

A 10 WEEK COMPANION BIBLE STUDY FOR

# Consider the Birds

By: Debbie Blue

WRITTEN BY: CAITLIN LIEDER, EMILY SMITH, AND AMY YOUNG

# **A 10-Week Companion Bible Study for**

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*by Debbie Blue*

Written by Caitlin Lieder, Emily Smith, and Amy Young

## **A 10-Week Companion Bible Study for *Consider the Birds***

Interested in going deeper with *Consider the Birds* by Debbie Blue? If reading this book left you wanting more, we get it. With this in mind, Caitlin Lieder, Emily Smith, and Amy Young put together a 10-week bible study inviting you to explore scriptural references of each bird. You will see familiar passages with fresh eyes and spend time with lesser-known verses. Through them, God will meet you as he reveals himself through one of his creatures. In addition, you will also compile a summary list of bird attributes to help anchor these lessons in you. We have prayed over these pages and for you as you spend time with God and yourself.

With blessing,

Caitlin, Emily, and Amy  
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This bible study follows the basic structure of *Consider the Birds* by Debbie Blue

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## **The Pigeon: First Bird Mentioned in the Bible**

By Amy Young

Did anyone else wonder if doves and pigeons are related, as author Debbie Blue of *Consider the Birds*, claimed? I (Amy) found this informative article answering this very question:<sup>1</sup>

Pigeons and doves (Columbiformes) are a group of birds that includes about 312 species such as Old World pigeons, American pigeons, bronzewings, quail-doves, American ground doves, Indo-Pacific ground doves, crowned pigeons and many other groups.

The terms 'pigeon' and 'dove' are informal and are not used to imply taxonomic divisions within the group. The terms are often used interchangeably, although there is a tendency for the term 'pigeon' to be used when referring to larger species and 'dove' to be used when referring to smaller species.

Not only are pigeons and doves related, they are far more interesting and varied than I thought! Finding out there are "about 312 species" made me love the use of this bird in the Bible all the more because it reminds me of how creative God is. In addition, I love the tender familiarity of "informal names." God could have chosen to use specific types of doves or pigeons in the Bible. Instead, he used informal terms. This frees me up to not have everything just right in my life. Amen? Amen.

The dove is mentioned 46 times in scripture.<sup>2</sup> Below I have chosen a few of the references for you to explore.

### **Scripture**

*"Then he sent out a dove from him, to see if the water was abated from the face of the land; but the dove found no resting place for the sole of her foot, so she returned to him into the ark, for the water was on the surface of all the earth. Then he put out his hand and took her, and brought her into the ark to himself. So he waited yet another seven days; and again he sent out the dove from the ark." Genesis 8:8-12*

## Questions

1. Many scholars referenced how Genesis was the first time a dove was mentioned in the Bible. How does this level of detail, naming a specific bird, influence your relationship with God's word?

2. By specifically mentioning doves, God is already laying breadcrumbs to future plan for salvation. What breadcrumbs do you see?

## Scripture

*"But if he cannot afford a lamb, then he shall bring to the LORD his guilt offering for that in which he has sinned, two turtledoves or two young pigeons, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering." Leviticus 5:7*

## Questions

3. This might be a bit obvious, but it is useful to slow down and observe the obvious too. With the chapter in *Consider the Birds* talking about purity and impurity, what does this verse reveal about God and the idea of purity?

## Scripture

*"Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me. I said, 'Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. I would flee far away and stay in the desert; I would hurry to my place of shelter, far from the tempest and storm.'" Psalm 55:5-8*

*"Like a swallow or a crane I chirp, I moan like a dove. My eyes look weakly upward. O Lord, I am oppressed, so stand up for me!" Isaiah 38:14*

*"We all growl like bears; we sigh mournfully like doves. We look for justice, but there is none, and for deliverance, but it's far from us." Isaiah 59:11*

*"Even the stork in the sky Knows her seasons; And the turtledove and the swift and the thrush Observe the time of their migration; But My people do not know The ordinance of the LORD." Jeremiah 8:7*

### **Questions**

4. What verbs are associated with doves?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What do you notice about doves from these verses?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. What do you notice about God in these verses?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. How do these verses apply to your current situation? (And if they don't, don't force it!)

