

Pet Tales

Ciona D. Rouse

For use with devozine meditations for October 29–31, 2012.

MAKING THE CONNECTION

“As I started working on this session, my cat Fival (an FIV+ rescued tabby) came running to me and snuggled at my feet. Pets have an amazing ability to say, “I love you! I need you! I want to be near you!” I think of the pets I have had through the years and reflect on the joy they have given me—even my dear fish in their bowls, who couldn’t snuggle but still brought me peace and happiness. Not everyone likes animals; but we were all given the task of caring for creation, so we can nurture a deep respect for animals.” —Ciona

MEET THE WRITER

Ciona D. Rouse is a writer who lives in Nashville, Tennessee. She was never a fan of cats until she met Fival, possibly the most precious tabby cat in the world. He’s a snuggly delight who, for some reason, doesn’t make her sneeze; and she’s learning so much about love and caregiving since he’s been in her life.

STUFF YOU WILL NEED

- computer
- Internet
- projector (or a screen large enough for the group to view video clips)

PLUGGED IN

- + The “Pet Web Site” is a good place to find pet information and stories.
(<http://www.petwebsite.com/>)
- + For some pure fun, start the session with a funny pet video from YouTube.
- + “Christian the Lion” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=btuxO-C2IzE>) is a short version of the true story of a lion raised in the city and returned to the wild. [NOTE: For the full story, visit “A Lion Called Christian” at <http://www.alioncalledchristian.com.au/>]
- + “Stories about St. Francis and the Animals” includes three stories of St. Francis, his ability to communicate with animals and his affinity for all creation.
(<http://www.americancatholic.org/features/francis/stories.asp>)

CHECKING IN

Invite group members to use an animal as a metaphor to describe their week. [For example: “My week was a kitten; I slept a lot.” “My week was a giraffe; it was so-o-o-o long.” “My week was like a teacup yorkie. I felt small, and I had to rely on my friends and family to carry me through.”]

EXPLORING THE WORD

Scripture: Job 12:7–10, Genesis 9:14–17

Option 1:

Begin by showing the group one or more YouTube animal videos.

Then read aloud Job 12:7–10. Invite discussion by asking this question (encourage storytelling):

What lessons have you learned from your pets or from other animals?

Option 2:

Consider introducing the story of two young Australian travelers who purchased a lion cub shortly after arriving in London. Invite the group to read about Christian the Lion and to watch the popular film clip (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=btuxO-C2IzE>).

Invite people to discuss these questions:

What lessons of love, loyalty, and faith did you learn from the story?

Even though Christian was a wild animal, he was also a pet. What does the story tell us about the power of love?

Although this is a unique story about a wild animal, what does it tell us about how humans and animals interact?

Next, tell stories about St. Francis of Assisi (see “Plugged In”), the saint often revered for living a life as close to Christ as is humanly possible and for truly loving animals. Suggest that like Christian’s owners, St. Francis considered animals to be family.

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Whichever option you choose to open your time of “Exploring the Word,” you may also want to invite the group to discuss the issue of cruelty to animals, both pets and wild animals. Consider showing short videos from “Animal Cops” (www.animal.discovery.com/tv/animal-cops).

Then discuss these questions:

When God clearly has given us charge to care for and to learn from all living creatures, why do we sometimes treat animals poorly? (Not all people like all animals, and we definitely should use common sense when encountering wild or unfamiliar animals; but we are never called to be cruel.)

How can we, as people of faith, represent God’s grace and love for all of creation?

Read aloud Genesis 9:14–17. Remind the group that God has love and passion for all of creation.

SHARING IN PRAYER

Invite each person to name aloud his or her pets. Then close the session with this adaptation of St. Francis' prayer for the Blessing of Pets:

“Blessed are you, Lord God, maker of all living creatures. You called forth fish in the sea, birds in the air, and animals on the land. You inspired St. Francis to call all of them his brothers and sisters. We ask you to bless all of our pets. By the power of your love, enable them to live according to your plan. May we always praise you for all your beauty in creation. Blessed are you, Lord our God, in all your creatures! Amen.”

—adapted from <http://www.americancatholic.org/features/francis/blessing.asp>

TAKING IT FURTHER

- Invite group members to volunteer at an animal shelter, to host a pet food drive for a local animal shelter, or to make a donation to a shelter.
- For more about volunteering or other ideas, check out “Pets Are Family Initiatives” (<http://network.bestfriends.org/initiatives/petsarefamily/pages/first-home-forever-home-four-legged-food-drive-2009.aspx>).
- Invite the group to hold a blessing of the animals for the church family or for the children of the church.