

PAWS & WINGS



AN ANIMAL LOVER'S DEVOTIONAL
Contains Scriptures that feature animals

MARY L. BALL

A MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR

My journey has been a road with ups and many downs. Through it all, I've learned to stand beside Jesus Christ and hold to His all-empowering hand. But like everyone, at one time or another, I've had to suffer, to learn to trust in Him.

My first quest was the time I lost my oldest daughter to a car accident. That was many, many years ago, and I was a young believer. My faith muscle wasn't strong, and with grief and questions, I stepped away from the Lord. However, God never gave up on me. He continued to place people in my path to remind me of who I was supposed to be. I'll never forget that faithful evening at a gospel singing when my heart turned. The next morning in church, I came back into His saving grace. Since then, I've made a decision that nothing will ever put a wall between me and God.

Years later, my mother developed Alzheimer's disease. I was faced with so much uncertainty and questions. Some say it's not right to ask God questions, but I think God knows that when we ask, we're in pain. For a year, each time I visited Mom in the nursing home, I fretted for her life past, one she'd never have again. At times, I'd cry because she didn't recognize her only child. I recall asking the Lord why I couldn't have peace, and just enjoy her while I could. God quickened my spirit and told me (yes, I heard in my

spirit God's message) He said, "I wasn't peaceful because I hadn't completely turned my sadness over to him."

During those six years, God used my mother's situation to teach me more valuable lessons.

So now, as I face whatever the rest of my life has in store, I know above all it's important to hold to Jesus Christ's promises and completely trust the Lord, with every circumstance that befalls me.

With the Lord, I'll always be a work in progress. As I do what I can to support my husband in ministry, I continue to learn the things God needs me to grasp. Like everyone, I'm slow at times, but I do know that if we all stand beside Jesus Christ and hold to His hand, we'll receive the greatest reward possible.

Blessings,

Mary L. Ball

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Wings:
An Animal Lover's
Devotional

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INTRODUCTION

“THE LORD IS GOOD TO ALL; HE HAS
COMPASSION ON ALL HE HAS MADE.”

PSALM 145:9

“Paws and Wings” explores a few of the many verses in God’s Word which speak of animals and winged creatures, along with a few facts about their traits. These creatures played a very important part in Jesus’ ministry. The Lord created birds on the fifth day; each flutter of a wing is a pearl of wisdom. These fowls show different representations. Some imply strength, some courage, some weakness. Through these representations, God sends guidance. He designed everything for an extraordinary purpose.

Any time animals and God’s Kingdom are discussed together the question arises: Are animals in Heaven?

Many of us have a fur baby of some kind. And we can’t help but to love these precious cuties. Pets are helpful to keep loneliness at bay, remove stress, and aid in various kinds of physical recovery. God blesses with every good thing. (James 1:17) And as we know, pets are a gift from God.

When a child asked this very question to Billy Graham his response was, “If that’s what it takes for

you to be happy in heaven, God will make sure your dog is in heaven.” Pet lovers can be comforted by Job 12:7-9 which says, *“But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?”*

Animals apparently have an innate sense of God, which implies their animal souls are an important part of God’s Kingdom.

We do know that God promises that Heaven is a place with no pain, no suffering, or sorrow (Rev. 21). Jesus calls it paradise.

The verses in this devotional are designed to uplift animal lovers (and others) through the illustration of how animals are part of God’s plan.

“SWARMS OF LIVING CREATURES WILL LIVE
WHEREVER THE RIVER FLOWS. THERE WILL BE
LARGE NUMBERS OF FISH, BECAUSE THIS
WATER FLOWS THERE AND MAKES THE SALT
WATER FRESH; SO, WHERE THE RIVER FLOWS
EVERYTHING WILL LIVE.” ~ EZEKIEL 47:9

PART ONE: PAWS

Paws Introduction

We begin this devotional focusing on various four-legged creatures and God's Word. From reading Genesis, we know that animals are God's creation. The Lord can and will communicate with an animal. God commanded the animals to go into Noah's ark; and in the book of Numbers, an angel appeared to Balaam's donkey.

