

Fire_Wind_River_Trees_Wk4_Trees

Scripture: Genesis 1:28; Psalm 1:1-3; Jeremiah 17:7-8; Ezekiel 47:12; John 15:4,8; 1-2 NIV

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In life, most of what you do, you do with the hope that it will result in some kind of benefit. In other words, there are a lot of things that we do with a purpose in mind.

For many people, they live their entire life doing things that make them feel good - the benefit they are receiving for their choices is that they are happy. Nothing completely wrong with that, but maybe a bit limited in scope.

Think about it other ways:

You get a job and work for what? Provision...maybe fulfillment? There's a purpose in the job. Let it rain (pretend to make \$\$ rain with hand gesture).

You play the game, to...? Win The purpose is to win.

You work hard in school to...? Get the good grade, get into the school..the purpose is to advance.

You develop a special skill to...? To be successful and in helping or serving people with that skill. The purpose is to provide a service.

You get a good night of sleep so that....? You aren't an ogre in the morning.

You get the idea.

Today, as we wrap up this series, we are going to reacquaint ourselves with one of God's purposes for us. If you can relate through your own experience, it's easy to look at our Creator and realize that he, too, did everything with a purpose. To accomplish that, we will discover that the imagery the Biblical authors used frequently to provide us with a picture of God's purpose is that of a tree.

SLIDE: insert the tree icon from canva as a solo image on the screen.

Trees are pretty amazing creations when you think about them.

So many varieties...so many different kinds of fruits whether they are safe for human consumption or not...different kinds of bark, different root systems, different sizes and shapes...truly a fascinating element of nature.

Trees, because of their diversity and variety, serve a wide variety of purposes.

Food

Shelter

Healing Medicine

Habitat

Clean air

Similarly, God has established humans in similar ways. Specifically, he has established those who have surrendered to his holy and perfect love to accomplish a certain kind of purpose.

PRAY:

Before we open the Scriptures this morning, it's that time in the service we take just a minute or so to pray and 1. ask the Holy Spirit to make us teachable, to receive the teachings of Scripture willingly, 2. Pray that same prayer for those seated near us, 3. And if you would be so kind, pray for me to speak exactly what it is that God has revealed through the Scriptures in a way that you could receive.

SLIDE:

You have a God-given purpose.

Genesis 1:28

28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

So often when we read these words we automatically jump to the conclusion: This is telling me to make babies and dominate all the living animals on land or in the water.

Now listen, God's plan includes procreation for sure.

But the God-given purpose that we have been established to fulfill has to be viewed in a broader sense.

God's purpose for humanity was not just procreation, but to multiply into a people who were devoted to him and to his ways.

ILLUSTRATION FROM BUSINESS:

Consider it this way: For many of you, you have either worked in or are aware of how businesses and institutions have certain values and expectations that they expect their employees to not only to obey, but to invest into others so that these values are upheld. I realize some of you may work for some companies where this isn't done, or in some cases it's the complete opposite. But generally, A business wants to have employees who want to be there, who embrace the mission, and who realize its potential. Why? Because they believe in what they are trying to do and want to help others realize that what they are doing is worth their investment as well.

I'm not equating God with a business man, but I'm trying to help you see that when God established humanity and gave them this purpose to be fruitful and multiply, it was intended to result in the worship of God and in the blessing of people. There was mission...purpose...reason.

That has not changed.

Now here's what you need to understand:

Everyone is multiplying something...good or evil? You multiply who you are...so who are you?

Everyone is producing something...beneficial or harmful? You produce what's already inside you...so what's growing within you?

Everyone is subduing or ruling something or someone...like it or not, it's true - are you leaving them better or worse?

HUGE IDEA DON'T MISS

You are fulfilling the purpose of being fruitful and multiplying - its the way God designed you.

*******But what you are producing and what you are multiplying, well, a lot of that depends on where you've planted yourself.*******

SLIDE:

You choose where you're planted.

You may not get to choose your family, your upbringing, where you grow up, etc.; but you have a clear choice about where you plant yourself when it comes to who you spend your time with and who you allow to influence your life.

