

Having been blessed with two amazing dogs in Kirby and Emmett, who both came into my life when they were young adults, one of the things that developed between us is this incredible trust. For instance, I hold out a bit of turkey or bacon and I trust instantly it will disappear. But at a deeper level, as I came to know these wonderful companions, I quickly knew that I could count on them to always be there for me, and they would always show me love and lift my spirits. And I've seen the same thing in them, as so many of us who are blessed to have a dog in our life have experienced.

However in daily life, let's face it, sometimes it can be quite hard to trust in anyone other than ourselves. People hurt us or let us down. Sometimes prayers seem to go unanswered and our faith is put to the test. But with a bit of wisdom, what we realize is that while trust can be broken, when we trust in God, He will ultimately lead us to great places, and eventually to heaven. It's just sometimes we can be blind to going where we need to go without his help.

Gail Irwin is an author and freelance writer who lives in Wyoming, and she's has a passion for pet rescue and adoption. Among the dogs she has been blessed to have known included a blind dog named Sage. And is so

often the case, what Sage did for her was to help her to see what trust, in particular trust in God, was all about.

One morning Sage and Gail were walking slowly down the newly tiled hallway of a school toward a boisterous classroom. The voices of 70 third graders mingled with charis dragged across a wooden floor. Sage paused in the doorway and cocked her head to listen. The children's whispers grew louder, and when they saw her, their delight manifested itself in enthusiastic squeals and jumps on the hardwood floor. Sage flopped to the floor and flattened herself horizontally. Gail bent down and whispered to her gently as the classroom teacher calmly spoke to her students. A moment later, Sage rose again, stuck her nose in the air, took a deep sniff and moved two steps forward, her feet following her nose. Having been her companion at that point nearly 9 years, Gail knew Sage's long black muzzle helped her understand her surroundings, capturing the multitude of scents filtering through the room, from the youngsters seated in chairs to the lunches in their backpacks.

Gail tapped her leather boot on the floor as she often did when they visited new places, helping Sage realize she was nearby and signaling her to

move closer. She obliged, using her senses of hearing and smell to guide her. Gail had come to understand during the past 9 years that a blind dog in an unfamiliar setting uses her other, more acute senses and her faith in her special person to conquer her fear of the unknown. After Sage sat next to Gail, Gail began her presentation to the students.

Gail writes she often marvels at Sage when they visit classrooms or other new places. Blind for nearly 8 years, she hesitates only slightly when they walk into unfamiliar buildings, following the sounds of her voice and footsteps with trust. When they reach a classroom filled with strange noises, as they did on that particular day, Sage pauses in the doorway and uses her nose and ears for navigation. Gail keeps her on a leash while in the classroom for, within a few minutes, fear of the unknown subsides, her curiosity peaks and she explores. The strangers' voices, though somewhat loud, make her inquisitive - she wants to meet the people in the room. She trusts Gail to lead her through the crowd, avoiding head-on collisions with the sturdy desks or the children's bodies. She greets each child with a wagging tail and sometimes a nuzzle to a soft cheek. Gail and Sage walk among the crowd as she talks about disabilities and answer questions

about her dog's blindness. This routine is repeated numerous times throughout the school year.

The journey began when a genetic disease robbed Sage of her eyesight at barely 2 years old. Trust increased as her vision decreased. The first ride on an elevator and the first night in a hotel room showcased her apprehension of the unfamiliar, but also her faith in Gail and in the words she had learned. Gail taught her words and phrases that she thought would help keep her safe, like "no," "sit," "come," and "stop" as well as "step up" and "step down" for navigating stairways and street curbs. Nearly a decade later, Sage was still walking with confidence, trusting in the one who guides, cares for and protects her.

But it's a two way street. Gail writes that in many ways, Sage helped build her faith. Her trust and her perseverance have provided great lessons. Her faith in Gail as her guardian taught her more about trusting God, and her perseverance through numerous collisions with furniture modeled for her patience through her life's obstacles. The first time Gail watched her blind dog leap from the floor onto the bed not only caught her by surprise, but reminded her of the numerous times God had called Gail to make a leap of

faith. As she puts it, fear can prevent us from stepping into the unknown, yet Sage continually jumped from the solid floor into the air to land on a piece of furniture she could not see.

Gail thought to herself, my blind dog constantly shows her faith in her as her caretaker. She cannot see Gail, yet she trusts in her. So for Gail, she asks can I also trust the One who cares for me yet I cannot see? Wading through uncharted waters of economic stress, stumbling amidst uncertainties in job situations, fumbling around dark caverns of loss in the death of special friends, and wavering among the new realities of her own aging physical body, Gail says she needs to trust that God is all-knowing, all-loving and all providing. Yet, she often doubts, she often questions, she often becomes discouraged.

Biblical writers though she says remind us that faith is not in what we see, but in what we do not see. The author of Hebrews says, "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." Sage embodies the idea of blind faith. Her sightless eyes cannot see the one who feeds her, walks her, or pets her, but she trusts Gail completely when she guides her down the steps, along the sidewalk, or through the

hallways of a school. She trusts her to care for her well-being and safety. And she bravely walks down a sidewalk and leaps onto a bed she cannot see.

Gail closes by writing that when she allows life to discourage her through fear, suffering, loss and other hardships. she needs only to look as far as the sightless dog lying at her feet to be reminded of the importance of blind faith in the one who really loves me.

