

# Story: In Front of Your Beak

August 18, 2024

Psalm 34:9-14

Ephesians 5:15-20

The 'elepaio had a problem. She was hungry.

This is not an uncommon condition for an 'elepaio, or for that matter for any bird up in the forests of Hawai'i. They tend to be small birds, but the things they eat are also small, so they tend to eat often or, to put it another way, whenever they can. Kind of like a human child in the middle of a growing time.

This 'elepaio, however, had a somewhat different problem. It wasn't that there wasn't food around. There was plenty. It was that, well, she liked to look ahead.

Again, plenty of 'elepaio look ahead. They're the curious birds of the forest. They check out the people moving through the woods, and they check out the trees – for food, generally. But they do it up close and personal. If you're walking through the forest and an 'elepaio wants to find out more about you, they'll perch pretty close.

This 'elepaio, however, had somehow got the idea that the way to learn what was happening was with the big picture only. She'd perch high in a tree, looking out over the slopes for signs of the insects that she ate. And... she'd find them. Sure. Bugs get around, and you'll find them high in a tree. What you won't do is see them in a distant tree. They're small. They don't move the leaves and branches. In fact, if you look at leaves and branches from a distance, you'll pretty much see... leaves and branches.

She was so intent one day on looking for bugs in distant trees that she didn't hear her mother land behind her.

"Child," said her mother, "what's the problem?"

"I'm hungry," said her daughter, "and I'm having trouble finding bugs to eat."

"Why do you think that is?" asked her mother, as she watched a bug walk along the very branch her daughter was perched on.

"I think it's just hard to do," said the young 'elepaio, who now had two bugs crawling along in front of her.

“Could it be that you’re looking too far ahead?” asked her mother, who knew it was.

“I don’t see how it could be,” said her daughter, who was so still that one of the bugs was near to climbing onto her.

“Look right in front of your beak,” said mother, and her daughter looked. Then she looked again, and then she ate one bug, then the other, and found two more on a nearby leaf.

“Better?” asked her mother.

“Better,” admitted her daughter, “but shouldn’t we be looking ahead for things?”

“It’s useful to look to the distance,” said her mother, “because there are important things there, which might be bugs, or storms, or a hunting ‘io. But there are also important things right in front of you, like breakfast, and water, and the materials for a nest.”

“And someone to teach me to look there,” said her daughter.

“And someone to be with you and care for you,” said her mother.

*by Eric Anderson*