Psalm 1:1-3

1 Blessed is the one
 who does not walk in step with the wicked
 or stand in the way that sinners take
 or sit in the company of mockers,
2 but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
 and who meditates on his law day and night.
3 That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
 which yields its fruit in season
 and whose leaf does not wither—
 whatever they do prospers.

In the introductory words of the Psalms, we read a comparison and contrast between two kinds of people. The Psalmist implies that there are those who fall into the category of wicked...sinners...mockers.

In a world where nearly anything can be justified if argued properly, it's challenging to remain unscathed by warped thinking. We are constantly bombarded with ideas that initially seem fine, but in God's Kingdom, they are warped...mocking his goodness and character.

ILLUSTRATION:

Recently I was made aware of a college philosophy professor who wrote an argument for something so terrible and so disgusting, I can't repeat it here. If I were to mention what he wrote about, it would result in a visceral response from every one of you. We would need to use the hashtag #triggerwarning. This professor used the power of an idea to influence the minds of many.

******I use that to illustrate how the power of an idea becomes the soil that you plant your roots in. And when you plant your roots in people whose ideas and worldviews are so twisted that innocent lives are vulnerable and the oppressed are even further oppressed - you multiply what you let live inside you.*

But the Psalmist contrasts those who absorb the ways and ideas of the wicked, the mockers, the sinners...

And he paints a different picture of those who delight in the law of the Lord - who MEDITATE on the heart and mind of God...who fill their minds with the ideas of Heaven and allow them to come to live within him or her...

He says that person - that person is different: **INVITE INTERACTION AND RESPONSE:**

They are like what? Like a tree.

A tree who is planted where? Streams of water.

And that tree produces what? Fruit.

And its leaves don't do what? Wither.

And whatever it does does what? Prospers?

That sounds really great doesn't it?

Here's why:

SLIDE:

When you abide in Jesus, he produces abundance.

John 15:1-8; Jeremiah 17:7-8; Ezekiel 47:10-12

ILLUSTRATION:

I've been following Jesus for about 25 years. I grew up in the church and was raised in a strict home and so there wasn't a lot of opportunity for me to get into too much trouble...

By God's grace I experienced genuine and meaningful relationship with him at a very young age.

But I want to let you in on a secret that many life-long or long-time church people have:
Being in the church can be a great disguise for living apart from Christ.

It is easy to look the part. Even fruitless trees can look beautiful.

But to move from a shallow rootedness in what many have called, "Churchianity" we need to take a radical next step.

You can choose where you're planted, whether in the soil of God's heart and love; or in the soil of everything and everyone else.

But listen, if you choose to set down your roots in the soil of the heart of God; you need to remain there in order to harvest the reward. This isn't a fastfood faith factory.

The prophet Jeremiah was addressing the people of Judah who were in captivity in Babylon and in the course of a message he said this:

Jeremiah 17: 7

**"But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord,
whose confidence is in him.**

**8 They will be like a tree planted by the water
that sends out its roots by the stream.**

**It does not fear when heat comes;
its leaves are always green.**

**It has no worries in a year of drought
and never fails to bear fruit."**

The blessing is in the abiding.

The blessing you're most longing for is received when you place all your trust in God himself.

A lot of people call on God and expect that he will do something for them when they find themselves in trouble. But for many of those people - maybe some of you - you live your daily life so rooted in soil that is parched and destroyed all the while expecting a life of God's refreshing goodness.

And listen. God is merciful. He loves you.

But he's calling on you to get transplanted into the soil of his love and his commands. Trust God so much that you're willing to make the daily choice to set your roots in him.

ANd when you do?

You don't fear when unexpected hardships come upon you.
You don't fear when people mistreat you or malign you.

No! Because your trust is the Lord you don't wither up and fall apart! Why? Because you've placed your roots in good soil - by living water.

Now there might be some pushback about what I just said...fear is a natural response to certain stimuli. But for the person whose trust is the Lord, we bring our fear to him and with hands open we surrender that fear as often as needed.

