

# Dog and God

by

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Creation was a distant memory. The land and the waters held their places around the vast reaches of the planet. The heavens swept by in all their majesty, and earth rolled beneath it, teeming with life. Morning and evening had come in their turns, more times than any but God could count. Eden, in the absence of the Man and Woman, flourished in quiet, unseen splendor.

God walked the quiet paths of Paradise, pausing at times to admire what intricate designs the urgent springing of His living creations had formed. A flower here, a twirling of ivy there, the tiny tracks of an army of ants, a spiderweb shimmering with the last of the morning's dew. A flock of sparrows flitted through the branches above, and the Almighty smiled to watch them. In the stillness, God heard a rustling, and a pattern of footfalls approaching. He watched, and in time, Dog made his way through the foliage. Stretching his paws forward, Dog gave God a low and respectful bow, and gratefully accepted a loving scratch on his head.

Dog and God walked in silence a while. Then God spoke in a friendly tone. "You've been out to see them again," He said.

Dog sniffed the air to identify a stray scent. "Lord, all my paths are known to You," he said. "You know my comings and goings. Yes, I've been to see them. I enjoy watching them. The things they do intrigue me, but puzzle me at the same time."

They walked on a while before God spoke again. "Do you think I was too harsh on them?"

Dog looked up. "Am I to judge Your decisions? All of creation is yours."

“Indeed,” God said “But this world is wide and varied and wonderful, and I love to know it through the eyes of my creations. Each of you has a special view all your own, and I take delight in sharing each one.”

Dog considered a moment. “Even so, I’m not made to decide such things.” He shook his head as a fly landed on his ear. “They do struggle, though, I see that. They battle the earth, the forest, the waters, and one another at times.”

“Struggle is their choice,” God said, shaking His head. “They struggled against me first. All that they needed they had at hand, but they chose to trust their own understanding over mine. The struggle they chose that day has become the fabric of their lives.”

Dog tilted his head. “Choosing struggle.” He held the thought a moment, then shook it out of his head. “It makes no sense to me. But something I do notice ... “ his voice trailed off.

God looked down at Dog. “What is it?”

Dog tilted his head once more. “Their struggle isn’t for nothing. It – wins them many things. They struggle with the earth, and the earth gives them grain and fruit and good things to eat. They struggle with the rivers and seas, and the seas give them fish of all kinds. They hunt without teeth or claws, without speed or power, and bring back game. They struggle with fire, and it sits where it’s told and cooks their food to eat.”

“And the forest?” God asked.

“It gives them trees,” Dog said. “They fight it back and it gives them more earth to grapple with. And with the trees they make things. Places to live in, warm and close and safe places. And sometimes they gather those places together for vast numbers of them to live.”

“Cities,” God said. “How they must seem to you.”

“Cold,” Dog said, his head lowering a bit. “Cold and barren, full of noise and confusing. But filled with intriguing smells. And so much food that they throw it away.”

God smiled at Dog. “You have an affinity for them, don’t you?”

Dog turned in a circle to lay on the ground. "I'll confess they do fascinate me. I don't know if they're safe, but I can't help watching them." He looked up at God. "I don't see why you sent them away."

God looked up, remembering former days. "They were faithless," He said sadly. "It was a simple condition that I gave them. Leave one fruit alone. Look, but don't taste. If they'd trusted me ... " His voice trailed off. "But as I say, they chose struggle. Faithfulness was beyond them. Given the choice between the word of their Creator and the claims of a talking snake, they chose the snake."

"No one trusts a snake," Dog said with a low growl.

"It wasn't the snake they trusted," God said sadly. "It was their own judgment. Their faithlessness ate away at them, and they turned to blame. They hid when they should have turned to me. The Woman blamed the snake, and the Man blamed the Woman. And the wedges began to fall between them. They couldn't stay. Eden is a place of harmony. Division has no place here." He looked back at Dog with a small smile. "It's hard for them, but the joys they find there are different than here. And sweeter for the cost it demands of them."

"Division," Dog said. "Yes, I see that. They'll gather together, but their very gatherings bring division. They hold to one another when threatened, then turn on one another when the threat goes away. They quarrel over the things they have, over those they love and those they hate. They doubt and suspect one another." Dog scratched his ear a bit, then nodded. "They are indeed faithless. They know how to be faithful, but it fails them. Sometimes it fails them when they need it most."

"Do you think they'll ever learn?" God asked.

Dog considered the question. "They can learn," he said finally. "But they need an example. In a sense, they learn the same way we dogs do, through observation."

"So they need to see what faithfulness looks like when it's consistent." God said. "A model of steady trust and loyalty." He glanced down at Dog who had put his head down to rest. "How would you like to take on the task?" He said.

Dog's head popped up. "Me?" He said. "I could teach them to be faithful?"

"Why not?" God said, smiling. "Who can show more capacity for loyalty than you? It's a special gift I've given you, steadfast faithfulness. Why, the Man even recognized it when he named you. What is Dog, after all, but God spelled backwards?"

Dog stared for a moment. "That never occurred to me,"

"Just as you mirror My name, you mirror these attributes of Mine. My steadfast love for them endures, in spite of what they do, to me and to one another. My hope for them is eternal, and I am quick to forgive them when they turn and repent. If they're careful to look, they'll see those same traits reflected in you.

"Of course, it won't be an easy task. They are self-centered and prone to grasp the worst of life. They may mistreat you, turn against you in their frustration, as they often turn against me. They may abandon you, as they abandon me. Their fortune will be your fortune. If they eat well, you will, too. If they starve, so will you. You'll see their moods before they do, and take those moods on yourself. You'll share their love and hate, and struggle alongside them."

"But, didn't You already give the Man a helpmeet?" he asked. "They come in pairs, just as the rest of us do."

"Your place as their companion will be different," God said. "So much of what they do will be a mystery to you. But you'll see things in them that they themselves can't see. And they'll depend on you when they can't trust themselves. They'll find courage in you, and comfort, when they can't find it in their own hearts. And their hearts will grow as they do."

Dog sat for a while in thought, and his tail began to wag. "They are a fascinating creature," Dog said. "And adventurous. I can see hunting with them, running with them, exploring this world of Yours with them."

"It will take time, you know," God said.

"Oh, that it will," Dog nodded. "They're fearful and suspicious. We won't win their trust right away. We'll need to approach them carefully, and let them approach us at

times.” He lowered his head in thought. “We’ll start at a distance, away from their campfires, outside their cities, until they grow more used to us.”

“And you to them,” God said.

Dog nodded, his tail still wagging. “We’ll study them, learn their habits, the tones of their voice. We’ll show them how well we can learn, how well we can work when taught. And as they train us, we’ll train them.”

God smiled. “I can see you’re warming to the task,” He said.

“It won’t be perfect,” Dog said with a sad tone. “I’m sure there’ll be mistakes along the way. We are not the same, and we’ll forget that at times.”

“You simply have to be yourself,” God said. “All things are in My hands, remember. All right, we’re agreed. Be their companion, follow them wherever they go, be diligent in every task you’re given, and teach them love by loving them.”

Dog looked up to God, his tail wagging happily. “This will be quite an adventure,” He said. “I hope you’ll be pleased. What is the phrase you use with them? ‘Well done, good and faithful servant’? I like that.”

God smiled more widely. “Actually, I have a new one just for you. And when you hear it from them, just know that it comes from me.”

Dog tilted his head. “What is it?”

God leaned down and stroked Dog’s head. “Who’s a Good Boy?” He said.