In 1954 a production, "A Man for All Seasons" by Robert Bolt aired. The play highlighted the life of Sir Thomas More and included a wonderful thought about animals and God: "God created animals for their innocence." Thinking of this comment makes us realize that the hearts of animals are similar to the innocence of a child. They are blameless and don't understand revenge. Animals just live each day and want nothing more than kindness. Like we do, these four-footed creatures have a history worth understanding.

Here are a few quotes about our furry favorites.

"I AM FOND OF PIGS. DOGS LOOK UP TO US.
CATS LOOK DOWN ON US. PIGS TREAT US AS
EQUALS." ~ SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL

Mary L. Ball

“UNTIL ONE HAS LOVED AN ANIMAL, A PART
OF ONE’S SOUL REMAINS UN-AWAKENED.” ~
ANATOLE FRANCE

“ANIMALS ARE SUCH AGREEABLE FRIENDS—
THEY ASK NO QUESTIONS; THEY PASS NO
CRITICISMS.” ~ GEORGE ELIOT

“TIME SPENT WITH CATS IS NEVER WASTED.”
~ SIGMUND FREUD

PAWS 1

“THEN SACRIFICE ONE MALE GOAT FOR A SIN
OFFERING AND TWO LAMBS, EACH A YEAR OLD,
FOR A FELLOWSHIP OFFERING.”
LEVITICUS 23:19

A lamb is a newborn sheep. These cute woollies are social animals and will recognize the faces of people whom they see regularly. As with all babies, if separated from their kind for too long, they'll become despondent. Lambs are gentle animals and show emotions such as sadness and fear, just as we do. When they grow into sheep, most remain the kind, easy-going creatures God made them to be.

In ancient days, believers martyred animals, and specifically goats and lambs, to rid themselves of sin. This ritual was normal, as it was the law God decreed, and a tradition to be done each year.

Until Jesus was born and became our savior, people had no other way to obtain forgiveness for sins. There is so much to be said for the sacrifice Jesus made; through Him we are set free. He martyred Himself to rid us of sin. We no longer need a created animal to be our scapegoat. This is why “lamb” references found in the Bible represent Jesus Christ.

Even in non-biblical stories, we've come to use a lamb to represent sacrifice and gentleness. There is a

story about a lamb that was led to slaughter and placed on a chopping block. Because of the lamb's gentle nature, it remained still with its head on the block. The lamb looked sideways at the man, only watching, never moving or crying out. When the butcher saw the kindness in the animal's eyes, he didn't have the heart to kill this gentle creature.

It's only fitting that a Jesus is the Lamb of God. He came and willingly remained on the Cross—watching all those gathered who had called for His death—and became the sacrificial lamb Who would atone for our sins and give salvation to the world. This great selfless act encourages us to have faith and to believe in God's plan.

By following God's Word, through faith, we can overcome the trials that try to hinder us. Salvation is offered to anyone who accepts Jesus Christ and is truly repentant of their sins. But people often turn their backs on the promises Jesus offers.

It's difficult to have family who deny the Lord. Prayer is the best tool we have. We can't push anyone into believing. And we can't save them through our own will. Only Jesus has that power. However, if we keep praying, God recognizes our faith and sincerity, and He can make a way. It may not be during our time, but it will be in His perfect time.

As Christians, we need to pray for those who don't believe and witness when an opportunity arises.

