



**SNEAK
PEEK!**

Take a look
inside

All God's Creatures

DAILY DEVOTIONS
for ANIMAL LOVERS

2027



Introduction

My father and I had a cautious relationship. A hardworking railroad man, he peddled his antique timepieces and swapped stories at weekend flea markets. Stories that seemed to be about everything but the two of us.

Like many men of his generation, he didn't show much emotion. Just toiled endlessly to buy hope for my agonizing and incurable condition, a genetic disease unknowingly passed down to me that caused painful tumors to grow throughout my body. "It's all *my* fault," I heard him cry out in the middle of a night of drinking. I saw him tucking money away to fund my future, but what I really wanted was my daddy's love in the present.

As I grew into adulthood, my relationship with my father didn't get any better. The one thing we both adored was my dog Muffin, a Benji look-alike we'd found at a flea market. I hadn't wanted to go that morning, but it was my day off from my nursing job at the hospital. As we drove, I pleaded with the heavens: *Daddy and I are so at odds these days, God. Could we find something there we can agree on?* I pictured a table full of vintage lamps or clocks. I loved how his gray eyes twinkled when he happened upon a find he could flip and sell quickly.

A rusted wire cage pulled Daddy to a spot under a tree, like a magnet to steel. A shaggy brown-and-tan puppy waited inside the cage. "Come here, Bertie Lynne!" Daddy said. He hadn't called me that since I was a little thing. There was a softness in his words, in his touch, as he stroked the black nose through the wire. I knelt to take in the magic, both of us lost in those chocolate-brown eyes. She was mine, mine, mine. I called her Muffin.

Now, when the phone rang after my nursing shifts, Daddy would ask, "How's our Muffin?" *Our* Muffin? It was a love story. A dog. A dad. A daughter.

Then life got hard. While I was in the Cleveland Clinic for brain surgery, Muffin disappeared back home in West Virginia. A father I didn't know emerged. One who combed the highways and "hollers" for any lead. Who

placed ads in the local paper begging folks to find Muffin for “his baby,” offering the princely sum of \$1,000 for Muffin’s return.

Calls poured in. *They just want that \$1,000*, I told myself. I was wrong. As I’d been wrong about a daddy who couldn’t show emotion. They’d read in the paper that his baby worked the night shift, couldn’t sleep, and especially missed her dog. A dog like the one Daddy had clung to when he became an orphan and had to fend for himself at fourteen.

The daddy I never knew, until we started sharing stories. How, during the Depression, he’d traveled from farm to farm, begging for food for his hungry German shepherd, Major, in a tiny, desolate West Virginia town. All he wanted was for me to know the comfort of Muffin again.

Daddy and I loved so many of the same things. Most importantly, each other. As he continued his recovery from alcohol addiction, the connection Muffin had brought us was a constant. Until my father took his last earthly breath, two decades later, the love of a shaggy dog and other animals we’d cherished were the stuff of stories. Stories of adored animals, doing what they do best: teaching us slow-to-learn humans that we aren’t so different after all.

You’ll find a kennel full of such tales in this volume, dear reader. May they ever remind you of one of God’s greatest gifts. All creatures, great and small. The creatures He entrusts to our care.

Roberta Messner
Guideposts contributing editor
and longtime *Walking in Grace* writer

January



Praying for My Deer Ones

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people . . . it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

—1 TIMOTHY 2:1, 3–4 (ESV)

APPROACHING A STOP sign on the way to pick up my sister, I was already slowing down when a fawn bounded across the road ahead of me. I slowed even more, anticipating his mother would follow, but saw no more movement. Had I mistaken what I saw? Was the deer not a fawn at all but a grown animal?

As I pulled up to the stop sign, I looked around and saw the deer standing in tall weeds by the side of the road. The spots on its coat marked it as a juvenile. A new subdivision stood between the fawn and the nearest tree line that would provide security. For the rest of the trip, I prayed God would keep that little one safe and reunite him with his mother. When I reached the stop sign on my return trip home, all looked well, and I thanked God for safeguarding the fawn.

My prayers that day got me thinking. I was raised in a happy but non-Christian home. My parents loved me dearly (no pun intended) but certainly never prayed for me. Yet I have no doubt that others did. Vacation Bible school leaders surely prayed for the timid little girl who came with her friend. Neighbors who knew that my family didn't attend church most likely lifted me up. Sunday school teachers at the church that I walked to by myself made it clear they prayed for me.

Those prayers added up, and I gave my life to Jesus at the age of nineteen. Since then, I've prayed that not only my two sons but my five grandchildren as well—all my dear ones (pun intended)—would come to know Jesus's gift of salvation. —Tracy Crump

Walk of Faith: Think of a child who is not being raised in the Christian faith, and pray that child will come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior.

