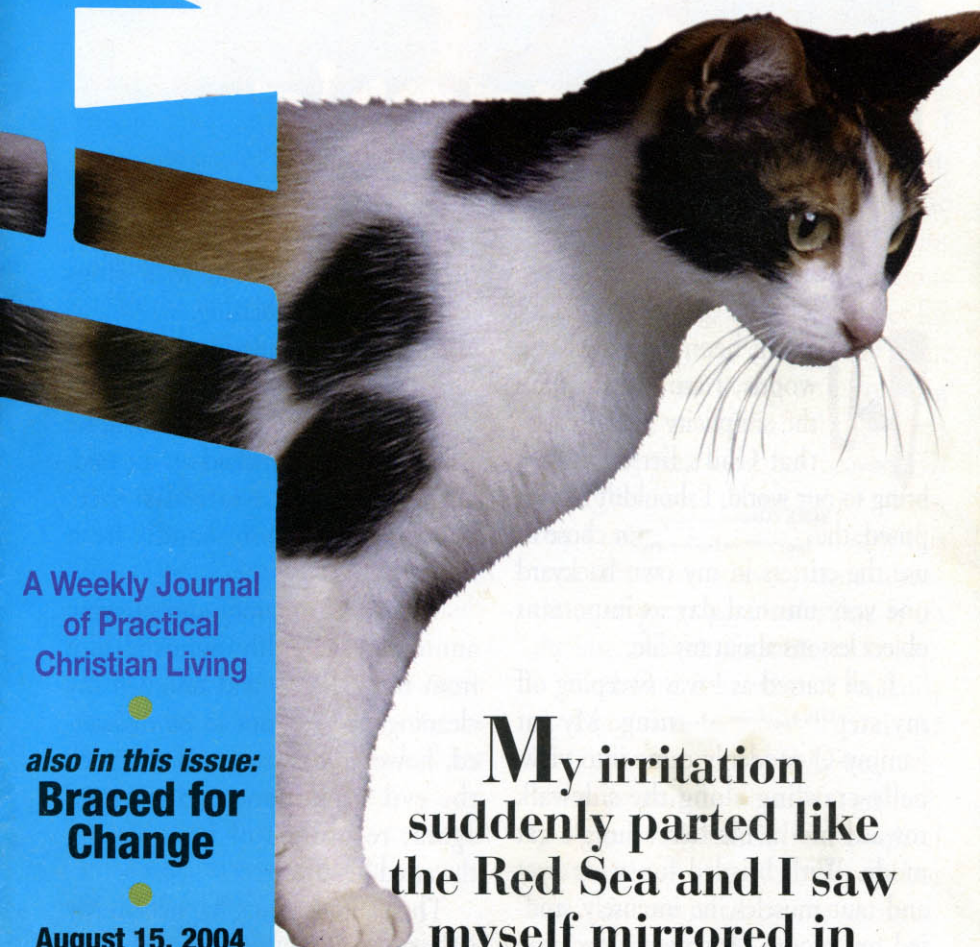


CRITTER LESSONS

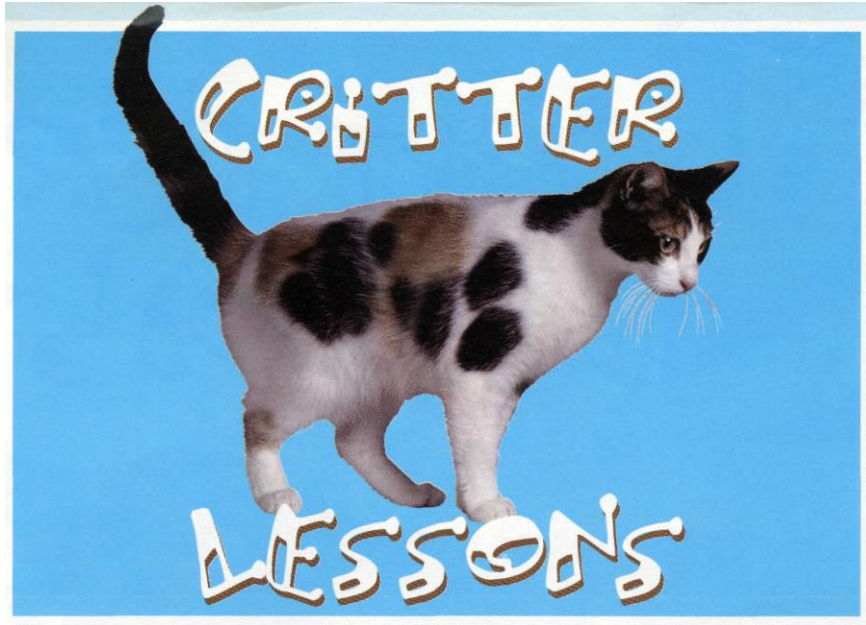


A Weekly Journal
of Practical
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also in this issue:
**Braced for
Change**

August 15, 2004

My irritation
suddenly parted like
the Red Sea and I saw
myself mirrored in
Sammy-Q's behavior.



a true story
by Debora M. Coty



aving been raised in the woods, I truly appreciate the simplicity and honesty that God's little animals bring to our world. I shouldn't be surprised, then, that the Creator chose to use the critters in my own backyard one very unusual day as important object lessons about my life.

It all started as I was sweeping off my steps in the morning. My cat Sammy-Q suddenly came into view, belly-crawling along the sidewalk toward me in his fierce jungle cat mode. With bristled fur, wide eyes and taut muscles, he intensely studied my broom. Apparently deciding it was not friend but foe, he attacked

the straw broom head with fangs bared and claws a-blazing.

