

# Creatures of Comfort

When I was sick in bed as a child there were only four things I wanted: French fries, Coca-Cola, The Price is Right, and the comfort of one of my cats curled up by my side. Now that I've grown up, only one thing has changed: there are no pets at our house.

We are renters, so our fluffy grey cat named Jameson is hanging out with my parents until we buy a house. Fortunately, they live ten minutes away and we get to spend time with him often. But when I am stricken with the flu or strep throat or whatever other ailment I managed to pick up from my children or the ones I teach, the space beside me where an animal friend should be is vacant.

After a couple of days in bed this week with strep throat, I decided that I would like to cuddle up with one of my four children, but to my dismay, they only made me feel worse. After messing up my sheets, sneaking Veggie Straws under my pillow (a crumbly situation), and asking me how I survived the Titanic, I kicked them out and longed for the days when my 20 lb. diabetic cat Spunky curled up by my legs and purred while I stroked his silky gray and white fur.

Still feeling lonely, I asked my Facebook friends to post pictures of their pets to cheer me up. Some of them I knew first hand, like my best friend Melissa's sassy little feline, Broadway. Others belong to faraway friends. I only knew their pets from pictures and videos they posted online, but felt as though they were the pets next door, like my Chicago friend Jill's little terrier Candy.

Besides cats and dogs of ever make and model, my farmer friends posted pictures of goats and horses and even a tiny black chick. Of course, some of my friends got silly, like Eric who shared a photo of the time he a ride in the enormous turtle shell in the Maryland Zoo.

I ended up with over 100 photos of my friends' pets. Some of the pictures made me laugh, some made me coo, but all of them made me smile. (The best part: not one of them snuck food into my bed or asked what I was doing on the evening of April 15, 1912.)

The last and best picture of the day came from my mom who sent me a beautiful picture of Jameson. Though I loved seeing pictures of my friends' furry companions, he belongs to me. Even though we weren't occupying the same room, it felt good to know that he wasn't far and that we would soon be reunited. And this is what Jesus offers us; the comfort we need to get through our hard times without necessarily experiencing his physical presence.

The next morning, I was feeling much better. My spirits were lifted by vicariously enjoying the company of my friends' beloved animal companions. Even though I couldn't touch them or feel their warmth first hand, simply gazing upon their sweet faces still brought me joy. A.D. Williams writes, "When I look into the eyes of an animal I do not see an animal. I see a living being. I see a friend. I feel a soul." Whether in person or in photographs, I'm inclined to agree.