

A God-Centered Life

10 Faith-Based Practices
When You're Feeling Anxious,
Grumpy, or Stressed

BY JESSICA BRODIE

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by Jessica Brodie

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Introduction

I'm not sure I've met anyone who truly has it all together. The perfect life? Ha!

Most people I know struggle with a multitude of woes, from low self-esteem to money troubles to relationship issues to poor health—myself included. For a long time, I was consumed by anxiety. There was a period when my worries grew so large they began interfering with my ability to enjoy life and fully worship God. At the time I didn't realize it was called "anxiety," thought I was just going through a rough time in life, but looking back now, I see it for what it was.

I've seen anxiety hurt people I love. I've seen anxiety stop a wonderful love relationship from blossoming because one friend was worried she might look foolish or appear too vulnerable and needy if she admitted to the man in question how she truly felt. The budding relationship fizzled, then faded away all together. I've seen anxiety turn a relaxed and healthy individual into a person knotted up in tight balls of tension. I've even seen anxiety stop a person from pursuing a long-held professional dream. It's like a paralysis sets in.

It's not just anxiety. Stress, general worries, self-absorption, general grumpiness—it's all a problem.



When we let negative mindsets fester for too long, they affect not only our human life but also our eternal life. We spend so much of our energies dealing with or trying to overcome (or ignore!) these mindsets that they start to come between us and God.

I see this most apparently in our prayer life, and that's a biggie. Prayer is our language with God, our communication system. It's a way to worship God and love God. It's supposed to be an unceasing dialogue, open and transparent.

But when we are consumed with our own worries, then that open dialogue is hindered. So is placing our focus and priority on God and doing God's will.

Poor attitudes, worries, and negative mindsets do not amount to a victimless crime. They hurt ourselves, those we love, and our ability to serve our Creator God in the way God intended.

I used to think anxiety was my own dirty little secret, but I've had to come clean about it as a way to make myself stay accountable in my personal faith walk. And while I think I might never perfect my work-in-progress of mastering anxiety, I have learned a few very helpful tips along the way.

This mini-book contains 10 tips I personally use to push my worries, stresses, and grumpies aside so I can focus entirely on my Lord.



1. Go Play Outside

Scripture abounds with verses on the glory of creation and praise for the One who made it. And we've heard repeatedly that exercise plays a huge role in lifting one's mood. Even mild cardiovascular exercise activates parts of the brain that help us think more clearly, plus releases certain happy-brain chemicals like endorphins, adrenaline, serotonin, and dopamine.

When we combine the two and head outside for a walk, to play with the dog, or to get other mild exercise, we get the benefit of a mood lift, plus the opportunity to be astounded by creation.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands," Psalm 19:1 (NIV) says, and the Gospel of John reminds us that, "Through Him all things were



made; without Him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:3). Remembering that while pairing it with a natural endorphin lift is a win-win.

If I’m grumpy or nervous about something and I just can’t seem to shake it, I slip on my sneakers and head outside.

Sometimes I bring one of my kids along and use the time for a catch-up session, but other times it’s just me, God, and the beautiful world He created. It doesn’t even need to be a full-on workout session. Just a quick walk from my house to the neighborhood pond and back usually does the trick.

You can also enjoy a hard, pounding run or bike ride—your choice.

Use your time outdoors to enjoy the world around you, to broaden your mind, to meditate on God, or to pray. Really think about your place in the world and your relationship with God. Think about how He can use you in a different or better way.

Watch the squirrels dart from tree to tree, or the birds swoop down for a worm. Watch the bees buzz around you or the gnats swarm. Nature is a busy place, and there’s a rhythm at work, a celebration going on all around you... if only you will open your eyes and notice.

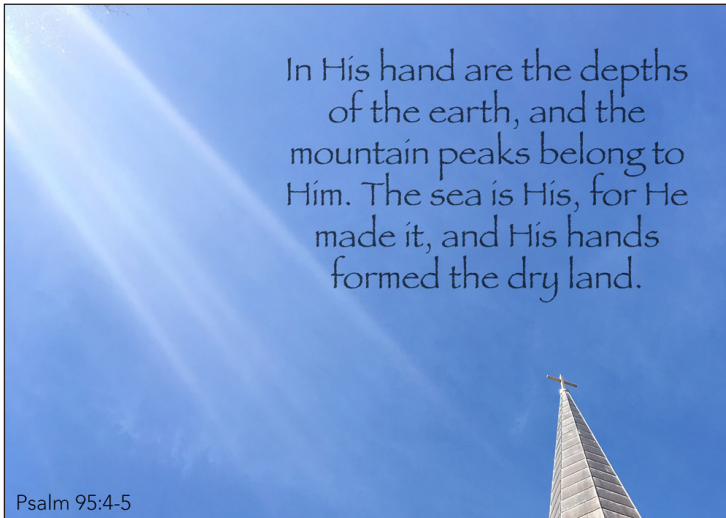
“The mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands” (Isaiah 55:12b).