JANUARY 2

Ocean of Love

*“By this all will know that you are My disciples,
if you have love for one another.”*

—JOHN 13:35 (NKJV)

THE MULTICOLORED FISH swim happily around our sixty-gallon tank. Black mollies and orange swordtails record laps through the abandoned diver’s helmet and around the shipwrecked pirate vessel. As I peer through the glass, their unhurried propulsion relaxes me and helps me unwind from the pressures of another busy day.

My wife and I created the fish tank environment as an early lesson in caregiving for the children of our family. When they come for a visit, each child rushes to the lower level of our house when it’s their turn to feed the fish. Young eyes light up watching aquarium dwellers enjoy their evening meal.

“Not too many flakes, Nicola,” I warn from my chair nearby. Nicola, just ten years old, is young enough that his generous nature could become a problem if he overfeeds the occupants of our underwater ecosystem. Over time, he’s learning to provide just the right amount of fish food.

“I know, Uncle David,” he says while screwing the cap back on the container.

Long after he exits the room to begin an adventure in another room, I think about the complexity of God’s world compared to the fish tank. He created oceans for millions of sea creatures and oceans of love for us who dwell on land. His primary commandment to His followers is to pass on His love and share it with those around us.

I know that just as we care for our aquarium, God looks after my small life. His love and care shine through each tender mercy woven into my daily routine. My goal is to let my presence at work, at home, and in the community be a light to those who peer in from the outside. When I read His Word and store it in my heart, He feels near each day. May my fish and the Bible teach me to swim contentedly around in my own corner of His ocean of love. —David L. Winters

*Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me,
he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and
We will come to him and make Our home with him.”*

—John 14:23 (NKJV)

JANUARY 3

One Small Act

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

—2 CORINTHIANS 12:9 (NIV)

OUR ADULT DAUGHTER, Michelle, graduated and started her professional life a while back. Though she grew up with pets and wants one of her own, she felt it wasn't a good time because of her schedule. Still, she kept sending me photos of dogs at rescue organization websites. She longed to adopt one herself and was sad she wasn't yet in the perfect life situation.

One day, when she shared a photo of a precious one-year-old pit bull mix at the shelter, I suggested she ask if they have a program for weekend respite visits. She contacted them, and they said yes! That weekend she picked up Artemis. They said she had been in a foster home at one time but hadn't left the shelter in quite a while. She really needed an outing.

Michelle took the pup home, and after a quick walk, Artemis snuggled up on the couch and promptly fell asleep across Michelle's lap. She slept and slept . . . and slept. The poor thing slept for four hours, waking briefly a few times to see where Michelle was. Each time she located Michelle, Artemis's tail would thump, and she would go back to sleep.

They had a great time together. I told Michelle she had done a wonderful thing by giving Artemis a break. Michelle also wrote a fantastic social media post about what a perfect dog Artemis was, and soon she was adopted! Now Michelle can do the same for other dogs in the future—a true calling to help.

Sometimes we can be all-or-nothing people, waiting for things in our lives to be perfect before we act. But God can use us at any time, taking whatever we have to offer—even if we see it as meager—and using it to touch lives. What a joy to be part of God's work! —Missy Tippens

*Walk of Faith: Think of someone you know who could use a break.
What is one small thing you could do today to lift their burden?*

Bluebird Hope

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him,
so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

—ROMANS 15:13 (NIV)

AFTER THE NEW Year, I attached a cedar bluebird house to a metal pole and planted it in the ground, near the hill by our driveway. I'd read that social and friendly bluebirds, with their vibrant blue feathers, send out scouts in January. There was still frost on the ground, but I was eager to lure them to the wide-open meadow that backed up to a wooded area on the west side of our yard.

Weeks passed with no visitors. I checked the box daily, praying for a sign, but after a few weeks, nothing had happened. I lost my enthusiasm and gave up. Chickadees and mockingbirds were actively nesting in the bushes. Maybe it wasn't meant to be.

In late February, I spied a male bluebird perched on the roof of the birdhouse, as if he were guarding it. A glimmer of hope flew into my soul. But days went by and nothing else happened. *What's going on?* Why did he mock me and peck a hole in my hope?

A few weeks later, I saw a bluebird pair busily flitting to and fro with grass in their beaks. They were nesting. I was overjoyed! Days afterward, I peeked inside and saw five bright-blue oval eggs in that fine nest. By April, the bluebird couple worked overtime feeding their frail, fragile, and extremely hungry offspring. After a few weeks, I watched the fledglings fly from the house I'd put up to the safety of nearby bushes.

It was a privilege to participate with nature by providing those bluebirds a home. Back in January, my hope was as frail and fragile as those hatchlings as I wondered if anyone would claim the house. But I learned to never give up on God's timing—or a bluebird's. I've got my fingers crossed that they'll nest there again. —Michael Floyd Thompson

*"Hope" is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul
and sings the tune without the words and never stops at all.*

—Emily Dickinson

JANUARY 5

It's Good to Be Different

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.

—ROMANS 12:6 (NIV)

CASPER IS QUITE different from my other cats. Solid white with incredibly communicative and curious expressions, he typically coos and chortles instead of meows, and he's so skittish that one false move will send him tearing off to hide, only to come creeping out apologetically a few minutes later.

