

The Benefits of Suffering

And because of my chains,
most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord
and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

Philippians 1:14 (NIV)

I recall, as a child, riding along a highway in the family car.

Our 1930 Buick certainly didn't have air conditioning and so we always had the windows down to enjoy the summer air and keep cool.

Suddenly a bumblebee came in through an open window and it immediately tried to escape the car through the front windshield. As soon as my mother saw the bee she panicked. She didn't wish to get a sting or have one of us stung by it.

My father tried to speak a calm word to my mom but she continued to be very upset.

Then my dad gently put his hand over to where the bee was walking along the windshield and got the bee to climb up onto his finger. He then reached out the window and allowed the bee to escape.

I learned that day to try to act in a calm manner when something threatened me.

I saw that being stable is better than panicking, and allows you to act in a constructive way.

In our verse today, Paul's making the point that his suffering—that resulted from preaching the Gospel—was of benefit to Christians not yet arrested and jailed for sharing the Good News.

These people saw the grace of God in Paul's life as he endured imprisonment, and they were persuaded God would also meet their needs if they were also punished for proclaiming Christ.

A good lesson to learn from suffering is this: as you display the sustaining grace of God in your time of sorrow, you're an encouragement to others who suffer.

Many years ago I received a letter from a cancer patient. This woman had been a cancer patient for 20 years at the time she wrote to me—shortly after my diagnosis with that disease. She told me that she had her surgery (and treatment) and was now free of the disease for twenty years.

That testimony to the fact that some people beat this dreaded disease was wonderfully en-

couraging to me.

I considered her suffering (and victory) over cancer and was encouraged that I too might be successful in this new battle.

I benefitted from her pain.

If you're someone recently fallen into difficulty, you may receive benefit from consulting others who have already had some years on a similar journey.

Or, as someone experienced in suffering, you may come alongside someone frightened by a new and unwanted reality like yours.

Whichever it is, connect today with someone either to bless them with your testimony or else get them to tell you how they have endured their sorrow.

We have work to do so let's get busy doing it.

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