

WAITING AT THE GATE



*The Remarkable Relationship
God Designed with Dogs...
and Why I Believe
We'll Meet Again*



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There was a theme park in the city where I worked, and one night rival gangs turned up in it at the same time.

By the time our SWAT team arrived, a K-9 officer and his Rottweiler had broken up a fight and were filling out field identification cards on the two men involved. About a dozen of their associates stood off to the side, watching us work.

The dog wasn't watching the two men in front of us.

He was watching the group.

His handler gave him a glance — no word, no command, just a look that meant eyes here. The dog came back.

Briefly.

Then he turned around, came up out of his sit, and locked onto one man in that group.

Not the group. One man in it.

Reading people is what we do. Officers are trained to watch for the hand that drifts toward a waistband, the hip that turns away from you, the subject who checks his own weapon without knowing he's doing it.

There were several of us standing in that light. All of us trained. All of us looking at the same dozen men.

None of us saw a thing.

The dog did.

I'll tell you the rest of the story later.

For now, I only want you to sit with the question that night forced me to ask...

***What do dogs sense, understand, and respond to that we so often miss?
And what best explains it?***

JURY INSTRUCTIONS

Before these proceedings begin, I'd like to ask something of you, the jury.

Please don't render a verdict before you've heard all of the evidence.

As a detective, I learned that first impressions are often wrong. As a therapist, I learned that human beings naturally search for evidence that confirms what they already believe. Both can lead us to the wrong conclusion.

So throughout this investigation, I simply ask you to do what every good juror does.

Listen carefully.

Question honestly.

Resist the temptation to reach a verdict until all of the evidence has been presented.

Then decide for yourself.

Good jurors don't begin by asking,

"What do I want to believe?"

They begin by asking,

"What verdict best explains all of the evidence—not merely part of it?"

Questions about dogs, heaven, and the character of God often generate strong opinions. Rather than asking you to accept mine, I'd rather present the evidence the way I learned to evaluate it—as a detective, one exhibit at a time.

For decades I've lived with dogs.

For ten years I investigated crimes, collected evidence, and testified as an expert witness before juries.

For ten years I worked alongside police K-9s trained to detect narcotics, track suspects, locate bombs, recover evidence, and protect their handlers.

For decades I've studied human behavior.

Those experiences taught me something else that has remained with me throughout my career.

People can deceive.

Memories can fade.

Opinions can change.

But consistently observed patterns of behavior rarely do.

That principle shaped the way I investigated crimes.

Years later, I realized it was also shaping the way I observed dogs.

Never render a verdict before all the evidence has been heard.

This book isn't asking you to agree with me. In fact, I hope you won't... not yet.

It isn't asking you to suspend your skepticism. Great investigators are skeptics by nature.

It's simply inviting you to investigate with me.

Listen to the evidence.

Evaluate each witness.

Pressure-test the testimony.

Look for weaknesses.

Look for inconsistencies.

Consider alternative explanations.

And continually ask yourself,

"What explanation best accounts for all of the evidence—not merely part of it?"

If you discover a better explanation than the one I eventually reach...embrace it.

Each exhibit stands on its own.

One story proves nothing.

One scientific study settles very little.

One biblical passage rarely answers every question.

But when independent lines of evidence—drawn from different experiences, different disciplines, and different sources—all begin pointing in the same direction... investigators pay attention.

Throughout this book, I'll present the evidence exactly as I encountered it: through childhood dogs, police K-9s, therapy dogs, behavioral psychology, neuroscience, Scripture, and ultimately through the character of God and the remarkable relationship He designed.

Only after every exhibit has been entered into evidence will I share the verdict I ultimately reached... and then invite you to render your own.

Until then...

keep an open mind.

Follow the evidence wherever it leads...

even if it leads somewhere you never expected.

These proceedings are now called to order.

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury...

The evidence will now be entered.

EXHIBIT JUAN

Juan – The Dog Who Started the Investigation

Every investigation begins with one observation that refuses to be forgotten.

I have a question for you. Have you ever looked into the eyes of a dog you loved and quietly wondered...

Could a love like this really have been created to last only a few years?

I've wondered that for much of my life.

Not as a theologian.

Not as a therapist.

Not as a former police detective.

I first asked it as a young boy.

His name was Juan, but he answered to Juan-Ton, Juan-Ton-Tomato and Juannie. With me, he was simply Juan –my shadow.

To this day, I have no idea how a Mexican name ended up attached to a chubby brown and white terrier mix, with one ear bent over and a brown patch over his right eye growing up in Southern California. Somehow, though, it fit him perfectly.

Juan wasn't really the *family's* dog.

He was mostly my dog. More accurately... I was his person.

Maybe it was because we were both fat kids. Photo evidence—and multiple credible eyewitnesses—support that conclusion.

Maybe it was because we shared an unhealthy affection for Pop-Tarts.

I should explain. My dad worked for Kellogg's, which meant there were always cases of Pop-Tarts stacked in our garage. To Juan and me, that garage wasn't storage—it was headquarters. We built forts between the cases and, from time to time, those cases would magically open.

Evidence at the crime scene should have been obvious. Empty wrappers. Missing Pop-Tarts. Two napping suspects. The only thing missing was the yellow police tape.

Fortunately for us, no formal investigation was ever opened, and Juan and I were only considered persons of interest.

Growing up in our house, I sometimes wondered if Juan thought his full name was **"No! No! Bad Dog!"** I don't remember hearing "Juan" nearly as often. If there was food left unattended, Juan considered it manna from heaven. If a gate was accidentally left open, he viewed it as a divine invitation to explore the neighborhood. The portly little fellow was like trying to catch a greased pig.

He was wonderfully imperfect. And totally loveable.

I grew up in what I would politely call a difficult home. It might be called something different today.

Children don't always have words for that.

Dogs don't need them.

Whenever life inside our house became more than I knew what to do with, Juan somehow knew. He never asked me what was wrong. He didn't have to. The details didn't matter to him.

He never tried to fix anything. He simply walked over, rested his head on my leg, and stayed there.

I don't remember what I was crying about that afternoon. I remember where I was sitting. I remember trying not to let anyone hear me. Then I remember Juan waddling over without being called. He didn't lick my face. He didn't bark. He didn't paw at me.

He simply leaned into me until I wrapped my arms around his neck.

Looking back, what struck me most wasn't fear. It was that his attention never seemed to leave me. I realize now that Juan might have fit the description of a therapy dog. Long before I knew therapy dogs existed... Long before I became a therapist...

Long before I watched highly trained service dogs detect panic attacks, depressive episodes, diabetic emergencies, and seizures before anyone else recognized they were happening...

there was Juan.

And somehow... he was always close by... and he always knew.

Years later, people would ask me when my fascination with dogs began.

The honest answer is... it wasn't fascination. It was gratitude. Because before I ever understood psychology... before I understood neuroscience... before I understood Scripture... a chubby terrier had quietly convinced a lonely boy that he wasn't alone.

Then one day my father told me it was time. I knew exactly what he meant before he finished the sentence.

Juan was old. We both knew what that meant. I remember almost nothing about the drive to the veterinarian's office, but I know why my dad chose me to go with him and not my mom or brother.

Neither of us said anything. I remember staring out the passenger window hiding my tears. I remember trying to convince myself there had to be another answer. I remember crying so hard I could barely see. I was a mess. Juan was not.

He was just being Juan.

That memory has stayed with me. He wasn't trembling. He wasn't trying to climb into the front seat. He wasn't trying to Houdini his way out of the car. He simply stayed close.

Looking back, I've often wondered if he was more concerned about me than he was about himself.

I've replayed that drive countless times over the years. Not because I finally found an answer. Because I kept returning to the same question. Why? Was it trust? Was it love? Or was it something else entirely?

I don't know what Juan understood that day. I only know what I observed. He hated going to the vet as much as I hated going to the pediatrician, but he wasn't panicked that day. I was heartbroken. He wasn't.

That became the first piece of evidence in an investigation that would eventually take me through police K-9 units, therapy offices, neuroscience journals, and finally into Scripture itself.

I didn't know it then. But the investigation had already begun.

When Juan died, I didn't begin searching the Scriptures. I didn't begin reading neuroscience journals. I simply carried a question that refused to leave me.

Years later, every police K-9 I met... every therapy dog I watched... every family who shared a story... seemed to add another piece to the puzzle.

Eventually I realized... I wasn't collecting memories anymore. I was collecting evidence.

Where the Evidence Points

One childhood story proves nothing.

One dog's behavior establishes no doctrine.

But investigators learn not to ignore observations simply because they cannot yet explain them.

How does a dog consistently recognize loneliness, comfort a hurting child without being asked, and face frightening circumstances with a trust that often exceeds our own?

Coincidence remains one possible explanation.

For now.

The investigation continues.

EXHIBIT TWO – THE WITNESSES

Opening

If you're wondering whether Juan was simply one remarkable dog, I wondered the same thing. As it turns out, Juan wasn't the conclusion of the investigation. He was only the first witness.

Long before I wrote my parenting books, I became fascinated by personality. As a therapist, I spent years helping parents understand that children are wonderfully different. The better parents understand those differences, the better they connect with their children. Years later I realized I'd been studying personality long before graduate school. Some of my earliest teachers had four legs and a Milk Bone obsession.

Observation

As the years passed, every dog who entered my life possessed a distinct personality. Some were comedians. Some were stoic. Some fearless. Others timid. Some melted under a disappointed look. Others looked back as if to say, 'Is that all you've got, big boy?' The personalities were different. The drive to connect never seemed to be. That's what got me thinking more like a therapist and less like a pet owner.

Witness: Sammi

Sammi was a 3-year-old white German Shepherd rescue dog from a death row in a kill shelter. At the time I was assigned to the Special Problems Unit, working undercover investigations. My job required me to notice subtle patterns of behavior that other people overlooked. I didn't realize it then, but I was about to make one of those observations in a dog.

Sammi caught my attention because she reminded me of a drug enforcement dope dog I'd worked with named *Hank*. Sammi was Lying down at the back of her 12' pen with a series of people and a family walking by and stopping to talk to her. What I noticed was, she seemed disinterested in visitors – including kids. She kept her head down, watched, but didn't move. When they left, I stepped to the front of her pen, looked and smiled at her. She raised her head and walked to me with her tail wagging.

Look, I get it. This could have been because I reminded her of someone she knew, but the fact that she engaged with me was interesting. I bent down and she leaned her whole body up against the fence and looked up and talked to me with kinda a half whine, half bark voice. What I found most interesting was that she reacted to me immediately and chose to greet me at the gate. That was a dog that chose to investigate a bond with a stranger even after choosing not to bond with previous people before me. Why? I had no idea at the time,

but it triggered a question in me that I wanted to learn more about. I understood that dogs had certain instincts, but what initiates it?

She was due to be put down that week and there was no way I could let that happen to this girl. She came home with me and it was a great decision for both of us. Wonderful with my young kids and a solid home defender.

Since Sammi was my first dog after Juan, I wasn't sure what to expect. What I found interesting is how she shared similar personality characteristics with Juan. Just like Juan, she locked onto me as her person. They have a way of knowing, right? And like Juan, she'd follow me around the house and when I'd go off duty and come home no matter what time of the night, she'd greet me at the door and be all over me – just like Juan when I came home from school.

Witnesses: Bosco & Tobias

Bosco was a gift from my mom and looking back, I'm pretty sure this was payback for something. Bosco was a certifiably (nuts) and had the energy of 10 black labs on uppers. Insanity aside, Bosco was adorable and I got to bond with her for about 3 months before she developed distemper and we had been informed, we had to put her down. That one hurt.

Toby *Black Labrador pup #2*

The kids wanted another black Lab (why not?) so we got Toby who was about 6 months old when we adopted him. Toby's energy level made Bosco seem lethargic. We did some training and it was going well except for one thing. Toby ate *everything* and I don't mean food. Toby ate the garden hose, the fence and finally the metal electrical conduit from the air conditioning unit outside. Fortunately, he got just enough jolt to curl his hair, but not enough to harm him.

With two little kids in the house, we needed to re-home Toby and found a farm (I promise it was a farm not a metaphor) nearby with dog lovers who had all the room for a mentally unhinged Lab to run and play with the other dogs. What struck me about Toby was that, like Bosco, Sammi and Juan – all four just wanted to be loved and love back.

Regardless of the breed, temperament, training and background, all four of my dog experiences demonstrated a drive to belong, be loved and love their family.

Witnesses: Ruthy & Peanut

Ruthy was a Golden Retriever. That almost deserves no further explanation. She was sweet, but not the smartest dog on the block – not even in the house for that matter. Ruthy was gentle with the kids and loved literally everything and everybody. My wife took the kids to

the mall pet store (I have plausible deniability as I was not there) and my daughter picked Ruthy out when she was a pup.

During the same visit, my son chose a small black and white Chihuahua/Terrier mix he decided to name Peanut. I met the new members of the family when I got home that evening.

These two couldn't have had more different temperaments. If Ruthy did something she shouldn't, all it would take is a stern look and she'd drop her head, lower her eyes and her ears would fall. She didn't want to disappoint. Golden. Right?

Peanut, on the other hand would look at me with a look that could only be described as rebellion – like, "Who are you looking at? Overruled! Next case."

Peanut was neurotic as could be and hid under my son's bed with his baseball cards most of the time unless she came out to harass somebody or steal Ruthy's food. My fondest memories of Ruthy and Peanut was when the kids were in the pool. Peanut would run around the pool barking at the kids and if she stopped for a moment, Ruthy would sneak up behind her and push her behind into the pool. Seriously. Every time. And it angered Peanut to no end. Still, it was hilarious. I'd laugh hard and Peanut would register her complaint by running up to me barking as if to tattle on Ruthy. Sorry, Nut... it's funny.

Those two were as different as red and black. One was a codependent poster pup and the other was proof God has a sense of humor. In some ways, they reflected two very opposite children in a family. While one was sweet and the other outlaw biker girl contemptuous, both craved affection, attention and thrived on connection. Their motivation seemed blissfully simple. Connect. Express love. Receive love. Even Peanut, neurosis and all, was still driven by connection.

Witness: Auggie

Here's where our family's canine-choosing challenges became fully evident. Enter Auggie.

My wife decided we needed a third dog – one she saw at the same pet shop where we got the two prior witnesses. Auggie was marketed as a purebred Australian Shepherd the same way I'm supposed to be in a '90s boy band.

Auggie had a different personality than the others that could only be described as 75% surly and 25% total sweetheart. Auggie was NOT good around strangers and other dogs (including Ruthy and Peanut), but she was great with *her* people. She clearly was not treated well as a puppy (again, puppy mill from the mid-west and shipped to a pet shop).

