

Dear Friends,

My study of this week's passage reminded me of the words from a hymn which I remember hearing Tennessee Ernie Ford sing many times in my youth. I still love to hear him sing those words.

1. Time is filled with swift transition,
Naught of earth unmoved can stand,
Build your hopes on things eternal,
Hold to God's unchanging hand.
 - *Refrain:*
Hold to God's unchanging hand,
Hold to God's unchanging hand;
Build your hopes on things eternal,
Hold to God's unchanging hand.
2. Trust in Him who will not leave you,
Whatsoever years may bring,
If by earthly friends forsaken
Still more closely to Him cling.
3. Covet not this world's vain riches
That so rapidly decay,
Seek to gain the heav'nly treasures,
They will never pass away.
4. Jennie B. Wilson, Published 1906

Occasionally I realize that a particular person has been weighing heavily on my mind for some time. I've learned, when this happens, to contact that person, let them know, tell them they are in my prayers, and ask if I can help them. Well, I suppose this week's Gleanings article is my way of telling any reader who is suffering or struggling with life's burdens that they are in my prayers, and, if they need it, Lord willing, I'm here to encourage them.

Folks, we're strangers, pilgrims, traveling through an alien country on our way home. During our sojourn, we need each other. We need to remember and encourage each other. We need to pray for each other. And we need to stay in the closest possible personal contact with each other. If I could sing this old hymn to you today, I'd love to sing it, to remind you that our God is stronger, better, and greater than any problem or

trial we face. Take courage, "Pilgrim." We shall reach our home and find that all is well and blessed there. Then we shall fully enjoy that home with our God and Savior forever.

Love in Jesus,
Joe Holder

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Final Word—Always a Blessing

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. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 5:10-11 KJV 1900)

I have long regarded Peter's final word in this letter as one of the most encouraging messages in the New Testament to struggling, suffering Christians. In this "Benediction," Peter lays one layer of blessing onto another. And his final word is what every believer should live for and pray for, "**To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.**" Our Christian faith is not about us and what we want or like. It is about our gracious God and His loving merciful care of His people whose only right response to such grace must be this note of high praise.

Given Peter's emphasis throughout the letter on Christian suffering, this final word takes on greater value. Christians in this country have enjoyed freedom from persecution, something of an exception to the historical Christian experience. I fear those days may be few for coming generations. While Christians in this country are striving to make their presence and values a part of the government, they should pause and study the historical record. The more Christians intrude into government, civil government eventually intrudes into the Christian faith. And every time in the history of Christianity, when civil government intruded into faith, Christians suffered persecution. Even when civil government favored one denomination, the weight of the government often came down with a heavy hand against Christians of any other denomination. However good the present intentions, our present Christian efforts to influence or control our government may well follow the historical record and prove to be far more a curse than a blessing for believers. The New Testament teaches believers to pray for civil authority, and to submit to it, but never does the New Testament teach us to attempt to control it.

But the God of all grace. Peter's choice of "**all grace**" strengthens his description in this letter of "**the manifold grace of God.**" (1 Peter 4:10 KJV) We who hold this gracious disposition of God in high regard at times may over-emphasize God's eternally saving grace and neglect His grace for life and for spiritual gifts. Given the persecution of the Christians to whom Peter wrote this

letter, we should respect the Lord's kind grace to believers facing persecution for their faith today, but that grace extends far beyond persecution for our faith. What is your personal burden? Your greatest trial? Take courage. God's "Manifold" grace is sufficient for your need.

Yes, God's saving grace is sufficient to save His chosen people to the uttermost without the loss of one. But it is just as sufficient to strengthen us for—or through—our greatest trials. Your trial may be failing health. It may be family members who are their own worst enemy, and you long to help them find a better way to live. It might be your career, your job. Whatever your trial, the Lord's "**Manifold grace**" is fully able to give you the help and strength you need. Whatever form God's grace takes, it serves our deepest spiritual need. God is its source. He is the "**God of all grace**." As we should praise Him for our eternal salvation, we no less should praise Him for daily grace to serve, to obey, to submit, to minister to others, and, if necessary, to suffer for Him.

Peter described our relationship to this "Manifold grace" as a "Stewardship." We don't own God's grace. It is not our domestic pet who submits to our wish and word. In the end, God's "Manifold grace" describes the Lord's personal character and disposition toward His children. As beloved children in the Lord's family, we are the beneficiaries of His "Manifold grace," His loving and kind "Grace" or graciousness toward us.

...**after that ye have suffered a while.** What is your form of suffering? Your heaviest burden? God's grace is sufficient. However, Peter reminds us that we are not in glory yet. Suffering punctuates every life. In one case, that suffering may take the form of persecution for one's faith, as in the case of Peter's first recipients of his letter. Our case, our suffering may be different. Peter carefully avoided qualifying our suffering, except as he qualified it earlier in this letter. "... **let none of you suffer**" as a sinner in any of the various forms he illustrates in 1 Peter 4:15. Logically, in this context, Peter thought primarily of his readers suffering as a Christian because of their faith.. When we are living through suffering, whatever its form, we think it will never end. But thank the Lord, it does end, and Peter reminds us of what lies ahead.

