

Losing A Pet

Losing a pet is heartbreaking. Death is a reminder that we are suffering from the effects from the entrance of sin. Remember when sin was introduced into human experience, death strode in at the same time. Every time there is death and mourning, we are reminded that we live in a world that is under punishment. Death snaps us to attention. Life is good for most of us and we forget that we are under God's judgment. We need something to cause us to remember that God judges sin, even our own sin. However, God's mercy is so profound for most of us that our lives are happy even though we live in a fallen world. We often forget that we live under the consequences of sin. We forget that the world is groaning, awaiting its release from God's judgment. Death is that reminder that snaps us to remember reality and to look for the Escape.

There's a lot of sadness that attends the loss of a pet, and the congregation must rise up to meet this additional ministry, in seeking to care for those going through such a trial. While pets aren't people, they do live with us and add life to our family. When they aren't around anymore, there is a void, a sense of loss. Even a full home can feel empty.

What is a pet—what is its purpose? A pet is a gift from God. God has given the pet, not as an end in itself, but so that we would worship the Giver of the good gift. Put plainly, pets are designed to point us to the Lord—as every other aspect of creation is intended to do.

In the book of James, in a section speaking about Christians enduring the trials that barge into life, trials that God brings, we are to develop a lifestyle of joy. Notice James 1:17 - *“Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.”* Pets, these gifts from the Lord, are meant to teach us something about Him. Not all pets are created equal, admittedly, but if you have a pet-- in God's providence... there's a reason He's given it to you. It's for your good and for His glory. We are to give thanks, as Paul says, in all circumstances.

A common question is, 'Will my pet be in heaven?' Not to make light of such a sensitive topic, but most people aren't asking if the cow from which they got their

burger will be in heaven, or are houseflies going to be in heaven. There are unstated limits established within the question itself.

There's no Bible verse that says pets will be in heaven. I think it's quite unlikely they will be, but I do think pets serve a great purpose. Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 3:21, "*Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth?*" Both man and animal die and return to dust, but the distinction is that the spirit (the breath) of a person goes before the Lord for accountability. Also notice Ecclesiastes 12:6-7, "*Remember Him (now) before the silver cord is snapped and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the spring is broken and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; (metaphors of death) then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.*" This is a clear distinction made in the Bible. The destinations of mankind and animals are different.

You might argue that in the restoration of all creation, our pets will come back. Some have said, 'Jesus will be on a horse at the Second Coming!' That's true, there are animals during the Millennial Kingdom, but that doesn't mean there will not be animals in the eternal state, after God creates a new heaven and earth. And if animals are with us forevermore, it doesn't mean that they are our resurrected pets. That's a long shot.

We never want to derive our theology from our emotions, whether they are joyous or grief-filled. You may want badly to see your dog or your cat again... but emotions can easily lead us astray. We have to anchor our hope in only one thing. Our only sure confidence is the Word of God.

Everything you love about your pet: being affectionate, comforting, caring, devoted, funny, outgoing... all of these things should remind us of the goodness of God. God gives good gifts to His children, and for some, that includes a pet. I also think most of the best aspects of our pets are shadows of the care and love of our unfailing God.

What makes losing a pet so tough? They are shadows that point us to our Creator. When our pet is gone, we miss that. Every great thing that you love about your pet now, points to a God whose desire is to give you good things. That's why He gives to you a sunny day, spring rain, that favorite meal, that

phone call from your child, that small thing that brings warmth and joy to your heart. In the midst of this world-wide judgment, He is merciful and He shows that mercy by giving you good things. He does good to people who reject Him and those who reject His rule, too.

If you have a pet, be reminded that your pet is a gift, and worship the Giver of that gift. If you have recently lost a pet... not only did God take your pet at His appointed time, but He did so for a particular reason. Praise the Lord for His kindness and thank Him that He gave you a shadow of His own love. Your pet is part of His panoply of grace. In giving you this undeserved gift, He has reminded you of the gift of His Son, the Redeemer who will save your soul. As Job said, *“Yahweh gave, and Yahweh has taken away. Blessed be the name of Yahweh.”* Be reminded, God is the God of all comfort. Don't seek your comfort elsewhere.