

Be a Tree

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“that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.” (Isaiah 61:3).

Have you stopped to think about how much the Bible talks about trees? Early in the book of Genesis we read of “trees”-the “tree” of the knowledge of good and evil; the “tree of life” and the “trees” of abundance. Trees set the course of what we are experiencing today. Jesus when he died was nailed to a “tree” (1 Peter 2:24). Jesus used trees as an analogy of a person who either does good or evil speaking of, “...the tree is known by *his* fruit” (Matthew 12:33). The Bible uses the analogy of a tree to describe his people. Psalms 1 says, “Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

“But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

“And *he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.*” (vv.1-3). Here is *the* way God’s people prosper-BE A TREE!

The Seed

Every tree, of course, starts from a tiny seed. But that tiny seed, insignificant as it seems, holds *within itself* life. It possesses the *potential* to become a *mature* tree. All it needs is moisture, warmth, air and light for germination to take place, and growth will begin. Jesus said that, “...a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is *less than all the seeds that be in the earth*:

“But when it is sown, it groweth up, and *becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.*” (Mark 4:31-32). This is the miracle of God’s design.

The “miracle of a seed” is an incredible process where a tiny, dormant seed, seemingly lifeless, can develop into a *complex plant*, capable of producing its own seeds and sustaining life and possesses the potential to become a *mature tree*.

Germination is the first process where the seed breaks dormancy and begins to grow. It requires specific environmental factors like water, oxygen, and the right temperature. Once these conditions are met, the seed absorbs water, the embryo inside begins to develop, and a *root emerges*, anchoring the plant.

The plant roots *first* grow *downward* (something you *don't* see) due to a process called gravitropism, where they respond to gravity and grow in the direction of its pull. This ensures that roots anchor the plant securely in the soil and absorb water and nutrients effectively. Then it grows *upwards*-Shoot Emergence; A shoot (plumule) emerges from the seed, growing upwards *towards* the light. The shoot develops leaves, allowing the plant to begin photosynthesis and produce its own food.

Our Spiritual Growth

In the *same way*, our spiritual growth as Christians begins when God plants in our minds the seed of His Word, “The seed is the word of God.” (Luke 8:11). And just like the *physical* seed the *spiritual* seed needs good conditions to grow. As Jesus taught in his parable; There was the seed that fell by the “wayside,” by the “rocks,” “thorns,” and the of course the “good ground.” (Luke 8). These represented the mind of man-those of the good ground, “...are they, which in an honest and good *heart*, having heard the word, keep *it*, and bring forth fruit with patience.” (Luke 8:15).

Jeremiah wrote, “Break up your fallow ground,” (4:3; Hosea 10:12). Prepare your mind when you “seek the Lord” get rid of all the dead religious concepts and preconceived ideas make the ground of your mind soft and ready to absorb the seed-the word of God! Make the conditions right for the seed to anchor and grow downwards to take root, and then upwards.

This doesn't happen as fast as you read it. As it takes time to cultivate the ground so does it take time to cultivate your mind. As Gill's commentary writes, “that is, of their hearts; which were like ground unopened, unbroken, not filled and manured, nor sown with seed, but overrun with weeds and thistles; and so were they, hard and impenitent, destitute of grace, and full of sin and wickedness, and stood in need of being *renewed in the spirit of their minds*; which this exhortation

is designed to convince them of, and to stir them up to make use of proper methods of obtaining it, through the efficacious grace of God;" (emphasis added). When one is called and seed is sown a bit at a time, the person cultivates his mind further to receive more and more of the word of God. Conversion is a process one must go through until it's complete. The others in this parable do *not* do this!

Spiritual Germination

When does a person receive the word of God in the heart and minds? The Bible speaks of a "calling" from God. This is the actual process of God calling you into his assembly-his church. God *chooses* who he wants, "Ye have *not* chosen me, but *I have chosen you*...I have chosen you out of the world..." (John 15:16, 19). The Apostles were chosen and called by God to do his work and to be saved and give the knowledge of salvation to others. It is a process of *God planting the seeds of his word* in his *chosen*, and then it grows by water (the Holy Spirit) and the sun (Jesus-the Sun of Righteousness Mal 4:2) dwelling in them.



Trees of the Lord

In its development trees first grow downward then upward. So is the spiritual growth of a Christian.

One cannot see the push downward, the work being done, first. The fruits develop afterwards for all to see later.

