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How Would You
Like to be
Like a Tree?

#1120-A

Series: Making the Spiritual Switch

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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How Would You Like to be Like a Tree?

How would you like to be like a tree
Placed by the river's flow?
How would you like to drink its life
And grow, and grow, and grow?

How would you like your branches
To heavenward stretch their arms?
How would you like to stand straight and tall
Amidst life's winds and storms?

How would you like those outstretched limbs
To be homes where the homeless can nest?
How would you like their shade to provide
A haven where weary can rest?

How would you like to possess the strength
Of a rugged, hearty tree?
You can, you know, in Jesus,
That's what He designed you to be!

Yes, you were *designed to be a tree*— a certain kind of tree, in fact. You were designed to have certain attributes that only trees have. So we are about to “em-bark” (if you’ll pardon the pun) on a lesson about “trees”: what they are, why they are what they are; and why the God who planted them did so.

Just what do you know about trees, anyway? Have you ever noticed that God devoted so much of Scripture to defining and describing different types of trees? Have you ever wondered why both the fall of man and the redemption of man were symbolized in Scripture through the use of trees? Have you ever wondered why the Bible begins and ends with a “tree of life”? Have you ever wondered why Jesus cursed the fig tree? Have you ever wondered why the Psalmist demonstrated the difference between the life of a fruitful believer and a scorner through the use of trees? Why is God so preoccupied with trees? Why is it said that Jesus bore “our sins in his own body on the tree”?

How Would You Like to be Like a Tree?

Why did God make trees, anyway? Why so many different types? Why so many different shapes? Why such a difference between how long they last? What were the cedars of Lebanon? And if it's true that, as the poet said, "Only God can make a tree", what is the significance of it all? It may seem like a strange topic for a Bible study, but I think that as it unfolds, we will begin to see a portrait of life through the lens of what we know as a tree.

THE IMPORTANCE

Few elements of nature play a larger part in Scripture than do trees. Over *300 times* in the Bible God speaks of trees or the product of trees or the use of trees. More than twenty five different kinds of trees were known to flourish in the Holy Land itself, and the Scripture describes many of them in detail. Specific references can be found concerning the almond, the alnum, the apple, the ash, the bay tree, the box tree, the cedar, the chestnut, the cypress, the juniper, the mulberry, the palm, the pomegranate, the sycamore, the tamarisk, and the willow, just to name a few. Again and again in Scripture God used the tree to depict truth, to define location, and to demonstrate character.

The story of the fall of man and of the ultimate redemption of man has its roots (pardon the pun again) in a specific creation of God called "The Tree of Life". Why did God use a tree? We shall see as we progress. It was the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil that caused Eve to covet and finally to fall, taking with her "her indecisive hubby" and the rest of mankind, as well.

Our first reference to trees is found in Genesis 1, where we read:

And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth; and it was so.

And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

(Genesis 1:11,12)

Read that passage again carefully. Five things immediately stand out about God's creation of trees.

- 1- The tree was designed for yielding fruit.
- 2- Its seed was in itself.
- 3- Each tree reproduced *only* after its kind.

How Would You Like to be Like a Tree?

4- God looked and decided that “it was “good”.

5- God “spoke” each tree into being.

Those are not earth-shaking statements in and of themselves, but once we realize *why God made trees*, they become intensely important. Look now at the next mention of trees in Scripture. It’s also in Genesis,

And The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. (Genesis 2:8,9)

And The LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

And The LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”. (Genesis 2:15-17)

So man’s first home was amidst a literal forest. Every conceivable kind of tree grew in Eden. It must have made the Great Northwest of the United States look like a barren wasteland. And immediately, we learn four more things about trees. We learn that:

6- Trees were pretty to look at; that is they were pleasing to the eye.

7- Trees were designed to provide food for the hungry.

8- Trees required care and upkeep, and man was assigned that task.

9- Not every tree was for public consumption. There was one that contained poison for the soul. (In fact, were man to eat of *that* tree, his spirit would immediately die and with it he would lose that incredible capacity he possessed to have intimate fellowship with his Creator God.)

Our omniscient, omnipotent God had spoken the worlds into being, and spoken man into being, and designed a beautiful paradise where man would derive his pleasure from fellowship with the God who made him. He called that paradise “Eden”,

How Would You Like to be Like a Tree?

positioned it on planet earth, and decorated it and populated it with something you and I have come to know as “trees”. Two of those trees were special trees. One was called “The tree of knowledge of good and evil”. The other was called “The Tree of Life”. It was from the use of those two trees that the cosmic conflict between Satan and God began to erupt; a conflict that holds the spirit world in its grasp even to this day.

