

Praise God for Birds

Matthew 6:25-27
September 8, 2024

What a blessing it is to be in God's great outdoors. Everywhere we look in Creation, we see God's wisdom, design, power, finesse, and love. But Creation does more. God created the universe in such a way as to teach us about Himself. There are lessons about God's character, about His attributes, about Himself and about us. Today, we're going to particularly focus on one type of animal God created on the fifth day. Say Birds. Open your Bibles today to Matt 6. I don't think you'll find any pew Bibles. While you're finding Matt 6, let's see how many birds you can name.

This could go on for a while for there are about 10,000 species of birds in the world (God likes variety). A student took a college class on bird identification. It was a very popular course held in an auditorium with a couple hundred students. Throughout the semester they learned about bird shapes, bird songs, bird feathers, bird legs, bird habits, etc. He studied all of that for the final exam. On that day, the professor came out, raised the curtain on the stage just a bit revealing a hundred sets of bird legs for them to identify. Everyone was angry but did the best they could. When finished he took his paper up with his student id number on it and slid it into the stack before turning to the professor and cutting lose. "This was the most horrible exam ever, this was unreasonable, you're an idiot, etc. The professor quietly listened then asked, "Young man, what is your name?" The student pulled his pant leg up a bit and said, "You tell me!"

Not only are there 10,000 species of birds in the world, there are as many as 400 billion individual birds which means there are 60 birds for each of us. Which is good because we use birds for lots of things. We eat them, including legs, eggs, gizzards, and even pate. We use their down to keep warm and fill pillows. We use their feathers for quill pens and their eggs for vaccines. Many of them pollinate our plants while others eat insects and rodents that cause us problems. They disperse seeds and plant trees and even serve as cleanup crews for dead animals. Praise God for buzzards ☺. We keep them as pets and teach them to talk. They serve as symbols like the US Bald Eagle, the German Black Eagle, the Baltimore Orioles, the Ravens, and many more. Birds bless our lives in many ways and birds are mentioned nearly 300 times in the Bible with over 25 different species including the dove and the raven on Noah's ark, the quail God fed the Israelites in the desert (first Chick-Fila), the ostrich and hawk in Job, the eagle in Isaiah and Revelation, the dove at Jesus' baptism and others. In fact Jesus used birds to teach us important lessons.

Let's read one of them from Matt 6:25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 26 Look at the

birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?"

Like us today sitting in this park, Jesus was sitting outside up on a hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee. As He taught that day, I'm sure birds flitted through their outdoor cathedral giving Him the perfect teachable moment. Many commentators believe this was in the fall when hundreds of millions of birds migrate from Europe and Asia to Africa passing through Israel on their way. It's their last chance to fill up before their 5-day journey across the Sahara Desert. We can imagine Jesus pointing up at one as He said, "As God cares of the birds, He'll take care of you!" Yes, we put feeders out for cardinals, blue jays, hummingbirds, orioles, but in most cases, they get along just fine without us. That's because God takes care of them.

Later in Matthew, Jesus says, (10:29-31) "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. 30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." Once again, He uses birds He created to drive home an extremely important theological truth we still struggle to believe. God will take care of you! Praise God for sparrows!

This echoes what Psalm 91 tells us, "Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. 4 He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge." That image of God shielding us as a mother hen shields her chicks is very powerful. In my office, I have a photo of a hen turkey up on a tree limb with several youngins under each of her outstretched wings shielding them from the rain. What a perfect picture of God's love and protection over His children. Think on this. Let it sink in. Soak your soul in the image of God protecting you from the storms of this world. Financial storms, political storms, storms at work, at home, emotional storms, and especially from our enemy the devil, who, like a coyote, comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Jesus Himself told His fellow Jews in Matt 23:37, "... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing." Learn from the birds and allow Him to tuck you under His protective wing today. Praise God for chickens!

I've had some really incredible encounters with birds while hunting over the years. In addition to the many turkey stories I could share, I once had a Carolina Wren land on the end of my gun barrel. That was pretty cool. But one morning last November as I sat in my treestand, a tufted titmouse landed on my right shoulder. It was very cool. I disciplined myself not to turn my head and scare him off but he left about as quick as he came realizing what he had done. But not before he left me a present in my open fanny pack. His quick departure reminded me of the truth of Prov 23:5 which says, "Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly

off to the sky like an eagle.” Or a titmouse. I did, by the way, see two eagles fly overhead in the same treestand another morning, and that was pretty special too. Praise God for wrens and titmice!

