

Optimistic Suffering—May 2007

I'm blessed and encouraged as I observe our CBM family handle suffering and hardship. The ladies in the office are quick to keep us informed and Ellie is faithful in providing appropriate cards. It's never done haphazardly or casually. We really do care, and we really do pray when you are hurting.

I sign the cards: sometimes get well, or sympathy, or one simply to let you know we are praying for you. A card can encourage, yet—ultimately it is the Lord—through His Word that will comfort us. After all, Paul called Him “the God of all Comfort” (2 Cor 1:3).

Peter also gives us reason for confidence in suffering: “But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.” (1 Peter 5:10) The verse is jammed packed full of “spiritual facts” that edify me:

1. We have God's grace.
2. We know we are going to glory.
3. Present suffering is only temporary.
4. Suffering builds our Character (... in these four ways:)
 - a. **“Make you perfect”**—this means that we will be equipped, adjusted or framed together. It is a beautiful picture when we realize that the same word is used for mending nets (Mark 1;19 Matt 4:21). God will mend, that which is broken; me! I have to chuckle when I see the stark contrast *from* the world's philosophy: the world throws away broken things, but God uses the broken for His Glory.
 - b. **“Stablish” us**—that is, to be set fast, to turn resolutely in a certain direction or to be confirmed. It's illustrated when Jesus “stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51).
 - c. **“Strengthen you”**—to be filled with His strength! God Himself is the very source of our strength. In fact, in my attempt to describe the power of God, I sometimes feel like a 2nd grader; “He is so powerful that he brought Jesus Christ back from the dead—so there!”(Eph 1:19, 20).
 - d. **“Settle you”**—to be grounded, to have the sure foundation that only comes from our growing relationship with Christ! Paul said that we could, “continue

in the faith grounded and settled . . .” and then actually be able to “rejoice in sufferings . . .” (Col 1:23, 24)

Remember; all this must be, and can only be, accomplished through the Word of God—
“Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.” (2 Pet 1:12)

Let’s settle it dear missionaries, accept the trusting certainty that our Father’s hand will never cause us a needless tear. Out of suffering come qualities, which the easy way of life will never bring. There is something doubly precious about a faith that has come victoriously through pain, sorrow and disappointment. The wind will extinguish a weak flame but will fan a strong flame into an even greater blaze.

Bill