

LIKE A TREE... FRUITS PSALM 1:1-3

A little girl once asked her Mom, "Is God as big as the universe?" The mother replied, "*He is.*"

"And Mommy, is Jesus God?"

"Yes, sweetheart, *He sure is.*"

"And Mommy, does Jesus live in our hearts?"

"Oh yes, *He certainly does.*"

You could see the tumblers turning in her head.

Finally the daughter drew her conclusion, "If Jesus is as big as the universe and if He lives in my tiny heart - that means, you will see Him shining through!"

And the world's most brilliant theologian couldn't have said it any better than this little girl. When we repent of our sin and trust in Jesus - He not only comes to *live in us*, but He also *shines through us!*

For each of this spring's three One-derful Sundays we've looked at this metaphor used in Psalm One.

Psalm 1:1-3 compares the blessed man, *the happiest man*, to a tree planted by a river.... This AM let's all stand together and read it as one... "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; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.

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.”

When you look closely at this metaphor, you'll see three concerns... a person's **roots**, **shoots**, and **fruits**.

As for **roots**... God wants us **positioned properly**.

A couple of weeks ago, when I spoke about sinking roots Kathy reminded me of the classic illustration.

My wife has a green thumb. She loves to plant living things. Trees, plants, shrubs... she would create a jungle around our house if I let her. In our old house, she planted a tree right in the center of our front yard.

If I remember correctly, she planted it while I was out of town. Not that I would've objected. *She just didn't want to run that risk.* She wanted a tree in our yard!

And it was a beautiful tree - *always healthy, drought resistant, a strong and sturdy tree.* But there was a reason for that tree's unusual resilience. Kathy planted it right over our septic line... So when the sewer backed up and the toilet overflowed it was discovered that her tree had sunk its roots into our sewage stream.

And this is what will happen if a Christian sinks their roots in the wrong places... Sewage might fertilize a tree. But spiritual filth and sewage will rot away a Christian's joy and faith and power. When you sink your roots into unholiness you grieve the Holy Spirit.

I've know many a believer who was gloriously born again - full of spiritual life - but they mistakenly positioned their life in the wrong places. They sunk roots and connected to wrong friends and influences.

There's a spiritual law no one escapes.

Galatians 6:7-8 states it crystal clear, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life."

In other words, it's either "garbage in, garbage out" or it's "grace in, grace out." But you reap what you sow.

The Psalmist tells us the blessed man "*walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful.*" He's careful who he *looks to... lingers with... and laughs at...*

As I mentioned, "Lives are not shaped by *mysterious forces*, but lives are shaped by *deliberate choices.*"

Where you sink your roots - how strategically you position your life, and your family - really does matter.

For out of our **roots** come the **shoots...** God wants us **progressing continually...** always growing in grace...

Faith is a muscle. It gets stronger or withers by the choices we make. Feed it properly - exercise it regularly - it'll grow. Take it for granted and it shrivels.

As we pointed out last time the time to worry about spiritual strength isn't in the heat of the battle. It's beforehand. The battle is won by the person who trained their faith through obedience, and fed their faith on the Word of God. The winner prepares for battle.

Thus, as we learned, spiritual growth - sprouting new shoots - is **intentional, behavioral, devotional, habitual.**

Healthy followers of Jesus are like a tree. Their **roots** are **positioned properly...** Their **shoots** are **progressing continually...** And they have **fruits!** Psalm 1 teaches that a blessed man is **productive annually.**

The light of Jesus not only *shines on him*, but it *shines through His life* to the people around him.

Notice again verse 3, the blessed man is **“like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season...”** A healthy believer **brings forth fruit!**

I want you to recognize three important truths about spiritual fruit... **It's our purpose. It requires perseverance. And it's practical.** Fruit is self-evident.

First, **fruit-bearing is our purpose in this world.**

But let me qualify that statement. Bearing fruit is not our purpose *as a Christian*. Ultimately, our goal is *to know God*. I agree with the Westminster Catechism, **“Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.”** God created us for fellowship, not the fruit we might bear or the usefulness we might serve. He desires us for who we are, not for what we might do.

