



*Priscilla Hochhalter*

Welcome to “Wiener Dog Wishes”—a lighthearted look at how God uses my wiener dogs (and their utterly transparent wishes and desires) to teach me about himself. Misty is the red dog and Copper is the black dog pictured with me above.

Like most canines, my dogs are a lot like people—lovable, yet self-seeking. But unlike people, they don’t hide what they want; instead, they wear it on their sleeves (if dogs have sleeves). What is it they want? Well, Misty wants attention and Copper wants food, and they spend a lot of time trying to get both. And because of their foot-long bodies and three-inch legs, they look hilarious the whole time.

I chose this topic for the sheer joy of it. I hope your kids enjoy these experiences. And what about you? There’s still a little kid inside you somewhere, too—isn’t there?

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 104:24 (NIV)*

One day in the fall of 2008, during one of the roughest years of our life, my husband emailed me a link that said, “Check this!” The link jumped to an ad and photo featuring two darling dachshund puppies.

Within days, we drove to Newberg to meet them. As soon as we opened our car doors, they jumped in, all wagging tails and licking tongues. Delighted, we adopted them and took them home.

From the start, they did what all good dogs do: they provided endless cuddling and affection, and they made us feel like the greatest human beings on earth. We needed that.

One day, as we continued struggling with the challenges we faced, our pastor preached about his own dark time. He said that right in the middle of this period, entirely by accident, he got to meet his favorite well-known Christian author. He felt as if God were saying, “I haven’t forgotten you, and I care about you enough to arrange this joyful surprise—just for you.”

Afterward, my husband said, “I was thinking enviously, ‘Why doesn’t God do something like that for me?’ And then I realized—he did! He gave me two adorable puppies, and they are extremely good at expressing God’s love for me.”

It might not be very deep or spiritual, but it’s true: God often uses humble things (even puppies) to show us his love. He created a great big beautiful world, full of wonderful things. And all of it is a love letter, a gift from God to you.

*SONG: This Is My Father’s World*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, thanks for the multitude of blessings you pour down every day. Open my eyes to see them all.*

—Priscilla Hochhalter

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 131:1-2*

I adore my dog Misty and find her very endearing. Each morning she emulates the giant worms in the movie Tremors. From under the covers at the foot of our bed, she burrows all the way up to the top and pokes her head out, as if to say, “Ta-da! I’m here!” (which we call her “Ta-da! moment”). Then she very slowly r-o-l-l-s onto her back, using her “mesmer-eyes” to hypnotize us into rubbing her belly.

You should’ve seen her the day we bought her a little pink raincoat. She pranced around like she just knew she was “all that.”

But evening is the best of all. When I come home from work, I scoop her up and cradle her in the crook of my neck—and she just melts. It’s amazing, as if she’s made of butter. She melts into my love and stays there, motionless, for several minutes.

That’s what today’s Scripture is about. One of my all-time favorite passages, it describes “melting into love” in God’s arms, like a weaned child with its mother. Once a child is weaned, it doesn’t need its mother’s milk anymore. It doesn’t need anything at all; a weaned child just melts into love for love itself—nothing else.

Do you know that God is more “ga-ga” over you than I am over Misty? Do you know that he finds you endearing and adorable? Do you feel his strong arms around you, holding you to himself? Quiet your heart like a weaned child and receive his love.

*SONG: Leaning on the Everlasting Arms*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, I am not too proud, too busy, too important, or too grown up to need you. In this moment, forgetting everything else, I melt into your love.*

—Priscilla Hochhalter

*BIBLE READING: Mark 8:17-21*

We call our dog Copper “Captain Copper” because he’s so capable and in charge. He hunts and kills field mice. He smells food a mile away with his keen “food-dar.” And whenever our printer starts printing, he protects us by jumping up and biting it.

He’s very expressive and empathetic. At bathtime, he looks tragic as if he were facing execution. (Dachshunds believe they will melt if they get wet.) And whenever we’re sad or upset, he crawls into our laps to share our pain.

He’s humble, too. When I pet him, he often assumes a “submissive bow”—in a low squat, head bowed, tail tucked under. And he lowers his ears. I call this expression his “humble ears.” For Copper, “humble ears” indicate that he is submitted to his master, just as we Christians should be submitted to ours. But I want to add something more to the concept. In today’s Scripture, the disciples are worried about lack of bread. Yet Jesus reminds them that they’ve just seen him miraculously feed 9,000 people. Can you hear the pain in his voice as he repeatedly asks: “Do you have ears but fail to hear? Don’t you see? Don’t you remember? Don’t you understand?”

The disciples do have ears, but they just don’t hear. They need “humble ears”—not just to submit to their master, but to receive deep spiritual truth. Jesus constantly tells them that “with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26) and that they need to “stop doubting and believe” (John 11:27).

And so do we.

*SONG: Only Believe*

*PRA YER SUGGESTION: Lord, give me “humble ears”—not just to submit, but also truly to hear and believe.*

—Priscilla Hochhalter

*BIBLE READING: Galatians 5:13-15*

So far I've mentioned only our dogs' adorable qualities. But they can be petty and selfish, too.

