

## Being Pet Smart July 13, 2008

It's been several years since we've had a Sunday where we honor our furry, four-legged friends, and the two times we have done that, we've focused on the benefits that come from having pets as part of our lives. Now, if you weren't around when we did that, or if you were and have forgotten, I'll quickly summarize what I believe to be some of the positives about our pets:

- Our pets are easier to train than children.
- They don't ask for money all the time.
- They don't drink or smoke.
- They don't hang out with friends who use drugs.
- They never ask to drive the car.
- They don't have to have the latest fashions.
- They don't ask to wear your clothes.
- They don't need a gazillion dollars for college.
- If our pet happens to get pregnant, you can sell their children!

I don't know about you, but I think those are some pretty sound reasons to consider having a pet in our lives!

However, there are other reasons, too, that are worthy of note. In fact, Job, in our Bible passage may be giving us a hint of what those are. If you're not familiar with Job's story, let me summarize it briefly for you. Job has been a very prosperous man, but he's fallen on bad times. The general thinking of the time that Job's so-called friends try to remind him about is that when someone hits the tough times, he or she has somehow done something wrong—has done something to deserve this treatment. In those times, prosperity was seen as a sign of God's blessing, and lack of prosperity was seen as someone having messed up royally.

What I most admire about Job is that he doesn't buy into the conventional wisdom of the time, even though those "friends" are pouring out all the pious platitudes and religious jargon they can come up with to try to make him 'fess up and admit what he's done. Somehow Job knows that's not right, and he tells his friends that animals—God's very creations—come closer to knowing the truth that they do!

That's is basically what's going on in our Bible passage for today, as Job answers his would-be friend Zophar. Our passage reads like this:

**But ask the animals what they think—let them teach you;  
Let the birds tell you what's going on.**

**Put your ear to the earth—learn from the basics  
Listen—the fish in the ocean will tell you their stories.**

**Isn't it clear that they all know and agree**

**That God's the sovereign and holds all things in  
God's hand—**

**Every living soul,**

**Every breathing creature?**

**Isn't this all just common sense,**

**As common as the sense of taste?**

In a nutshell, I think Job is telling his friends that, while they think they have all the wisdom and knowledge about God's ways, they don't come close to getting it.

He's positive that there's more wisdom and understanding among the God's creatures and creation than we could possibly imagine—that we might come closer to getting at the truth if we attune ourselves to our animal friends and listen to them, learn from them.

Any of us who have pets can attest to the fact that we can learn a lot from our pets. So, given the fact that Mike and I are the proud parents of two sweet and loving cats—Harley and Davidson (better known as "Dave"), I thought I might try to share what they might be teaching us as a result of having them in our lives.

For example, it's interesting to note what happens then the garage door goes up announcing that one or the other of us is home. Both cats race to the door, and sit there waiting for us to walk in. When we do, it's as though they're saying, "Hooray! Hooray! You're home! You've been gone all day, and we've missed you!" It really feels good to walk into the house, knowing that they're there, pleased as they can be because we're there.

I find myself wondering if there isn't a lesson here for us to learn. In fact, I remember years ago when Mike and I attended a Marriage Enrichment weekend. One of the things we were asked to share with one another was what made us feel loved and valued. One of the things Mike mentioned was how good it felt when our dog at the time, a wonderful beagle named Widget, met him at the door. He said that Widge didn't care how late he was getting home, or where he'd been, he was just glad to see him, just glad he was home.

That's how it is with our cats, too. They don't judge or criticize us for being gone too long; they're just glad we're there. So, maybe that's a lesson we can learn from our wise animal friends—that we really do need to show our joy and happiness, appreciation and gratitude at even the simplest moments. We can learn from our pets to let go of our petty grievances and complaints, and just be grateful for the few minutes we have to spend with a loved one.

I suppose another of the good things about having a pet in our home is that they provide such good companionship. Just having them around has a way of warding off loneliness. They become a part of the family, the best of friends, and great company! Someone commented, "**We give dogs time we can spare, space we can spare and love we can spare. And in return, dogs give us their all.**" I think that's true of all our animal friends—they do give us their all.

Another positive is that, in their eyes, we can do no wrong. Even if we accidentally step on their tail or hurt them in some way or another, they're right there, forgiving us, loving us. They're better at this forgiving thing than most of us are, so maybe they can help us reach for our best and highest self. Maybe we can learn from them just how important it is to let go of the hurt, to forgive, and to be ready to trust again.

One more plus when it comes to having a pet has to do with their ability to say to us, "Hey! Lighten Up! Why are you so serious? Let's play!" Our cats make us laugh all the time, because they do such "cat-like things

that are really funny, and each of them has his own particular style of having fun.

Dave, the younger of the two, has developed a new trick. He seems to like high places, and whenever we happen to leave the closet door open, he springs from the clothes hamper to the very top of the door, and stands there as if he's balancing on a tightrope. Sometimes he tries to step to the door frame, and winds up doing cat-splits! We keep thinking we may need to sign him up for the circus!

As I was at my desk working on this message, I had a visit from Dave, and not an uncommon one. I had been hard at work for quite some time, but not really making the progress I was hoping to make. Then out of the blue, Dave was standing in front of my keyboard, purring away. I knew instantly what he was thinking, and what he wanted. "Linda," he as much as said, "I need a hug and a little cuddling." And that's what he did. He climbed up on my shoulder, snuggled in until he was comfortable, and just purred away while I held him close.

His peacefulness filled me with a sense of peace; his happiness seemed to somehow transfer to me. That's was his way of showing love and affection and it made my day so much better. He somehow knew the value of being held and loved; it made his day, and mine.

What would we do without our pets? They are just so naturally themselves, and can help us be our best selves. They make our lives healthier because they help us deal with stress and lower our anxiety levels. Experts tell us that the presence of a pet can cause both our blood pressure and hearts rate to go down. We sleep better with them in our homes, and we typically get more exercise, because they require it. When it's all said and done, having a pet makes our lives healthier and happier.

And our pets can teach us something if we pay attention. Here are some of the things we can learn from our dear pets:

When loved ones come home, always run to greet them.  
Take naps.  
Stretch before rising.  
Run, romp and play daily.  
Let people love you.  
When you're happy, dance around and wag your entire body.  
Stop eating when you've had enough.  
Be loyal.  
Always be yourself.  
When someone is having a bad day, be silent, sit close by and nuzzle them gently.

Maybe that's the kind of truth Job thought we could gain from some of God's very best creations—our beloved pets!

Closing:

Someone has said, "He is your friend, your partner, your defender, your pet. You are his life, his love, his leader. He will be yours, faithful and true, to the

last beat of his heart. You owe it to him to be worthy of such devotion." And Roger Caras summarized the value of pets for us with these words: "Pets are not our whole life, but they make our lives whole."

There's no way to say it any better! Our pets bless our lives, and make us better people.

Have a great Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.