Still, she warmed up and trusted us and became a loveable family pet with the exception of one detail. If I got out of bed at night, she absolutely had to crawl into my spot and lay her head on my pillow. Side sleeper like me, I guess. And when I'd come back to bed she'd refuse to leave and low-growl at me like she was a tough dog never realizing I worked with police K9's who enjoyed biting. I gotta admit, it cracked me up each time and my laughing would wake-up my wife. Compounding errors.

Auggie helped me put more observations together about my dogs – but not only my dogs – but the police K9's as well. They all seemed to share common personality motivations. They were ALL pleasers. In human, psychotherapy terms, you might call it codependency. They delighted in delighting and I could read it on their expressions and body language.

Specifically, when they did something that made me laugh (frequently), their ears would go back, they'd wag their tails aggressively, and in some form, shift their weight from one side to the other several times. Some would jump up to be closer and receive affection, but others would just wag and dance in place. I started to pay closer attention to this and other reproducible personality traits.

Even the K9s at the department thrived on attention, praise, and connection. They'd literally put their lives on the line for their human handler and the praise and love that followed a successful event.

Next Witness: Vinny

The Vin was my boy. 90 pounds of extremely smart Australian Shepherd with eyes that studied everything. This was a very smart dog and I was his person. Like the others, Vinny wanted to please me and, to a lesser degree, the family. He was stoic (an Aussie trait), but a pleaser, nonetheless.

His *thing* was to bring in packages and mail. It was his job and you didn't dare try to bring in a delivery by yourself or you got a scolding from Vin and whatever you were carrying would be snatched away. Even if he couldn't get his mouth around a box, he'd push it out of your arms because you were doing his job. That's how he pleased people. You might disagree and say I trained him and gave him treats when he performed. That's true, but long after the treat training was done, Vin did it (a) to please me, and (b) because Aussies have to have a job to feel they've earned their place.

The Pattern Crystallized

Developmental psychologists have long observed that healthy children (even very young children) form a defined pattern of separating from their parents for brief moments but repeatedly return. I wrote about it extensively in one of my parenting books, so I was keenly

attuned to what it was and how it appeared among different children. It's called *proximity seeking* or *attachment* or *reunion behavior*, but regardless of the term, it's evident in virtually all children.

They explore the world around them for a while, then come back to reconnect before venturing out again. That cycle of exploration, reconnection, and renewed confidence is considered a hallmark of secure attachment.

What that means is, the behavior isn't just casually random, it's universal, which means the separating/attaching behavior is hardwired into the human condition. Underscore the power of that for a moment. For believers like myself, that means God installed that behavior into all of us for a purpose. My intention here is not to discern *why*, but to point out how that behavior is reproduced in dogs and now I realize I've been witnessing that all my life – from my dogs, to K9 police dogs to therapy dogs.

I'll give you a *right now* illustration. As I'm writing, Bud, who was somewhere in the house over the last few hours, casually strolled into my office, managed to squeeze his hog body under my desk and shoved his face up from under the desk at me. If there's such a thing as reincarnation, Bud was a stand-up comedian in his past life.

Anyway, he continued to nudge me until I looked at him at which time he started clowning around. He wagged his bottom, smiled slightly and decided my smile was the green light to try to wedge his way onto my lap – all 80 pounds “I smiled, you smiled, now you have to deal with me”. When I said, “Not now Bud” he casually sauntered over to my running shoes, removed both socks, and circled me as if showing off. When I said, “Dude, again?” He upped his game and pushed my socks against my leg in sort of a *you want these back?* manner.

He does similar things all the time. I used to think it was just his invitation to play, but I see it sporadically throughout the day when I'm doing different things. It's the same developmental pattern psychologists have studied for decades, and I wrote about in my books. Yes, he's happy to play if I want to, but what he really was seeking was attachment and once he was noticed, his emotional tank was full and he was free to go do Bud stuff alone until he needed to connect again.

Let's add another piece of evidence to the attachment testimony. Enter Blushy (aka Bud Light because she's half his size) her attachment, connection-seeking behavior shows up differently. She's not a sock grabber like Bud, she's a grinner. I know that sounds crazy (I wear it proudly), but her reconnection manipulation is grinning and side winding-walking. You may have seen it with your dogs. She figured out smiling was her superpower – her way

of forcing attention/reconnection. She literally mimics a human smile by raising her upper and lower lips to reveal a big goofy toothy smile that defies anyone not to laugh. And once she gets your laughter (connection established) she side-wind-walks (front legs facing forward – hind legs to the side with tail-less bottom wagging furiously) up to you for the obligatory payoff. She absorbs that attention for about a minute and then she's off doing her thing.

Now I can see that, this exact psychological behavior is evident in police K9's (both dope sniffing and suspect-finding varieties) and therapy dogs. I'll go into deeper detail in later chapters, but the pattern is undeniable.

EXHIBIT THREE

The Restorers

Question Under Investigation

Why do so many dogs appear driven to repair relationship after conflict?

One of the first lessons therapists learn is that conflict rarely destroys relationships.

What happens **after** the conflict does.

Every disagreement creates a choice.

Move toward...

or move away.

Over the years I've watched thousands of people make that decision.

Some withdraw.

Others can't rest until the relationship has been repaired.

Then one afternoon I watched one of my own dogs make that same decision.

Bud had done something he knew he wasn't supposed to do.

I don't even remember what it was anymore.

What I remember... is him.

I corrected him.

Immediately his head dropped.

His ears folded back.

He avoided eye contact.

Without saying a word, he slowly walked away.

Every dog owner knows that posture.

The correction had registered.

For a while he disappeared into another room.

I went back to work.

About twenty minutes later I felt something brush gently against the back of my leg.

It was Bud.

He wasn't asking to play.

He wasn't looking for a treat.

He wasn't carrying one of my socks trying to make me laugh.

He simply stood beside me.

Quietly.

A few moments later he leaned against my leg.

Then he followed me into the next room.

Not demanding anything.

Just staying close.

That's when my therapist brain interrupted my dog-owner brain.

Wait a minute...

I've seen this before.

Thousands of times.

Not in dogs.

In marriages.

In families.

In children.

People don't all respond to conflict the same way.

Some withdraw.

Some pursue.

Some need distance.

Others simply need to know...

"Are we okay?"

Was I watching one of the oldest relational behaviors in psychology... played out by a dog?

Once I noticed it in Bud, I began noticing similar patterns everywhere.

Over the years I observed remarkably similar responses in dog after dog. The breeds were different. The personalities were different. The homes were different. The behavior varied, but the pattern did not.

Every therapist eventually learns the same lesson.

Healthy relationships are not defined by the absence of conflict.

They're defined by what happens next.

For decades I taught that principle to couples, families, and parents. As I looked back over a lifetime with dogs, I realized I'd been watching many of them do something remarkably similar. Not every dog responded to correction the same way. Just as not every child responds to discipline the same way...

Some of my dogs would lower their heads, tuck their ears back, avoid eye contact, and quietly walk away. If you have owned dogs, you've probably seen that posture. The correction registered. There was no question about that. The interesting part came later. Many of those same dogs came back.

Not because I called them.

Not because they expected a treat.

Not because they had forgotten what had happened.

They simply came back.

Sometimes they'd quietly brush against my leg.

Sometimes they'd lean their body into mine.

Sometimes they'd follow me from room to room without asking for anything.

Others would bounce into that unmistakable play bow every dog owner recognizes, almost as if they were saying,

"Come on...

Let's be us again."

That fascinated me. Not because they had been corrected. Because they appeared uncomfortable with the interruption in the relationship. The more dogs I lived with, the more I noticed something else. They didn't all attempt restoration the same way. Neither do we. Some dogs were quiet restorers. They simply stayed nearby until the emotional atmosphere softened. Others were persistent.

They nudged.

They licked.

They rested a paw on my leg.

They shadowed me through the house.

Different personalities.

Different repair strategies.

The same apparent objective.

Restore the relationship.

Let me share with you an example from my home. Let me stipulate up front that my wife and I have probably had two arguments in our entire marriage. And in case she ever reads this... I was wrong both times.

We don't yell at each other, but clearly the tone and temperature are noticeable. During one such occasion, we were standing in the kitchen having a 'conversation' when Bud entered and sat down on my foot facing my wife. My first thought was 'my backup finally arrived', but his posture and expression told me he was aware something unusual was happening and it made him uncomfortable.

I asked friends if they ever noticed what their family pets do when there's an argument?

What I learned was, not all dogs, but most had a similar response to family drama. Almost none had no reaction.

Some barked.

Some paced.

Some sat or stood between their people.

Some left the room.

That's when I realized I wasn't just watching dogs anymore. I was watching relationship.

Come to think of it, people aren't much different.

Some raise their voices (kinda bark).

Some pace.

Some sit.

Some leave the room.

Bud's personality directed him toward the tension and to position himself between his people. I would add that sitting on my foot clearly signaled he agreed I was right.

What was evident is that remarkably often, dogs reacted to emotional disruption in such a way that they appeared to be attempting to restore something that had been interrupted.

I can't tell you what they were thinking.

Good investigators resist assigning motives they cannot prove.

But I can tell you what I repeatedly observed. The correction clearly mattered.

But the interruption in the relationship seemed to matter more.

As a therapist, I eventually realized there is a question that predicts the health of almost every relationship.

Not...

"Do you have conflict?"

Every relationship does.

The better question is...

"What do you do after conflict?"

Do you move toward one another...

or away from one another?

Do you seek restoration...

or distance?

Looking back over a lifetime with dogs, I found myself asking exactly the same question.

Remarkably often...

they sought restoration.

Could there be simpler explanations?

Of course.

Perhaps they had learned that staying close eventually produced affection.

Perhaps experience had taught them that correction doesn't last forever.

Perhaps they simply wanted another treat.

Good investigators consider every reasonable explanation before drawing conclusions.

But those explanations never fully satisfied me.

Because I observed the same behavior when there was no reward.

No command.

No expectation of food.

Only a relationship that had briefly been interrupted.

And a dog that seemed determined to make it whole again.

Standing alone...

one dog returning after conflict proves nothing.

One observation never establishes a pattern.

But over the course of sixty years, I watched the same behavior appear in different breeds...

different personalities...

different homes...

police K-9s...

therapy dogs...

and family pets.

Each one responded differently.

Yet remarkably often...

they shared the same apparent objective.

Restore the relationship.

As an investigator, I can't tell you exactly what they were thinking.

As a therapist, I can tell you what that behavior consistently resembled.

And as I continued collecting evidence, I found myself asking a question I could no longer ignore.

Why would God create an animal that seems so deeply motivated to repair relationships with the people it loves?

The investigation continues.

EXHIBIT FOUR

The Joy Seekers

Question under investigation:

Why do dogs seek participation in our joy?

As I was writing this very chapter, something unexpected happened.

I laughed out loud at something while Bud was in another room.

Within seconds he came trotting in.

Not running.

Not barking.

Almost checking in.

He put his front feet on my knees and decided it would be a good idea if he jumped onto my lap.

I hadn't called him.

I wasn't offering him treats.

I wasn't asking him to play, and I was mildly anxious that a 200 pound therapist and an 80-pound Aussie might exceed the load-bearing limits of my office chair.

My laugh wasn't even loud. It was nothing more than a quick, quiet chuckle.

Yet somehow he always seemed to know that joy had broken out somewhere in the house...

and he wanted to be part of it.

His nub of a tail immediately began wagging.

His whole body seemed to smile.

Sometimes he'd lean against my leg.

Other times he'd dance around the room as though he had just arrived at a party.

And on special occasions, he decided he was a lap dog. Whether I agreed or not.

If I had observed that only once, I would have dismissed it.

But I hadn't.

I'd watched variations of the same behavior across multiple dogs over many years.

So I found myself writing another note in the case file.

That caught my attention.

The dog owner in me smiled.

The psychologist in me stopped.

The question wasn't whether Bud heard my laughter.

The question was why he moved toward joy.

Those are two very different questions.

One of the most fascinating areas of developmental psychology isn't language.

It isn't intelligence.

It's joy.

Researchers have spent decades studying what happens between an infant and a parent during moments of shared delight.

Long before babies understand words, they understand faces.

A smiling mother almost always produces a smiling baby.

A laughing father is often rewarded with laughter in return.

Those exchanges aren't simply adorable family moments.

Developmental psychologists recognize them as some of the earliest building blocks of secure attachment.

Through repeated cycles of shared positive emotion, infants gradually learn something extraordinary:

I am seen.

I matter.

My joy matters to someone else.

That research fascinated me because it explained something I had been observing in my own clinical work.

Researchers use different terms to describe these early emotional exchanges. Some emphasize social smiling. Others describe shared positive affect or affect attunement. More recently, researchers have focused on what are called serve-and-return interactions—the repeated back-and-forth exchanges that literally help build the architecture of a child's developing brain.

The terminology varies.

The conclusion does not.

Ladies and gentlemen, don't get distracted by the 'shrink' vocabulary.

Shared joy isn't merely an expression of healthy attachment. It helps create it.

Years ago, while researching early emotional development, I became fascinated by that process.

Eventually I developed what I called the **Joy Loop**.

A child does something.

A parent genuinely delights in it.

The parent expresses that delight.

The child experiences the parent's joyful response.

Gradually the child begins to internalize an extraordinary message:

I bring joy to someone I love.

That repeated emotional exchange doesn't simply create happy moments.

It helps build identity.

Security.

Connection.

Years later, I found myself wondering if I had been watching another version of that same process.

Not with children.

With dogs.

It wasn't simply that Bud wagged his tail when I came home.

Every dog owner expects that.

It was something much more subtle.

Joy itself seemed to attract him.

Whenever laughter broke out, he wanted to join it.

Not because I had invited him.

Because he appeared drawn toward positive emotion itself.

The psychologist in me immediately asked a different question than the dog owner in me.

Was Bud responding to the sound?

Or was he responding to the emotional state behind the sound?

Those are not the same questions.

If he were merely reacting to noise, I should have seen the same response when I coughed...
or sneezed...

or dropped a book.

I didn't.

I saw it when people laughed.

When excitement filled the room.

When happiness was shared.

Somehow my dogs appeared remarkably sensitive to those moments.

More than that...

they seemed eager to participate in them.

Developmental psychologists would likely describe part of what I observed as **shared positive affect** or **affective synchrony**—the natural tendency of social beings to align emotionally with one another. Many mammals exhibit forms of emotional contagion, automatically mirroring another's emotional state.

But I found myself wondering if my dogs were doing something beyond emotional mirroring.

They weren't simply becoming excited because I was excited.

They appeared to move toward joy.

They sought it.

They joined it.

They became participants rather than spectators.

That distinction may seem subtle.

I don't think it is.

I can't tell you what Bud was thinking.

Good investigators resist claiming more than the evidence allows.

I can only tell you what I repeatedly observed across multiple dogs over many years.

When joy appeared...

they often came looking for it.

They didn't need to be invited.

They wanted to participate.

Standing alone, that observation proves very little.

