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# SECRETS OF TRUE GREATNESS

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# *SECRETS OF TRUE GREATNESS*

For well over a century, textbooks have suggested that we are so closely related to the animal kingdom that we are actually part of it. Since Charles Darwin first proposed the theory of evolution in the late nineteenth century, it has developed into the teaching that the human race is the product of a brutal battle for survival of the fittest. Only the biggest, the toughest and the best will endure, while those who are weak will simply pass off the scene.

Although this philosophy fosters a vicious approach to life, we have been taught to accept that this is the way things are, and that we cannot fight the forces of nature. However, we still tend to frown on those who use brute force to get ahead. Instinctively, we seem to have moral reservations about trampling on the weak.

Have you ever paused to consider the differences between humans and animals? While we may sense that there are fundamental differences, these can be difficult to define clearly. Human beings build houses and live in communities, but this is not unique to the human race. For example, beehives and termite piles are highly organised and intricately constructed communities.

Humans' ability to communicate has often

been singled out as a differentiator.

However, language is not unique to the human race. Many animals communicate verbally: dolphins and pigs are two well-known examples. Those clicks, grunts and squeals actually mean something, and even though their vocabulary is more limited than ours, dolphins and pigs speak to each other in a sophisticated form of communication.

Beyond the animal kingdom, the discovery that plants communicate with one another using a chemical language is still more fascinating. For instance, when an infestation of caterpillars makes its way into a forest, infected trees send out a chemical warning to the other trees. Upon receiving the signal, the healthy trees begin to boost their immune systems.

They produce a chemical with an offensive taste that successfully repels hungry caterpillars. Many trees are saved in this way. This is another example of effective communication, this time without a sound being uttered.<sup>1</sup>

The above discussion makes clear that a general sense of community and the basic skill of communication does not distinguish humans fully from other living creatures. Instinctively, we may sense a difference, but we must examine our capabilities more carefully to define that difference.

Consider again the skill of communication. Despite animals' ability to communicate,

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, the 1984 study at <http://www.gi.alaska.edu/ScienceForum/ASF7/762.html>

there is no doubt that humans possess language skills that far exceed any used by animals. Animals certainly communicate, but there is no doubt that our language is more vast and sophisticated. The English language alone has more than a quarter of a million words, not counting all the variations of meaning you can find if you consider things like inflection or multiple definitions. Other human languages have a similar level of complexity. While direct comparisons are impossible, experiments and scholarly reports indicate that, at best, the language achievements of highly trained chimpanzees can be roughly equivalent to those of a very young child.

Likewise, even though a termite pile is an impressive piece of work, nobody would dare to suggest that it's anything like the skyscrapers on the city skylines of the

world. Termites never draw architectural plans, and they never consult an engineer. This is not because they've chosen a low-stress life-style; it's because they simply can't do it. They don't have the physical brain structures to reason in the same way that human beings do.

Of course, we all know that there are some amazing animals that can learn to fetch your slippers, pull a plough, or jump through hoops, but that's still not thinking and learning the way we do. A really smart dog might be able to find his way home, but he doesn't spend much time planning his retirement or thinking about what he's going to do next winter. He just doesn't have the capacity to do so.

A clever raccoon might be able to figure out how to open your garbage bin, but he has



never celebrated an anniversary or bought his wife a present, because he doesn't have the capacity to think about special occasions and the deep relationships they represent.

Animals can't tell the difference between kindergarten finger paintings and a painting by Vincent Van Gogh. They don't think in abstract terms. They can't appreciate the poetic beauty or the rational argument of a passage of Scripture. They can't pour out their deepest longings to God in prayer. Those are distinctly human traits; things that truly separate us from the animal kingdom.

For more insight into this, let us consider what the first book of the Bible has to say:

*And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and*

*creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good (Genesis 1:24, 25).*

The Bible says God made all the animals after their own kind. In other words, dogs will always be dogs, and cows will always be cows (except in cases where human beings deliberately play with genetics). Cows don't give birth to dogs, and dogs don't give birth to cows. And when your cat gives birth to kittens, those kittens are made in the image of their father and mother: "after their own kind". But when it comes to the human race, the creation account reveals a significant difference:

*And God said, Let us make man in our*

*image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them (Genesis 1:26, 27).*

The reason we are different is that God made us different. Formed in God's image, we are uniquely able to reason, plan, create and manage. These capabilities distinguish humans from animals. Similarities in appearance or functionality can be explained by the fact that all nature was designed by the same Being. The similarities are simply God's fingerprints, splashed across creation like the recognisable brushstrokes of a master

artist. While some animals have two eyes like us, it doesn't follow that we are just like them. Since stereoscopic vision is a good design feature, it makes sense that God chose to use it more than once. The similarities provide evidence of a common Creator.