2. Soak Up the Sun

Of course, exercise isn't always feasible, or maybe we're feeling downright lazy. If that's the case, consider the reverse: Go outside and just bask in creation. Grab a folding chair or sit on a blanket by a garden, take a seat on your front porch step, or cuddle up in your jammies in a sunny patch someplace in your house.

Leave your phone and your book inside. Just go and sit in the silence of the Lord as His masterpiece of nature unfolds all around you.

One of my favorite Bible verses right now is one that eluded me for many years: "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). I'm a type-A-personality do-er, so being still can be hard. But I've come to understand forcing myself to sit and just be with the Lord is important. I've realized many of us are afraid of the quiet and the solitude because, deep down, we know when the noise and the excitement stops, we'll be all alone. In the quiet, that's when we are most likely to encounter God and wrestle with our true natures, and sometimes, we fear this.



But the quiet always comes. Even when we fight it, there comes a time sooner or later when the noise stops and we are left alone with our Creator. The sooner we can know it, face it, embrace it, and own it, the sooner we can stop going through the motions of living and start truly living.

In the quiet of creation, our souls can simply unite with God.

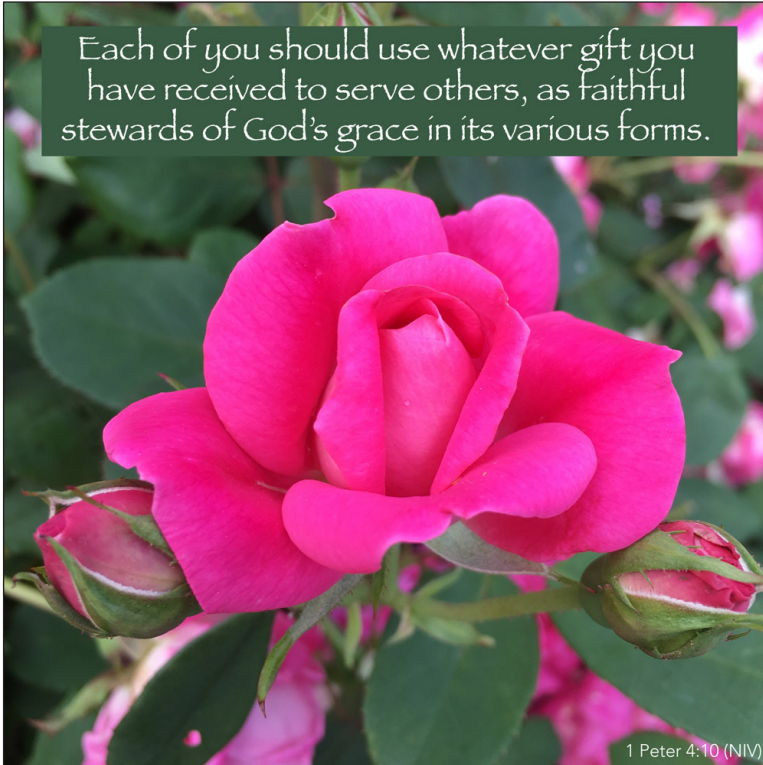
Look around—the flowers barely sway in the breeze, yet their vibrant-hued faces are turned upward, focused on the Lord. Notice how perfectly crafted every tree is, every blade of grass, every rock, every creature.

“But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In His hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind” (Job 12:7-10).

“In His hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to Him. The sea is His, for He made it, and His hands formed the dry land” (Psalm 95:4-5).

There’s a rhythm and a unity, a harmony, undergirding it all. Take some time in the quiet to truly see it.

3. Service Over Self



When I became a mom, I was suddenly extraordinarily busy... yet extraordinarily happy. I was happier, in fact, than I'd ever been. It wasn't just new-mommy hormones or falling in love with that sweet baby, either. It was a new perspective.

See, before kids, I was only responsible for one person: Me. So if I had an atrocious hair day, felt sensitive about a personal slight, or something rotten happened at work, I had the luxury of far too much time to dwell on my emotions.