### **Scripture**

*"And John testified, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.'" John 1:32-34*

## **Questions**

8. You know Christ's baptism was mentioned in each gospel, and in each, the dove was mentioned. Noah used a dove, the Temple sacrifices used doves, David mentioned doves, the prophets mentioned doves. Knowing that many of John's listeners would have been familiar with the dove's use in the Hebrew Scriptures, what might they have thought when they heard, "I have seen the Spirit descending on him like a dove."? In other words, what is God revealing about The Spirit saying it was like a dove.

## **Conclusion**

9. What one or two things do you hope to remember about doves and pigeons from the Bible? Each week you will add to your list of birds (see page 35) what you hope to recall.

## **The Pelican: Sacrifice and Gift**

By Caitlin Lieder

I was intrigued reading how the early church fathers viewed pelicans as a picture of Jesus and sacrifice. They believed that a pelican mother would pierce her own breast and feed her children her own blood if they were starving. The erroneous idea so invaded the early church that some churches still have pelicans as ornaments in their Christmas trees and the pelican remains on the Louisiana state flag and seal!

Although pelicans don't sacrifice their own blood for their children, they still "sacrifice" and will fly up to 60 miles to find food for their young. They then allow their young ones to put their entire heads in their mouths to eat and keep them alive and strong. Pelicans point us to Christ—the ultimate sacrifice.

When Christ sat with his disciples at the last supper, He gave them the cup to drink and told them to drink, as it is His blood. He gave up His seat at the right hand of God and poured out His blood for all of us. As we consider His sacrifice, we read Debbie Blue's commentary, "We've been so inculcated in the church with the idea that sacrifice is good and beautiful and necessary, it's a little hard to shift perspective—but maybe this is something that Jesus Christ our pelican is trying to get us to do. He isn't trying to reinforce the system; he is trying to undo it."<sup>3</sup>

### **Scripture**

Hebrews 9 says, "*But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself...*"

### **Questions**

1. Contemplating the text above by Blue and Hebrews 9:25, what system do you see that Jesus is trying to undo through His sacrifice?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What did Jesus' sacrifice entail? (For example, He sacrificed His place in Heaven; He sacrificed His oneness with God; etc.)

3. How does His sacrifice affect your heart and your ministry?

As a mother of four young children, I can often feel like the pelicans. I metaphorically feel like my kids are stuffing their heads down my throats for more food, more time, more attention, and the list goes on. Even if you do not have children, you for sure have many people tugging at you for the same things over and over. You daily sacrifice, your own desires for the demands put on you. There may be pressure on you to do things you never thought you'd have to do in a country you never pictured yourself in. You sacrifice being closer to home or you've sacrificed even knowing where you consider home. You sacrifice your own needs or desires to help another or to fulfill your quotas. The list goes on and on.

### **Scripture**

Debbie Blue refers to Job 12:7-10: *"But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you; or the bushes of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind."*

### **Questions**

4. What sacrifices are you making for the Lord or for your ministry?

5. Look closely and ponder the verbs in this passage of Job. Either list or highlight them. Connect the verbs to the nouns that are telling you about God. How do these nouns specifically show us about God?

6. How does this scripture comfort you?

### **Scripture**

Jesus quotes Hosea in Matthew 9:13 when He talks to the Pharisees and says, *"I desire mercy, and not sacrifice."* Blue goes on to state, "Sacrifice isn't what's required to make something good and valuable, but maybe joy is. Maybe gratitude and compassion are essential."<sup>4</sup> As much as I feel I sacrifice my body and desires for my children, it's not what they want or what God wants. They don't want a mother who is exhausted and sighing (even if it's inwardly) as they ask for yet another snack or to go to the park again. They want a mother who gladly loves them with gratitude. They want a mother whose heart is for them filled with compassion. If I give them all they want to the detriment of myself, that actually gives them nothing. But if I love them well, even in a sacrificial way, that speaks volumes. So is it with the Lord. If we push ourselves and give and pour out all we have, but He doesn't have our heart, then it isn't what He is after. He is after your heart and wants to show you all the ways He loves you. He has already made the ultimate sacrifice so you do not have to.

### **Questions**

7. What kinds of ways are you sacrificing in His name and yet, you realize that your heart is not in it?

8. How can you be free from this? How can you reconcile working hard for Him, but not sacrificing in a way that keeps your heart from Him or burns you out?

## Scripture

*"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day." Matthew 6:25-34*

## Question

9. Jesus says to consider the birds. Yet the aspect He asks us to consider is how He takes care of us! He wants you to lay down your burdens and seek him. Take some time out to reread this passage and let Him comfort you. He is our pelican. He has made the ultimate sacrifice so you can rest and be free in Him. Any thoughts you want to record?

