



Mario
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The Day God Attended the Funeral of a Hamster

He watches over every creature



Some might say he was just a rodent--one whose life was immensely insignificant in the scheme of the universe. Yet, to my son, he was an precious friend holding an important place in his heart. He was a member of our family. This little ball of fur was a gift from my brother, who had raised many generations of hamsters, carefully selecting the most gentle and calm natured animals for breeding. My son was five when Todd gave him the "just weaned" baby hamster. Ryan was instantly captivated with this bright eyed bit of fluff. He promptly named him Mario after the popular video game of the era. True to his classification as a "pocket pet," Mario quickly found his residence in my son's shirt pocket. It was common to see

Mario watching life from the vantage point of Ryan's pocket then disappearing deep inside to take a nap. I washed that t-shirt nearly everyday until we convinced Ryan that Mario would sleep better in his aquarium during the day.

Mario's hamster haven was a mass of tunnels and tubes that spanned most of one wall in Ryan's room. Unlike most hamsters that I have known, Mario did not spend his nights trying to escape. When he was with Ryan, he would crawl up on Ryan's lap, as if wise enough to know he was safe and protected with his best friend. The only time he ever got out on his own was the night he had to feed himself! I had cleaned Mario's aquarium that afternoon and forgotten to replace his food dish. Waking up in the night, I remembered and snuck into Ryan's room. There was Mario, cheek pouches full of seed, trying to get back into his aquarium! He had gotten out, found his way to Ryan's closet where his food was stored, filled his "pockets" and was trying to return to his habitat. We were always so impressed with his intelligence!

Other hamsters joined us and Mario became the father of many gorgeous long-haired, teddy bear hamsters, but none of them came close to the special place Mario held in Ryan's heart. Mario ran mazes in science fairs at school, became a 4-H "project" and always remained sweet, gentle and calm.

Hamsters are not known for their longevity. Most don't live beyond two and rarely does one live past three years. Mario was almost three years old and showing clear signs of his advanced age. His ears had grown shiny and he was losing weight. He still ran on his exercise wheel but it turned slowly and while in his younger times he could exercise all night, now he tired very quickly. I began to talk to Ryan about the fact that Mario was getting old. I dreaded the day Ryan would need to face the loss of his precious pet.

Tragically, Mario did not have the option of peacefully dying in his sleep as I had envisioned. Ryan, getting up early for school found Mario lying lifeless, on the kitchen floor. He had clearly gotten out of his cage during the night and been caught by Tawny, our new cat. Ryan wanted to believe that Mario might still be alive, but it was clear from the blood loss and injuries that he could not have survived. The signs of his torture were evident in three rooms of the house. The day I had dreaded arrived, but it was much worse than I expected!

Ryan and I both cried and I told him if he needed, we could call the school and tell them he would be late. He decided he wanted to go straight to school. Through tears he asked me why God let Mario die in such a horrible way with so much suffering. After I dropped Ryan off, his question loomed large in my mind and I had no idea of how to answer him. To this point, Ryan had never experienced anything to cause him to question God's love, goodness and protection. Through the day, I cried for the tender heart of my son, his great faith and the pain and grief of his suffering. I asked God for wisdom and for His comfort for my son.

And God arrived...

As it drew close to time to pick up Ryan, I felt the Lord impress my heart that we were to have a funeral for Mario. I wonder how often we miss God when we forget to ask for His wisdom! God knew exactly what my son needed and this loving act of preparing his little coffin and gravesite allowed Ryan to focus on his task while still processing the loss of his dear pet. On the way to the backyard the Ryan me to bring my Bible. I did not have a clue as to the appropriate Scripture to read at a hamster funeral. We bowed our heads and prayed. Ryan thanked the Lord for the gift this hamster had been. I randomly opened my Bible, thinking of looking up a verse on comfort. Then, as if there was a spotlight on it, was the Word of the Lord came to my son and I, “And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the young goat, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze, Their young will lie down together, And the lion will eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea.” Isaiah 11:6-9

The Word came filled with an awesome awareness that the LORD was with us and He was sharing His heart regarding Mario's death, as well as a promise and comfort that it would not always be this way. We are living in a world that has lost the knowledge of God and His ways. When the world again is filled with the knowledge of God such sorrow and pain and death will be forever ended. God was

speaking at little Mario's funeral, assuring us that it was not His will for animals to kill one another, or for children to experience this devastation. Ryan noted His words specifically about the little boy's place in His Kingdom and this ministered comfort to Ryan's heart, as he knew again, God's personal concern for his grief. We has a sense that when God spoke these words to Isaiah thousands of years ago, He knew that one day, He would be speaking them directly to the heart of this child of His at a hamster funeral! Not only did He bring abundant comfort, he also provided understanding to the questions Ryan was asking and gave a promise of a future that was free from pain and heartache of loss due to violence.

"And it shall come to pass, before they call, I will answer, and while they are still speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb will graze together and the lion will eat grass like an ox, and dust will be the serpent food. They will do no evil or harm in all my holy mountain, says the LORD." Isaiah 65:25

Why should we be surprised that the God whose eye is on every sparrow who falls would be watching over a little boy and a pet hamster?