



Euthanasia: Why It's OK for Pets, Not People

One of the places our hearts get entangled is in the lives of our favorite animals. Loving always sets us up for experiencing pain. No, I'm not being cynical, just playing the odds, especially where pets are concerned. Since we outlive them, we are bound to suffer loss and, perhaps, even face some very difficult choices. I hope these thoughts will help you.

Many people are genuinely troubled over the decision to put a much loved animal "to sleep." I think this is a fairly modern problem. Consider what it must have been like for the vast multitude who once lived on farms: The cycle of life and death was always playing out before their eyes by natural rhythm and in great numbers.

Old age took many animals. At other times they had to put an animal down that got injured with no hope for successful treatment. Often enough they slaughtered animals for their own food—and thought little of it except how good it tasted. In addition to these considerations all animals had a utilitarian function and, though they may have been loved, they were also used and were expected to earn their keep. (If you actually grew up on a farm, let me know how close this comes.)

How different it is for those of us who have grown up far removed from seeing death as a normal and regular occurrence for animals and for whom the pet is not so much a servant as a family member. This change surely makes it difficult for moderns to choose euthanasia, rather than extensive and expensive medical care at the end of a pet's life. But I suspect that a very significant boundary line has become blurred—*pets are not people*.



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Animals seem so much like us that we can seem to be one of them: They have personalities; they can communicate; they have feelings; they seem to have thoughts or ideas that they pursue; they can feel pain; some seem to grieve; they can learn; some have an elementary language. Of course there are scientists who don't credit any of this to animals, but then behavioral psychologists don't credit much of it to the rest of us either.

Don't let the similarities fool you! There is a huge qualitative difference between people and animals. We have an opposable thumb (making us "handy" with tools) and we can reason. This much can be seen without Biblical revelation, but these aren't the real distinctions. The Bible shows us a great gulf that separates us from animals.

In making us from dust God "breathed" His very breath into Adam's nostrils, turning Adam-the-animal into a "living soul." That "*neshuma*" is what separates humans from animals. What does it mean? I readily confess that I must bow before a mystery here, but this much can reasonably be said: Among other things it surely means that we are actually the crown of creation and hold a very unique position.

1) God created people in His image. All animals reflect aspects of His character—His personality is stamped upon His whole creation, but only we bear His Image.

2) God gave us dominion over the animals and made us stewards of the whole of creation—hence, we are rightly called the crown (authority) of creation. This isn't species pride; it is a God-mandated Reality.

3) Jesus died for people, not animals. This shows the radical, unique importance of human lives to the Lord and also reveals that we are the source of what is wrong in all of creation. Again we see by this that people are qualitatively different, even if part of that difference is our fallen-ness!

Putting this together, we understand as Christians that people live the whole of their lives in a process of being redeemed back into the relationship with God that became lost to us. The new birth only begins this process of redemption. Therefore the end of a person's life is hugely significant as an opportunity for them to grow spiritually into a relationship with God if they don't have one—by calling on His name under the duress of suffering and approaching death. It also gives those who do know Him an opportunity to draw closer, to surrender up more of what they have withheld from Him, to open themselves wider to receive His life and love under these same conditions.

It may be hard for us to see it at times, but even the most difficult of deaths can be an opportunity for spiritual growth and redemption. Such suffering is not caused by God! But He can and will use anything going on in our lives to help us to grow into our true personhood. For fallen humanity suffering always holds the possibility of becoming redemptive in every moment

of life and especially at the end of life, provided that we give what we are going through to God in trust and obedience.

The truly merciful thing for us to do for a suffering person is to lift as much suffering as possible and then by prayer commit the person to God for whatever He may desire to do. We simply cannot see God's dealings deep in the spirit of a person, but God will not allow human suffering to be meaningless for those who put their hope in Him (Romans 8:28).

Euthanasia is a horrible idea for people, because it robs God as well as the ones facing death of the hope of a redemptive passage through their suffering. For some people this could mean the difference between eternity in heaven or hell. As a priest I have seen many people finally open to God only on their deathbed.

However, with animals it is very different. They are not fallen creatures as we are and therefore they live the entirety of their lives connected to God by the Spirit in ways that He sustains. There is absolutely no need for them to be redeemed and therefore suffering for animals has no redemptive benefit at any time in their lives. *Spiritual growth is as impossible for them as it is unnecessary.*

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For us to prolong the suffering of an animal that cannot be restored to a healthy, pain-free physical life is to raise the question, who are we doing this for? For the animal, or for ourselves? To relieve the emotional pain we ourselves will feel over the loss of an animal by unnecessarily prolonging their suffering is surely a selfish decision on our part. Better to bravely face the loss and learn to grieve well.

This is why euthanasia is a mercy for relieving the suffering of animals as they approach death. How much suffering warrants it? Seek the Lord and let Him lead, but let's make sure it is for the animal's sake that we are asking the question.

For more on spiritual growth see [Spiritual Growth A, B, C's](#) at our website. If you want some criteria for when to initiate euthanasia, take a look [at this site](#).

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For over a decade Steve Evans and [Healing Streams](#) have been helping people recover inner peace and freedom through the free eCourse for healing, [Matters of the Heart](#). Through Forerunners4Him he has been showing how we can be saved for heaven and teaching the way to live a Spirit filled life on earth. Go now to receive a completely free primer, [Getting to Heaven](#) and/or an introduction to [Living in the Spirit](#) at our website.



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