

Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL

The Wonder
&
The Glory



“But now ask the beasts, and let them teach you;
And the birds of the heavens, and let them tell you.
Or speak to the earth, and let it teach you;
And let the fish of the sea declare to you.
Who among all these does not know
That the hand of the LORD has done this,
In whose hand is the life of every living thing,
And the breath of all mankind?”

Job 12:7-10

GOD’S CREATION IS ONE OF OUR BEST TEACHERS. It at all times displays His glory, and the wonder of His sovereign genius. Part of that genius is how the Lord graciously instructs us in His ways through the beasts of the field and the air. He uses what we call “nature” to teach us through homely illustrations—life lessons that speak of the fundamentals of faith: mercy, grace, God’s love and longsuffering, the ugliness of sin, and the beauty of God’s heart.

The natural world reveals God to us, if we care to look for Him there. Nature emits a heavenly tone that is in sympathy with the Spirit God has placed in the believer. Like the Spirit, this heavenly music does not force itself on us. But when we open our eyes and our ears and our hearts to His presence, the tone-poem of heaven pours over us, washing its revelation through every part of our being.

And God is made nearer.

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I STEPPED OUT THE WORKSHOP DOOR and was immediately, and quite furiously reprimanded for so callously permitting the bird feeder to remain empty.

Our bird feeder hangs from a rope in a high branch just outside the sun room windows. With winter past, and what with the sometimes ridiculous price of fifty pound bags of seed, come spring we leave the birds on their own.

The myriad feathered fowl accepted this decision with a dignified maturity, but the two squirrels who helped themselves to the bounty over the cold winter months were clearly displeased. During Sunday brunch we watched as the female clambered over and around and under the feeder, struggling to retrieve the few remaining seeds beyond her reach. She had already torn away one supporting piece of wood, and was now searching for an alternate way in to the food—at one point even hanging upside down beneath the feeder to gnaw at its wooden base.

Stepping out the door on my way to the mailbox, the air was suddenly turned blue by the female squirrel's loud protestations. In her sharp, rhythmic bark she told me in no uncertain terms that she wanted—no, *insisted*—that I fill this feeder forthwith. She scolded me up one side and down the other. I pointed out the obvious to her, that the yard was filled with delicious acorns. Had she forgotten where she had hidden them last autumn? But she was having none of it, insisting on having her preferred food. So I left her to her scoldings, hoping our outdoor cat could persuade the squirrel to cease and desist.

The episode reminded me of an old television commercial—a cartoon advertisement for a hot breakfast cereal—in which a small boy insisted quite loudly “I WANT MY MAPO!”

And I come back to that familiar nagging question: Why do I not have that same insistent attitude over my *spiritual* food? When my rather substantial mid-section growls with hunger, I suppose my motivation for insisting on food has

something to do with an inbred survival instinct—without food I will die. Why not the same for my spiritual sustenance?



Herein lies one of the uncomfortable ironies of the Christian faith: Grace has removed our survival instinct. The blood of Christ has removed any need for anxiety over our survival. Those in Christ will survive, whether they feed themselves or not. My choice to read a chapter of Scripture per day, a few verses, or nothing at all will have no bearing on where I spend eternity. It will affect my daily walk with Christ, but not my ultimate survival.

The lesson I must learn is that my eternity has already begun. It may be assured, but if I am living in it already, then my choice of nourishment right now will affect the quality of that eternity.

I should really be insisting on the good stuff. ◆

May Your compassion come to me that I
may live,
For Your law is my delight.

Psalm 119:77



CHECKING THE PROPANE LEVEL during some winters is as much social occasion as regular maintenance routine. Our tank sits out near the timber around the barn, and during the winter months, when the furnace is running, it must be checked regularly. Once the gauge shows the level to be down to twenty percent or lower, the propane man is called for a delivery.

On top of the five-hundred gallon tank, the valve and gauge are housed beneath a large hinged dome, and many winters this space is shared by a family of mice. It is an ideal shelter against the biting cold and wind of the winter months. The mice build their nest by carrying small, dried leaves up the narrow pipe that leads from the ground to the valve, collecting them under the dome.