“HE WAS OPPRESSED AND AFFLICTED, YET
HE DID NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH; HE WAS LED
LIKE A LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER, AND AS A

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SHEEP BEFORE ITS SHEARERS IS SILENT, SO
HE DID NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH." ISAIAH 53:7

PAWS 2

“WATCH OUT FOR FALSE PROPHETS. THEY
COME TO YOU IN SHEEP’S CLOTHING, BUT
INWARDLY THEY ARE FEROCIOUS WOLVES. BY
THEIR FRUIT YOU WILL RECOGNIZE THEM. DO
PEOPLE PICK GRAPES FROM THORN BUSHES,
OR FIGS FROM THISTLES?
MATTHEW 7:15-16

Wolves are ferocious when it comes to hunting prey and protecting their pack. They have even been known to turn on each other if one isn’t beneficial to the pack (usually the old, sick, or crippled wolves). Wolves are apex predators, and they target the weak...and the innocent. Wolves prefer easy kills, which is why they often go after young animals that don’t realize they’re in danger.

Many people, including Christians, have witnessed someone using religion for gain. A charismatic leader can prey upon Christians because we are taught to accept all, including the weak and the fallen. The verse is a strong reminder that we must stay aware of those around us. The Bible references someone pretending to be sincere and godly when their heart is wicked. Jesus spoke of teachers and preachers who appear to be holy, but are full of treachery. These false Christian leaders want riches or power; they aren’t sincerely interested in religious

practices except to use them as a weapon towards others. Underneath their godly costumes they are like raging, hungry wolves.

Fraudsters have selfish desires, using hypocrisy as a tool. The true teaching of God's word and salvation is far from their minds.

Many Christians have seen congregations torn apart by a minister's misinterpretation of the gospel. Often, we find out later that they knowingly were far from God's calling.

We need to be kind and giving, but we also must pay attention and not be led astray. If we notice another believer, preacher, or teacher who isn't striving to live righteously, and appears to be misleading others, we must test the fruit they bear. If it isn't godly fruit, we shouldn't be part of the ministry. It's heartbreaking that this goes on. However, throughout history there have been fraudulent people proclaiming God's Word for their own ends.

The gospel teaches love, faith, peace, and the salvation through Jesus Christ. Rest assured that anyone endorsing salvation based on anything other than belief in Jesus, the second Person of the one Trinitarian God, is a false prophet.

**"DO NOT CONFORM ANY LONGER TO THE
PATTERN OF THIS WORLD, BUT BE
TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF YOUR
MIND. THEN YOU WILL BE ABLE TO TEST AND
APPROVE WHAT GOD'S WILL IS--HIS GOOD,
PLEASING AND PERFECT WILL." ROMANS 12:2**

PAWS 3

“IT IS EASIER FOR A CAMEL TO GO THROUGH
THE EYE OF A NEEDLE THAN FOR SOMEONE
WHO IS RICH TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF
GOD.” MARK 10:25

Jesus isn't telling us to stay in poverty. The verse above is proverbial concerning our hearts.

The suggestion of a needle isn't clear. Some scholars believe that the needle referred to talks about the 'Needle Gate' which was a narrow, low gap found in the wall surrounding Jerusalem. This opening was said to be used for after-hours entry and made small for people's safety. If someone on a camel needed to enter the gate after dark the animal would have to crawl on its knees to get inside. If true, it'd have to be a well-trained camel to make it go against instinct and crawl into a tight space.

Gathering only the riches of the world, without a caring heart is just as hazardous as crawling into a tight hole. It blinds us to the important things in life.

Some people diligently set their hearts to seek wealth. Often, they're so busy following worldly gold that they overlook Christ and His salvation. Their focus isn't on God.

Many financially successful people are oblivious to our Lord and His Holy Word. Those seeking

monetary wealth may go through their whole life without realizing that true wealth is not about money, it's having faith in Jesus Christ and receiving His salvation.

Also, wealth can be a dilemma for some, because they don't comprehend the act of giving to help advance God's Kingdom. Most Christians feel that in some way they should pay tithes to God's ministry and often use the ten percent rule mentioned in the Bible. Sometimes, striving to fulfill this ten percent makes us focus too hard on finances, even when we have good intentions and love the Lord.

In Matthew, it tells us that where our treasures lie, our hearts will be there also. Mark 10:25 isn't only referring to money, it concerns what we feel is important and where our focus stays.

