

Everything I Know About Pain I Learned from My Dog

The steroids gave her 4 more days of a normal life (although she was still weak). But when I woke up on the day for her return visit to the vet, she was in obvious pain. I took the very short walk with her, just enough for her to stretch her legs and relieve herself. I had to help her back into the trailer so I could finish what I needed to do, then I carried her into the truck. At the vets, I got the news I expected: she was suffering. I made the decision to end her life.

I think back on her life. How she fought to be the alpha dog as soon as she could walk. I think about how she loved to romp in the snow. I never saw such joy or excitement in her as when there was snow on the ground, and I think of this most of all. I think of how, when she was grown but still young, she would race around the back yard, her muscles rippling with every stride. She was never more beautiful than when in a sprint. I think about the time she found a dead squirrel on one of our walks and carried it home, with over a quarter mile left to go. She set it down before going inside the house. I, of course, got rid of it. I remember how disappointed she was the next walk we took when she saw it was gone. But I also think of how much she taught me about God.

As I walked her and her canine siblings (she was second oldest at the time), I once wondered how much like gods we are to the animals. We live for many generations by their standard. We have wisdom beyond their comprehension. We dictate what they can and can't do. Something as simple as opening a door to let them outside is nothing short of miraculous to them. Is there anything between our relationship with God that doesn't have a parallel with our relationship with dogs? Yes, of course there is. But differences are mostly by degree.

We demand obedience from them yet quickly forgive the worst things that they do. We provide food and shelter. And we allow pain in their lives. It is this last thought that has haunted me through the years, and it always comes to mind when God allows some misfortune to enter my life.

I'm not talking about the pain that comes from abuse, Satan sees to that. I'm talking about the pain that corrects one's behavior and/or makes one stronger. She didn't know why I took her to the veterinarian's to get her shots. All she knew was that I let her be hurt by the vet. Yet, she never stopped loving me. Instead of being angry, she would just press closer to me. She didn't know why it was important for me to train her to do certain things, all she knew was that it would be unpleasant if she didn't. Yet she never stopped loving me. She would just look up at me with big eyes for some sign that I forgave her. She didn't know why she couldn't run free like some other animals, all she knew was that a fence kept her from it. Yet she never stopped loving me. She would get excited and run to me whenever I stepped into the yard.

How much better would our relationship be with God if we stopped pretending we know better than He? Every time we are hurt, we have a chance to come closer to God or to move away from Him. But it's not the pain that decides this movement, it's how we react. When the time came, her life was in my hands just as my life is in God's hands. She didn't know what was happening. She was scared and obviously in a lot of pain. But she didn't lash out. Instead, she attempted to curl up with me as best as her weakened state would allow. I hope I can be as brave and trusting when my time comes.

To wish I could go to heaven so I could see her run in the eternal snow is a form of idolatry. I need to want to go to heaven because that's what God wants for me, not because I want to be with her. But if George MacDonald is right, I can find some comfort here on Earth knowing she'll never have to

stop playing in the snow there. And maybe it will be God's will to reunite us after all.

Thank you for all you did and taught me. I am going to miss you girl.

Jolene Mulholland 1 January 2009 - 2 October 2020