

Stay: Lessons My Dogs Taught Me about Life, Loss, and Grace

Intro

- When Dave learned that his best canine friend Hannah had cancer he began to journal his feelings and wrote that preparing for death is preparing for life. Explain why you agree or disagree with that statement.
- Dave learned lessons of faith from his dog. What are some unusual or creative ways that God has taught you about life and about faith?

Chapter 1 – Puppy Love

- Dave tells about the dog he grew up with in Ohio. What are some favorite memories of a childhood dog or pet in your life?
- When have you lost something or someone in your life and God has replaced that void with something/someone else?

Chapter 2 – Always There

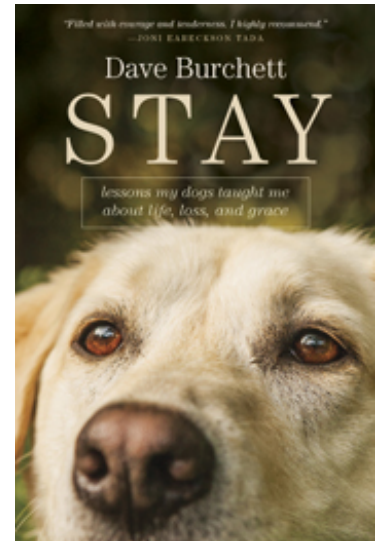
- Dave talks about how one sentence can change your life. What sentence or event changed your life and perhaps challenged your faith?
- Hannah knew just what to do to comfort Joni and Dave in their cancer crisis. Describe how a friend has known just how to comfort you during a trial.

Chapter 3 – Be Present

- Dave reveals that one of the most profound lessons he learned from Hannah was the value of “caring presence” in a difficult season. Why do you think that is so important?
- What are some practical ways you can love and walk with someone going through a trial?

Chapter 4 – Live In The Moment

- The comment from a veterinarian about Hannah not fearing death and living in the moment was a game changer for Dave. How could that change how you live your life?
- Dave writes that Satan wants you to live in regret of the past and fear of the future so you cannot live joyously in the moment. How can you avoid those traps in your life?
- Read Matthew 6:25-27 and 31-34. How do those teachings from Jesus help us to live in the moment?



Chapter 5 – Unleashed

- Hannah showed Dave how liberating it was to be “off the leash”. That reminded the author of many legalistic leashes that had restricted his freedom. What are some man-made performance rules that have limited your freedom and joy?
- Review the list of “no” verses on page 39-40 and the summary on page 40. How can those truths help you be unleashed to freedom in Christ?
- What changes in your walk with the Lord when you live out of gratitude for no condemnation instead of performance to gain acceptance?

Chapter 6 – Good Friends

- We were created to be in community with other followers of Christ. Why can that be so difficult and why is it vital to our journey?
- Dave wonders if part of our reluctance to immerse fully into grace is a fear of relinquishing control and our perceived rights to get even, keep score and balance the scales. Why do you agree or disagree with that statement?
- Dave notes that real friends are a treasure that we too often push down our priority list. What are some ways you can be more intentional to cultivate and grow real friends?

Chapter 7 – Run To The Master

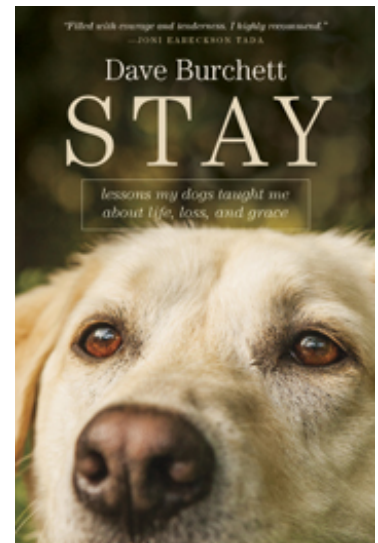
- Hannah followed Dave and leaned into him during a violent thunderstorm. Read Deuteronomy 33:27 on Page 58. Why do we sometimes struggle to lean into God during the storms in our lives? How can this verse encourage us to trust Him in the storm?
- Dave writes that God loves us too much to only give us smooth sailing. Why do we need storms to grow and become more like Jesus?
- What storms have you endured and how have they changed you?

Chapter 8 – Shake Off The Lies

- Hannah’s self-image is not damaged when Dave cannot play or respond to her attempt to nuzzle. She does not hear condemning “voices” from her past like Dave outlines on page 71. Name some of the “voices” you hear when you face failure or rejection.
- Name one or two lies that Satan hurls at you whenever you fail. What is the counter strategy to shake off these lies that Dave describes on page 72-73?

