**One Small Miracle**

by Nancy Thomas

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Balofur's timing was perfect. Our slight black cat, bewildered and inexperienced, began giving birth to her first litter just as the kids got home from school. Fascinated, we all sat on the rug to watch and encourage.

Our fascination quickly changed to concern as Balofur struggled with the second kitten. She groaned and strained, rested awhile, and tried again, seemingly in vain. Accusation and confusion mingled in the look she threw me, and somehow I felt personally responsible. The kids were worried, and I certainly didn't know what to do. Finally in desperation I turned cat midwife, gently pulling until kitten number two slid out. Balofur then easily gave birth to the third and last kitten.

The first and third kittens soon began whining and searching for sustenance. Nature seemed to have the situation well in hand. The still-confused mother tentatively pawed and licked, beginning to understand that these ragged pieces of fur belonged to her.

But kitten number two was a pathetic sight. Not a sound found its way from his throat. Not a single movement of spindly limbs groped toward warmth or food. He just lay there, and every few seconds gasped for air, followed by a brief sharp convulsion. Somewhat objective, keeping pity at an adult minimum, I observed to myself, "This cat is not going to make it."

But David and Kristin were far from objective. "Mommy!" Kristin wailed. "Do something!"

Yes, certainly. Do something.

The thought flitted through my brain, "Why don't you pray?"

I immediately rejected it, reasoning, "This kitten is obviously going to die, which really isn't uncommon for a first litter. Besides, if I pray for healing and then the cat dies, what will my kids think of God? What would it do to their faith?"

Just as quickly, the Spirit of God spoke to my spirit: "Nancy, I have not placed my reputation in your hands. I'll take care of your kids' faith. You just obey me. Pray for the kitten."

The kids readily agreed, and we laid fingers on the small corpse-like body. David, not encumbered with my adult common sense and doubts, prayed briefly and simply, asking God to heal the kitty. And that was that.

As the afternoon wore on, the kitten grew weaker. I moved it close to the mother, hoping instinct would prod Balofur to care for it. But she was still too bewildered by all the events of the day to be of much help. In spite of the lack of encouraging signs, I felt good. God's words had touched a deep place in me, and I was free to leave the whole situation in his hands. How silly to think that I was the guardian of the Almighty's reputation—that so much depended on me.

That night we put the four cats in a basket and went to bed.

The next morning all three kittens were squealing, sucking, sleeping—doing all the things normal healthy kittens are supposed to do. Balofur seemed resigned to her new responsibilities and was mothering like an old pro. David named kitten number two "Miracle."

In the succeeding weeks Miracle's vivacity and active mischief reminded me that God certainly can take care of his own reputation.

Of course it wouldn't be completely honest to leave this story as it is. Our family has had its share of sad pet stories, times when we prayed and, well….

Mokey came to us some years after Miracle's birth. This lively little terrier was one of the most intelligent dogs I have known. We all loved her, but she was Kristin's special pet. And her demise still tugs at our hearts. In order to keep the ants out of the food, Hal had sprayed the legs of the old kitchen cabinet with an insecticide that probably would have been illegal in the US. Bolivian standards were more lenient, and the powerful spray did indeed take care of the ants. Unfortunately it also "took care" of Mokey. We figured she had licked some of it (she was not a picky eater), and quickly became violently ill. In spite of our fervent prayers, natural consequences played out and Mokey died.

And I think of Pancake, the funny hamster Uncle Clyde gave to David. We called him Pancake because when we petted him, he spread out all four legs and flattened down in bliss. He almost seemed to purr. But David was still learning about responsibility and had not yet made a strong connection between regular meals and his pet's well-being. Again, no amount of praying would revive Pancake, and knowing that starvation was the cause of death didn't help matters.

Although I prefer lessons learned through miraculous answers to prayer, we grew stronger as a family as we talked about the deaths of our pets, worked through the emotions, and decided to keep on talking to God.

In spite of the risks, we made the decision to involve our kids in praying for more than the healing of pets. We prayed for the healing of people, relationships, even countries. We prayed for peace in violent places. Sometimes we saw the answers and documented them in a prayer notebook. Often we observed no visible short-term results.

And sometimes the results surprised us. One Sunday morning, before Hal left on a trip to visit a church, we were praying together. Kristin, probably eight years old at the time, was feeling rebellious, not wanting to pray out loud. Hal encouraged her, and she finally just blurted out, "Help Daddy not to get killed in a car wreck today! Amen!" David laughed and Kristin burst into tears. On that note Hal drove off.

Later that night when Hal returned, he told us of nearly being run off the road by an oncoming truck. The driver had momentarily gone to sleep. It was a winding mountain road, and the mere presence of a flat place on the side to veer onto was evidence of God's care. We remembered Kristin's funny prayer, but this time without laughter. God had heard her and had honored her growing faith.

God's reputation was not ruined; our kids still trust their Savior, and they're passing it on to their children—at times praying for risky, scary stuff. I'm still learning to take my prayer clues from God. Knowing how to pray, especially with kids, can be puzzling. I'm grateful for the occasional small miracle. I love it when Christ whispers, "Pray for the cat."

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