Placed beside everything we've already observed... their desire to attach, their remarkable sensitivity to social correction, and their persistent efforts to restore relationship after conflict—it becomes another independent line of evidence.

One more behavioral pattern.

One more recurring observation.

One more question demanding an explanation.

Perhaps dogs are not merely affectionate animals.

Perhaps they are uniquely oriented toward human relationship.

I can't prove that.

Not yet.

But the evidence continues to point in the same direction.

And once again...

it asks the jury for a verdict.

EXHIBIT 5: THE COMFORTERS

Question:

Why do dogs move toward human suffering?

The first time Juan found me crying...

I don't remember calling him.

In fact...

I'm quite certain I didn't.

He simply appeared.

Years later, I would watch therapy dogs do something remarkably similar with complete strangers.

No commands.

No introductions.

No explanation.

Just quiet movement toward someone who was hurting.

That raised another question.

How did they know?

Human Psychology

Psychologists have long understood that humans communicate emotion in ways that extend far beyond words.

We reveal sadness through our posture.

Our breathing.

The tension in our muscles.

The pace of our movements.

The expressions on our faces.

Sometimes...

we reveal it through nothing at all.

The absence of conversation.

The absence of laughter.

The absence of movement.

People who know us well often recognize those subtle changes long before we say, "I'm having a hard day."

Dogs appear to recognize them too.

Perhaps even more remarkably...

they often respond.

Scientists increasingly believe dogs detect emotional states through multiple channels simultaneously.

They read our faces.

They hear changes in our voices.

They observe our posture.

They detect changes in our movement.

Some evidence suggests they can even smell changes in our body chemistry associated with stress and emotional arousal.

None of that surprises me.

What surprises me...

is what they choose to do with that information.

They move closer.

Detection alone doesn't explain comfort. That's the part that kept drawing my attention.

Knowing someone is hurting...

and voluntarily entering that pain...

are two different behaviors.

One recognizes suffering.

The other participates in it.

That distinction continued to demand an explanation.

One emotional signal that kept drawing my attention was *grief*.

Not necessarily dramatic grief.

Not the kind that leaves us sobbing on the floor.

The quieter kind.

The kind we often try to hide.

As a therapist, I've spent thousands of hours sitting across from people carrying pain they never intended to reveal. One of the things experience teaches you is that people communicate far more than they realize. Long before they tell you they're hurting, you often see it.

Their shoulders sit a little lower.

Their movements slow.

Their voice loses some of its life.

They smile less.

Sometimes they stop smiling altogether.

Even silence has a different quality.

Emotion has a way of leaking out of us whether we intend it to or not.

Healthy people eventually learn to notice those changes when they encounter another person's pain...

Then I noticed something else.

They either move toward it...

or they move away from it.

Neither response necessarily makes them good or bad.

Some people become uncomfortable around suffering because they don't know what to say.

Others quietly change the subject.

Some keep their distance because another person's grief reminds them of their own.

It's understandable.

Pain has a way of making people uncomfortable.

But every now and then you meet someone who does something different.

They don't have the perfect words.

They don't solve the problem.

They simply move closer.

They sit beside you.

They put a hand on your shoulder.

They stay.

Looking back over a lifetime with dogs, I found myself noticing something remarkably similar.

Only more consistent.

Juan did it first.

Long before I became a psychologist...

long before therapy dogs became common...

Juan somehow knew when life inside our home had become too heavy for a little boy.

He never asked what was wrong.

He never tried to fix it.

He simply refused to let me hurt by myself.

Years later...

I watched other dogs do the same thing.

Not one dog.

Not one breed.

Many.

Sometimes I'd have a difficult counseling day and come home emotionally exhausted.

I hadn't said a word.

Yet one of my dogs would quietly settle beside me.

Not asking for anything.

Not demanding attention.

Just present.

Over the years I saw similar moments repeated with police K-9s...

therapy dogs...

family pets...

and my own dogs.

Different personalities.

Different histories.

The same remarkable tendency.

They moved toward pain.

That observation caught my attention.

Not because dogs can detect emotion.

Scientists have already demonstrated that dogs recognize human facial expressions, changes in voice, body posture, and even subtle shifts in our body chemistry.

Frankly, that doesn't surprise me.

Dogs live with us.

Of course they learn to read us.

What surprised me...

was what they did with the information.

They moved closer.

Bud and My Dad

The week after I lost my father was brutally difficult.

One day in particular, after all the final arrangements were handled, I couldn't sleep.

I sat alone at about 3AM in my office...

staring at my Bible open in front of me and tears I couldn't seem to release.

I sat in complete silence in a quiet house just feeling my grief.

Then I heard him coming down the stairs.

I hadn't called him... I hadn't moved... I hadn't made a sound.

Bud walked slowly into my office and sat next to me for what seemed like a few minutes.

I didn't engage with him. I just wasn't ready.

He wasn't doing his usual prodding for morning treats.

I could see him out of the corner of my eye...

Sitting motionless just looking up at me.

Then he rose and slowly moved forward, resting his head on my knee for what seemed like several minutes.

He didn't whine.

He didn't nudge.

He just looked at me with what I can only describe as *recognition*.

As if to say: *I know*.

I have spent decades studying human behavior..

And in that moment in my office, with Bud's head on my knee I began to suspect I may have been studying the wrong species.

That's the part I couldn't ignore.

Detecting suffering is one behavior.

Entering another's suffering is quite another.

A machine can detect sadness.

A thermometer can detect fever.

Neither one climbs onto the couch beside you.

Neither one quietly rests its head on your knee.

Neither one seems content simply to stay until something inside you begins to settle.

That is relationship.

Not treatment.

Not training.

Relationship.

As both a therapist and a former detective, I've learned to be careful about assigning motives.

I can't tell you what my dogs were thinking.

I can't tell you they understood grief the way people do.

Good investigators resist making claims the evidence cannot support.

I can only tell you what I repeatedly observed.

When people were laughing...

my dogs often joined the joy.

When people were hurting...

they often entered the hurt.

Not to fix it.

To share it.

Standing alone, that observation proves very little.

Placed beside everything we've already seen—their drive to attach, their desire to restore relationship after conflict, and their remarkable attraction to shared joy—it becomes another independent line of evidence.

Another behavioral pattern.

Another witness.

Another question that refuses to go away.

Perhaps dogs were designed for something far more profound than companionship.

Perhaps they were designed for relationship.

The investigation continues.

EXHIBIT SIX

Purpose and Self-Transcendence

Question Under Investigation

Why do dogs seem happiest when they have a purpose that serves someone besides themselves?

Witness: Vinny

Let's call Vinny back to the witness stand. You met him in Exhibit Two.

Vinny was my large Black-and-white Australian Shepherd, and he had appointed himself Director of Deliveries.

Mail.

FedEx.

Groceries.

Dry cleaning.

It didn't matter.

If it was on the porch or in your arms on the way into the house, it became Vinny's responsibility.

He wouldn't just walk whatever into the house either, he'd parade it in like a show dog, place it on his carpet square in the kitchen and wait for you to put it away.

Only then was his job complete.

And make no mistake – he was proud of his accomplishment. You could see it in his posture, his ears up, his attentive stare and expectation of a five-star review.

He didn't expect a treat. Or wait for praise. The job itself seemed to satisfy him.

That observation stayed with me because I'd seen it before. Not just in family dogs, but in police dogs.

Witness: Hank

Hank was one of the finest narcotics dogs I'd ever worked with. Finding drugs wasn't simply something Hank had been trained to do.

It appeared to become the purpose that energized him. The moment he located narcotics, everything about his posture changed.

He became animated.

Focused.

Alert.

He immediately looked to his handler as though saying,
"I found it."

Not because he wanted applause. Because completing the mission appeared deeply satisfying.

Watching Hank reminded me of Vinny.
Different work.
Different environment.
The same unmistakable pride.

Witness: Heinz

Then there was Heinz.

A Belgian Shepherd trained in Germany who understood only German commands.

Officer Richard Jackson and Heinz worked as partners. One night we responded to a robbery in progress. The suspect had disappeared into a dark warehouse.

As we searched between towering stacks of pallets, Heinz suddenly froze. He looked toward the pallets... then immediately back at Richard. A split second later the suspect burst from behind the pallets with a knife. Heinz launched without hesitation. He struck the suspect's knife arm and drove him to the floor.

What happened next fascinated me. Throughout the struggle Heinz kept looking up at Richard. Not at me. Not around the warehouse. Only at his partner.

He wasn't asking,
"Did I get him?"

He was waiting. Waiting for one thing. The command to release.

The moment Richard gave that command—in German—Heinz immediately let go. His mission wasn't to bite. His mission was to protect his partner. Everything else was secondary.

Witness Jaws

There was a theme park in the city where I worked, and one night rival gangs turned up in it at the same time.

There had already been a stabbing.

Several of us from the SWAT team were called in to provide extra security, which is a polite way of saying we were there to keep the rest of the night from happening.

A K-9 officer and his Rottweiler — I'll call him Jaws — had just broken up a fight.

The two combatants were standing in front of us while the officer filled out field identification cards. Ordinary paperwork. The least interesting part of the job.

About a dozen of their associates stood off to the side, watching us work.

Jaws wasn't watching the two men we were interviewing.

He was watching the group.

His handler noticed. He gave Jaws a glance — no word, no command, just a look that meant *eyes here*.

The kind of thing that passes between partners who have worked together long enough to stop needing language.

Jaws came back to the pair in front of us.

Briefly.

Then he turned back to the group.

He came up out of his sit into alert and locked onto one man.

Not the group. One man in it.

Now, I want to be careful here, because this is the part that was most interesting.

Reading people is what we do.

Officers are trained to watch for furtive movement.

The hand that drifts toward the waistband.

A hand in a jacket pocket.

Crossed arms to keep a jacket from opening and revealing a weapon.

The subject who glances at his own weapon without realizing he's doing it.

The one who begins measuring the distance to the nearest exit.

There were several of us standing in that light, all of us doing exactly that, all of us looking at the same dozen men.

None of us saw a thing.

The dog did.

Jaws started inching toward him on the long lead. Slowly. Deliberately. Never breaking his stare.

And that was when the subject began to look nervous.

Not before. After.

His handler knew what that meant. You work alongside a dog long enough and you stop asking him to explain himself.

We moved toward the group.

The subject ran.

A short distance ahead of us, still running, he pulled a handgun from his waistband and threw it into the bushes.

That was enough. The officer stopped, unclipped the lead from Jaws' collar, and gave a command in German that I could only assume translated to *dinner is served*.

Jaws caught him and took him to the ground.

We cuffed him, recovered the weapon, and made the arrest.

Here is what I have never been able to explain away.

Whatever Jaws saw in that man, it was there the entire time.

Some tension in the posture.

Some hand held a half-inch closer to the waistband than it needed to be.

Something in his eyes.

Some quality of stillness that belongs to a man who knows he is armed in front of police officers.

It was there in plain sight, in front of trained observers who are paid to see it.

And we missed it.

A dog on a lead, told once to look somewhere else, did not.
A dozen men stood in that group.

One of them had a gun.

Four or five trained officers looked at that group and saw a dozen men.

Jaws saw one.

Over the years I watched that same pattern again and again. Police dogs weren't merely performing a trained behavior.

They appeared deeply invested in completing a purpose.

Even afterward, their bodies remained flooded with adrenaline for extended periods, much like the physiological recovery we see in people after intense stress.

Witness: Gracie

Author's note: Names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of patients, colleagues, and their families.

Not every dog with a job wears a badge.

Some of them work in hospitals.

During my internship, one of the psychologists in the building brought her dog to work. Gracie was a golden retriever with a graying muzzle, and she had the run of the place.

She sat in on group sessions the way a senior staff member might — regularly, without being invited, and with the settled confidence of someone who had been there longer than I had.

Mostly she slept.

Group would begin, and Gracie would find her spot on the carpet and go out like a light.

Patients loved her.

Then one morning I watched her work.

There were nine or ten of us in the circle. Someone across the room was talking about something ordinary — her work that week, I think.

Nothing in her voice suggested distress. Nothing in her posture did either.

I want to be careful here, because this is the part that matters.

I was an intern being trained to notice exactly this.

Breathing that shortens.

A tighter grip on the arm of the chair.

Shifting posture.

The particular way a sentence trails off when someone is beginning to lose the thread.

There were two supervising therapists in that room doing the same thing.

There was nothing to notice.

Gracie lifted her head.

She got up, crossed the circle without hurrying, and rested her head in that woman's lap.

She didn't whine.

She didn't paw.

She simply put her head down and stayed there.

A minute later, the panic attack arrived.
The woman's hands started shaking.

Her breathing went shallow and fast.

She said she couldn't get enough air — the thing people always say.

And a dog was already in her lap.

Not arriving. Already there.

Consider what Gracie passed over.

There were nine other people in that circle.

Any one of them would have been glad to have her. I would have been thrilled to take a mental break and pet her.

She had been asleep on a warm floor.

Nobody called her.

Nobody signaled her.

There was no treat waiting, no command given, no handler watching to see whether she performed.

She left something comfortable, crossed a room full of people who wanted her, and went to the one who didn't know yet that she needed her.

Afterward I asked her doctor owner how often that happened.

She looked at me the way people look at you when you've asked whether water is wet.

"That's why she's in there," she said. "That's her superpower."

Vinny carried packages.

Hank found narcotics.

Heinz protected his partner.

Each of them had something to complete.

An object to deliver.

A scent to locate.
A threat to stop.

You could identify the finished work.

Gracie had none of that.

Her assignment was one woman in a circle of ten, who had not asked for anything, and who did not yet know she needed help.

There was nothing to carry.

Nothing to find.

Nothing to subdue.

The work was a person.

And she chose the right one.

Witness: Abraham Maslow

Years later, while reflecting on the behaviors I had observed in dogs, I found myself returning to the work of psychologist Abraham Maslow.

Psychologists have spent decades trying to understand what gives human life its deepest sense of fulfillment. Near the end of his career, Maslow concluded that our highest motivation wasn't merely personal achievement or even reaching our individual potential. It was what he called **self-transcendence**—finding meaning through purpose, service, sacrifice, and contributing to something larger than ourselves.

If you're spiritually minded, you may find it interesting that Maslow's later work became surprisingly compatible with a biblical worldview. He came to believe that the highest expressions of humanity move beyond self toward love, service, meaning, and sacrifice—ideas that resonate strongly with Scripture.

I wasn't reading Maslow because I thought his hierarchy explained dogs. I was reading him because I couldn't stop noticing how often the behaviors I had observed in dogs seemed to resemble those same relational themes.

That gave me pause.
Not because dogs are human.
Not because Maslow intended his theory to describe animals.
But because the behavioral parallels were difficult to ignore.

Maslow described humanity's highest motivations this way:

- Purpose
- Meaning
- Service
- Sacrifice
- Contributing to something larger than oneself
- Love that extends beyond self-interest

Now think back through the evidence we've already heard. Individually, those observations might seem ordinary, but are they?