Over the weeks and months of winter, the leaves decompose within the cozy space under the cap, generating heat that keeps the mice warm. Lifting the cap to check the gauge one can actually feel the warmth emanating from the

nest—and it is always the polite thing to say a friendly “Hi-howdy” to the nervous noses poking out, wondering who it is disturbing their domestic tranquility.

Over the years I have received some quizzical frowns from the propane delivery men when I’ve asked them to please not disturb the mice any more than is necessary. They’d just as soon brush away all those messy leaves and get on with the work at hand.

But every time I lift that lid and stare into the tiny eyes of those frightened mice, I am reminded of the mercy my heavenly Father has shown me. To those small creatures I must seem god-like, towering huge over them, with the power to brush them away with the back of my hand—which is just how we feel sometimes, so tiny and fragile against the towering strength of the One who is truly God.

God’s mercy, however, is superior to ours. The mice have done nothing wrong—which is why it is so easy for us to show them mercy; they’ve done nothing to deserve less. But, in a human sense, we

never deserve the mercy God shows us. We really deserve His condemnation; we deserve the back of His hand. Through Christ, however, we receive instead His mercy.

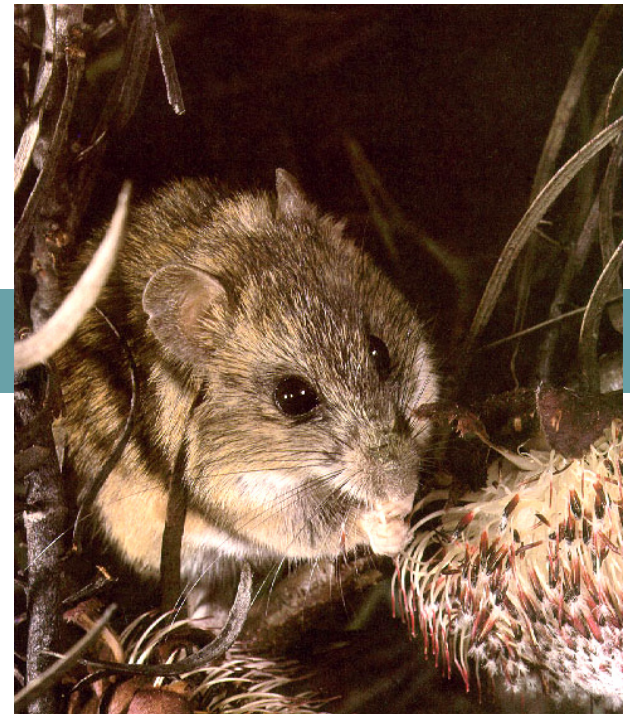
But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

Ephesians 2:4-5

During the winter months the mice remain happily content within their cozy nest, snuggled into their organic warmth against the howling winter winds. That is how they spend my mercy. But how are we to spend God's mercy? What are we to do with this extravagant gift? ♦

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

Romans 12:1



“Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

Joshua 24:14-15

WE WERE STOPPED at a traffic light when out of the far corner of my vision I spied a brief shadow of white.

It drifted closer, swooping and dancing upon an invisible current, something purest white drifting down from heaven. It had no weight to speak of, so it fluttered tirelessly upon drafts incapable of moving anything more substantial.

The feather seemed to care nothing of the bustle of traffic, the grating cacophony of the city. It was oblivious to the stench of exhaust and the cloying wrap of urban smog. It felt none of the press of calendars and clocks and schedules and meetings. It was but a feather, purest white and lingering only for a moment, passing through it all on the barest wisps of the air. It slowly drifted past us,

teasing in that back-and-forth manner of things so light, making us believe it could somehow defy the laws of gravity and remain aloft forever.

Oh, to be as that feather: so clean and pure, so far above and detached from the world through which it must pass, so carefree and happy to be supported by a strong force invisible to all the rest.

But then, gravity held sway over the feather, and gradually—almost grudgingly—it drifted down to the pavement. It lay there, just touching the greasy hard surface, a whiff of cleanest white between the belching autos poised to leave their starting line. Though barely in contact with the surface, a few vain tugs by the invisible force could not dislodge the feather from the spiny talons of the asphalt, and it stayed there, trapped where



it had fallen, now a sad bit of fluff to be trampled under the boots and treads of the oblivious traffic.