Yet fruitfulness is one of the reasons he leaves us in this world. God knows our relationship with Him will impact us in advantageous and appealing ways, and the byproduct of His influence will attract others to Him.

Thus, He plants us so we'll grow and bear fruit.

How many of you have ever received a fruitcake at Christmas time? How many of you like fruitcake? The answers are usually, “*everybody and almost nobody.*”

I ran across an interesting list. Here are the top ten suggestions for how to recycle leftover fruitcakes...

"10) pot-hole filler, 9) shot put, 8) speed bump, 7) boat anchor, 6) flower press, 5) bed warmer (*heat to 350d*), 4) ice pack (*freeze for 12 hours*), 3) chopping block (*watch out for breaking knives*), 2) scratching post for your cat, 1) wheel chock for a tractor-trailer."

A fruitcake is intended to be eaten, but sometimes you can find alternate uses... *Christians though are a different story!* God expects us to fulfill our purpose for being here - and according to verse 3, it's to bear fruit.

God's intent is for us to glorify Him and impact others. In contrast, the psalmist says the “*ungodly,*” the person without God, has no purpose at all. Verse 6 puts it, he’s “*like the chaff which the wind drives away.*”

In other words, he’s aimless. He drifts, or better yet, he’s blown here and there. His life has no steering mechanism. He’s like a boat with a broken rudder.

It reminds me of the business executive who's goal was to climb the corporate ladder. He climbed and climbed. His eyes only saw the next rung on the ladder.

His ascent was just *the expected thing to do.*

Finally, after reaching the pinnacle of his profession, he admitted, “*I've spent my entire life climbing a ladder that was leaning against the wrong wall.*”

A piece of chaff - a dry leaf on a windy day - it swirls in the breeze - it's driven - there's movement - it might appear as if there's progress, but it's not moving in a meaningful direction. It's drifting with no purpose.

During WW2, prisoners at a Nazi concentration camp converted waste products into synthetic alcohol.

The alcohol was used as a fuel additive. One day the Allies bombed the camp, and destroyed the operation.

The Nazis decided to punish the inmates...

They forced them to pile all the rubble from the air raid at one end of the field. When they finished, they were ordered them to carry the debris to the other end of the field. This went on, back and forth for weeks, until many of the captives cracked-up under the strain.

Some of the prisoners tried to escape and were shot.

Other men electrocuted themselves by jumping into the high voltage fencing that surrounded the camp.

A few of the camp's inmates went insane.

And here's why... **“Because their work made no sense their lives had no meaning.”** I hope you heard that statement. It's a principle. Let me repeat it, **“Since their work made no sense their lives had no meaning.”**

I'm sure there are occasions when your job feels rewarding. But I'll bet there are many more moments of despair. *What ultimate good am I doing here? I'm making money, but for **who** - and for **what** - and **why**?*

I'm raising kids who one day might not be thankful!

Is my gargantuan sacrifice really worth the trouble? Is there any eternal value in what I'm accomplishing?

It's been said, "Most people are like the crew members who were busy arranging chairs on the deck of the Titanic." So what if you make a splash on earth, when this world is a sinking ship? If what you accomplish is forgotten in a few months or years what good have you done? I love the line, "Only one life will soon be past, and only what's done for Christ will last."

I'm sure you've heard someone say, "Take a glass of water and stick your finger in it - now pull it out quickly. The time it takes for the water to refill the hole is the time it'll take for you to be replaced once you're gone."

In one sense, there's a lot of truth in that picture. But in another sense, my goal is to defy that illustration.

My desire is to leave behind a big footprint. I want my life to create a permanent dent in this world. My goal is to make a splash that produces eternal ripples.

Imagine, one day strolling the streets of heaven, and bumping into a fellow who grabs your hand. He starts shaking it profusely. After clearing the lump in his throat he tells you that he was the child who learned of Jesus in your Sunday School class. You played a role in him getting to heaven. *Can you imagine a greater thrill?*

Several years ago I was challenged, "Sandy, do you want to be known as a great pastor, or the pastor of a great church?" After much soul searching I concluded I'd rather be known as the pastor of a great church.

