you heard from the beginning lives deeply in you, you will live deeply in both Son and Father. This is exactly what Christ promised: eternal life, real life!

1 John 2:24-25 The Message

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When Linda and I spy one deer emerging from the woods, it is our habit to quickly scan the area for more, for we know that by focusing on the one we may miss the group that often follows behind. Just so, in every aspect of our relationship with God and His people we are not to settle for the small, the isolated, the attitude that "just enough" is sufficient.

Even something good and righteous can be shortsighted. Even a small obedience can disappoint our Father. What He longs for in us, instead, is what Friedrich Nietzsche called a "long obedience in the same direction." Persistence, depth, truth, sincerity, transparency, and a habit of considering the "big picture"—these are the qualities God desires in His children so He can pour blessings to overflowing into a life.

