

Trunk

Good afternoon ladies! I am pleased to be able to share some thoughts with you today about our spiritual growth. In our tree analogy, this is represented by the trunk. But let's begin with a prayer....

*When I was told that we would be using this tree analogy, I chuckled a bit to myself. When I was in college at Harding University, I had a group of friends with a funny game. I hung out with a lot of bible majors and one of their favorite games was to point to any object in the room and challenge the other person to make an object lesson out of it for a devo. So it needed to be bible/God/Christian life themed and needed to use that object. A bit like in the movie Forrest Gump, Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you're gonna get. Well, same idea. This happened everywhere and led to some really funny discussions, but it is something that really has stuck with me. It helped me to use my mind to see how God can use anything. We can learn more and more about God through so many things. God uses many tools to help us understand, and Jesus' loved to use parables, which give us perspective and understanding like nothing else. Well, this simple game helped me to practice focusing my attention to Godly things. So when this analogy was given to me, my mind started flooding with ideas. But as with all analogies, there comes a point where it can break down. If we try to apply everything to this object, it will not make sense anymore or it will start to go down a bad path. So with this in mind, I have tried to prayerfully prepare this lesson, but please know, I am only human and I still have much to learn! I have tried to find some logical comparisons, using bible verses/passages, but if something I say doesn't make sense or you think it is saying something else, please forgive me. I hope to help remind us of where we have been and give some tools for moving forward. That is how these verses have helped me. I pray they will help you as well. Or better yet, that they will encourage you or inspire you to find other verses that do the same.

In doing some research on trees, to prepare for this lesson, I came across an interesting article. ### Role of wind in a tree's life - By [Anupum Pant](#)

Remember the [biosphere 2](#)? In short, it's a miniature version of our planet, now owned by the university of Arizona, constructed for scientists to study how the planet's living systems actually work. Learnings from this tiny planet enabled scientists to innovate and come up with new ideas related to growth of plants etc. Or that is what they thought when they planned to make this biosphere.

The major discovery from it was something they had never expected. The most interesting thing they learnt from it was the importance of wind in a plant's life. Who'd have thought!

In the biosphere 2, they had trees growing faster than they would grow in the wild. Also, they found that these trees wouldn't completely mature. Before they could, they used to collapse. Later it was found that this was caused by the lack of wind in the biosphere. And it turns out, wind plays a major role in a tree's life. The presence of wind makes a tree stronger, it is thus able to mature and not fall down due to its own weight.

When plants and trees grow in the wild, the wind constantly keeps them moving. This causes a stress in the wooden load bearing structure of the tree. So, to compensate, the tree manages to grow something called the [reaction wood](#) (or stress wood). This stress wood usually has a different structure (in terms of cellulose or lignin content and more) and is able to position the

tree where it'd get the best light, or other optimum resources. This is the reason why trees are able to contort towards best light and still survive loads in even awkward shapes. A contorted building like that would easily fall. The tree is able to grow in a more solid manner – thanks to the reaction wood. If there's no wind, like in the biosphere 2, the trees end up being much weaker and aren't able to survive for long. This happens in homes too. Plants grown indoors, without any kind of wind hitting them on a regular basis tend to become weak. So, before they are planted outside in the wild conditions, their structure has to be strengthened by causing stress.

Remember, **stress is what makes a tree strong enough to sustain the wear and tear that it'd face later in life.**

####*1*Talk about a lesson all by itself, right?! But this leads into discussion about the trunk.

First off, let's look at the big picture.

####What are all trees doing? Reaching toward the light.

####They are finding any way they can to get more and more light.

What are we called to do as Christians?

Keep reaching for God. In the bible, He is called Light.

####1 John 1:5-7

####God is light, and we need to walk in the light...This is calling us to reach for Him. To keep our eyes focused on Him.

####John 8:12

####Ps 119:105

He is guiding us with his Light. His word is our light. It helps us reach for Him.

Ok, well, then the question we need to ask ourselves is:

Am I reaching toward the Light? Reaching for God? Most of us would automatically say, Yes! But if we are honest, it might be more like, ...well, most of the time...or I try but...

So what are the things that take our focus off of God? In this analogy, what are the obstacle that get in the way of the tree reaching for the light?

####Rocks,

####Trucks,

fences,

bikes, benches,

What are the obstacles in our path, blocking us from reaching toward the Light?

Money, lack of time, stress, lack of sleep, relationships, pain, grief, loneliness, depression, disaster, lies...the list can go on and on... These are things that get in the way of us reaching towards God. What is it for you? I know for me when my kids were younger it was definitely lack of sleep and lack of time. I was completely overwhelmed and over exhausted. I was truly weak, and I really felt it because I really stopped trying to reach towards God. I was drowning in my guilt of not only not feeling like a good mom, but also of not reading my bible or praying more to "doing" more things for God. Now that I am further from it, I feel like what I was truly missing was just that leaning on God! My reaching for Him was slowed because I was trying to do everything with my own strength. I stopped praying and kept trying to fix it all myself. This was my true obstacle....being caught up in ME!

