In our busy lives, do we ever take time to consider the ant? Do you ever sit down and watch ants tirelessly carry pieces of dirt from their hole and deposit it outside only to return quickly for another piece? Have you ever wondered how that ant carrying food through the grass knows where it is going? The inspired writer of the book of Proverbs watched ants and God commands us to do the same. God commands us! Let us take heed and be wise. When we watch ants through the spectacles of Scripture, then we grow in knowledge and wisdom.

When you read Proverbs 6:6, you will notice that God commands the sluggard to consider the ways of the ant. That means that we all must consider the ant. Even if you consider yourself an extremely busy and efficient person, you must still consider the ant because the sluggard in this text is not one who is merely slow in daily work, but one who is spiritually sluggish. No matter how busy we appear to men, we are by nature spiritual sluggards. Often it is the case that the more busy we are in earthly things, the more sluggish we are with spiritual things. There is not a person in the whole church who can say "this command does not apply to me."

The book of Proverbs directs our attention to spiritual wisdom and not merely practical wisdom for daily life. Spiritual wisdom is the foundation and basis for the practical wisdom of earthly living. Wisdom in the book of Proverbs is first of all knowledge of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. Spiritual sluggishness is apparent when we don't feel like searching the Scriptures diligently to grow in our knowledge of Christ and our salvation. Growing in wisdom involves a great deal of work. We are all by nature sluggards, and therefore we all must consider the ant so that we can learn how to be busy spiritually.

The best way to consider the ant, is to go outside, stop, and watch them and think about their activity in light of the Word of God. Keep in mind that they are working toward the goal of storing up food for winter, and think about the goal for the Christian: knowledge of God through salvation in Christ. This simple activity of watching an ant come out of its hole with a piece of dirt, walk a couple inches, drop it, and disappear again down its hole will give you plenty upon which to meditate. Here is just one question to ponder. How does your diligence in seeking the Kingdom of God compare to the diligence of the ant?

Watching an ant dig its hole is not the only "way" of the ant. The Scriptures command us to consider the "ways" - plural - of the ant. Let us therefore consider the ant a little more closely and discover some things about the ant which are not so easily seen.

When God created the earth, He made sure that we would be able easily to find these tiny instructors in wisdom. They can be found on nearly every square foot of dry ground. In fact biologists consider the ant to be one of our planet’s dominant creatures in that they greatly outnumber all other non-insect terrestrial animals combined. Imagine that! Count every man, woman and child, every mouse, chicken, dog, cat, and every other animal in the whole world, and the ants still far outnumber them.

Ants have a distinctive activity. When we look at the two places in the Bible where we read about ants, we notice that both passages refer to their gathering up of food in the summer. This work of gathering involves a complex array of tasks, but standing out from this activity are two important things that are specifically mentioned for our instruction. The first is that the ants have no guide, overseer, or ruler, the second is that the ants are so small and "a people not strong" (Proverbs 30:24-25). These two truths about the work of ants and the ants themselves manifest the wisdom of ants, and serve specifically for our instruction in wisdom.

We begin by considering the ant's gathering of food. Gathering food in the summer is important for the ant because it is a matter of life or death. It is important that they gather food in the summer.
because that is the time which God has given them for the gathering of food. If they wait around for another day, they will starve and die. This simple principle also applies to us. God has given to us our life on this earth as a time for us to gather spiritual food. The child of God is regenerated and therefore wise to seek spiritual food. Waiting ends only in spiritual death.

When ants gather food, they look for anything that is sweet and can be converted into liquid sugar which fuels their active little bodies. We all know how quickly ants find something sweet on the picnic table; but did you know that ants also "milk" aphid cows, and cultivate gardens under the ground? Aphids are tiny insects which group together on plants and suck out sugary juices. They are also slow, vulnerable creatures and defenseless against wasps and ladybugs which prey upon them, but God has provided the ants to guard and defend them against predators. In return, the aphids produce excess sugary fluid for the ants to drink. Using this quick energy, the ants are able to gather more food for the colony.

