

Seasoned

“1 Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
3 He shall be like a tree
Planted by the rivers of water,
That brings forth its fruit in its season,
Whose leaf also shall not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper.” (Psalm 1:1-3 NKJV)

Have you ever taken time to observe a tree?

Stories of winds and storms are hidden in the (invisible) roots and the crooked branches. The weathered bark tells us of what has been. Coloured leaves falling off during the autumn announce change. Chilling absence of leaves in the winter present expectation of the coming. A wondrous return of leaf buds in the early spring bring this time of waiting to a climax. The majestic crown of leaves that appears and stays during the summer reflects abundance. Isn't nature beautiful?

Now let's compare ourselves to a tree like the Psalmist does in verse three. The implication here is that there are times that no fruit is brought forth and that is evident when we reflect on our lives. You might have (had) some fruitless periods, crooked branches, damaged bark or loss of leaves due to the season that you are, or have been in. Not that I think everything that happens to us is a punishment or chastisement from God, let's not be fatalistic or accusing God. But some things really are beyond our control and cannot be explained other than as a weather change, a change of seasons in life.

Going through these times shows us what the basis of our faith is. Roots are the essential component of a tree. The quality of the ground they are in and the depth of their reach determine how long a tree can stand the seasons. So examine yourself. Are your roots in the right soil?

If we look at ourselves as this tree in the passage above, we can rest assured that, when there is change of seasons, it is not a matter of God laying a guilt trip on us, but a matter of Him giving us the possibility for growth in our relationship with Him.

All things

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28 NKJV)

Romans 8:28 (the whole passage of Romans 8:18-39) tells us about all things working together for good, including all kinds of suffering. All things work together for good? Well if it's up to our understanding of the word good, this statement is a lie. This leads us to the conclusion that God has a different understanding of what is good. His “good” is not our “good”.

Sovereignty

“8 For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD.
9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9 NKJV)

With our limited minds we cannot fathom the wisdom of His ways. We shouldn't dare to think we can grasp His plans. He who puts the Lord on trial puts himself on the stand, like Job found out. But it doesn't end here. No, we are challenged to lay it on the line, to be honest toward God.

Rewarding struggle

Obviously there is a need for a genuine struggle in these times of hardship. Elijah, one of the famous prophets, was in despair when he fled from Jezebel. It took a lot (an angel and the Lord Himself) to get him to return. Jeremiah (just like Job) even wished he would have never been born. In 1 and 2 Samuel and the Psalms we see how many struggles David had. These are just some examples to shed light on this subject of struggling from a Biblical perspective. In the Bible there are numerous accounts of people in distress not saying the politically correct things, but pouring out their hearts to God. This comforts us: to know that God wants us to struggle with Him just like He wrestled with Jacob.

“22 And he arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok. 23 He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had. 24 Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. 25 Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. 26 And He said, “Let Me go, for the day breaks.”

But he said, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!”

27 So He said to him, “What is your name?”

He said, “Jacob.”

28 And He said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel¹; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.”

29 Then Jacob asked, saying, “Tell me Your name, I pray.”

And He said, “Why is it that you ask about My name?” And He blessed him there.

30 So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel²: “For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.” 31 Just as he crossed over Peniel³ the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip.” (Genesis 32:22-31 NKJV)

Though the fight injured him for life (and we will be injured in this life in some sort of way that is for sure) he was abundantly blessed. Job also was rewarded after going through major hardships. In other words: we find enough evidence in the Bible that the outcome of wrestling with God in a genuine way is more than rewarding.

¹ Prince with God

² Face of God

³ Same as Peniel, verse 30

Persevere

“3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” (James 1:3-4 NKJV)

“1 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” (John 15:1-2 NKJV)

“12 For whom the LORD loves He corrects,
Just as a father the son in whom he delights.” (Proverbs 3:12 NKJV)

It might not always be crystal clear to us what is going on (and I believe God will not reveal everything during these times, for there would be no need for trust if He did), but these verses encourage us that we are on the right track when God prunes the branch, as Jesus called it. God loves us and He loves us so much that He wants shape us into His likeness in a deeper way so that He will be glorified in us. It's a fact of life that some things cannot be learned in comfortable seasons but only through difficulties. Tests completed in the power of God always produce something real, something that lasts that cannot be taken away.

After His baptism Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert. In Luke 1:1 we see "Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness."

He was full of God's Spirit Who decided that He needed 40 days in the wilderness without food and that, at His weakest moments, He would be tempted. Jesus withstood the liar and stayed obedient to God even though He had opportunities and reasons not to. After that we read the following in Luke 1:14a "Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee (...)". Notice the difference between verse one and fourteen: from being filled to being empowered. It was an absolute necessity that He went through this period after being filled with the Holy Spirit in order for His ministry to be in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Focus your eyes

We sometimes feel like it's all too much. Then it's good not to look at the waves (circumstances) but to focus on Jesus Who can make us walk on water like He did with Peter. That faith in His unfailing support and power motivates us to constantly choose to go even though we, if we would look with natural eyes, seem to go nowhere. But with spiritual eyes, that means eyes focused on the power of God's Word and the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, we will see beyond our limited view and behold the beauty of God's providence in all circumstances.

“1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:1-2 NKJV)

Thank Him

The circumstances that bother you might be spiritual, emotional, relational, financial, physical or the like. It doesn't matter to Him for God still is the same good God. Have faith, trust in God and thank Him for who He is and what He has given to you and gives to you every day. Choose to hold on to who He is and proclaim His goodness in your grief. A broken heart brings better praise.

Though deliverance from your circumstances might not seem nigh and the outcome uncertain, remind yourself of this.

Adversity deepens appreciation of good things. God's illuminating goodness overshadows adversity.

In the seasons of your life: may God help you through, teach you, restore you and strengthen you.