Vinny found obvious satisfaction in faithfully serving his family.

Hank seemed energized by successfully completing the work he had been trained to do.

Heinz willingly placed himself between danger and his partner, remaining focused on his mission until released.

No, I'm not suggesting Abraham Maslow intended his hierarchy to describe dogs. I'm suggesting something much simpler.

The same behavioral characteristics psychology eventually identified as some of humanity's highest motivations repeatedly appeared in the dogs I had observed throughout my life.

By itself, one of those behaviors might simply be an interesting coincidence. Two might still be dismissed.

But as the exhibits accumulate, the evidence keeps pointing in the same direction. These aren't isolated canine behaviors. They're a remarkably consistent pattern of relationship, service, and purpose.

Dogs repeatedly display a constellation of relational behaviors remarkably similar to those psychology has spent generations identifying as central to healthy human flourishing.

As both a therapist and a former detective, I have learned to be cautious whenever independent lines of evidence begin pointing toward the same conclusion.

I'm not asking you to accept my conclusion.
I'm simply asking you to consider the evidence.

History documents the exploits of dogs in war—their devotion to the mission, their apparent sense of purpose, and their willingness to sacrifice their lives for the person they serve.

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, whether we're talking about a dog who proudly carries groceries into the house or one willing to risk its life protecting its partner, I submit that the question is no longer whether these behaviors exist.

The question is what they mean.

Or perhaps another question: *Why would God create one particular animal that repeatedly exhibits so many of the very behaviors psychology associates with our deepest fulfillment if those capacities were never intended to point beyond mere survival?*

EXHIBIT SEVEN

Guilt, Shame and Relational Awareness

Question Under Investigation

Why do dogs display what millions of owners immediately recognize as a guilt response—even before they've been confronted?

Witness: Bud

If you've ever owned a dog, you already know "the look."

You don't need a psychology degree.

You don't need a veterinarian.

You don't need an animal behaviorist.

You simply walk into the room and immediately know something has happened.

Maybe the trash can has been tipped over.

Maybe your favorite shoe has been customized.

Maybe the Thanksgiving turkey is mysteriously missing drumsticks.

Before you've even discovered the evidence... your dog has.

Head lowered.

Eyes looking away.

Ears folded back.

Body lowered.

Movement suddenly slower than usual.

Dog owners everywhere smile. "We've been here before." They call it **the guilty look**.

Bud gave me that look one afternoon.

I walked into the room, and Bud was reclining on his back on his usual spot on the sofa.

I hadn't said a word, but I could tell something was up.

His head lowered.

His eyes gazed downward.

Then up at me. Then downward again.

Uh-oh. Where's the crime scene?

With most dogs I've had, I don't have to canvas the house to locate the crime scene – if I wait a moment, they'll show me exactly where the crime took place. Bud's eyes glanced briefly to the corner of the room and then he put his head on his paws and looked the opposite direction like, "Nothing to see here."

There it was. My wife's favorite plush holiday Easter bunny lying partially behind a chair surrounded by white stuffing. Clearly a crime of passion took place here.

A little context might be helpful. My wife breaks out that same glasses wearing bunny in a dress with its Happy Easter sign every Easter. I'm not a fan. Not just this bunny, but all the plushy, knickknack, wooden sign, wall-hanging clutter that I have to risk life and allergies navigating the attic ladder carrying 40lb plastic tubs on each of the seemingly 300 holidays a year.

Honestly, there was a small part of me hoping Bud might eventually solve my seasonal decorating problem, but he was far too preoccupied worrying whether he'd been caught to notice my rather Grinch-like smile.

Most dogs, like bad poker players, have a 'tell'. As an investigator, we called it a 'consciousness of guilt' – a unique expression, body posture, and shifting eye movements that would say more than words. Bud confessed to his crime before I even knew the crime had been committed.

Witness: Psychology

The "guilty look" has fascinated psychologists and animal behaviorists for years.

Most agree the behavior itself is real.

The debate is what it means.

Developmental psychologists have also spent decades studying the emergence of guilt and shame in young children. Long before children can fully explain moral reasoning or understand ethical principles, many begin displaying recognizable behaviors after violating an important relational expectation. They avert their gaze. They lower their heads. They hide. They attempt to repair the damage or restore the relationship.

Researchers continue debating exactly how much of that response is biologically prepared and how much is learned through experience.

The debate continues.

The observation does not.

The capacity for these guilt- and shame-related behaviors appears remarkably early in human development.

One reason the guilty look fascinates psychologists is that guilt- and shame-related behaviors are generally regarded as complex social emotions. They require an awareness of relationships, social expectations, and the consequences of violating them. Whether dogs experience those emotions in the same way humans do remains debated. What is not debated is that the behavior itself resembles responses we normally associate with sophisticated social interaction.

Unlike simple fear responses, these behaviors are fundamentally relational. They emerge in the context of attachment, shared expectations, and the recognition that an important relationship may have been disrupted. That's precisely what makes them so intriguing to psychologists—and what made Bud's response so intriguing to me.

Some researchers believe dogs are simply reading subtle human cues—our facial expressions, posture, voice, or body language—and anticipating correction before it occurs.

Others—including me—wonder whether that explanation accounts for every observation.

Bud made me curious because his behavior changed before I had spoken a single word and before I knew what he'd done.

One observation doesn't settle the question.

But when the same behavior appears repeatedly across different dogs, breeds, homes, and owners, investigators begin paying attention.

Whether we're observing toddlers... adults... or dogs... the timing of the behavioral response continues to intrigue me.

Perhaps the more interesting question isn't whether dogs experience guilt exactly as humans do. Perhaps it's whether they possess an extraordinary sensitivity to relational disruption that consistently produces behaviors we normally associate with guilt and shame.

What exactly triggers the guilty look in dogs? Is it learned anticipation of correction... or are we seeing another expression of the remarkable relational design we've been observing throughout this investigation?

Witness: Genesis

One of the most fascinating moments in Scripture occurs immediately after Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit.

They had been clearly warned not to eat from the tree. They knew a boundary had been crossed.

What has always fascinated me isn't the command. It's their response. Before God speaks a single word of judgment... before punishment is announced... before anyone confronts them... they hide.

They cover themselves. They withdraw from the relationship they had previously enjoyed.

Whether we describe that internal experience as guilt, shame, moral awareness, or something else is open to discussion.

The observation itself is much simpler.

Their behavior changed before the confrontation.

That timing caught my attention. Not because dogs are people. But because timing matters.

I've learned that *behavior* often reveals something important long before anyone can fully explain what is happening internally.

For the Christian, this raises an intriguing possibility.

God created human beings with the capacity to recognize when an important relational boundary had been violated and the relationship was in jeopardy.

Adam and Eve didn't have to be taught to hide. They didn't need a lecture on shame. Something within them immediately recognized that the relationship was in jeopardy by their actions, and their behavior reflected it.

I'm not suggesting dogs possess a human conscience. Nor am I suggesting that Bud experienced guilt exactly as Adam and Eve did.

I'm asking a different question.

Could God also have designed dogs with an unusual capacity to recognize and respond to the relational world of human beings?

Dogs certainly learn our routines.

They learn our commands.

They learn our expectations.

But learning alone may not fully explain why dogs seem so remarkably prepared to understand and respond to our emotional and relational lives.

Perhaps the more important question isn't whether Bud experienced guilt exactly as I do.

Perhaps it's why dogs appear so extraordinarily sensitive to relational disruption with us in the first place.

Witness: The Detective

As both a detective and a therapist, I've learned that timing often tells us as much as behavior itself.

If a suspect begins hiding evidence before investigators arrive...

I pay attention.

If a child begins apologizing or explaining before a parent has spoken...

I pay attention.

And when a dog changes its posture before a single correction has been given...

I pay attention.

I'm not prepared to tell you exactly what the dog is experiencing.

I am prepared to say the behavior deserves careful investigation.

Closing Argument

Dog owners call it the guilty look.

Parents call it busted.

In criminal investigations, detectives recognize behaviors that police and prosecutors often describe as evidence of a consciousness of guilt—actions like fleeing, concealing evidence, or attempting to avoid detection. Those behaviors don't prove guilt by themselves, but they are considered meaningful enough to investigate.

Psychologists approach the same canine behavior more cautiously. They ask whether it reflects learned anticipation, appeasement, fear, or another emotional process entirely.

Different disciplines use different language.

They're all trying to explain the same observable phenomenon.

Throughout this investigation, I've become less interested in whether dogs experience human emotions exactly as we do and more interested in something else. They repeatedly respond to the very relational moments psychologists consider central to healthy human development—attachment, joy, comfort, service, and now, the apparent recognition that a relationship has been disrupted.

As we've done throughout this investigation, I'm less interested in assigning a label than in understanding the behavior.

The question is no longer whether the behavior exists.

Millions of dog owners have witnessed it.

The question is simply this:

What does it mean?

EXHIBIT EIGHT

Celebration

Question Under Investigation: Why do dogs appear to celebrate our return?

Witnesses: Bud and Blushy

Think about it.

A spouse comes home.

Kids come home.

Dogs come home.

Who celebrates the most?

Dogs.

Every.

Single.

Time.

They're not merely recognizing arrival.

They're expressing delight in reunion.

Humans admire people who make others feel genuinely welcomed.

Dogs seem naturally gifted at it.

I've often wondered what Bud thinks happens every time I leave the house. And let's just go ahead and enter into the record that I feel twinges of guilt each time I leave him because he used to experience separation anxiety before we found Blushy (technically my wife's dog, but we all recognize we got her as Bud's therapy friend).

He doesn't know whether I'm running to the grocery store, meeting a client, teaching at church, or simply taking the trash to the curb.

He only knows one thing. For a period of time... I'm gone. Then something remarkable happens. The garage door opens. Before I've reached the kitchen... Bud is already

celebrating. Tail (at least what's left of it) wagging furiously. Body twisting into shapes no orthopedic surgeon would recommend. Eyes bright.

Blushy celebrates differently.

Bud greets me with all the subtlety of a linebacker. There's about a fifty-percent chance I'm about to become a tackling dummy followed by a full-face wash.

Blushy gets just as excited, but she does something none of my dogs has ever done. She smiles. I don't mean she simply looks happy. She actually curls back both her upper and lower lips into a huge, "Check it out! These are all my teeth!" smile. It makes me laugh every single time.

It isn't simply the enthusiasm that fascinates me. It's the consistency. I've come home thousands of times. Bud and Blushy have celebrated thousands of reunions. They've never once greeted me with, "Oh...were you gone?"

Witness: Psychology

At first glance, this could be dismissed as simple excitement.

Many animals become excited when they anticipate a reward.

My koi gather at the surface when I approach the pond.

A horse nickers when grain arrives.

A hamster may become active when it hears the person who usually brings food.

Those are perfectly normal conditioned responses.

Dogs certainly learn routines as well. No argument there. But their reunion behavior demands a closer look.

Many dogs celebrate just as enthusiastically after they've already eaten.

They celebrate when their owner returns empty-handed.

They celebrate after an absence of five minutes...

five hours... or even years, as we've all seen when military veterans return home.

Those reunions move millions of people to tears. Why? Because something far deeper than excitement appears to be taking place. That raises a different question.

What exactly are they celebrating?

Developmental psychologists have long recognized that one of the clearest indicators of healthy attachment is not merely distress during separation. It's joy during reunion.

Attachment is measured not only by proximity.

It is also reflected in the intensity and warmth of reunion after separation.

That observation caught my attention.

Perhaps celebration is more than excitement.

Perhaps celebration is the visible expression of attachment restored.

One of the clearest indicators of secure attachment isn't simply proximity.
It's reunion.

Infants who form secure attachments don't merely enjoy being with their caregivers. After a separation, they actively seek them out again.

The reunion matters because it reveals something the separation alone cannot.

This person matters to me.

That made me wonder.

If reunion is one of the clearest expressions of healthy human attachment... why do dogs display one of the most enthusiastic reunion responses in the animal kingdom?

Witness: Separation

We naturally notice the celebration.

We rarely stop to think about what *produced it*.

Every celebration tells us something happened before the front door opened. Someone mattered enough to be missed. Every celebration is evidence of an earlier separation. Celebration doesn't create attachment.

Attachment creates celebration.

The greater the significance of the relationship... the greater the joy when that relationship is restored.

I'm not suggesting dogs experience absence exactly as humans do. I'm suggesting something much simpler. Their behavior consistently suggests that our presence matters to them. Perhaps the celebration itself isn't the mystery. Perhaps the mystery is why reunion seems to matter so deeply to dogs in the first place. Perhaps the more important question is this: **Why does one particular person matter so much?**

Witness: Scripture

One of the recurring themes throughout Scripture is the joy of reunion.

A shepherd rejoices when the lost sheep is found.

A father runs toward his returning son.

Heaven itself is often described in terms of joyful reunion rather than mere arrival.

The point isn't that dogs understand redemption. They don't.

The point is that reunion is one of God's most powerful relational experiences.

Perhaps it shouldn't surprise us that the animal uniquely designed to share our daily lives repeatedly celebrates one of life's deepest relational moments.

Witness: The Detective

I mentioned earlier that I worked with police K-9s while serving in Vice, Narcotics, SWAT, and Patrol. Some of the dogs remained comfortably kenneled at the station, and all of us interacted with them throughout our shifts.

I'm not saying I occasionally slipped them a snack... but unless you have photographs, I'll deny everything.

Every officer could pet them. Every officer could talk to them. Every officer could sneak them a treat. They liked all of us.

But when **their** handler walked through the door... everything changed. The excitement immediately shifted toward one person. Reward alone couldn't explain that. Preference did.

As both a detective and a therapist, I've learned to pay close attention to repeated behaviors.

One enthusiastic greeting proves very little.

Thousands of nearly identical greetings... across different homes... different breeds... different owners... begin to tell a story. The consistency becomes evidence. Not of what dogs are thinking. But of what repeatedly matters to them.

Closing Argument

Most explanations for reunion behavior begin with reward.

Food.

Treats.

Play.

Attention.

Those explanations certainly account for part of what we observe.

But I wonder if they account for all of it.

Throughout this investigation we've repeatedly observed dogs responding to the most important moments in human relationships.

Attachment.

Restoration.

Shared joy.

Comfort.

Purpose.

Relational awareness.

Now...

Reunion.

One exhibit might be coincidence.

Two might still be explained away.

But with each new exhibit, the evidence keeps pointing in the same direction. These aren't isolated canine behaviors. Together they form a remarkably consistent relational profile.

They're a remarkably consistent pattern of relationship.

As we've done throughout this investigation, I'm less interested in assigning labels than in understanding behavior.

The question is no longer whether dogs celebrate our return. Millions of families have witnessed that. The deeper question is this:

Why does one species so consistently mirror the very relational experiences psychology identifies as central to healthy human flourishing?