Notice, Jesus says, "The seed is the word of God." (Luke 8:11); and "He that *soweth* the good seed *is the Son of man*;" (Matthew 13:37). Jesus sows that seed-his word in the good ground that is prepared to receive the word of God. It is through God's power-his Spirit that he plants that seed in the good ground of your mind, "Yea, they made their hearts *as* an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the *words* which the LORD of hosts hath sent *in his spirit by the former prophets*..." (Zech 7:12); "...the words that I speak unto you, *they* are spirit, and *they* are life." (John 6:63). The Father "draws" people to Christ (John 6:44)-this is the work of the spirit of God, and by *hearing* the word of God (Rom 10:13-17).

The Seed is Planted

The seeds are planted-the word of God then begins to take root, and the *spiritual* gravitropism process begins ***what the world doesn't see***. The dark damp difficult resistance and the pushing through, overcoming old habits and persecution, putting into practice the word of God; getting rid of the doubts-reading, studying, defending your faith, proving your faith-establishing deep roots! (*Here at the BICOG, the work you see is a result of studying, researching and putting into practice our faith before it was revealed to the public-the spiritual gravitropism process-what people didn't see establishing deep spiritual roots!*)

Once this is done, and the roots are deep, then the phototropic process starts of breaking *through* the dirt. Phototropic describes the growth or movement of an organism in response to a light stimulus. This phenomenon is often observed in plants, where shoots typically exhibit positive phototropism, *growing towards the light* optimizing light capture for photosynthesis. This optimizes light absorption for increased productivity. The “**Sun** of Righteousness” is Jesus Christ and the tree [The Christian] bends towards Him to increase and produce the “fruits of righteousness.” To put into practice the *teachings* of Christ, “I am come that they might *have life*, and that they might have it more *abundantly*.” (John 10:10); “But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; *which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.*” (Matthew 13:23).

Again, “*I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*” (John 8:12; 9:5).

Spirit of God like water

A basic requirement for the growth of a tree is water. Water determines the health and vigor of a tree. A tree planted by a river is in a good location, because its roots can seek out the water, so its leaves will not wither.

What does water symbolize spiritually? The Spirit of God! Isaiah wrote, “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: *I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring:* “*And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses.*” (44:3-4).

The spirit of God helps us grow in our spiritual life revealing the truths of Almighty God through his word. Jesus said he would give us, "...rivers of living water." (John 7:38; see also Jeremiah 2:13). And what happens to the water a tree absorbs? Vast quantities of water are taken in by the roots, which spread out in all directions seeking moisture. The water then rises through the tree and is exuded from the leaves in the process known as transpiration. Notice that the tree doesn't hoard all the moisture for itself. It gives it out through the leaves. This moisture, along with the discharge of oxygen, is what gives the forest atmosphere its fresh, pleasant fragrance. Similarly, the Holy Spirit should flow in all Christians in great quantities, as we seek it from God, and flow through us and out again as we give help, friendship, Christian love and good works to *all those around us*.

A large apple tree in full leaf may absorb as much as 95 gallons of water from the soil every day! Trees need vast amounts of water. And we need a *vast amount* of God's Holy Spirit.

How can we make sure we have plenty of the Holy Spirit? Luke 11:13 tells us we need to ask God to give us more of His Spirit, "how much more shall *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" We need to ask Him to fill our minds with it-to soak and saturate our branches and roots with it, so we can constantly grow as a *vibrant, vigorous, blossoming tree*. Christians need plenty of the *spiritual* water-the spirit of God to make us understand his word and law so we can grow and produce those "fruits of righteousness," (Philippians 1:11) to share with others and the world.

Cultivate and Protect

Once converted and a Christian "grow[s] in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 3:18); one must protect and cultivate the garden of salvation. The scripture says, "LORD God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it." (Gen 2:15). Spiritually a Christian must do the same thing. Once saved, Jesus said, "If ye keep my commandments, *ye shall abide in my love*; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." (John 15:10).

Abiding in his love-keeping God's law, means we must "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:7). To, "Love *not* the world, neither the things *that are* in the world." (1 John 2:15). One must cultivate and protect oneself from the spiritual weeds and tares from the devil as he attacks God's people with fleshly appetites and desires.

Let God's authority be over you "And let the peace of God *rule* in your hearts," (Col 3:15), and let him protect your Garden, as he says in Isaiah, "Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill:

"And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes..." (5:1-2). Let the word of God be your guide and let God protect and cultivate around you to protect from the world and its evils. Then one can flourish and produce the fruits of righteousness in the world and be an example to others and one can serve God and his people.

Be a Producer

Be a Tree! Christians are designed to be productive, it is ingrained within our very being as God said, "Be fruitful and multiply." The seed of the fruit is planted by God on the inside of the Christian, and based on what is on the inside it will be manifested to the world.