But with those obstacles I mentioned, some are from our own sin and situations, and others are outside forces. Things others have done to us or even natural disasters, things that are truly out of your control. Both can block our path to the Light.

But if we look back at the trees, what do you see...even though there was something blocking it's path, it didn't stop trying. What a lesson there, right?

#####Gal 6:9

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#####*2*When we look at a tree trunk, the first thing we see is the bark.

#####What is it's purpose? To protect the tree.

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- The outer bark is the tree's protection from the outside world. Continually renewed from within, it helps keep out moisture in the rain, and prevents the tree from losing moisture when the air is dry. It insulates against cold and heat and wards off insect enemies.
- The inner bark, or "phloem", is pipeline through which food is passed to the rest of the tree. It lives for only a short time, then dies and turns to cork to become part of the protective outer bark.
- The cambium cell layer is the growing part of the trunk. It annually produces new bark and new wood in response to hormones that pass down through the phloem with food from the leaves. These hormones, called "auxins", stimulate growth in cells. Auxins are produced by leaf buds at the ends of branches as soon as they start growing in spring.
- Sapwood is the tree's pipeline for water moving up to the leaves. Sapwood is new wood. As newer rings of sapwood are laid down, inner cells lose their vitality and turn to heartwood.
- Heartwood is the central, supporting pillar of the tree. Although dead, it will not decay or lose strength while the outer layers are intact. A composite of hollow, needle like cellulose fibers bound together by a chemical glue called lignin, it is in many ways as strong as steel. A piece 12" long and 1" by 2" in cross section set vertically can support a weight of twenty tons

In this analogy, God is like the outer bark. He is our protection.

#####Ps 5:11-12

We take refuge in Him and are glad!

In His protection, we can sing songs of Joy!

#####Ps 91:4

He covers us and protects us, our shield and rampart. These are battle terms.

#####2 Sam 22:3

Here David is praising God after He has protected him from his enemies and Saul. I love this one, because it feels like a warrior's praise! Can you tell I have 2 boys at home?! Well, 3 if you count my husband?! :)

So we are protected...from what? Well, we sort of mentioned them earlier with our obstacles in our path...Satan and he has many tools - Doubt - Fear - Persecution - Temptation - Lies - Deceit - Laziness - etc. He will protect us, but that doesn't mean bad things won't happen. He doesn't

protect us by taking us out of this world to keep us out of harm's way. He shields us, covers us with His feathers.

Meaning he is right there with us. Don't miss that fact! If he is shielding and covering us, where does that place Him? Right beside us and in front of us!

He can protect us from these things, but we also need to be strengthening our relationship with him. We need to keep growing, keep reaching. How do we do that? In the biosphere, the trees needed that wind to help them become strong. What do we need to become strong from the inside out?

James 1:2-8

I know it is hard to think of trials with pure joy, but see how the layers are strengthened...testing your faith produces perseverance which can mature. Faithfully ask for wisdom, not doubting. We need to constantly be renewing our inside - adding layers to our trunk - nourishing, growing, moving, developing - those cambium, sapwood, and heartwood layers in the trunk.

2 Tim 1:7

But we are not timid creatures, God builds us with power, love and self-discipline!

Eph 6:10-17

Again, I think of my boys at home! :) Our spiritual armor...we are called to put it on, that is a call to action. Each of the pieces strengthens our spiritual growth. As we are growing closer and closer to God, each of these pieces are strengthened as well. ####

*3* As we look deeper into the trunk, we see the rings, which represent our years of growth, our spiritual history.

Each spring and summer a tree adds new layers of wood to its trunk. The wood formed in spring grows fast, and is lighter because it consists of large cells. In summer, growth is slower; the wood has smaller cells and is darker. So when the tree is cut, the layers appear as alternating rings of light and dark wood. Count the dark rings, and you know the tree's age.

Study the rings, and you can learn much more. Many things affect the way the tree grows, and thus alter the shape, thickness, color and uniformity of the rings.

The rings show how the tree has adapted to the changing seasons and the environment. They are the visual reminder of the past.

Let's first look at our past as those who believe in God. We are given this in the bible. Why should we look back at their stories? We can learn about all the ways God has worked through the lives of those recorded in the bible.

Rom 15:4

Written to remind us, give us hope!

