

CONSIDER THE ANT

Your family goes on a picnic by the lake. Your father lays a blanket or tablecloth on the grass, and on it your mother spreads a delicious feast. You all sit down to eat and—

“Oh no!” someone cries out. “Ants!”

When you return home, you go to the sink to pour the melted ice from your cooler, and there they are again—ants!

“How did they get here?” you wonder aloud.

Then your mother asks, “Did you clean up that soda you spilled last night?”

“Yes,” you reply emphatically, “I wiped it up with a paper towel.”

“But did you use water or even dish soap?”

“Well, no.”

“Then there was still sugar on the counter, and the ants found it,” Mother explains.

Few people like ants. Those pesky insects seem worthless. They have a reputation far bigger than their tiny bodies.

There are many kinds of ants—nearly 16,000 different species of them—and they come in all sizes, from the tiny black ants to the more-than-an-inch-long dinosaur ants and bullet ants of South and Central America. Most ants are merely a nuisance, but some of them, such as fire ants, are invasive and can pack a painful sting or bite. Ants are among the most plentiful of all insects and are found practically everywhere, except the extreme polar regions.

But ants also are quite interesting and instructive.

They are hard workers. Watch an anthill sometime. The ants are constantly moving, instinctively doing their God-given work.

When an ant finds food of whatever size, it struggles to get it back to its nest. Harvester ants can carry up to 50 times their own body weight! Some ants can carry up to 100 times their weight. Umbrella ants can carry a piece of leaf that is equivalent to a man's carrying 1,000 pounds!

Ants are continually digging new tunnels and chambers in their nests and repairing old ones, especially after a rain. They regularly hunt for food and are always caring for their queen, her eggs, and the baby ants. When necessary, they fight to protect their little underground kingdom.

Ants actually work themselves to death. Their untiring faithfulness to their work caused Solomon to tell the lazy person, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard. . ." (Pro. 6:6).

Ants are social insects, meaning that they live and work together as a team. But each ant knows and performs its own duties until it dies.

The queen, for example, is responsible for laying all the eggs. If she failed to do that one thing, the entire colony would soon die out.

Worker ants have many different jobs. As soon as they are grown, they begin to do their specific jobs within the colony. Some of them are "architects," building the system of tunnels and rooms in the nest. Others care for and feed the queen and her offspring, even moving them if necessary. Other workers scavenge for food. Still others defend the colony against enemies.

Amazingly, each ant does its job without being told. Ant colonies have no government, no ruler, and no bosses to make sure the ants do their jobs. Each ant just does its job.

When Solomon encouraged us to study ants, he mentioned that the ant, "which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest" (Pro. 6:7–8).

The bulk of the work that ants do involves food gathering. Unlike many people, ants do not live for the present. Instead, they focus on the needs of the future generation of ants.

Harvester ants, for example, store seeds. They bite off the germ to prevent the seeds from sprouting in the dark, damp nest. Umbrella ants shred the leaves

that they gather into a mulch on which they grow “gardens” of fungi similar to mushrooms. In such ways, ants ensure that the entire colony will continue to survive. Leaf-cutter ants are “cowboys,” raising other insects, such as aphids, like dairymen raise cows. They “milk” them of sweet secretions or harvest them as meat.

But there is one thing about ants that we should *not* imitate. Some ants actually welcome enemies into their nests. European *Myrmica* ants, for example, adopt and care for the grub form of the *Maculinea* caterpillar, which eats plant leaves and then secretes a fluid from its body that the ants love. When the caterpillar gets older, however, its taste changes. Instead of eating leaves, it begins to eat young *Myrmica* ants!

The next time you see an ant, don’t be so quick to squash it. Rather, take some time to watch and study it—and then learn from it. As Solomon advised, “Go to the ant . . .; consider her ways and be wise” (Pro. 6:6).