...**make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.** When the Lord appeared to Elijah in his secluded cave, He reminded Elijah that He was not in every storm, earthquake, or fire. (1 Kings 19:11-12 KJV) Perhaps He also reminded Elijah that He was therefore not with Ahab and Jezebel, so the prophet had become too fearful of a power that God was not involved in. In 1 John 2:16, John reminds us that our God is not "**In**" all that is in the world, things such as lust and pride as examples. We need to keep this truth in mind to maintain a right view of the character of our God. He is not double-minded. However, in kind providence, the Lord may well support and teach us His wise truth as we suffer through our trials and pains. Thus, Peter reminds us that God can guide us through our trials to "**Make**" or grow us stronger in our faith. Much of the impact of life's

painful moments on us hinges on how we respond. If we focus on the pain of the situation, it will bring us down and leave us weaker and less stable in our faith. If we keep our heart and mind on the Lord as we go through it, we shall find His sufficient grace to endure it, even if, like Paul's thorn in the flesh, we must live with it instead of finding deliverance from it. Paul makes this point in another context.

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:17-18 KJV)

The affliction is light (Not bone crushing), and it endures “**but for a moment**” only “**While we look...at the things which are not seen,**” eternal things. If we look at the affliction, it is not light or brief. The weight—and deliverance—we experience by looking at eternal things alters our reaction to affliction. Notice the present tense verb, “**worketh,**” in this lesson. God's eternal glory steps into our world and our life, working in us and for us with power. But this only occurs when we “**Look...at the things which are not seen,**” eternal things . When life's pressure cooker is bearing down on us, we so easily think only of that pressure. At that moment in our minds, little else exists. Our entire world becomes that pressure cooker. Paul's inspired words encourage and nudge us to a different path. Look away from your pressure cooker to Jesus and His eternal things. Oh yes, our God gives us special songs in the night to remind us that the day is soon coming. But Scripture also reminds us that God's sufficient grace specializes in bringing the weight of eternal things to bear in our midnight hours when we look to Him and His eternal things.

During his wrestling with his thorn in the flesh, after learning that the thorn would remain, but God's sufficient grace would rest with him, Paul reasoned wisely.

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. (2 Corinthians 12:9-10 KJV)

Forget imagination regarding Paul's thorn in the flesh. He didn't tell us what it was, so we don't know. Keep your eye and mind on what he teaches us in the lesson. Because of the Lord's sufficient (And manifold) grace, we can accept our own “Thorns” or troubles and look to the Lord for His

grace and wisdom to guide us through them. What is our option to this path? We have only one. Focus on the trouble, grieve about how unfair it is, and become angry and bitter. If we avoid the deceiver's tickling our imagination and realize that these are our choices, it becomes a logical easy choice. Look to the Lord, stand faithfully in His fellowship regardless how many troubles or disappointments you face. And what does Paul assure us will be the outcome? "... **that the power of Christ may rest upon me ...for when I am weak, then am I strong .**"

So how does this all work? Jesus gave us His example. Prior to His arrest, torture, and crucifixion, He knew what was coming. And He reacted to the coming ordeal three times with the same reaction. He prayed! He prayed! And He prayed again. When He prayed, "**Let this cup pass from me,**" He was not asking the Father if He could choose a different way to accomplish the salvation of His people. He was praying for the hour to come and be finished. When we face our pressure cooker moments in life, our best option is to pray, and pray repeatedly for the Lord's grace. In some instances, the Lord's grace delivers us from the ordeal. He gently leads us to deliverance. At other times, that same "Manifold grace" abides with us and gives us the same quality of grace that the Father gave to Jesus to endure His cross and get past it to victory and glory.

Jesus prayed repeatedly when He faced the cross. Paul prayed repeatedly when he struggled with his painful thorn in the flesh. Don't pray once for your deliverance or sufficient grace. Pray, and pray again. Then pray some more. And keep your heart and your mind fixed on your Lord and His "eternal things," things not seen or known by mortal minds. Whether your trial vanishes, or you must endure it, that fixed look of faith will bring the weight of God and His eternal things to bear in your mind and heart. I've seen this miracle in godly people many times. I've experienced it a few times personally. But most importantly, I've found the testimony of Scripture reminding me repeatedly that my God and His sufficient grace stand at the ready to step into my—and your—affliction when we look off and away from our trial to our God and His eternal things.

...**make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.** Oh, what a better outcome we see when we look steadfastly to our God and His eternal things. Our faith becomes more "perfect." It becomes stronger and more stable, established, and strengthened. And whatever may be the outcome of our trial, our path becomes more settled. Long before Jesus came, Joshua rebuked Israel for their idolatry and reminded them to choose God and His way. "Israel" was already God's people, but they were not living like His people. Whatever Israel might choose to do, Joshua told Israel what he intended to do.

...**but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord .**" (Joshua 24:15b KJV)

In this crazy, twisted world in which we find ourselves, what shall you and I do? Listen and live with its angry confusion? Or look to God's eternal things and serve the Lord. An old hymn says it well, "**Build your hopes on things eternal . Hold to God's unchanging hand.**"

Elder Joe Holder