

Adventuring with God

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Out on a Limb with Him

Two of our grandsons have recently acquired new pets. Jake, who's ten, picked out a beautiful black-bear hamster that he named Windy. Hamsters are soft and appealing looking creatures and are known for being gentle and easy to handle. Being a natural caregiver, Jake was super excited when he brought her home.

He had carefully prepared her new home, complete with an exercise wheel, a tiki hut, tunnels for exploring, and various food and drink containers. He had been told by those who know such things that he needed to wait at least 24 hours before interacting with her, to give her a chance to become accustomed to her new place. So he patiently (actually, not so patiently) waited for that time to pass so he could begin to build his new relationship.

If Jake was disappointed in Windy's lack of shared enthusiasm for bonding with her new owner, he didn't express it. He cheerfully continued to provide for her needs as the days went by, but there was an obvious difference in how they were responding to the new situation. Windy seemed less concerned about building a relationship with her caregiver and more interested in hiding away and keeping herself "safe" in the new environment in which she found herself.

The soft clumps of bedding that cover the bottom of her tank are piled up in a big heap in one corner, and she spends the majority of her time huddled under the pile. She comes out to eat and drink, of course, and in the late evening she may run on her exercise wheel for a while. She doesn't resist Jake's attentions, but there is seemingly no desire to spend time with him away from the safety of her home. We are all hoping that she will come around and give Jake a little more feedback for all his love towards her, but only time will tell. In the meantime, he remains hopeful that they can one day enjoy a mutually enjoyable relationship based on trust and genuine affection.

We were all somewhat surprised when we heard that John David, Jake's twelve-year-old brother, had decided to get a different kind of pet—a rat. Having no experience with domesticated rats, we were pretty dubious when he brought the less-than-desirable rodent home. To her credit, the rat (whose name is London) seemed rather sweet natured, but it was hard to overlook her dark beady eyes, constantly sniffing nose, and large creepy tail. Providing food and shelter for a creature we usually associate with disease and filth seemed weird. The old stereotypes we've carried for years are hard to overcome.

But London has been a delightful surprise. From the very beginning, she seemed to enjoy being held by John, and she excitedly explored her new surroundings with carefree abandon. Instead of seeking to preserve her space and safety, like Windy, she seems to relish being brought out into the big, bad world to see things from the perspective of John's shoulder or head.

All our previously held prejudices melted away as we watched her interacting with her new caregiver. From all appearances, she seems to like being with him as much as he enjoys sharing his time with her. Instead of shrinking back when he comes to her cage, she moves toward him with eagerness and curiosity, anxious to experience whatever may be coming her way. Who could have predicted that such an inauspicious beginning could turn out so well for all of us?

While our relationship with our heavenly Father is quite different in kind from that of an owner and his pet, we can still draw some spiritual parallels about our responsiveness to God's loving care. As His disciples, are we always seeking to protect ourselves from all potential harm, keeping to the safety of our natural surroundings? Like Windy, are we afraid to be thrust out of our comfort zone into the "big bad world" to experience life with Him? Or can we—like London—eagerly approach each new situation He invites us into because it means we will enjoy His

fellowship and see the world from a different perspective? In other words, can we trust Him enough to get out on a limb with Him occasionally?

There's nothing wrong with being a little apprehensive, especially when we're venturing out into totally new territory. Perched precariously on a limb that looks less than stable and secure, we'll likely find our hearts quaking with fear at times. That's okay, as long as we don't let our concerns and "what ifs" keep us from venturing forth with Him. Jesus told us that if we seek to "save" our lives, we'll actually lose them. That's because the pitiful little lives that we seek to protect are not real "life" at all. They are mere shadows of the true. The true, eternal life that He offers His followers can be experienced only when we are willing to forfeit our human comforts and paralyzing fears to pursue His interests and companionship.

In Matthew 14 we read the account of Jesus walking on the lake in the middle of the night. At first the disciples were really scared to see a figure approaching them on top of the water, but He called out *"Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid"* (v. 27). Peter boldly asked Him if he could join Him on the water, and Jesus replied, *"Come."* Peter became afraid again when he saw the wind and waves, but we have to ask an important question: What prompted him to climb out of the safety of the boat in the first place? What gave him the courage to even try such an impossible feat?

I believe it was a desire to be with Jesus, to experience what He was doing along with Him. It was an impulsive act spurred on by affection and trust. Peter demonstrated a London sort of heart in that moment, and even though he almost drowned, Jesus was there to rescue him. Imagine what Peter learned that night about the power of his Lord and Savior! If he had stayed in the comfort of the boat, as the other disciples did, he would never have known the thrill of sharing a kingdom moment with Jesus.

If He calls us into a situation that looks precarious and uncertain, we shouldn't let our fear stop us from moving forward in faith. He will take responsibility for our safety when we put ourselves fully in His hands. To shrink back from Him shows Him how little we value our relationship; like Windy, we say that our own comfort

takes precedence over spending time with Him and learning from our experience.

Knowing the wonders of His nature and the power of His resurrection is available to every disciple. But we must be willing to be brought out from the confinement of our earthly comforts and limited human perspective to experience life from His vantage point. Life in the kingdom is always a little unpredictable and scary, but that's part of the joy of adventuring with God.

How much do we trust Him? How serious are we about being trained for spiritual service? These two factors, more than any others, will determine how life-changing our relationship with Him will be. Jake longs to see Windy put down her defenses and come to know him better. There is lots of love he can give her if she will leave the security of her downy bed. God has more for us too ... but we have to be willing to come when He bids us to, and to trust Him with the consequences of our obedience and fellowship.

We may not feel safe out on a limb, but if He is with us, we are actually safer than we are in the most luxurious and tranquil surroundings. And what we will learn on that perch will far outweigh any inconvenience or hardship we may face while we're there. When we can see the world from His perspective, and participate in seeing His kingdom advanced through the power of His Holy Spirit, our faith will grow by leaps and bounds. We'll know for ourselves the inexhaustible riches of His grace and be filled with wonder that He has invited us to be a part of all that He is and all that He is doing.

London the rat didn't have much to recommend herself when she arrived on John's doorstep, but she found her place through identification with him. Isn't that a wonderful illustration of the power of love to transform the lowliest creature? All praise to the One who "loved us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever!" (Revelation 1:5-6). We'll learn how to reign with Him when we're willing to leave our comforts behind and let Him take us out into places of ministry to experience real life with Him.