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Lesson in Loyalty

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FAMILY TIES

LESSONS *in* LOYALTY

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

Recently I read an account about the loyalty of a dingo pup who saved a young child. The pup stayed with her, lying across her body beneath a snow cover, throughout a sub-zero night. Dog and child were found in the morning not 100 feet from where searchers killed a large black bear during the night. As the child's mother shared her story, she said her daughter wasn't even afraid because her dog was with her.

One unfortunate spring in Alaska, a late snowstorm struck. Dozens of geese snuggled their eggs tightly beneath their warm bodies. Three feet of snow fell that day, completely burying the surrounding area, yet the mother geese did not abandon their eggs. When the spring sunshine reappeared and began to melt the snow, dozens of dead Canada geese were discovered. They had suffocated under the snow rather than abandoning their eggs.

In 1858, John Gray was buried in old Greyfriars Churchyard, in Edinburgh, Scotland. For fourteen years the dead man's faithful dog kept constant watch and guard over the grave until his own death in 1872. James Brown, the old curator of the burial ground, remembers Gray's funeral, and Bobby the Skye terrier who was one of the most conspicuous of the mourners.

The casket was covered as usual, but the next morning Bobby was found lying on the newly-made mound. Old James could not permit his intrusion, for at the gate an order clearly stated dogs were not admitted. Bobby was driven out, only to be discovered again the next morning. For a second time James discharged Bobby. The third morning was cold and wet, and when the old man saw the faithful animal still lying shivering on the grave, he took pity on him and gave him some food. This recognition of his devotion [and loyalty]

earned Bobby the right to make the churchyard his home. From that time until his own death, he never spent a night away from his master's tomb. Attempts were made to keep him indoors in bad weather, but by dismal howls he made it known this interference was not agreeable. He was always allowed to have his way. Nothing could induce him to forsake that hallowed spot, which he so faithfully preserved.¹

I am especially moved by these stories of God's creatures who show great loyalty. Greyfriars' Bobby was a bittersweet movie our family watched with tears and cheers. As sad as it was, our children loved the story. I believe they learned an important lesson about loyalty—they saw that the dog had a life-long covenant, alliance or pledge with his kind owner.

It was an excellent opener for discussions about personal and family loyalty.

Although the word "loyalty" is not contained in scripture, God established working relationships with key people throughout history based on this quality. Certainly there are many stories of covenants made ... Ruth, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Daniel to name a few. There are also stories of covenants broken (Judas) and the resulting loss of blessings.

I invite you to purposely engage in building your family's loyalty quotient this year.

Susan Murray is an assistant professor of behavioral science and social work at Andrews University.

¹ Adapted from www.greyfriarsbobby.co.uk

