

The Ants And The Grasshopper

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The ant, like the bee, has long been held up as a paradigm of industriousness. Proverbs 6:6-8 says, "Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider her ways and be wise: which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest. "

One fine day in winter some ants were busy drying their store of corn, which had become damp during a long spell of rain. Presently, a grasshopper came up and begged them to spare her a few grains. "For," she said, "I'm simply starving."

The ants stopped work for a moment, though this was against their principles. "May we ask," said they, "what you were doing with yourself all last summer? Why didn't you collect a store of food for the winter?"

"The fact is," replied the grasshopper, "I was so busy singing that I hadn't time."

"If you spent the summer singing," replied the ants, "you can't do better than spend the winter dancing." And they chuckled and went on with their work.

Aesop

Belling the Cat**2**

Some little mice, who lived in the walls of a house, met together one night to talk of the wicked cat, and to consider what could be done to get rid of her. The head mice were Brown-back, Grey-ear, and White-whisker.

“There is no comfort in the house,” said Brown-back. “If I but step into the pantry to pick up a few crumbs, down she comes, and I hardly have time to run to my nest again.”

“What can we do?” asked Grey-ear. “Shall we all run at her at once and bite her, and frighten her away?”

“No,” said White-whisker. “She is so bold we could not frighten her. I have thought of something better than that. Let us hang a bell around her neck. Then, if she moves, the bell will ring, and we shall hear it and have time to run away.”

“O yes! yes!” cried all the mice. “That is a wonderful idea. We will bell the cat! Hurrah! Hurrah! No more fear of the cat!” And they danced in glee.

When they were quiet again, Brown-back asked, “But who will hang the bell around her neck?” No one answered. “Will you?” he asked White-whisker.

“I don’t think I can,” replied White-whisker. “I am lame, you know. It needs someone who can move quickly.”

“Will you, Grey-ear?” said Brown-back.

“Excuse me,” answered Grey-ear. “I have not been well since that time when I was almost caught in the trap.”

“Who will bell the cat, then?” said Brown-back. “If it is to be done, someone must do it.”

Not a sound was heard, and one by one the little mice stole away to their holes, no better off than they were before.

From Beka Reading Series

One good, practical reason for controlling our cravings is that if we grasp for too much, we may end up getting nothing at all.

A little boy once found a jar of nuts on the table.

“I would like some of these nuts,” he thought. “I’m sure Mother would give them to me if she were here. I’ll take a big handful.” So he reached into the jar and grabbed as many as he could hold.

But when he tried to pull his hand out, he found that the neck of the jar was too small. His hand was held fast, but he did not want to drop any of the nuts.

He tried again and again, but he couldn’t get the whole handful out. At last he began to cry. Just then his mother came into the room. “What’s the matter?” she asked.

“I can’t take this handful of nuts out of the jar,” sobbed the boy.

“Well, don’t be greedy,” his mother replied. “Just take two or three, and you’ll have no trouble getting your hand out.”

“How easy that was,” said the boy as he left the table. “I should have thought of that myself.”

Aesop

This may be Aesop's most famous fable, and for good reason. The fastest way to lose our "good reputation" is to lose our honesty.

There was once a shepherd boy who kept his flock at a little distance from the village. Once he thought he would play a trick on the villagers and have some fun at their expense. So he ran toward the village crying out, with all his might:

"Wolf! Wolf! Come and help! The wolves are at my lambs!"

The kind villagers left their work and ran to the field to help him. But when they got there, the boy laughed at them for their pains; there was no wolf there.

Still another day the boy tried the same trick, and the villagers came running to help and were laughed at again.

Then one day a wolf did break into the fold and began killing the lambs. In great fright, the boy ran back for help. "Wolf, Wolf!" he screamed. "There is a wolf in the flock! Help!"

The villagers heard him, but they thought it was another mean trick. No one paid the least attention or went near him. And the shepherd boy lost all his sheep.

That is the kind of thing that happens to people who lie. Even when they do tell the truth, they will not be believed.