At the moment it touched down, the feather became something common; it seemed to do it with a sigh. No longer the spotless, dancing sprite, it was now soiled by the world and compromised by its values. It was no longer out of the ordinary, something to be admired, but now just another part of the world it had for so long labored against.

How blessed is the man who does not
walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and
night.
He will be like a tree firmly planted by
streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.

Psalms 1:1-3



In a common world, the follower of Christ is to be uncommon. The Christian's path is challenging, for we are to thread our

way through a minefield of temptations, distractions, and proffered compromises. We are not to permanently detach ourselves from this world, since it is, in Jesus' terms, a "field...white for harvest." We are always to be serving, reaching, "harvesting" those that do not yet know our Savior.

"Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor."

John 4:35-38

Yet, as any farmer can tell you, tramping through a field that has been sown will result in dirty feet. Seeds are not planted in clean, level pavement, but in deeply plowed, soft, fertile soil. If there has been welcome rain, the soil will have turned to a wet, sucking muck that tries

valiantly to remove the boots from our feet. Gnats, mosquitoes and flies buzz irritatingly around our face and bare arms, driving us mad with their mindless persistence. No, tramping through a field ripe for harvest is not the same as a pleasant walk in the park.

Through it all, however, though we are to remain *in* the world, we are not to be *of* the world. ♦



“I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”

John 17:14-16

IT WAS A HEAVY, RESOUNDING THUD that told me a very large bird had just struck one of the windows in the sun room. The occurrence is not uncommon. Small birds often strike the glass and, in most cases, are just wind-ed as a result. They will lie there awhile, gasping for breath until, once recovered, they fly off none the worse for the experience. Sometimes, however, the impact is strong enough to kill them outright by snapping their neck or, in their helpless, stunned condition, they become easy pickings for any predator happening by.

The sound of this most recent collision told me this was no sparrow that had just made unfortunate contact with our house. Looking outside the east-facing windows, I discovered an immature red-tailed hawk headfirst in a snow bank, its feet clawing at the air, struggling to right itself.

Fast as I could, I jumped into my boots and put on leather gloves. It took me only a moment to get to him, but by the time I did, his feet were no longer mov-

ing. Lifting him out of the deep snow, his head flopped to one side like a broken doll's head. He had probably broken his neck on impact.



Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." And the LORD opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

2 Kings 6:17

Birds are injured or killed when they are deceived by the pretty images of trees and blue sky they see reflected back by the window glass. They recognize no difference between the reflection and reality, but see their pathway clear and un-hindered, as familiar as the path just left through the open spaces of the earth. But in a split-second they are done in, as illusion gives way to hard reality.

Mirrors and black glass throw back only images of this earth: familiar, yet fleeting

and base. Nothing seen in a reflection is real, for even if what it reflects is tangible, it will eventually be consumed. It is only illusory—at best, fleeting. When we race toward the familiar, seeking to make contact with more from this temporal plane, we invariably make contact only with the hard reality of shattered dreams and empty expectations.

There is a place more steady and real. It consists not of abstracts and dreams, but of truth and wisdom and light. Though our gaze is drawn like a magnet toward the dust from which we have been made, it takes small effort to lift our gaze higher, toward the unbounded skies of God.

Racing heavenward we find not the hard surprise of death, but the soaring joy of eternal life. ♦

For He knows our frame;
He remembers that we are dust.
As for man, his days are like grass;
As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.
For the wind passes over it, and it is
gone,
And its place remembers it no more.
But the mercy of the Lord is from ever-
lasting to everlasting
On those who fear Him,
And His righteousness to children's chil-
dren,
To such as keep His covenant,
And to those who remember His com-
mandments to do them.
The Lord has established His throne in
heaven,
And His kingdom rules over all.

Psalms 103:14-19 NKJV



Alan Vernon

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 6:12

I SAW HIM FIRST OUT THE LIBRARY DOOR, a squat mass of fur waddling decisively through the thick carpet of leaves. Then he stood up, taller than expected (about three feet), straight as an arrow on his hind legs, swiveling his head around to survey the terrain. Then he lowered to the ground and continued on his way, headed toward the deck off the east side of the house.