Why do they attach...

miss us...

restore...

comfort...

serve...

celebrate... and appear to recognize relational disruption?

Taken individually, each of these behaviors can be explained in several ways. Taken together, they begin to describe something far more difficult to dismiss.

Perhaps the celebration isn't the mystery.

Perhaps the mystery is why dogs seem uniquely designed to enter so deeply into the relational world of human beings. Dogs don't merely adapt to our environment. They consistently orient themselves toward our relationships. That is precisely what has kept this investigation going.

EXHIBIT NINE

Reciprocity

Question Under Investigation: Why does the relationship between dogs and humans seem to benefit both?

Witness: Everyday Life

Healthy relationships have something in common.

They aren't one-sided.

A good marriage changes both husband and wife.

Parents shape their children.

Children reshape their parents as well.

Close friendships leave both people different than they were before they met.

The healthiest relationships aren't measured by what one person receives.

They're measured by what both become together.

That made me wonder.

Have we been asking the wrong question about dogs?

For years we've asked,

"What do dogs do for people?"

Perhaps a better question is,

What kind of relationship did God create between us?

Witness: Bud

Most afternoons (almost always), Bud settles beneath my desk while I work.

He isn't asking for anything.

He isn't asking to go outside.

He isn't waiting for me to ask if he wants to go get a burger.

Full disclosure. Once a week (okay...maybe three times a week), the Buds race to my car and I drive them through McDonald's. They stick their heads out the windows and greet everybody. I know fast food isn't exactly a health food for dogs, but one burger patty shared between two Australian Shepherds brings all of us joy—including the McDonald's staff.

I've never doubted Bud derives comfort from being under my desk. Day after day, it's where he chooses to be. Still, it gets pretty warm in my office and it couldn't possibly be the most comfortable place for him to be.

He's bonded to me, and being close is something he chooses.

What I started to consider was something much more personal.

What do I receive from Bud being there?

The first thing I noticed was surprisingly simple.

If Bud wasn't under my desk... I noticed. If he chose another room... nothing was wrong... but something was missing. Not dramatically. Just enough that I'd glance down before pushing my chair back to be sure I didn't roll into him, then wonder where he'd gone.

That surprised me.

If he moves to another room...that's perfectly fine. But somehow, in my mind... Bud belongs under my desk. His presence has quietly become part of what feels normal.

My office doesn't seem quite as empty when he's there. The work somehow feels less isolated. The room itself feels different. And I have someone to bounce ideas off without judgment. Bud is very agreeable.

Then I realized something else. It wasn't merely that I enjoyed Bud's company. I was genuinely happier and more at peace because he was there.

Nothing had changed. No conversation. No interaction. No game of fetch. Just... presence. For reasons I still can't fully explain, everything simply felt more complete. At first, I assumed what I was experiencing was simply emotional.

I never imagined it might also be biological.

Then I started reading the research.

Scientists have discovered that the relationship between a person and a familiar dog isn't merely psychological. It appears to be biological as well.

Researchers have found that positive interaction between dogs and their owners is associated with measurable biological changes in both species. Levels of oxytocin—the hormone most closely associated with trust, attachment, and bonding—often increase, while stress hormones such as cortisol tend to decrease. Even quiet moments together can produce measurable physiological changes.

That fascinated me. It suggested that what Bud and I experienced with him under my desk might not simply have been companionship. Our biology may have been responding to one another. That means the relationship isn't occurring only in our hearts and minds. It's occurring in our bodies as well.

I don't know exactly what was happening inside Bud's brain while he quietly slept at my feet. And I certainly wasn't thinking about hormones while trying to finish patient notes.

But the more I studied the science, the more remarkable the relationship appeared. It wasn't simply that I enjoyed Bud's company. My body may actually have been responding to his presence. And perhaps... Bud's body was responding to mine.

The relationship itself appeared to be shaping both of us. Perhaps relationship *reciprocity* isn't merely emotional. Perhaps God designed this relationship so deeply that it is reflected in the biology of both species.

It occurred to me that I wasn't simply providing companionship for Bud. Bud was providing just as much companionship for me. We were quietly giving one another the very same gift.

Maybe that's true in every healthy relationship. Eventually we stop asking, "*What are we doing together?*" and begin appreciating, "*I'm simply glad you're here.*"

Healthy relationships eventually reach a point where presence itself becomes the gift. Perhaps that's one of God's quietest miracles. He didn't simply create a remarkable animal. He created a remarkable relationship. One in which simply being together quietly enriches both lives.

Witness: Psychology

Psychologists have long understood that healthy relationships are reciprocal.

Parents influence children. Children reshape parents. Strong marriages change both husband and wife. Close friendships influence both people. Healthy relationships rarely move in only one direction. That principle made me reconsider the relationship between people and dogs.

For years we've documented what dogs receive from us.

Food.

Protection.

Affection.

Security.

But we now know something equally important. People receive measurable psychological and biological benefits as well. The relationship doesn't merely benefit the dog.

It appears to benefit both. That struck me as unusual.

Witness: Therapy Dogs

One of the clearest demonstrations of reciprocity isn't found in a laboratory.

It's found every day in hospitals, rehabilitation centers, pediatric units, and nursing homes.

Therapy dogs now visit frightened children awaiting surgery.

They sit quietly beside patients receiving chemotherapy.

They comfort veterans struggling with trauma.

They encourage stroke patients through difficult rehabilitation.

They patiently visit residents who haven't had family visitors in weeks.

Different patients.

Different illnesses.

Different settings.

The same remarkable pattern.

The benefits to patients have become well documented.

Anxiety often decreases.

Blood pressure may fall.

Loneliness lessens.

Children become more willing to participate in therapy.

Patients frequently smile, laugh, and engage with caregivers in ways they hadn't just moments before.

That's remarkable.

But something else quietly happens.

The dog isn't the only one changing the room.

The frightened child smiles.

The parents exhale.

The nurse smiles.

The physician pauses for a moment to scratch the dog's ears before moving on to the next patient.

Therapists linger a little longer.

The emotional atmosphere itself begins to change.

Several hospitals have even recognized that therapy dogs don't merely benefit patients. They also reduce stress and improve morale among healthcare professionals who spend their days caring for others.

One relationship.

Three beneficiaries.

The patient.

The caregiver.

The dog.

Then another question quietly emerged.

What does the dog receive?

Anyone who has spent time around experienced therapy dogs notices something else.

Most don't appear reluctant to go to work.

They often pull toward the hospital entrance.

Their tails wag.

Their attention sharpens.

They appear eager to greet the very people they're there to comfort.

I'm careful not to project human emotions onto dogs.

I can't know exactly what they're experiencing internally.

But I also can't ignore what I've repeatedly observed.

The relationship appears to enrich everyone it touches.

Perhaps that's what reciprocity looks like.

Not one life changing another... but one relationship quietly enriching everyone within its reach.

Witness: Scripture

From the opening pages of Scripture, relationship is presented as part of God's design.

"It is not good for the man to be alone."

Human beings were created for relationship.

With God.

With one another.

Throughout the Bible, healthy relationships are rarely one-sided.

Parents nurture children.

Children bring joy to parents.

Friends strengthen one another.

The church is called the body of Christ because every member both gives and receives.

Even our relationship with God reflects this beautiful pattern.

"We love because He first loved us."

The Bible also reminds us that every good and perfect gift comes from above.

That made me wonder.

Perhaps one of God's most remarkable gifts wasn't simply the creation of dogs.

Perhaps it was the creation of a relationship unlike any other in the natural world.

Not because dogs are human.

Not because humans are dogs.

But because two very different creatures appear capable of quietly enriching one another's lives in extraordinary ways.

Perhaps reciprocity wasn't an accident.

Perhaps it was part of the design.

Closing Argument

Throughout this investigation we've repeatedly encountered the same pattern.

Different dogs.

Different situations.

Different families.

Different settings.

The same remarkable observation.

Again and again, the relationship appears to benefit both participants.

At first, I thought I was simply documenting what dogs do for people.

The further I investigated... the more I began asking what people do for dogs. Somewhere along the way, the question quietly changed.

Perhaps the most remarkable part of this relationship isn't what either species receives. Perhaps it's what they become together.

As we've done throughout this investigation, I'm less interested in assigning labels than in understanding behavior. The evidence suggests that this relationship is more than practical.

More than convenient.

More than companionship.

It appears to be reciprocal.

Each quietly enriching the life of the other.

That observation raises another question. One that reaches beyond psychology.

Beyond biology.

And perhaps... even beyond dogs.

Why would one relationship in the natural world consistently display this kind of mutual enrichment?

I don't think we've reached the final answer yet.

But I do think we've uncovered another piece of the evidence that may prove important to the case.

EXHIBIT TEN

Waiting

Question Under Investigation: Why do dogs wait?

Not simply at doors—which many do.

Not simply at windows.

But with such remarkable expectation.

Over the years I've watched Blushy (our older therapy dog for Bud) wait when my wife leaves in ways that make me feel just a little sorry for her.

She waits at whichever door Jan used to leave the house.

Blushy has developed a ritual.

Every afternoon it unfolds almost exactly the same way.

Here's the part that fascinates me.

She doesn't alert to every vehicle passing the house.

She alerts to minivans.

She can't see them.

She hears them.

Having participated in hundreds of police surveillances, I can appreciate recognizing a vehicle by the sound its tires make on pavement.

Lower frequencies often suggest a heavier vehicle.

Wider tires and tire tread produce a different sound than narrow ones.

That's about where my hearing IQ ends.

Blushie's begins.

She hears minivans.

Her ears perk up.

She sits up.

She presses her nose against the door.

Then she waits.

Sometimes... disappointment.

Wrong minivan.

Lest you think she's a savant, she can't distinguish the make.

The model year.

Or even the color.

She simply knows...

"That's not Mom."

At first, I never thought much about it.

Waiting simply seemed like another one of those charming things dogs do.

Then I began asking a different question.

Why do they wait at all?

More importantly...

What are they waiting for?

Waiting isn't a command.

No one teaches a dog to stare out a window when we leave.

No one trains a dog to return to the same doorway every afternoon.

Waiting appears to be one of attachment's most natural behaviors.

The stronger the attachment...

the stronger the expectation of reunion seems to become.

That observation fascinated me.

Because waiting isn't merely standing still. Waiting assumes something.

Children wait for Christmas because they believe Christmas is coming.

A wife waits for her husband because she believes he'll come home.

Parents wait outside an operating room because they hope to hear good news.

Waiting isn't passive.

Waiting is *hope* expressed through *expectation*.

Could dogs be expressing something similar?

Not human hope.

Not theological hope.

But something every dog owner immediately recognizes.

The expectation that the person they love will return.

Perhaps waiting is simply what love looks like when two companions are temporarily separated.

Perhaps waiting is simply the quiet expectation that love will soon become reunion again.

Witness: Psychology

Psychologists have long recognized that strong attachment changes behavior during separation.

Children repeatedly ask when Mom or Dad will be home.

They look out windows.

They wait.

Dogs display surprisingly similar attachment behaviors.

Researchers have documented that dogs monitor departures and arrivals, have a rough idea what time it's supposed to happen, orient themselves toward places where their owners typically return, become distressed during prolonged separation, and enthusiastically celebrate reunion.

Some dogs, like Bud, experience significant separation anxiety.

Others simply wait quietly like Blushie.

Researchers are careful not to claim dogs think exactly as humans do.

Neither am I.

But they do agree on something important.

Attachment changes behavior.

The stronger the attachment... the stronger the expectation of reunion appears to become.

Perhaps waiting is simply attachment made visible.

Witness: Hachikō

One story has captured the world's imagination for nearly a century.

His name was Hachikō.

Every morning he walked his owner, Professor Hidesaburō Ueno, to the train station in Tokyo.

Every afternoon he returned to meet him.

Then one afternoon, Professor Ueno collapsed and died suddenly while at work.

He never came home.

Hachikō didn't know that.

The next afternoon he returned to the station.

And waited.

The day after that...

he waited again.

Then the next day.

And the next.

For nearly ten years.

Eventually people began noticing.

Shopkeepers fed him.

Commuters recognized him.

Newspapers told his story.

Today a bronze statue stands outside Shibuya Station—not because Hachikō performed some remarkable feat... but because he never stopped waiting.

People from around the world continue visiting that statue.

I've often wondered why.

It's certainly not the attraction of a train station.

Perhaps because, instinctively, we all recognize what waiting represents.

Loyalty.

Hope.

Love refusing to let go.

The quiet belief that love is stronger than absence and that waiting will someday become reunion.

Witness: Scripture

Throughout Scripture, waiting is rarely portrayed as passive.

It is one of love's greatest demonstrations.

Those who love remain faithful during absence because they trust the relationship more than the silence.

Abraham waited.

Israel waited.

The prophets waited.

The disciples waited.

Today, Christians still wait.

Not because we enjoy waiting.

Not because waiting is easy.

But because love perseveres.

The Christian life is lived between two reunions.

Christ came.

Christ ascended.

And now, those who love Him wait with the confident expectation that He will come again.

Hope, in Scripture, is never wishful thinking.

It is confident expectation rooted in the faithfulness of the One who made the promise.

That observation fascinated me.

Dogs don't appear to wait because someone told them to.

They wait because attachment has created expectation.

The relationship itself gives them reason to believe that absence is temporary.

I'm not suggesting dogs possess Christian faith.

They don't.

But I can't help noticing that one of their most recognizable behaviors quietly mirrors one of Scripture's deepest relational themes.

Love remains faithful.

Love perseveres.

Love waits.

And hope looks toward reunion.

Perhaps that's why waiting has always moved the human heart.

Perhaps faithful waiting only exists where love already lives.

Closing Argument

Throughout this investigation I've repeatedly asked what dogs reveal about relationships.

This exhibit may have asked the deepest question yet.

Why do they wait?

Waiting makes very little sense without *expectation*.

Children wait because they expect a parent.

Spouses wait because they expect someone they love.

Dogs wait because they expect the person to whom they've become attached.

Perhaps that's why stories like Hachikō continue to move people around the world.

His story isn't really about a train station.

It's about a relationship.

As we've done throughout this investigation, I'm less interested in assigning human thoughts to dogs than in carefully observing their behavior.

The evidence suggests that dogs don't merely accompany us through life.

They spend much of their lives...

waiting for us.

And somewhere along the way, I realized something else.

Perhaps that's why **Waiting at the Gate** eventually became more than the title of a book.

It became a description of what faithful love has always done.

Love remains faithful.

Love perseveres.

Love waits.

And hope patiently anticipates reunion.

Not because I can prove what waits beyond death.

Some things belong to evidence.

Others belong to faith and hope.

But because every day I've watched remarkable creatures quietly remind me that love doesn't disappear simply because someone is absent.

Sometimes...

it waits.

