

## 7. In the Shadow of His Wings (2Q 2011—Garments of Grace: Clothing Imagery in the Bible)

**Biblical material:** Exod. 19:4, 2 Samuel 11, 12, Ps. 17:8, 32:1, 36:7, 51:2, 57:1, 61:4, 63:7

### Quotes

- There is an eagle in me that wants to soar, and there is a hippopotamus in me that wants to wallow in the mud. *Carl Sandburg*
- A believer is a bird in a cage, a freethinker is an eagle parting the clouds with tireless wing. *Robert Green Ingersoll*
- The reason birds can fly and we can't is simply that they have perfect faith, for to have faith is to have wings. *James Matthew Barrie*
- You cannot fly like an eagle with wings of a wren. *William James*
- You can put wings on a pig, but you don't make it an eagle. *Bill Clinton*
- At their core, when things really matter, people see a need to turn to God for strength and protection. *Lee Greenwood*
- Though men are false, God is faithful. *Matthew Henry*

### Questions

How do such images of shelter illustrate the character of God? Why is clothing seen as protection such an important concept? Why did Bible writers so often use bird imagery in their descriptions? Why do we see ourselves as “flightless”? What is our ultimate objective, and how does this study help? How is our picture of God helped?

### Bible summary

God tells his people, “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.” (Exod. 19:4 NIV). 2 Samuel 11 and 12 recounts the sad story of David and Bathsheba, with all its consequences. The psalms of David reflect his inner struggles that include this dark chapter of his life-story. He prays, “Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings.” (Ps. 17:8 NIV). Yet God does not keep him from his moral choices and their results... He prays for forgiveness of his sins (32:1), for shelter and protection “in the shadow of your wings,” (36:7; 57:1; 61:4) and will sing from there (63:7). This “clothing” with God’s wings evokes the imagery of a mother bird protecting her young, keeping them safe from predators and harm. Ps. 51 is David’s heart-rending cry after his adultery with Bathsheba, seeking forgiveness, cleansing, and healing.

### Comment

The image of the eagle is of a majestic bird sailing through the clouds high above this earth. The desire to fly is age-old, and speaks to our sense of being flightless, earthbound. As Sunday’s lesson comments, “Eagles can soar to an altitude of 10,000 feet, higher than most birds. Like the eagle, David soared high. The shepherd-king reached heights of greatness few monarchs ever attain. He was clothed in the spoils of military victory and covered with honor and glory. But David forgot that his kingly robes were a gift from God. They could not hide a man’s sins—even a king’s—from God’s sight.”

The tragedy of moral failure sends David running back to God, with another image from the world of birds—being safe and protected in the shadow of God’s wings. For it is in this that David is truly seeking after God, for as he sees his failures, he wants to be re-made in God’s image.

Despite his many sins—and let us not gloss over them—God still calls him “a man after mine own heart” Acts 13:22 NIV. The praise of David is extensive: David’s heart was perfect with the Lord (see 1 Kings 11:4; 15:3), and God speaks of him as “my servant David, who kept my commands and followed me with all his heart, doing only what was right in my eyes.” 1 Kings 14:8 NIV.

Why? Because even though he was truly a sinner, he recognized his failings and went back to the Lord, for forgiveness and healing. In this impassioned prayer he prays, and in his brokenness of spirit he turns to God, and then God can work. As David pleads for God to create in him a pure heart, God can see that this is someone he can help. In this way, with a contrite heart, David is one who is after God’s heart—pursuing the good, looking for the right, and confessing his own sinfulness and failure.

### **Comment 2: How swift life passes**

You once flew so strong, so free in the clear air of the high skies. Truly living your name Swift—the fastest of the swooping summer birds that fly so effortlessly over the green land far below. But now you lie crumpled and broken in my hand.

What was it? A split-second misjudgment that left you crashed and grounded. Against a wall, a wire, a car? Not that it matters now... For underneath your nest in the eaves you flutter in circles, dazed and confused, your left wing trailing limply. And all the while weak chirpings come from the nest, asking, begging—are you mother, are you father?

I clean you up and stroke your back. Heart beating rapidly, you sit there, eyes glazed. In pain? I cannot say, I cannot know. And so you rest, and eventually, hoping against hope, I return you to your nest.

But come the morning, you are on the ground again. Having tried to fly, knowing you couldn’t fly. Bravery, courage, or is it desperation?

And so I collect you once again, and hold your little body in the hollow of my hand. Bright eye stares right through me, and yet I know what has to happen. For a bird without flight is doomed, and I can do no more. The wound is too severe, the bones too badly broken. No future for a Swift bound to this dusty prison house of earth.

But yet I pray, in hope, that I will see you flying free in the sunlight fields of God’s tomorrow. Where no pain will sadden, where no tears will spoil, and no death will end the joy of those who will on eternal wings fly in the presence of our glorious and loving Lord.

### **Ellen White Comments**

As time passed on, David’s sin toward Bathsheba became known, and suspicion was excited that he had planned the death of Uriah. The Lord was dishonored. He had favored and exalted David, and David’s sin misrepresented the character of God and cast reproach upon His name...

But the history of David furnishes no countenance to sin. It was when he was walking in the counsel of God that he was called a man after God’s own heart. When he sinned, this ceased to be true of him until by repentance he had returned to the Lord. . . .

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