

## Introduction

### To the Parent

What do you *wanna* be when you grow up? Children ponder this question repeatedly during the course of their childhood. They relate to father or mother, grandparents, friends, neighbors—everyone around them has something that they specialize in and do. Children happily emulate what they envision in their playful activities—trying on different hats and shoes—whether they be of fireman, farmer, foreman, or flight attendant. God has designed your child with unique gifts and talents for a purpose that will one day unfold before your eyes. Someday—and soon enough—you will look at your child and realize he or she is *all grown up!*

You have a wonderful opportunity with the *When I Grow Up* series to guide your children to better understand the world around them and take advantage of their delight-directed interest in the subjects presented. Ideal for children ages 4-10, older students and even Mom and Dad can learn right alongside them about the many special callings (or occupations) that people are involved in and love. This is not just a wafting of information but an in-depth study that has been thoroughly researched and introduced along with engaging text, fun activities, and special learning adventures and ideas for further creative exploration. Enjoy the process of mentoring your child to become what God desires for him (or her) by discovering and encouraging his uniqueness and individuality through these hands-on studies. This could be the spark that ignites the fire of interest for your child—and who knows what path it may take!

### To the Student

Do you have any pets? Have you ever taken your pet to visit a veterinarian? You may think of a veterinarian as a doctor for cats and dogs, but did you know that veterinarians care for all types of animals and that some veterinarians do not even work with animals at all?

Some veterinarians travel to exotic locations to help people care for their animals. And other veterinarians even work for the military and various government agencies. Still others use their skills on the mission field, serving others while caring for God's creatures.

Take a closer look at the varied field of veterinary medicine. Meet a veterinarian and learn about his life and adventures caring for animals near and far. Discover what educational training is required, how much money veterinarians earn, and more. You might even decide that caring for animals is the occupation for you!

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## My Life as a Veterinarian

Hi! My name is Dr. Brad Christensen, and I am a veterinarian. I grew up in rural Wyoming where large animals were an important part of our lives. The people living around us were ranchers, and since my father is also a veterinarian, I spent a lot of time working alongside our neighbors as they cared for cattle, horses, and sheep. You can say I've been around animals my whole life.

For example, in the Dakotas, llamas are commonly used to herd sheep. They take really good care of the sheep and will courageously chase away coyotes! You can imagine how helpful llamas are to sheep farmers. These valued animals work alongside the farmers and are given regular medical care. I was able to care for many of them and alpacas, too, while I was at school.



**Figure 1. This child is feeding a baby llama some carrots. This llama will grow up and be a working llama some day.**

Have you ever seen bison? These mammals have a thick, woolly coat which means they're better suited for cold-weather climates. Bison<sup>1</sup> are **big** and can weigh between 1,500 and 2,200 pounds. In addition to that heft, they are wild and dangerous and strong. They'll charge right through a fence or ram a truck! Well, Canadian ranchers, who keep big herds of bison just as we do cattle, had bought a herd from Wyoming (my home state).<sup>2</sup> My father was hired to test the animals prior to sending them across the Canadian/American border, in large part, because we owned a big rodeo arena which the ranchers planned to keep the herd of bison in. They had to stay about three or four days to allow us to get all the work done, and the entire time, a full-time welder was there repairing the fences the bison kept destroying! My father and I drew blood from these animals for testing and vaccinated<sup>3</sup> all of them as fast as we could. Even though bison are called domestic<sup>4</sup> animals, they are still pretty wild!



**Figure 2. Here is my father, working on a bison. Can you see how the horns are tied with rope? The bison must be still while the small amount of blood for the test is drawn. This doesn't hurt him but rather keeps him from getting scared and hurting himself or my dad. Only a little bit of blood is drawn for tests. It won't hurt him at all.**

