



# Dog Days

Daily Dose of Encouragement ... ZooKeepers Ministries ... Week 3



*Caniculares dies* . . . ring a bell? Yep, you got it . . . Dog Days . . . not only does that phrase refer to the hottest, most sultry days of summer but it also defines a time period or event that is stagnant or marked by a dull lack of progress. Do you ever feel like that describes many of your days? I guess we all do at times . . . that's why I'm excited to share some fun stories of cool stuff the Lord has taught me using our Canine Companions as the star performers. So, grab a cup of coffee and get ready for five days of light-hearted, load-lifting doses of encouragement!

## Hot Diggity Dog!



My sweet little Lucy recently inherited a very special bed and it fits perfectly in the front seat of my car. She definitely thinks that she's Queen Bee when she's on her new throne! On a recent trip home from my mother's in SC, Lucy began to pant profusely. I lowered the window and let her get a brisk shot of cool air and she seemed ok for the moment but in just a few minutes, the scenario repeated itself. I was actually a little chilly with the window down and couldn't figure out why little Miss Lucy was so hot. She never even moved her little body; she just barely lifted her little head as if to groan, "Help!!!" Finally, it occurred to me to check the seat heater and wouldn't you know it, the setting was on high! She was a hot dog for sure! Why in the world would she just lie there and suffer when she could have so easily moved? The answer? She was too comfortable to move out of her misery.

Aren't we like that, ladies? So often, we cry and whine and complain and sigh and moan and groan . . . all the while choosing to stay in our comfy bed that is positioned right over the seat heater! We get so comfortable in our sin and misery that we refuse to do what we know to do and therefore, we miss the blessings of God. It's almost like our pain becomes the security blanket we clutch ever so tightly. James 4:17 says, "To him who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin." So, as the Holy Spirit asked me, I ask you today: what are you clutching? A habit? A sin? A relationship? A secret? A mindset?

We could literally spend days talking about each of those areas but I believe that if you go to God with a humble heart, ready to obey (That's VITAL!!!), He will reveal the comfortable place that's holding you back from enjoying the relationship He intends to have with you. May He draw you into sweet moments with Himself today and cool you off by the washing of the water of His Word. ☺

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.  
Titus 3:5-7



## Reckless and Abandoned

Not long after Darin and I married, we decided to spend the day at the lake and reminisce about our first date. How romantic! On the way, however, Darin noticed something rummaging around on the side of the road and what began as a fun day at the lake ended up as a rescue and adoption mission! A scrawny little puppy emerged from the roadside brush and came straight toward us with her tail wagging and nose to the ground.

By the end of the day Abbie, short for 'Reckless and Abandoned', had experienced her first trip to the vet, had ticks the size of toenails removed from her feet and was all dolled-up like she was ready for Madison Square Garden! It was the conversation with the vet that God used to teach me something about Himself and His great love for us. Dr. Bennett was appalled that I would want to keep this scraggly puppy because I had grown up in a family that showed and bred champion Italian Greyhounds and Great Danes. Why wouldn't I just have her euthanized? (Looking back, I really can't believe the vet suggested that but he did.)

In his eyes she was worthless . . . no fine pedigree, no titles or hope of producing champion offspring, no signs of hunting prowess or even interest in finding anything other than frogs! Certainly there would be no blue ribbons hanging on the wall next to her picture! But . . . but . . . we found her and she needed us and we loved her . . . already!

God paints the portrait of our helplessness in pretty vivid ways through many of the Old Testament prophets. In Ezekiel 16, God is reminding faithless Israel of her predicament when He found her: *As for your birth, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water for cleansing; you were not rubbed with salt or even wrapped in cloths. No eye looked with pity on you to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you. Rather you were thrown out into the open field, for you were abhorred on the day you were born.*" It gets a little more graphic but I think you get the picture.

Isaiah says there are none of us righteous and we are like sheep who have gone astray. Do you have any idea how gross sheep are outside the care of their shepherd? Not only are they gross, but without the shepherd's care, their death is a certainty and it will likely be a miserable one.

Ladies, we WERE that one who was abhorred; we WERE that straying sheep but while we were helpless and separated from Him because of our own sin, God demonstrated His great love for us and paid the ultimate price to buy us back from the slave market of sin. There is nothing that can separate you from His love! We are adopted! We are heirs of the manifold grace of God! You are no longer a mangy mutt, an unwanted baby or a cast sheep! You, my dear sister in Christ, are a child of the KING! Let's demonstrate our gratitude by remembering WHOSE we are!

## Dog Training at the Carr's

Dog training at our house is serious business. So much so that my husband Darin has read and re-read everything Richard Wolters has written and let me tell you, he sticks to that man's teaching as if his life depends on it! And you know what . . . there are situations where it just might. Obedience is a crucial character trait in animals as well as humans. I mentioned in my last set of devotions (*Thriving not Striving*), that God spells love this way: O-B-E-Y.

Not too long ago, it was time for the big day to see if Jazz had learned a particular skill. Darin put her on a "Sit Stay" command and he disappeared behind the shed and fired his gun. She had to remain motionless. I'll have to admit that this little demonstration of obedience was quite impressive and it occurred to me that just as Jazz trusted Darin to do his part in the execution of that maneuver, I can trust my Heavenly Father to do what He says He will do whether He seems to be hidden behind the shed or out in plain sight. God's Word says that He will never leave me or forsake me (*lose His grip on me*) and that, my precious friend, is worth more than silver or gold!