## Conclusion

7. What one or two things do you hope to remember about pelicans from the Bible? Add to your list of birds what you hope to recall.

## **The Quail: Believing God is Enough**

By Emily Smith

"The opposite of scarcity is not abundance; the opposite of scarcity is simply enough."  
Brené Brown, *Rising Strong*.<sup>5</sup>

I was reading *Rising Strong* at the same time I was first reading *Consider the Birds*. I had the above quote scribbled in the margin of this chapter. When looking at God's provision of quail, this quote seems to summarize so beautifully. The Israelites were coming out of slavery and a time of scarcity. The scarcity mindset would have still been with them. God was teaching them that He was enough. He provided manna and quail. He didn't give them storehouses. He gave them enough for one day. It was good, a delicacy even, but it was something to be given in small portions every day.

Still they feared. They wondered why they ever left Egypt. So God gave them meat in abundance. He gave them more than they could ever eat. The account in Numbers says it became loathsome to them. Abundance was not the answer. God wanted Israel to trust Him in his provision.

Quail seem to be more of a side point in these accounts. The Israelites wanted meat and God provided in the form of quail. It may be that God wanted to show Israel his extravagance by giving them a delicacy. He could have given them anything and He chose quail.<sup>6</sup> The abundance didn't come from the quantity or the ability to store up enough so no one would ever want again. The abundance came in the quality of the gift and the invitation to trust God more deeply.

### **Scripture**

*"And the Lord said to Moses, 'I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, "At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God."' In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp." Exodus 16:11b-13*

### **Questions**

1. What is the attitude of the people? How does God respond to them?

## Scripture

*"And say to the people, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat, for you have wept in the hearing of the Lord, saying, "Who will give us meat to eat? For it was better for us in Egypt." Therefore the Lord will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall not eat just one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, but a whole month, until it comes out at your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have rejected the Lord who is among you and have wept before him, saying, "Why did we come out of Egypt?"'" But Moses said, 'The people among whom I am number six hundred thousand on foot, and you have said, "I will give them meat, that they may eat a whole month!" Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, and be enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, and be enough for them?' And the Lord said to Moses, Is the Lord's hand shortened? Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not.'" Numbers 11:18-23*

2. In this second account, what did the people of Israel desire? What were they longing for?
3. Look at Moses' response to God. What did he seem to believe about God's ability to provide?
4. Where do your desires show a lack of belief in God's trustworthiness or ability to provide?

## Scripture

*"He spread a cloud for a covering,  
and fire to give light by night.  
They asked, and he brought quail,  
and gave them bread from heaven in abundance.  
He opened the rock, and water gushed out;  
it flowed through the desert like a river.*

*For he remembered his holy promise,  
and Abraham, his servant.”  
Psalm 105:39-42*

5. How do you view God's attitude as he provides for the people of Israel?

### **Conclusion**

6. What one or two things do you hope to remember about quail from the Bible? Add to your list of birds what you hope to recall.

## **The Vulture: Challenging Our Preconceived Ideas**

By Amy Young

The subtitle on this chapter title in *Consider the Birds* is *Ugliness and Beauty*. Doing this study on birds, I see how I have more unconscious awareness of birds than I thought. But if we were to play a word association game, I can easily share what comes to mind with *dove, ostrich, peacock, robin*, and this week's bird, *vultures*.

In English speaking contexts, who wants to be compared to a vulture? Not me. It is pretty much the opposite of what I hope to be associated with. Debbie Blue wrote, "It might be hard for us to get our minds around, but there was a time when vultures had a reputation almost entirely different from the one they have now."<sup>7</sup>

She goes on to explain "The Hebrew word *neshar* is often translated in our English versions of the Bible as 'eagle,' but most scholars agree that 'griffon vulture' is at least an alternative, if not more fitting translation. As vultures became more loathsome to us English speakers, translators couldn't quite bring themselves to use the word *vulture*, even if it seemed like the best choice."<sup>8</sup>

With this in mind, let's look at a few verses.

### **Scripture**

*"Like [a vulture] that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions, the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no foreign god with him." Deuteronomy 32:11-12*

### **Questions**

1. List the verbs. List the objects of verbs (i.e. the nest). What stands out to you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How does the message of this verse change for you when you think of a vulture instead of an eagle?