Aesop

Mark Twain once said he had known a lot of troubles in his life, and most of them never happened. We imagine many of our fears into existence. To avoid foolish cowardice, refrain from too much mountain making out of molehills. Courage, said Plato, is knowing what to fear.

Chicken Little was in the woods one day when an acorn fell on her head. It scared her so much she trembled all over. She shook so hard, half her feathers fell out.

“Help! Help!” she cried. “The sky is falling! I must go tell the king!” So she ran in great fright to tell the king. Along the way she met Henny Penny. “Where are you going, Chicken Little?” Henny Penny asked. “Oh, help!” Chicken Little cried. “The sky is falling!”

“How do you know?” asked Henny Penny.

“Oh! I saw it with my own eyes, and heard it with my own ears, and part of it fell on my head!”

“This is terrible, just terrible!” Henny Penny clucked. “We’d better run.” So they both ran away as fast as they could. Soon they met Ducky Lucky. “Where are you going, Chicken Little and Henny Penny?” he asked.

“The sky is falling! The sky is falling! We’re going to tell the king!” they cried.

“How do you know?” asked Ducky Lucky. “I saw it with my own eyes, and heard it with my own ears, and part of it fell on my head,” Chicken Little said.

“Oh dear, oh dear!” Ducky Lucky quacked. “We’d better run!” So they all ran down the road as fast as they could. Soon they met Goosey Loosey waddling along the roadside.

“Hello there, Chicken Little, Henny Penny, and Ducky Lucky,” called Goosey Loosey. “Where are you all going in such a hurry?” “We’re running for our lives!” cried Chicken Little.

“The sky is falling!” clucked Henny Penny. “And we’re running to tell the king!” quacked Ducky Lucky. “How do you know the sky is falling?” asked Goosey Loosey.

“I saw it with my own eyes, and heard it with my own ears, and part of it fell on my head,” Chicken Little said.

“Goodness!” squawked Goosey Loosey. “Then I’d better run with you.” And they all ran in great fright across a meadow.

Before long they met Turkey Lurkey strutting back and forth.

“Hello there, Chicken Little, Henny Penny, Ducky Lucky, and Goosey Loosey,” he called.

“Where are you going in such a hurry?”

“Help! Help!” cried Chicken Little.

“We’re running for our lives!” clucked Henny Penny. “The sky is falling!” quacked Ducky Lucky.

“And we’re running to tell the king!” squawked Goosey Loosey. “How do you know the sky is falling?” asked Turkey Lurkey.

“I saw it with my own eyes, and heard it with my own ears, and part of it fell on my head,” Chicken Little said.

“Oh dear! I always suspected the sky would fall someday,” Turkey Lurkey gobbled. “I’d better run with you.”

So they all ran with all their might, until they met Foxy Loxy.

“Well, well,” said Foxy Loxy. “Where are you rushing on such a fine day?”

“Help! Help!” cried Chicken Little, Henny Penny, Ducky Lucky, Goosey Loosey, and Turkey Lurkey. “It’s not a fine day at all. The sky is falling, and we’re running to tell the king!”

“How do you know the sky is falling?” said Foxy Loxy.

“I saw it with my own eyes, and heard it with my own ears, and part of it fell on my head,” Chicken Little said.

“I see,” said Foxy Loxy. “Well then, follow me, and I’ll show you the way to the king.”

So Foxy Loxy led Chicken Little, Henny Penny, Ducky Lucky, Goosey Loosey, and Turkey Lurkey across a field and through the woods. He led them straight to his den, and they never saw the king to tell him the sky was falling.

A mouse from the city went on a visit to a friend in the country.

The country mouse brought out the best he had and waited on his guest.

There was plenty of oatmeal and peas, a nice scrap of bacon, and even a piece of cheese for dessert. While the guest was dining, the country mouse, out of politeness, would eat none of these dainties for fear there would not be enough. He just nibbled a piece of straw to keep his guest company.

When the dinner was over, the city mouse said, "Old friend, I thank you for your courtesy, but I must have a plain talk with you. I do not see how you can bear to live this poor life in a hole. Why not come with me to the city where you will have all sorts of good things to eat and have a gay time? You are really wasting your life in this quiet place. Come with me, and I will show you how fine the city is."

