

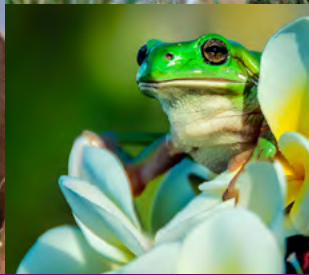


All God's Creatures

DAILY DEVOTIONS

for ANIMAL LOVERS

2024



January



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JANUARY 1

Chain of Love

If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root.

—ROMANS 11:17 (NIV)

SOME OF THE best dogs I have ever had were never mine. They were fosters. I was just a stop on their road to a forever family that would love and care for them in the way they deserved.

“How can you fall in love with them, get them back from their hard and difficult pasts, and then just let them go?” This is a question I’ve been asked on more than one occasion. It’s almost always asked with a measure of judgment.

But there is something special in being called to be the one who stands in the gap. As a foster family, we help the dogs work through the trauma in order to nourish and teach them that love can be more powerful than any horror. I remember Dobie, who needed someone to nurse her through heartworm treatment. When she left with her new forever person, she said goodbye in the sweetest tail wag, but she was just too happy to linger.

As I think of the many dogs who were short-timers in my life, I think of people who have been short-timers, as well. Have you ever tried to make someone a permanent fixture in your life only to realize you were really meant to be a bridge in a gap? Trauma, emotional and physical abuse, substance abuse, and heartache are really tough rivers to cross. Some of us throw out the lifeline to someone who is drowning, and someone else is called to open their arms and become that person’s home. But in between those two are those of us who are called to be the bridge. We open our hearts and stand in the gap, and I find that this is when a lot of love happens.

Letting go—of both animals and humans—may not be easy, but when love no longer needs the bridge, something beautiful happens. This chain of love has many links, and I realize the strength of the chain is in knowing what link I am with each relationship that comes into my life.—Devon O’Day

God, thank You for the short-timers You’ve brought into my life so that I can be part of their chain of love. Amen.

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JANUARY 2

Friendship Sanctuary

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.

—PROVERBS 17:17 (NIV)

WHEN MY FRIEND Susy wrote a book with an Irishman named Patrick, she introduced me to the fascinating world of donkeys and a special one named Jacksie. Patrick grew up in a family that ran a sanctuary for injured, neglected, and abandoned donkeys. To him, donkeys are like family. Jacksie—a young donkey that had been abandoned by his mother—came into Patrick's life when he was recovering from addiction and rebuilding his life.

The first time I saw Jacksie and Patrick was in a YouTube video that highlights their unique bond. I was spellbound. Patrick is so well acquainted with donkeys that he can bray like one, and Jacksie seems to think he is a human. When Patrick brays, Jacksie runs over and puts his front hooves on Patrick's shoulders for a hug. It wasn't until I read Susy and Patrick's book, *Sanctuary*, that I learned how that bond was formed—through Patrick's long night shifts in the barn at the donkey sanctuary. He got up every three hours to feed Jacksie, create a warm nest of straw for him, and snuggle him. At the time, Patrick needed Jacksie as much as Jacksie needed him, so they grew, healed, and were strengthened together.

Patrick's friendship with Jacksie resurrected my gratitude for the relationships that God orchestrated when I needed a sanctuary of healing. These friends saw me at my worst and helped me become my best. In some cases, I found out that my gift of a friend needed me as much as I needed her.

Just as Patrick did for Jacksie and Jacksie did for Patrick and many have done for me, I pray that I will be the kind of friend others can turn to when they need a sanctuary. —Jeanette Hanscome

Walk of Faith: Take a few minutes to thank God for the friends who became a sanctuary when you needed one. How did He use you to bless them in the process?