THE ILLUSTRATION

So God had something particular in mind when He designed and planted what we have come to know as “trees”. What was it? Surely it was more than just a part of His blueprint for nature’s existence. Indeed, it was. For when God made the tree, He was making a physical illustration of a spiritual reality. He was fashioning in the tangible world a series of truths that would make the intangible world real. He was calling on us to make “the spiritual switch”.

The spiritual switch means that every time a mighty wind blows, you will not only grab hold of your hat, but you will quietly thank God for his Spirit and those attributes of His Spirit demonstrated by the wind *which He created for that reason*. It means that every time the thunder rolls, you will not only reach for your umbrella, you will lovingly worship God for His power, never forgetting that *God created thunder for that purpose*. It means that every time you see a huge rock or a stately mountain, you will, in your heart, immediately give thanks to God who promises to be our Rock, our Shield, and our Defender and *who created rocks to remind us of that fact*.

But one of the greatest gifts God gave us in the physical realm to teach spiritual truth is the gift of the tree. Nothing in nature teaches us more about our God than the tree. To make sure we don’t miss the lessons, God planted them everywhere. And to be sure we got all of the nuances He intended to teach, he instructed us to keep them and care for them. To top it off, He told us to *become* one. He told each of us to *be a tree*, (or at least to become like one). So how would you like to be like a tree? You would? Then gather around, and let’s see what the Bible says about trees.

THE EXAMPLES

Let’s imagine that you have a yard full of beautiful trees. Every morning you go out to spend time with God and worship.

How Would You Like to be Like a Tree?

What can God say to you *through the Scriptures* each time you see a tree? Well, let's begin by looking at the parallels of the Genesis passages, and then go on from there.

Psalms 1, Matthew 3, Romans 11, Isaiah 61, Matthew 7, John 15, and dozens of other passages teach us that the tree, though it has many lessons to teach, was given to us *primarily to demonstrate truths about ourselves and our relationship with God*. We learn a lot about rocks in Scripture, but God is The Rock. We learn a lot about God from the thunder, but we were never called upon to demonstrate the attributes of thunder. Thunder speaks of God. But the tree...ah, the tree. The tree is a picture of us: what we're like when God is in control, and what we're like when He's not.

What did we learn from Genesis about trees? And what does it say about living the Christian life? Let's review those truths:

1- First of all, we learned that God designed trees to yield fruit. They were not there to have their own needs met. They were there to give of what was produced *through* them to the rest of nature. That is the will of God for us, as well....not to *be served*, but to serve.

2- We learned that the seed was in itself...that is, it possesses the ability to reproduce itself. And so do we, spiritually. The seed, which is the Word of God placed in us, when allowed to grow, will *naturally* reproduce itself in other lives. We sometimes tend to forget that, and when we do, we forget the reason for our existence.

3- It reproduced only after its kind. We will see much more of that as we go, but the truth is that *by their fruits ye shall know them*. The Spirit of God in you cannot produce evil. The spirit of the evil one in you *cannot produce good*; he can produce a weak substitute, but not the real thing.

4- God looked at his creation and said, "It is good". That is God's perspective of His children today when they are planted, watered, and flourishing. His hand of blessing fills them with all spiritual blessings, and He multiplies their lives in the process.

5- Trees didn't just happen. And neither did you. You were knit together in your mother's womb, and you were born again by the Word of God who spoke your new life into being.

6- Trees possess a natural beauty. So does the Life of Christ

How Would You Like to be Like a Tree?

in you. When God is allowed to be Himself in you, a radiance the world cannot duplicate flows from your inner being, and a supernatural beauty draws others to Christ.

7- Trees were designed to provide food. You were, too. Your calling as a believer is to stay well nourished yourself, so you will have spiritual meat to feed to others who are seeking to be fed. Again, it is why you are here.

8- Trees require discipline, care, and love. So do you. Without someone to feed you, water you, and occasionally prune your branches, you will wither up and become useless. God designed His Body, the Church, to meet that need.

9- And finally, not every tree is what it seems to be. The fact that a tree *looks green and appears healthy* is not enough. The quality and quantity of fruit must be revealed before accurate judgement can be made. God gave us a handbook to warn us of what is, and what isn't, life-giving fruit. Many false prophets, many "make-believe" Christians are parading around dispensing "Christian-sounding" counsel and theology, but some are poison. It is only when your eyes are opened to their deceit, that you realize the dangers of partaking of the fruit they offer.

There are also nine aspects of the *nature* of trees that teach us about the character of the Christian. But that is only the beginning. When you really want to make the spiritual switch in any given area, find every passage where that photograph is engraved, and meditate on the spiritual significance of each. Here are just a few more passages concerning trees:

1- Trees were designed to be places where others can come to find rest. (Genesis 18:4, Job 40:21,22). You were designed to be an oasis of shade in a desert of heat for those around you who are hurting.

