



PAWVERBS
~ FOR A ~
CAT LOVER'S HEART

Inspiring Stories of Feistiness, Friendship, and Fun

JENNIFER MARSHALL BLEAKLEY



PAW VERBS
~ FOR A ~
CAT LOVER'S HEART

Inspiring Stories of Feistiness, Friendship, and Fun

JENNIFER MARSHALL BLEAKLEY



A Tyndale nonfiction imprint

Visit Tyndale online at tyndale.com.

Visit Tyndale Momentum online at tyndalemomentum.com.

Tyndale, Tyndale's quill logo, *Tyndale Momentum*, and the Tyndale Momentum logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Ministries. Tyndale Momentum is the nonfiction imprint of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois.

Pawverbs for a Cat Lover's Heart: Inspiring Stories of Feistiness, Friendship, and Fun

Copyright © 2022 by Jennifer Marshall Bleakley. All rights reserved.

Some of the stories were previously published in *Pawverbs: 100 Inspirations to Delight an Animal Lover's Heart* by Tyndale House Publishers in 2020 under the ISBN 978-1-4964-4105-8. First printing by Tyndale House Publishers in 2020.

Designed by Ron C. Kaufmann

Edited by Bonne Steffen

Published in association with Jessica Kirkland and the literary agency of Kirkland Media Management, LLC.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked CEV are taken from the Contemporary English Version, copyright © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked ESV are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked GNT are taken from the Good News Translation in Today's English Version, Second Edition, copyright © 1992 by American Bible Society. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked MSG are taken from *The Message*, copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers.

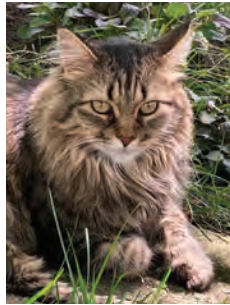
Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*,® *NIV*.® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at csresponse@tyndale.com, or call 1-855-277-9400.

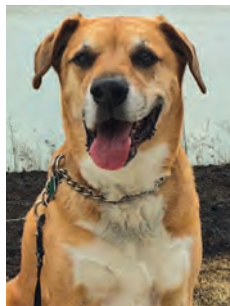
ISBN 978-1-4964-6024-0 Hardcover

Printed in China

28 27 26 25 24 23 22
7 6 5 4 3 2 1



For Sephy and Bully



(and their humans who love them so much)

INTRODUCTION

WHILE I WAS COLLECTING STORIES for this devotional, a friend commented that this book would surely be harder to write than my previous one *Pawverbs for a Dog Lover's Heart*. When I asked why, she answered, “Well, most dogs seem hardwired to demonstrate positive traits, but cats are, well . . . just, cats.”

I chuckled at her analysis. But the truth is, cats being cats not only made this project enjoyable but also brought surprising depth and complexity to many of the stories.

As I wrote, I began to notice that it was the cats’ complexities—and their unwillingness to fit into a one-size-fits-all mold—that continually directed my heart to God and encouraged my soul.

You see, I like for things to fit nicely into boxes, categories, and molds. Categorizing things helps me understand them better. Helps me make sense of them. Which, of course, works well for culinary spices, laundry piles, and story ideas. But not so much with cats, or people for that matter. And definitely not with God.

As you might have noticed, God does not fit into a box. He cannot be categorized, condensed, or compartmentalized. His ways are hard to understand. Sometimes they are impossible to understand. He is strong and yet gentle; powerful and yet meek; sovereign and yet gives us free will. He is just and yet delights in lavishing grace upon us. God is more complex than we could ever fully explore.



The more I wrote about cats and their unique attributes, the easier it became to stop trying to force God and his ways to fit into the confines of my limited understanding. After all, if I can accept that a cat is complex, why would I think that the God who created them would be any less so?

It might sound ridiculous to say that writing about cats has helped expand my view of God, but it did—and it continues to do so. And I pray this book does the same for you. Within these pages you will find a collection of stories based on real-life cats, each one highlighting a principle or lesson found in the book of Proverbs.

Several of the stories in this book are based on personal stories of cats I've had throughout the years—including Foxy, my current stray-cat-turned-beloved-pet. Many other vignettes were inspired by friends, family, coworkers, and fellow cat lovers.

