

TREE-ODOGY

PSALM 1:1-3

This AM I want to talk about a famous tree. Actually, there are numerous “*famous trees*” around the world...

“[The Lone Cypress](#)” on the California coast sits by itself on the rocky shoreline, weathering the storms.

A giant tree named “[General Sherman](#)” grows in the Sequoia National Park. It’s the largest tree on Earth.

In 1792 a group of freed slaves, who had fought in the American Revolution, gathered under “[The Cotton Tree](#)” in Sierra Leone to thank God for a new start. Even today its a symbol of freedom for West Africans.

“[Major Oak](#)” in Sherwood Forest was recently voted Britain’s favorite tree. Legend has it, it’s hollow trunk was a hide out for Robin Hood and his merry men.

Then there’s a small forest of famous trees in southern Lebanon. “[The Cedars of God](#)” get their name from the Bible. Psalm 104 refers to these tall cedars as “[the trees of the LORD.](#)” Solomon used the timber from these Lebanese cedars to build the first Temple.

And then there’s a tree called “[The Tree of Life.](#)” It’s a 400 year old mesquite that sits alone in the Bahrain desert. It’s the only living thing within hundreds of miles. It has survived, and even thrived, because its roots have tapped into a underground source of water.

Which leads me to the tree I want to talk about this AM. In my opinion, it is the world's most famous tree.

It too is spoken of in Scripture - in *Psalm One*. It's actually a metaphor - a picture of a believer in Jesus. A Christian is like **“a tree planted by the rivers of water.”**

Like *the Lone Cypress* in California the Psalm One tree can endure isolation... like *the giant Sequoia* it's a pillar of strength... like *the Cotton Tree* it's a symbol of freedom... like *the Oak in Sherwood Forest* it's a place of refuge... and like *the Cedars of Lebanon* it too is the perfect timber from which to build a Temple...

And like *the tree in the sands of Bahrain* it can survive, even thrive, in desert environments - *and why?*

It's a tree by the waters... *it's roots are flowing, and it's shoots are growing, and it's fruits are showing...*

And God wants you and I to *be*, like this *tree!*

Let's read the first 3 verses in Psalm 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.”

This AM I want to share a *tree-mendous* vision for our church. It's *tree-rific*. I'm calling it, **Treeology**.

I don't want to *bark* at you this AM - or *pine* away too much on this - or *branch* out too *fir* - and I definitely don't want to talk like a *nut* - or go out on a *limb* - or *stump*

you... but no one *leaves* until we hear that God wants you, your family, and our church to be like a *tree!*

The psalmist begins, “**Blessed is the man...**”

The Hebrew word translated “**blessed**” means “**happy and prosperous.**” But what makes this word so intriguing is that it’s in the plural. A more literal translation would be, “**happy, happy, happy is the man.**”

Phil Robertson couldn’t have said it any better!

The person with more blessings than he can handle is like a tree. And God wants all of us to be that person.

When you look closely at this metaphor in Psalm One, you’ll see that God has three concerns... the believer’s **roots**, and his **shoots**, and his **fruits**.

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

As for **shoots**... He wants us **progressing continually.**

As for **fruits**... He wants us **productive annually.**

Healthy Christians, and healthy churches, are like *this tree planted by the waters...* **properly positioned, continually progressing, and annually productive.**

Over the last few months, as I’ve thought and prayed about God’s direction for CC, He keeps bringing me back to Psalm One. I feel so strongly about this metaphor we’ve made it our logo - *even got us T-shirts!*

God wants *everyone in this church, and everyone as this church, to be like a tree planted by the waters!*

This AM we're considering what it looks like in real life to **sink roots**, and to **sprout shoots**, and to **bear fruit**.

First, let's focus on **roots** - *where are you sinking your roots?* In all of life **proper positioning** matters.

The success of a business depends on how well it brands itself and positions itself in the marketplace...

A victorious politician is the candidate who was able to strategically position himself in the minds of voters...

And position certainly matters in sports. In basketball the player who gets the rebound isn't necessarily the guy who can jump the highest. It's the player who had the best position... A football player can be big and fast, but if he's out-of-position he won't make the play.

And likewise in your spiritual life, if you want to grow healthy, you need to plant yourself in the right spot.

The blessed man makes a deliberate decision to position he and his family near godly resources and influences. He or she avoids the way of the wicked, and sinks their roots alongside spiritual nourishment.