3. What does this verse tell you about God and his nature?

### **Scripture**

*"Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the [vulture's]." Psalms 103:1-5*

### **Questions**

4. You do not need to be a bird expert, if you are not familiar with vultures, look at this short article on vultures and list a few facts:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Griffon\\_vulture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Griffon_vulture)

5. With those in mind, go back and reread Psalms 103:1-5. What might it look like to be renewed like the vulture?

### **Scripture**

*"But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like [vultures], they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."*  
Isaiah 40:31

## Questions

6. What are you waiting for now? Reread this verse out loud inserting what you are waiting for here: *But they who wait for the Lord in this area \_\_\_\_\_ shall . . .*

What was the experience of saying it out loud like for you?

7. Vultures are known for flying higher than most birds. Yet as Debbie Blue wrote, "I had noticed how wobbly turkey vultures were. This seemed more like my experience, waiting for the Lord—not mounting up but circling and tottering."<sup>9</sup> In light of what you are waiting for, how do these two pieces of information speak to you in your waiting?

## Conclusion

8. What one or two things do you hope to remember about vultures from the Bible? Add to your list of birds what you hope to recall.

## **The Eagle: Trading Power for Childlikeness**

By Emily Smith

The eagle has a reputation for power and strength. I (Emily) live not far from Debbie Blue, the author of *Consider the Birds*. I was in early elementary school when the threat level to eagles was reduced. Sightings of eagles were possible, but still very rare. I remember pulling to the side of the road so that we could watch the eagles soaring. In my second grade mind, every adult knew where these birds were nesting along the rivers and lakes. They were majestic and strong and beautiful. Even still, there is something special about watching them soar so effortlessly and high in the sky.

Yet, these are very likely not the bird so often found in the Bible. As we looked at last week, the bird often translated as “eagle,” may more likely be a vulture. Once all the verses about vultures are eliminated, there is little left about eagles as we think of them.

The eagle looks beautiful and powerful, but even a glance at their character seems to be far less attractive. They are predators. Their survival is linked to their ability to kill and destroy. If they have two chicks in the nest, it is not uncommon for the strong chick to attempt to kill the weaker one. “Should one chick decide to kill its sibling, neither parent will make the slightest effort to stop the fratricide.”<sup>10</sup> The Eagle elevates itself at the expense of others.

The Bible may not have a lot to say about eagles, but it does have something to say about power. Jesus himself came as a dependent and powerless infant. We are told to approach the kingdom of God like a child (Matthew 18). We are commanded to love and forgive our enemies (Romans 12), which is about the furthest action on the spectrum from killing our brothers.

The eagle represents power and dominance. The alternate quality given in this chapter was vulnerability. Children seem to embody that vulnerability. With this in mind, take a look at the following scripture passages and questions.

### **Scripture**

*“At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, ‘Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a*

*great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”*  
Matthew 18:1-5

### **Questions**

1. Jesus tells us to become like children. What are some attributes you would use to describe children? Circle or highlight the attributes you believe Jesus is referring to in this passage. (Hint: throwing yourself on the floor and crying to get your way should not be circled.)

2. Compare the two relationships with children that are mentioned. How does Jesus view those who receive his children? What is his attitude toward those who cause his children to sin?

3. What does this show about Jesus' view of power?

### **Scripture**

*“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the*

*Lord.' To the contrary, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."* Romans 12:9-20

### **Questions**

4. If you have printed this out, circle the commands. If you are typing, list the commands. Do those commands require an attitude of power or vulnerability?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Think of someone who fits the description of someone following these commands. Pick three or four adjectives to describe them.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. We seem to naturally want to resist vulnerability in ourselves. Look again at the adjectives you used to describe the person above. Are those traits you would want to be known for?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. Where have you been holding a double standard and not allowing vulnerability in your own life?

### **Conclusion**

8. What one or two things do you hope to remember about eagles from the Bible? Add to your list of birds what you hope to recall.

## **The Ostrich: A Bird We Can Identify With**

By Amy Young

When I think of birds, I tend to associate them with flying majestically above me, gliding gracefully through water, or sitting on a nest. The ostrich doesn't fly and tends to live in deserts, going long periods not only without gliding, but without even drinking water.<sup>11</sup> It turns out they are easily frightened and "the voice of the ostrich is very mournful, especially when heard at night in a lonely desert. It is said to be like the crying of a hoarse child."<sup>12</sup> In fairness to the ostrich, they are crazy fast runners.

