



ANTLERS DEVOTIONAL

PSALM 75: 4-5, 10

“I say to the boastful, ‘Do not boast,’ and to the wicked, ‘Do not lift up your horn; do not lift your horn on high, or speak with haughty neck . . . All the horns of the wicked I will cut off, but the horns of the righteous shall be lifted up.”

EXPERIENCE

Every hunter remembers killing their first buck. I enjoy asking those who hunt about their memories related to this special moment. Seven years ago, I was hunting with my thirteen-year-old son, it was opening day and by ten in the morning we had already seen about eleven does. A number of those does were still around us when I saw to my right a beautiful seven-point buck. With my heart racing, I slowly swung around to make the shot. A few moments later, with our legs shaking violently from the excitement, Colton and I were celebrating that I had killed my first buck.



We stood there admiring the antlers on this buck. I did not grow up hunting, so for Colton and me, as relatively new hunters, this seven-pointer was such a treasure. When I moved to Western Pennsylvania it was quickly apparent to me that if you did not hunt you were left out of so many conversations. Now, after eight years of seeking a buck, we had a set of

antlers to show others and an accompanying story to share. I remember taking the rack to a meeting with a friend who is a long-time hunter. I am so thankful for the way he practiced the art of rejoicing with those who rejoice. His enthusiasm for me was genuine and heart-warming. As hunters, if we are honest, we do not always feel enthusiastic or rejoice at other's successes. As we see photos of the bucks our friends or acquaintances have killed, especially with big antlers, our hearts can betray us. Rivalry, comparisons, and envy can quickly rise up in our hearts. There is a profound connection between these inward thoughts and feelings and the emblem of antlers.

CONTEMPLATION

Why are we so enamored with antlers? We are not alone, does also are aware of the bucks with the biggest antlers. Antlers are an emblem of exalted strength and power. Bucks' strength and prowess in fighting off other bucks earns them the best territory. These are the bucks that female deer recognize as the best mates who will produce the strongest offspring. For many hunters, the biggest antlers represent status, the best story, and a perceived sense of superiority. It is commonplace to carry around one's prized antlers for months until the taxidermist is ready to finish the mount. The anticipation of a shoulder mount of a 12-point buck hung above

one's desk in the office or above the couch in the den is enough to puff up any hunter's chest. Deer hunters are not immune to prideful hearts and the temptation to boast. Boasting about bucks is the norm amongst hunters. On the other hand, it can feel humiliating for an avid hunter to go a whole season without getting a deer.

A set of sizeable antlers are a big deal to the bucks that exalt in wielding them as weapons, to the hunters who delight in mounting them on walls, and to those that yearn for the best fawns. Yet between bucks, hunters, and does, Psalm 75 (see above) calls only the hunters to humility. Horns (antlers) and humility do not easily go hand in hand. As a hunter, what is your strategy for avoiding haughtiness and pursuing a humble heart? How do you use the weapons of God's Word to kill selfish ambition, vain conceit, unhealthy comparisons, and envy in your heart?

My friend Mike, who is one of the most passionate hunters I know, wields thankfulness to tame his heart. Focusing on gratefulness to God is a terrific way to kill prideful temptations. In the book of 1 Samuel we read of how Hannah, who knew the humiliation of barrenness, exulted in the Lord's strength and power rather than anything in and of herself. In response to God's provision, she said in 1 Samuel 2:1, "My heart exults in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD." Exalting in what God has accomplished helps put our hunting success or the success of others into perspective. The Bible says in John 3:27, "a person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven." Certainly, a successful hunt is God's gracious provision.

My heart and mind immediately think of God's gracious provision of the ram with the entrapped horns that Abraham sacrificed in the place of Isaac (an ironic hunting success in Genesis 22:13-14). This whole episode is a foreshadowing of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Fixing our eyes on Jesus and God's provision of salvation in Christ is powerfully humbling. Truly, God ". . . has raised up a horn of salvation for us" (Luke 1:69). As you see and consider antlers, as you dream of a trophy buck, and as you go hunting this season, meditate on God's provision of salvation. Think about Christ lifted up on the cross and God raising him up from the grave. Let those truths guide your heart to hunt with a more humble and God-glorifying posture, remembering: "Blessed are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O Lord, in the light of your face, who exult in your name all the day and in your righteousness are exalted. For you are the glory of their strength; by your favor our horn is exalted" (Psalm 89:15-17).

PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, it is so easy in hunting season to fall into the traps of selfish ambition, vain conceit, unhealthy comparisons, and envy. Help me to rejoice with those who rejoice. Give me a deep sense of thankfulness regardless of what transpires over the course of this season. Antlers remind me of strength and power. I recall that you alone had the power to conquer sin and death. Any strength that I possess to overcome temptation is because of your favor. Any strength I have to conquer a haughty spirit is because of your grace. My heart exults in you O Lord. I exult in your provision of a successful hunt but most of all, I rejoice in your provision of salvation. Indeed, in Christ you have raised up a horn of salvation for your people. We lift up your name O Lord. We praise and exalt you. In Christ's name, Amen.

CONFIRMATION

Admittedly, antlers and horns are different. Horns are a permanent fixture on animals like cattle, sheep, and bison. Antlers are regrown each year. Deer grow and shed their antlers seasonally. Nonetheless, both antlers and horns serve the same purposes. They are used for protection, so that an animal can defend itself, its offspring, or its territory. Antlers and horns also attract mates. The similarities are so close that meditation on either will produce the same emblematic conclusions. Antlers and horns are both emblems of exalted strength and power. This association is confirmed by the Bible, as seen in the passages above, and by our culture too. There is good reason Dodge chose ram horns as the symbol for their pickup trucks. The iconic horns project strength and power.

Horns have other emblematic connections in the Bible. Horns are used to hold anointing oil, horns of animals are also used as trumpets (see 1 Kings 1:39). There is plenty more to meditate upon where horns and antlers are concerned.

Andrew Wilson

God of All Things: Rediscovering the Sacred in an Everyday World

In his book, *God of All Things*, Pastor Andrew Wilson explores the emblematic nature of God's created world. I am so encouraged to see other current pastors and contemporary authors thinking outdoors! In one of Wilson's chapters, he confirms horns as an emblem of exalted strength and power.

"The horns of an animal, first and foremost, are a sign of strength. They are fundamentally weapons, used for fighting off predators,

defending offspring, or competing with other members of the same species for land, supremacy in hierarchy, or the right to mate with a particular female. Battles between horned animals can be fierce, the stuff of nature documentaries and viral YouTube videos. . . . So horns represent strength, power, and victory in battle. We still use the symbolism today in the names and logos of our sports teams: rams, buffaloes, bulls, rhinos, even Vikings.”¹

¹ Andrew Wilson, *God of All Things: Rediscovering the Sacred in an Everyday World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2021), 41.