Fearing that he might mix it up with Angel, at the time our outdoor female cat who would sleep on the deck, I opened the door and made noises intended to shoo him into the woods. The furry beast did indeed take off—right toward the deck.

Trooping up the stairs leading to the deck to check on Angel, I saw no one. But as I passed by the garbage cans, headed toward the corner of the garage, the deck beneath my feet began to vi-

brate. A steady, droning, growling sound was emanating from the narrow cavern beneath the wooden slats.

Now, to be fair, groundhogs are nothing to fear. They will turn tail and run rather than confront man or beast. They're vegetarians and, well, to be kind, not terribly bright. But it was an odd, unsettling sensation having something growl at me from beneath my feet, feeling the anger (or fear) rumbling away, even traveling up my legs.

And I was reminded of our enemy, Satan, always lying in wait, crouched down in the dank underbelly of our world, always searching for ways to snare our steps and drag us under. Through the blood of Christ, the Christian may have supernatural powers at his or her disposal, but the earthly Christian is still made of flesh—and Satan has an appetite for flesh.

Satan likes to growl; he does it well. He knows how to sound truly nasty and intimidating—as well as, on occasion, utterly beguiling—and we should never take his abilities for granted. But he is, inevitably, powerless against our sanctification in Christ.

No matter how fierce that groundhog made himself sound, there was still several inches of treated wood between my feet and him. There was no way he could get me. But even if that barrier had not been there—even if I had faced him without that layer of protection—the groundhog would have been impotent against me. He would have immediately turned tail and run, because he would have known, instinctively, that he was up against a superior foe. ♦



Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’” Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.

Matthew 4:8-11

ONE MOUSE TOOK NO TIME AT ALL to realize he had found a good thing in the cozy stud space of our new barn.



The year we had our house re-sided and new windows installed, in preparation for the anticipated salvage from that project, Linda and I (being frugal pack rats at heart) cleaned out the loft in our small barn to make room for stacks of old, but still usable wood trim that would be removed from the house.

That diminutive barn my father-in-law and I constructed (with able help, of course, from Linda and her mom) was then thirteen years old—sufficient time for the loft to become a tangled heap of this and that and the next thing, much of which had been tossed up there from below, with little thought given to order or neatness.

Not surprisingly, the removal of said mélange was not unlike prying open the lid of the mythical Pandora's Box. One

never really knew what unpleasant surprise awaited when turning over the detritus of the last thirteen years. Swarms of black ants had nested between sheets of stacked paneling and sheets of plywood, and mouse nests were discovered in boxes, rolls of old carpet remnants, and nooks and crannies of any description.

Being situated hard against our stand of timber, the barn's loft had become refuge and indoor potty for all manner of beast—an occupation which had started well before the barn was even completed.



On the day we built the loft, thirteen years earlier, I was up in the rafters arranging and laying down the sheets that would become its floor. Once they were ready to be nailed into place, I discovered a heaping mound of twigs wedged into the space at the top of the back wall. Thinking it to be an empty bird's nest, I was surprised when something moved within the pile. Soon, with a little prod-



ding, a rather substantial mouse emerged and scurried out of his snug home.

Wishing to discourage his permanent residence in my brand new barn, I removed all the twigs and thatch and tossed them outside, nonetheless marveling at the rodent's bright industry in securing such a cozy spot well in advance of winter. Out of nowhere a building was raised up in his woods, so the mouse seized the opportunity for shelter. If permitted to stay, he would have met the cold winter months secure under a solid, well-shingled roof.

One thing I have asked from the Lord,
that I shall seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the Lord
And to meditate in His temple.
For in the day of trouble He will conceal
me in His tabernacle;

In the secret place of His tent He will
hide me;
He will lift me up on a rock.

Psalms 27:4-5

That mouse, the loft's inaugural resident, knew, whether by instinct or experience, that the approaching winter would be far more pleasant when snuggled in a barn, than huddled shivering beneath a cold, damp tree stump. Within that shelter he and his family would remain not only warmed, but high, dry, and safe from the myriad predators who would like to have them for lunch.