In review, they run (not fly), they are easily scared (not so majestic), and the sound they make is like a "hoarse child crying" (not a soothing coo). If one believed in spirit animals (or birds), I think I've found mine.

This study is reminding me again how much God is the God of details. Consider the birds we have already explored and how perfectly the bird used in scripture highlights an attribute or uncovers an aspect of God, life, or ourselves. Today's bird is no different.

### **Scripture**

*"The wings of the ostrich wave proudly; but are they the pinions and plumage of love? For she leaves her eggs to the earth, and lets them be warmed on the ground, forgetting that a foot may crush them, and that the wild beast may trample them. She deals cruelly with her young, as if they were not hers; though her labor be in vain, yet she has no fear; because God has made her forget wisdom, and given her no share in understanding. When she rouses herself to flee, she laughs at the horse and his rider."*  
Job 39: 13-18.

### **Questions**

1. In this section of Job, God asks Job where he was at creation and reviews various animals. Since the verbs are where the action is, list the verbs in this passage.

2. Looking at the verbs, how are you like an ostrich?

3. How is God not like an ostrich? What does that mean for you, today?

### **Scripture**

*"For this [the doom of the cities of Judah] I [Micah] will lament and wail; I will go stripped and naked; I will make lamentation like the jackals, and mourning like the ostriches. For her wound is incurable; and it has come to Judah, it has reached to the gate of my people, to Jerusalem." Micah 1:8-9*

### **Questions**

4. Read the Micah 1:8-9 replacing "mourning" with "crying of a hoarse child."<sup>13</sup> What picture came to mind as you read it?

5. Where do you see Jesus mourning over the country where you currently live?

### **Scripture**

*"The precious sons of Zion, worth their weight in fine gold, how they are reckoned as earthen pots, the work of a potter's hands! Even the jackals give the breast and suckle their young, but the daughter of my people has become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness. The tongue of the nursing cleaves to the roof of its mouth for thirst; the children beg for food, but no one gives to them." Lamentations 4:2-4*

## Questions

6. This verse contains descriptive adjectives! Precious, fine, earthen. God describes how he values and sees his children; but instead his children are being cruel. In this verse, how do jackals treat their young? How do ostriches? What is God revealing about himself in this verse?

7. Where have you been a bit too ostrich-like this week instead of being jackal-like?

## Conclusion

8. What one or two things do you hope to remember about ostriches from the Bible? Add to your list of birds what you hope to recall.

## **Sparrow: A God of Infinite Compassion**

By Emily Smith

The sparrow is arguably one for the most well-known and common birds throughout the world. Common, ordinary, and largely overlooked by many, the sparrow has been far from overlooked throughout history. Debbie Blue describes them very well in *Consider the Birds*.

Field guides describe them as bland, dingy, and dull, with songs that are monotonous and grating. The Egyptian hieroglyph based on the sparrow has no phonetic value. It was used in words to indicate small, narrow, or bad. In ancient Sumerian cuneiform writing the sparrow was the symbol for enemy. Saint Dominic called a sparrow that interrupted his lecture the incarnation of the devil himself and then proceeded to pluck all of its feathers in front of the frightened novices while it shrieked. Worthless isn't the half of it; the bird has often inspired rage.<sup>14</sup>

Sparrows were viewed as worthless and hated. They were small annoying pests. Yet this was the bird that Jesus chose to talk about in Matthew. He says, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father." If the worthless and the hated are not above the attention of the Father, how much more does he pay attention and show care to us?

God's heart of compassion is big enough to extend even to the sparrow. Keep this in mind as you look at the following passages.

### **Scripture**

*"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." Matthew 10:29-31*

*"Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows." Luke 12:6-7*

### **Questions**

1. Look at these two accounts found in Matthew and Luke. What two comparisons are used to show how God values us?

2. If God has the capacity to notice the small and seemingly inconsequential, what do you believe about the value he places on you?

3. Are there areas where you fear you are being overlooked by God? Compare those beliefs to what you read in the scripture above.