Leaf-cutter ants live in the tropics and tend gardens of fungus underground. With their big jaws, they neatly clip off chunks of leaf many times their own size and carry them to their holes. They harvest tons of leaves removing about 15 percent of leaf production in the rain-forests where they live. Since ants are unable to eat and digest the leaves, they must undergo further processing. Inside the nest, slightly smaller workers cut the leaves into smaller bits and passes the pieces to another class of ants which chew them into pulp and mixes it with waste material and dead insects for fertilizer. Other ants carry this leaf paste into empty chambers where yet another group will transplant living fungus into the rich leaf mulch prepared by the ants. In these carefully prepared chambers, the environment is just right and the fungus grows rapidly. While the fungus is growing in these chambers, the smallest ants in the colony will tend and harvest the fungus which is excellent food for the ants.

So much work and care for premium food! The ant uses every available resource and works hard when it is time to work. So must be our diligence in seeking spiritual food. All our school work and other activities ought to be done with the goal of growing in our knowledge of God and gathering the people of God into the Church. We ought to consider our talents and think about how our talents can best be employed for work in the church. The church needs good fathers and mothers, teachers, elders, deacons, and those who care for the elderly. The church also needs money to function in this world and therefore she needs people with generous hearts and willing hands and minds to work.

We read in the Bible of the ants as a "people not strong." In itself, an ant is small and insignificant. As an organized group, however, the ant colony is able to do amazing things. They are small and therefore their strength lies in numbers. But they are not merely a mass. They work together as a harmonious whole. Some compare each ant to one of thousands of transistors in a computer chip, and the colony to a computer or mind. The strength of the ant lies not merely in numbers, but in wisdom.

What is that wisdom? For an ant to be wise is to live in accordance with the law God has given to the ant. God has given them the goal and task to gather food in the summer. They know that goal and they conform all their activity to the attainment of that goal. They work together in the most efficient way possible while the sun is hot and God is providing food for them to gather. That is wisdom.

Working together to find food requires some sort of system. Yet we read in the Bible that the ants have no ruler to coordinate the work. Actually, it would be rather foolish for one ant to coordinate the work because an ant in itself is weak. We already noticed that their strength was in the wisdom of working together. So how do they work together? God rules over them. God is the source of the ant's wisdom and strength. Within the colony there are various sized ants for various tasks. Some work as soldiers to defend the colony, some gather food, and some take care of matters in the nest. Size is determined by the way in which infant ants are fed. If the infant would be fed all it could eat, it would grow and grow to an oversized worthless giant of two or three inches long. The feeding is carefully regulated by workers to produce the most efficient proportion of workers for various tasks. Some are
fed so that they become large food gatherers, others are very small garden tenders. Each one knows its place and works in harmony with the others.

The workers which are out gathering food use an amazing system of communication and navigation. When the ant goes out to search for new food sources, it navigates with "splash" patterns of sunlight in the atmosphere. Even on a cloudy day, the ant is able to see the patterns of light from which it can determine its location with relation to its hole. When one ant discovers an abundant source of food, it takes only a little and returns to the colony as quickly as possible. It determines the straightest path possible and leaves behind an invisible chemical trail. The chemicals hover in the air close to the ground in the thick grass where the air remains undisturbed and holds the scent in place for a time. The other ants are able to follow the trail easily with their antennae and at the same time release more chemical with each trip back to signal the fact that more food remains. The stronger the scent, the more ants follow it. Even if their path becomes blocked, God has given to the ant the ability to assess the situation, and within minutes recognize, in the most mathematically efficient way possible, the network which will lead back home the quickest.

When we consider the ant and its relationship to the colony, the likeness to the church and the believer is striking! God is pleased to gather His people into a Church which is the body of Christ. We are wise when we strive to work and fellowship together as the body of Christ. This wisdom is found only in those whose hearts have been renewed by the atoning work of Christ. Yet we must fight against our old foolish nature. If we seek our own individual goals, our work is futile and worthless and we will perish. We need to be of one mind and pursue one goal. That is the command of God to us when He commands us to consider the ant. Go outside now and consider the ant!

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