The intellectual and spiritual capacities possessed by humans are so marked that they are even acknowledged by those who refuse to believe in God. For instance, when evolutionists draw charts and plot family trees, they still refer to the rest of creation as the "lower animals". Why is this? Is it because it's obvious to them that we are not the same as the animals, even though evolutionary philosophy teaches that we are?

In the book of Psalms, Chapter 8, David

marvels at the special status God has given the human race:

*What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet. All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas (Psalm 8:4-8).*

There is something different, something remarkable, about the human race. God could have made us swing through the trees like monkeys or live in a hole like a bandicoot, but He didn't. He could have designed us to root around on the forest

floor, to grunt and scratch and look for insects to eat, but He didn't. According to the Bible, humans were designed with a crown of glory and honour. We were created in the image of God Himself, and then set at the pinnacle of creation as the masterpiece of God's work. God designed humans to be His companions, to have an intelligent appreciation of His care for them, and to express their gratitude in praise and loving service.

We were given minds to think and hearts to love, just like Him. We were made capable of intimacy and thought, just like Him. He implanted within us a burning desire to be creative and productive, just like Him. This is part of the reason why the Bible says humans were made in God's image. Above all, this distinguishes people from animals.

Let us consider for a moment what might happen if God suddenly took away those capabilities. The Bible tells us in Colossians 1:17 that Jesus Christ not only made this world, He also holds it together. That means that if He suddenly withdrew His presence, everything would literally come “unglued”. So, if God should suddenly take these attributes away from the human race, we would devolve into mere animals, having lost everything that makes us great.

The Bible provides a graphic illustration of how degraded humans would be without these god-like qualities. In Daniel Chapter Four, we find the story of an ancient king who became so conceited that God needed to send him a message about the transience of human power in comparison with God’s eternal power.

The king's name was Nebuchadnezzar. After years of empire building on the battlefields of the Middle East, Chapter Four of Daniel finds him at rest in the palace, basking in his accomplishments. As monarch of the golden empire of ancient Babylon, he has more wealth than anybody else. The known world belongs to him. He has the power to command anything he wants.

However, Nebuchadnezzar's pride had placed a barrier between himself and God (Isaiah 59:2). Ultimately, our connection to God is the only thing that determines true greatness. Of all sins, pride is the most dangerous, because it closes the heart against God and the infinite blessings He came to give. When we stray from God's plan, it is impossible to predict the depths to which we can sink.



I believe that the problem of pride is so widespread that this story serves as a warning to the entire human race.

In a few brilliant verses of Scripture, God paints a picture of what we might all look like without Him. Let's pick up the story as Nebuchadnezzar recounts his dream:

*I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me. Therefore made I a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known unto me the interpretation of the dream (Daniel 4:5, 6).*

In his quest to remember and understand an earlier dream, Nebuchadnezzar had commanded his magicians to unveil both the dream and its meaning, on pain of

death (Daniel 2). Despite their previous inability to do either, Nebuchadnezzar again turns to them for advice.

Throughout history, psychics have never possessed the keys to the mind of God. Perhaps we should not be surprised, then, that the astrologers were unable to interpret this dream, even when Nebuchadnezzar related it to them. God had blessed Daniel's obedience by giving him the true spirit of prophecy. Consequently, Nebuchadnezzar at last turned to Daniel, whom he had named Belteshazzar, for help.

“In my dream, I saw a tree growing in the middle of the earth,” Nebuchadnezzar said to Daniel. “As I watched, a being came from heaven and ordered it to be cut down. The fruit fell off all over the earth, and the animals that lived under it ran away.

However, its stump was left in the earth, surrounded by a band of iron and brass, until seven times passed over it.

“None of the magicians can explain my dream,” Nebuchadnezzar concluded, “but I know, Belteshazzar, that you can, because God’s Spirit lives in you. Please, tell me what it means” (see Daniel 4:9-18).

As Daniel realised the meaning of the dream, he was astonished, and hesitated to tell the king its meaning. At Nebuchadnezzar’s urging, however, he began.

“The tree,” explained Daniel, “represents you, Nebuchadnezzar: your kingdom, your power and might. This dream shows that you’re about to lose everything—and I don’t just mean your money and your

kingdom. I mean you're going to lose everything, even your mind and your personality. You're going to live like an animal for seven years."

Then Daniel pleaded, "But Nebuchadnezzar, it's still not too late. God is warning you because He loves you and He doesn't want this to happen. All He's asking is that you come to your senses and remember where your greatness comes from. He's asking you to abandon your pride and follow His ways."

For a while, the message of his dream led Nebuchadnezzar to reform his actions. However, Nebuchadnezzar did not surrender himself fully to God, and his former pride returned. While his early reign had been marked by justice and mercy, he now became oppressive and

greedy (Isaiah 47:10; Ezekiel 34:3, 4).