4. If God's notice can extend even to the sparrows, does this change how you view or interact with other humans?

### **Scripture**

*"How lovely is your dwelling place,  
O Lord of hosts!*

*My soul longs, yes, faints  
for the courts of the Lord;  
my heart and flesh sing for joy  
to the living God.*

*Even the sparrow finds a home,  
and the swallow a nest for herself,  
where she may lay her young,  
at your altars, O Lord of hosts,  
my King and my God.*

*Blessed are those who dwell in your house,  
ever singing your praise!"*

*Psalm 84:1-4*

### **Questions**

5. Highlight the complete sentence talking about the sparrow. Where does she make her home?

6. What does this show about the access that God grants us to his house and himself?

### **Conclusion**

7. What one or two things do you hope to remember about sparrows from the Bible? Add to your list of birds what you hope to recall.

## **The Rooster: Cockiness and Betrayal**

By Caitlin Lieder

The rooster portrays a different aspect of the gospel, namely, the disciples. Roosters have historically been a symbol of masculine strength and violence. Cock fighting has been a source of entertainment for thousands of years even until today. When in close proximity, two roosters will fight to the death! Debbie Blue pointed out that the disciples were a likeness to roosters.

The Passion Week, the week preceding Jesus' death, is full of big events and parables and prayers of Jesus. He cleansed the temple, made Pharisees angry, had the last Passover. But only Luke records the fighting among the disciples the day before Jesus was betrayed: "A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest..." (22:24) Imagine the disciples eating and drinking with Jesus as He prophesied His impending death and betrayal with a solemn Last Supper. Instead of comforting Him or praying for Him, they start fighting. They are like the roosters who cannot be in close quarters with one another.

Shortly after their quarrel, Jesus prophesies that Peter will betray Him, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me." (Luke 22:34) When Peter denies him and hears the rooster, he weeps bitterly. I like how Blue described Peter, "Peter is the rock upon which church is built—it's not a very impressive rock, really. I think this is beautiful. The rock is broken."<sup>15</sup> But Jesus did not just leave him in his betrayal and brokenness. He had already prayed that Peter would be strengthened (Luke 22:32) and as we read in the letters Peter wrote in the New Testament, he became strong in faith and knew Jesus intimately.

### **Scripture**

Luke 22:26-27 records Jesus' answer to the disciples' fighting, "...let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves."

### **Questions**

1. As you read that, prayerfully consider how you desire to be the "greatest" or "most important". What is God prompting you in your heart? How are you "fighting" for a title or place of honor?

2. If Jesus says that we are to serve instead of fight for this honor, how can you do this? What is God asking of you?

### **Scripture**

As we think on Peter and the suffering he endured due to his betrayal, let us read what he wrote in his letters about struggle in I Peter 1, *"In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."*

### **Questions**

3. How are you grieved and suffering because of betrayal in your life? How does this passage help you think about your trials?

4. What is Peter encouraging you to do in your suffering? Highlight the imperatives in the passage and prayerfully meditate on these verses.

5. What is the connection you see in this passage between faith and suffering? How does this change the way you are thinking about the trials in your life right now?

## **Conclusion**

6. What one or two things do you hope to remember about roosters from the Bible?  
Add to your list of birds what you hope to recall.

## **The Hen: Insider and Servant**

By Caitlin Lieder

Hens used to run free and eat freely of their farm or fields but now they have largely become domesticated and have lost much of their freedom. Jesus *chose* to become a mammal for us and *chose* to lose his freedom, to become domesticated for us. He found it an essential way of revealing Himself to us.

Jesus became a human, someone we can understand, who lived among us. He became a baby who drank his mother's milk, spit up, and was unable to hold his head up. He grew into a teenager, sweating and growing hair on his chest. He then grew into a man, touching the "unclean," eating and drinking.

What's more, Jesus came as a stranger into a foreign land, something many of us can understand. "But made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men ..." (Philippians 2:7). Jesus did not stay away, leaving us to our own devices with no way of receiving salvation or forgiveness. He came into the world and walked among us and knows us. He fully understands the idea of living in a foreign place, not belonging and feeling outside.

He longs to gather us as a hen gathers her children. He longs for you and me to come with all our struggles, longings, and confessions to him who humbled himself and became a domesticated servant on our behalf. He came as one of us to show us His love. He loves you and desires you to bring your heart before him.

### **Scripture**

*"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" Matthew 23:37*

### **Questions**

1. List or highlight the verbs in this verse.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What do they show us about God? About those who aren't acting on God's behalf?

3. In what ways have you felt "stoned" or "killed" recently? Does the stoning or killing seem to be from God? It's okay if you sense it is! Just giving space to reflect.