Oh that we would have the simple wisdom of the beasts. Man has a bad habit of expending great effort searching for shelter in all the wrong places.



Some seek shelter perched atop a bar stool. Some look for it in the arms of someone other than their own spouse. Still others seek it in drugs or fanciful “new age” twaddle.

All the while, however, our true security lies within the arms of the Savior, where He—better than any other—is equipped to meet head-on anything that might bring us harm. ♦

When my heart was embittered
And I was pierced within,
Then I was senseless and ignorant;
I was like a beast before You.
Nevertheless I am continually with You;
You have taken hold of my right hand.
With Your counsel You will guide me,
And afterward receive me to glory.
Whom have I in heaven but You?
And besides You, I desire nothing on
earth.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
But God is the strength of my heart and
my portion forever.

Psalms 73:21-26

*O safe to the Rock that is higher than I,
My soul in its conflicts and sorrows would fly;
So sinful, so weary, Thine, Thine, would I be;
Thou blest “Rock of Ages,” I’m hiding in Thee.*

*In the calm of the noontide, in sorrow’s lone hour,
In times when temptation casts o’er me its power;
In the tempests of life, on its wide, heaving sea,
Thou blest “Rock of Ages,” I’m hiding in Thee.*

*How oft in the conflict, when pressed by the foe,
I have fled to my refuge and breathed out my woe;
How often, when trials like sea billows roll,
Have I hidden in Thee, O Thou Rock of my soul.*

*Hiding in Thee, hiding in Thee,
Thou blest “Rock of Ages,”
I’m hiding in Thee.*

William O. Cushing

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
 Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.
 There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.
 Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

Psalms 19:1-4a NIV

IF WINTER IS THE TIME for quiet introspection, then surely spring is the time for abandoned praise. If winter is when the earth sleeps in its annual Sabbath rest, then spring is when all joy bursts forth as a result.

Come spring the wrens have returned, the males staking their claims on the houses placed around the property and making their preparations for coaxing a female to make a home with them. Between trips shuttling twigs from the ground to the interior of the house, the tiny wren will pause upon a nearby branch to lift his vibrant song to the sky.

Now the lilting melodies of the meadowlark join with the ratcheting calls of the pheasant and wild turkey. The mockingbird and brown thrasher fill the air with their glorious, variegated songs so energetically pronounced. The robins,

too, add their simple voice to the chorus, while they pull up worms from the soft spring loam and build their mud-lined nests for the family that will soon be bursting their seams.

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." But Jesus answered, "I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!"

Luke 19:39-40

The hard truth may be that, if their songs were translated into man's native tongue, those birds would simply be giving voice to the more mundane necessities of life. The small wren in his full-voiced melody may only be saying, "Where are you? I'm lonely!" The mockingbird may really be saying, "Oh yeah! Well, take *this!*" And the robin may simply be muttering to

himself, “Now where is that worm? He was here just a minute ago.”

But if the true worth of an utterance is the emotion it stirs in the breast, then this winged chorus is indeed lifting praises to their creator. One cannot stand in the midst of this choir without feeling himself in God’s cathedral. As the air is filled with their rejoicing, the human heart is overwhelmed with praise and adoration of the One who filled the earth with so many good things. ♦

Let everything that has breath praise the
LORD.
Praise the LORD!

Psalm 150:6



Music is both an expression and a source of pleasure, and the pleasure that is purest and nearest to God is the pleasure of love. Hell is a place of no pleasure because there is no love there. Heaven is full of music because it is the place where pleasures of holy love abound... It is the nature of love that it cannot lie quiescent. It is active, creative, and benign. The love of God is one of the great realities of the universe, a pillar upon which the hope of the world rests. But it is a personal, intimate thing, too. God does not love populations, He loves people. He loves not masses, but men. He loves us all with a mighty love that has no beginning and can have no end. In Christian experience there is a highly satisfying love content that distinguishes it from all other religions and elevates it to heights far beyond even the purest and noblest philosophy. This love content is more than a thing; it is God Himself in the midst of His Church singing over His people. True Christian joy is the heart's harmonious response to the Lord's song of love.

A. W. Tozer



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