EXHIBIT 11

SCIENCE TAKES THE STAND

Throughout this investigation I've asked the reader to consider observations.

Not conclusions.

Not assumptions.

Observations.

We've watched dogs attach.

Comfort.

Celebrate.

Wait.

Restore relationships.

Demonstrate remarkable reciprocity.

But every honest investigation eventually reaches the same point. Observation alone isn't enough. The evidence must survive cross-examination. If these behaviors are nothing more than instinct... science should expose them. If they're simply products of conditioning... science should tell us.

If generations of dog owners—including me—have mistaken affection for attachment or projected human emotions onto dogs... science should correct us in an unambiguous way.

That's exactly what good investigative technique is supposed to do. Not protect ideas. Test them. Challenge them. Follow the evidence wherever it leads.

So I decided to call one final witness.

Science.

As the investigation continued, I noticed something interesting. The farther we moved from observable behavior... toward subjective meaning... the more cautious science became.

And perhaps... that's exactly what honest science should do.

Cross-Examination — ATTACHMENT

The Scientific Objection

Dogs don't form genuine attachment relationships with humans.

They simply remain close to the people who provide food, protection, shelter, and routine.

If that's true, what appears to be attachment is little more than conditioning.

That's a reasonable objection.

Evidence Under Cross-Examination

This is one of the strongest areas of modern canine research.

Scientists have applied many of the same attachment measures originally developed for human infants and caregivers to dogs and their owners.

The findings are remarkably consistent.

Dogs seek proximity to their owners.

They experience distress during separation.

They use their owner as a secure base from which to explore unfamiliar environments.

And during times of uncertainty, they consistently seek comfort from the person to whom they're attached rather than simply the nearest available human.

Biology supports the behavioral evidence.

Positive interaction between dogs and their owners has repeatedly been associated with measurable changes in oxytocin, the hormone most closely associated with trust and attachment.

The relationship clearly extends well beyond food or routine.

The Court's Ruling

Behavioral evidence admitted.

Science strongly supports the conclusion that dogs form genuine attachment relationships with particular humans.

Cross-Examination — RESTORATION

The Scientific Objection

What appears to be reconciliation after conflict may simply be appeasement.

Perhaps the dog isn't attempting to repair the relationship at all.

Perhaps it's merely responding to tension while trying to avoid punishment or regain reward.

That's a legitimate objection.

Evidence Under Cross-Examination

Science clearly demonstrates that dogs are extraordinarily sensitive to human emotional states.

They monitor facial expressions.

Tone of voice.

Body posture.

Changes in breathing.

Even subtle hormonal changes associated with stress.

What science cannot yet determine is the dog's internal motivation.

Does the dog think,

"I've damaged our relationship and I want to repair it"?

Or is it simply responding to social tension?

Current science cannot answer that question with certainty.

What it can say is this:

Dogs consistently recognize relational disruption and modify their behavior accordingly.

The Court's Ruling

Objection taken under advisement.

The evidence strongly supports relational awareness.

Whether that awareness includes a conscious desire to restore the relationship remains unresolved.

Cross-Examination — THE RESTORERS

The Scientific Objection

Dogs approach distressed people because unusual sounds, movement, crying, or emotional arousal capture their attention.

That doesn't necessarily mean they recognize suffering or intentionally attempt to relieve it.

Evidence Under Cross-Examination

Modern research paints a richer picture.

Dogs distinguish human emotional expressions.

They detect emotional changes through facial cues, vocal tone, body language, and even scent.

Researchers have demonstrated that dogs can detect human stress through odor alone.

Additional studies have shown dogs attempting to reach or release distressed owners significantly more often than owners displaying emotionally neutral behavior.

Science appropriately stops short of claiming dogs understand suffering exactly as humans do.

But it repeatedly documents behavioral responses that are difficult to dismiss as simple curiosity.

The Court's Ruling

Behavioral evidence admitted.

Science strongly supports emotional detection and responsive behavior.

The precise nature of the dog's internal experience remains unknown.

Cross-Examination — SHARED JOY

The Scientific Objection

Dogs don't actually share our joy.

They simply become excited when we become animated.

Higher voices.

Movement.

Play.

Excitement produces excitement.

Nothing more.

A reasonable objection.

Evidence Under Cross-Examination

Science confirms that dogs distinguish between positive and negative human emotional expressions.

More interestingly, researchers have found evidence that dogs respond differently when their owners experience genuine happiness—even when the outward cues are surprisingly subtle.

Scientists describe this as emotional contagion or emotional synchronization.

The behavioral evidence suggests that dogs do more than merely react to movement.

They appear to respond to emotional state.

What science cannot establish is the precise subjective experience occurring inside the dog's mind.

The Court's Ruling

Behavioral evidence admitted.

The behavioral foundation for shared positive emotional experience is well supported.

Whether dogs consciously experience joy in precisely the same manner humans do remains beyond science's present ability to determine.

Cross-Examination — COMFORT

The Scientific Objection

Dogs don't intentionally comfort people.

They're simply responding to learned routines, attention, or environmental cues.

Evidence Under Cross-Examination

This objection becomes increasingly difficult to sustain.

Science consistently demonstrates that dogs detect human emotional distress through multiple sensory systems.

They distinguish sadness from happiness.

Stress from calm.

Normal scent from stress odor.

Controlled studies have repeatedly documented behavioral changes in response to authentic human distress.

Therapy dog research further demonstrates measurable reductions in anxiety, loneliness, and physiological stress among many patients.

Science can clearly document detection.

Science can clearly document response.

Science can clearly document measurable benefit.

What science cannot yet measure is conscious intention.

The Court's Ruling

Behavioral evidence admitted—with clarification.

The evidence strongly supports intentional relational responsiveness.

Whether the dog's internal motivation is identical to human compassion remains undetermined.

Cross-Examination — PURPOSE

The Scientific Objection

Dogs don't possess a sense of purpose.

They perform because they've been trained.

Remove the rewards and the behavior eventually disappears.

Purpose is simply conditioning wearing a human label.

Evidence Under Cross-Examination

The evidence suggests something more complicated.

Working-dog handlers have long recognized that dogs require more than repetition.

They require success.

Following the attacks of September 11, handlers working at Ground Zero noticed that search dogs became discouraged after repeatedly finding only human remains.

To maintain motivation, handlers occasionally arranged successful finds using hidden volunteers.

That observation deserves careful consideration.

Experienced handlers evidently believed that rewards alone were insufficient to sustain these dogs' motivation over time.

Handlers did it because experience taught them that meaningful accomplishment sustained the dogs' willingness to continue searching.

Science also recognizes the importance of environmental enrichment, meaningful activity, and successful engagement in canine well-being.

Whether dogs experience purpose exactly as humans do cannot be established.

But reducing their motivation to treats alone appears inconsistent with both research and experience.

The Court's Ruling

The Court reserves final judgment.

Science strongly supports sustained motivation through meaningful engagement.

Whether that subjective experience should properly be described as purpose remains beyond present scientific measurement.

Cross-Examination — GUILT, SHAME & RELATIONAL AWARENESS

The Scientific Objection

Dogs do not experience guilt in the human sense.

What owners commonly call "the guilty look" is more accurately explained as submissive or appeasement behavior triggered by the owner's anger, body language, or expectation of punishment.

Science would point to Alexandra Horowitz's well-known study and argue that dogs display the so-called guilty look even when they have done nothing wrong, provided the owner believes they have.

If that's true...

the guilty look tells us more about human behavior than canine emotion.

A legitimate objection.

Evidence Under Cross-Examination

The Horowitz study deserves tremendous respect.

It demonstrated something important.

Dogs clearly respond to human accusation.

That finding should not be dismissed.

But neither should the investigation end there.

When that study was published in 2009, inexpensive home surveillance cameras simply weren't part of everyday life.

Today they are.

Thousands of owners have now watched their dogs while no human was present.

Many have observed dogs lowering their heads, avoiding damaged objects, changing posture, or behaving differently immediately after creating a mess—even before anyone returned home.

Those observations do not prove guilt.

Neither do they prove innocence.

They simply remind us that the question remains open.

Science has successfully challenged one explanation.

It has not yet established another with certainty.

Even Dr. Horowitz has acknowledged that the precise emotional experience remains unresolved.

Perhaps science has not yet developed the tools necessary to distinguish guilt, shame, relational awareness, anticipation, or something entirely different.

The Court's Ruling

The Court declines to render final judgement. Science has successfully demonstrated that the classic "guilty look" cannot presently be accepted as proof of moral guilt.

That objection is sustained.

However, the broader question before this Court was never whether dogs possess human morality.

It was whether dogs demonstrate complex relational awareness extending beyond simple conditioning to include a consciousness of guilt.

On that question... the evidence is not totally conclusive, so it goes to the jury to decide.

Cross-Examination — CELEBRATION

The Scientific Objection

Dogs don't celebrate reunion.

They're simply exhibiting conditioned excitement.

Owners return home.

Owners become animated.

Owners speak enthusiastically.

Dogs respond to that excitement.

Nothing more.

If the human remained emotionally neutral, science argues the greeting would likely diminish.

A reasonable objection.

Evidence Under Cross-Examination

The evidence tells a more interesting story.

Studies examining separation and reunion consistently document predictable behavioral changes.

Dogs orient toward the place where their owner disappeared.

Some vocalize.

Some pace.

Many remain near the point of departure.

Most initiate contact almost immediately upon reunion.

Importantly, these behaviors often begin **before** the owner has spoken, touched the dog, or initiated interaction.

Science describes reunion as one of the defining behavioral characteristics of attachment.

What science cannot determine is precisely what the dog experiences internally during those first few moments.

It cannot measure love.

It cannot measure joy.

But it can clearly measure behavior.

And the behavior repeatedly points in the same direction.

The Court's Ruling

Behavioral evidence admitted.

Science strongly supports reunion as a genuine attachment behavior.

Whether the dog's internal emotional experience mirrors our own remains beyond present scientific measurement.

Cross-Examination — RECIPROCITY

The Scientific Objection

The relationship between dogs and humans primarily benefits people.

Humans domesticated dogs.

Humans feed them.

Train them.

House them.

Provide veterinary care.

Calling the relationship reciprocal may simply reflect human sentiment rather than biological reality.

A thoughtful objection.

Evidence Under Cross-Examination

The evidence extends well beyond anecdote.

Researchers have repeatedly documented measurable biological changes occurring in both members of the relationship.

Positive interaction between dogs and their owners influences oxytocin, cortisol, heart rate, and other physiological markers in both species.

The relationship appears biologically reciprocal.

The benefits extend even further.

Therapy dogs improve measurable patient outcomes.

Families experience reduced anxiety.

Children become more willing to participate in treatment.

Healthcare workers report improved morale and reduced stress.

Remarkably...

the dogs themselves often appear eager to return to the very environments where they perform this work.

Science cannot fully explain every aspect of that reciprocity.

But it repeatedly confirms that both members of the relationship are affected by one another.

The Court's Ruling

Behavioral evidence admitted.

Science strongly supports the conclusion that the dog-human relationship is biologically and behaviorally reciprocal.

The precise subjective experience of each participant remains beyond direct scientific measurement.

Cross-Examination — WAITING

The Scientific Objection

Dogs don't wait in hope.

They learn routines.

They recognize schedules.

They recognize sounds.

They recognize vehicles.

Remaining near a door or window is simply conditioned behavior reinforced through repetition.

Any suggestion that waiting reflects expectation or hope exceeds what science can establish.

A fair objection.

Evidence Under Cross-Examination

Science readily acknowledges that dogs learn routines.

No one disputes that.

But science also documents something more.

Dogs consistently orient toward locations associated with their owner's departure.

They remain attentive.

They seek proximity.

They exhibit measurable behavioral changes during prolonged absence.

And reunion consistently produces one of the strongest behavioral responses documented in attachment research.

Science has established the behavior.

What it cannot establish is the thought behind it.

Does the dog think,

"She'll be home soon."

Science cannot answer that.

Nor can it determine whether waiting carries anything resembling hope as humans experience it.

Those questions extend beyond present scientific methodology.

But one observation remains difficult to ignore.

Across homes.

Across breeds.

Across cultures.

Dogs continue to wait.

The Court's Ruling

Behavioral evidence admitted.

Science strongly supports persistent attachment-related waiting behaviors.

The meaning of those behaviors remains for the jury to determine.

EVIDENCE SUMMATION

Science had been called to impeach the witnesses.

It didn't.

Not even most of them.

It corrected some language.

It narrowed some conclusions.

It challenged several interpretations.

And occasionally, it reminded me that good investigators don't ask evidence to answer questions it was never capable of answering.

That's exactly what I wanted it to do.

But something else had happened.

Attachment survived.

Emotional responsiveness survived.

Comfort survived.

Reunion survived.

Reciprocity survived.

Even waiting survived—as an observable attachment behavior, though science understandably refused to call it hope.

Science didn't confirm every conclusion I had considered.

But it told me which parts of the case could stand on evidence alone...and where evidence respectfully yielded to observation, faith, and hope.

INTERLUDE: The Nature of the Designer

Scripture teaches that *“Every good and perfect gift is from above...”* (James 1:17).

I’ll let you decide what qualifies as good and perfect gifts.

I will, however, share something unexpected happened while writing this book.

When I began this investigation, I thought I was studying dogs.

I expected to learn more about attachment.

About loyalty.

About grief.

About comfort.

About why one remarkable species seems so uniquely connected to our own.

I certainly didn't expect to learn more about God.

But somewhere along the way... that's exactly what happened.

Every chapter seemed to uncover another remarkable characteristic.

Attachment.

Joy.

Comfort.

Restoration.

Celebration.

Waiting.

Reciprocity.

At first, I thought I was simply making observations about canine behavior. Then I began noticing something else. These weren't merely characteristics of dogs. They were characteristics of healthy relationships. And as I quietly worked my way through Scripture, another pattern emerged. The very qualities that make dogs so deeply treasured by human beings are many of the same qualities God repeatedly demonstrates and asks of us.

God remains faithful.

Dogs remain faithful.

God comforts.

Dogs comfort.

God restores broken relationships.

Dogs instinctively move toward broken relationships.

God patiently waits.

Dogs patiently wait.

God delights in reunion.

The Bible begins with reunion in the Garden.

It ends with reunion in Heaven.

Perhaps that shouldn't surprise us.

After all, relationships didn't originate with us.

They originated with God.

Jesus summarized the greatest commandments as loving God and loving our neighbor (Matthew 22:37–39).

The Apostle John went even further. "God is love." (1 John 4:8)

If relationship reflects the very nature of God... perhaps it shouldn't surprise us that He filled His creation with reminders of it.

Not just in marriage.

Not just in family.

Not just in friendship.

But perhaps... even in a dog.

I'm not suggesting dogs possess divine qualities. Nor am I suggesting they understand God in the way human beings do. That would stretch both Scripture and observation beyond what either allows.