But we can also see the rings as a way to view our own personal spiritual history. When we truly open ourselves up and prayerfully review where we have been, what we have done, choices we made, how we handled situations, we can learn so much. Sure, it can be difficult, maybe you have made some really poor decisions or had bad things happen to you...this introspection is not to meant to make us crawl into a little ball and wallow in our guilt and shame. That can easily happen when you have no hope. Praise God for giving us hope - for Him to continue to help us change and giving us new chances everyday to make better choices/decisions and for Him not giving up on us. I have recently been able to do several

online bible studies with my mom, who lives in Colorado. This is a terrific way for us to stay connected and has been an overwhelming blessing for the both of us. My mom was raised Catholic, then converted to the Lutheran church to marry my dad. They raised my brother and I going to the church every now and then. Mainly for Christmas, Easter and then weddings and funerals. So she would tell you that her faith was VERY small. She has told me that she has made too many bad decisions, bad choice to deserve anything better in her life. And I could give you lots of examples but the main point is that she felt she never deserved anything good in her life because of all the bad choices made. But she started going to church with my sister-in-law and started asking more questions and now is doing these studies with me and she is slowly realizing she is made worthy through Christ. She could've wallowed in her guilt even longer, like she had done up until about a year ago. But through prayer and truly starting to trust God and truly believing that what she reads in the bible applies to her too, she is beginning to see her worth. This introspection can't change what has happened, but it can help us focus. We can see where God has been working in our lives. This helps build our trust. One way to help with this is by journaling. If you are like me, you are inwardly rolling your eyes at that idea. I really hate sitting to write down what I am thinking/feeling. But I do see the value in it. If you keep a prayer journal, you can look back and see where you prayed for something, and maybe later, you can see how God answered that prayer. It seems so logical, now to actually do it!?! Now in thinking of those rings, think of them like layers. As you still live, you will be creating more layers. So now the question is,

####what kind of layers will you be making now?

####2 Peter 1:5-8

Think of each of these characteristics as layers.

####Each one is added to the one before. Each one strengthens the next. So here are a few questions to consider:####

-Is your relationship with God stronger today than it was last year at this time? How about last week?

-Which of the 8 elements listed above may you be lacking? How may you add that element(s)?

-What layer do you plan to "add" today? How will you do that?####

####*4*Finally, let's discuss our legacy, represented here by the wood.

####When you cut down a tree, that wood can be used for many, MANY things.

####Ships -

####Houses - #### , ####

####Bridges

####Furniture -

Sculptures - Pencils - Paper/paper products -

####rotten firewood - Mulch - toothpicks -....

So what are we leaving behind. As we looked at our history, we can see where we have been. But again, while we still have breath, we can make a difference in our growth and also in those around us. Our influence and what we are leaving behind.

####Deut. 6:1-2

This calls us to do something with that history. To tell our family and friends. To continue to share how God is working in our lives. This was written to the Israelites and is still applicable to us today!

#####Deut 6:5-9

These amazing things, we need to tell our kids, and talk of them often. Not only on Sunday, but all the time.

#####Ps. 78:4

Not hiding the amazing things He's done, but telling the next generation. Passing it on!

#####Ps 145:3-7

As the generations share His mighty acts.

Now we can also look at the Apostle's legacy, which was amazing. They sat at the feet of Jesus, saw his death, and burial and then resurrection and were called to go out and tell everyone, share what they learned and what they knew.

#####Matt. 28:19-20

And they did! The church began, they wrote down their stories, and now there are churches all over this world. That is an incredible legacy! Did they do everything perfectly? Of course not. But they did keep trying. God can use us in any way He sees fit. So do I want to be a good example (ship, house) or a bad example (rotten firewood). Both can be used. Even if you have made mistakes (and let's be honest, we all have) and are living with the consequences of those - you can still change how you handle things from here on. No, you can't go back and change it, but God can guide you in how to deal with it now.

#####Psalm 51:10-12

David is lamenting after his sin with Bathsheba. This whole psalm is his repentance and calling out to God. I read it often when I am feeling overwhelmed by my sins, the bad choices I have made.

What do we need to do? Tell...tell our kids...tell our friends...tell our neighbors...We need to remind ourselves and tell those around us. This keeps Him on our minds and lips and also helps give us perspective as things are happening. Often we get caught up in what is happening right now, without stepping back and remembering that God's plan is bigger than right now. He has the whole world in His sight and His plan is perfect, even if we don't understand right now. Where do we go from here? Well, as we look back at the trees, let's be reminded to think about what kind of legacy we are leaving behind. To build a stronger legacy, remember we need to think layers, as we take an honest look at our past, our history, to see where God has been working in our lives to help us grow, this builds our trust helping us to try and nourish and grow new layers. And we can take comfort in His protection. And finally, let's keep reaching for the Light - for God - no matter the obstacle.