

God Cares "Fur" Us

Job 7:7-10, 13 & 1 Peter 5:7

Blessing of the Animals/VBS ~ June 25, 2017 ~ Pastor Jo Ramsey

The French author, Anatole France once said, "Until you've loved an animal, a part of your soul remains unawakened."

Is your soul awake? Do you love an animal? If you're here today, there's a good chance that you do or you have. (If not, that's ok too.)

What is it about whiskers, tails, feathers and scales that wakes us up? Animals, like little children, are messy, vulnerable, open-hearted and not easily controlled. Why do we love them? Perhaps for these very reasons---and maybe because they're also amazing and beautiful. They awaken within us the parts of us that connect, empathize and care. Animals speak to our souls.

And when we care for them as pets, we grow—more patient, more loving, more willing to serve. I mean, no one likes scooping litter, cleaning up the yard or mucking the stall, but it's all part of the fun! The cuddling and comforting are worth it. Or in the case of lizards and snakes and turtles—they're just cool!

Animals also teach us how to live. I personally think they show us the value of trusting our instincts and listening to our bodies. They are brave and resourceful. They stick up for themselves and seek what they need. But, here's the official top ten list of life lessons that pets teach us...See if you agree or what you would add.

10. Live in the moment – Don't over think the past or worry about the future.
9. Enjoy the journey – Imagine a dog with its head out the window. He's not worried about where he's going, he's just enjoying the ride.
8. Show gratitude - Pets appreciate what they have and express their thanks openly by wagging, purring or whatever they do. Say thank you.
7. Make time to play –Animals have a knack for finding things they like to do and then doing them. Enjoy life.
6. Overcome fear with love -- With enough attention, patience and love, most animals open up to a new friend. Face a fear and find freedom.
5. Forgive and stop holding grudges – Most pets and forgive easily after a few seconds. They don't let an accidental step on the tail or late arrival home bother them for long. Let go!

4. Accept yourself -- Pets don't worry about their looks or compare themselves to other animals. Love what makes you unique!

3. Be loyal and trustworthy – Treat others as you'd like to be treated

2. Love unconditionally – Hang in there on the hard days...they will pass.

And the number 1 thing that pets teach us...Take lots of naps! It's Sunday, enough said!

But animals don't just teach us how to live. They also teach us about God. Like the passage Nathaniel read this morning...If we ask the animals, they will teach us about God.

That's just what we did this week at Vacation Bible School. As you know, we wrapped up a wonderful week of Vacation Bible School on Thursday night. Our theme this year was Pets Unleashed: Where Jesus Cares "Fur" Us. Each day, we met a pet visitor or two---Buddy, the guinea pig, Myrtle, the turtle, Smokey, the bird, three snakes and lots of dogs! We created pets to adopt---pet rocks, pipe-cleaner critters and toilet paper roll parrots. We made pet toys for the Animal Friends shelter, bird feeders for the Faithful Followers, and animal decorations for our shut-ins and Food Bank families. We crawled through our huge gerbil maze, munched on animal-theme snacks like rice cake gold fish and marshmallow sheep, and sang awesome songs about animals. We collected food and money for our Food Bank and the Backpack Initiative. And finally, we explored all sorts of Bible stories about animals which teach us about God.

On Day One, we learned how God created the whole earth, the seas and all that is in them. God sees all he has made and calls it good. God makes each one of us too---designed with purpose and meaning. We matter to God -- He looks upon us and calls us good too. God continues to create even today...His spirit moves over our chaos, making something good out of our mess. The animals teach us that our **God creates** and keeps on creating.

On Day Two, we went sailing on Noah's Ark. God calls the animals two-by-two to go on a long cruise. He provides the Ark as a way for them to survive the great flood, and when the earth is washed, he places a rainbow in the sky. The rainbow is a sign---that God loves us and will not hurt us. We can trust that God will take care of us, no matter what. The animals of Noah's Ark and the rainbow they see, teach us that **God makes promises** and keeps them.

Next, we wandered through green pastures with David's sheep. The children discovered that God is our shepherd and we are his flock. He watches over and guides each us and all of us. No matter how lost or alone or afraid we may feel, God is always there. He will never abandon or forsake us. The sheep teach us that **God protects** us, through the high meadows and deep valleys of life.

Finally, we met the animals who welcomed Baby Jesus to earth. We realized that the barnyard animals are Jesus' first friends. They nuzzle him with their wet noses and lull him to sleep with their gentle mooing and baaing and clucking. Jesus isn't born in a fancy place for fancy people. He is born for everyday people in a humble barn. God comes right into our lives—he doesn't need us to be perfect or polished or different than we are. The manger animals teach us that **God saves** us right where we are.

All of our Pets Unleashed VBS Bible stories, activities, lessons and games ultimately point to the passage that Macy read this morning—"Cast all your cares on God for He cares for you." That's what the animals teach us...God cares "fur" us...God loves us and never stops loving us. He is concerned with all that concerns us. He will care for us and carry us.

When it seems like nothing new is possible, God creates.

When it seems like the storms won't stop, God promises.

When it seems like we are lost and alone, God protects.

When it seems like we just aren't good enough, God saves.

As the children learned, when it seems like no one cares, God cares.

Now kids, help me show them how we do it...(call and response)

Who cares? God cares!

Who cares? God cares!

Who cares? God cares!

Never forget it!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.