Whatever talents, skills God has planted *in you*, used them, cultivate them and make them grow by feeding on the word of God, as God says, "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, *and maketh it bring forth and bud*, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:

"So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it." (Isaiah 55:10-11). God's word planted in the Christian *must* produce, it has to, it is active and has life, and it must be fed and watered to produce the fruits on the outside for the world to see. The only way it dies, is by the person who decides *not* to do anything with the gift God has given.

"and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it,"

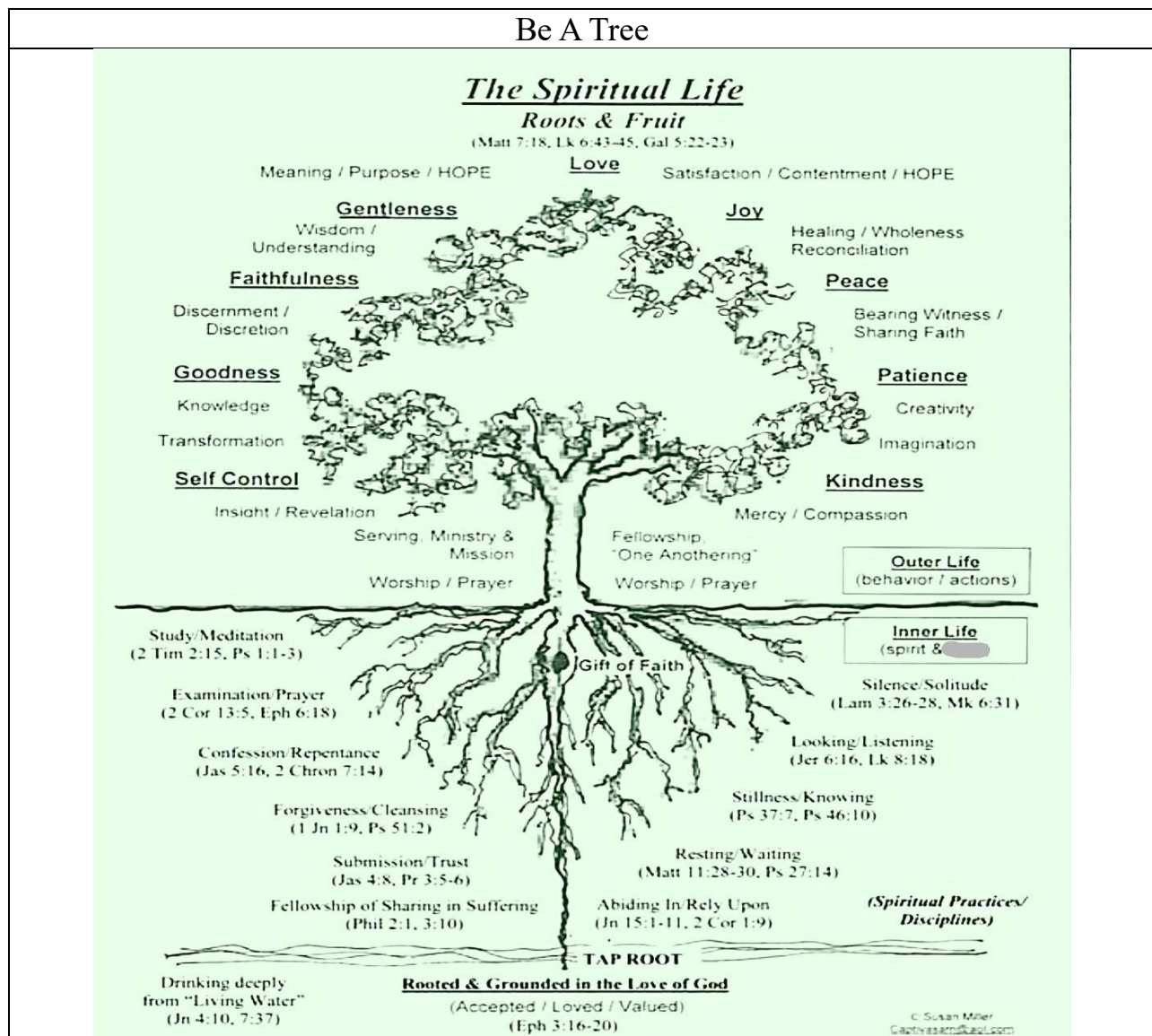
There is also the pruning process as well. If you stand for a while under a tree, or under a group of trees in a forest, you are sure to notice a continual rain of cast-off fragments of bark, needles, twigs, dried leaves and so on. It's as if the tree is dying daily, with bits and pieces constantly dropping off it.