I want to be part of a church that'll long outlive me - a church that will still be winning people to Jesus when I'm a footnote in the history books - a distant memory.

At times you assume the role you're playing in the church's ministry is minor. It doesn't matter if you step up or not. "*Oh, I can easily be replaced.*" Think again!

It takes a lot of cogs to keep the wheels rolling.

What this church does from week to week is vitally important... *From the folks who lead worship, teach SS, man the media, staff the Brook, usher, make CDs, count the offering, give the offering, and just show up...*

We're all creating a place in our community for people to hear God's Word and experience His grace.

That's not to mention the other outreach that goes on. Most Christians take their church for granted, since it's always there - *but don't*. You have a part to play.

Our purpose at Calvary Chapel is to show our community - in fact, our world... *that God is alive and well... that the Bible is truth for today... that it's cool to be a Christian... that grace is the better way... and that Jesus is the person who can heal their hurts...*

God wants you and me to be a tree!

And a tree's purpose - *a church's purpose* - is not just to take up space, or look pretty, or grow big - it's to *show love and speak truth*. In essence, it's to bear fruit.

Fruit-bearing is our **purpose**, but it also requires **perseverance**. Notice, what the Psalmist says about the tree planted by the river, "**(It) brings forth its fruit in its season...**" Bearing fruit is *a seasonal occurrence*.

This requires patience and perseverance.

How often have we seen newbies get involved in Christian ministry expecting to see instant success, only to be disappointed. Such people don't last long.

We need to think back on how long it took us to come to Christ. Yes, there was a point-in-time when we prayed a prayer or walked the aisle. But for most of us, our conversion came as the end result of a process...

Circumstances awakened a need... A Christian friend took an interest... We finally broke down and went to church... After several weeks of listening to the Bible study we decided we needed to become a Christian...

But it didn't happen over night. It was the culmination of events... And we need to remember this when we interact with other people. Don't get disappointed when you pray for your friend and nothing immediately happens. Or you invite them to church and they refuse.

Trust me, they're listening to you - they're watching you - to see if you really believe what you say. They want to see the difference Jesus makes in your life before they take the step of asking Him into their own.

Throughout the Bible, Christian ministry is compared to farming. The two disciplines have much in common.

There's a time for *sowing* - its hard work to till a field, and plant seed... There's also the *reaping* - the harvest is exciting and rewarding - you get to see the results.

But in between the sowing and reaping there's lots of *waiting*. Patience and perseverance is required.

Wouldn't it be great to reap the day after you sowed? But the farmer knows it just doesn't work that way.

Take for example the Chinese bamboo.

Plant a bamboo sprig, and for four or five years nothing happens. You water it, fertilize it, weed it, but you see no noticeable growth for four long years. But in the fifth year an explosion of growth takes place.

In a period of six weeks the bamboo sprig grows into a tree 90 feet tall. During its period of growth a bamboo tree can grow three feet in a twenty-four hour period.

It's incredible that a tree could lie dormant for years, and then suddenly explode with dramatic growth. Yet Christians and churches can sometimes do the same.

Some of you don't know this, but my wife, Kathy, is a very fine tennis player. She's got trophies now to prove it! Her team recently won the ALTA city championship.

Kathy played tennis in High School, but she laid down her racket for years. I recall when she got back into it. I went out with her a couple of times to help her get back in shape. And she had great form. I could tell she'd played before. She had "*great form.*" In fact, I was checking out *her form!*... ***But she lacked stamina.***

And this can happen in Christian ministry. A person can have great form, but lack stamina and endurance.

Actually, tennis and ministry have a lot in common. They say in tennis, "[An effective serve requires a good follow through.](#)" And the same is true in ministry.

A cheetah's sleek body and strong muscles make it the fastest animal on the planet. At full stride a cheetah can reach speeds upwards of 70 mph. But the animal's heart

is extremely small in proportion to its body - so it lacks the stamina to sustain its speed for very long.