After being urged a long time, the country mouse at last agreed to go to the city that very night. So they started off together, and at about midnight came to the great house where the city mouse lived. In the dining room was spread a rich feast. The city mouse, with many airs and graces, ran about the table, picked out the nicest bits, and waited on his country friend. The friend was amazed at the good things, and he ate to his heart's content.

All at once the doors of the dining room were flung open, and in came a crowd of people, laughing and talking. They were followed by a big dog, who barked loudly and ran about the room. The mice rushed for the hole to escape, and the little field mouse almost died of fright. As soon as he was able to speak, he said, "Well, if this is city life, I have seen enough of it. Stay in this fine place if you like. I will be very glad to get home to my quiet hole and my plain oatmeal and peas."

From Beka Reading Series

Vanity is largely a matter of self-control, or lack of it. Others may try to feed our ego, but it is up to us to control it.

A coal-black crow once stole a piece of meat. She flew to a tree and held the meat in her beak.

A fox, who saw her, wanted the meat for himself, so he looked up into the tree and said, "How beautiful you are, my friend! Your feathers are fairer than the dove's."

"Is your voice as sweet as your form is beautiful? If so you must be the queen of birds."

The crow was so happy in his praise that she opened her mouth to show how she could sing. Down fell the piece of meat.

The fox seized upon it and ran away.

Aesop

The chopping down of the cherry tree is surely the most famous truth-telling tale in America. It first appeared in 1806 in the fifth edition of Mason Lock Weems's imaginative biography of Washington, entitled The Life of George Washington with Curious Anecdotes, Equally Honourable to Himself and Exemplary to His Young Countrymen. Here is an early twentieth-century rendition.

When George Washington was a little boy, he lived on a farm in Virginia. His father taught him to ride, and he used to take young George about the farm with him so that his son might learn how to take care of the fields and horses and cattle when he grew older.

Mr. Washington had planted an orchard of fine fruit trees. There were apple trees, peach trees, pear trees, plum trees, and cherry trees. Once, a particularly fine cherry tree was sent to him from across the ocean. Mr. Washington planted it on the edge of the orchard. He told everyone on the farm to watch it carefully to see that it was not broken or hurt in any way.

It grew well, and one spring it was covered with white blossoms. Mr. Washington was pleased to think he would soon have cherries from the little tree.

Just about this time, George was given a shiny new hatchet. George took it and went about chopping sticks, hacking into the rails of fences, and cutting whatever else he passed. At last he came to the edge of the orchard, and thinking only how well his hatchet could cut, he chopped into the little cherry tree. The bark was soft, and it cut so easily that George chopped the tree right down, and then went on with his play.

That evening when Mr. Washington came from inspecting the farm, he sent his horse to the stable and walked down to the orchard to look at his cherry tree. He stood in amazement when he saw how it was cut. "Who would have dared do such a thing?" he asked everyone, but no one could tell him anything about it.

Just then George passed by.

"George," his father called in an angry voice, "do you know who killed my cherry tree?"

This was a tough question, and George staggered under it for a moment, but quickly recovered. "I cannot tell a lie, father," he said. "I did it with my hatchet."

Mr. Washington looked at George. The boy's face was white, but he looked straight into his father's eyes.

"Go into the house, son," said Mr. Washington sternly—

George went into the library and waited for his father. He was very unhappy and very much ashamed. He knew he had been foolish and thoughtless and that his father was right to be displeased.

Soon, Mr. Washington came into the room. "Come here, my boy," he said. George went over to his father. Mr.

Washington looked at him long and steadily. "Tell me, son, why did you cut the tree?"

"I was playing, and I did not think. . . ." George stammered.

"And now the tree will die. We shall never have any cherries from it. But worse than that, you have failed to take care of the tree when I asked you to do so."

George's head was bent, and his cheeks were red from shame. "I am sorry, father," he said.

