

Chapter 1

“Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.”

– Daniel 10:12

I now know how people can die from grief. While you may or may not think that the death of an animal, not a spouse or child, can elicit this kind of response, I can assure you from my personal experience that it can. My pain stemmed from events that were so touching, so beautiful, that I felt unworthy of experiencing them. It became a matter of faith for me.

Matters of faith are by definition events, experiences or things we cannot explain other than through faith. I couldn't write this book without leaning heavily on my Christian faith. It has carried me through times of sadness, tumult and despair. It also carries me through the good times as well – asking for help from God also carries with it the responsibility to thank God as well.

Just a few days before I began writing this, we lost our beloved cat of 22 remarkable years, probably one of the oldest cats in the world. I have never felt this much spiritual pain and sadness as I have with the loss of this animal. However, even in the depths of despair, I still realized one important fact. Without death and grief, we would not embrace life and living as we do. Even more on point is a quote from C.S. Lewis. The great Christian writer said after his wife's death: ***“No one told me grief felt so much like fear. I'm not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid.”***

Her Green eyes looked up at me as she lay in my arms. The veterinarian had injected her with an anesthetic a few minutes ago. She lay in my arms the same way an infant would, her head resting in the crook of my arm, my opposite hand holding her rump, a position that we were both familiar with

over the past few years in her elderly years. At 22 she is beyond geriatric, whatever is beyond, however the veterinary sciences classify it. I held her head up so she could see the forest that she loved so much one more time, returning her to look at me. As the minutes passed and her eyes became heavy with sleep, she gave one last small meow and slipped into forever.

That experience affected me more than any other in my life, the sadness rolled over me like a tsunami, in endless days of despair and sorrow. Even now, three months later, the above paragraph sends me over the abyss of grief.

When our cat died, I was fully aware that I had experienced a miracle on that day, prayers answered and the seed of this book planted as you will read in following chapters. Somehow I knew I would have to write this book, both for my emotional healing as well as to put into words what so many of us go through: The grief of losing an animal companion. One of the questions I have asked myself over the past few years is which is less painful – losing a pet after a short time or after a long and wonderful life.

Another question that can be controversial, possibly disappointing and, in my opinion, totally unanswerable is whether or not our pet companions have an afterlife. More importantly, will we be reunited with them after we die?

Those are a few million dollar questions that I hope to answer by the time I am done writing this book. This is something that I hope and pray will help people answer this for themselves.

In order to do any of this, we must see what God says about this topic – animals, souls, afterlife, heaven, spirit. I've always found that as a human being and a sinner (sometimes with tragically humorous results) I always ask myself:

Are we translating God's word correctly? Is our original sin getting in the way of seeing God's truth?

In a 1999 article in the Washington Times, Rev. Brian McLaren wrote about grief where he used the word bereaved. Bereaved is a violent word, to be ravaged, plundered, torn and that grief is like an unwelcome guest in our lives.

Like it or not we're going to feel grief, not one person is excluded – every single one of us will. You have, I have, every single person that you see will experience grief in their lives. Like love, grief is an experience that ties humanity together. Even some animals mourn for losses. Dolphins mourn the death of their companions as do Chimpanzees and dogs. You may have seen the news story in 2015 about the dog of a Navy SEAL who died. His dog refused to leave the casket during the funeral **footnote**¹. A Gorilla named Gana grieved over the loss of her baby and tried to revive it after the offspring's death.**footnote**²

Elephants are known to bury their dead, cry, become depressed and stop eating after the death of one of theirs. Geese, who mate for life mourn the loss of their mates.

As you can see, grief isn't restricted to one species. While writing this book, I have spent countless hours considering and reading about grief as well as reliving my own episodes of grief. I had thought that I could keep the emotions from past events at bay so I could carefully consider each time I had grieved, which as it turns out was wishful thinking on my part.

The pain and anguish of losing our 22 year old cat, Ted Bird, forced me to re-evaluate my entire outlook on life, faith, and what it means to me. You or someone you know has probably been through this same experience. The hardest part is not the re-evaluation but recognizing it and observing it in order to learn how it changes us.

I know that the explanation isn't exact but I refer to Psalm 23 – ***The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.***

From the Pulpit notes at biblehub.com **footnote**³ regarding Psalm 23:

Verse 4. - Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. A sudden transition and contrast, such as David loved. The quiet paths of righteousness and peace remind the poet of the exact opposite – the dark and dismal way through the valley of the shadow of death. Even when so situated, he does not, he will not, fear. ***I will fear no evil***, he says. And why? ***For***

thou art with me. The same Protector, the same gracious and merciful God, will be still with him – leading him, guiding his steps, shepherding him, keeping him from evil. ***Thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff*** - i.e. thy shepherd's crook, and thy staff of defense – they comfort me. They make me feel that, however long and however dreary the way through the dark vale, I shall still have thy guidance and thy protection.

So as you see, Psalm 23 isn't specifically about our own death but can be applied to any journey that we take that includes death, mayhem, strife or anything else we need the arm of God around our shoulders for.

Even in the grief from losing Ted Bird, I had that absolute and total faith that God “had my back”, that he guided me through all the stress and strife that I went through.

It was and still is the most painful time of my entire life. I would have thought that after more than a half century of living that I would be, by now, equipped mentally and emotionally to deal with an event of this magnitude. I was not but was through my faith.

What you will read in the following chapters is how I got to this point. How I have managed grief in the past and how I have learned that only ***the God that I know*** can guide me through the grief. I hope it helps you as well.

1. Dog refuses to leave casket

(<http://www.delawareonline.com/article/20120717/HEALTH/307170025/Dogs-show-signs-human-trait-grief>)

2. Gorilla mourns death of baby

(<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-1046549/A-mothers-grief-Heartbroken-gorilla-cradles-dead-baby.html>)

3. Biblehub pulpit notes, Psalm 23

(<http://biblehub.com/commentaries/pulpit/psalms/23.htm>)

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