If the cheetah doesn't catch its prey in its first burst it'll tucker out. The intended victim escapes. Because the cheetah doesn't have the heart for the chase - it fizzles out... *And this is the problem with Christians...*

They want to serve the Lord, and take a role in the church, and count for God's kingdom, but they don't have the heart. They drop out before they get started.

Did you hear about the suicide bomber who went on 50 missions? *He was involved, but apparently, he wasn't very committed.* He lacked follow through. If we're going to count for Jesus we need perseverance.

Bearing fruit is our **purpose** - second, it requires **perseverance** - and lastly, it's very, very **practical**.

Notice the last line of verse 3, "**and whatever he does shall prosper.**" Apparently, he's **does** stuff. Rather than talk a good talk, the blessed man acts and does.

His words and deeds are a witness for Jesus!

And there are all kinds of creative ways for you to tell someone that Jesus loves them. John Patrick once wrote a comedy entitled, "**The Curious Savage.**"

In his play, a curious Mrs. Savage notices that her friend, Fairy May, seems bothered. She asks Fairy what's wrong. At first Fairy answers curtly, "**nothing.**"

But when Mrs. Savage presses her she replies, "**It's just that no one has said they loved me this lifelong day.**" Mrs Savage responds, "**Oh, yes they have, Fairy.**" She insists, "**No they haven't, I've been waiting.**"

Mrs Savage points out, "I heard Florence say she loved you at dinner tonight." Fairy answers, "Did she?"

Florence chimes in, "Did I?" Mrs Savage explains, "Sure you did. You told Fairy not to eat too fast."

Fairy wasn't sure she understood, "Was that saying she loved me?" Mrs. Savage continued, "Of course it was. People tell you they love you when they say, 'Take an umbrella its raining' - or 'Hurry back' - or even, 'Watch out, you'll break your neck'. There're hundreds of ways to word it - you just have to listen for it."

I like that thought. There are literally thousands of ways to communicate the love of Jesus to an unlovable world. Anytime we show we care we share God's love.

And we need to show His love - *not just at church.*

Annie Dillard writes, "Its madness to wear ladies' hats and velvet hats to church. We should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For God may draw us out to where we can never return." She's saying that God wants you and I to move out beyond the four walls of the church building and impact our community for the cause of Jesus!

Where you work... at the ballpark... in your school... in the neighborhood look for ways to show God's love.

Recently, the London Zoo opened a new exhibit.

School children can now observe what the zoo calls the world's most destructive animal... "the human!" Paul Hutton spends his weekends on constant display.

Imagine, what it's like for Paul, to be caged up and watched all day longed. It's got to be a creepy feeling.

Yet this is how we as Christians have been called to live our lives. People are looking at us. We're under scrutiny. Call yourself a Christian and you're on exhibit.

And rather than resent this scrutiny - or run from it - we should embrace it, and take advantage of it.

Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” Our lives need to be “*exhibit A*” that Jesus is alive and well - and that He's at work in hearts and lives that trust in Him.

God sees the orchard called the Church, and He inspects it for fruit. The Lord desires *acts of love, and works of kindness, and demonstrations of devotion.*

He wants us to join Him in the work of reconciling a wicked world back to its Creator. God has enrolled each of us in a daring mission to build up His kingdom.

Once you're planted in a church, and growing in Christ - the next step is to find a place where you can get involved, and use your gifts, and regularly serve...

And I've discovered the best way to make friends at church is to get involved serving with other people...

People who rub shoulders serving together get to know each other and develop a bond, a closeness.

It's like soldiers occupying the same foxhole.

Nine times out of ten, the people who complain and grumble are the people who aren't serving in any way. It's once you take the plunge and get involved - you develop a trust. You see that people are trying.

Once upon a time, Margaret and Ruth were elderly residents of a nursing home in Englewood, NJ.

Margaret is black and Ruth is Jewish. Both were accomplished pianists before suffering serious strokes.

Margaret barely survived. She spent months in rehab to recover the use of her left side. Her right side stayed paralyzed... After Ruth's stroke she laid on the floor for two days before she was found. Ruth still had the use of her right side, but she was confined to a wheelchair.

