

Tenderized Hearts by Carol Levergood

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

...Philippians 1:6 KJV

When I left Brazil I believed it was the end of ministry for me. But God taught me many things during those years, and since.

Shortly after Bill and I married, I fried a round steak, searing one side then the other. I watched as my new husband tugged at that chewy piece of beef as if he had caught his prey for the day and didn't want to let go. Fearful of disappointing me, he ate it with no complaints. But I noticed he did not go back for seconds. I quickly learned to pound my round steak first.

I wish I had known back then that just a little papaya helps tenderize a tough cut of meat. *Mamao*, or papaya, is a fruit found in Brazil that is sweet when ripe. If it's not sweet enough to ones liking, a touch of sugar may be added. The Brazilian people also use it for intestinal purposes. I, on the other hand, use it to tenderize slabs of beef. Since returning to the States, I've discovered that many tenderizers available in the supermarket contain papaya.

Just as papaya serves as a tenderizer to meat, we should allow the Word of God to tenderize our attitudes and hearts. Sometimes God uses suffering to "pound" us—never a pleasant process, but often necessary. With trials we can become "tough" and bitter as a result of God's process of purifying our hearts, or we can become richer and more fulfilled by doing His will. Allow the Holy Spirit to tenderize your heart.

After leaving Brazil, a deep depression brought on by a chemical deficit made me feel as if I would never have my life together again—after all, I was a missionary, a pastor's wife! I felt embarrassed, ashamed and berated myself daily. I couldn't believe God would ever use me again. I allowed fear to rein after the mafia hit our house, when our children were away at boarding school, with the loss of our beloved people on the highways of Brazil, and dealing with my own insecurities.

God began to work on me a little at a time, letting me know He was not finished with me. It was a time of tenderizing, and love was the main ingredient. God was "rooting" for me, and His love brought me through.

Remember: He who began "a good work in you" will perform it "until the day of Jesus Christ." What a wonderful thought! The place of ministry has been somewhat altered, but God's love for me has only increased.