

Love, Loyalty and Perseverance

(December 7, 2022)

As readers know, we recently rescued a young puppy whose right leg had been run over. The Vet said no bones were broken; just soft tissue damage. The dog - Scooby - is on Gabapentin to help with nerve pain and is getting therapeutic/cold laser therapy. Hopefully, he won't need surgery. He's eating well, playing hard and we've noticed he is not only very intelligent, but loves us dearly.

I've learned one thing about rescues because we have had several throughout life. They seem to really appreciate what we human parents do for them when they were in situations that were not so good. They become exceedingly loyal and loving and want to only do those things that improve their relationship with their humans.

Scooby is no different. He is remarkably intelligent and picks things up very quickly. He already knows "sit," and when he is doing something wrong, he's beginning to understand the words, "leave it." He will usually obey, but you can also see him fighting with himself to ignore his natural tendencies. Who taught that dog to understand those commands? The previous owners did not.

Clearly, Scooby wants to do the things that please us. We don't hit him in reprimand when he is doing something wrong. No rolled up newspaper to the nose (which doesn't hurt but simply surprises them and gets their attention). What we've found so far is that firm but gentle commands that are one or two words repeated over time help him understand what we mean. After only a few weeks, he has learned that going to the bathroom is something done outside the house.

He likes to jump up on us to show his affection. Instead of yelling at him or smacking him, we simply say "down" firmly while *gently* pushing him back to the floor. He is getting it. We are going to be taking him to the trainer that trained our older dog, starting this Friday. She is a search and rescue dog trainer but she also trains dogs in the basic commands. Eventually, we will train him using an electric collar because he tends to run off when off leash. He needs to learn to stay close to us as Buster, our older dog has learned, especially when camping or hiking.

But all this is to say that this young pup loves us. He wants to be near us. He will constantly walk between our legs if we are doing dishes by the sink, or he will sit on our feet if we are sitting down. If we walk into another room, he will follow and sit or lay near us. He readily follows us wherever we go. He also wants to be very close to Buster, but sometimes, Buster just doesn't want to be bothered by his younger "brother."



In the car, he has learned from our older dog that eventually, you just curl up on the back seat or the floor and sleep until the car stops and then onto something else, like shopping at Lowe's!

My wife took this photo of Scooby sitting on/near my feet, leaning against me and gazing up at me. The people who don't understand dogs are missing a great deal in my opinion, but I do understand that some folks are simply not pet people. It's always amazing to me how many people will give our older dog Buster, a wide berth. They immediately think he's a Rottweiler as if Rottweiler's will attack you just as soon as look at you. Buster can have the most placid look on his face, with his ears rounded, tongue lolling out with a "smile" on his face and tail wagging furiously to let people know he's friendly, but still, many become nervous at such a large dog (he's 75 pounds). What can you do? Not much.

Like Buster, Scooby loves us and has no problem showing it, either through obedience, submission or simply drinking us in. A dog's eyes, ears, mouth and tail will tell you what you need to know. It's too bad more folks don't know about dogs and their "calming signals"[1] used to communicate with other dogs. Dogs don't just bark or whine. They use a plethora of communication through body language; a "play bow," a face turned away, or any number of things to communicate their intentions. If you own a dog, you would do well to begin to understand their language of communication.

Dogs love us and we can certainly love them back. In fact, love is evidenced in many ways. We all appreciate being loved and dogs are no different since they've become domesticated. We are all familiar with **John 3:16**. There, John tells us how much God loves us, enough to be willing to take on the form of humanity and die for us after living sinlessly for thirty-something years. As a child, I grew up singing the words to "Jesus Loves Me (This I know)," and because of the Bible and songs like this, the concept of God in Christ loving us is something that was instilled in me as a young boy. However, it is one thing to know this truth in our brains and quite another to know it in our hearts. In order for the latter to happen, there must be difficulties in our life that God either saves us from or works inside of those difficulties to prove His love for us.

Love is something that can be understood as a concept, but it makes so much more of an impact on us when that love is understood experientially. I'm *not* talking about going by "feelz." I'm simply referring to the fact that when we know others have done something for us because they love us, their love impacts us and creates a desire on our part to love them back (or should).

