

T R A N S I T I O N S

October 2011

by Chris Ann Waters

FORGIVENESS AND A SHIH TZU

Then came Peter to Him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times but, until seventy times seven.
Matthew 18:21-22

Recently I was visiting my uncle and his good-natured shih tzu. I am an early riser so I got up about 5:00 in the morning, put on a pot of coffee, and decided to take the dog out for a walk while the coffee was brewing. It was already quite humid on that particular summer morning but it did not stop this happy little dog from investigating the landscape and exploring to his heart's content. He stayed near me and eventually he was ready to go inside and began to go up the steps into the house. Suddenly he stopped and he began to chew on what I thought was a foreign object that could be harmful to his body, his digestion. I spoke to him and then I tried to take it from his mouth. He did not like that. He nipped at my hand but did not break the skin. I stood there and watched him; shortly thereafter he stopped chewing and wanted to go in the house. The family has been cautioned that while this little dog is friendly, one thing he does not like is to be disturbed when he is eating. But in this instance, I disturbed him in the interest of his well-being. He did not know that. Time would reveal that thankfully whatever he ate did not make him sick. He was just fine.

When we went back into the house, he followed me around calm and happy. But I was unsettled. He might have bitten me! This was out of character for him. He knows me when I come over and knows I play with him when he brings me his toys. He is accustomed to me petting him and being attentive to him. Given how amiable he is, I was surprised he would nip at me. He did not break the skin but for me the matter broke our fellowship. But not for him. He went about in his usual manner with me. I admit that it was with some trepidation I petted him after he ate his food and drank his water. He followed me around while I prepared my coffee and puttered around the kitchen. Then he followed me as I took my coffee to the guest room and went back to bed to read for a while. He jumped on the bed, curled into a ball, and settled in for a nap. It was as though nothing ever happened between us. All was forgiven.

Pets have something to teach us about unconditional love and forgiveness. Jesus said we are to forgive 70 times 7. Creatures that become part of our family seem to have forgiveness down. For them, to forgive is something they simply do. No instructions required. Do I forgive that easily? Do you? For us, forgiveness may take time depending on the incident, the person. We can be reticent to interact with someone if there has been offense. The Lord makes room for that but He still wants the end result to

be forgiveness. No barriers. No barrier to create a chasm that allows Satan to come in and agitate all the more and get one to thinking that the offense is unforgiveable. Jesus will forgive anything. We are to forgive anything. He wants no barriers to the possibility of closeness with that person—perhaps even closer than we were before we or they did something to offend.

When we forgive, we become closer to Jesus. Forgiveness is not acceptance of an act that occurred but it is a pardon for it. Do we not all need to be pardoned at times? I do. Others need my pardon. They need your pardon. When we forgive each other, we keep our personal communion with the Lord and keep unity in the Body of Christ. Even if communion with others is from a distance, in the spirit realm there is no division. This pleases God. Whatever pleases Him surely pleases those who love God.

When our pets die, these great and small creatures leave with us life lessons about unconditional love. Part of the grief that comes due to pet loss is because of the absence of their unconditional love. Sometimes when we have had a challenging day at school or work, to come home to the dog or cat is as a healing balm. When that is gone, it hurts. We make our lives with these creatures and they help make us who we are. Indeed, pets have a place in our hearts and when it is time for them to leave this life, we grieve.

But as with any relationship of merit, would we stop forming relationships to be spared the pain of loss? Short or long in duration, the Lord allows us to gain from all of our exchanges. God's way is such that He soothes loss with time, with the presence of the Holy Spirit, and with the arrival of new interests and renewed purpose. Furthermore, in His blessed kindness, He restores memories to be a source of joy and gratitude for having made the memories at all.

Pet loss is painful because pets are a source of real love and affection. If you or someone you know is experiencing grief due to the death of an animal, do not minimize these feelings. Talk, cry, have a memorial service, look at pictures, and remember that creature. It is not inconsequential to lose anything or anyone inspiring love. Give place to what has been and trust God to give place to what shall be. In memories and in the making of new ones, God shall bring new life and new hope. He is the God of Life.

Lord, thank You for the treasure we know with pets. They are evidence of Your blessings. May we continue to trust Your heart and Spirit in times of loss. May we recognize the value that pets offer us as we try in earnest to conform our character more into the likeness of Thine own. In Thee, Lord Jesus, Amen.