

# **My Dog Henry and The Theology of the Potato Chip**



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Henry came into our family about twelve years ago, and nothing has been the same since. Not in a poetic way. In a real way. A furniture-has-never-fully-recovered kind of way.

Henry runs against the grain. He does not acknowledge rules as laws. He treats them like loose lifestyle suggestions, drafted by people who clearly did not consult him beforehand. Henry believes rules exist primarily to create the emotional thrill of breaking them. He is living proof that rebellion does not require a manifesto. Sometimes it just requires access to the kitchen.

Henry has done things that cannot be explained with logic, training, or prayer. Things that make you stop mid-sentence and say, "There is no way a dog just did that." He generally assumes no one is watching. Sometimes he knows you are. Either way, he proceeds. Because for Henry, life is about fun. About pleasure. About enjoying the good life. Preferably at someone else's expense and usually involving crumbs.

But Henry did not arrive during a lighthearted chapter of my story.

He came when I was climbing out of one of the darkest valleys of my life. And not a poetic valley with soft shadows and metaphorical mist. I mean the kind of valley where multiple losses

stack up, one grief hands off to another, and exhaustion becomes your most faithful companion. A season shaped by a collision of events that left me worn thin, emotionally spent, and wondering whether the word “better” was still meant for me.



I was deep. Low. Buried under the weight of my own life. At the bottom of the well, straining to see if there was still such a thing as light. And when I say bad, I mean it gently, plainly, and without drama. It was bad. I was still standing. Still moving. But only because momentum hadn't fully given up on me yet.

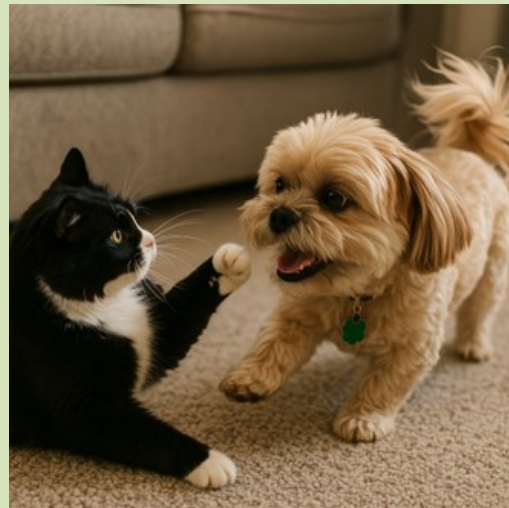
And into that moment walked Henry. Unaware. Unburdened. Unimpressed by existential despair. Henry, without even knowing it, became my accidental instructor in survival.

He taught me the first and most sacred law of recovery: when life becomes unbearable, take a nap. Henry does not spiral. He does not ruminate. He sleeps. Deeply. Committed. Like rest itself is a protest against despair. And more often than not, when you wake up, things do feel different. Not fixed. But lighter. Looser. Possible.

He taught me that sometimes hope is not a grand vision. Sometimes hope is a stolen potato chip. Something small. Salty. Immediate. Something that reminds you that taste still exists.

He taught me about family systems, especially the highly unstable diplomatic relationship between dogs and cats. We have a cat named Thora. She is clever. Strategic. Unreasonably confident. She will lie on the couch just close enough to Henry to provoke him without consequence. Perfect posture. Unbroken eye contact. Stillness so pure it feels personal. She does not move. She dares.

Henry does not see symbolism. Henry sees disrespect. And every so often, he reminds Thora that peace is not guaranteed forever.



Henry taught me something there, too. Sometimes you practice restraint. Sometimes you practice humility. And sometimes, wink-wink, you bark back at what keeps taunting you from the couch.

But the deeper lesson Henry gave me was not about rebellion. It was about returning to life.

Henry, in all his quirky, chaotic, unapologetic ways, taught me to climb again. To breathe again. To adventure again. To remember that joy does not require your permission to return. He taught me that not everything has to be so heavy. That not everything requires analysis. That some days you just chase the sound of happiness down the hallway and see where it goes.

He taught me that when the world feels like it is sitting on your chest, you are allowed to make noise about it. Bark a little. Stir the air. Refuse to fade quietly. Stay in the game. And then he taught me the lesson that surprised me the most. Sometimes you do not need to fight. Sometimes you do not need to run. Sometimes you do not need to bark at anything at all.

