

Question: Recently our hearts were broken by the death of a beloved little pet. Does God love animals, too. Does he have a plan for the animals after death like he does for humans?

Only those who have experienced the special qualities that God has given some of our animal friends can understand the heartache that comes with the death of a beloved pet. Our God cares about all his creatures, and he expects humans to take responsibility for the proper care and management of all creation. This care includes the care of animals, even though God may not have a plan for them after death.

To Job, God declared his wisdom and care for all his creation by a series of questions. Concerning animals he asked, “Do you hunt the prey for the lioness and satisfy the hunger of the lions when they crouch in their dens or lie in wait in a thicket? Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God and wander about for lack of food?” (Job 38:39-41 NIV). The implied answer is that no one other than God provides for these animals. In the New Testament, Jesus said, “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them” (Matthew 6:26). He also said that the heavenly Father does not allow even a sparrow to fall to the ground apart from his will (Matthew 10:29).

Not only does God care about the animals, but he has also charged humanity with the responsibility of properly managing every part of his creation. God made man ruler over the works of his [God's] hands, including “all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea” (Psalm 8:6-8; cf. Genesis 1:28). Although God permits the eating of meat (Genesis 9:3-4), he also demands wise ecological use of this resource. The law to Israel said that if someone found a bird's nest with a mother sitting on the young or the eggs, he should not take both the mother and the young (Deuteronomy 22:6-7). To take both would cut off future food supply. Concerning the use of animals for domestic purposes, Proverbs 12:10 says, “A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal.”

However, a distinction is made between animals and man in the creation story. God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.” The same is not said of the animals. While humans will give an account of their deeds before God in judgment, nothing like this is said of animals (Matthew 12:36; Hebrews 9:27).

Based on the above scriptures, I conclude that animals are a part of God's amazing creation given to bless our lives on earth. They are a part of the creation that declares the glory of God and makes him known to us (Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:19-20). From the colorful plumage of the peacock to the grandeur of the horse and the playful antics of the monkey, God made them all. He has even endowed some of them with a sense of loyalty and unconditional love toward their human masters that can touch the most hardened of hearts.

While some people may not have had the experiences to appreciate your sense of loss when a pet dies, others have. Be thankful for the wondrous companionship of one of God's creatures even though short-lived. Above all, keep your eyes on the Father who continues to bless us with everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Learn from God's creatures, and determine to trust in his goodness as the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). Even from the death of one of God's creatures, we are reminded that life for all of us in this world is limited. But through faith in Jesus Christ, we can have a hope of blessings eternal that will more than compensate for our losses here. We can live in God's presence where he will wipe every tear away and where there will be no more death or mourning or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. God will make all things new (Revelation 21:3-4).

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