

## GO TO THE ANT

### Timeless principles to learn from these tiny creatures

Global economic uncertainty makes us pause, think and confront the sobering reality that good jobs are hard to find and hard to keep. Layoffs and long-term unemployment have become the new reality for many. In a competitive job market, those with a strong work ethic stand out.

God wants us to have the abundant life, not a life of anxiety and worry. And who doesn't desire abundant living? But it is not a free ride. God's Word is the manual that shows the way to peace, success and happiness, including this important instruction: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest" (Prov. 6:6-8).

Most of the time, we hardly pay any attention to these small insects. We notice them when they swarm all over some sugar, honey or jam that we have forgotten to seal. These busy little creatures quickly scurry, in an orderly column, to transport their newfound spoil from our kitchen or pantry to their secret hideout.

According to the *World Almanac for Kids*, there are about 20,000 species of ants in various sizes, colors and shapes. In his book *Adventures Among Ants*, author Mark W. Moffett writes that ants run into the millions of billions and outnumber humans by a factor of a million: "A single hectare in the Amazon basin contains more ants than the entire human population of New York City, that's just counting the ants on the ground—twice as many live in the treetops."

Ants are social insects that live together in large colonies. Their group home is usually a system of underground tunnels and chambers, with mounds above, formed out of the dirt or sand they removed in digging.

But some ants are different. Carpenter ants carve tunnels in wood, but don't eat it. In the rain forests of South America, the Aztec ant lives inside trees. Tailor ants from the tropics of Africa use leaves to build their nests. And Army ants don't build at all. They travel in big groups looking for food.

Each ant has a specific job. The queen lays eggs to populate the colony. Worker ants collect food, feed members of the colony and enlarge the nest. Soldier ants are large workers that defend the colony and sometimes attack ants who are strangers.

The Dalmatian ant actually cooks its food by chewing it into patties and baking them in the sun. Harvester ants collect and store seeds. Leaf-cutter ants grow fungus for food. One trait is common to all these ant species: They're always busy working hard. What are some lessons we can learn from them?

Ants are industrious and hardworking. How many people today view work as something to be avoided or at least reduced to an absolute minimum? Whole technologies are built on the concept of making tasks easier to complete. Manual vocations are often perceived as lowly or demeaning, in part because they involve physical exertion, and even getting dirty sometimes.

Hard work and industriousness are distinctive characteristics of the true Christian's work ethic because he follows the example of God's work ethic. God reveals Himself to us as a worker: "But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17). God worked the work of creating and when He created Adam and Eve, He made them workers too: "And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed... And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden **to dress it and to keep it** (Gen. 2:8, 15).

Unfortunately, for some, work is considered as the undesired time between pleasure and leisure. Recreation and relaxation excite them; work does not. They cannot distinguish between true tiredness or plain laziness. These individuals have trouble holding a job. They

readily make excuses about why one job isn't working out or why another doesn't fit them.

The work ethic—the desire, the love for and the satisfaction gained from producing and creating—needs to be part of our character, just as it is part of God's character. And we can see this industriousness in the activity of ants.

### **Ants are diligent**

Ants can carry as much as fifty times their body weight! They are tiny and may appear fragile, but working together they can move big things. They are able to build huge ant hills by burrowing into the dirt, tunneling even ten or fifteen feet underground. Ants prepare their food supply during the harvest time and ensure the survival of the colony: “The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer” (Prov. 30:25). We can go to the ant to learn about its incredible diligence.

Former President Dwight D. Eisenhower, in his farewell State of the Union address January 7, 1960, told the nation:

America did not become great through softness and self-indulgence. Her miraculous progress and achievement flow from other qualities far more worthy and substantial: adherence to principles and methods consonant with our religious philosophy; a **satisfaction in hard work**; the readiness to sacrifice for worthwhile causes; the courage to meet every challenge to her progress.

Is this the work ethic of Americans today? Are we still engaged in the pursuit of excellence?

Sadly, what we see in the workplace today is a growing and alarming descent towards shoddy work. American ingenuity and good old-fashioned hard work are being worn away by the downward pulls of sloppiness and mediocrity! Having the right attitude towards our job is important because whether one is a working man, housewife or

student, each of us is being judged by our performance in these daily tasks!

Are we working only because we have to? Notice the outstanding example of diligence personified by the Moabite Ruth, who resolutely accompanied her mother-in-law Naomi back to Israel. There Ruth labored at gleaning the fields under the hot Judean sun in order to supply their needs (Ruth 2:17-18), Yet the Bible does not record a single word of complaint, of whining and belly-aching from Ruth. Not a single act of regret for the decision she made. Rather, she simply rolled up her sleeves, wiped the sweat off her brow and went to work.

Going above and beyond characterizes the true Christian's work ethic: "But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he than that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say We are unprofitable servants: we *have done that which was our duty to do*" (Luke 17:7-10).

A profitable worker is one who gives his employer a decent day's work, working hard all day at whatever his boss gives him to do. Such an exemplary worker goes even farther than is required and gives his employer even more than he is getting paid for. He takes the success of his employer personally, and, like the ant, more than carries his own weight.

### **Ants are self-starters**

Ants don't have to have leaders and supervisors constantly directing them. They are hard-wired to work diligently and zealously without being prodded. Employers value those workers who show initiative, flexibility and resourcefulness.

Those who must be constantly supervised will be paid less than those requiring little or no supervision who do their jobs without being told, or do it promptly when told how. Each of us can be the kind of person who enhances the productivity of his supervisor and co-workers. When the time comes for raises and promotions, this is usually the man or woman who will be remembered.

Workers with initiative, drive and enthusiasm stand out. They don't have to pretend to be hard at work because the boss is watching. The self-starter is not a flatterer who believes success and advancement come from buttering up the right people. He knows his responsibility, and like the little ant can be counted on to do his work promptly and without prodding.

The tiny ant demonstrates principles that can produce big benefits—lessons of industriousness, quality and excellence; lessons of initiative and zeal in doing the very best we can with all of our hearts, energies and resources; lessons of intrinsic self-motivation.

These timeless principles are the reason why God instructs us to go to the ant, consider her ways, and be wise.