I'm suggesting something much simpler. Perhaps the Creator's fingerprints are visible in His creation. Artists often leave recognizable patterns in their work. Architects develop signatures that identify their buildings. Composers have styles that listeners recognize within a few notes. Great designers are often recognized long before they're identified. Why should we expect the Creator to be any different?

Perhaps the relational qualities we've observed throughout this investigation aren't accidental. Perhaps they reflect something about the One who designed them.

As a therapist, I've spent a lifetime studying human behavior.

As a hostage negotiator, I learned to look for patterns others missed.

As a Christian, I've spent decades studying Scripture.

Yet writing this book surprised me.

I began with a question about dogs.

I finished with a deeper appreciation for the Designer.

Not because dogs prove God.

They don't.

Not because science proves heaven.

It doesn't.

But because the more carefully I observed one of God's creatures... the more I found myself admiring the wisdom of the One who imagined such a relationship in the first place.

Perhaps that's why this investigation strengthened my faith instead of merely satisfying my curiosity. It reminded me that the God who designed gravity...

music...

laughter...

marriage...

and redemption...

also designed a relationship capable of quietly teaching us something about faithful love. And if a Creator would weave so much relational beauty into one remarkable creature... I find myself trusting even more deeply that He also knows what awaits those who love Him.

Not because a dog proved it. But because the Designer has proven Himself faithful from Genesis to Revelation.

Perhaps that's the greatest discovery this investigation gave me. I set out to understand the dog.

Instead...

I found myself in greater awe of the Designer.

THE FINAL VERDICT

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury...

Over the course of this investigation, we've examined a series of independent exhibits.

No single exhibit was ever presented as proof.

Each was offered simply as evidence.

Some came from a childhood dog named Juan.

Others came from decades of observing dogs in homes, counseling offices, police work, and everyday life.

Some came from psychology.

Others from neuroscience.

Still others from behavioral science.

Finally, we examined what Scripture itself has to say.

Individually... each exhibit leaves room for discussion.

Collectively... they demand an explanation.

In a courtroom, this is known as the **preponderance of the evidence**.

Not absolute proof.

Not certainty beyond every conceivable doubt.

Simply the conclusion that best explains the totality of the evidence that has been presented.

Throughout my career, whether conducting a psychological assessment or investigating a crisis, I learned that the strongest conclusions rarely come from one dramatic piece of evidence.

They emerge when independent observations begin pointing in the same direction.

When psychology, behavior, biology, personal observation, and even Scripture quietly converge... investigators must pay attention.

That is exactly what happened during this investigation.

Not every question was answered.

Not every theory was absolutely confirmed.

Science pressure-tested some of my assumptions.

It reinforced many. It narrowed others.

And in several places, it honestly reminded me that evidence can only take us so far.

I appreciated that.

Because truth has never been served by asking evidence to answer questions it was never designed to answer.

But something else happened.

The cumulative evidence kept pointing toward one remarkable conclusion.

This Court finds that dogs appear uniquely designed for relationship with human beings.

Not merely companionship.

Relationship.

No other creature I've observed consistently assembles the same remarkable pattern.

Attachment.

Restoration.

Shared joy.

Comfort.

Presence.

Purpose.

Celebration.

Waiting.

Reciprocity.

Individually... other species may display one or two of those characteristics.

Collectively... I have never observed another animal weave them together with the consistency dogs do.

That verdict does not diminish God's affection for His other creatures. Far from it. Scripture repeatedly celebrates His care for all creation.

Cats are wonderfully, gloriously, unapologetically cats.

Horses possess breathtaking strength and beauty.

Elephants astonish us with memory.

Dolphins with intelligence.

Every creature reflects something of its Creator.

But dogs... dogs seem uniquely oriented toward relationship with us. That is the verdict the evidence most naturally supports. And once I reached that conclusion... another question quietly emerged.

If God intentionally created one creature capable of understanding, responding to, and participating in the deepest dynamics of human relationship... why?

Why create an animal that celebrates our joy as though it were its own...

moves toward our suffering instead of away from it...

works to restore relationship after conflict...

finds purpose in serving us...

waits for us...

and bonds so completely with the human heart...

if that relationship was always intended to end forever?

Perhaps there is an answer.

Perhaps there isn't.

Science cannot answer that question.

Psychology cannot answer it completely.

Neither can observation.

Eventually, every investigation reaches a place where evidence has said everything it can say.

Beyond that point... each of us must decide what best explains the evidence we've seen.

For me... this investigation unexpectedly strengthened my confidence in both the Designer and His design.

It deepened my appreciation for the remarkable relationship God created between dogs and people.

And it strengthened my hope that a God who designed such an extraordinary bond did not do so carelessly or without purpose.

I cannot prove what waits beyond death.

Some things belong to evidence.

Others belong to faith and hope.

But after following this evidence as honestly as I know how...

I know which verdict best explains what I've observed and what I believe.

Now...

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury...

Throughout this investigation I've simply asked you to do what every good investigator attempts to do.

Observe carefully.

Question honestly.

Follow the evidence wherever it leads.

Now I ask one final thing.

Weigh what you've seen.

Consider the cumulative evidence.

Ask yourself whether, taken together, it reaches the level our legal system calls a preponderance of the evidence.

Then ask yourself one final question.

What verdict are you leaning toward?

Then render the verdict that best explains the remarkable dog who first made you ask the question.

If your verdict differs from mine... I respect that.

But if, somewhere along the way, you found yourself seeing dogs—and perhaps even the Designer—through different eyes...

then this investigation has accomplished far more than I ever hoped.

QUESTIONS FROM THE JURY

Before a jury deliberates, they are permitted to send questions back to the court.

These are the ones I have been asked most often — in counseling offices, in parking lots after church, and in emails from people who had never written to a stranger before.

I will answer them the same way I presented the evidence. Honestly, and without claiming more than I can support.

What hints might the Bible give that there are animals in heaven?

That's a fair question.

It's also a more honest question than asking,

"Does the Bible specifically say dogs are in heaven?"

It doesn't.

Scripture never says,

"Your dog will be waiting for you in heaven."

If it did, there would be very little reason to write this book.

Instead, the Bible gives us something investigators often value just as much as direct testimony.

It gives us patterns.

It gives us hints.

It gives us pieces of evidence that, when viewed together, deserve careful consideration.

For example...

The Bible repeatedly describes animals as part of God's good creation.

Before sin entered the world, Adam named the animals and lived among them in perfect harmony (Genesis 2).

When God preserved life through the flood, He instructed Noah to bring representatives of the animal kingdom into the ark (Genesis 6–7).

The prophets describe God's future kingdom with remarkably peaceful images of wolves, lambs, lions, calves, and children living together (Isaiah 11:6–9).

The book of Revelation portrays horses in heaven, including the white horse upon which Christ returns (Revelation 19:11–14).

Scripture also repeatedly reminds us that God delights in His creation.

He feeds the birds.

He knows when a sparrow falls.

He provides for wild animals most people never see (Psalm 104; Matthew 10:29).

Again and again, the Bible portrays a Creator who notices, values, and cares for the creatures He made.

Does any one of those passages prove our dogs will be in heaven? No.

Individually, none of them settles the question.

Collectively, however, they paint a picture that is difficult to ignore.

Animals are not incidental to God's story.

They are woven into it from Genesis to Revelation.

That doesn't answer every question.

But it does challenge the assumption that heaven is somehow less full of life than the world God originally called *very good*.

Perhaps the better question isn't,
"Does the Bible ever mention animals in heaven?"

It clearly does.

The better question is,
"What kind of God would create such remarkable relationships... only to have no purpose for them beyond this life?"

That question can't be answered by a single verse.

It requires us to consider the whole character of God.

And that's exactly what this investigation has attempted to do.

What do people who disagree say, and why?

That's a fair question.

In fact, I hope you've been asking it throughout this book.

Every good investigation requires us to hear both sides of the case.

People who disagree with my conclusions generally fall into three groups.

Some disagree because of science.

They argue that everything we've observed can be explained through biology and evolution.

Attachment.

Loyalty.

Comfort.

Waiting.

Even grief.

In their view, these behaviors are simply the result of natural selection shaping dogs to bond closely with humans because doing so increased their chances of survival.

It's an intellectually serious position.

And it's one I tried to represent fairly throughout this investigation.

Others disagree because of theology.

They point out that the Bible never explicitly says,

"Your dog will be in heaven."

They're right.

It doesn't.

Some also believe eternity is reserved exclusively for human beings because only people are created in God's image and redeemed through Christ.

I understand that position.

It's why I was careful throughout this book not to claim more than Scripture actually says.

A third group simply believes we're projecting human emotions onto dogs.

They would say that because we love our dogs, we naturally assume they're thinking and feeling much the way we do.

That's an important caution.

Human beings have a remarkable ability to see themselves in the things they love.

I took that concern seriously as well.

So why didn't those objections ultimately change my conclusion?

Because I wasn't relying on any one observation.

Or one scientific study.

Or one Bible verse.

It was the cumulative evidence that persuaded me.

Science explains much.

Scripture reveals much.

Observation contributes much.

None of them, by themselves, answers every question.

But together...

they pointed me toward a conclusion I hadn't expected when I began this investigation.

That doesn't mean everyone should agree with me.

Reasonable people can examine the same evidence and reach different conclusions.

I've respected that possibility from the first page of this book.

In fact, that's why I asked you not to decide the case until all the evidence had been presented.

If, after considering everything, you reach a different verdict...

I respect that.

My hope has never been to eliminate every disagreement.

It has simply been to ask whether the remarkable relationship between people and dogs deserves more thoughtful consideration than it has often been given.

After following the evidence as honestly as I know how...

I believe it does.

Isn't this just wishful thinking?

That's an important question.

In fact, it's one I asked myself repeatedly while writing this book.

If all I'd done was tell sentimental stories about dogs...

I'd probably answer,

"Yes."

If I'd ignored science whenever it disagreed with me...

or stretched Scripture to say more than it actually says...

I'd have the same concern.

Wishful thinking begins with a conclusion...

then searches for evidence to support it.

An honest investigation begins with a question...

then follows the evidence wherever it leads.

That was my commitment from the first page of this book.

More than once, science corrected my thinking.

Several times it narrowed conclusions I was tempted to make.

On a few occasions, it reminded me that my personal observations had carried me farther than the available evidence could responsibly support.

I welcomed those corrections.

Because my goal wasn't to prove I was right.

It was to discover what was true.

By the end of this investigation, I didn't arrive at absolute certainty.

I arrived at something I believe is more intellectually honest.

Hope supported by evidence.

Not proof.

Not speculation.

Hope.

There is a difference.

Throughout these pages we examined attachment.

Reciprocity.

Comfort.

Celebration.

Purpose.

Waiting.

Not one of those behaviors proves dogs are in heaven.

But taken together, they reveal a relationship unlike any other I've observed in the natural world.

Then I asked a question.

If God intentionally designed such a remarkable relationship...

what best explains it?

That's where science reaches its natural boundary.

Science can tell us what dogs do.

It can often explain how they do it.

It cannot answer why God may have designed them that way.

That question belongs to philosophy.

Theology.

And ultimately...

faith.

Some readers will conclude that everything we've explored is simply the product of biology and evolution.

Others will conclude that it reflects the intentional design of a Creator.

Reasonable people may disagree.

I've tried to represent both positions fairly throughout this book.

After weighing the cumulative evidence as honestly as I know how...

I believe hope is the verdict that best explains what I've observed.

Not because I wished it were true.

Because I followed the evidence until it could take me no farther.

The rest...

belongs to faith.

Did I do the right thing when I chose euthanasia?

I have carried this question into more counseling rooms than almost any other.

I've carried it myself more than once.

So let me give you the most important part of the answer first.

Almost certainly... yes.

Now let me explain why.

Years ago, a veterinarian gave me what I believe is the wisest counsel I've ever heard on this subject.

It wasn't complicated.

It wasn't theological.

It was simply this:

"It's better to do it a day—or even a week—too soon than a day too late."

Sit with that for a moment.

Because it turns our greatest fear upside down.

Most people worry they acted too soon.

That there was one more good day.

One more walk.

One more sunrise.

One more chance.

But our dogs experience those final days very differently than we do.

They don't understand why they're hurting.

They don't know the pain will eventually end.

They simply know they hurt.

Sometimes we hold on because **we're** not ready.

Meanwhile, they're carrying a burden they never chose and cannot understand.

Waiting isn't always mercy.

Sometimes...

waiting is for us, not for them.

Then consider what your decision actually required.

You took an animal that trusted you completely.

One who had faithfully walked beside you through some of life's happiest and hardest moments.

And when their body could no longer carry them...

you chose to carry the burden they couldn't.

You accepted your own heartbreak so they wouldn't have to endure more suffering.

That isn't a failure of love.

It's one of love's greatest sacrifices.

In all my years of counseling, I honestly cannot remember someone telling me,

"I think I let my dog go because I was tired of caring for them."

I've heard something very different.

Again...

and again...

and again.

"I just couldn't let go."

Most people don't choose euthanasia too early.

They postpone it because love makes letting go almost unbearable.

So if you're replaying that day...

wondering whether you got it wrong...

remember this.

The fact that you're asking the question isn't evidence that you loved your dog too little.

It's evidence that you loved your dog deeply.

Grief has a way of putting us on trial.

It asks us to replay every decision.

Every conversation.

Every "what if."

Every final moment.

But love is not measured by how long we were able to postpone goodbye.

Love is measured by the life we gave them...

and, when the time came...

our willingness to suffer so they didn't have to.

If that's the decision you made...

I hope you'll allow yourself the same grace your dog gave you every single day of your relationship.

Because if dogs have taught us anything throughout this investigation...

it's that love doesn't keep score.

It simply loves.

What if I wasn't there when my dog died?

Or perhaps it was simply too hard for you to stay.

If that's your story...

please hear this.

You're not alone.

I've known people who desperately wanted to be there but couldn't.

They were traveling.

They couldn't get to the veterinarian in time.

Their dog died unexpectedly while they were away.

I've also known people who simply couldn't bear to watch their best friend take their last breath.

And for years afterward...

they've quietly wondered,

"Did I fail them?"

I don't believe you did.

Your dog didn't measure your love by the final five minutes.

Your dog measured your love by thousands of ordinary moments.

Morning walks.

Car rides.

Treats.

Vacations.

The sound of your voice.

The comfort of your presence.

Years of faithful companionship.

Dogs don't evaluate a relationship by one painful afternoon.

Neither should we.

Sometimes we imagine our dog looking around the room wondering,

"Where are they?"

The truth is...

we don't know exactly what they experienced.

Many dogs spend those final moments in the gentle hands of veterinarians and technicians who understand how sacred those moments are.

I've known many who quietly cried with families after they left the room.

They don't simply practice medicine.

They care deeply.

And if you weren't able to stay...

or couldn't bring yourself to watch...

please don't let one decision rewrite an entire lifetime of faithful love.