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JANUARY 3

Bookworm

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable— if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

—PHILIPPIANS 4:8 (NIV)

KILLING TIME WHILE my wife and daughter went shopping for shoes—an activity I assiduously avoid—I strolled down the strip-mall sidewalk to a secondhand bookstore. For the better part of an hour, I trawled the dusty aisles, studied the titles, and thumbed through pages. In some books you could see the creases that marked the place where the reader stopped reading and dog-eared the page. I found the occasional underline and wondered what made this sentence so important to a long-ago reader.

Halfway down the Literary Classics aisle, I found a bookworm. I don't mean a person who loves books and reads a lot. I mean an actual bookworm—a worm that bores through books. A bookworm is not a true worm but the larvae of an insect—a beetle, a moth, a termite, whatever—which gnaws through the dry, starchy paper common in old volumes. There he was, a small brown worm tunneling through Tolstoy, making tiny pinholes.

When I was a boy, I was a bookworm. There was nowhere I would rather be than between the pages of a book. I would devour all sorts of books, like *Treasure Island*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *The Swiss Family Robinson*. Books about faith, heroism, American history. But in recent years my book reading has tapered off. It used to be, in reading books, I found myself diving deep into the important things of life. Now, too often, I just skitter along on the surface, making tiny marks like that bookworm.

There are so many good books, old and new, that would exercise my mind, enlarge my imagination, and take me places I've never been. I want to be a voracious bookworm again. Thank God for good books, and may they take us to places that God would have us go.—Louis Lotz

The more that you read, the more things you will know.

The more that you learn, the more places you'll go!

—Dr. Seuss

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JANUARY 4

A Tiny Circle of Peace

He has redeemed my soul in peace from the battle that was against me.

—PSALM 55:18 (NKJV)

SHE LOOKS SO peaceful in her bed.” My mom’s Scottish terrier, Becky, had suffered through the flood that had caused my mom and her two dogs to be rescued by boat in the fall of 2021. A year later, I was sitting by the fireplace with my mom and her dogs, hoping they’d recover from their loss of serenity and security.

That year had caused much grief for my mom. Not only did her home get flooded, but she also lost her brother a few days after his eighty-fourth birthday and two of her four beloved dogs—one to seizures, the other to old age. The older dog, a black Shiloh shepherd named Katy, had been my mom’s soul-soothing companion. Losing her hit Mom hard and still caused her sadness.

While we rocked and crocheted by the fire, we chatted about how she missed Katy and would often talk to her before realizing she wasn’t there. Her current dogs helped ease the pain, but nothing seemed to fill the hole left by Katy’s absence.

Seeing how peaceful Becky looked, I snapped a photo with my phone and sent it to my mom, knowing she’d like it. Then, Becky repositioned herself, looking even more at peace. I quickly snapped another photo, brought it up to see if it looked much different from the first, and beheld a surprise that sent a shiver through me.

My mom’s photo in the tiny chat symbol on my phone was a picture of Katy. Because I’d already sent that first photo to her, the chat circle had appeared on my phone. When I took the second photo, Katy’s picture somehow showed up on it, as though watching over Becky—and my mom. I knew that Jesus used cell-phone technology to send me and Mom a tiny circle with a guardian angel of peace.—Cathy Mayfield

*Thank You, Jesus, for caring enough to use even my cell phone
to bring peace to a wounded heart. Amen.*

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The reason birds can fly and we can't is simply because they have perfect faith, for to have faith is to have wings.

—J. M. BARRIE

Welcome to All God's Creatures!

IN THIS 2024 EDITION of *All God's Creatures*, we celebrate not only our cherished pets but all living creatures—be they furry, scaly, or feathered. Within these pages, you'll find hundreds of anecdotes from our writers about their interactions with the critters with whom we share this earth and the many ways these encounters connect us with God. Be inspired by the spiritual insights gleaned from an observation of a bird in the sky, a brush with a wild animal in the woods, studying creatures in the ocean, and, of course, living alongside our beloved pets.

As you read the touching and sometimes humorous devotions, we hope your spirit will be lifted and that the scriptures, prayers, and inspirational quotes bring you a renewed sense of His amazing care, loving-kindness, and grace.



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