Mr. Washington put his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Look at me," he said. "I am sorry to have lost the cherry tree, but I am glad that you were brave enough to tell me the truth. I would rather have you truthful and brave than to have a whole orchard full of the finest cherry trees. Never forget that, my son."

George Washington never did forget. To the end of his life, he was just as brave and honorable as he was that day as a little boy.

Adapted from J. Berg Esenwein and Marietta Stockard

The Goose That Laid The Golden Eggs

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Here is Aesop's classic fable about plenty not being enough, about what happens when "having it all" becomes the motto of the day.

A man and his wife had the good fortune to possess a goose that laid a golden egg every day. Lucky though they were, they soon began to think they were not getting rich fast enough, and imagining the bird must be made of gold inside, they decided to kill it in order to secure the whole store of precious metal at once. But when they cut it open, they found it was just like any other goose. Thus they neither got rich all at once, as they had hoped, nor continued to enjoy the daily addition to their wealth.

Much wants more and loses all.

Aesop

This story is retold from a poem by Jean de La Fontaine (1621-1695), who, like Aesop, was a master of the fable.

Once upon a time, out in the green, silent woods near a rushing river that foamed and sparkled as it hurried along, there lived a poor woodcutter who worked hard to make a living for his family. Every day he would trudge into the forest with his strong, sharp ax over his shoulder. He always whistled happily as he went, because he was thinking that as long as he had his health and his ax, he could earn enough to buy all the bread his family needed.

One day he was cutting a large oak tree near the riverside. The chips flew fast at every stroke, and the sound of the ringing ax echoed through the forest so clearly you might have thought a dozen wood choppers were at work that day.

By and by the woodman thought he would rest awhile. He leaned his ax against the tree and turned to sit down, but he tripped over an old, gnarled root, and before he could catch it, his ax slid down the bank and into the river!

The poor woodman gazed into the stream, trying to see the bottom, but it was far too deep there. The river flowed over the lost treasure just as merrily as before.

“What will I do?” the woodman cried. “I’ve lost my ax! How will I feed my children now?”

Just as he finished speaking, up from the lake rose a beautiful lady. She was the water fairy of the river, and came to the surface when she heard his sad voice.

“What is your sorrow?” she asked kindly. The woodman told her about his trouble, and at once she sank beneath the surface and reappeared in a moment with an ax made of silver.

“Is this the ax you lost?” she asked.

The woodman thought of all the fine things he could buy for his children with the silver! But the ax was- n’t his, so he shook his head, and answered, “My ax was only made of steel.”

The water fairy laid the silver ax on the bank, and sank into the river again. In a moment she rose and showed the woodman another ax, “Perhaps this one is yours?” she asked.

The woodman looked. “Oh, no! he replied. “This one is made of gold! It’s worth many times more than mine.”

The water fairy laid the golden ax on the bank. Once again she sank. Up she rose. This time she held the missing ax.

“That is mine!” the woodman cried. “That is surely my old ax!”

“It is yours,” said the water fairy, “and so are these other two now. They are gifts from the river, because you have told the truth.”

And that evening the woodman trudged home with all three axes on his shoulder, whistling happily as he thought of all the good things they would bring for his family.

Adapted from Emilie Poulsson

Here is one of the oldest and best-loved stories of kindness paid and repaid. From it we learn that compassion has within the power of both the mighty and the meek. Kindness is not a feeble virtue.

One day a great lion lay asleep in the sunshine. A little mouse ran across his paw and wakened him. The great lion was just going to eat him up when the little mouse cried, "Oh, please, let me go, sir. Someday I may help you."

The lion laughed at the thought that the little mouse could be of any use to him. But he was a good natured lion, and he set the mouse free.

Not long after, the lion was caught in a net. He tugged and pulled with all his might, but the ropes were too strong. "Then he roared loudly. The little mouse heard him, and ran to the spot.

"Be still, dear Lion, and I will set you free. I will gnaw the ropes."

With his sharp little teeth, the mouse cut the ropes, and the lion came out of the net.

"You laughed at me once," said the mouse. "You thought I was too little to do you a good turn. But see, you owe your life to a poor little mouse."