Chapter 9 – Trust...The Currency Of Love

- Hannah followed Dave with complete trust even when the routine was new and unusual. What causes you to hesitate when you know you should trust God in a new or unusual place?
- Read Mark 10:13-16 on pages 78-79. What do you think Jesus meant when He said that “anyone who doesn’t receive the Kingdom of God like a child will not receive it”?
- What are some ways that you can trust God and follow Jesus in your current journey?



Chapter 10 – Live Out Of Who You Are

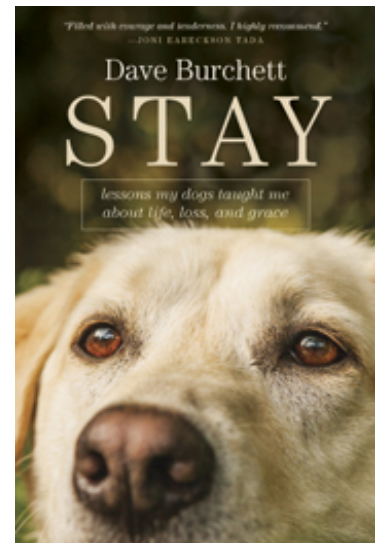
- Henri Nouwen wrote about purpose. “We seldom realize fully that we are sent to fulfill God-given tasks. . . . We act as if we were simply dropped down in creation and have to decide how to entertain ourselves until we die. But we were sent into the world by God, just as Jesus was. Once we start living our lives with that conviction, we will soon know what we were sent to do.” How would believing that change your motivation and self-image?
- Dave quoted a line from the book Truefaced. “If you are a Christian God is not interested in changing you. You have already been changed. God is interested in you *living out of what is already true about you.*” How do you react to that concept?
- Name some ways that you have already been changed at the moment you became a Christian. A partial list is at the bottom of Page 89 and top of Page 90.
- Challenge your group to write your combined list down and read them every day until your next meeting.

Chapter 11 – Gratitude Starts With Attitude

- Hannah showed gratitude for the same thing every day. Why do we struggle with feeling gratitude for the everyday mercies of life?
- Can you remember a difficult time or experience that God later redeemed and you saw His sovereign hand in the trial? Share that story if you are comfortable to do so.
- Why do you think some respond to tragedy and trial with deeper faith while others turn from faith in anger and doubt?
- How can the partial list of the “Gifts of Grace” on page 103 help you be more grateful in your daily walk?

Chapter 12 – Bury The Bones Of Bitterness

- Dave writes that forgiveness may be the most unnatural thing that Jesus asks us to do. Explain why you agree or disagree with that statement.
- Read Ephesians 4:32 on page 111. Where do we find the motivation to forgive others even when it is difficult to do?
- Read Romans 7:21-8:2. How would really believing there is no condemnation in Christ change how we live our journey with Jesus?
- This question is for private reflection unless you feel comfortable sharing with the group. Is there someone or something you need to forgive to be free? Write down that name or names and ask the Holy Spirit to begin to change your heart today. Be patient. God will accomplish His work in your life as you trust Him.



Chapter 13 – Welcome Waggin’

- Dave notes that a dog is a self-esteem booster shot every time you show up. Why is affirmation so important to our well-being and happiness?
- Most people already know (or get told often) what is wrong with them. We need to look through the lens of grace to let others know what is good about them. Write down who you can affirm in the next week and beyond.
- Review the verses of affirmation on pages 124-125. Discuss how that affirmation from God could change our attitude if we trust the truth of those words.

Chapter 14 – Only The Good Die Young

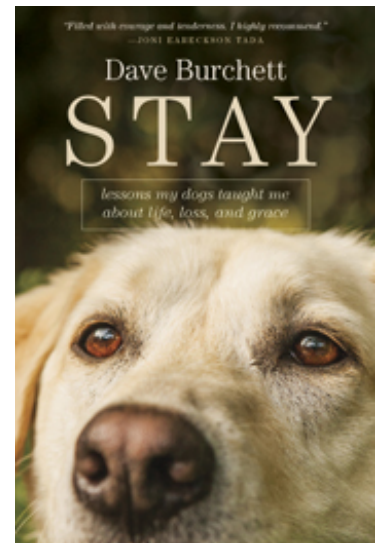
- Dave noted that one of the amazing things about our canine friends is how they wake up and accept whatever that day gives. Why is it so difficult in this culture to find moments of joy in the mundane or even miseries of life?
- Read the Randy Alcorn quote on page 134. Jesus said our hearts follow where our treasure is stored in Matthew 6:18-21. When you reach the end what treasures will truly matter?