Along with the stories and photos, you will find “Paws & Ponder” and “Paws & Pray” sections at the end of every story. These sections were designed to help you go deeper into the story. To help you look past the surface in order to see a spiritual truth that might impact your own heart.

My prayer is that, as you read, you will find encouragement, laughter, inspiration, and some new friends. And that you might start seeing your own pets as potential teachers—with paws. Who knows, maybe you will be so inspired that you will decide to invite a new feline friend into your life—one who will leave precious little paw prints on your heart and enlarge your own view of God.

Much love,

Jen







MR. CATTYPANTS

When you tell the truth, justice is done, but lies lead to injustice.

PROVERBS 12:17, GNT

“WHAT IN THE WORLD is making that sound?” Liz asked her husband, James. “It sounds like a cow impersonating a siren.”

Liz pulled the curtains back but couldn’t see past the torrential rain that had turned the evening sky ominous.

“I’ll go check it out,” James said, taking a flashlight from the shelf.

“Can we come?” pleaded their seven-year-old twins, Molly and Michael.

“I come!” two-year-old Emma echoed, refusing to be left out of the adventure.

“You guys stay here. I’ll be right back,” James instructed.

“What do you think it is?” Molly whispered.

“A dinosaur!” Emma shouted.

“It’s not a dinosaur,” Michael corrected. “Dinosaurs died a long time ago—like two hundred years ago!”

Before Liz had a chance to set the record straight on the demise of the dinosaurs, James reappeared with a wiggly mass of wet fur in his arms.

“Kitty!” Emma squealed, her chubby fingers reaching for the cat.

James was soon surrounded by six eager hands wanting to pet the trembling cat in his arms. Liz ran to get some towels.

“Let’s give the poor thing some room,” she said, wrapping a brightly colored beach towel around the orange-and-white cat. His white socks were caked in brown mud.

“Can we keep him?” Molly asked.

“Please, Mom!” Michael chimed in.



“Peeeease, Mama?” Emma’s ocean-blue eyes were wide with expectation.

The kids had been asking for a cat for months. Molly had even started praying for one every night. A part of Liz wanted to make their feline dreams come true, but a bigger part of her recognized that the cat in her husband’s arms likely belonged to someone else.

“Kids,” Liz began, bending down to her children’s eye level. “I think this kitty belongs to someone else. He probably got lost in the storm and couldn’t find his way home.”

Molly’s bottom lip began to quiver. As their most sensitive child, Liz suspected Molly’s impending tears were as much about her empathy toward the cat being scared and lost as it was to the realization that God had likely not provided a miraculous answer to her prayers for a cat.

“But what if we can’t find his owner?” Michael asked. “Then could we keep him?”

Liz glanced at James. He simply shrugged his shoulders and adjusted the bundle in his arms.

“Let’s talk about that after we try to find his owners first. Deal?”

James placed the cat on the floor. After several minutes, the cat began exploring. He rubbed his face against Michael’s leg, pawed at Molly’s shoelace, and ran his tail along Emma’s shoulder, which elicited a belly laugh from the toddler.

“He looks like he’s wearing pants!” Molly observed, pointing to the large white patch that ran from the middle of his back down both legs.

“We should call him Mr. Cattypants!” Michael suggested.

For the next three days Liz and James posted signs and talked to neighbors about their temporary visitor. Meanwhile, Liz watched her children become more and more attached to Mr. Cattypants.

At the end of the third day, the phone rang. A distraught woman named Amanda said she had found Liz’s sign and believed the cat in the photo was her cat, Toby. She explained how he had slipped out the back door when she went to bring in the patio furniture cushions before the storm. She lived several miles away and couldn’t believe that Toby had gotten so far.

Liz invited her to come right over.

“There’s my sweet Toby!” Amanda exclaimed as soon as she laid eyes on him. She scooped the marmalade-colored cat into her arms.

Emma reached up for Liz to hold her. Michael and Molly huddled close to each other.

Amanda wiped tears from her cheeks, then handed Liz a photo of Toby with her family, which included two children around the twins’ age.

“My kids have been heartbroken,” Amanda said. She knelt down in front of Michael and Molly. “You are our heroes. Thank you for finding our kitty and for taking such good care of him.”

“Emma hero?” Emma asked.

