

## The Day 'Tater' Died

Just a few days ago I arrived home on a Monday afternoon after a long week on the road in Texas. I hadn't been home ten minutes when the phone rang and a friend told me that he had seen my son Tyler's dog (named Tater) lying on the side of the road bleeding. It appeared that Tater had either been shot or hit by a car.

I jumped back in my truck to check on Tater before Tyler drove by and saw him like this. Sure enough, Tater had been hit by a car and obviously had severe internal and external injuries that were beyond repair. Tater was still conscious. He recognized me and allowed me to pet him.

You have to understand that Tater was just a different kind of dog! Though he seemed to love me, I just didn't like him much. I have a full brother to Tater, but they are completely different dogs with completely different personalities. Cletus (my dog), is calm, affectionate but obedient, and just not much trouble. Tater on the other hand, was for lack for a better word, just an idiot! He was into everything and would chew up anything. He went crazy over a tennis ball. His personality would crack you up, but he was just a hyperactive ignoramus! If there has ever been a dog with A.D.D., Tater was the one.

However, at this critical time, when I knew I had no other humane option but to put Tater down, I felt a love for Tater that I had never felt for him before—even though nothing about his personality had changed.

This experience reminded me of a story that I heard about a little girl named Susie who lived out in the country with her parents and several brothers and sisters. She was a pretty, quiet and gentle little girl who stayed to herself most of the time, but who was very pleasant and loving toward everyone and everything.

Susie had a little kitten that she loved very much. Everywhere you saw little Susie, you saw that she was affectionately cuddling, caressing and caring for the little kitten in her arms.

This however, was no ordinary kitten—it was an ugly kitten. It's hair was rough and it appeared to have some sort of mange. It's little eyes were always matted up. There was nothing about the kitten that would make you want to love it, but Susie did. Besides being ugly, it always seemed to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Nobody else in the family liked the kitten. In fact, they all very much disliked the ugly little thing. Either they ignored it, or they were kicking it out of the way, throwing it outside the door, or fussing about it. At every meal, you could hear someone holler: "SUSIE, GET THIS UGLY MANGY CAT OFF THE TABLE AND OUT OF THIS HOUSE!" Nobody loved the little kitten but Susie, but she loved it dearly and she was always there to take care of it and to love it when everyone else rejected it.

One day just out of the blue, little Susie got sick. As the next couple of days passed, she just got sicker and sicker and within three days little Susie was dead. As you can imagine, her mother and daddy, and all the family were just heart broken and stricken with grief because little Susie had died.

As the family sat on the front porch after the funeral, some were weeping, some had wept all they could and were just sitting and staring in silence as they thought about how much they loved and missed little Susie. How could they ever get through another day without Susie who they loved so much?

Just as they were in the depth of their grief, the ugly, mangy, little kitten that Susie loved so much came walking out from under the porch. As soon as the family saw the kitten, they all jumped up and ran to get it. As one of them picked up the pitiful little thing and starting hugging it, they all began stroking and touching the kitten with all the affection that Susie had shown it so many times before. “Oh you precious little kitten, you are so beautiful and sweet. Susie loved you so much and we love you too.” It seemed that they couldn’t show the ugly, mangy little kitten enough love and affection.

Now I ask you, what changed about the kitten? That is right--absolutely nothing! It was still ugly, still dirty, still mangy, still had matted up eyes, and still looked sickly. Nothing at all had changed about the kitten. The only difference was that now the family loved the ugly kitten because they loved Susie and they knew how much Susie loved the kitten. They now loved the ugly kitten for Susie’s sake!

That is sort of how it was with me and Tater. He was always a little crazy, very hyper, annoying, and always in my way. But now, at this critical time when I saw him injured beyond repair, I loved Tater! Tater had not changed one bit, but because I knew how much my son loved Tater—and because I love my son so much, I loved Tater for Tyler’s sake! My feelings and affection for Tater totally changed even though he had not changed at all.

You know, that is the way it is for those of us who know, love, and have experienced the love and forgiveness of Jesus in our own lives! The Bible teaches that we are all ugly, diseased and sinful when compared to a holy, loving, sinless God. That sin separates us from the God who loves us and wants more than anything else to have a personal relationship with us.

Without Jesus, we are all in the same boat—even though some of us may live better lives and be more lovable than others, we are all still sinners and fall short of God’s holiness. Nothing about us makes us worthy of His love, affection and salvation—yet He loves us anyway!

In fact, He loves us so much that He sent His one and only Son to earth so suffer and die on a cross in our place for our sin—taking upon Himself the death and punishment that we deserve. The Bible says in Romans 5:8: “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” All we have to do is turn our lives over to Him and accept His forgiveness that Jesus’ blood purchased for us.

This brings us back to Tater and the kitten. If while we were still unlovable, God loved us, how much more should we love Him? If we truly love Him, how much more should we love one another and the rest of the world for Him? If all the world’s people whom God loves is ever going to know of His love for them, they will have to see that love demonstrated in and through those of us who know and love Him.