

## **The Trees: Pain or Promise**

**February 12, 2023**

### **The Trees**

The Tree of Life represents the connection between God and humanity. When you choose to yield to God's definition of what is good and what is bad, you are choosing to live in the Tree of Life. However, when we choose to depend on our own strengths and ideas, we are choosing to live out of the Tree of Knowledge Good and Evil (aka... the DIY Tree). Where we place our trust (either in God or in ourselves) becomes our subconscious motivation for the actions we take in life. Can we believe in God's promise enough to trust Him with our pain?

### **The Origin of Pain**

Adam and Eve lived in a pain-free environment in the Garden of Eden. All that they needed was provided to them by God and they did not know struggle or lack. But, as soon as they ate from the tree of Knowledge Good and Evil, they began to experience pain (Genesis 3). At that moment, their eyes were opened and they suddenly felt shame and their nakedness and fear of punishment. Since then, humanity has felt confusion, fear, and pain. However, God's purpose for humanity and His promise for us has not changed.

### **1 Peter**

Peter wrote his first letter to encourage believers, especially the Gentile believers who were being persecuted. These new believers in Christ were facing the risk of punishment and even death because of their faith. Also, many Jews still did not see the Gentile converts as being part of God's family. Peter wrote to remind them: "For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for

doing good than for doing evil” (1 Peter 3:8-22). He did not tell them that the pain they were experiencing would cease if they simply had enough faith but encouraged them to trust in God’s plan and promise to sustain them through their suffering. Following Jesus is not a promise that there will be no pain. In fact, suffering because of your faith aligns us even closer to the life of Jesus. However, the promise is for a future glory where pain will not exist. A return to Eden.

### **Peace and Hope**

In Romans, Paul wrote about how hope is built. “We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love” (Romans 5:3-5).

In this scripture, we can see how experiencing pain can help us work toward God’s promise. Trials build endurance. Endurance builds character. Character builds hope. As we walk through our pain with a focus on God’s promise, we become stronger and more confident in the hope of salvation.

### **Present Suffering and Future Glory**

One of the most commonly used scriptures that people turn to for comfort during difficult times is also found in the book of Romans. Paul writes: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). But, once again this is not a promise that you will be free from pain in life but that God will take the suffering and use it for the good of all. Within the context of the whole

passage (Romans 8:18-37), it becomes clear that this was not written to any one individual but to the entire collection of believers. An individual focus during struggles prevents us from seeing the collective perspective of God's bigger story and purpose. We cannot fully understand but we can trust God if we are living according to our purpose. We can trust that He is good and faithful to His promise. It is bigger than our individual struggles - it is about God's timeless story.

### **Praising through the Pain**

There is an amazing story in the book of Acts about Paul and Silas (Acts 16:16-40). As they are traveling through the Roman colony of Philippi, there is a possessed slave woman who works as a fortune teller that is following them around and harassing them. Paul finally gets annoyed and casts the spirit out of her. When he does this the slave woman owner becomes furious and turns them over to the officials because he was out money from her not being able to read fortunes anymore. They are arrested, flogged, and put into jail.

However, instead of wallowing in self-pity, demanding justice, and focusing on the pain of their situation, they began to praise God and thank Him for His faithfulness. As they worshiped in the midst of the other prisoners, they were freed. Yes, the literal chains that bound them came loose and the prison doors were opened, but the true freedom they offered to their fellow prisoners, the jailer, and his entire family was the inward freedom that can only come by focusing on God's promise despite situational pain. Worship and prayer are the best ways for us to overcome the hard circumstances we face in life. Spending time with God and praising Him, no matter the hard situations you are currently facing is how we overcome!

## **Planted by the Waters**

“Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind, who makes the flesh his strength and turns his heart from the LORD. He will be like a shrub in the desert; he will not see when prosperity comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in Him. He is like a tree planted by the waters that sends out its roots toward the stream. It does not fear when the heat comes, and its leaves are always green. It does not worry in a year of drought, nor does it cease to produce fruit” (Jeremiah 17:5-8).

If pain produces endurance in our lives we have to have a steady flow of the living waters in our lives to keep us from shriveling up and dying. No one wants to be a bush in the desert. We all want to be a tree living by the stream of living water. The tree planted by the water is the tree of life. When we are like this tree, we live our lives in a way that others see as steady. Are you ready to make the changes needed in order to be like this tree?

Even in our pain, we have to keep our eyes on the promise. Living out of the tree of Knowledge Good and Evil causes us to blame God for everything that is happening that is negative. We loathe when bad things happen to us. We see ourselves as victims and nothing goes right for us. But, when we learn to live out of the Tree of Life we are capable of understanding that yes, bad things happen but we can choose to see it as an opportunity to grow stronger in our faith.

## **Further Study:**

- Project Church: “Wisdom” Message Series
  - <https://theproject.church/series/wisdom>

- Bible Project Video: 1 Peter Overview)
  - [https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/1-peter/?utm\\_source=web\\_social\\_share&medium=shared\\_video](https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/1-peter/?utm_source=web_social_share&medium=shared_video)

**Discussion Questions:**

- How can pain grow into hope?
- How does praising God help us through our struggles?