Birds have amazing instincts. Say Instinct. That’s a word scientists use to describe animal behavior they have absolutely no explanation for. Because many deny the Creator, they reject any suggestion that God purposefully designed animals to do the incredibly complex things they do. So there must be some other reason. But incredibly complex they are. Take for example the miracle of migration. Right now, some of the birds we’ve enjoyed throughout the summer are packing their suitcases preparing to head south for a few months. Our tiny hummingbirds with eggs the size of tic-tacs will soon be making their 2000 mile trip to Central America for winter vacation, a portion of which involves a 600 mile non-stop stint over the Gulf of Mexico only to return next spring, some to their exact same tiny nest. Praise God for hummingbirds!

Let me mention some other migrants. Pacific Golden Plovers are shorebirds about the size of mourning doves and live in northern Siberia and Alaska during the summer. But they spend their winters in Southern Asia and Australia or one of the Pacific Islands. Nearly all of those from Alaska fly first to Hawaiian Islands which are a few scattered specks in the enormous Pacific Ocean. It is an 88 hour non-stop flight covering over 2800 miles of open ocean. These birds never took swimming lessons and there is no land to stop for a breather. 88 non-stop hours. Over 3½ days including nights. No food, no drink. Just flight.

So that’s pretty incredible all by itself. But, they shouldn’t be able to do it because it requires more energy than they can store in their small bodies. So before they hit the runways up in Alaska, they tank up with a reserve of 70 grams of energy, enough to take them 70 hours. Which is still 18 hours short of Honolulu. So, like geese, they fly in a V to draft each other saving 1/4th of the energy it would take if they did it alone. Of course the lead bird has no advantage, so they take turns. They arrive in Hawaii with nearly 7 grams of energy to spare although they lose about half their body weight. Imagine a 130 pound person jogging for 3½ days straight with no food or water and losing 65 pounds.

So that’s pretty incredible, but there’s more. The parents head out on an earlier flight leaving their youngsters to find Maui all by themselves later on. Which they do having never been there before and having no GPS or Atlas. Say instinct. Say God. This is the fingerprint of God! Praise God for plovers! In Ps 50:11 God says, “I know every bird in the mountains.” Yes, He does. In fact, these plovers don’t actually hold the record for non-stop flight. That belongs to a bar-tailed godwit that flew for 265 hours straight, over 11 days, and more than 8000 miles from Alaska to Tasmania below Australia.

Nor is this the longest. For an Arctic Tern racked up nearly 60,000 miles in one round trip from England to Antarctica and back. That's flying around the earth twice plus 10,000 extra miles. Because they do this every year, some accumulate nearly 2 million frequent flyer miles in their lifetimes. That's like going to the moon and back 4 times. Engineering professor Andy McIntosh has said, "Flight alone demolishes any concept of evolution." The B-2 Stealth Bomber is fashioned after one of the fastest of all birds, the peregrine falcon which dives at 280 mph. Gliders are proportioned like the albatross which can soar for six hours without ever moving its wings. Praise God for terns, falcons and albatrosses!

So what are the spiritual lessons we can learn from these winged critters? 1. Obviously the importance of working together sharing leadership. One person can never lead everything all the time. Let's take turns and share the load so we don't use up all our energy and drop out of the sky prematurely. Those in front have to step aside and fall into formation from time to time and those in the back have to step up. Some Christians seem content to fly in the back all the time. There are times and seasons for each one to step up and take some of the wind off of others.

2. Say endurance. Paul tells us to run with perseverance the race marked out for us. We must run the race and finish our course in spite of the difficulties. In spite of life's pain, in spite of darkness. Taking a rest every seventh day, pacing ourselves to make our journey through life.

3. Navigation. As I mentioned scientists still don't know how birds find their way. It seems some use landmarks, some use the sun and/or the stars, some use the earth's magnetic field, and some we still have no clue. How do the young plovers find their way across a trackless ocean to a destination they've never been to before. Say God. God guides them. If He guides them, will He not also guide us with His unseen Holy Spirit. We must trust God's Word and His Holy Spirit to lead us to the destination He has in mind for us, which is a paradise far better than Hawaii that we've never been to before, but that He wants us to enjoy. Jesus is the way and He will lead us if we faithfully follow the leading of His Spirit and His Word.