This same Jazz who will stop on a dime at Darin's every command curls up in my lap every night and we snuggle in my recliner. I know that it sounds silly, especially if you're not a doggie person, but I look forward to that time with her and believe it or not, she looks forward to her time with me. What a wonderful picture of our relationship with God! We not only are on mission for Him, daily accomplishing His will and purpose in our lives, but we are also called into deep fellowship with Him where we curl up in His lap and just enjoy His presence. I love the way that John Piper says it: Scripture reveals that the great business of life is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever!

God's Word clearly reveals that the Apostle Paul was one who definitely enjoyed his relationship with God. It was difficult at times; it was dangerous at times; it was deadly at times and it was even despairing at times BUT it is in those times that we come to understand who God really is and how much He loves us. We come to know Him by name. Can you say with the great apostle:

*. . . More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead . . .  
Philippians 3:8-11*



# Retrievers & Icicles

Called by name - before the foundation of the world you were chosen to be in Christ Jesus - called to salvation when it pleased Him - sealed unto the Day of Redemption with the Holy Spirit of Promise



and snow and ice are up to the dogs' elbows!! But... they are hard-wired for hunting! No winter storm is going to keep those girls back from what they were born and trained to do. After watching in amazement for almost half an hour, my husband finally raised his gun and shot off a round to get the birds to fly away. Only then, did the dogs exit the pond and within minutes, they were covered with icicles.



What in the world do these truths have to do with Retrievers and icicles? God used our canine comrades once again as the star performers in some pretty cool lessons for life! It's a rare moment for us in Greensboro, NC to be snowed in, especially under about a foot of snow and ice! I'm as happy as a clam pecking away at my laptop with no chance of leaving the house but my darlin' husband wouldn't dare miss the opportunity to take our dogs on a short hunt. Grace (our 11-year-old Labrador Retriever) and Jazz (2-year-old Wire-haired Pointing Griffon) are both hard-wired for hunting! I think my husband has a little of that gene, too, but please don't tell him my suspicions! Sometimes the hunting tales are almost as exciting as the event and you could see it in his eye... he had something to share!

Darin, Grace and Jazz were at a small pond that's within walking distance of our house and as soon as the dogs saw Mallards and Canada Geese, they dove in and swam like motorboats to catch their prize! Did I mention that the temperature is below 20\*

So, Tami... where's the life lesson in all of this? Glad you asked! The Apostle Paul exhorted the Ephesian believers when he reminded them that they were 'God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.' If you have trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, then you can know that you have been hard-wired for 'good works, which God prepared beforehand that you should walk in them.' There is a plan and a purpose for your life that is not dependent on your circumstances nor your feelings; it is dependent on the fact that God chose it before you ever responded to His invitation for salvation. You are no longer under the control of the prince of the power of the air but he will definitely try to trip you up and keep you from knowing God and walking in those good works. O precious sister in Christ, how I pray that you will set your heart to press through the icicles of life and live in a way that pleases the One who called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)



## Puppy Love

Well, dear friends, can you believe that it's Friday already? Have you survived the Zoo this week or are you looking to escape it this weekend? I hope you've enjoyed reading some of the lessons that God has taught me through our wonderful Canine Companions! It is so amazing to me that the one and only true God would choose to speak to lil' ole me, let alone use my precious pooches for His object lessons. And by the way... He speaks to Lil' Ole You, too! The week just wouldn't be complete without the mention of the marvelously forgiving spirit of a dog.

So often part of the training process involves negative reinforcement: a loud stern voice, the withholding of treats, the occasional pop on the nose, and my least favorite: that quick jerk on the choke collar to let them know you really mean business. If someone did those things to me, I think I would hide away with my tail tucked between my legs forever!

But regardless of the rigors of discipline and training, none of our dogs have ever met my husband or me without their tail wagging and the light in their eyes brimming with delight. Can you think of a better picture of unconditional love and pure devotion?

Luke 17 and Matthew 18 record Jesus' instruction concerning reconciliation and forgiveness. We could sum it up with the famous Nike slogan: Just Do It! It might help to understand what forgiveness is and is not before you go into shock over that last statement!

Forgiveness is NOT approval or excusing sin; it is NOT justifying or condoning their actions; it is NOT denying or forgetting what happened and it is not pretending that you are not hurt. Forgiveness is NOT taking away the consequence of sin. Forgiveness IS, however, being fully aware of someone's actions and choosing to release their indebtedness to you and refusing to retaliate. It is keeping no record of wrongs and silencing the temptation to share the hurtful behavior with anyone who will listen. Forgiveness is an inner condition of the heart that results from the absence of hostility and resentment. Forgiveness is the antidote for the poison of bitterness. Extending forgiveness is one of the ultimate acts of love and you are definitely being Christ-like when you forgive!



So, the next time someone offends you (especially if it's your husband), just wag your tail and demonstrate that marvelously forgiving spirit of a dog! You'll be glad you did and you will be especially glad you did when you see your children imitate the forgiving spirit of their mother.