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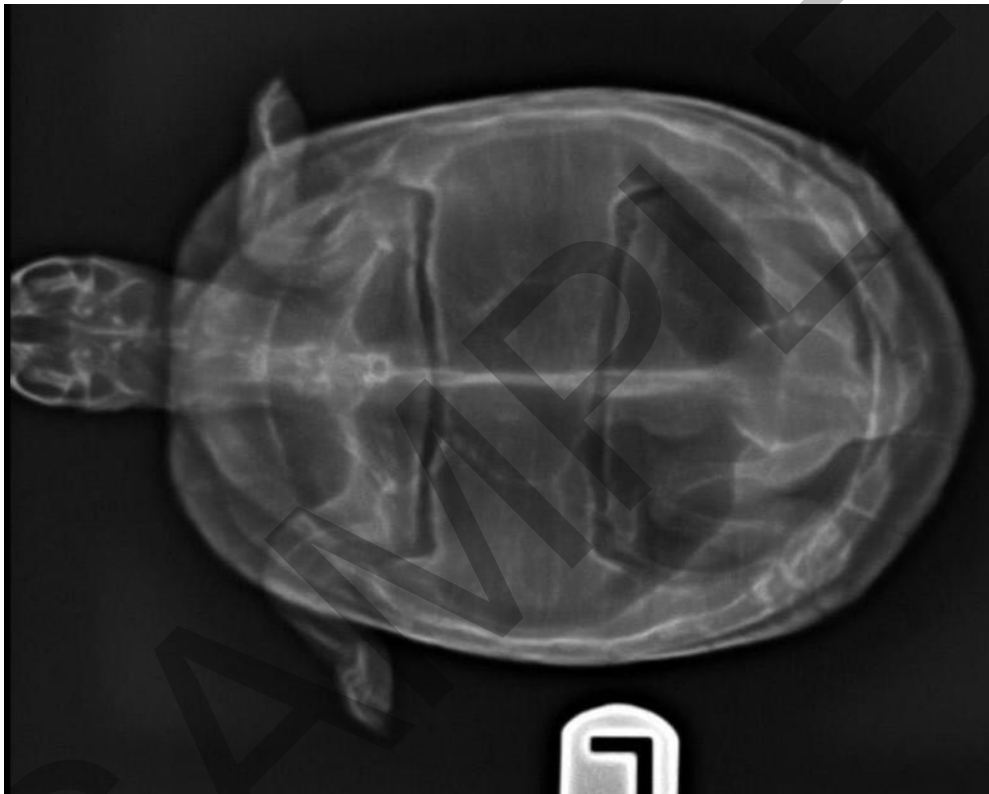
<sup>1</sup> Bison are related to cattle but are, technically, their own species. They are the largest land animals in North America.

<sup>2</sup> Before you can introduce herds to a new country, the animals must be tested to be sure they are not carrying any diseases that can infect animals abroad.

<sup>3</sup> **Vaccines** - Sometimes live, dead, or altered forms of pathogens (agents that cause disease) are injected into the body to improve immunity.

<sup>4</sup> **Domestic animals** - Animals that have been tamed and are used to being with people.

Right now, I work in the city as a small-animal veterinarian. My average day consists of examining pets and giving vaccines to little puppies and kittens. I deliver baby animals, and when they're born, we rub them with towels, suction liquid out of their throats, and help them start to nurse milk from their mothers. I also perform spay and neuter surgery,<sup>5</sup> fix broken bones, deal with illness, and manage the animal hospital where sick pets are on IVs<sup>6</sup> and need liquid medications and sometimes X-rays.



**Figure 3. This is an X-ray of a turtle. A turtle's top shell is called a "carapace," and its lower shell is called a "plastron." The X-ray allows us to see what is going on inside the turtle without hurting him. Turtles are reptiles and lay eggs.**

While I mainly work with dogs and cats, occasionally I'll see birds, ferrets, snakes, or iguanas. I really do not enjoy working with birds because I've gotten some

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<sup>5</sup> **Spay and neuter surgery** - Sometimes pet animals must have surgery to prevent reproduction. If you have sheep or cattle, you **want** them to reproduce, but most homes cannot accommodate endless supplies of puppies or kittens.

<sup>6</sup> **IV** - This is an abbreviation of the term "intravenous therapy." This is when liquid medicine is continuously delivered straight into the vein by use of a thin tubing and hollow needle. When medications are taken by mouth, the body must absorb them through the stomach or intestinal linings. IV medications immediately enter the bloodstream and have a much faster effect.

pretty mean bites from them! Fortunately, we have a doctor on staff who specializes in exotic animals, so she takes care of the birds.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 4. Even though my daily routine is predictable now, working with animals never is. Here are some pictures of my staff holding one of my newest patients: a duck!**



**Figure 5. Here is an X-ray of the duck.**

Besides allowing me to work with animals, which I love, my career gives me the freedom of living wherever I want because, where people are, you'll find animals. I do my daily job, and I enjoy doing it, but in addition to the daily blessings it gives, the Lord provides opportunities for me to do other unique things.

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<sup>7</sup> **Exotic birds** - Exotic birds are birds that are not indigenous to our region. Popular exotic pet birds include parakeets, parrots, conures, cockatiels, and large macaws.

Let me give you an example of that. A couple of years ago, I had the opportunity to go to Egypt<sup>8</sup> on a mission trip. We had been serving at a church in Cairo<sup>9</sup>, when a family who worshipped with us there invited us to their hometown to look at their animals. Because of my skills, I was able to leave the city of Cairo and enter into El-Fayoum, an oasis where they depend on farming to survive. I was shocked at how green and beautiful it was after driving across the dry desert. We literally went from desert to lush and gorgeous in just a couple of miles. It almost looked tropical, and there were fruit trees everywhere!



**Figure 6. Before I got into the town, a man approached with a sick camel.**

Once you enter the town, everything changes. Their homes are shaped like cubicles that are all stacked up. The houses are so close together that it is like walking down a dormitory hallway instead of an alleyway. They have minimal electricity, no sewers, no running water, and no refrigeration.<sup>10</sup> I walked into one house and saw

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<sup>8</sup> Egypt is a country in northern Africa, where 90% of the people are Muslims.

<sup>9</sup> Cairo is the capital of Egypt and the largest city in Africa.

