

Sample Devotional

PEACOCK PROBLEMS

Our family loves going to the zoo, and we especially love opportunities to interact with the animals. On our first trip to the Cincinnati Zoo, Asher was a toddler small enough to ride in a stroller. His only memory of the entire day is our encounter with the peacocks. To be honest, it's about the only thing I remember, too. For me, it was hilarious, but for Asher, it was horrible.

Until 2010, the Cincinnati Zoo had a large number of peacocks who were allowed to roam the property freely. The birds were so happy and healthy that their flock, or "ostentation," reproduced and grew rapidly. By 2010, the peacock population had swelled to 40, and the zoo was forced to rehome the large ostentation. Officially, the reason for rehoming the peacocks was their rapid breeding and overpopulation. I believe an additional factor was at play.

Our peacock encounter took place in 2009, at the height of the peacock population. Well accustomed to humans and secure in their numbers, the fowl had become quite aggressive. The peacocks, apparently, had learned that they could procure food from humans. And they liked it.

Halfway through the morning of our visit, we decided to have a snack. As soon as we sat down, the peacocks started closing in. I was delighted to be in close proximity to the beautiful birds. Asher was understandably wary because the birds were larger than he was.

Taking our snacks out of the bag, I deposited a few goldfish crackers on Asher's stroller tray. He scarcely had the opportunity to grab one before the peacocks darted in to steal snacks for themselves. Asher's feelings toward peacocks immediately changed from wariness to animosity. He grew more and more angry and screamed more loudly each time a peacock snatched a goldfish.

I wish I could say that I rescued Asher from his distress by chasing the birds away, but that isn't what happened. Being the compassionate mother that I am, I continued placing goldfish on Asher's tray for the peacocks. Seeing a flock of huge, majestic birds stealing goldfish crackers from a toddler was more entertaining than I can describe. Eventually, my motherly instincts kicked in, and I saved Asher from the hungry birds. Although the whole encounter only lasted a few minutes, the memory will live in our hearts forever.

Let's think about how you and I respond to unexpected or frustrating situations. Hopefully, we don't scream and cry like a toddler, yet we often let our emotions run wild. When our emotions take over, everything we experience passes through the filter of what we feel. If we are angry, the smallest slight will make us angrier. If we are frustrated, every snag becomes more frustrating. If we are depressed, every interaction feels more disheartening. With such intensified emotions, we begin to act irrationally and make bad choices.



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If we can keep our emotions in check, however, we'll retain the capacity to think clearly. Often, we see a solution or resolution before the situation has an opportunity to worsen. Even if we don't find a solution, remaining calm allows us to see God, access his strength, and abide in his peace. According to Psalm 46:1, "God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble."

As a toddler, Asher didn't have the mental and emotional capacity to stay calm. He was too upset to realize that I had plenty of goldfish for him and for the peacocks. He was too intimidated by their size to notice that his mother was bigger than the birds and plenty strong enough to protect him.

Unlike toddlers, you have the faculty to respond calmly under pressure. It does take practice, but you'll have plenty of opportunities. Next time a peacock gets in your face, look up at your Father, acknowledge his strength, and settle into his protective care.

Lord, thank you for being my source of strength and my place of refuge. Help me remember to focus on you when my emotions begin to overwhelm me. I acknowledge that my feelings can be misleading and distracting, and I repent of allowing them to control me in moments of stress. Help me to see the world through the filter of your love and peace so that I respond to every situation with wisdom and grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Personal Reflection: Make a conscious choice to submit your emotions to God today. In particular, give attention to the way you react to frustrating or stressful situations. When your emotions begin to rise, pause for a moment to breathe deeply and pray. Before you respond, ask yourself if you are responding through the filter of your emotion or through the filter of God's love.