Aesop

From this longtime favorite we learn, as it says in the third chapter of Genesis, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread."

A little red hen once found a grain of wheat. "Who will plant this wheat?" she said. "I won't," says the dog. "I won't," says the cat. "I won't," says the pig. "I won't," says the turkey. "Then I will," says the little red hen. "Cluck! Cluck!" So she planted the grain of wheat. Very soon the wheat began to grow and the green leaves came out of the ground. The sun shone and the rain fell and the wheat kept on growing until it was tall, strong, and ripe. "Who will reap this wheat?" says the little red hen. "I won't," says the dog. "I won't," says the cat. "I won't," says the pig. "I won't," says the turkey. "I will, then," says the little red hen.

"Cluck! cluck!" So she reaped the wheat. "Who will thresh the wheat?" says the little red hen. "I won't," says the dog. "I won't," says the cat. "I won't," says the pig. "I won't," says the turkey. "I will, then," says the little red hen. "Cluck! cluck!" So she threshed the wheat. "Who will take this wheat to mill to have it ground?" says the little red hen. "I won't," says the dog. "I won't," says the cat. "I won't," says the pig. "I won't," says the turkey. "I will then," says the little red hen. "Cluck! cluck!" So she took the wheat to mill, and by and by she came back with the flour. "Who will bake this flour?" says the little red hen. "I won't," says the dog. "I won't," says the cat. "I won't," says the pig. "I won't," says the turkey. "I will, then," says the little red hen. "Cluck! cluck!" So she baked the flour and made a loaf of bread. "Who will eat this bread?" says the little red hen. "I will," says the dog. "I will," says the cat. "I will," says the pig. "I will," says the turkey. "No, I will," says the little red hen. "Cluck! cluck!" And she ate up the loaf of bread!

Retold by Penryhn W. Coussens

Bestowing compassion is like offering most other gifts. Often it's the thought that counts.

Once there was a little girl named Elsa. She had a very old grandmother, with white hair, and wrinkles all over her face.

Elsa's father had a large house that stood on a hill.

Each day the sun peeped in at the south windows. It made everything look bright and beautiful. The grandmother lived on the north side of the house. The sun never came to her room.

One day Elsa said to her father, "Why doesn't the sun peep into Grandma's room? I know she would like to have him."

"The sun cannot look in at the north windows," said her father. "Then let us turn the house around, Papa."

"It is much too large for that," said her father.

"Will Grandma never have any sunshine in her room?" asked Elsa. "Of course not, my child, unless you can carry some to her."

After that Elsa tried and tried to think how she could carry the sunshine to her grandmother.

When she played in the fields, she saw the grass and the flowers nodding their heads. The birds sang sweetly as they flew from tree to tree.

Everything seemed to say, "We love the sun. We love the bright, warm sun." "Grandma would love it, too," thought the child. "I must take some to her."

When she was in the garden one morning she felt the sun's warm rays in her golden hair. Then she sat down and she saw them in her lap.

"I will take them in my dress," she thought, "And carry them to Grandma's room." So she jumped up and ran into the house.

"Look, Grandma, look! I have some sunshine for you," she cried. And she opened her dress, but there was not a ray to be seen.

"It peeps out of your eyes, my child," said her grandmother, "and it shines in your sunny, golden hair. I do not need the sun when I have you with me."

Elsa did not understand how the sun could peep out of her eyes. But she was glad to make her dear grandmother happy.

Every morning she played in the garden. Then she ran to her grandmother's room to carry the sunshine in her eyes and hair.

Retold by Etta Austin Blaisdell and Mary Frances Blaisdell

Once upon a time a girl was walking along with a pail of milk. She sang a happy song, for she was thinking of the money she would get when she sold her milk. Then she said to herself—

“I have two gallons of milk, which I shall sell. With the money I shall buy fifty eggs. I shall put these under some of my hens. The hens will keep them warm until little chickens are hatched.”

“I shall give these chickens plenty of good food and clean water. They will grow fat, and by Christmas they will be large enough to sell. I can get enough money for them to buy a fine new dress.”