Indeed, though both Kirby and Emmett see, they've taught me too so much about trust. In just looking at one another, we'd know we'd be there for one another and could count on one another. But as I said, sometimes that's easier to do with a dog than with people or even God. Yet when we trust in God, what wonderful things await us, which is what we learn from Elijah and the widow he meets and the widow in the Gospel.

Elijah is one of the great Old Testament prophets, but as we all know life for prophets isn't easy. He's told Ahab the king of Israel to reform his ways, as he's fallen into idolatry. When Ahab doesn't listen, he's warned him a drought will descend on the land, and so it does. The drought is causing

the water to dry up, and also causing famine. The spiritual meaning here is the water flows from God and gives life; remember when the soldier pierces the side of our Lord blood and water flow out. Ahab, and consequently Israel, has cut themselves off from this life. Elijah is caught up in this and helpless, but trusts in the Lord when he tells him to go to a little river, the Wadi Cherith, and we are told ravens feed him there. A very odd thing for God to ask, but Elijah trusts that God knows what He's talking about and because of that trust, there is water and food.

It's a good starting point for us to think about how do we sit and listen to God and spend time with him? Some of my happiest moments are just sitting on the sofa with Emmett. He'll come over and lay his head in my lap. Kirby would do the same thing. In particular if I'm stressed or tired or have things on my mind, there's this calming effect they have on me. But even more so, God does this. It's why we pray. Why we come to Mass. Why we find time for silence with God. So where is prayer in your life? Are you connected to the water? Do you trust that when you come to the Lord He will give you food and drink for the soul?

We are then told that Elijah is commanded to go to Zarephath. It's in foreign territory. Here he's told to see a widow, who will provide for him.

I wonder if Sage in her mind thought this is scary, I don't want to go here, not only because of her blindness but because it was different leaving where she was. My friend Andy, who fosters dogs, is so patient with them and I'll see how a dog comes in all scared and after some days and weeks begins to trust and leave her crate or then go into the house and then the yard and then with the other dogs and then with other people, because the dog comes to recognize his human friend loves him. Well how about you and me? I've talked before about having to leave our "safe spaces" in life. We sometimes can have plans, and know where we are going or think we know where we are going. But when we are listening to God, how do we react when he challenges us? When he says to us things that maybe we don't want to hear? Perhaps we ruminate, how can I do this, how will it work out. But with a bit of trust, what happens is when we look back we say listening to God and going down that road was the best thing that ever happened to me.

And this is where our story picks up. He goes, and the people here are feeling the effects of the drought too. And in almost a bit of a humorous story, we are told the woman is making the last of what she has and then preparing to die with her son; Elijah first asks her for a cake. He then tells her to trust as he has. And what happens? The jar does not go dry. The Lord comes through.

Sometimes we want to do things our way. I wonder what Elijah was thinking when God told him to go to the widow. Certainly the widow objects. But they surrender to the will of God. How about us? Sage and dogs so often trust completely. I think of when I took Kirby to the vet for the first time. He certainly wasn't happy and I wouldn't be either with the exam and what they have to do. But it was to help him stay healthy, and he was calm because I was with him and I think he knew I wouldn't bring him somewhere and abandon him. God will often challenge us. God may say "no" to what we want. And sometimes God's plans will be completely different from our own. But do we know that God has our best interests at heart? When we discern God is calling us to do something challenging, can we listen to Him and trust like Elijah and the widows? Listening to Him also means listening to His prophets too. It's worth asking yourself who is the

Elijah in my life? Maybe someone is challenging you to try something new, or to make a change in your life. Listen to them.

Lastly, keeping at it as a way of life. With the widows in our readings, they hold nothing back. Remember widows in this time had nothing; no safety net, no social security. But rather than cling to what they have, they give what they have to God. The paradox is the more they give of their life and their love, the more divine grace increases. God called me to be a priest; I have to make sure I strive to live up to that daily, not just at certain hours. I have to work on growing in grace; I have to look at how I live out my vocation, and keep turning it up a notch. When God calls us to something, it means we say yes to all it involves. A parent says yes to getting up late night, to helping their child grow and learn right from wrong; to passing the faith onto them. Gail and people who are dog lovers say yes to walking the dog, caring for the dog, and loving the dog as a member of a family.

Whatever it is, it takes work. But the paradox again is the more we give love away - love being willing the good of the other - the more it increases. I have little doubt Sage loved Gail more every day, the same thing that happens in a good marriage, in a family, and in a relationship. It takes work, but it leads to incredible peace and happiness.

Though the stories of the saints all differ, one thing you see in common is that there is always a trust, and a holding of nothing back. Peter, dropping his net when called by a young rabbi to come follow him who certainly wasn't as experienced of a fisherman as he was. Katharine Drexel, an heiress who was a multi millionaire giving it away to help evangelize and minister to Native Americans. Charles Borromeo, nephew of a pope and a wealthy young man who didn't focus on his career but on reforming the Church and helping the poor, giving most of what he had away. The list goes on and on. It's easy to trust when mission is easy or the going isn't rough or we can see clearly where we are going. But when we can't see, when the journey becomes difficult, when life becomes hard, what we have to remember is we are never alone, for God is with us, and loves us more than we can ever imagine. Something good to think about was we prepare now to meet our Lord and receive Holy Communion. As Saint John Paul II said, in that little host is the answer to the world's problems. How true is it. Because in that host is the love of our God which will never run out. May that love lead us always, comfort us in our struggles, and flow through us as like Elijah and the two widows, we answer "yes" to what God has called us to do.