Amanda laughed and touched Emma’s cheek. “You are my hero too.”

After Amanda left with Toby, Liz snuggled on the sofa with the children and listened as they talked about Mr. Cattypants. Meanwhile, James grabbed his laptop and searched *cats available for adoption* on a cat rescue site.

It looked like Molly’s prayers would soon be answered after all.

PAWS & PONDER . . .

Have you ever faced a situation where you knew telling the truth would result in disappointment or heartache? What did you do? What was the result? How do you find the courage to tell the truth, especially when it’s hard?



Paws & Pray

God, I want to be a person who is truthful and champions justice, even when it may cost me something. And yet I know I cannot do this in my own strength—I need your help. Grant me the courage to always speak the truth in love.





DUSTY'S DEVOTION

*The generous will prosper;
those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.*

PROVERBS 11:25

CHERI COULDN'T IMAGINE A CAT being more devoted to a dog than Dusty was to Shatzi. From the moment Dusty joined their household, she had been trying to win Shatzi's attention and affection. Unfortunately for the black cat with the fluffy tail, her efforts often failed to get anything more than a passing glance from the family's loyal and even-tempered Keeshond—whom people often said looked like a cross between a German Shepherd and a Pomeranian.

Eventually, Dusty had taken a new tactic, one that the resolute cat knew would be impossible for Shatzi to ignore. Every morning, Dusty attempted to groom Shatzi while the tolerant dog took her after-breakfast nap.

"I gotta give you points for your tenacity, Dusty," Cheri said as she sat down with her mug of coffee. Dusty was hard at work licking Shatzi's plush, double-layered coat. "That's gonna be quite a hairball though."

Day after day, Dusty would groom her canine sibling, snuggle up to her while she slept, and attempt to bring her gifts from the great outdoors.

One day, after Cheri returned home from a daylong conference, it became obvious that Dusty's devotion had gotten a little out of control. Shatzi was in her crate, and Dusty was sitting in front of the crate, starstruck. Shatzi, however, was cowering and whimpering in the back corner of the enclosure. The reason was evident. Clinging to the metal bars under the crate's roof was a goldfinch—frantically flapping with all its might, so hard that it ruffled Shatzi's fur.

Cheri swallowed the rising panic in her throat. Shatzi was clearly terrified of Dusty's "gift"—and clueless as to what she was supposed to do with it. Meanwhile, Dusty looked as proud as a preschooler awaiting her mother's praise over her latest finger-painting masterpiece.

"Dusty!" Cheri squealed. "Shatzi does *not* want a bird—alive or dead or stuffed! You have to stop bringing her things from outside!"

Dusty leaned over and licked her side. Shatzi let out a pitiful bark that sounded a lot like *out!*

Cheri knew she had to intervene and rescue the bird, so she put on a pair of oven mitts, counted to five, flipped the latch on Shatzi's crate, and reached for the small yellow and black bird, snatching it on her first attempt. She hurried to the back door to set their traumatized houseguest free but came to an abrupt stop. The door was locked and impossible to unlock with her hands in the oven mitts. *Why didn't I think to open it before starting "operation free bird"?* Thankfully, just then her husband, Daniel, walked in from the garage.

"Door!" Cheri yelled.

"What? Why do you have . . ." Daniel started to ask but then quickly put the pieces together. "Dusty?"

"Yep!"

Daniel threw open the back door, and Cheri opened her hands. The bird shook its feathers, looked left, looked right, looked up, and took flight. Cheri then checked on Shatzi, who was being consoled by Daniel—and keeping a wary eye on Dusty.

That evening Cheri typed "how to get a cat to stop bringing unwanted gifts to a dog" into the Google search bar on the computer. But two weeks later, Dusty took care of that herself. After she misjudged a jump and ended up with a cast on her back leg, Dusty was confined to the house. And so, her daily presents for Shatzi ended.

Dusty navigated like a pro while wearing the lime-green cast, but Cheri could tell her little black cat missed being able to come and go through her cat door. On day two of Dusty's convalescence, Cheri watched in amazement as Shatzi dropped her favorite ball at Dusty's feet. The little cat looked adoringly at Shatzi. A moment later, Dusty swatted the ball with her front leg. Shatzi retrieved it and

dropped it again. Their slow game of fetch lasted for several minutes before Shatzi lay down next to Dusty.

