

Stand Firm

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you.

-1 Corinthians 15:58

In the middle of the first century Paul brought the message of Christ to one of the most pagan corners of the world – Corinth. Those who placed their trust in Jesus immediately found themselves under a barrage of hostile ideas and pressures. Nowhere was less Christian than Corinth. Yet, Paul exhorted the church to hold firmly to the hope that was within them and await their eternal reward.

Today's world differs from ancient Corinth in many ways. Yet it is remarkably similar as well. Consequently I believe Paul's advice is extremely helpful, especially for those who live and work in decidedly hostile corners of the world – such as the Arunachal Pradesh province of India. When we find ourselves facing intense opposition to our faith we are to look to Him for our joy and strength.

This truth was driven home to me in a personal way back in 1993. Two years earlier I had resigned my job with the Indian government to serve in campus ministry. This was not a difficult decision – I sensed God's call and responded – but it did make our lives difficult. The demands of ministry in an area hostile to Christian faith were substantial. And my salary was miniscule.

Initially this was not a huge concern. We were able to rely on my wife's job to make ends meet. But in May of 1993 Asangla felt God's call to full-time service as well. We had long since abandoned any dream of owning a home, but now we found ourselves forgoing basic needs. Food and shelter became uncertain.

And then the blow came. In the midst of transitioning to her new work, Asangla fell sick and completely lost her vision. I gathered every dollar I had, and rushed her to a distant hospital. When the doctor told me he suspected a brain tumor my world stopped. How would I live without her? What about the ministry? Who would help me raise our two children? Had we made a wrong decision? Why would God kill or cripple my wife if He wanted her to serve Him? We spent a month in that hospital on our knees, pleading for faith, confidence, and joy.

Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth, “Stand firm. Let nothing move you... always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” Two thousand years later, we sensed that this was God’s word to us. Stand firm. Let nothing move you. Your work is not in vain. With the encouragement of hundreds of letters and cards from fellow believers, we believed God for the strength to move beyond our present suffering and fear. During the darkest moments we found the ability to rest in His arms, to thank Him for the lives He had already changed through our work and to look ahead to fruitful years of service.

For thirty days there was no improvement. And then the clouds began to lift. Asangla began to regain her vision. She could see! What’s more the doctors reported that she did not have a brain tumor. She would live!

Miracle or not, we learned a lesson through that trial: never doubt God’s call. Never allow the present reality to overshadow that which is unseen. Stand firm in Christ, empowered by His grace, even if you live in Corinth.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Increase the faith of your suffering saints!