After kids, I still experienced snubs and work woes (and most definitely bad hair days!), but I was too busy to spend much emotional time and energy on anything besides the priorities: taking care of my kiddos and myself.

I learned an important truth in that busy season: I can't worry much about my own problems and stresses if I'm too busy worrying about others.

Now, I'm not saying we should be too busy in life. There is a delicate balance, and many times we are so busy that we miss out on quiet moments with God or beautiful opportunities to be His instrument in the world. But too much idle time can cultivate self-absorption, at least for me.

God commands us to do His work in the world. As Jesus told his disciples in Luke 10:2-3, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves."

And, as He said in Mark 16:15, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."

Go. Do. Serve. Love.

This is echoed throughout the New Testament:

"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms" (1 Peter 4:10).

"You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Galatians 5:13-14).

"Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:18).

When I focus on service over self, I find freedom.

4. Have a Vent Session

Many of us have heard about the Bible's King David, ruler of Israel, mighty warrior, beloved by God, indeed known as a "man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). More than 60 chapters in the Bible are dedicated to David, a man who sought God time and again in personal sin and in victory.

What strikes me as most profound about David is the fact that he had a practice of taking all his worries, his drama, his angst, his fears, and his deep soul-cries to the source: God. After all, God is the almighty, all-powerful creator of the universe. He made us and knows each of us personally.

So when trouble befell him, what did David do? He had a vent session with the One who could do something about it if



He chose to.

When life's stresses threaten to flatten me, that's exactly what I try to do: Go to God with my troubles. Tell God all about it. Have a vent session with my Lord, King, and Savior. Name the unnamable.

There is such power in confessing the depths of our heart to God. Not only does naming the problem undermine the power it has over us, but by bringing it to God and laying it at the foot of the cross, we are stepping out in faith and asking Him to take control.

Psalm 145:18-19 reminds us, "The Lord is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear Him; He hears their cry and saves them."

Psalm 91:1 says, "Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty."

And in Psalm 55:22, "Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous be shaken."

Those same sentiments are peppered through the New Testament, too. James 1:5 urges, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." And 1 Peter 5:6-7 says, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you."

Venting to others accomplishes nothing but a temporary feel-good. But venting to God is a powerful way to draw closer to Him and know that everything really will be OK.

5. Thank God for the Bad

One ironic truth I've learned: Embracing the downright awful can be the best solution.

A couple of years ago, I had a debilitating headache that lasted for three days straight. I tried everything—Advil, exercise, rest, a good meal, migraine medicine—to no avail. On Day Three I sat on the edge of my bathtub, head in my hands, wondering how I could get relief and begging God for it to go away.

Then a verse I'd read flashed through my mind: thank God for everything. My inner self rolled my eyes. But as I sat there, trying to decide whether to drag myself downstairs for breakfast or collapse in bed again, the verse echoed again.

Thank God for everything.



And so, as weird as it felt, I closed my eyes, bowed my head, pressed my hands together and mumbled with every ounce of non-sarcasm I could muster, “Thank you, God, for my headache.”

In the still of that morning, in the quiet haze of headache and bleary non-sleep, I felt a sudden peace surround me. God. There, in that moment, with me. I still had my headache, but God was with me in the pain.

My headache eventually went away, but I’ve found myself holding onto that verse, which comes from Paul’s words to the early church in Thessalonica: “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

We know there are blessings in bad situations, whether a mere headache or a truly devastating situation. When I look back at really tough periods in my life, I can easily see they are now woven into my faith testimony—how I learned to let go of My Way and cling to God’s. I’ve heard much the same from people who survived near-death experiences or major illness or trauma.

Bad times help us draw closer to God. They help us develop a more Christ-like attitude—humility, faith, and trust in God’s will (“thy will be done”). They teach us things we wouldn’t know otherwise. They help us become patient. They can later help us to comfort others. And when we thank God for these situations, even when it feels ridiculous to do so, we’re acknowledging His sovereignty, His dominion, and His power.

Try it. It helps.

6. Trust that God Has a Plan

Sometimes when life is tough or we woke up off-kilter, it's hard to see the big picture. We don't understand God's plan for our pain, our stress, or our hardship. You know that cliché about how it's hard to see the forest when you're staring at the trees? It's a common saying for a reason.

When we're drowning in debt or frazzled by parenting young kids, when we're facing cancer, a natural disaster, a failed marriage, or a job loss, we often think we're alone. Anxiety sprouts and then blossoms. Hopelessness settles in.

But as we are reminded in Romans 8:28, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

God has a plan—even when we cannot see it. Especially when we cannot see it.