2- Trees were designed to be nurtured by pruning (Matthew 3:10) And so were we.

3- Trees were designed to be continually nourished. (Psalm 1:3) And so were we.

4- In the Old Testament trees were protected during times of war and not to be destroyed because they were an essential and valuable of food. (Deuteronomy 20:19) Just so, God protects us in the midst of our battles, *if we remain solidly in Him*, so that we might be used to feed others.

How Would You Like to be Like a Tree?

5- Trees can only yield fruit when God produces it.
(Ezekiel 34:27)

6- Trees represent the person of Christ in the believer.
(Isaiah 61:3, Proverbs 3:18, Matthew 7:17-18)

7- Because trees were designed to be instruments of life, they have the potential to be instruments of death, when Satan is freed to so use them. (Joshua 10:26, Galatians 3:13, Genesis 40:19)

8- Trees were to figuratively know where their strength comes from. (Ezekiel 17:24)

And all the trees of the field shall know that I the LORD have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish. I the LORD, have spoken and have done it.

And on and on and on it goes. The tree: a simple, yet complex creation of God's, became from the beginning a symbol of life, a way of escape, a portrait of our redemption. It began as the ultimate source of life yet became the ultimate instrument of death. It is the portrait of comfort, of shelter, of nourishment; yet, when abandoned or left unpruned, it may become filled with disease and decay and stoops to the ground in humiliation, virtually worthless. Left to itself it often becomes an eyesore and must ultimately be cut down and burned in the fire.

Ah, but when planted by the flowing waters from whence its strength is gained, it flourishes; it grows; it spreads out its branches to the heavens. Birds rest in its arms; animals flock to its side for shade; people photograph it; artists draw it; passersby envy its strength and its beauty. In its ultimate form of stately grandeur, no one can take glory for its existence except the Creator who formed the seed from whence it came. Even the world, you see, acknowledges with awe that "only God can make a tree".

That is why when the real majestic beauty of Christ begins to flow through your spiritual veins, and the leaves of eternity begin to sprout from your heart, and the kind of fruit that feeds others begins to blossom from your life, no one will mistake it for anything *you have done*. A tree is obviously the result of something planted within, watered from without, and sustained supernaturally. And so are you.

So how would you like to be a tree? How would you like to be

How Would You Like to be Like a Tree?

a tower of strength that others look at in amazement? How would you like to have the satisfaction, as the years go by, of seeing the hurting huddle beneath the shadow of your branches, the hungry feeding from the fruit borne of your life, the weary lean against you to keep from falling?

Still, nothing God ever made teaches more spiritual truths than those beautifully etched portraits of His majesty that He has planted upon the hillsides of His creation called "trees". They were planted there not only *for His glory, but also for our edification*, for from them we are to learn the rich, deep truths of the Spirit that will change our lives.. truths we will remember... *every time we see a tree.*

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE LIKE A TREE?

So how would you like to be like a tree?
Standing the test of time,
How would you like to just relax
And know that in God's design,

You are quietly and steadily
Growing stately and tall,
Even though in the midst of the storms
You cannot see growth at all!

How would you like to become like an oak
Growing beside the sea?
Then pay attention, Beloved,
To how God grows a tree!

How Would You Like to be Like a Tree?

A Challenge to Further Study and Application

Take one week and look through the lens of one of God's most significant acts of creation: the tree. Here are the specifics:

1- Using a concordance, begin to do your own study of trees. Make a chart showing,

- a) the verse
- b) the truth in the passage about trees and
- c) the corresponding truth after making the spiritual switch.

2- Spend some time as you walk, jog, or just sit in your own backyard, and use the trees you see as object lessons to help passages of Scripture come to life.

3- In preparation for the next lesson, write out and then paraphrase (put in your own words) the following passages:

Psalm 1:1-3

Isaiah 61:3

Jeremiah 17:5-9

John 15:1-7

4- Take some time to see the importance of time in the life of a tree, and of how gradual, but how permanent, are the effects of those hidden things such as where its roots grow and how it stays free from crippling disease.

5- Finally, consciously practice making the spiritual switch. Ask God to make you aware of what the Scripture says, *spiritually*, about rocks, wind, the sun, clouds, rain, thunder, flowers, the stars, etc. The idea is to give spiritual significance to *everything we see and everything we touch*, so that the reality of Christ's plan for our lives will become a minute-by-minute experience that is amplified even by the physical world we live in.

Scriptures for Further Meditation

Ezekiel 47:12

Leviticus 26:4

Ezekiel 34:27,

Joel 2:22

Romans 11:24,

Revelation 22:2

Revelation 22:14

Luke 23:31

Memorize Matthew 7:17-18, and Job 14:7

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