

Uninvited Guests

One of the great pleasures of summer is throwing open the doors and windows. Fresh air fills the house. Sunshine streams in. The garden bursts into life. Everything feels brighter.

Unfortunately, we're not the only ones who appreciate an open door. Without an invitation . . . without so much as a polite warning . . . the uninvited guests arrive.



The ants begin their annual pilgrimage across the front doorstep.



The flies buzz around the kitchen with astonishing determination.

And the wasps . . . well, the wasps somehow know precisely when the tea, cake and strawberries appear. I've often wondered if they have access to my diary. They never arrive when I'm decluttering the garage. Only when meals are served.

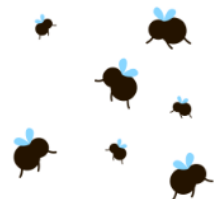


The ants fascinate me. One ant discovers a crumb and, within minutes, hundreds of its colleagues appear as though someone has posted the location online. How do they know? Who told them? No wonder King Solomon wrote, 'Take a lesson from the ants, you lazybones. Learn from their ways and become wise' (Proverbs 6:6 NLT).



Imagine that. One of God's teachers is an ant. God has a delightful habit of teaching us through the ordinary.

Then there are flies. Now, flies possess an extraordinary ability. You can open every window in the house . . . and they'll still spend twenty minutes trying to escape through the one that's closed. Watching them, I've often found myself saying, 'Turn around!' Then it suddenly occurs to me . . .



How often have I done exactly the same thing? How often have I kept battering away at a closed door when God had already opened another

Persistence is a wonderful quality – unless you're heading in the wrong direction.

And then there are wasps. I have to confess, I've never quite understood them. Bees make honey. Butterflies make gardens beautiful. Ladybirds are welcomed almost everywhere. Wasps seem to have been appointed Director of Summer Interruptions.



It's remarkable what one tiny wasp can do. A peaceful family picnic suddenly becomes an Olympic synchronised arm-waving event. Someone spills their drink. Someone else abandons their dessert. Children scatter in every direction. Meanwhile, the wasp remains perfectly calm.

I've learnt something over the years: the more you flap, the more interested the wasp becomes.

There may be a lesson here. Not every irritation deserves a reaction. Some problems become bigger simply because we keep feeding them with our attention.

The Bible says we should be 'quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry' (James 1:19 NLT). That's wise advice. Especially in wasp season.

As I stood watching these tiny summer visitors recently, it struck me that insects aren't the only uninvited guests. Life has plenty of them. An unexpected diagnosis. A redundancy notice. Financial pressure. Disappointment. Delay. Grief. None of us plans for these visitors.

Yet, somehow, they still find our address. The remarkable thing is that God often does some of his deepest work through the interruptions we would never have chosen.

- Joseph never invited the prison.
- David never invited Goliath.
- Daniel never invited the lions.
- Paul never invited the storm or the shipwreck.

Yet God met every one of them there. Perhaps that's why the apostle Paul could write, '*We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God*' (Romans 8:28 NLT).

Notice carefully what he says. He doesn't say that everything is good. Far from it. He says that God is able to work through everything for our good.

That's an altogether different promise.

As I write this, there are probably ants somewhere outside our front door. There may be a fly circling our bedroom. And if the sun stays out, a wasp will almost certainly pay us a visit in the kitchen.

I'll probably still encourage them to relocate. Some prayers are more hopeful than expectant! But perhaps I'll complain a little less than I used to.

Because sometimes God wraps his lessons in the most unlikely packages.

- The ants remind me to work faithfully.
- The flies remind me to keep facing the right direction.
- The wasps remind me that not every irritation deserves my attention.

And all three remind me that God is present in the ordinary moments of everyday life.

He's at the front door. He's in the garden. He's in the interruptions. He's even in the things that make me sigh.

Then one final thought occurred to me. We spend a great deal of our lives trying to keep unwanted visitors out. Locked doors. Security lights. Alarm systems. But there is one Visitor we should never refuse.

Jesus says, 'Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in' (Revelation 3:20 NLT).

Most uninvited guests take something from us. Jesus comes to give.

- Forgiveness instead of guilt.
- Peace instead of anxiety.
- Hope instead of despair.
- Life in all its fullness.

Perhaps the greatest invitation you'll ever receive comes from the One who politely knocks rather than pushes his way in.

So this summer, if an army of ants marches across your path, if a fly buzzes around your bedroom or a wasp interrupts your afternoon tea . . . pause for a moment before you shoo them away. They may be irritating. They certainly aren't welcome. But they might just remind you that some of God's greatest lessons arrive as uninvited guests.

And that the greatest Guest of all is still standing at the door . . . waiting to be welcomed.

Grace and peace,

J. John