Intent on completing my task, I impatiently pushed him aside and continued the chore. Undaunted, he regrouped and launched an air raid, pouncing from a safe distance, knocking the broom handle from my hands.

With verbal reproof and growing annoyance, I bodily removed him from the premises and resumed my cleaning. He was not to be dissuaded, however, and returned to attack the evil stick-monster again and again, regardless of how often I thwarted his efforts.

Then an odd thing happened. My irritation suddenly parted like the Red Sea and in the dry riverbed of

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revelation, I saw myself mirrored in Sammy-Qs behavior.

I, too, had been trying on my own initiative to accomplish tasks that I stubbornly refused to yield to God, even when my own best efforts repeatedly fell short. Seeing only the goals that I wanted to accomplish, I couldn't see God's bigger picture. I could never explain to Sammy-Q what I was doing or why, nor could he, in his limited capacity as a cat, ever understand my human reasoning for not allowing his misdirected efforts to succeed. We are simply on different levels.

In the same way, I cannot, in my limited human capacity, ever completely comprehend God's divine blueprint for my life. In some instances, I may never see the bigger picture, and like Sammy-Q, I must learn to accept that my Benefactor has reasons, whether I understand them or not, for allowing me to fail.

Later that eventful morning, I went outside to investigate a commotion in the yard and found to my dismay that the neighbor's dog had cornered a baby squirrel in my garage. After several touch-and-go moments, I managed to rescue the little guy out of the drooling jaws of death.

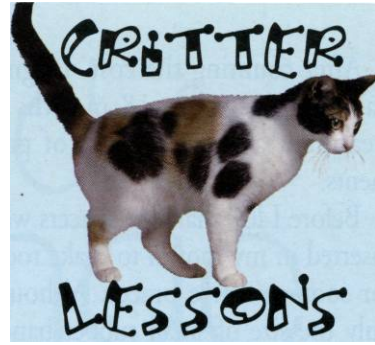
I held him tightly in my cupped hands and entered the safe haven of

the house with the intention of soothing him and enjoying his unique presence before releasing him into the backyard. But the terrified rodent would have none of it. Even after the danger had passed, he refused to be comforted, striving instead to break away from the comforter. I had proven myself to be his savior, but he would not trust me enough to allow me to take care of him.

Contemplating this over lunch, I realized that I show no more faith than the little squirrel. I recognize that Christ is my Savior, but I cannot seem to turn the care of my precious daughter over to Him. She leaves for college next year, and already I am up nights worrying and fretting about the many bad things that could happen. God has proven His lovingkindness to me many times, but I continue to struggle with this issue about trust every time something of great personal value is on the line.. .health, finances, or family.

Yet I find that when I willfully turn my situation over to God, the knot of anxiety in my belly begins to soften around the edges and gradually melts away, like a hard block of unsweetened chocolate over a hot burner. Convicted by my squirrel-

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like reluctance to trust the One who saved me, I stopped right then and there and entered into God's protective haven by releasing my concerns about my daughter to Him. What sweet **relief!**

The lessons were not over yet. Later that same afternoon, as I was watering some yard plants, a rustling in the shrubbery caught my attention. A large flying insect, the likes of which I have never seen before, was tangled in some bushes. It looked like a cross between a moth and a bat. Bright yellow, with a wingspan of at least 6 inches, it had a body the size of a Vienna sausage.

At first, I thought the insect appeared panicked because of its imprisonment, but then I saw a garter snake, the size of an 8-inch twig, slithering rapidly toward it. The reptile was apparently intent on having a gourmet dinner, which was very optimistic considering that the yellow flying beastie was 10 times bigger than the snake. This minor detail didn't deter him as he coiled to strike.

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At that moment, the insect broke free from the bushes, and began winging his way low to the ground, with the snake in hot pursuit. With a flash of speed, the tiny snake caught up to the moth-bat, and reaching upward with his open mouth, latched onto the back of one yellow wing.

To my astonishment, the highly motivated insect continued pursuing his flight to freedom, dragging the snake behind him across the grass. I could see that the yellow fellow was struggling to bear this additional burden, and the snake refused to let go of his trophy. I decided it was time for some human intervention.

I trotted alongside the locked-in-combat duo and stomped my foot hard on the ground. The snake was so startled by this mini-earthquake that he released his vise grip on the moth-bat, which then shot upward and escaped into the tree branches.

After a good chuckle over this ridiculous scene, I began to see yet another parallel between my little nature friends and myself. How many times have I bitten off more than I could chew and been overly optimistic in my estimation of all the tasks I could handle? For years, not being able to say no had caused my plate to be increasingly piled high with responsibilities at church, work, and community functions. Constantly hustling and bustling, I was

serving everyone else at the expense of my family.

Like the pseudo-catastrophe that had stilled the snake, it took a skiing accident and three knee surgeries within 7 months to make me stop and reconsider my goals. God got my attention by using the only way I would listen.

During my long recovery time, I reevaluated the way I was expending my finite energies during the ever-shortening time my two teenage children would need me as a hands-on, cookie-baking, there-to-hug-you-when-you-fail kind of mom while they were still at home. It was a time of establishing priorities and learning to slow down and concentrate my efforts on what really mattered.

I was surprised the Creator chose to use the critters in my own backyard as important object lessons about my life, but I'm glad He did.



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