Take bones, for instance. There may be several around, but Misty wants only the one that Copper has. She'll try to trick him into leaving it unattended, then steal and hide it—behind a chair, in a closet, or under a blanket. Her hiding places are pretty lame, but she looks so smug that we can almost hear her crowing: "He'll NEVER find it here!"

Copper is just as competitive but more straightforward: instead of hiding the bones, he just eats them.

They compete for affection, too. When we come home, Copper barks like crazy and meets us head-on, but Misty approaches shyly from behind. So Copper bumps her aside like a billiard ball. He wants all the petting for himself.

Lifelong friends and playmates, they can't survive without each other. Yet they constantly try to outmaneuver and one-up each other.

It's funny when dogs do that. But it's sad when Christians do. Even with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we frequently compete to get the best for ourselves—the best career breaks, the best romantic candidates, the best school placements for our kids—instead of trusting God with our desires. It's fine to have aspirations and to work hard to reach them, but we must be careful not to step on others along the way.

*SONG: Blest Be the Tie That Binds*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, the gift of relationship with others is one of the most precious assets we have. Help us remember to treat them accordingly.*

—Priscilla Hochhalter

*BIBLE READING: John 13:12-17*

Misty's a princess, all right, with a regal sense of entitlement. Her life message is "I insist on service!" Her demands are softened by hopeful tail-wagging, but they are still demands.

She'll shake her toys until we play with her. She'll paw our knees until we pick her up. She'll pout by our gas fireplace until we turn it on. And at bedtime, she'll whimper until we go to bed, and then she'll happily snuggle in. We don't always comply, of course, but she has a pretty good record of getting what she feels she deserves.

Sometimes, though, she doesn't—like when we get up very early before she's done sleeping. When that happens, she's peeved that we've removed our warmth from the bed. So she follows us and gives us an unmistakable look of reproach as if to say, "This is NOT the way to treat a princess!"

I think American Christians sometimes act entitled like Misty. We love comfort—why should we have to suffer? We seem to be saying, "This is NOT the way to treat a princess!" But maybe, at least in one way, the recession has been good for the United States. Maybe it's helped us to curb rampant consumerism, and refocus with new empathy on those whose needs are far greater than our own.

"Not the way to treat a princess"? True, we may be royalty in Christ, but we are also called to be servants.

Jesus himself, the King of Kings, never acted entitled to anything; instead, he came to serve (Mark 10:42-45). And he promised that serving others leads to blessing.

*SONG: Make Me a Servant*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, help us not to have a sense of entitlement, but rather to care for the needs of others and imitate your sense of service.*

—Priscilla Hochhalter

*BIBLE READING: Acts 3:1-13; 4:13*

I like dogs a lot—but my husband Dan LOVES dogs. If he could, he'd probably have a houseful of them—the noise and mess and expense wouldn't faze him.

For my sake, though, he settled on our two little dachshunds: they don't take up much space or shed everywhere. (Whew!) I help feed and bathe them, but Dan takes them on walks, road trips, outings to the park, and errands. When he's at his desk, they sleep at his feet. He's with them all the time, except when he's at work or someplace else dogs can't go.

In return, they stick to Dan like glue. If he goes downstairs, they follow him. If he sits outside, they join him, almost beaming with pride and awe: "I'm with Dad!" They seem to bond ever closer to him.

In Acts 3, Peter and John heal a lame beggar in Jesus' name, and crowds of onlookers come running to see. The crowds notice that Peter and John are very ordinary except for one thing: they've spent time with the Lord.

When we spend time with the Lord, who loves us and provides for us, we bond with him and follow him closely. We feel like exclaiming, "I'm with Dad!"

As we draw near him, others can tell that we've been with him. We are changed. And like the crowds amazed by Peter and John, they may be, too.

*SONG: More Like the Master*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, 1 Corinthians 1:31 says, "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord." May my whole life boast with joy and awe, "I'm with Dad!" for all to see.*

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*BIBLE READING: Acts 1:7-11*

Whenever we leave the house, we tell the dogs that we'll be back soon. They jump up on the back of the couch and wait by the window—sometimes whining softly, wondering if they'll ever see us again. And when we finally reappear, they make a mad dash to greet us.

Copper gets especially ecstatic. He acts as if he can't believe we came back, and since we have, it's the best thing that's ever happened in the history of the world! He barks wildly with earsplitting volume. He groans with hilarious vocalizations of pleasure (earning his other nickname "Copper the Talker"). He runs in circles. He dances on his hind legs and waves his front paws in the air. Delighted, I rub his neck and greet him: "Yes, I'm really back! Paw the air!"

Copper's excitement reflects the immeasurable joy we'll feel at Jesus' return. Because it hasn't happened yet, some unbelievers think we're foolish to expect it. But the Bible says that one day Jesus will indeed return, descending from heaven with "power and great glory" (Luke 21:27) just as he ascended there after his resurrection.

Like my promise to my dogs, Jesus' promise to return is true. We WILL see him again—either in heaven or (if he returns before we die) here on earth. Maybe we won't exactly "paw the air"—but I'm sure we'll dance with inexpressible excitement and joy, just like Copper.

Imagine that great day!

*SONG: Jesus Is Coming Again*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, thank you that you've promised not only to be with us in spirit, but also to return in the body. While we wait, help us reflect your beauty to others so they, too, can know your salvation.*

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