Sometimes you just need to love.

Sometimes Henry just wants to be petted. Just to be close. No agenda. No mischief. No crime in progress. Just connection. Sometimes that connection looks like a quiet weight against your leg. Sometimes it looks like him licking your hands and face until you are loudly demanding a towel and questioning every life decision that led to this moment. Sometimes it looks like snuggling when the world finally goes quiet.

And every time it happens, Henry teaches me again. Connection heals without asking permission. Love does not require explanation. And sometimes presence is the medicine. Over time, I realized he was teaching me something even deeper than comfort. Henry was teaching my nervous system how to come home. Without lectures. Without techniques. Without clinical terminology. Just through presence, warmth, and rhythm. Through proximity. Through the quiet intelligence of connection. He taught me the lived experience behind everything I now teach about polyvagal reform, heart coherence, and neurocardiology. Not as theory. Not as charts. But as practice on the living room floor.

When I come home now, I get down on the floor with Henry and the other littles, dogs I mean, and I do not say a word. No phone. No problem solving. No performance. I disconnect from the world and reconnect with the most ancient language there is. Touch. Breath. Stillness. Beating hearts.



And something real happens.

Our nervous systems synchronize. Our breathing slows. Our hearts begin to fall into that beautiful coherent sine wave that radiates not just inside the body but outward, into the room itself. Fifteen feet of healing space. Maybe more. It is impossible to measure love precisely, but you can feel when the air changes.

Henry taught me that love is not just emotional. It is physiological. It is electrical. It is rhythmic. It is ordered. It settles chaos from the inside out. He taught me

that when I live too long in dorsal vagal collapse, when everything goes dim and heavy and far away, I do not need a sermon. I need activation. Movement. Play. Barking. Adrenaline. A return to life through the body before the soul can follow.

And he taught me the opposite too.

When I am too wound up, too driven, too amped in sympathetic surge, he pulls me back into the green zone. Back into regulation. Back into safety. Back into vagal tone. Back into the sacred middle space where healing actually integrates.

That is the place I call Vegas. Not the city. The Vagus nerve pathway of restoration. The place where God meets us quietly after the noise wears off. The place where your nervous system finally believes again that it is safe to be alive.

Henry taught me how to travel there without a map.  
And yes, I believe this plainly and without apology.  
Henry was sent by God.

Not as a symbolic notion. Not as a poetic metaphor. But as a living conduit of what God was already trying to teach me. That healing is embodied. That faith is not just believed. It is regulated. It is breathed. It is felt. It is synchronized.

Henry did not just teach me NeuroFaith® in my head. He taught me NeuroFaith® in my body. Experienced. Entrained. Integrated.

And somewhere along the way, I had a quiet realization.  
There is a lot of Henry in me.

I do not bow easily to ideological pressure. I buck against it. I run against the grain when I know the grain is wrong. I do not let the cat provoke me when I have done nothing to deserve it. And when something keeps taunting what is good, what is true, what is hard-fought inside me, yes, I will fight back.

I do not live in fear anymore.

There was a time when I was buried in it. When fear felt like the native tongue of my nervous system. But somewhere between naps, stolen potato chips, reckless joy, and stubborn barking, I chose something else. I chose courage. Tenacity. Spirit. Engagement. I chose to stay in the game.

Henry taught me that too.



But Henry also taught me the tempering. He taught me how to quiet down. How to stand down when standing down is the wiser strength. He taught me that not every moment demands a charge, not every tension demands teeth. Sometimes the bravest thing you can do is sit still and let yourself be close to someone.

Sometimes you fight. Sometimes you bark. Sometimes you run full speed into joy with no explanation at all.

And sometimes...  
You just snuggle.

Henry taught me how to know the difference.

When to hold them. When to fold them. And when to run like something beautiful is waiting on the other side of the room.

And if that is not a spiritual education, I do not know what is. Twelve years later, I can say this without exaggeration. Henry did not just join our family. He helped pull me out of the well. He taught me to rest without shame. To take joy without apology. To bark when life presses too hard. To love when nothing else makes sense. And to always be suspicious of a cat that looks that calm.

Not bad for a dog who believes rules are optional, naps are sacred, potato chips are a moral imperative, and love is best delivered at full speed with an open mouth.