Oops, sorry, I forgot you're safe, he seems to say, sidling up to me with a sleek kitty rub.

My favorite Casperism is the way he uses the cat door to get from our kitchen to the screened patio. The other cats dart through headfirst, certain about what's ahead. But Casper has invented his own unique method, tapping the door hard with his paw until it swings liberally, then lifting the door toward him so he can slowly maneuver his frame under and through to his destination. It's so adorable, I just might have several videos of this in action.

Casper's special mannerisms and personality traits remind me of today's scripture. The apostle Paul tells God's people that our Father gives each of us distinctive abilities and quirks that help us more perfectly comprise the whole body of Christ. We're supposed to be different from each other, for those differences help us work together toward God's purpose in a better and more effective way. I might be an encouraging teacher, while my brother is a mercy-filled servant and my sister a phenomenal leader. I don't need to worry that I cannot do what my brother or sister can do, nor should I feel inferior or superior. Different is good and a beautiful part of God's perfect design for His people.

Sometimes I compare myself to others, forgetting that God didn't design me to be like them—He designed me to be me, with my own peculiarities and characteristics. And as I cherish my sweet Casper, I must remember the comforting and affirming truth: God sees the unique charm in me and loves me as He created me.

I am beloved, and I belong to Him. —Jessica Brodie

*Make strong in our hearts what unites us;
Build bridges across all that divides us.*

—David Steindl-Rast

JANUARY 6

Lead Me

The LORD directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives.

—PSALM 37:23 (NLT)

I STARED AT MY calendar and groaned. How could this have happened? I'd gotten my weekends mixed up and offered to speak at a Christian conference the same weekend as our youth group's fall retreat. As a youth sponsor, I needed to be at the retreat. What should I do? What would God want me to do?

I glanced down and saw my terrier mix, Peyton, staring at me. "Do you need to go outside?" I asked. She wagged her tail. A clear yes. I opened the bedroom door, and she took off down the hallway. I started to follow her, but my husband, Eric, came in, so I explained my problem to him. As we spoke, Peyton ran back into the bedroom and stared at me. I chuckled. "It's like she's saying, 'Are you coming, Mom?'"

Eric shook his head. "Why doesn't she go downstairs and just wait for you by the door?"

"She never goes downstairs without me. It's like she needs me to lead the way."

"Such a funny little dog," Eric said.

As Peyton took care of her business and I prayed about my double-booked weekend, I recalled the way she waited to be sure I was with her. "God, I don't want to run ahead of You. Please show me which event is the one I should attend."

For the next few days, I prayed a lot. I really wanted to hear from God before deciding which commitment to keep and which to cancel. I mentioned the conflict to the conference director and explained that I was praying about what to do. But I was determined to hear from God first and follow His leading.

Finally, the conference director called me. "I've rearranged our schedule. Would you be able to speak on Thursday night instead of Saturday afternoon?"

The change would allow me to participate in both the conference and the youth retreat. Grateful that I had followed Peyton's example, I thanked God for working this out and allowing me to attend both events after all, leading me to exactly what He wanted me to do. —Diane Stark

Let God have your life. He can do more with it than you can.

—Dwight L. Moody

JANUARY 7

On the Run

We need have no fear of someone who loves us perfectly.

—1 JOHN 4:18 (TLB)

AT FIRST, I was enchanted. A full-grown black bear was making eye contact with me—and it wasn't through the bars of a cage at the zoo. Then, reality set in. The only thing between that bear and me was about twenty yards. My hiking buddy Cindy and I stopped dead in our tracks, too stunned to take decisive action. I knew I was supposed to make myself look larger. Unfortunately, I wasn't wearing horizontal stripes. I also didn't have a bear bell or whistle on hand to make noise to scare him off. I could yell, but that felt akin to calling "Here, kitty, kitty . . ." Besides, my voice seemed to have beaten its own hasty retreat.

As Cindy and I traded whispered options for escape, the bear began to run straight toward us. I hoped it wasn't with the same enthusiasm I'd had when chasing down a neighborhood ice-cream truck. Cindy and I began briskly walking backward, our eyes still on the bear.

Suddenly, our furry foe stopped and hung a left. An overflowing trash can apparently held more culinary appeal than we did. Once the bear was otherwise occupied, my friend and I hightailed it around the bend in the road, out of the bear's sight, and hopefully out of danger.

All afternoon, Cindy and I talked about the combination of wonder and fear we'd experienced in the bear's presence. C. S. Lewis's words about Aslan, from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, kept running through my head: "'Course he isn't safe. But he is good."

God, in His own way, is even wilder than that bear. His power is greater. His omnipotence isn't safe. But while I don't know what a wild animal will do, I know God's character and intentions. Both are based in love. That means I can run toward Him, not only with confidence but with joy. —Vicki Kuyper

Though our feelings come and go, [God's] love for us does not.

—C. S. Lewis



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