

OF PESKY ANTS AND PRECIOUS PEARLS



Photo by Richard Parker

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a boy comes under the influence of the gospel, he has experienced the greatest force for good he will ever know. That is an important part of Royal Rangers.

Challenge

After a person has had an encounter with Jesus Christ and his life is changed, he needs to be challenged. There is a difference between "ideas" and "ideals." The prodigal son probably had ideas, but it is obvious he was lacking in ideals.

The lives of the dedicated men who work with the Royal Rangers provide a challenge for boys to emulate. Boys are challenged to live godly lives and to grow to be men of character.

Charge

After a young man is in Royal Rangers and challenged to walk with Jesus, he is charged with the responsibility of influencing other boys for Christ. Paul gave a charge to Timothy, and we must charge young men today with the responsibility of communicating the gospel. The responsibility of influencing the lives of their peers and those younger than they is incumbent upon them.

Royal Rangers is as strong as the men on the local level make it. Thousands of dedicated men work tirelessly to change, challenge, and charge the boys of the local assembly through Royal Rangers.

A mature man appeared at church one Sunday in his Royal Rangers uniform. He was to participate in a special service. A brother in the church looked him over and said, "Surely you aren't going to get up in front of the people wearing *that*."

Undaunted, the Royal Rangers leader replied, "If it would help and bless God's boys, I would get up there in my pajamas!"

There are still boys who need help and guidance. There are still men who instruct and guide them—by precept and example.

They get together in Royal Rangers.

I noticed a tiny sugar ant had ventured onto the garment I was ironing, and directly into the path of the iron.

Not wishing to harm it, I flipped it away. Without noticing where it landed, I continued ironing. In seconds I knew where it landed, for I felt a sudden sting on my wrist.

Now that was an ungrateful way to repay my kindness, I thought. *I saved its life and was repaid with a sting!*

But of course the ant did not know I had saved its life. It only knew it had been harshly treated, and it struck back.

That is the nature of a sugar ant. It reacted to its problem in the only way known to an ant.

A different approach to problems comes from the mollusk family, of which the oyster is a member.

Something tiny, perhaps a grain of sand, a tiny rock, or even a small worm may find its way inside the shell and become lodged, inflicting hurt upon the little being who lives there.

Instead of striking back at the hurt as the ant did, mollusks have another method by which to cope. Nacre, or Mother-of-pearl, is produced by shell-secreting cells located in the mantle of the mollusk's body. When a foreign particle penetrates the mantle, the little mollusk simply covers it with a coating of luster, transforming it into a shimmering pearl.

In Japan there are hundreds of sea farms where cultured pearls are produced. Here the little mollusks are carefully opened and a tiny grain of sand or rock is inserted into the shell of each. The mollusks are then placed in the waters again. Months later, an iridescent pearl of lustrous beauty is extracted from the place where the irritant had been inserted. The size

of the sand granule or rock fragment determines the size of the pearl which will grow.

An ant meets its problems by lashing back, by stinging. The mollusk simply transforms its problems into pearls.

One of the loveliest things on earth is a pearl. The Bible says each of the twelve gates of heaven will be one gigantic pearl! How precious pearls must be to the heart of God, that He would construct heaven's gates of them; and how significant it is that the pearl is produced in affliction.

We too face problems. We may meet them head-on as did that little ant—in armed conflict, as it were. Or we may use our problems as stepping stones toward spiritual growth.

Someone said, "Those Christians whom the Lord permits to dive into the sea of afflictions bring up rare pearls." Somewhere else I read, "Nothing shows more accurately what we are than the way we meet trials and difficulties."

When God has permitted problems in my life, all too often I have approached them with the reaction of an ant. But God cannot use me until I stop lashing out at my frustrations and hurts.

Only when we begin to make pearls of our problems is God able to glorify himself in situations and in us. And once we enter the business of pearl-making, should we be surprised if God allows even bigger trials to enter our lives?

After all, the size of the sand granule or rock fragment determines the size of the pearl. So too the size of our problem determines the size of our victory over it. Christians with small victories in life have small problems. Those with the most tremendous victories have overcome much.

Some beautiful promises to the overcomer are found in the Book of Revelation, chapters 2 and 3. In Revelation 21:7 we find the Lord saying that the overcomer "shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son."

What better reward could the overcomer expect than this?