If you haven't noticed, the world we live in is not entirely sympathetic to Christianity... The latest craze in reality TV is nudity - *naked surviving, naked dating, even naked home buying* - it's insane. Obviously, the goal of most media isn't to raise a standard of morality.

Perk up your ears in the break room at work and the conversation isn't encouraging people to love God.

Hang out at the gym, or on the street corner, and the chit-chat isn't likely to enhance purity and godliness.

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.”* In other words, he or she is careful about **who they listen to... who they linger with... and who they laugh at...**

Realize this truth, **lives are not shaped by *mysterious forces*. Lives are shaped by *deliberate choices*.**

The *opinions of the friends you listen to - the people you hang out with - the amusements you're entertained by* - combine to shape what kind of person you'll be.

How you position your life and family really matters!

I don't care how strong you are, stand in the middle of a raging river long enough, and the current will eventually take you under. Likewise, *listen to ungodly counsel* and you'll begin to make ungodly choices.

Entertain yourself with sinful stuff and you'll eventually lose your appetite for the good and godly.

Sit in the seat of the scornful and you'll turn cynical.

We've all seen a great player on a lousy team. A superstar gets dragged down by bumbling teammates.

Whereas, the opposite can occur... A mediocre player on a team full of quality performers excels because his mates elevate his game. Success or failure often depend on the people that surround you.

And the same is true spiritually... *in a Christian's life.*

Jesus is at work in us, but if we surround ourselves with influences that drag us down it undermines our growth. Smart people position themselves to succeed.

Why do you think outfielders move a little left or right with each batter? They have scouting reports on the hitter's tendency that places them in optimum position for where he usually hits the ball... *position matters!*

An employee positions himself for promotion by working hard, being on time, and respecting his boss...

A High School student positions herself for college by buckling down and making some decent grades...

And if you're serious about growing spiritually you have to position yourself around the things of God...

Walk with people who walk with the Lord...

Stand with folks who are strong enough to lean on...

Hang out with people who are hanging on to God...

Listen to the right counsel - linger with the right people - and laugh with folks who're really having fun.

Don't just go with the flow. Don't just drift with the tides of this world - with what's popular. Toilet paper goes with the flow - not a flourishing, healthy Christian.

A wise person chooses to *properly position* their life.

Understand, a tree is not a bush or an annual. It's hard to move a tree once it sinks its roots. Plant a tree, and it stays put. That's why before you plant a tree you need to give serious thought to where it belongs...

When you walk out on the lawn behind our building, you'll notice several river birches. They're the trees with the gnarly bark by the parking lots. But these trees weren't always there. We planted them as baby sprigs.

In fact, we spent hours figuring out where we could position these trees to make the most of their shade.

And this is how *the blessed man* thinks - he doesn't just act randomly - he considers the best place to sink his roots to gain a sense of belonging and support.

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 - but there was a reason why it was so green and tall... Kathy planted it over our septic line... So when the downstairs toilet backed up, and sewage started to overflow, we quickly realized her tree had sunk its roots right into the sewer line.

And this is what happens 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 what's unholy you grieve the Holy Spirit.

I've known many a believer who was gloriously born again - full of spiritual life - but they mistakenly positioned themselves 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 "godliness in, godliness out." You reap what you sow. *The fruit you grow is up to the place you plant.*

Realize, Christianity involves interaction with other Christians. You don't just avoid the evil influences, you connect to holy and wholesome role models. The NT is full of what we call, "one another commands."

Here're a few examples: "Love one another, pray for one another, encourage one another, greet one another, honor one another, serve one another, admonish one another, accept one another, bear one another's burdens, forgive one another, submit to one another, teach one another, bear with one another, be devoted to one another..." And on and on it goes...

But you can't obey any of these commands without first forming a relationship *with another believer*. If you hold on to old friends who don't share your faith - or if you

remain a loner and try to go it on your own - you'll cut yourself off from the source of strength you need.

You've got to move outside your comfort zone and connect with a few other Christians - *sink some roots*.

Author Gordon MacDonald writes about an AA group he once attended. A woman named Cathy rose to tell her story. He figured at 21 she'd been a beauty queen, but now at 35 she looked weathered and haggard.