<sup>10</sup> By not having access to sewers, running water, and refrigeration, can you see how difficult it is for these people to stay clean and disease-free? No sewers means human waste must be manually removed from the home; no running water means that clean-up is nearly ineffective, and the simple act of frequent hand-washing (which is so vital to

that I was in a 10' x 20' room where four people slept. The adjoining room was also 10' x 20', but it had three cows in it! This is not unusual. Many of them keep their cattle right inside their house. They shovel the manure<sup>11</sup> right outside the front door into the alleyway, where it all piles up. We were able to set up a makeshift clinic in the alleyway, and people began to bring us their animals for examination.



**Figure 7. Can you see all the manure in the alleyway?**

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good health) becomes an unheard-of luxury; no refrigeration is a hardship because everything they prepare must be eaten immediately or it will spoil.

<sup>11</sup> **Manure** - Animal waste.



**Figure 8. I'm wearing the grey sweatshirt and examining a goat for intestinal parasites.**

People began to show up with goats, sheep, and cows. As you can imagine, these people need their animals for milk and for meat. Unfortunately, they don't really know how to raise them or how to reduce disease. All the animals I saw had internal worms or external mites. Some of the animals they brought me were completely hairless due to the voracious mites that thrive in the humidity of the oasis. These animals need treatment three to four times a year,<sup>12</sup> but as much as these Egyptians would like to keep them healthy, they have no access to medications or the money to get them.

In North America, we're at the leading edge of veterinary. Our animals are clean and healthy, but in these countries, even their children are plagued with measles and rubella.<sup>13</sup> We had to do what we could. My brother-in-law<sup>14</sup> and I worked for three hours and treated 75 animals! We gave them all the medications we had.

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<sup>12</sup> In North America, we keep our herds clear of these diseases by providing optimal living conditions and routine medication.

<sup>13</sup> **Measles and rubella** - These diseases have been largely eliminated in North America due to vaccinations of children. While many people who contract measles can heal completely, in under- or malnourished victims, measles may cause permanent vision damage or even death. Rubella is a much milder disease, but the biggest impact of rubella is that it can cause serious harm to unborn babies.

<sup>14</sup> My brother-in-law is a cattle rancher with a lot of experience working with animals. He came to help me and the people of Egypt with their animals.



**Figure 9. You can see how busy we were. The lady in purple is a pharmacist and is dispensing vaccines.**



**Figure 10. You can see the happiness of the people when their animals have received care. You can see by my smile (that's me in the grey t-shirt) that it's a joy to give them the care they need!**

When we finished working, we were all invited to worship together. We were taken to their little church, where they had a couple of wooden benches and one worn-out Bible in Arabic. As a treat, we were given dinner, and we were served some special homemade cheese. They had a sheepskin that had been filled with cow milk and hung until the milk curdled. When it was time to eat, they pulled a plug at the bottom and the cheese squirted out like icing!

During the time of worship, my brother-in-law, who is also a Christian, noticed that the four- to eighteen-year-old children were not involved in the service at all. He took them outside and played with them and had an opportunity to witness to them. Even though he came along to help me in veterinary work, God used his love of children to impact the community further.

Many veterinarians use their skills exclusively to serve others in this way. There is an [association of veterinarians](#) that does a lot of mission work both in the United States and abroad. It is exciting to have a skill that can provide income for me and my family, as well as give me an opportunity to give to those less fortunate. It is especially fulfilling to see my God-given skills used by God to further the Gospel.

Some people think that veterinarians only work on pets or on zoo animals. As you've seen, vets can work on ranches or on the mission field or both. Other vets only work on small animals, some just work on horses, and some may work only on cows. Some veterinarians work for the government to make sure the animals we eat are safe. Ten percent of North American vets are government vets who focus on pig herds, cattle herds, etc., to protect the general animal population from disease.

Some veterinarians are scientists who are statisticians<sup>15</sup> and follow trends and research treatments, herds, and nutrition without ever having to handle animals.<sup>16</sup> Mostly, they want to learn about diseases such as cancer and also how to heal them. They work for universities or the government, and many travel to other countries to help them do the same.

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<sup>15</sup> **Statisticians** - While statisticians are given the unfair nickname “number crunchers,” they actually participate in very exciting discoveries. By taking huge amounts of data and correlating factors such as infant mortality and breastfeeding, or hand washing and diarrhea, or vegetable-based diet and cancer, they can pinpoint benefits and/or detriments of certain practices. Their research contributes to knowledge that can lead to longer and healthier lives. In the case of animals, the research of veterinary statisticians can help us be better caregivers and improve animal health, our stocks, our food supply, and, consequently, our own health.

<sup>16</sup> They may examine why certain sheep populations are shrinking, for instance. Their research may reveal a disease taking hold of the population or perhaps an environmental hazard previously undetected such as tainted water or feed.

The field of veterinary is broad and diverse. It is never boring or monotonous, and I feel privileged to have this occupation. Now that you have a good idea about what the life of a veterinarian can be like, do you agree that my work is exciting? Let me tell you what it takes to become a veterinarian on the next page.

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