Let me tell you something - I get afraid. In the 8.5 years of our church's brief history I've had a lot of moments or seasons of fear. There's been some scary times. I've had some scary conversations. Received some scary news. Experienced some scary times of depression and discouragement.

Here's the point - it's not that you have an absence of fear, it's that you have a greater trust in the Lord than in that which you're afraid of. And when you have your trust in the Lord, your fear is brought under his authority...you still need to face it...you still need to do the hard thing or have the hard conversation...but because you trust in the Lord, you will not wither and you will not fail to bear fruit.

Remember last week's message from Ezekiel 47? I left something really awesome out last week - I wanted to save the best part of that for last...

Ezekiel 47:12 Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing."

Look at this...now you're seeing where God's PURPOSE, the value of being PLANTED in Him, and what is PRODUCED by trusting in him all come together...

When you abide in the presence of God you will bear fruit in accordance with his nature, you will stand out among the dried up, crispy and scorched, and did you catch the description Ezekiel was given?

Through those who have chosen to set their roots down in the soil of the Father in Heaven, there will be healing.

Healing.

What kind of healing do you need today?

Spiritual
Relational
Physical

The promise is that the presence of God restores life.

Listen to how Jesus restates all of this:

John 15:4,8 Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me....**8** This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

The blessing is in the abiding. Jesus said it.

Here's what happens when you understand how God's purpose is fulfilled as you plant yourself in him and as you begin to produce fruit in accordance with his goodness and nature: you bring glory to the Father and you verify that you are a disciple of Christ.

Remember what I said earlier?

Everyone is multiplying something.

Everyone is producing something.

You are either multiplying and producing in accordance with the goodness and nature of God, bringing him glory; or you're not.

Again, there's likely some pushback on this.

What if I'm sort of abiding in Jesus, but there are some things I've got going on that are not abiding in Jesus?

Like, I love Jesus, but I love getting drunk out of my mind with a few friends a couple times a month.

Jesus is my Lord and Savior, but there are some people I simply hate.

I'm abiding in Jesus, but I'm also abiding in witchcraft and psychics and other forms of sorcery...I'm just into spirituality in general.

Stop. Listen.

Jesus is worth your all.

If we take the imagery and metaphor of a tree another step further, there are trees that you have seen that have had both dead branches and living branches.

That tree is in tension.

When you half heartedly follow Jesus - you may show some evidence of being his disciple. There is a glimpse of his presence and nature. You likely have knowledge, but lack power.

But there is also clear evidence that within you, there is no real life.

SLIDE:

The abundant life won't last without pruning.

John 15:1-8

John 15: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. **2** He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."

Jesus is worth your all.

He is worth giving everything you are to everything he is.

He is worth you giving up on the parched, worthless soil that you've been trying to live in and transplanting into life with him.

He is worth giving up your bitterness...what people have done, said, or not done and not said...he's worth leaving that soil behind because all it's doing is producing within you more of the same.

He is worth fastening yourself to, abiding in, because there is a life available that is beyond words and comprehension.

Someone here today, you need to make the change. It's time to give up on the way you've been living and embrace Jesus, the True Vine and graft yourself into him. Be given life through him.

Someone needs to walk away from the wicked things you're dabbling in. It's sucking the life out of you and yet you keep going back expecting different results. Be done with it!

Jesus wants for you to experience life in him. He longs for you to put all your trust in him.

You will know the depths of his goodness the more you place your trust in him.

So today, some of you may be realizing, I need this life that Jesus offers...How do I go about gaining that?

"Jesus, I confess right now that I've been doing my own thing. I am making the choice today to reject the things I know have been taking me down and I turn to you. Please forgive me of my sins. Please cleanse me and make me whole."

If that was you, in just a minute, would you join me up front or leave a message if you're viewing online?

Introduce Communion AND Prayer time:

Explain Communion

- Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11
- Requirements: Believer

**If, as you come up to receive communion this morning, while you're here you want to stay and pray and worship, I encourage that. This space is safe, it's symbolic of moving out of the place of comfort and being willing to risk your comfort to experience the presence of Christ with others.

