

Story: Unsatisfied

July 5, 2026

Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

It was her first time to be leader of the flock. She greatly appreciated the responsibility. Look at all those birds – twenty or more – who would rely on her to help them find food and shelter and safety. There were ‘apapane like herself, there were ‘amakihi, there were ‘akepa, there was even a pair of ‘alawi and a remarkably patient i’iwi.

She thought the i’iwi might be trouble, but he was quiet and polite and seemed to be thoughtful, not like the grumpy, crabby ones who’d sometimes chased her around the forest. She was glad for his presence and, it turned out, eventually glad for his wisdom. But I’m getting ahead of myself.

While the i’iwi wasn’t a problem, quite a few of the ‘apapane were. One or two seemed irritated that she was a leader so young. One or two didn’t seem to like having a leader at all. And one or two just didn’t pay much attention, so they flew in the wrong direction a lot.

Quite a few of them, however, criticized everything she found, everything she did, and everything she didn’t do. If she found koa in flower, they muttered about ohi’a. If she found a tree full of fruit, they muttered about nectar. If she found a big selection of caterpillars, they wanted full-grown bugs.

They were never satisfied with the things she found. And they weren’t satisfied with the things she had nothing to do with. “Why isn’t it sunnier?” they demanded when it was raining, and “I’m so thirsty” when the sun came out. “It’s too windy to fly!” they complained while flying perfectly well, and “It’s so much work to fly with no wind,” they’d moan an hour later when the breeze subsided.

She felt like a horrible leader, the worst one ever, and she considered stepping down before her turn as leader was done.

“Don’t worry about them,” said the i’iwi unexpectedly. “They’re never satisfied. If you were perfect, they wouldn’t be satisfied.”

“Do you read minds?” she asked.

“No,” he said, “I read the sad way you’re perching and the way you flinch every time they complain. It’s easy when you’ve seen it before.”

“You’ve seen it before?” she asked. “I thought it was me.”

“It’s you, it’s the leader before you, and all the leaders before that,” the i’iwi told her. “If they said left, these birds would say right. If they were in midst of a grove of ohī’a, they’d be asking for mamane – and out of season.

“I don’t know why some birds are never satisfied,” he said, “but it’s true. Some never are. All you can do is the best you can, realizing that it won’t be enough, because perfection wouldn’t be enough. And when your time as leader is over, maybe you’ll take a moment to reassure the next one that they’re doing better than any of these other birds will ever admit.”

The ‘apapane looked at the i’iwi again, and realized that he’d been through it himself. He’d been through it, knew how it felt, and knew that she was doing her best.

“Thank you,” she said. “I’ll follow that advice.”

“Thank you for your leadership,” he said. “You’ve done well for us, and I’m grateful.”

by Eric Anderson