There are many other God-lessons we can learn from birds. A Clark's Nutcracker can hide as many as 500 seeds per hour, over 8 a minute. But here's the best part. Months later, it returns and digs them out from under heavy snow, remembering as many as 10,000 locations! (Even with PrevaGen, I can't find my keys). If God made them to remember that much with a brain the size of an acorn, He can certainly remember each of us! And know how many hairs are on our heads as Jesus said! Praise God for nutcrackers!

Or take owls. Say who. Can not the God who made the owl to see on the darkest night not see you in your darkest night? Besides mice and snakes, Great Horned owls

love to eat skunks. Say yuck. Believe it or not, they can't smell. And they can't taste that well either. Most birds have very few taste buds. No wonder they eat like birds. But their talons clamp shut at 500 pounds per square inch compared to our grip of 65. Owl feathers have soft edges enabling them to fly without any sound. And, of course, their heads are on swivels enabling them to, like your mother, watch behind as well as in front, reminding us that God is always watching. Speaking of eyes, the eyesight of eagles and hawks is about 8 times better than yours spotting a mouse from a thousand or more feet up. So can the One who made the hawk eye not see you in your joy or despair, in your obedience and in your sin? Praise God for hawks, eagles, and owls!

Say flamingo. Do you know what a group of flamingos is called? A flamboyance. No lie. Look it up. A group of crows is a murder. Flamingos live in super salty lakes that would strip your skin off and they eat algae and shrimp that would kill most of us. But they turn it into the beautiful pink and orange colors they are known for. Reminding us of how God can take our garbage, our trials, our poisons, and turn them into beauty. Flamingos also mate for life with some celebrating 50th wedding anniversaries reminding us the intended permanence of marriage. And wrens make 500 trips per day back and forth from their nests to feed their young reminding us to care for our children. Praise God for flamingos and wrens.

Let's talk about bird songs. Say songs. Ps 104:12 tells us, "The birds of the air nest by the waters; they sing among the branches." Even now we hear crows overhead or other birds in the distance. A good rooster, like the one that woke Peter from his denial, can be heard up to a mile away while a peacock is good up to 5 miles, not to mention his incredible splendor. But the loudest bird is the white bellbird from the Amazon at 125 decibels. That's like being 50 yards from a jet that's taking off. They do this to attract mates, who must obviously be hard of hearing. Praise God for roosters, peacocks, and bellbirds!

But what many birds lack in volume, they make up for in beauty. There are about 4000 species of songbirds. Many of them are rather ordinary looking but produce beautiful music while other birds with beautiful plumage don't sing that well. Which explains why my singing is so limited 😊. Beautiful music is no accident. It must be composed with melody, rhythm and harmony. God composed birdsongs with all of these. Those who have studied birdsongs are utterly amazed at their complexity. Birds have perfect pitch without any tuning fork. Some finches can sing up to 45 notes per second (count it) with several hundred notes in a 20 second song. As I've shared before, birds basically have two voice boxes, one at the top of each lung enabling some of them to sing two different notes at the same time. Blue Jays can sing the notes of a major chord simultaneously. And birds have quite the repertoire. Mockingbirds can sing 150 different songs while nightingales know 300. Some species sing matched duets complementing each other like opera singers, while some even sing antiphonally alternating notes back and forth in the same song. All without a single voice lesson. Bird

brains? I don't think so. We could go on and on, but instead of analyzing all the research, there's still nothing more therapeutic than just sitting in the woods listening to the birds. It heals the heart. It mends the mind. It soothes the soul. Praise God for songbirds!

Why do birds sing so beautifully? Yes, to attract mates but mostly to just glorify their Creator! Should not we do the same? For this Creator not only created them to sing such incredibly beautiful music, He has created and designed ears for us to hear it! And minds to appreciate it! And tongues to glorify Him for it and to join them in singing His praise! Why are there flowers blooming in the desert where no human will ever see them? Why do birds sing beautifully on top of yonder mountain for no person to ever hear? Why do stars shine so brightly in deep space beyond the reach of any telescope? Why do certain rocks contain beauties concealed deep within the earth? Because this universe is about much more than just you and me or even us. There is a God they glorify! And we should do the same! May we learn the many lessons birds can teach us and may we praise the God who made them and for the beauty and blessing of birds. If you've never come under His sing, do that right now as we pray.