Chapter 15 – Goodbye

- Dave related that even though he had journaled and prepared for Hannah’s death he still was melancholy and depressed for a period of time. Why do we often try shortcuts in the grieving process instead of embracing the pain of loss?
- Review the story at the bottom of page 144-145. Explain what that analogy should mean for a follower of Christ as we face our own mortality?

Chapter 16 – Forgetting Her Name

- Dave writes about all of the rescued dogs in his family. Paul writes in the his letter to the Romans that all of us are rescued from sin and death. How should that truth affect how we worship and live our lives for God?
- Dave and Joni’s current rescue puppy was given a new name and she often failed to respond. We are given a new name and identity as children of God. Dave admits that he often forgets his new identity and has to be reminded every day. How should remembering our new identity in Christ impact how we live our journey with Jesus?
- Review the story of Don Quixote and Aldonza on pages 154-55. Have you ever been changed by an act of grace from another person? How did you feel when you received grace when you might not have deserved it?
- Read Romans 8:14-17 on page 151. Discuss what it means to be able to call God by such a term of endearment as “Abba, Father”. How does that affect how you approach God when you are sad and lonely.



Chapter 17 – The Impact Of Our Story

- Joni and Dave knew nothing about Maggie's story except that she was found wounded, hungry and scared. They had to be patient to win her trust. Why are we so quick to judge others instead of trying to understand the baggage they are carrying through their journey?
- Review the bottom of page 161 and top of 162. Why is it important to realize you are both desperate sinner and redeemed saint?
- When we recognize our identity is not in our success in life but as a new creation in Christ we can give up our need to judge. What are some practical ways we can remind ourselves daily to help keep us from judging others?

Chapter 18 – Sit! Stay!

- Maggie learned to sit so she would not misbehave. Scripture tells us to abide so we will not sin. What does it mean to you to abide in Christ?
- Read the verses from Matthew 14 on page 174. When did Peter lose faith and become afraid?
- How can keeping our eyes on Jesus cause us to sin less?
- What did Paul talk about in the first three chapters of Ephesians after the church had slipped so badly? How can that example change how we communicate to those who are not living in faith?

Chapter 19 – Gentle Leading

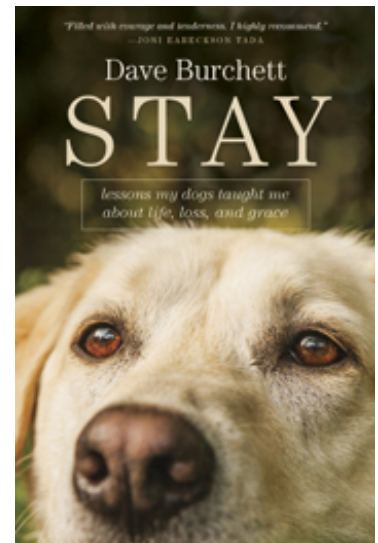
- Jesus taught that His yoke is easy and the burden light. Yet life can be anything but that. Explain what Jesus meant in the cultural and spiritual context of His teaching.
- Read the story of the older ox on page 184. How does that help you understand how we are to submit to the leading and strength of Jesus?

Chapter 20 – Life Interrupted

- Dave writes that we have a hard time understanding the difference between discipline and punishment. How do you see the differences between the two?
- Does God discipline His followers? Why does He (or why does He not) discipline Christians?
- Read Hebrews 12 on pages 191-92. How does that passage encourage you about discipline from your Heavenly Father?

Chapter 21 – The Hidden Toxicity Of Forbidden Fruit

- Maggie's forbidden fruit escapade could have been fatal yet she probably would do it again. Just like Maggie we are drawn to forbidden fruit. Why do we so often think that happiness is somewhere or something else?
- Review the familiar Romans passage as translated in The Message on pages 200-201. What is the prescription for escaping the sin cycle?
- Read Psalm 4:6-8 on page 202-203. List some of the "more than enough" things that God has given you and review them over the next week.



Chapter 22 – O Maggie, Where Art Thou?

- Maggie tried to hide behind a tree when she was caught doing wrong. Why is our first impulse when we sin to hide and cover up our sin?
- Pastor Tim Keller said that “in the Garden of Eden the first lie of the serpent was to make humans disbelieve that God had their best interests in mind”. Do you agree or disagree with Keller and why?
- Dave writes that his default response is to hide or put a good face on his failure and sin. Failure makes him feel vulnerable so he wants to cover up. What is your response to failure and sin?
- Why are we afraid to trust God with everything He says is true about us?
- What do you need to learn or trust in order not to hide when you feel afraid or vulnerable after failure or sin?

Chapter 23 – Learning To Live

- Review this summary of the book and write down one or two areas where you can regularly pray and trust God to work in your journey. Share those with the group.