When I saw the above picture my wife took, I immediately got a lump in my throat because it reminds me of how I will likely react when I see my Lord and Savior face to face one day after my life is over. Yes, I understand that after I die, I will face the BEMA Seat of Judgment where my works will be judged and whether or not they were done in His strength or mine. However, my salvation will *not* be in question.

He will wipe my eyes over any tears shed by me for the failures done here in this life. He will comfort me in spite of all those failures. He knows my frame and is fully aware of my weaknesses (not as an excuse to sin, but simply to say that He is just *and* compassionate). I'm quite sure that I will spend much time in eternity simply sitting as close to Jesus as I can get, possibly even leaning against Him and just gazing up at his face - His *loving, accepting* face where He will look at me the way Scooby looks at me, fully appreciating the fact that He (Jesus) loves me so much! Sometimes, Scooby will simply lay his head on

my feet. I can imagine doing the same thing with Jesus. Will we ever have enough of Him in eternity? I cannot imagine it.

This life is becoming dark in so many ways. But it is up to each Christian to reach for the many opportunities that still exist to bring some measure of God's light and love into our lives.

Do you ever think about eternity? Do you consider that one day, you will not only see Jesus face to face, but you will hear His voice. You will gain understanding from His appearance and reality that we wish for now.

Can you imagine when He sees you the smile that will come to His face? Can you imagine the words He might say to you? Can you imagine that His Presence will make heaven and eternity what it will be?

Dogs have such a capacity to love their humans. They are able to show that in so many ways if we can recognize it. Recently, our neighbors took in an older rescue. He's not really that old but he's not a puppy. Apparently, he didn't have a great life prior.

We have a fenced yard but our neighbors do not. They will let their new dog - Jake - wander around the front of their yard from time to time. When we first met Jake, he was quite standoffish, so we gave him room. We were strangers to him and didn't want to push things.

The other day, our two dogs were outside and I heard our Buster bark. Scooby joined in with Buster. I turned and saw Jake on the other side of the fence. I slowly walked over to the fence, calling Jake's name, just talking to him. I asked him if he wanted to come in. He looked like he was going to bolt so I stopped my approach but kept talking to him.

Eventually, Jake started playing with my dogs by running alongside the fence from outside. Buster and Scooby ran alongside from inside the fence. I kept my distance but continued to talk to Jake and my dogs. I encouraged them by telling them what good dogs they all were, etc.

I eventually went outside the gate and toward Jake but stopped with plenty of space in between us. I called his name but he just looked at me. So I crouched down and called his name and all of a sudden he ran right at me with tail wagging. He stopped right where I was and rolled over on his back. I petted him, rubbed his tummy and told him what a good boy he was.

We kept inviting him in by opening the gate and holding Scooby so he wouldn't run out. Jake showed no sign of wanting to come inside the yard. A few moments later, Jake had apparently decided he'd give it a go, so we opened the gate and he ran in. I texted the neighbors that Jake was in our yard playing.

In just a few minutes, Jake had gone from apprehension to acceptance and was now playing with our two dogs. They were having a ball and there was no worry of them running out into the road and getting hit by a car.

After about 20 minutes or so we could tell the dogs were tired so we escorted Jake home. Scooby apparently wanted Jake to stay longer but we had other things we needed to do. Jake kept turning around toward Scooby, but he also listened when we called him and followed us to his home.

This morning, I noticed that our older dog, Buster, after getting up from a good night's sleep, went outside and just hung out by one of our big trees. He kept looking over at the neighbor's yard for a sign of Jake.

Dogs are such beautiful creatures and I am SO glad God made them. They are capable of incredible bravery, loyalty and love. If treated with love and acceptance, there is no telling what they are really able to do.

In a very small way, our relationship with dogs can mimic our relationship with God. I don't mean that disrespectfully. I mean that if we are capable of loving our four-legged friends and they are capable of loving us, how much *more* does God love us and help us in our weaknesses?

I don't know what you might be going through in life, but I *do* know this. Jesus loves you more than we can fully fathom or appreciate in this life. He is there for us even when it appears we are in the wilderness being tried by the enemy of our souls.

It is Jesus who loved us first and made it possible to be able to love Him back. You don't need a dog for that, but if you do have a dog, that's wonderful because they tend to be walking examples of love, loyalty and perseverance.

May God bless you with a greater understanding of how much He loves you.

[1] <http://en.turid-rugaas.no/calming-signals---the-art-of-survival.html>