

Freestyle Note: Kia ora whanau - use this space to write a message & let your loved one know why you thought they'd be interested in this article.

Losing our Pets

Like many Opal people the day I went to prison was bit of a surprise. Amongst all of the upheaval new homes had to be found for our dogs, Felicity and Basil, our cats Henry and Fanny and our mice Myfanwy and Bubbles.

In those first weeks of imprisonment I was so numb with grief over losing my son that I couldn't even ask about the whereabouts of my pets because it was all too painful.

One day out of the blue I received a letter that'd been sent to me by the person who'd re-homed our cat Fanny. It was a lovely letter just letting me know that Fanny was safe, happy and adjusting to his new life. There were also a couple of photos of him in his new bed.

This shattered me.

No(!) – I wasn't shattered that Fanny was happy and safe. Of that I was thankful. What shattered me was the realisation that this was all real and that our pets were gone forever and that I'd never see them again – all because of me.

By the Grace of God within minutes of me having received the letter and having absorbed its contents, the Prison Chaplain made his first visit to our wing.

Having seen my distress he took the time to talk to me about the pets that I'd lost. He asked their names and for a description of their personalities. He also prayed aloud for me, my son and our lost pets.

Even though at the time I was still angry and distanced from God – He'd sent an **angel** in the form of that Prison Chaplain to comfort me.

If you're dealing with having lost your pets, please know that you aren't alone in your experience and that there are many other people in the Opal community who're going through every emotion that you're feeling right now.

To give you some direction and to help with your healing I want to remind you that God made everything on this planet including your pet(s) and that he loves and cares for them as well.

My faith is Christian but many of us Opal's follow different paths to God. A Muslim inmate once shared her grief with me after hearing that her pet cat had died, she said that she knew that her cat was now playing joyously in Paradise.

Knowing this gave her a great amount of peace and encouragement to live a worthy life so that she could re-join with her beloved pet in Paradise one day.

Here are my suggestions to help you during this period:

- ✓ Make the time to actively reach out in prayer to God asking Him to watch over your pet.
- ✓ Make the time to actively pray for other Opal people who are in the same situation as you are.
- ✓ If you have kids make sure that you discuss what'd happened to your pets.
- ✓ Tell them that you are sorry that this has all happened and reassure them that your pets will ultimately be okay because God is watching over them.
- ✓ Encourage and empower your children to pray for your pets.

Looking back now I'm thankful that I acknowledged how bummed out I was about losing our pets with my son during my years of imprisonment. Because I openly spoke about our lost pets and didn't try to ignore or hide what'd happened, we got to pray for them together. Now all these years later we can talk about our lost pets with an appreciation for the years that we were blessed with them.



Here are some prayers that you're welcome to adapt to suit your needs:

A Prayer for other people in The Opal Community.

Dear Lord, in my time of sadness please receive my prayers and send them out to any other person in The Opal Community who like me are grieving and worried about their lost pets. Amen.

A Prayer for the Blessing of an Animal

Psalm 147:9 tells us that God is concerned for all His creation, including the animals He created. We can take from Scripture that if God takes care of animals, so should we. In fact, it is God's care for animals that most fully explains our desire to have pets. God created mankind in His image, and we have inherited the part of God's nature that cares for the animals. If you want to lift up a prayer for the blessing of animal, pray this:

Heavenly Father, how great the variety of living things, You, have put at our disposal! You told our first parents: "I give you all the animals of the land." Bless this animal. May it carry out the function it has been given and may it aid us to think of You its Creator and give praise and thanks to You forever. Amen.

A Prayer of Thanks for Animals

Animals are not only God's creatures, but also a great blessing to us. Those who have pets should love them, provide for them and care for their needs. Loving an animal is a beautiful thing. The care we show an animal entrusted to us is a gauge of personal integrity. The Bible tells us, "A righteous man care for the needs of animals" (Proverbs 12:10). If you want to give God thanks for your pet, pray this prayer:

Among His proofs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the creatures He spreads in them. He is able to summon them, when He wills. [Qur'ān42:29]

In Your infinite wisdom, Lord God, when You created the universe you blessed us with all living creatures. We especially thank you for giving us our pets who are our friends and who bring us so much joy in life. Their presence very often helps us get through trying times. Kindly bless my pet. May my pet continue giving me joy and remind me of Your power. May we realize that as our pets trust us to take care of them, so we should trust You to take care of us, and in taking care of them we share in Your love for all creatures. Amen.

A Pet Blessing

*Dearest God, Heavenly Father
maker of all living creatures,
we ask you to bless (name of pet),
who brought so much joy into our life.
By the power of Your love,
enable him (her) to live according to your plan.
May we always praise You for all Your beauty in creation.
Blessed are You, God, in all Your creatures!
Amen.*

Freestyle Area—Use this area to draw pictures of capture special memories about your pet(s) - you could draw pictures, write down funny memories, write poems about your pet and your prayers.