A Lesson from a Frog… Teaching Children about Grief

Hoppy, the red-eyed tree frog, was my grandson, Will’s birthday gift on his 8th birthday. He had been begging for a pet and was over the moon. Hoppy was beloved, not only by Will, but also by his brother and sister. Sadly, Hoppy died today and with his death, he has given these crying children the best gift he could give them. He is teaching them about death, loss, grief, heaven and healing.

As sad as it is to watch them cry, I am reminded that learning to grieve after the death of a pet gives us an opportunity to teach children how to grieve in a healthy ways that will eventually lead to healing. And while a pet’s death is heartbreaking, it prepares the child for the other deaths they will certainly face later in life.

 Here are four ways to help you use the death of a pet as a teachable moment:

#1) Acknowledge their pain. Let them cry. This is tricky because we hate to see our kids cry. But grief involves tears and tears are the best ways to express the pain that is beyond words!

#2) Share your beliefs about heaven and life after death with them. I know, theologians are unclear about whether or not pets have souls, but children have no doubt. Their pet has a soul! And I am pretty sure that God will not mind us telling our children that pets go to heaven as we prepare them for the most difficult life events they will ever face. I guess we will all find out in heaven if pets go there or not.

#3) Let them express themselves. All people heal much more quickly if they freely express their pain. Invite your children to write a letter to their pet or draw a picture of their favorite memory. This will help them begin a life-long journey of expressing emotions appropriately.

#4) Have a ritual. This will teach your child about saying goodbye and giving our loved ones into God’s loving care. (You can find a complete home funeral service for pets on my website: Leanne-hadley.com).

So today, Will asked me what he should do feel better about Hoppy? I told him, “Cry… there is very little else to do.” He did. It was difficult to watch him. Then we read a book about grief that I wrote titled, “*The Golden Cord,”* and we talked about souls, God and heaven. Then we made paper hearts with notes written on them to Hoppy and they decorated a little box to bury him in. Will insisted that he bath Hoppy before we placed him in the box. Now we are going outside to bury him.

Will wasn’t the only one who loved Hoppy, I loved him too. But now, I love him even more. For this little frog gave my grand kids a beautiful gift… he gave me the opportunity to teach them about death, grief, heaven and God’s love that never leaves us. I loved Hoppy… and now, I love him even more.