Our challenge is to push ourselves aside and trust Him.

Many of us are familiar with the Old Testament story of Joseph, a Hebrew teenager sold into Egyptian slavery by his brothers—a terrible betrayal (Genesis 37-50). Joseph was the son most beloved by his father Jacob, also called Israel, and his brothers hated him for it. But God’s plan was always at work. Not only did Joseph cling to God and rise to Egyptian leadership in spite of his shackles, but he eventually saved both Egypt and his family during a time of severe famine.

When his brothers realized their transgression, they fell down before the brother they had once despised. Joseph wept and responded, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Genesis 50:20 ESV).

I imagine the years-ago version of Joseph, stripped of everything and cowering at the hands of his brothers, didn’t have any idea the God of the universe had a master plan to make all this good. But he trusted God anyway. Though all of Joseph’s hardships, the Bible tells us, “The Lord was with him” (Genesis 39:3). And after Joseph died, his bones were ultimately carried out of Egypt by Moses, the man God called to liberate His people when they, hundreds of years later, endured their own slavery, and buried in his people’s new home, Israel.

Trust God has a plan. We might not see His hand at work, but His hand is always there.

7. Steep Yourself in God's Word



I'm a coffee drinker, but on occasion I enjoy a good cup of hot green tea. I add in some delicious local honey and bask in the knowledge that the antioxidants are making me healthier with each fragrant sip.

Sometimes I'm in a hurry and make the mistake of soaking the tea bag just a few minutes. The result is a mug of honey-flavored water—the “good stuff” is missing. I need to steep the bag the full amount of time to get the tea I crave.

When we're anxious, worried, troubled, or stressed, we often make the mistake of going through the motions when it comes to our faith practices. We might pray, but it's a shortened version. We might read the Bible, but perhaps only a chapter without taking the time to meditate on what we've read or go deeper into the message. Our negative thoughts swirl.

But in times of hardship or worry, I've learned one of the best things I can do is spend some good, solid time in God's word—steep in it like I'm a teabag and His truth is a nice cup of Earl Gray.

That doesn't only mean reading the Bible. It can also be reading a devotional, listening to Christian music, or spending time with a positive Christian friend.

Staying rooted in God's Word is so important in our faith journey, especially when we are wavering because of stress or worry. After all, the theme "do not fear" is echoed more than 350 times in the Bible.

Psalms 119:105 reminds us, "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path," as does Joshua 1:8, urging, "Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."

Romans 15:4 says, "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope."

Hebrews 4:12 reminds us, "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

And Paul tells young Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Consider it your daily armor, part of getting dressed for the day. It helps, often when nothing else does.

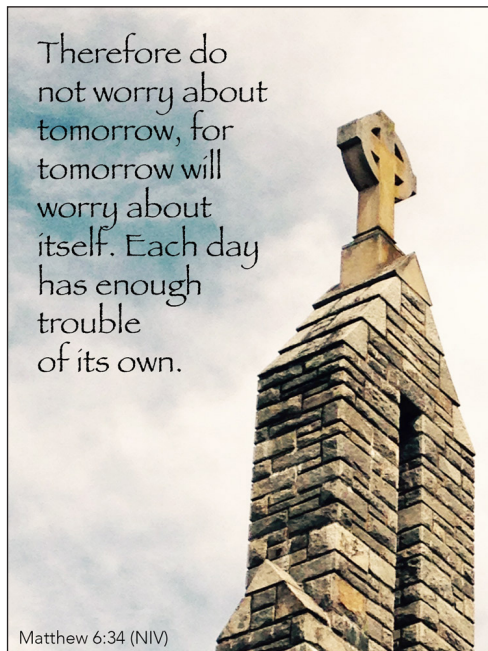
8. One Bite at A Time

My kids like to stump people with riddles. One favorite is “How do you eat an elephant?” Responses vary from the intricate to the mundane, with people going into various methods or tools needed to accomplish the task.

Of course, the answer is simple: You just take one bite at a time.

We like to make things so complicated, don't we? It's the same thing with stress. I have a tendency to take small things and blow them way out of proportion.

But Jesus tells us we must not do this. In Matthew 6:25-27, Jesus says, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds



Matthew 6:34 (NIV)

them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"

Jesus notes that the flowers are dressed more splendidly than even King Solomon with all his earthly riches, reminding us that God takes care of us even better than He does the flowers.

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:34).

We are not guaranteed tomorrow, either. James 4:13-15 reminds us, "Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.'"

