A Funeral for a Pet

As heartbreaking as the death of a pet is, it is also a gift because it allows us the opportunity to walk with our children and grandchildren through the grief process. Learning about death is so difficult but, because our children will all experience many deaths throughout their lifetimes, we need to use every opportunity we can to help them learn how to grief in healthy and authentic ways. And to celebrate, with them, that healing follows grief!

Supplies needed:

* Art supplies, paper, crayons, markers.
* A candle and matches
* The Bible marked to Romans 8:38-39
* If you are burying the pet, have a stone or cross to place at the grave.

Preparing:

* Invite your children to draw a picture or write a letter to the pet that has died. It can express their sadness, be a thank you note, or capture a special memory.
* If you are burying your pet, have the hole already dug and the pet placed in a box. The children may want to decorate the box before you place the pet in it. Carry it out and gather around the dug grave.
* If you are keeping the ashes of your pet, you might want to have the ashes and a candle on a table to gather around.
* If your pet was already buried or disposed of, you might want to place a picture and the candle on a table to gather around.

Gathering:

Say: The death of (pet’s name) is very sad. We gather here to remember him/her and also to remind ourselves that God’s light of love can never be put out. Even death cannot separate us from God’s light of love. (Light the candle)

Read: Romans 8:38-39

A Time of Sharing and Remembering:

* Invite each family member to share a story or memory about your pet.
* Invite each family member to say anything they would like and have the children read and share their pictures and things they wrote.

(If you are burying the pet, do it now)

Closing Prayer: Oh God, we thank you for (Pet’s name) and for the joy and blessings he/she gave to us during his/her life. We thank you for the time we got to spend with him/her and now we lovingly, but sadly, give his soul to you. And we know that nothing can separate us or (pet’s name) from your love. In Christ’s name we pray! Amen.

Important Follow Up:

In one month: Gather and light your candle again and ask your children to share any thoughts or feelings they have about their pet. Then note that, while they are still sad over the loss, they have begun to heal.

Do this throughout the year and on each anniversary. This will help your child understand that grief is a long process but that the pain does get less and less as time goes on. Note that sadness and happiness are both valid and important emotions. Note that healing follows grief. For the story is, “Life, death and resurrection”… death is never the end of our story.

To order the book: *The Golden Cord: A Gentle Way to Teach Children about Death,* written by Rev. Dr. Leanne Hadley, please go to: <http://stlukeshr.com/reservations/goldencord/>