



"It's not great talents that God blesses, but great likeness to Jesus."
—Robert Murray M'Cheyne

10-May-02

Lesson Learned

Yesterday evening, my son John learned an important life lesson, "courtesy" of our young Siberian Husky, Chocolate.

It was finally time to cut the ankle-high grass in our backyard, so I dragged my lawnmower out of the shed and tied Chocolate, who normally roams free there, on a 20-foot wire tether to a stake in our front yard. She loves to be where the action is, even if she cannot join in all the fun the kids are having down in the cul-de-sac or on the driveway. Her tether allows her the freedom to explore about half of the front yard yet keeps her out of our flowerbeds. Almost.

I had nearly finished cutting the backyard grass when my wife Beth caught my attention and shouted, "Chocolate has hurt herself!" Shutting off the mower's engine, I hustled to the front yard. I found the tether wrapped around the trunk of a sapling crepe myrtle, and the silly dog's left front paw caught in one of its loops. In desperation, Chocolate had started to bite her own leg to free herself from the trap.

Before Beth and I had arrived, however, a neighbor girl had heard the dog's distress and run to the door to tell us. Upon hearing her warning, John had run out to help Chocolate. When John had reached down to loosen the tether on her leg, Chocolate, not knowing what was happening, had snarled and slashed his arm with her very sharp, wolf-like teeth. Forgetting her distress, he had sprinted inside to take care of his now-bleeding forearm, leaving us to worry about the dog.

Beth unhooked the staked end of the tether, and this gave us plenty of slack to unwrap

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the tree trunk and Chocolate's paw. She was bloody and limping, but we led her to her water dish, where she drank greedily. We bathed her paw, and after I finished mowing, took her to the backyard. This morning, her leg was clean, the limp was gone, and she seemed to have forgotten the whole, scary incident.

John, meanwhile, had cleaned his wound and applied some ice to it. Upon closer examination, it was a rather shallow gash about a half-inch long, and it had quickly stopped bleeding. Later, he covered it with some antibiotic salve and a bandage and went to bed unconcerned. He is young; he will heal just fine.

However, he did learn a lesson about helping those in distress. When one is the first on the scene, and the victim's suffering and fear are magnified by his rescuer's confusion and uncertainty, solving the immediate problem—though noble—is sometimes not the best course of action. In this case, doing so literally bit John!

The more painless and successful solution lay, literally again, just down the line. Unhooking the tether and providing slack eased the restriction of the line around the tree and the leg, and the animal could step out of the loop herself. No one else needed to have been hurt, and had it been a person rather than a dog caught in a snare, other vital lessons would have been learned.

It is in our natures to help those in need or distress. Most of us cannot stand to see others suffer, and we will go out of our way, like the Good Samaritan ([Luke 10:25-37](#)), to help. It takes a pretty hardhearted person to ignore the cry of another human being's pain. Helping the poor, downtrodden, needy, alone, and suffering among us is right and godly ([James 1:27](#); [Psalm 68:5](#); [Isaiah 58:6-7](#); [Matthew 25:34-40](#); [Job 29:12-13](#); [Galatians 6:9-10](#); etc.).

Even so, we should consider another angle of such a situation: What is the wisest method of aid? The modern liberal throws money at every problem from education to illegitimacy, but the results of this course are lamentable. Many conservatives espouse the "teach them how to fish" principle as the ultimate solution, a form of pulling oneself up by his bootstraps. Both solutions have their flaws; neither solution will work in every case.

This is where common sense and [wisdom](#) must come to the fore. [God](#) has given us the capacity to project the results of any given course of action to a remarkable degree of accuracy. But will we use it? Of course, foresight requires us to be alert, knowledgeable, understanding, objective, honest, and decisive, among other things, yet these are all areas in which God has already instructed us to grow. Having and using foresight to

predict behavior—ourown and others'—isa godly characteristic. God uses His awesome foresight all the time and in many ways while dealing with us. This is part of His image, then, we need to put on.

The next time we stumble across someone in need, before we simply "help" him, we need to step back and determine how best we can truly help him. By doing so, we will put on the image of God.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Lessons From the Animals](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

John Ritenbaugh reminds us that mankind, created after the Godkind, has been given dominion or responsibility for the care of animal life, preserving and embellishing their environment, as God would take care of them. Our well-being is inextricably connected to our care of animals (Proverbs 12:20). By having Adam name the animals, God evidently wanted him to become acquainted with their characteristics, enabling him to learn commonsense wisdom from observing their behavior and traits, either for the purpose of emulating particular behaviors, such as diligence and self-discipline from the ant (Proverbs 6:6), affection and motherliness from a deer (Proverbs 5:19), or avoiding negative behaviors such as gossip or slander by observing the behavior of an adder or asp (Psalm 140), aimless willfulness or stubbornness, as in a wild ass (Jeremiah 2:24) or a goat (Matthew 25:32).

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by Mike Ford

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