For months, God's judgment lingered. However, one year later, as Nebuchadnezzar was looking out over the empire, his heart and his head swelled with pride. The Bible describes the result:

*The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty? And while the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, 'O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field' (Daniel 4:30-32).*

The Bible says that the "watchers" in

heaven could now see the danger of pride. Angels watched in amazement as a mere human refused to allow his Creator to occupy the throne of his heart and worshipped himself instead. A loving God ultimately doesn't force His way in where He's not welcome; however, because God cannot condone pride, He removed His hand of blessing from Nebuchadnezzar. At that point, the king became like an animal:

*“The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles’ feathers, and his nails like birds’ claws”* (Daniel 4:33).

The man the entire kingdom respected and feared became the wild man of Babylon.

In a heartbeat, everything he believed made him great, disappeared. In a very harsh lesson, he discovered that without the image of God in our hearts, we have nothing to be proud of.

Nebuchadnezzar's story illustrates that the only glory we have is the glory we've been given by our Creator. The only thing that separates us from the animal kingdom is the fact that we were made in the image of God. But if we insist long enough on going our own way and relying on our own ability, eventually God will allow us to experience the consequences of our actions.

When you stop to think about it, Nebuchadnezzar really got what he asked for. His self-worship left no room in his heart for God. You will notice, however, that God didn't destroy him. "Leave the

stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass,” God said (Daniel 4:15). In the Bible, brass is a symbol of salvation, and iron a symbol of strength (Numbers 21:9; John 3:14; Psalm 2:9). God’s ultimate purpose in His dealing with Nebuchadnezzar was not humiliation, but salvation. God allowed King Nebuchadnezzar to reap the consequences of his actions for seven years, but then He gave it all back.

Nebuchadnezzar’s experience was recorded for our benefit:

*For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope (Romans 15:4).*

It calls upon each of us to consider a



serious question. There are moments when God needs to give us some time in the wilderness so that we will realise how much we need Him. There are times where our pride has blossomed out of control and we need to learn the lesson of our reliance on Him. The Bible says in Hebrews 12:6 that God disciplines the ones He loves, because He wants to ensure they will have a place in His eternal kingdom.

Of course, tough times sometimes come our way when we have done nothing to deserve them. The book of Job illustrates this. It is vital to remember that we have limited knowledge of what causes a certain event.

However, I would encourage you to do a little self-examination. As you look honestly over your life, please ask if there's anything you need to make right

with God. Is it possible that God is trying to attract your attention? Perhaps He has allowed you to experience difficulties for a reason, because you've become a little too self-absorbed. Only intense personal communication with God can reveal to you the true motives of your heart.

Despite the sober warning of Nebuchadnezzar's story, there is good news. Whatever your circumstances, God has already put two rings around the stump of your life, because He wants to make something great out of you. He's trying to refine you and help you expel those things that will keep you from entering His kingdom. In John 15:2, we're told that sometimes God prunes the tree of our life. He cuts away the dead branches, the parts that we have not surrendered to Him, so that we can bear more fruit.

It may be tempting to think we've gotten where we are by slugging it out for millions of years in a brutal evolutionary contest. No God means no judgment, no accountability, no consequences for wrong-doing. Gone are definite, unchanging moral absolutes. Humans are free to live as they please.

In Daniel four, however, God reminds us of where we came from. He assures us that we are His children (John 1:12; Galatians 4:7). Like with Nebuchadnezzar, He can place a ring around the stump of our ruined lives, so that in His hands we can be re-created into the image of God.

Nebuchadnezzar ultimately learned the lesson of humility and trust in God (Daniel 4:34-35, 37). It is astonishing to think that after he had behaved like an animal for

seven years, Nebuchadnezzar's people restored him to his throne (Daniel 4:36). This is further evidence that God's hand is over the events of history; that it is He that "removeth kings, and setteth up kings" (Daniel 2:21). As the image of God—humility, selflessness and love—began to flourish in his soul, Nebuchadnezzar found the secret of true greatness.

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Today, Darwin's theory of evolution is taught as fact in many textbooks. Indeed, it may be tempting to think we've gotten where we are by slugging it out for millions of years in a brutal evolutionary contest. No God means no judgment, no accountability, no consequences for wrong-doing. Gone are definite, unchanging moral absolutes. Humans are free to live as they please.

The Bible, however, paints a very different picture of the origins of humanity. And in Daniel Chapter Four, we see the results of pride and oppression, the ultimate outgrowth of evolutionary philosophy.

Discover the relevance of a king's experience to your life, and the secret of true greatness.



Pastor Gary Kent is Speaker for **The Incredible Journey** ministry. He has spoken and produced numerous documentaries on subjects including the Bible, Bible prophecy, world events and natural health. His passion is to share the good news of Jesus' imminent return.

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