Cathy confessed, *"In the last month I've been in five states. I've slept under bridges... been arrested, raped, robbed..."* Through tears she continued, *"I don't know what to do. I don't want to be homeless anymore, but I can't stop drinking... I just can't stop... I can't stop..."*

MacDonald says at that moment an older, rounder gal named Marilyn - sober for a dozen years - reached her arm around Cathy. She spoke gently, *"Honey, you're going to be ok. You're with us now. We can deal with this together. All you have to do is keep coming. Hear me? Keep on coming."* In his writing MacDonald questioned if Cathy would've received the same reception at the church he pastored... *I have no doubt.*

I know your stories. This church is full of formerly broken people who've been put back together by God's grace. And the healing we've tasted, we're now serving up... *If you're new here you'll be ok. You just got to keep coming. Sink some roots, and healing will begin.*

I like the phrase the psalmist uses for connecting to other believers. He puts it, *"planted by the rivers..."*

Have you ever “*planted*” flowers, or a bush, or a tree? It’s messy. It’s dirty! You dig a hole. You uncover the roots. You turn over the clay. You add some potting soil. Then you nestle in the roots and pat it all down.

And likewise when people come together with other people, even Christians, it can get dirty and messy.

There’ll be a misunderstanding or two, some bruised feelings, some drama... *and nobody likes drama!* But this is what it takes to get “*planted.*” You learn to love, forgive, accept... But here’s the truth: **Either we’re growing together, or we’re probably not growing at all!**

Understand, according to the Bible the Christian life is more than just *believing*, it also includes *belonging*.

I pray that in the days to come we’ll all sink our roots deeper into the fellowship of believers here at CC.

Healthy Christians are **positioned properly**.

But they’re also **progressing continually**. Inspect a tree’s branches. You’ll find **shoots!** *Roots and shoots...*

Apparently, this *tree planted by the river*, is strong, and vibrant, and resilient. It never wilts or withers. It’s evergreen. It bears fruit seasonally. It grows constantly.

This tree avoids periods of dormancy. It’s alive year round. The *sap is always flowing*, the *tree is always growing*. Even when the winds howl, and the trunk creaks... even when the branches bear the weight of the snow and ice... this tree continues to grow!

And this is God's desire for us - not only that we're *positioned properly*, but we're *progressing continually*.

When you're converted to Christ you become a babe in the faith - a spiritual infant - but you aren't expected to stay that way. Nowhere in the Bible does it mention pacifiers, or teething toys, or building blocks in heaven.

Somewhere between our *coming to Christ* and our *going to heaven* God expects you and I to grow up!

I read of a youth group that had the following motto painted on the wall of their meeting room, "*Keep the faith, baby; not the baby faith.*" I like that message!

Ephesians 4:13 in the Phillips translation reads, "*We are not meant to remain as children... but to grow up in every way into Christ...*" God's goal for everyone in this room is for you to be on the path of consistent growth.

This is why sinking roots is just the first step. Proper position is necessary for growth, but there's more...

No one becomes godly simply by hanging out with godly people. No one thinks biblically just by toting a Bible under his arm. Holiness isn't like catching a cold.

It's not contagious. Spiritual growth is *intentional*.

If I asked you the question, "*How tall does a tree grow?*" You'd probably want more information - "*what kind of tree? what kind of soil? what type of climate?*"

But there's an easier answer to "*how tall will a tree grow?*" "**As tall as it can!**" Everything in nature grows to its maximum potential... trees, bushes, grass... *wow, does my grass grow!* But there's one exception...

There's one living thing that may or may not grow to its potential... *that's people!* Humans make a choice. And sadly you can choose to be less than God desires.

Remember, *lives are not shaped by mysterious forces, lives are shaped by deliberate choices.* *Have you made spiritual growth your goal - to sprout shoots?*

The psalmist tells us in verse 2, the happy, happy, happy man... *“delights himself in the Law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.”* He chooses to seek hope, confidence, comfort in the Word of God.

He goes through the Bible, and he lets the Bible go through him. He *“meditates (on it) day and night.”*

Understand, *biblical meditation* is not the same as *eastern meditation*. Rather than put your mind in neutral, and rely on rote chants and mantras - the Christian engages his mind, and opens his heart.

We mull over what God has said, as we do His Spirit enlightens our understanding with wisdom and clarity.

Christian meditation is like a cow chewing its cud. As we roll the Bible over and over in our minds, the Spirit of God reveals the application of what we're reading.

This is how a believer grows spiritually.

I love Psalm 119:9, *“How can a young man cleanse his way?”* Notice, he doesn't ask, *“how can a toddler cleanse his way... or a grandma cleanse her way?”* Tots and grandmas aren't exactly notorious sinners.

