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## Lucky Ducks?



In 1940, Ed Pembroke got his ducks in a row — and they've been in a row every day since, literally!

The story of the Peabody Ducks actually started seven years earlier, after a hunting trip in Arkansas by Frank Schutt, general manager of the stately Peabody Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee. Legend has it that he and a friend were well lubricated when they got home and thought it would be funny to put some of their live duck decoys in the beautiful fountain that graced the hotel's lavish lobby.

Three English call ducks were chosen and both staff and hotel guests were captivated. Before long, five North American mallards replaced the originals. But it was Pembroke, a bellman and former circus animal trainer, who taught the mallards the now-famous Peabody Duck March, which still happens daily. Every morning at precisely 11:00, the ducks leave their roof-top digs and take the elevator to the lobby where they waddle down a red carpet to the rousing strains of military music before hopping into the ornate marble fountain.

They spend all day in their pretentious pond, playing in the water and posing for pictures taken by people from all over the world. "The ducks have many duties," says current trainer Jason Sensat, "mostly to make people happy and bring a little joy to their lives." Not to mention a little business to the hotel.

At 5:00, the music sounds again and the ducks retrace their steps to their posh penthouse on the roof. In 2008, the Peabody spent \$200,000 on new quarters for the quacking quintet, complete with granite floors, bronze statuary and their very own private pond.



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But the luxury is short-lived. Unbeknownst to visitors, a new crew of marching mallards comes in every three months and it takes only a week to train them. "It's just a matter of getting them into that routine," explains the Duckmaster. "Once they get the routine down, they're pretty much good to go." The displaced ducks go to a nearby pond where they have to fend for themselves.

Not to put too fine a point on it, the story of the ducks is a cautionary tale about the priorities we set. In a culture where *how you do* and *what you have* trumps *who you are*, there is immense pressure to do the duck march; to put on a show and live large in the limelight after achieving the kind of success society craves.

At every turn, the saturation of media and materialism reinforces the message that money talks and, if you don't have any, you don't get a say. There's no longer a line between need and greed, or success and excess. Just recently, Houston Texans wide receiver Andre Johnson demanded a raise, halfway through his seven-year contract. It wasn't enough that he was getting \$60 million to catch a football.

That same sense of entitlement is seen among other athletes, actors, and entrepreneurs, or singers and fashionistas who pride themselves not only on their abilities but also the extravagant lifestyle they live. They're paraded down the red-carpet by those who run the show — the corporations, agents and fixers — and spend much of their time posing and preening for the audience. It's a great gig while it lasts.

But fame can be fleeting. As we've seen so often, sports injuries end careers. Corporations collapse. Changing tastes and the never-ending search for the Next Big Thing plunge the famous into obscurity. No worries — there are plenty of other ducks to put on display.

Though we may envy the celebrity duck walk or the possessions of our peers, it sears the soul. "*I observed most people are motivated to success because they envy their neighbours,*" wrote Solomon. "*But this is meaningless, like chasing the wind... Better to have one handful with quietness than two handfuls with... chasing the wind.*" (Ecc. 3:4)

As we read in Proverbs 30:8, 9, we should pray the Lord will give us just enough to meet our needs because — with too little — we may sin to get more, and — with too much — we may forget God. But if we're truly content, envy will roll right off us, just like water off a duck's back.