4. How have you sensed being "gathered" recently by Jesus.

5. As you compare the two, being stoned and being gathered, what comes to mind?

### **Scripture**

*"But made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men ..."* Philippians 2:7

### **Questions**

6. What are your thoughts on Jesus coming onto this earth as a "foreigner"?

7. How does the truth about Jesus becoming human affect your daily life? What about his incarnation moves you or surprises you the most?

8. What do you need to bring before the Holy-God-become-man? What is on your heart?

### **Conclusion**

9. What one or two things do you hope to remember about hens from the Bible? Add to your list of birds what you hope to recall.

## **The Raven: All Over The Board**

By Amy Young

Describing the Raven, a bird website says, "Common Ravens aren't as social as crows; you tend to see them alone or in pairs except at food sources like landfills. Ravens are confident, inquisitive birds that strut around or occasionally bound forward with light, two-footed hops. In flight they are buoyant and graceful, interspersing soaring, gliding, and slow flaps."<sup>16</sup>

Once again, I see myself in a bird—"interspersing soaring, gliding, and slow flaps." Maybe more flapping than soaring, if I'm honest. I'm drawn to the fact that they are confident and inquisitive, but then the word "strut" puts me off a bit. Um, was that a mirror I just walked by?

The ravens are used in a variety of places in the Bible. With their description in mind, look at these passages:

### **Scripture**

*"Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!" Luke 12:24*

### **Questions**

1. In light of our lives of cross-cultural service, what insights do you see when it comes to the raven and God's provision for you?

### **Scripture**

*"And sent forth a raven. It went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth." Genesis 8:7*

### **Questions**

2. The raven is the first named bird in the Bible. Imagine this scene with Noah, guess why he might have selected a raven to send forth.

## Scripture

*"Now Eli'jah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As the Lord the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.' And the word of the Lord came to him, 'Depart from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, that is east of the Jordan. You shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.' So he went and did according to the word of the Lord; he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith that is east of the Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook. And after a while the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land." 1 Kings 17:1-47*

*"The eye that mocks a father and scorns to obey a mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures." Proverbs 30:17*

*"Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God for help, and wander about for lack of food?" Job 38:41*

## Questions

3. What do these three passages reveal to you about God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. If you were to select one key verb from each verse, what would you choose?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Where is a desert in your life now? What ravens is God using to feed you during this season? Does it feel like you are being regularly fed (like the twice a day that Elijah was)?

## **Scripture**

*"And these you shall have in abomination [for eating] among the birds, they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, the osprey, the kite, the falcon according to its kind, every raven according to its kind, the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull, the hawk according to its kind, the owl, the cormorant, the ibis, the water hen, the pelican, the carrion vulture, the stork, the heron according to its kind, the hoopoe, and the bat." Leviticus 11:13-19*

## **Questions**

6. I've been waiting for weeks for us to look at this scripture! Look at all the birds we have studied. Briefly list the birds we have considered and something you remember about them.

## **Conclusion**

7. What one or two things do you hope to remember about ravens from the Bible? Add to your list of birds what you hope to recall.

### **Summary Bird List**

What do you hope to remember about each bird you studied? Weekly add one or two lessons, attributes, or characteristics to this list. Spend a few minutes reviewing when you add.

The Pigeon

The Pelican

The Quail

The Vulture

The Eagle

The Ostrich

The Sparrow

The Rooster

The Hen

The Raven

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> <http://animals.about.com/od/pigeons-doves/p/pigeons-doves.htm>. Accessed August 15, 2016.
- <sup>2</sup> <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2015/07/13/what-does-a-dove-mean-or-represent-in-the-bible/>. Accessed August 15, 2016.
- <sup>3</sup> Debbie Blue. *Consider the Birds: A Provocative Guide to Birds of the Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2013. 35.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid, 35.
- <sup>5</sup> Brené Brown. *Rising Strong*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015. 9.
- <sup>6</sup> Blue, 56.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid, 69.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid, 70.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid, 73.
- <sup>10</sup> [www.baldeagleinfo.com/eagle/eagle4.html](http://www.baldeagleinfo.com/eagle/eagle4.html), Accessed August 24, 2016.
- <sup>11</sup> <http://www.ccel.org/c/cook/animals/h/webdoc20.htm>. Accessed August 17, 2016.
- <sup>12</sup> Blue, 73.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Blue, 129-30.
- <sup>15</sup> Blue, 167.
- <sup>16</sup> [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Common\\_Raven/id](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Common_Raven/id). Accessed August 23, 2016.