But young men - adolescent males - no offense guys, but you have a reputation for being *cocky, hotheaded, reckless, hormonal, stubborn, impulsive...*

If you can cleanse a young man's way you can affect anyone... And what can do this industrial cleansing?

Verse 9, "By taking heed according to Your word."

Only the Bible can *renew a mind - transform a character - tame a lust - break old habits - create a new outlook - produce sensitivity - spawn self-discipline - refocus priorities - and grow a vibrant faith?*

Some churches attract big crowds with entertaining presentations, or by telling folks what they want to hear. Yet any method, not Bible-strong, is sure to fail.

There are thousands of shortcuts - spiritual fads that come and go. But our only real hope is a steady diet of God's Word! This is why the happiest man of all is the one who "*delights himself in the Law of the LORD...*"

And... "*in His law he meditates day and night.*"

Spiritual growth is *intentional*, but apparently, it's also *gradual*. The rhythm of our spiritual growth is "*day and night... day and night.*" It requires daily disciplines.

When Moses told Israel to take possession of the land of Canaan. he said in Deuteronomy 7:22, "your God will drive out those nations before you little by little; you will be unable to destroy them at once..."

Notice His promise of victory - it would occur "little by little." A complete victory wouldn't happen overnight.

Likewise, spiritual progress comes in increments. It's step by step - our growth as believers is measured over weeks, months, years - not minutes or days.

It tickled me when my kids were younger - they'd wake up, look in the mirror, straighten their shoulders, and then announce proudly, "I think I grew last night."

And I'm sure they did, but on a daily basis that growth was imperceptible. And likewise, spiritual maturity *takes time - takes patience - takes endurance*.

Before James Garfield was elected our nation's president, he was chancellor of Hiram College in Ohio.

A friend of Garfield's, whose son was enrolled in the school, asked if there was any way he could speed up his son's education. Garfield replied, "Sure, but it all depends on what you want to make of your son. When God makes an oak tree it requires a hundred years. When He produces a squash it takes only two months."

A tree grows, but it doesn't go from a seedling to a towering oak overnight. It takes time and consistency.

It takes "*day and night...*" "*day and night...*"

Did you hear of the awful accident on 78 last night?

A snail was inching his way down the center of the road when he was run over by a turtle. When the paramedics arrived they asked him, "*What happened?*"

The snail replied, "*I don't know. It happened so fast!*"

Often we get impatient. Spiritual growth seems oh, so slow - but hang in there, you're making progress.

Here's a great quote, "*Nothing that doesn't occur daily will ever dominate your life.*" It's the *day after day* and *night after night* that makes the practice effective.

Perhaps you've heard of the 21-day rule?

Supposedly, it takes 21 days for a new activity to become a habit. I don't know if its 21 days, or 51 days, or 101 days - the point is don't give up after one week!

Stick with it. You don't reap a crop of corn the day after you sow the seed. You water, weed, and wait...

This is why the time to sow spiritual seed is now! Battles will come. You need to be ready when they do.

Once, there was a National Geographic special that showed film footage of the Alaskan bull moose, and the male sparring that goes on in the fall breeding season.

The male Bullwinkles butt heads over and over hoping to prove their dominance. They keep crashing antlers until one set weakens and breaks. The moose with the heftiest body and strongest antlers prevails.

But the battle is actually won in the spring and summer. For the heftiest body and stoutest antlers belong to the moose that ate the healthiest diet.

Preparation and growth were determined long before they were needed. The same is true for you and me.

The spiritual outcome of our lives isn't decided in the heat of the battle, *it's being decided right now!* If you're *bull-headed* and stubborn, and refuse to meditate on God's Word, don't be surprised when you fail and fall.

There's a hospital diagnosis that sometimes appears on an infant's medical chart. It's the acronym "FTT" - it means "[failure to thrive](#)." The baby isn't growing and putting on weight. And this can happen to a Christian.

If you don't want your chart in heaven to read, "Failure To Thrive" then delight yourself in God's Word.

Spiritual muscle - enduring faith - are best developed before they're needed! It's my prayer that everyone who attends this church will *choose to sprout shoots!*

Healthy followers of Jesus are like this tree in Psalm One. Their **roots** are **positioned properly**. Their **shoots** are **progressing continually**... And they have **fruits!**

The blessed man is **productive annually**.

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

Once, a little girl asked her Mom, "Is God as big as the universe?" The mother replied, "*Yes, 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'll have to see Him shining through!"

