

## LESSONS LEARNED FROM A DOG

Romans 5:6-11

October 11, 2009

Did you hear about the dyslexic, agnostic, and insomniac?  
He stayed up all night contemplating the existence of dog.

God spelled backwards is indeed dog.

This morning I am beginning a 3-week sermon series that connects with pets. Since so many of us have had or now have a pet of some kind, I thought it would be a topic that would spark some interest.

I'm curious how many of you have had a pet at one time in your life? (Turn to your neighbor and tell them the kind of pet you had and its name.)

Now who had dogs? We will be looking at them today.

Who had cats? We will talk about them next week.

Anyone have an aquarium? Who had fish? They will be lifted up two (2) weeks from now.

Anybody had birds? How about rodents like mice, gerbils & hamsters? Did anybody have bigger animals like rabbits or guinea pigs? Did I miss any? My brother and his wife have a pet tarantula named Ralph.

Though I will not be preaching about those animals you can still bring them today at 12:00 noon for the "Blessing of the Pet's Service".

To begin I want to introduce you to my dog. His name is Chester. Chester is a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel. Chester is 2½ years old. If you go to a dog show you will see the Cavaliers in the toy breed. Chester himself is bigger than the standard for his breed.

As you can see he is a very friendly dog. Except for really tall men, Chester is happy to greet anyone.

For years, Elizabeth and I just had cats. Elizabeth was such a staunch cat lover she would make fun of dogs. "Cats rule dogs drool" would be a favorite saying in the Huseltine household. But not anymore!

Since Chester has come into our home, our attitude towards dogs has changed completely. If it were up to Elizabeth, Chester would have several other dogs to keep him company.

When I was young my family had one dog as a pet. Louie was a black poodle. We only had him for a couple years. Looking back I believe there were two bad decisions that led my parents to give Louie back to his breeder. After attending a circus one year, my brother thought it would be a good idea to teach our dog to climb a ladder. That was mistake number one. The other bad decision was my parents not having the dog spayed.

Though we had a fenced back yard, whenever nature would call, Louie would climb over the fence and be gone. Given we lived in the city, we were fortunate he was never hit by a car. Rather than taking a risk our dog was moved back to the country.

I think I was in junior high when we had Louie. It was nice having a dog but I really didn't get attached to him. Being an adult and having Chester has brought about a whole new appreciation of dogs. Now I understand why dog owners are so loyal to their dogs.

Having lived with one for over two years, I believe there are some lessons a dog can teach us about God. When I do a children's message, basically all I am doing is a simple object lesson. I take the qualities of one thing and use it to talk about God or faith.

I often toyed with the idea of bringing in a dog for a children's message. If I did, where do you think the children's attention would be, on what I was saying or the dog? Having Chester in the Sanctuary this morning is still a risk. I trust he won't be too much of a distraction.

Now for the lesson!

A dog's love is unconditional. You come home from school, or work or doing errands, and there your dog is happy to see you. I will be at home and hear the garage door opening up. Chester will hear the sound and run to the door to greet Elizabeth. When she comes in, the tail is wagging and there are many dog kisses to be given.

It doesn't matter how your day has been, or what you might have done, the dog is excited to see you. If you have even been on the receiving end of one of these greetings, you know how great it feels.

The love, the affection the dog gives you is without cost. You didn't have to earn it. It's free. The dog loves you just because you are you. We are not perfect; we make bad choices and bad decisions, but still the dog's loves us.

In the unconditional love of Chester I see an example of the love of God. It's not who I am or what I have accomplished that causes God to love me. God loves me because I am a child of God. Guess what? We are all children of God! God loves every one of us.

Even when we feel unlovable, even when we make mistakes and do things we shouldn't, God still loves us. All we need to do is open our hearts and feel that love of God.

Our scripture said: "but God has shown us how much he loves us - it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us." Imagine Christ died for us. We didn't deserve it, we still don't! But that's the point. How does one show love? By doing something for someone even though that person does not deserve it.

Because of God's love for us we are able to receive salvation. Freedom from sin and death is ours to have. All we need to do is claim it. That salvation however didn't come cheap. Our gift came at the cost of a life, Jesus' life.

I have to say that even though the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life is great, it's the love of God that never leaves us that is awesome. If our spirit ever needs to be lifted up, all we need to do is think about God loving us.

What do we sing in the hymn "In the Garden"?  
"and he walks with me and talks with me and he tells me I am his own; and the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known."

God's love is unconditional. It is also non-judgmental. Like I said, except few a few tall men, if you come to my house you will be greeted by a very happy dog. It doesn't matter your skin color, the language you speak,

whether you are physically handicapped or have some other disability, Chester will be happy to meet you.

God too is open to all people. Sure God has expectations of people. God sent Jesus to model for us how we should live. But if we don't measure up, it doesn't mean God will stop loving us.

A part of being non-judgmental is being non-biased. God doesn't have a pecking order. God loves us all the same. As for dogs I'm not sure. Many dogs are very loyal to their masters. On the other hand I have seen dog owners disheartened when Fido seems just as excited to see the neighbor, as they are to see them.

The last quality we can often find in a dog is forgiveness. Elizabeth watches a show on the Animal Planet channel called Animal Rescue. The show follows the officers of the Humane Society of several major cities. The neglect and abuse of the animals is sickening.

What's amazing is that after such mistreatment at the hands of humans, the animals will often go back to being loving and happy. A few even are returned to their owners. You might think they would want nothing of their previous owner, but no there is affection for them.

Someone asked Jesus how often we should forgive others. Jesus responded by saying 77 times 7. Basically Jesus was saying we forgive as often as we can. His answer was a glimpse into the workings of God.

There is mercy and forgiveness within God's love. When we decide to do wrong, God does not give up on us. If we do decide we don't need God and go it alone, God never stops loving us. And if we come to our senses like the prodigal son, God will forgive us our sins and welcome us back into the fold.

Pets can be therapeutic. Whenever you spend some time with a dog or cat you often feel better. Studies have shown that time with a pet lowers one's blood pressure. You have an encounter with a dog or cat and your spirit is uplifted.

I hope when we leave this service we will all feel up-lifted. Yes there has been a dog with us in worship, but much more important, this morning we

have been in the presence of God. We came just as we were. We were broken, worried, sinful, but we came. And God has met us here and has accepted our worship.

“How sweet it is to be loved by you,” James Taylor sung those words. Though they are meant to describe a relationship between a man and a woman, I think they speak of the love God has for us.

I end with this suggestion. Every time you see a dog say a quick prayer to God. Thank God for loving you and enjoy the rest of the day surrounded by God’s love.