



"We cannot infer from prosperity that God is pleased with us, nor can we infer from adversity that he is displeased with us."
—Wilson Benton

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Lessons From Roots (Part One)

[Jesus Christ](#) declares that among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist ([Matthew 11:11](#); [Luke 7:28](#)). John was the forerunner of the Messiah, the messenger sent before Him to prepare the way ([Malachi 3:1](#)). Despite his status, very few of this great prophet's words are actually recorded for us. Because of their rarity, those that are recorded hold a tremendous amount of weight.

In one instance, John is shown preaching [the gospel](#), beginning with the need to repent ([Matthew 3:2](#)). When he observes the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his [baptism](#), he forthrightly tells them that they need to bear fruits that demonstrate their [repentance](#) ([Matthew 3:7-11](#)). In one of his few statements, John warns them that "every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." In other words, unless they bore spiritual fruit—fruit confirming that they were changing and following God—their futures were dim indeed, even though they had Abraham as their father.

During Christ's last night with His disciples, He gave them the same admonition. In John 15, He speaks at great length on the requirement of

those who are in Him to bear fruit. He says that every branch—every individual—that does not bear fruit, He takes away ([John 15:2](#)). He then goes on to say that those who do bear fruit He will prune. He will strip away the things that are not conducive to spiritual health, so they can produce even more fruit. But we cannot produce any fruit at all unless we are abiding, or continuing, in Him ([John 15:4](#)).

Fruit, though, is not produced all at once. In general, fruit is produced only when a tree or plant is both mature and stable enough that mere survival is no longer its top priority. Much of that depends on—and starts with—the tree's or the plant's roots. The roots are a chief factor in the overall health of the tree, as well as in the quality and quantity of the fruit that is produced. The same is true of a Christian: The fruit he or she produces depends on the spiritual roots.

But what are our spiritual roots? In John 15, Jesus says that those who are in Him are the ones who will bear fruit. The roots of an individual, then, are a function of his being in Christ—and thus Christ being in him. [Colossians 2:7](#) says that we are "rooted and built up in Him." That is where our foundation lies. In [Ephesians 3:17](#), Paul equates "being rooted and grounded in [love](#)" with Christ dwelling in our hearts through [faith](#). Again, the roots come from a faithful relationship. Similarly, in [Romans 11:16-18](#), Paul takes it one step further and says that Jesus Christ is the root, and he reminds us that we do not support the root, but that the holy root supports us.

To put it another way, our roots are our solid, deepening relationships with the Father and the Son. The Father and the Son are the source of the strength, the stability, and all the other resources that we have. Everything rests on our growing connection with Them.

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus focuses on the importance of roots in one of His examples and in its interpretation:

Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because *they had no root* they withered away. . . . But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately

receives it with [joy](#); yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. ([Matthew 13:5-6](#), 20-21; emphasis ours)

Jesus teaches that the roots are absolutely necessary when it comes to enduring adversity. The plants without deep roots could not take the heat, as it were, and they withered.

We can expand the metaphor by extending it to more than just seeds of grain. Consider what a strong root structure does for trees. When the roots are extensive, strong, and healthy, they enable a tree to remain standing even through a hurricane. The roots help a tree keep from being washed away in floods, mudslides, or avalanches.

Likewise, the right roots keep an individual stable, able to withstand the trials and adversities of life. Strong spiritual roots are what keep us from toppling and falling from Him whom we ought to trust and obey. Even before we get to bearing fruit, being able to survive all that comes our way rests on the strength and health of our roots.

However, when a tree—an individual—is properly rooted, a beautiful picture emerges:

Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit. ([Jeremiah 17:7-8](#))

These verses point out the centrality of trusting in [God](#), and in putting our hope in Him and in His power rather than in man's abilities (verses 5-6). When we let go of insisting on being in control, and we trust God with our lives, then we will be like a tree with roots by the river. When our trust and confidence is in God, we will always have a steady, abundant supply of what is needed to produce fruit.

We will add still more to this metaphor in Part Two.

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Fruit of Repentance](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

We are continually in need of repentance. The churches in Revelation 2 and 3 were warned to repent, prefiguring the identical conditions which would be extant in the current greater Church of God. Like faith, repentance must exist in the end times. We are admonished to change our mind and attitude, bringing about a total about-face in behavior, in which we abhor our human nature and diligently seek God's nature. Repentance must be motivated by a Godly sorrow which leads to a dramatic change of behavior. The Corinthian congregation was beset with myriad sins, including party-spirit and porneia, even though they were puffed up with pride because of their spiritual 'gifts.' Paul addressed the Corinthian congregation as carnal, even though its members were converted. The congregation in Paul's letters to the Hebrews had become dull of hearing, losing their spiritual maturity. Faith and repentance are inextricably linked as we move on to perfection. Godly sorrow leads to perfection, while worldly sorrow leads to death. Repentance has seven distinct fruits: 1) diligence (the motivation to accomplish), 2) clearing of self (washing away), 3) indignation (anger at injustice and sin, especially at ourselves), 4) fear, 5) vehement desire (a strong and persistent craving for righteousness and a burning desire to change), 6) zeal (wholehearted ardor for accomplishing a task), and 7) vindication (setting things right). We must, in repentance, voluntarily surrender the self, striving to imitate our Heavenly Father and our Elder Brother.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Fruit of the Spirit: Patience](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

From the Bible's perspective, patience is far more than simple endurance or longsuffering. The patience that God has shown man collectively and individually gives us an example of what true, godly patience is. It is this kind of patience that Paul urges us to put on as part of the new man.

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