And the world's most brilliant theologian couldn't have stated the truth 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 also *shines through us!*

Jesus and His disciples were once walking through Jerusalem when they noticed a fig tree with no fruit.

It had a trunk, and leaves, and branches, *but no figs... go figure?* And Jesus cursed this fig-less fig tree.

Overnight it shriveled up and died.

God didn't make fig trees to fill up, or stand tall, or stay green - fig trees were created for one purpose - to produce figs *or fruit*. The same is true of Christians.

How many of you have ever eaten 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 fruitcake...

"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 *"bring forth fruit in its season."* Our purpose is to bear fruit!

God intends for us to *glorify Him* and *impact people*. He wants our lives to count for Him in time and eternity.

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’s blown about. His life has no direction. He’s like a boat with no rudder.

A piece of chaff or 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 any meaningful direction. It’s drifting along with no purpose.

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

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

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

Perhaps you’ve seen the movie, “*Mr. Holland’s Opus.*” Glenn Holland is an aspiring musician who in order to feed his family gets forced into a teaching job.

He embraces his job at the school half-heartedly. His frustration is always just below the surface. He fancies himself as a musical composer, not a band teacher.

Yet throughout the decades of his life, his passion for music rubs off on his students in a positive way.

The day comes when Mr. Holland walks out of the school for the last time. But before he leaves he’s invited into the auditorium. It’s packed with his former students. One of his alumni is now the state governor.

She addresses the crowd, "Mr. Holland had a profound influence in our lives, yet I get the feeling he considers a great part of his life misspent. Rumor had it he was always working on this symphony, and this was going to make him famous and rich (probably both).

But Mr. Holland isn't rich and he isn't famous. At least not outside our little town. So it might be easy for him to think himself a failure, but he'd be wrong. Because he's achieved a success far beyond riches and fame."

The governor says to her former teacher, "Look around you. There is not a life in this room you have not touched, and each one of us is a better person because of you. We are your symphony, Mr. Holland. We are the melodies and the notes of your opus."

Sometimes we get caught up in just *finishing the job*, and *pocketing the paycheck*, and *fixing up the house*.

We forget that life is really measured by our impact on people... our family, friends, church, community.

It's been said, "Most people are like the crew who were busy arranging chairs on the deck of the Titanic."

So what if you make a splash on earth, when all this world is a sinking ship? It's the people around you that will live forever. It's people that matter most.

Imagine, one day strolling the streets of heaven, and bumping into a fellow who grabs your hand. He starts shaking it profusely, and clears a lump from his throat.

He tells you that *you saved his marriage when you invited him to bring his family to church... or he was the kid who learned of Jesus because you taught him in Sunday*

School... or he was the high risk teenager who got back on track because you gave an extra offering to send him to camp... or he was saved because his pastor came to the conference you worked at, and he was encouraged not to give up...

Imagine, playing a role in getting a person to heaven

Can there be a greater thrill? *Here's a reason to roll out of bed. This is worth ironing a shirt, or putting on makeup.* When we touch people we impact eternity.

Our purpose at CC is to show our friends, and our community, and our world *that God is alive and well - the Bible is for today - its cool to be a Christian.*

Our goal is to be an outpost of Heaven in the midst of a barren Earth. We want people to know that real love, peace, joy, healing - is only found in Jesus. *I can think of no higher purpose on which to spend my life!*

God's purpose for you and me is not just to take up space, or look pretty, or add stuff - but to bear **fruit!**

Well, I want to be *a tree planted by the rivers of water.* How about you? If so, there's three places we should examine... our **roots**, our **shoots**, our **fruits**...

Look at your **roots** - are you **positioned properly?** Are the people around you headed in the same direction you intend to go. Tap into good and godly influences.

And what about your **shoots** - are you **progressing continually?** Are the choices that you make conducive for growth? Do you meditate daily on God's Word?

And let's inspect our branches for spiritual **fruit** - are we **productive annually?** Are we impacting people for Jesus. Can folks see Jesus shining through our lives?

Whether today's message is a *revelation* to you. or just a *reminder* let's take it to heart. It's strategic!

This tree... would make for a great church logo!

Let's sink our **roots**, and sprout our **shoots**, and bear some **fruit**. If we do, our lives and church will be *tree-mendous*, *tree-ific*. Here is some *sound tree-ology*.

In the days ahead let's you and me, *be like a tree!*