

Look, Wait and Discern: Lessons Learned from My Dog, Colt

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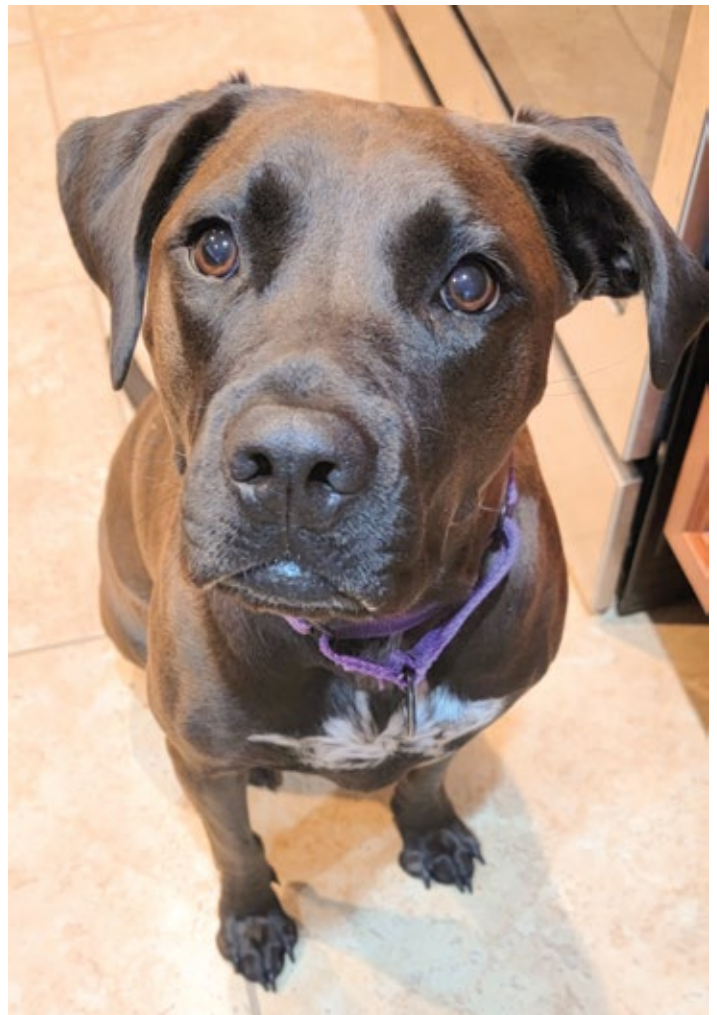
I have previously written two stories about my cats, so I think it's time to write one about my dog, lest I become referred to as a crazy cat lady. We only have one dog right now, and her name is Colt. She is a beautiful chocolate Labrador Retriever, with some gene variations mixed in from a rather diverse ancestry including:

Golden Retriever, American Staffordshire Terrier (pit bull), Rottweiler, bulldog, boxer and a few others I've never heard of. Compared to the other dogs we've had, Colt was rather difficult to train and control. She joined our family from a rescue facility at five months of age. It didn't take long to realize that she was strong-willed, rambunctious, and quite destructive when left alone. And when she sensed the slightest moment of freedom from the confines of a leash, she was off to the races with a pace that resembled a thoroughbred. In short, she was a handful; but she was also beautiful, loving, and downright adorable. So when she was about a year and a half, we turned to a professional dog trainer for help. His primary focus was to help us better understand her behavior, so we could communicate more effectively in her language. He was actually more of a people trainer than a dog trainer.

One of the commands we learned to use was "look." We were given a homework assignment to practice multiple times a day for one month. The exercise required us to get her attention and then say "look," so she would associate the command with staring us in the eyes. By first getting her attention with that command, she was more responsive to a follow-up command. This training reminds me of two passages in the Bible in which the apostle Peter took his eyes off Jesus. The first occurred in Matthew Chapter 14 as Jesus walked on water. In verses 28-31 (NIV), it states: "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" It doesn't specifically state that Peter looked away from Jesus, but it's generally agreed that the reason Peter started to sink is because he took his eyes off Jesus and focused

instead on the wind and waves. We need to remember to look to our Savior in times of need, *fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith* (Hebrews 12:2 NIV), because He is the only One we can fully trust.

The second biblical story that comes to mind is the rooster crowing. In Luke 22, starting in verse 31, Jesus predicts Peter's denial of Him. In verse 34 (NIV) Jesus states: "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me." Verses 57-60 capture Peter's denial of Jesus on three separate occasions followed by verse 61: *The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times."* In this instance, we can imply from scripture that Peter had taken his eyes off Jesus. To be obedient and follow Jesus' commands, not only must we keep our eyes fixed on Him at all times, but we must also look towards Him for guidance and direction.



Another command the trainer taught us to use with Colt is “wait.” At first, I found myself saying it to her repeatedly, due to her limited attention span. I laughed at times when I got frustrated with her, reflecting on how God’s Word reveals that He often finds it necessary to tell us to “wait.” Some examples include:

- Isaiah 40:31 (ESV): *“but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”*
- Psalm 28:14 (NIV): *“Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.”*
- Isaiah 64:4 (NIV): *“Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for Him.”*
- Lamentations 3:26 (ESV): *“The Lord is god to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him.”*
- Hosea 12:6 (ESV): *“So by the help of your God, hold fast to love and justice and wait continually for Him.”*


Depending on the translation, the Bible mentions waiting on the Lord at least 116 times! To wait on God’s voice of instruction is an essential part of our spiritual walk. It is an important step in learning to be obedient to God.

The last behavioral tool that I developed for myself while learning how to train Colt is “discern.” I discovered that giving her a few treats before leaving the house seems to calm her down and prevent wanton destruction. Treats are definitely her love language. Each time we leave the house, we give her three dog treats, two pumpkin biscuits

and one slice of dried sweet potato. After a while, we noticed that she is rather discerning about how she approaches eating the treats. She always chooses the sweet potato first, and then proceeds to the biscuits. Treat preference is a discernment that came naturally to her; but we’ve also been guiding her to be more discerning in some important behavioral decisions, such as whether to bolt out the door or remain safely positioned in the friendly confines of the house.

Discernment is the ability to make wise choices; and we know from God’s Word that He wants us to be discerning. In 1 Kings 3:5 (NIV) it says, *“At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.”* Solomon responded in verse 9: *“So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.”* Verse 10 states: *“The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this.”* Therefore, discernment is a quality that pleases the Lord.

Books have been written by authors who suggest that “Everything I Need to Know about Life, I Learned from My Dog.” I wouldn’t go quite that far, but it’s safe to say that I have learned many life lessons from my beloved pets. I can’t help but notice that many of those lessons are substantiated in God’s Word. I suspect that is not by coincidence. Every time I look at Colt’s loving yet mischievous face, I’m reminded not to take my eyes off the One who guides me, to wait for His command, and to then proceed with discernment while enjoying the treats He has provided for me along the way.



O LORD, THOU ART MY GOD; I WILL
EXALT THEE, I WILL PRAISE THY NAME;
FOR THOU HAST DONE WONDERFUL
THINGS, EVEN COUNSELS OF OLD, ARE
FAITHFULNESS AND TRUTH.

ISAIAH 25:1