

Story: Those Birds

May 31, 2026

Genesis 1:1-2:4a

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

A lot of the honeycreepers in the mountain forests have brightly colored feathers. I think I've mentioned that before. The 'apapane and the i'iwi are bright red and black. The 'amakihi and the 'akiapola'au are bright yellow. The 'elepaio has these fascinating speckles in its feathers, even if they aren't all that vibrant.

And then there's the oma'o. The oma'o is basically gray. Gray head. Gray wings. Gray belly. Some brown in the back, but basically gray.

This oma'o felt perfectly fine about that. He didn't see the need to show off his feathers. He was content to sing out with a good song when he felt like it, and to eat the berries and bugs he found. All in all, he felt pretty good about the world.

Except for the i'iwi.

He couldn't help but notice that some of the i'iwi in the forest had some bad habits. They didn't like other birds nearby when they were feeding. They didn't like other birds nearby when they were singing. They didn't like other birds nearby most of the time. If an 'apapane settled nearby, they'd chase her away. If an 'amakihi perched in a neighboring tree, they'd chase him away. Sometimes it felt like the most common sound in the forest was the wingbeats of an i'iwi chasing another forest bird.

Some i'iwi live alongside other birds without feeling the need to chase them away from flowers in blossom, but the oma'o didn't actually notice that. It's the noisy ones that get attention in the forest just as it is among people. The oma'o's eye passed right over inoffensive i'iwi as their aggressive cousins chased 'apapane and 'amakihi away.

"I'iwi are evil," the oma'o announced one day after one had bullied three 'apapane, an 'amakihi, and a confused 'alawi (who doesn't even eat the same food as an i'iwi) out of the neighboring stand of ohia trees. "Something should be done."

"Like what?" asked his sister, who was perched nearby.

"I don't know," said the oma'o, "but look at what's happening. What kind of world is that for 'apapane and 'amakihi to live in?"

The sister said nothing then, but she did some thinking. Could an entire kind of bird be evil? Could a combination of feathers and beak and diet and song make you automatically harm others?

She perched near her brother a couple days later and asked, "How are you different from the i'iwi?"

"That's simple," he said. "I'm not evil."

"Okay," she said, "but you're alike in a lot of other ways. You've got feathers, and you fly. You've got a beak and feet that can wrap around a branch."

"They're nothing alike," he protested. "My beak is straight and short; the i'iwi has one that is long and curved. I've got gray feathers; they've got red and black. I eat berries, they eat nectar. Most of all, I don't chase other birds."

"Do you think their red feathers make them chase other birds?" she asked. "The 'apapane doesn't. Or their curved beak? The 'akiapola'au doesn't. Or their diet of nectar? The 'amakihi doesn't."

She looked him in the eye. "Isn't it true that you don't chase birds because you choose to? Isn't it true that some i'iwi choose to, and some don't? Isn't it true that you and I have more in common with an i'iwi than we do with a nene, who doesn't bother much of anyone at all?"

He had nothing to say.

"We're all birds of the forest up here," his sister told him. "We choose good and bad. I'iwi aren't just evil. They're our cousins, too, sometimes for better, and sometimes for worse. We can only encourage everyone to be better to one another."

by Eric Anderson