She was thinking so much about her new dress that she forgot to be careful. Her foot struck a stone. As she tried to keep from falling, the pail flew out of her hands, and the milk was spilled.

From Beka Reading Series

Once there was a beautiful hound. He had long, silky ears and a smooth, bright coat. He was not only beautiful, but strong and swift, and a faithful servant. Wherever his master went hunting, the hound went with him and chased the deer. After many years, the hound grew old and feeble, but still he followed his master with the other dogs.

One day a stag had been chased till it was almost tired out, and the old hound caught up with it and seized it. His teeth were so old and broken that he could not hold on tightly. The stag gave a sudden bound and got away. Just then the master rode up, and seeing what had happened, was very angry. He took his whip to strike his faithful old hound.

“O dear Master,” said the hound, “do not strike me. I meant to do well. It is not my fault that I am old. Remember what I have been, if you do not like me as I am now.”

From Beka Reading Series

This Scandinavian tale is a good companion for "The Little Red Hen." In this story, there's no shortage of animals willing to pitch in and help.

One morning, bright and early, a sheep and a curly-tailed pig started out through the world to find a home.

"We will build us a house," said the sheep and the curly-tailed pig, "and there we will live together." So they went a long, long way, until they came to a rabbit.

"Where are you going?" asked the rabbit of the two.

"We are going to build us a house," said the sheep and the pig.

The rabbit said I can gnaw pegs with my sharp teeth; I can put them in with my paws." "Good!" said the sheep and the pig. "You may come with us."

So the three went on, a long, long way farther, until they came to a gray goose. "Where are you going?" asked the gray goose of the three.

"We are going to build us a house," said the sheep, the pig, and the rabbit. "May I live with you?" asked the gray goose.

"What can you do to help?" asked the sheep, the pig, and the rabbit.

The gray goose said, "I can pull moss and stuff it in the cracks with my broad bill." "Good!" said the sheep, the pig, and the rabbit. "You may come with us."

So the four went on a long, long way, until they came to the barnyard cock. "Where are you going?" asked the cock of the four.

"We are going to build us a house," said the sheep, the pig, the rabbit, and the goose. "May I live with you?" asked the barnyard cock.

"What can you do to help?" asked the sheep, the pig, the rabbit, and the goose." The cock said, I can crow very early in the morning; I can awaken you all."

"Good!" said the sheep, the pig, the rabbit, and the goose. "You may come with us." So the five went on, a long, long way until they found a good place for a house.

Then the sheep hewed logs and drew them. The pigs made bricks for the cellar.

The rabbit gnawed pegs with his sharp teeth and hammered them in with his paws. The goose pulled moss and stuffed it in the cracks with her bill.

The cock crowed early every morning to tell them that it was time to rise. And they all lived happily together in their little house.

Retold by Carolyn Sherwin Bailey

This folktale reminds us that an act of dishonesty is never truly hidden.

Once upon a time a man decided to sneak into his neighbor's fields and steal some wheat. "If I take just a little from each field, no one will notice," he told himself, "but it will all add up to a nice pile of wheat for me." So he waited for the darkest night, when thick clouds lay over the moon, and he crept out of his house. He took his youngest daughter with him.

"Daughter," he whispered, "you must stand guard and call out if anyone sees me."

The man stole into the first field to begin reaping, and before long the child called out, "Father, someone sees you!"

The man looked all around, but he saw no one, so he gathered his stolen wheat and moved to a second field.

"Father, someone sees you!" the child cried again.

The man stopped and looked all around, but once again he saw no one. He gathered more wheat and moved to a third field.

A little while passed, and the daughter cried out, "Father, someone sees you!"

Once more the man stopped his work and looked in every direction, but he saw no one at all, so he bundled his wheat and crept into the last field.

"Father, someone sees you!" the child cried again.

The man stopped his reaping, looked around, and once again saw no one. "Why in the world do you keep saying someone sees me?" he angrily asked his daughter. "I've looked everywhere, and I don't see anyone."

"Father," murmured the child. "Someone sees you from above."

Traditional