

SPIRITUAL TRUTHS DOGS CAN HELP TEACH (PART TWO)

In Part Two of this series, we are presenting more group visit ideas for you to do, using your dog to teach spiritual truths in Scripture.

Basic Rally Obedience: Obeying God

For those of you unfamiliar with Rally Obedience, it's a fun activity to do with your dog which emphasizes teamwork, communication between you and your dog, and the dog's focus on you, the handler. It's less strict than regular obedience trials, and speed is not emphasized as it is in agility trials. You can talk to your dog while doing the rally course, use hand signals, clap your hands, etc. You're just not allowed to touch your dog during the competition.

Some of the skills that comprise beginning rally obedience are heeling (the dog is on your left side) at normal, slow, and fast paces; stop and sit; 90-degree L and R turns in Heel position; 180-degree L and R turns; Sit-Down; Sit-Down-Sit; a brief Stay; Down-Stay or Sit-Stay while handler walks around the dog; serpentine weaving around cones. There are others too, and most skills just require good basic leash handling. Here is a short video introduction to Rally:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11zRJYHIYvE>

You can design your own simple Rally routine, incorporating several of these moves to do with your dog for your group of participants (it shouldn't be long or complicated). The lesson here is that your dog will succeed if it stays focused on you and obeys you. In a similar manner, we need to make sure we stay focused on God and obey Him, no matter what He asks us to do!

Dog Puzzles: Discovering God's Hidden Blessings After a Struggle or Challenge

Dog puzzles are a good source of mental stimulation for your dog. A dog puzzle has several compartments in which to place a treat, and the dog must figure out how to maneuver the moving pieces of the puzzle to get to each treat. Dog puzzles come in a variety of difficulty levels – When purchasing a dog puzzle, it's important to get one that's sufficiently difficult to challenge your dog, but not so difficult that it will frustrate your dog to the point where he gives up on it. Here is a link to a wide variety of dog puzzles:

https://www.google.com/search?q=dog+puzzles&rlz=1C1CHBF_enUS936US936&oq=dog+puzzles&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyEggAEEUYORiRAhixAxiABBiKBTIHCAEQABiABDIHCAIQABiABDIHCAMQABiABDIHCAQQABiABDIHCAUQABiABDIHCAYQABiABDIHCACQABiABDIHCAgQABiABDIHCAkQA BiABNIBCTM3NjZqMGoxNagCCLACAQ&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

I have found that whether I'm visiting students at a university or elderly patients in a senior living facility, they all take an interest in watching my dog "solve" his puzzle. I show them how the puzzle works, then set it up and let them watch my dog go at it. Sometimes I time how long it takes for my dog to solve it, then see if he can beat that time on a subsequent try. The participants love cheering on my dog, especially while he tries to get at that last treat!

The spiritual lesson in this activity is that sometimes God presents us with challenges or struggles, but if we persevere, there are hidden blessings to be found in every trial.

Dog Band: Making a Joyful Noise Unto the Lord!

Another really fun activity if you are visiting with a group of dogs is to form a “dog band”. You can use instruments such as a child’s toy tambourine, a small toy keyboard that lies on the floor (I got one cheap at a Goodwill store), bells, and a small toy drum. You can even dress up your dogs with hats, scarves, or fancy collars for fun! To teach your dog how to strike any of these instruments, place the instrument on the floor and put a treat under it in full view of your dog. Move the instrument around on the floor to grab the dog’s attention, and when he puts his paw on the instrument to try to get the treat, lift the instrument and let him have the treat. Here is a short video on how to train this. (You don’t have to use a clicker, however. You can say “Yes” or “Good” to mark the behavior instead.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9tOdmJLVl0>

After the dog learns the behavior, you can use a command such as “Touch”, or “Hit It”. If your dog first learns this behavior with a tambourine or some other object, it’s fairly easy to transfer that behavior to another instrument such as a miniature keyboard or drum. To do this for a group of people, bring a small portable speaker and an appropriate upbeat praise or worship song that you can access on your phone. Play it while you let the dogs “accompany” it on their instruments, and the participants will love it! The takeaway from this is that God doesn’t care how good our musicianship skills are – He just takes delight when we make joyful sounds for Him!