For the next six weeks, Shatzi rarely left Dusty's side. The two played together, attempted to groom each other, and napped together. Dusty had never been happier.

Or at least she was until the cast came off and Shatzi became the aloof big sister again.

But something had changed. Dusty had experienced a taste of true sisterhood, which—much to Cheri's delight—seemed to have cured her of her gift-giving ways. Now the two siblings seemed content just knowing the other was there.

PAWS & PONDER . . .

In what ways do you think that living generously can lead to a prosperous life? How can you show generosity to someone today? What are some examples of being refreshed by another person? When have someone's actions refreshed you?



Paws & Pray

Lord, you have lavished me with generous gifts. Thank you for all the ways you provide for me. Often I can get so consumed with my own desires, circumstances, and needs that I forget to extend generosity to others. Please show me how I can be a blessing and a refreshing presence to someone today.





WHERE ARE THE CATS?

*Do you like honey? Don't eat too much,
or it will make you sick!*

PROVERBS 25:16

JENNIFER SHOOK THE RAIN off her umbrella, then leaned it against the side of her pet-sitting client's house. She retrieved a key from her pocket, unlocked the front door, and entered the dimly lit foyer.

"Plato . . . Aristotle . . . Socrates . . . Jack," she called to the cats she had been taking care of all week.

No response.

"Here kitty, kitties. Where are you?"

Jennifer looked in the kitchen where Plato liked to play with the rug. She peeked in the family room expecting to see Aristotle and Jack wrestling with the curtains. She walked to Socrates's favorite hiding spot behind a potted plant and looked under the dining room table where he would often nap after eating.

No cats anywhere.

She tried not to panic as she mentally retraced her steps from the night before. She had come by at seven and been greeted by four attention-seeking cats. She had cleaned the litter box, scooped kibble into their bowls, put down fresh water, and then played with them for a few minutes. All four had been happy, healthy, and accounted for when she left. *What could have happened?*

She checked the back door. It was securely locked. And all the bedroom doors in the home were closed.

"Kitties?" she yelled, somewhat frantically.

Suddenly, a muffled sound reached her straining ears. But it wasn't a meow or a hiss. *Was that a moan?*

Jennifer willed the sound to repeat again.

There! It was coming from the laundry room.

Jennifer ran to the room and stopped in the doorway. There, lying on the tiled floor, were all four cats—each sprawled with legs fully extended and with the roundest bellies she had ever seen.

“What in the world?” Jennifer spoke softly and knelt down to pet Jack.

The Russian Blue was sleeping in a pile of kibble. Jennifer’s gaze followed a path of dry food to the source—an open and empty container lying on its side. Jennifer racked her brain. She thought she had closed the lid securely after feeding the cats last night. Either her memory was going, or the cats had somehow managed to pop off the lid and then feasted nonstop on their plunder.

Jennifer moved to Plato, running her hand over his distended belly. A deep feline moan escaped his half-open mouth, making his long whiskers vibrate.

“Oh, you guys!” Jennifer chastised. “How much did you eat?”

Socrates opened one eye and looked at her.

“Just couldn’t stop, huh, buddy?”

The gray cat closed his eye.

“You okay, Aristotle?” she asked, bending down to scratch him between his ears.

The tan-and-white cat raised his head for a moment, before it thudded back to the floor.

After making sure the food-coma patients had fresh water, Jennifer jotted down the name of the food she needed to buy to refill the container. Then she let herself out and drove back home.

When she arrived, she took off her boots and coat and headed straight for the bowl of Christmas candy on the kitchen counter. Instinctively, she grabbed a heaping handful as she walked by. But suddenly a picture of four comatose, gluttonous cats passed through her mind.

She dropped all but a single piece back into the bowl. “Maybe I should just have one today,” she said to herself, chuckling.

PAWS & PONDER . . .

It's been said that "too much of anything can be bad." Do you agree with this statement? Can you think of an example from your own life when too much of a good thing caused a problem? What do you need to "put back in the bowl" today, in order to maintain balance and moderation?



Paws & Pray

Lord, there are so many good and worthwhile things competing for my time, attention, and resources. Please grant me greater self-control so I know when to say "enough"—even to good things. Help me to choose you first and then trust you to help me balance the rest.



