

One thing we know for sure ...
Neil Trollip, 2 August 2009

1. Benefit of struggles

James 1 : 2-4

- Struggles help us develop perseverance, so that we may become mature and complete
- “Complete” here means complete obedience and wholehearted dedication to God

Hebrews 12 : 7 - 11

- The recipients of this letter had endured severe persecution for their faith, and here they are encouraged to accept God’s discipline
- Discipline does not refer to God beating or punishing us when we do wrong - its meaning is closer to that of training and educating
- God puts us through challenging times to train us to be His people, and also to let us know that we are His true sons and daughters
- We should be thankful if God is putting us through struggles and challenging times – he views us as His true children and wants to train us to be obedient to Him and to be more like Jesus

Hebrews 5 : 8

- Jesus as the true son of God the Father also needed to learn obedience through suffering / times of pressure

Hebrews 2 : 10

- Even Jesus needed to suffer to be made perfect / complete - refers to complete obedience and wholehearted dedication to God

Mark 9 :43 - 49

- This is not a call for physical self-mutilation, but strong talk by Jesus about making costly sacrifices.
- Life with God requires sacrifices – even radical denunciation of parts of our body that give into sin
- And the statement that everyone will be salted with fire also speaks of sacrifice

Mark 9 : 49 Being salted with fire

In the culture of the times, salting was associated with purifying. Before sacrifices could be made to God in the temple, they needed to be salted (read about that in Leviticus chapter 2 and Ezekiel chapter 3). Salting was part of the process of ensuring the sacrifices would be acceptable to God.

And in those days, fire was associated with trials and tribulations. So to be salted with fire means to be purified or made more holy by difficult times / by trials and tribulations. We are ALL promised tough challenging times as part of our sanctification / process of becoming more like Jesus and thereby to be acceptable to God. “EVERYONE will be salted with fire”.

2. God's promise

God does not promise us an easy life. But He does promise that he will never leave us i.e that He will be with us through our struggles.

John 14 : 5 – 15 : 21

- Jesus promised his disciples the Holy Spirit – that when he leaves, God will send his Spirit to live in them (and therefore us)
- Greek word for counsellor is parakletos - one of those words which has broad meaning and which is very difficult to translate into a single English word
- Parakletos literally means “one who is called to one’s side” and was used in ancient Greece to describe someone who pleaded another one’s cause
- Parakletos is also translated as comforter, helper or advocate, and also has an association with defending in battle

Isaiah 43 : 1-3

- Those who are in Christ are the redeemed who are summoned by God (the new Israel)
- We can know with certainty that God is always with us even through the uncertainty and struggles symbolised by crossing rivers and walking through fire

3. Conclusion

Romans 8 : 28 - 39

- Vs 28 - all things means all things, but the context of this passage indicates a special emphasis on difficult times / suffering e.g. vs 18 and 35 .
- Vs 28 - the “good of those who love Him” must be understood from God’s perspective – this is not a promise of great wealth, success or happiness in this world. What is good for us from God’s perspective is developing a stronger faith, becoming more like Jesus and having a more certain hope
- In all things, especially through difficult challenging times, God provides opportunities to grow in faith, to become more like Jesus and to strengthen our hope in the Resurrection
- Vs 37 – 39 - as long as we are in Christ, nothing can separate us from God

Summary

We are not promised an easy life as Christians - we can expect struggles and pressure since we need them to develop perseverance and to mature in Christ. God uses our struggles to train us, to teach us obedience and wholehearted dedication to Him, and to show that he cares about us as His true sons and daughters. We all need difficulties to be purified and to become more like Jesus. Even Jesus needed to suffer to be made complete i.e. to learn complete obedience to the father.

Although we can expect struggles and testing times, God promises that he will be with us through those struggles. He has sent his Spirit to live in us as our counsellor, comforter, helper, protector and advocate. If we stay in Christ, nothing will separate us from God and His love.