But it didn't take long in the nursing home for Ruth and Margaret to discover each other and their common love for the piano. Soon they were playing together at senior centers, civic groups, and veteran's hospitals...

They sat side-by-side on the piano bench. Margaret played with her left hand, while Ruth played with her right hand - and together they made beautiful music.

Margaret spoke for them both when she commented, "I never thought God could use us the way He is doing. We are so happy - and we thank Him every day."

I'm not sure there's much any of one of us can do for God on our own. We're all spiritual invalids. Spiritually speaking we've all been stroked out - disabled by sin.

But here's the deal... If I'll take the little I've got left, and join it together with the little you've got left, and we combine it to what he has left, and what she has left...

All of us working together might just be able to make some beautiful music! As One we can bear more fruit, *than the sum of what each of us to bear on our own.*

Let me start wrapping up with a parable. It's lengthy, but it's worth it. It's entitled, "The Life Saving Station."

"On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur there was a crude, little life-saving station.

The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea, and with no thought for themselves went out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost.

Some of those who were saved, and various others in the surrounding area, wanted to become associated with the station, and give of their time and money and effort for the support of its work.

New boats were bought and new crews trained. The little life-saving station grew.

Other members were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea.

They replaced the emergency cots with beds, and put better furniture in the enlarged building.

Now, the life-saving station became a popular gathering place for its members, and they decorated it beautifully and furnished it exquisitely. They now used it as a sort of club.

Fewer members were now interested in going to sea on life-saving missions, so they hired life-boat crews to do this work. The life-saving motif still prevailed in this club's decoration, and there was a symbolic life-boat in the room where the club initiations were held.

About this time a large ship wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boat loads of cold, wet, and half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick.

The beautiful new club was in chaos. So the property committee immediately had a shower-house built outside the club where victims of shipwreck could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's life-saving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club.

Some members insisted upon life-saving as their primary purpose, and pointed out that they were still called a life-saving station. But they were finally voted down and told if they wanted to save lives of all the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own life-saving station down the coast. They did.

As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old.

It evolved into a club, and yet another life-saving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit that sea coast today, you will find a number of exclusive clubs along the shore.

Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters, but today most of the people just drown."

God help us to remember that we're not just some "*Christian club*" - we're still "a life-saving station."

Let's not lose our vision.

God wants our *roots planted* and our *shoots growing*, not so we can turn inward and only relate to each other, but so we can *bear fruit* and impact a lost world.

When Calvary Chapel SM had grown to a hundred people or so, and we'd been established a number of years, one of our members approached me, "Pastor Sandy, I bet you feel good now that we're no longer a mission. We've now become an established church."

I was quick to correct him, "I don't care how long we survive, or thrive, I want us to have a mission mindset."

William Booth said it this way, "Some may be content to stay near church and chapel bell, but I want to run a mission a yard from the gates of hell!" Me too...

Our church exists not just to take up space. Let's be a life-saving station. Let's pray for our community, and reach out, and be on the lookout for those who are lost.

People are shipwrecked and drowning in these waters - off our coast, on our watch! Its up to us to row out and pluck as many as we can from the surf.

Perhaps you've seen the movie, Apollo 13.

If you haven't seen the movie, you're probably familiar with the story. On the way to the moon the Apollo spacecraft was crippled by an explosion. The prospects for the astronauts' safe return looked grim.

Early in the movie, Gene Kranz, NASA's flight operations chief in Houston, is confronted with the slim odds of bringing the capsule and it's occupants home.

Rather than capitulate to the circumstances, Kranz showed his determination. He barks out, "We've never lost an American in space, and we're not going to lose our first on my watch! Failure is not an option!"

This is how I feel about our post in this community.

Let's not be content with a single soul dying and going to hell on our watch! We need to bear fruit!

Bearing fruit is our **purpose**. It takes patience and **perseverance**. And its very, very **practical**.

But oh, when eternity's first day is done we'll look back and see that it was so, so worth it! Let's be **properly positioned**, **progressing continually**, and **productive annually**. It's about *roots, shoots, and fruits*.