

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: Our family cat, that the kids grew up with, needs to be put down. Our kids are young (4 and 6) and very upset, and they are asking if animals will be in Heaven. What do we tell them?

ANSWER: This is far more than just answering a difficult question*; it is an **opportunity** to teach lasting and motivational lessons, as well as to develop foundational theological convictions. Seize it!

Lesson one: Sit down with them, have a family prayer out loud lead by dad. This will dramatically show your children what YOU do when tragedies come. The first and best course of action is to pray. (Hopefully, this isn't the first time they have seen you turn to prayer.)

Lesson two: You talk about death. How death is **not** natural, **not** part of something God intended. It is **not** part of the "circle of life", but the end point of the "line of life". And, it is **not** good. God never planned for us to endure the pain of separation and sadness at death. We were not made for pain; we were made for joy. But, something terrible has happened to every aspect of life—sin.

Lesson three: You talk about how good God is, because he has done something wonderful. He has turned death into the gateway to Heaven. He has taken something painful and permanent and transformed it into new life everlasting. (1 COR 15:51-57)

Lesson four: You get out your Bible. This will reinforce the idea of where truth comes from, and where YOU turn in time of need.

Lesson five: Dad reads about how God has such love for his creation that even a sparrow cannot die with him knowing.... this knowledge is an indication of his far greater love for us (MT 10:29). Read in Genesis about how everything God made was good, and how man has a special relationship of responsibility with all life. Read in Romans 8:22 and following how all of creation "groans" and longs for Christ to return so things can be perfect again.

Lesson six: Ask them: "Do you think there is anyone stronger, more loving, or more able to take care of little "Fluffy" than God? Do you think we can trust God with little "Fluffy"? Let them think about the character of the God they believe in.

Lesson seven: Enfold your children in your arms. I would say something like this: "I think God will enfold little "fluffy" in his arms the very moment he dies. He will keep him safe for you forever until you die someday and can hold little "Fluffy" again. I trust him. You know what else? God does even more. He will keep all believers safe after we die to be with him forever."

Lesson eight: **If the kids want (Don't force them: ask them carefully.), and if you believe they can handle it,** take them to the Vet. Have the veterinarian explain what will happen, and what they can expect to see. Let them know they do not have to watch, but they can. You will be at their side. Let your children say their "good-bye's" now that they have hope and know the whole story. This event will provide peace and closure even though it will be

emotionally difficult. Stand by them, give them lots of hugs, and let them see the mixed feelings of sorrow and joy we Christians have when we encounter death. In the times to come, share fun memories and pictures. Help them look forward to the Hope of Heaven

This event may very well help solidify a life-long faith structure. Use it well.

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* We do not know what becomes of specific animals after they die. The Bible is silent on this issue. Some may argue that animals don't have a soul and therefore do not have access to eternal life. Animals don't have the kind of redemptive relationship with God that people do. However, neither do angels and they exist in eternity. The Bible does speak of a new heaven and a new earth being created. I believe animals might very well be a part of this new existence. They have some "awareness" of God's purposes that isn't fully explained in Scripture; they long for all things to be restored. Heaven is beyond what we can even imagine, so who is to say for certain whether the creatures that mean so much to us here will not be some part of our eternal joy? Narrowly focusing on the answer to the question will rob you of the opportunity to do far more.