Love doesn't require that every person has the strength to witness death.

Sometimes love reaches its limit.

Not because it is weak...

but because it is so deep.

Before we leave this question...

Jesus reminded us that not even a sparrow falls to the ground apart from the Father's knowledge (Matthew 10:29).

If God notices the smallest bird...

I don't believe He overlooked your faithful companion.

Perhaps you couldn't be there.

But I don't believe your dog was ever alone.

Did my dog know how much I loved him?

I totally believe so.

In fact...

I think your dog spent much of his life showing you that he knew.

Dogs don't understand love the way human beings define it.

They don't need to.

They understand something much simpler.

Presence.

Protection.

Kindness.

Safety.

Affection.

Consistency.

If you've read this book, you've already seen the evidence.

Your dog chose to be near you.

He waited for you.

He celebrated when you came home.

He found comfort beside you.

He looked to you when he was frightened.

He trusted you.

Those aren't simply charming behaviors.

They're the language of attachment.

Throughout this investigation we've also seen that dogs appear remarkably skilled at reading us.

They recognize our faces.

Our voices.

Our scent.

They notice changes in our emotions.

Many seem to know when we're sad before another person in the room does.

Science continues discovering just how deeply dogs tune themselves to the people they love.

Then consider one more thing.

Dogs never seem to spend much time wondering whether they're loved.

They simply respond to love.

If you fed your dog...

protected him...

played with him...

talked to him...

laughed with him...

let him sleep beside you...

and welcomed him into your family...

your dog experienced those things every single day.

Not as isolated events.

But as a lifetime of evidence.

Sometimes people tell me,

"I wish I had spent one more day with him."

Or,

"I wish I'd taken one more walk."

I understand that feeling.

I've felt it too.

But don't let one missed opportunity outweigh years of faithful love.

Your dog didn't build his understanding of your love from your last day together.

He built it from thousands of ordinary days that came before it.

Morning greetings.

Car rides.

Games of fetch.

Quiet evenings.

Your voice calling his name.

Your hand resting on his head.

Love isn't communicated in a single moment.

It's communicated over a lifetime.

And if I know anything about dogs...

I know they pay attention to the things that happen over and over again.

Let me leave you with one observation...

The question itself tells me something.

You're asking,

"Did my dog know I loved him?"

Your dog never seemed to ask,

"Did my person love me?"

He simply kept coming back.

Kept trusting.

Kept waiting.

Kept loving.

Perhaps that's because, in ways we still don't fully understand...

he already knew.

Is something wrong with me for grieving this hard?

No.

In fact...

your grief may say far more about the relationship than it does about you.

One of the most surprising discoveries I made while writing this book was this:

People rarely apologize for grieving the loss of a dog because they loved the dog too much.

They apologize because they're afraid other people will think they loved the dog too much.

I've heard it countless times.

"I know it was just a dog..."

"I feel guilty for crying this much."

"People probably think I've lost perspective."

I usually stop them right there.

Then I ask a simple question.

Who spent every day with you?

Who greeted you every morning?

Who noticed when you came home?

Who sat quietly beside you when life hurt?

Who listened without judging?

Who celebrated simply because you walked through the door?

For many people, the answer is...

their dog.

When a relationship like that ends, grief isn't irrational.

It's inevitable.

Here's something else I've observed as a psychologist.

We don't grieve according to species.

We grieve according to attachment.

The deeper the attachment...

the deeper the grief.

That's true whether we're talking about a spouse, a parent, a lifelong friend...

or a dog who faithfully shared fifteen years of life with us.

Grief isn't measured by what was lost.

It's measured by what was shared.

That helps explain why some people grieve a dog more deeply than a distant relative they rarely knew.

They're not grieving DNA.

They're grieving relationship.

And relationships matter.

God designed us that way.

Could grief become unhealthy?

Of course.

Any grief that keeps us from living, loving, or moving forward deserves gentle attention and, at times, wise professional help.

But tears themselves are not a sign that something is wrong with you.

They're often a sign that something was very right.

Something beautiful existed.

Something worth missing.

One more thought.

Throughout this investigation we've repeatedly returned to one conclusion.

Dogs don't merely occupy our homes.

They occupy our hearts.

If that's true...

then losing one is not like losing a possession.

It's like losing a companion.

So if you still find yourself tearing up months—or even years—later...

don't be embarrassed.

Don't apologize.

You are simply honoring a relationship that mattered.

And relationships worth celebrating...

are always relationships worth grieving.

What do I tell my child?

When a child asks,

"Will my dog be in heaven?"

I'd probably smile and say,

"That's a wonderful question."

"Can I tell you what I believe?"

"I believe God loved _____ even more than we did because He created him."

"I believe God knows exactly how much you loved him."

"And I believe heaven will be more wonderful than anything we can imagine."

"The Bible doesn't tell us everything we want to know about dogs in heaven."

"But after everything I've read, studied, prayed about, and thought about..."

"I believe God creates our dogs to love us and to be part of our family."

"I believe God has good reasons for everything He does."

"And because I believe those things..."

"Yes, I believe we'll see _____ again in heaven."

A note to parents:

I'd follow up the chat with a hug.

Because sometimes children won't remember every word we said.

But they'll remember how safe they felt while we were saying it.

And if you're the parent...

don't worry about having every answer.

Your child isn't asking you to solve one of theology's great mysteries.

They're asking whether hope is still safe.

It's okay to tell them what you believe.

It's okay to admit there are things only God knows.

Children aren't frightened by mystery nearly as much as adults are.

What reassures them is seeing a mom or dad whose confidence rests in the goodness of God, even when every question doesn't have an answer.

Years from now...

your child probably won't remember every sentence you said that day.

But they'll remember that when their heart was breaking...

you gave them permission to hope.

What about cats, horses, and other animals?

That's a wonderful question.

And I'm glad you asked it.

Nothing in this book is intended to diminish God's remarkable creativity or His affection for the rest of His creation.

In fact, one of the things I hope this investigation has accomplished is exactly the opposite.

I hope it has increased your appreciation for all the creatures God made.

I've known people who loved horses with a depth that surprised me.

Others have shared extraordinary stories about cats, parrots, dolphins, rabbits—even cows.

Animals enrich our lives in countless ways.

Scripture tells us they are all part of God's good creation.

So why focus almost exclusively on dogs?

Because I believe dogs occupy a unique place in the created order.

Not because they're more valuable.

Not because God loves them more.

But because no other animal I've observed consistently demonstrates the same remarkable combination of attachment, comfort, celebration, restoration, waiting, reciprocity, and faithful companionship with human beings.

That doesn't mean another species couldn't surprise us.

It simply means dogs appear uniquely designed for relationship with people.

Could there be horses in heaven?

The Bible certainly portrays horses there.

Could there be other animals?

I see no reason Scripture would prohibit that thought.

In fact, heaven appears to be filled with life, beauty, and creation—not less of it.

So if someone asks me,

"Will I see my cat again?"

or

"Will my horse be there?"

my answer is much the same as it has been throughout this book.

I don't know with certainty.

The Bible doesn't answer that question directly.

But I know the character of the God who created them.

And I know He delights in His creation.

If God chooses to reunite us with any creature that faithfully shared our lives...

I won't be surprised.

I'll simply be grateful.

This book, however, has focused on dogs for one reason.

After sixty years of living with them...

after years of working beside police K-9s...

after counseling hundreds of people...

and after examining the science...

I have never encountered another animal that appears so intentionally designed to enter the emotional, relational, and even spiritual world of human beings.

That was the question I set out to investigate.

Not whether dogs are God's favorite animals.

But why they seem to have become ours.

Perhaps every creature reflects something of its Creator.

The strength of the horse.

The majesty of the eagle.

The wonder of the whale.

The beauty of the deer.

The playfulness of the dolphin.

Each reveals something different about the imagination of God.

But dogs...

dogs seem to reveal something uniquely relational about Him.

And perhaps that's why they've found such a permanent home...

not only in our houses...

but in our hearts.

Will my dog remember me?

If there's one thing I've become convinced of throughout this investigation, it's this:

Your relationship mattered.

It mattered to you.

And I believe it mattered to your dog.

One of the remarkable discoveries of modern science is that dogs don't simply recognize us.

They remember us.

Studies have shown they recognize our faces.

Our voices.

Our scent.

Some dogs recognize a familiar scent years after being separated from someone they loved.

Many continue searching for, waiting for, or greeting their person with unmistakable excitement after long absences.

Anyone who has returned home after weeks—or even months—away has probably experienced it.

Your dog didn't merely remember your name.

Your dog remembered...

you.

Not simply because you filled the food bowl.

But because you filled a place in their life.

So what about heaven?

The Bible doesn't answer that question directly.

It doesn't tell us how memory works in eternity for people or for animals.

But here's what I find difficult to believe.

If God designed a dog with the remarkable ability to know us...

to recognize us...

to become deeply attached to us...

and to remember us throughout life...

why would reunion require that relationship to be erased?

Throughout Scripture, heaven is presented not as the loss of what is good...

but as its fulfillment.

Not the destruction of relationship...

but its restoration.

Jesus once reminded His listeners that not even a sparrow falls to the ground apart from the Father's knowledge (Matthew 10:29).

Think about that for a moment.

If God notices the fall of a single sparrow...

how much more would He remember a relationship He intentionally created between you and a dog who faithfully walked beside you for years?

I can't prove what a dog's memory will be like in eternity.

No one can.

But after everything I've observed...

everything I've studied...

and everything I've come to believe about the character of God...

I find it much easier to believe that a loving Creator preserves what He Himself designed than erases it.

Perhaps the better question isn't,

"Will my dog remember me?"

Perhaps it's this.

Would the God who remembers every sparrow forget a relationship He lovingly created?

I don't believe He would.

The God who remembers every sparrow is not the kind of God who forgets love.

Is it wrong to get another dog?

If you're asking that question...

there's a good chance you're carrying a little guilt.

You may even feel as though opening your heart to another dog somehow diminishes the one you lost.

I don't believe that's true.

In fact, I believe the opposite.

Love isn't a pie.

When you give some away...

there isn't less left.

One of the remarkable things God built into the human heart is its capacity to love again without loving less.

When a second child is born...

parents don't divide their love.

It grows.

The same often happens with dogs.

A new puppy doesn't replace the old one.

How could it?

Different personality.

Different habits.

Different memories.

Different relationship.

No one can replace a dog who faithfully walked beside you for fifteen years.

But another dog doesn't need to.

They're not applying for the same job.

They're beginning a completely new relationship.

I've often thought about something else.

If I truly believe dogs teach us anything about love...

it's this.

Dogs never make us choose between them.

They don't become jealous because we loved another dog before them.

They simply love us...

today.

Perhaps we should extend ourselves the same grace.

If your heart eventually opens to another dog...

don't think of it as replacing the one you lost.

Think of it as honoring everything that dog taught you about loving well.

Your first dog expanded your heart.

Your next dog simply discovers how much room is already there.

And if, one day, my beliefs are correct...

I have a hard time imagining your old friend greeting you in heaven with disappointment because you loved another dog after they were gone.

I suspect...

if dogs could speak...

they'd simply wag their tail and be happy that another one of God's remarkable creatures was given the chance to love you too.

Why did God give us dogs if we only have to lose them?

I've asked that question myself.

Especially after looking toward the spot under my desk where Bud usually sleeps.

Loss has a way of making us question the gift itself.

But let me ask you a different question.

Would your life have been better if you'd never known your dog?

Most people don't hesitate.

"Of course not."

The years of companionship...

the laughter...

the adventures...

the comfort...

the lessons...

the memories...

far outweigh the heartbreak of saying goodbye.

That tells me something important.

The pain doesn't mean the gift wasn't worth receiving.

It means the gift mattered.

God rarely protects us from loving things we'll someday lose.

He gives us children.

Parents.

Friends.

Spouses.

And yes...

dogs.

Every meaningful relationship in this life carries the possibility of grief.

Not because God delights in our pain.

But because love always carries risk.

The alternative would be a life without attachment.

Without vulnerability.

Without relationship.

That wouldn't be a safer life.

It would be a lonelier one.

As I look back over my life, I don't wish I had loved fewer dogs.

I simply wish I had a few more years with each of them.

That longing, I believe, says something beautiful.

It reminds us that we were created for relationships that don't end.

Perhaps that's one reason dogs touch us so deeply.

They awaken something eternal.

They teach us to love faithfully.

To celebrate generously.

To comfort quietly.

To wait expectantly.

And then, when they leave us...

they remind us that our hearts were never designed to believe death gets the final word.

One of the things I've come to believe throughout this investigation is that **God doesn't measure a relationship by how long it lasts.**

He measures it by what it accomplishes.

Every faithful dog leaves something behind.

A gentler heart.

A kinder spirit.

A better listener.

A family knit a little closer together.

A child who learned unconditional love.

Those gifts don't disappear when the dog does.

Perhaps that's why God gives us dogs.

Not simply to make life happier...

but to quietly shape the people we're becoming.

And if I've learned anything through this investigation...

it's that **the God who uses a relationship to change us so profoundly... is not the kind of God who wastes it.**

Can God really use a dog to teach us about Himself?

I believe He already has.

Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly uses His creation to reveal His character.

Jesus pointed to birds when teaching about the Father's care.

He pointed to flowers when teaching about God's provision.

He used sheep to describe His followers...

a shepherd to describe Himself...

a vine to explain our dependence upon Him...

and seeds to explain the Kingdom of God.

Creation has always been one of God's classrooms.

The Apostle Paul wrote that God's invisible qualities are clearly seen in what He has made (Romans 1:20).

In other words...

creation doesn't replace Scripture.

But it often illustrates it.

So why couldn't God use a dog?

Not because dogs are divine.

Not because they're perfect.

But because they so beautifully demonstrate qualities God Himself values.

Faithfulness.

Loyalty.

Forgiveness.

Presence.

Joy.

Comfort.

Patience.

Unconditional acceptance.

The remarkable ability to celebrate someone simply because they walked through the door.

As I've reflected on these things, I've come to believe something else.

Dogs don't teach us who God is by speaking.

They teach us by reflecting.

Every time a dog waits faithfully...

comforts quietly...

celebrates generously...

or loves without keeping score...

I catch a small glimpse of the heart of the One who designed them.

Not perfectly.

No part of creation reflects God perfectly.

Only Christ does.

But perhaps dogs reflect something uniquely relational about their Creator.

Maybe that's why they've become such faithful companions.

And maybe that's why they've become such remarkable teachers.

Not because they point us to themselves...

but because they quietly point beyond themselves.

To the Designer.

If this investigation has changed anything in me...

it isn't simply what I believe about dogs.

It's what I've come to appreciate about God.

The more carefully I studied the relationship He designed...

the more deeply I admired the One who designed it.

Perhaps that's been the greatest discovery of all.
