

Student Work

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Lessons from a Guinea Pig: Love, Fear and the Law

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Lessons from a Guinea Pig: Love, Fear and the Law

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Shelbi Gesch

Daily Scripture Texts

[Psalm 119:33-40](#)

[Leviticus 24:10-23](#)

[Matthew 7:1-12](#)

It's amazing, the things you can learn from a guinea pig—or a pair of them, in our family's case. We brought S'mores and Cinnamon home from the pet store about three years ago on the day after Christmas. Since we'd never had a family pet before, we figured guinea pigs would be an easier trial run than a puppy. Besides, I told my husband, I'd already potty-trained three small humans and I wasn't up for the experience again, however cute puppies might be.

Our two little fluff balls were pretty timid when we first introduced them to their new home, a small cage equipped with food, water, timothy hay, and a plastic igloo to hide in. After a couple weeks, they'd adjusted well, and we decided to try putting them down on the living room floor. After we'd blocked off all the exits under the couch and behind the bookcase, we set them down. But we weren't at all prepared for what happened next.

No, they didn't run off. Quite the opposite—they immediately headed for home: their cage. For the next couple days, we experimented with putting them down in various places around the house, and every time, they found their way back to their home. I suppose that shouldn't have been terribly shocking, if you think about it. They trusted us. They knew that in their cage they would have safety and everything they needed. Out in the open world, they weren't sure of anything. While we, the resident humans, saw their cage as a place of confinement, control, and restriction, S'mores and Cinnamon saw their cage as a place of safety, provision, and comfort.

Maybe we can find parallels to this story with the Psalmist in Psalm 119:35. It's a little shocking to hear someone writing about his delight in the law. The Law is a set of rules. Who loves rules?

People appreciate rules when they want to know what's expected of them. People who want to please someone tend to like rules or guidelines, because rules give them something to do with that love that they have. When we love our authorities, we trust them, knowing that they truly are on our side, out for our own good.

Because the Psalmist loves God, he loves God's commandments (John 14:15). The beautiful thing about our relationship to our good Father is that we can always go to Him for help when obedience is difficult. It is impossible to please God without faith that comes from no one but Him (Heb. 11:6). The Psalmist here implores the Lord to change the inclination of his heart—to change not only his behavior, but also his desires. He is wholly dependent upon the help of the One he loves.

But there is mention of fear—even dread—here, as well. “Confirm to your servant your promise, that you may be feared,” the Psalmist asks, “Turn away the reproach I dread, for your rules are good.” The Psalmist expresses the fearsomeness of God, but in doing so he expresses his own dread not of the person of God, but of His reproach.

A child who knows she is loved unconditionally by her parent will feel free to go to him or her for help when obedience is hard. She will feel free to confess shortcomings and learn that trying to hide things from mom or dad always ends in more pain. Love has a way of revealing truth.