One day at a time. Focus on right now. With God by your side, remember: You've got this.

9. Tackle the Worry Monster

My daughter sees a counselor on occasion who works with her on taming anxiety. From the start, this counselor has trained her to see these worries in a physical representation: a mean “worry monster” whose purpose is to plant lies in her head and stir up worries and fears.

I know the worry monster by another name: the devil.

Her counselor knows my daughter needs to control her worries, but she often can't do that until she understands they have no power over her. Identifying the worry as a lie from the worry monster—a trick he's using to get at her and tear down her defenses—helps. Often, as soon as she recognizes the anxious thought for the kernel of self-doubt that it is, it



Get behind me,
Satan! You are a
stumbling block to
me; you do not
have in mind the
concerns of God,
but merely human
concerns.

Matthew 16:23 (NIV)

becomes smaller, more manageable. She can “slay” the proverbial beast because she knows what she’s dealing with.

Sometimes my stresses, worries, fears, and anxieties threaten to knock me down. Their weight is so heavy, and sometimes they build up so fast—or so sneakily—I can’t even understand why I’m worried. I just know I feel unsettled, worried, and stressed-out.

Naming the worry helps. If I feel overwhelmed in a crowded, noisy, overheated store, pausing a moment to breathe and realize why I’m feeling that way, e.g. “Oh, it’s because I’m feeling claustrophobic,” helps a great deal.

Name your worry or stress so it has no power over you.

As Jesus said to Peter in Matthew 16:23, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

Worrying interferes with an open, authentic relationship and dialogue with God. It interferes with our ability to center ourselves in the Lord, and therefore, it is an evil to be defeated.

Naming it makes it tangible, and when it’s tangible, it can be dealt with—and overcome.

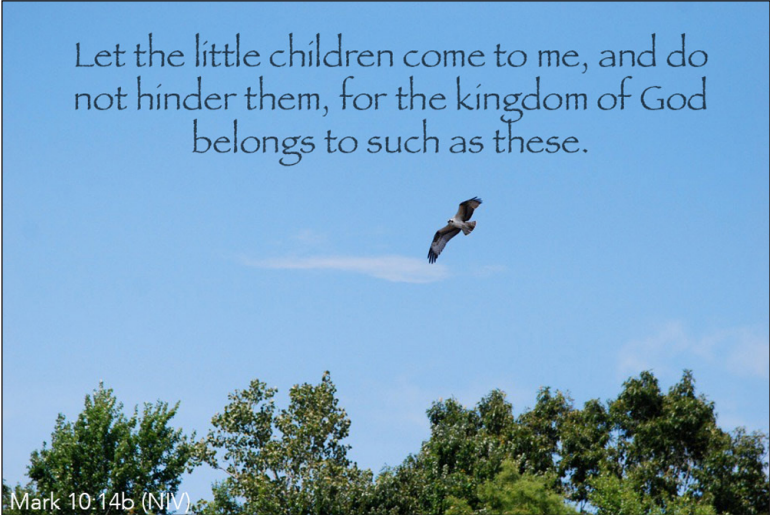
10. Spend Time with Animals or Young Kids

When God created the first man, He knew right away Adam needed a companion. As it says in Genesis 2:18, “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’” From Adam, God made Eve—a suitable companion, a woman to join with him as “one flesh” (2:24).

Likewise, when we’re upset or grumpy, sometimes it takes spending quality time with another person to reset. Often, that’s a spouse or close friend, and it works great. But we humans can all too quickly lure each other into our own negative mindsets. The “grumpies” can spread like a virus.

That’s when I’ve found spending time with those seemingly immune to the grumpies—little kids, cute baby animals, or super-positive ray-of-sunshine friends—can be a big help.

The innocence of children can be a balm to many a soul. Perhaps that’s why Jesus was indignant when his disciples



Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

Mark 10:14b (NIV)

rebuked parents for bringing Jesus little children for a prayer.

“He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’ And He took the children in His arms, placed His hands on them and blessed them” (Mark 10:14b-16).

Animals, too—they can sense pain, sickness, and sadness, certainly. But they have a beautiful way of coping with it: they seem to rest in it, accepting the moment with peace.

We can often learn a lot from animals. They were created prior to and independently of humans, given the blessing of God, and instructed to “be fruitful and increase in number” (Genesis 1:22). Clearly they are of value to God—He enjoys them! He made them!

Spending time with children or animals helps refresh our souls and bring a new perspective on life. Their innocence, authenticity, and simple appreciation of life can be infectious in a very good way.

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