

CHAPTER 2

THE GIRAFFE

- THE ALERT ONE

Psalm 119:18 – Open my eyes, so that I may see the wonderful truths in your law. (Good News Bible)

They traveled on a bit further, and this time it was Mum who spotted something moving by the trees.

“Look over there! Some giraffe,” she exclaimed.

Several tall giraffes were eating from the treetops, their sandy colour almost the same as the savanna grass. As they drove a bit further they saw some more giraffe, a bit closer this time, and with them were some zebra, some antelope called impala and some buffalo.

“Would you like to learn your first lesson from the animals,” asked Dad.

“Yes please,” said everyone.

“The giraffe is very tall,” said Dad. What advantage does that give him?”

“He can see very far,” said Samson. “A bit like standing on top of a hill and being able to see all around.”

“Exactly,” said Dad. “The giraffe sees everything because he’s so tall and because he has very good vision. His eyes are set on the sides of his head so that he can see all around. A giraffe has good hearing too. He watches and listens for approaching lions, and knows when to protect himself. As soon as a member of the herd senses danger approaching it will signal to the rest of the giraffes with snorts and hisses. The giraffe constantly stays alert, watching and listening carefully for any sounds of danger. Once a lion knows it has been seen it will stop, knowing that one kick from a giraffe’s strong legs can be deadly.”

See the zebras, impala and buffalo grazing with the giraffe? These animals know that the giraffe is good at detecting danger. They feel safer grazing with the giraffe.”

"I wish I had eyes and ears as good as the giraffe's," said Serena.

"It is true that people do not see and hear as well as some animals," said Dad, but people can see and hear in a way that animals can't."

"How is that?" asked Serena.

"God can give us special eyes and ears to hear what He is saying. When we pray we do not just have to tell God our thoughts, but we can be still, be alert, and listen. God can speak to us through our thoughts. He can also give us special 'eyes' to understand the things in the Bible...like the parables. When Jesus told the parables, many of the people listening did not understand the meaning. But some prayed for God to open their eyes and ears, so that they could understand the special meaning."

"And do you know," said Mum, "Children have very sensitive eyes and ears for hearing God's voice and understanding what He is saying. Once you know that you are a child of God, you just have to practice!"

They traveled around the bend and came across some giraffe in near view, eating from the tops of a tall acacia tree. Now they could get a closer look at the beautifully shaped animal, with an extremely long neck, legs like stilts and a remarkably patterned short body. The dappled pattern is what gives it a camouflaged effect. On the top of the head they saw the short horns. They could also now see how large the eyes were.

Dad knew the landscape well, and told them that they were nearing a waterhole.

"You might see some giraffes drinking," he said. "It's difficult for giraffes to drink, because of their long legs. They have to splay their legs right out, and at the same time watch out for crocodiles."

"Look out!" shouted Samson. "An elephant is coming!"

"He's heading for the water hole," said Dad.

Feeling very excited, and a little bit nervous, they fixed their eyes on the elephant.

GIRAFFE FACTS

- Giraffes are the tallest animals in the world.
- Males can grow to nearly six metres and females are up to five metres
- A giraffe's tongue 18 inches long and is tough enough to cope with prickly branches of the acacia tree.
- Giraffes can go for weeks without water, getting water from the leaves they eat.
- Drinking is difficult for a giraffe. When drinking at a waterhole, a giraffe has to spread its front legs out to the sides so that it can lower its head into the water. This is when it is most likely to be attacked by lions, because it can't stand up quickly from this position to run or defend itself.
- Giraffes may look alike to us, but each giraffe has different markings. This helps giraffes recognize each other.
- Giraffes have two horns on top of their heads.
- A giraffe has two ways of moving – walking and galloping. A giraffe can gallop at 48 km per hour, but most of the time it walks along slowly munching leaves.
- Giraffes can sleep standing up or lying down, but don't sleep much because they mainly spend their time feeding, even at night.
- The mother giraffe gives birth standing up and drops the calf about 1.8 metres to the ground. Although the baby weighs about 70 kg, it is not harmed by the fall.
- A calf, which may be two metres tall, will stand within five minutes and within half an hour will drink milk from her mother.
- Although a mother giraffe will defend her baby using her strong hooves to kick enemies, many baby giraffes don't survive attacks from crocodiles, lions, leopards and cheetahs.