Are we making money our idol?

Are we more attentive to what's going on with the stock market, than what the Bible says?

It doesn't matter if you have millions in the bank or you live on the street. Salvation and sanctification are free to anyone who desires. With our hearts on the Lord, we are sure to have blessings.

"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."
1Timothy 6:10

"Hyraxes are creatures of little power, yet they make their home in the crags;" Proverbs 30:26

Hyraxes are not only creatures of little power, they are small. They live among cliffs and rocks—a rather

rugged environment that requires excellent survival skills.

Have you ever felt small and unimportant?

Proverbs speaks of the little creatures that may seem helpless, but are smart enough to understand how to protect themselves. These little mammals lack strength, but they are wise.

Their choice of refuge is a safety net and a good example for us. I'm not speaking of a sturdy house. We are to surround ourselves with the protection of God and lean on His assurance in times of trouble.

No matter whom we are or where we live, we're capable of doing big things for God. It starts with being the person God wants us to be. Following His ways and living the life He desires for us. Remember we're never unimportant; we're part of God's kingdom. A Christian always has a task and God equips us for the mission of spreading His light.

We may believe we are too insignificant for spiritual duties. We might hesitate to exercise grace when faced with the corruptions of this world. We may even think there is nothing we can do that will make a difference. None of this is true. John 14 says, *"Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."*

God uses anyone who is willing. And everywhere we go there are opportunities to plant a seed of faith. Our deeds might be as simple as telling someone to have a blessed day, or agreeing to pray with a person. But to another individual this could be life-changing.

Believers are a force to behold when we stand firm with the Lord. We can plant ourselves on the solid rock of His salvation and shine a spiritual light.

Remember, each of us has heavenly wisdom to defeat the arrows of the devil. In God we are never insignificant. Let's make a point to look at every situation with the knowledge that that we are important workers for God's kingdom. Center yourself on the Lord, walk in faith, and God will use you for His special purpose.

“MY FATHER, WHO HAS GIVEN THEM TO ME,
IS GREATER THAN ALL; NO ONE CAN SNATCH
THEM OUT OF MY FATHER'S HAND.”

JOHN 10:29

PAWS 4

“THE LIONS ROAR FOR THEIR PREY AND SEEK
THEIR FOOD FROM GOD.” PSALMS 104:21

Lions are famous for their roars, but they also hiss and meow. Because the lion is such an independent and brave animal, it's always been a symbol of strength and power.

What's the comparison between a lion's roar and seeking from God?

God is the provider of everything. Even in nature, God's power is evident. But, animals are especially intriguing; they can thrive in almost any situation. In times of winter, when food is scarce, animals continue to flourish, either by hibernation or by finding a meal even when food is scarce. Their ability to survive is thanks to God's wonderful earthly design. Psalms mentions the mighty lion seeking food from God. This, too, is part of God's design.

A lion's roar can be a scary sound for humans and other animals, alike. As a lion chases prey, its roar is frightening. This fear causes the prey to become nervous and stumble, making it an easy catch for a lion. However, even with the lion's loud cry, God is still the provider. He is the One who gave the lion its mighty roar and prowess. And just as God provides for the “king of beasts,” He also supplies our needs.

We live in a turbulent world. Nothing is secure or easy; each year, things get more complex. We might not be able to count on the government or any agency or even our neighbours, but we can count on God. The Lord watches over animals. He'll certainly make a way for us. We're blessed with endless opportunities to make a living.

If we seek Him spiritually, we'll automatically count on Christ when the going gets tough. Let's make a determination to stay strong like a lion, live boldly, while completely placing our providence in God's hands.

**"HAVE I NOT COMMANDED YOU? BE STRONG
AND COURAGEOUS. DO NOT BE TERRIFIED; DO
NOT BE DISCOURAGED, FOR THE LORD YOUR
GOD WILL BE WITH YOU WHEREVER YOU GO."**

JOSHUA 1:9