That might seem to be a debilitating process, but it is actually one of the tree's most *beneficial* growth activities. It's good in that it adds organic matter to the

humus of the soil in which the tree is growing, thus contributing to the tree's future growth. Also, it removes parts that would otherwise become diseased.

Similarly, we as Christians need to “die daily” (1 Corinthians 15:31), casting off our rough spots, weaknesses and sins, brushing off parts of our carnal nature that might afflict us with spiritual disease if they remain.

Sometimes this natural daily dying that a tree goes through is not thorough enough. Sometimes someone has to step in and aid the process by pruning a tree to improve its performance. Jesus talked about this in John 15:1-2: “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser....every branch that bear fruit *He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*”



This type of pruning is to *judiciously* cut branches even though they have fruit on them, or are capable of bearing fruit. God prunes us spiritually by correcting us, by testing us in trials that seem tough and severe at the time, but that result in *better growth* later. As God says, “For the time *is come* that judgment must begin at the house of God” (1 Peter 4:17). It is the time of correction for us Christians, “*Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction.*” (Hab 1:12). This is the pruning process Christians go through to maintain and to become more righteous and produce more fruits.

That’s the idea of pruning. It’s a bit of a paradox, really, to cut back the tree to make it produce more, but good gardeners know it works, bringing forth bigger and better fruit! Trials are a paradox like that, too, but they cause God’s people to be able to bring forth more fruit in the future.

A warning from Christ

However there is also *another* pruning process Jesus describes. As Jesus says “I am the vine.” And that “Every branch” is “in me.” All Christians must be *plugged* into the vine or one will wither and die. “Abide in me, and I in you. *As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.*” (John 15:4). We are plugged into Christ by his spirit, “Hereby know we that *we dwell in him, and he in us*, because he hath given us of his Spirit.” (1 John 4:13).

Notice what Christ said, “Every branch in me that beareth **not** fruit *he taketh away:*” (v.2). This type of pruning is to eliminate “dead wood” -to cut off branches that are *not* producing. Sometimes people appear to be Christians, but they just aren’t growing. Spiritually, they’re dead! (Rev 3:1) Often it’s hard to tell that a branch is dead just by looking at it, but when you hit it, it breaks off in your hand, dead and rotten. Sometimes branch after branch follows, and you find that the whole tree is dead.

Such trees won’t last long in severe storms, troubles or brushfires. The rotten, dried-up trees are the first to break or burn. And trees like that will never bear fruit- so they might as well be destroyed. Christians are to be producers, and produce we must! Christians must do their part. The only way to *not* produce is to, “fall away” *unplug* themselves from Christ, to, “crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh,” (Heb 6:6)-to put Christ death in their lives. This will of course, “beareth thorns and briers *is rejected*, and *is nigh unto cursing*; whose end *is to be burned.*” (Heb 6:8).

In John 15:8, Jesus went on to discuss the most important aspect of our lives as spiritual trees-the overriding reason for our existence: “Herein is my Father *glorified*, that ye bear *much fruit*; so shall ye be my disciples.” In verse 16, He added, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and *bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.*”

What’s the use of an apple tree if it doesn’t produce any fruit? After a few years of no apples, you might as well chop it down. John the Baptist warned, “Bring forth therefore *fruits* meet for repentance...And now also the axe is laid unto *the root of the trees*: therefore every tree which bringeth *not forth good fruit* is hewn down, and *cast into the fire.*” (Matthew 3:8, 10; see also Matthew 7:19).

The fruits Christians are to produce - the fruits of the Spirit - are listed in Galatians 5:22-23. If Christians aren’t bringing forth these fruits, *without repentance* their end will be “according to their works” (Rev 20:12, 13)!

What kind of tree are you?

God’s creation contains many different types of trees, and we’re certainly all different from one another. But the important thing is that we grow, that we be spiritually alive, active and vibrant, drinking in of the water of the Holy Spirit and the light of God’s truth, withstanding the rough storms of trials and bringing forth the fruit God wants. “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:16, 20)-BE A TREE!

Notice Jeremiah 17:7-8: “Blessed *is* the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is.

“For he shall be as a *tree planted by the waters*, and *that* spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.”

We can be like trees planted by the water-drawing on God’s Holy Spirit and having it flow through us in power. We can stand firm in the heat and drought of the trials life brings us, if we draw on God’s great source of nourishment and growth. Let’s use God’s help to grow, mature and flourish as spiritual trees, bringing forth beautiful fruit in great abundance!