

the greatest suffering, the suffering of His own Son (Isaiah 38:17-20, 53:10; Hebrews 5:8-9; 1 Peter 1:6-9).

With suffering being used by a loving God to train His people toward holiness, how dare we interrupt the training session and call it compassion. It is saying that we would rather be treated like “cockroaches.”

Certainly medical science has given us many tools to use to ease the pain of suffering. We do not have to kill the patient to accomplish that. But to say a person is better off dead is an arrogant assumption that there either is no God or He does not know what He is doing.

The blessings of suffering I witnessed in just 14 years of parish ministry are innumerable. Such blessings came not only to the person suffering but to those family members, friends, and caregivers who were

part of the process. Sins confessed, sins forgiven, old wounds healed, new bonds established, priorities reestablished, love strengthened, faith renewed, God’s grace acknowledged—all these and so much more form a litany of blessings that God can use for His eternal purpose and for the ultimate good of His people.

Those who, in the name of compassion, would rip such pages of suffering from our lives must think of their fellow human beings as nothing more than “cockroaches.” That’s too bad because who is going to housebreak a “cockroach”?



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God's Love in Human Suffering

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There are certain creatures—fish being the most notable—whose size grows with each recounting of its capture.

Since cockroaches also fall into this genre, I will not attempt to tell you its size. It was in the process of staking out a claim on our kitchen counter, as if it had a right to whatever morsels it might find, when I silenced its “scratching, scratching” advances with a well placed blow from a coffee mug.



So, why this cruelty? Why didn't I capture the creature, set up some boundaries by building a little cockroach corral, and submit it to a rigorous training regimen so that it would come when I called or roll over or not jump on guests and visitors? In short, why didn't I housebreak my cockroach?

The answer is simple. I do not love cockroaches!

Dusty, however, is another matter. Dusty is my golden retriever. I *do* love Dusty. I chose him out of a litter of nine to be my very own dog. I spent considerable time and money setting up some boundaries for him by fencing in my backyard. Now he will not get out on the street or get in trouble with the neighbors or get tangled up with a less respectable canine. I have given many patient (most of the time) hours training him to stay where I want him to stay, walk where I want him



Actors portraying Dusty over the years.

to

walk, fetch what I want him to fetch. He has been taught not to bark at people, or jump up on them, or beg for their food.

Not all of this training has been pleasant.

A slap on the rump here, a bucket of water in the face there, a yank on a choke collar, a loud scolding—all necessary to get him to do what I want him to do. That, after all, is the ultimate aim. I do not train Dusty to make him happy. I train him so he will follow my directions. I have noticed, however, that this does end up making him happy. Tail wagging and canine pride are at its peak when Dusty has accomplished something he knows will please me!

Human Suffering

How does this relate to the topic of human suffering? It helps us answer the question, “Why do the people of a loving God suffer?” It is because we are “golden retrievers,” not “cockroaches.” We have not scratched and scratched our way into God’s domain to stake out a claim as if we had a right to all His blessings. He has chosen us to be His very own and He loves us. His creating hands shaped us in our mothers’ wombs. His nail-pierced hands redeemed

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us from sin’s curse. We are very special creatures!

His ultimate will for us, His special people, is not for us to be happy. His ultimate will is that we will be with Him in heaven someday and that on our way there we be what He intends us to be. Then we will be happy. When Jesus said, **“I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly,”** (John 10:10) He was not just talking about eternal life but also life right here and now.

Here is where suffering comes in. (Please keep ol’ Dusty in mind as we proceed.) It is precisely because we are His special loved people that He sends and uses suffering as He sets up boundaries and shapes us into what He wants us to be.

“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves” (Hebrews 12:5-6a).

“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline” (Revelation 3:19a).

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“Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons” (Hebrews 12:7a).

“Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness” (Hebrews 12:10).

There it is in God’s own inspired handwriting; He wants us to share in His holiness. That is His ultimate goal for His “golden retrievers.” “Cockroaches” are on their own. They are not disciplined. They may suffer. Most often, however, it seems that they do not, much to our dismay. They have free rein “scratching and scratching” around unaware that their ultimate end is destruction under the avenging hand of God.

Meanwhile those chosen by God are being trained according to His good and gracious purpose. It doesn’t always seem pleasant, but we trust in our master.

“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11).

The Blessings of Suffering

This is why the Bible speaks of suffering in a way that our present world with all of its “cockroaches” cannot understand. It talks of God’s presence and His voice speaking in times of suffering (Job 36:15). There is hope in suffering (Psalm 42:10-11; Isaiah 53:11; 1 Peter 5:10). God’s promises are our comfort in suffering (Psalm 119:50). For God’s chosen people, good comes from suffering, including the greatest good from