

## Pet Smarts

*"An ox knows its owner, and a donkey its master's manger, but...  
My people do not understand"  
Isaiah 1:3*

I've loved dogs for as long as I can remember. As a young child my favorite TV show was, of course, Lassie. And since my 5<sup>th</sup> birthday, a family dachshund was associated with every stage of my life at home. But this love for dogs peaked almost 8 years ago when my husband and I adopted a female Doberman puppy. Instantly capturing our hearts, she became the pampered princess of our household. Moreover, acquiring this unconditionally loving, dependant creature actually changed our lives for the better. Her presence with us out and about served as an instant icebreaker for strangers, and we met scores of new people. Camping was our preferred vacation because we could take her with us. Familiarizing ourselves with many dog-friendly parks, restaurants and hotels, our little threesome traveled up, down and across many scenic regions of the state with our copy of "The Dog Lover's Companion to California" in tow. (Remember that old song, "Me and You and a Dog Named Boo?")

Yes, we're pet-lovers but we're not alone; look at how easy it is to find a Petco or Petsmart. Yet the man-animal bond is nothing new. We find it in the Old Testament where the prophet Nathan told a story to King David about a poor man's ewe lamb that was "as a daughter to him (2 Samuel 12:3)." If David, formerly a shepherd, hadn't empathized with this bond, would the lamb's unjust death have kindled his anger so hotly? It triggered Nathan's proclamation that "thou art the man!" (2 Samuel 12:7), humbling David into repentance. Our pet dogs and cats may very well be today's equivalent of that poor man's beloved ewe lamb.

Another longstanding truth is that domesticated animals are dependant on human masters throughout their entire lives. Therefore, owning a pet is a commitment to endure. Any failure on man's part directly affects that animal's life adversely. Deprivation of food results in their physical starvation while deprivation of attention and affection likewise results in their emotional starvation. The amount of our faithful persistence directly correlates with the quality of a pet's life and ultimately the degree to which they enrich our lives as well.

For our Doberman the commitment included training because we acquired a puppy destined to become a formidable looking animal. Since a large, noisy, uncontrolled guard dog is a menace to society, training wasn't optional but necessary. Yet the safety of our pet is an important by-product as well; "stay" keeps her out of the path of an oncoming car, for instance. She does indeed stay, but it's ultimately because we're the ones who foreknow the danger and consequently look out for her welfare. Knowledge and love are the driving forces for our commands to be beneficial, not harsh or detrimental. Still, while we try to be good earthly masters, we're human and bound to err at times.

In contrast, we enjoy a relationship with our divine Master whose righteous commandments come from perfect knowledge and love. The same God who feeds the sparrows (Matthew 10:29-31) wants to give the best gifts to His children (Matthew 7:11) who cry out, "Abba, Father." From Him we receive food, clothing and shelter but also the fulfillment of every spiritual and emotional need. Therefore, his commands aren't intended to deprive us from good, rather to keep us from harm.

We clearly see that the animal mind comprehends a very limited view of our world, yet is man as quick to understand that his own knowledge is only a speck compared to God's? Though we're never able grasp the reason why some things happen, we're always able to trust in our righteous, all-knowing Heavenly Father. His Plan, revealed to mankind, culminates in the sacrifice of His Son to save the lost. Moreover, those saved are given spiritual understanding to know the Scriptures that are the very mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). When His Word becomes the anchor of our soul we walk by faith, not by sight. Though our eyes see dimly now, our faith bridges time to eternity where all eternal eyes behold Him face to face with perfect clarity about every "why" of life.

While enduring patiently, we become partakers of the divine nature through His Word that transforms us to become more like Christ. So God is pleased when His own divine character shines forth from us. And the fellowship shared with God perpetuates our desire to further delight and glorify Him. While we worship Him as Master, we love Him as Father, knowing that the same Good Shepherd that leads us and feeds us is Jesus, who laid down his life for us, His sheep.

Though pets, like sheep, can wander off, we don't hesitate to search and bring them home as a shepherd looking for a lost lamb. Upon finding them, we rejoice. So is man "prone to wander," but if we stray from Him, His love never strays from us. Upon our return home God welcomes us back like the father who fell down to greet his repentant prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). In my life I've wandered too, yet my Good Shepherd always found me and guided me back to the safety of His fold.

Yes, I've loved dogs for as long as I can remember but God loved His sheep infinitely more than any of us can love anything.

By Mary Nixon

