

“What Soil Are Your Roots Planted In?” – Kevin Beers

There’s an old saying:

“The best way to make sure you are removing a weed and not a valuable plant is to pull on it. If it comes out of the ground easily, it is a valuable plant.”

Any of us who have ever tried our hand at gardening knows that weeds are one of the toughest plants found in nature. They tend to grow faster than the plants we are trying to grow, their roots go deeper than the plants we planted, and without constant plucking, the weeds will take over the entire garden in a very short amount of time, choking off the plants we are TRYING to grow.

Even people who have the proverbial “black thumb”, you know those people, if they touch a plant it will die.

Even THEY cannot seem to kill weeds. So why do weeds grow so well, while other plants, those we TRY to grow require so much work? It’s all about the roots.

That’s what I want to talk about today, “roots”.

In the passage Sarah read this morning, we see this phrase, “continue to live your lives in him (referring to Christ Jesus), ROOTED and built up in him”. So what does the phrase “rooted in Christ Jesus” actually mean?

To fully understand that phrase, we have to look at what “roots” do for plants. The entire idea of being “rooted” is an analogy about plant roots that would be easily understood in an agrarian society of Paul’s day. Many of us no longer live on farms, or never grew up on a farm, so we can sometimes gloss over the passage meaning that may require some special insights that we are lacking.

So let’s look at 2 different plants and see how this idea of “being rooted” might apply.

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First is the oak tree.

When an acorn is planted, or buried by a squirrel who forgets where he buried it, and after winter has ended, the acorn begins its growth cycle. The first part of this cycle is to send out a root, called the “tap root”. The tap root is the most important root in any root system. This root, for oak trees, grows vertically, essentially straight down. This root is searching for a source of moisture. When the root finds that source of moisture, it will begin to send out horizontal roots to find additional minerals. It also sends up a sprout, again vertically, but this time, toward the sun. For a fully mature oak tree, its root system can spread over miles. Because of the oak’s root system, it is one of the strongest standing trees on Earth. Even tornadoes and hurricanes have a hard time taking an oak down, all because of its roots.

The second plant I want to look at is the bamboo. Bamboo is somewhat unique when we talk about roots because it’s not a tree, it’s actually a type of grass. Even though it is not a tree, it can grow taller than many different types of trees. What makes it unique is its growth cycle. It doesn’t grow like most other plants. And THAT has everything to do with its roots.

Anyone who has ever attended professional growth seminars or training classes has heard “the bamboo story”. The story goes like this: When you plant a bamboo in the ground, for the first year, you water and fertilize it. But no growth can be seen. The second year, you water and fertilize it, but still, you see no growth. The third year, the same thing. Fourth year, just keep watering and fertilizing. But in the fifth year, a shoot appears. But it doesn’t just “appear”. It grows 3 feet a day until it reaches as high as 130 feet straight up.

So what happened? Did it lay dormant for 4 years and then suddenly by some sort of miracle it shot up in the 5th year? No. The first 4 years, when we saw nothing, there was a lot of growth, but it was ALL in the roots. Why did it spend 4 years with nothing

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but root growth? Imagine a plant growing 130 feet tall with a diameter of 6 to 10 inches. How large must the root system be to support not only the rapid growth, but the weight of the stalk when it's that tall? The roots have to be substantial for that to work. If the roots were not developed first, the stalk would simply fall over.

No matter what the illustration might be, the point always comes back to the “roots”. The roots are the MOST important part of the plant. Without a strong root system, the plant will wither and die.

The Bible has many stories and sayings about roots.

For example, in the parable of the sower, we read this:

Matthew 13:5-6

Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away.

Jesus further explains the meaning of these seeds.

Matthew 13:20-21

As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away.

“such a person has no root” – Have you ever known anyone who hears a really good idea, and they decide this is what they are going to follow. And as soon as they hit a bump in the road, they decide that it's no longer for them. That's what Jesus is talking about. In his day, people would hear his message and decide to follow. But when times got tough, they fell away. They were not

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invested in his message, or had no “root” developed to give them strength.

Let’s talk about your lawn.

Are you aware that every time you cut your grass, each plant must concentrate its energy on recovering from the cutting? If you concentrate on making the grass look well manicured with constant mowing, the plants must concentrate on blade development and it takes energy **AWAY** from the roots. If you mow too often, the roots end up being unhealthy and eventually the blades of grass will take on a brown, unhealthy appearance. By looking at only the blades that can be seen and trying to beautify it, you will lose the roots that actually create the beauty you desire.

When we say that we are “rooted” in Christ, we mean that we draw our spiritual nutrition **FROM** Christ, just as a plant draws its nutrition from the soil through its roots.

We cannot have a superficial relationship with God and then have the spiritual strength we need when persecution comes, or life throws us a curve ball, or the roof comes crashing in on us. We have to tend to our roots, growing an ever stronger “root system” (if you will) in Christ. Pastor Dave often mentions that we need to be reading our Bibles. It’s not just so we have head knowledge of what it says, but so we can incorporate what we read into our hearts and lives and deepen our relationship with Christ Jesus. It is to strengthen our roots.

If we constantly work at our appearance to the world as a “good person”, or constantly work at “service”, but then ignore our rootedness in Christ, our outward beauty will fade, because it’s our roots that make us beautiful to the world, not our service.

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Jesus was asked which commandment was the greatest. He answered: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

If we ignore our relationship with God through Jesus, we can be a “good person” toward others. We can also “serve” our neighbors. But we are commanded to LOVE our neighbors, not just serve them. The more we love God, (our root) the more we are able to love our neighbor. When we focus on loving God, learning about God, developing a relationship with God. The more we focus on the health of our roots, the more spiritual nutrition we receive FROM God. And like plants, the healthier our roots, the healthier our outward manifestation. Love comes from God. If we are rooted in God, those roots become the conduit of love into us, and then from us to our outward actions, where we can spread that love to our neighbors. But we need to be ROOTED in God through Jesus in order for that to happen.

Sarah also read:

“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ.”

What is this saying to us?

“Don’t be taken captive by philosophy”. That’s an interesting phrase. I personally love philosophy. But what we are being warned about here, is “don’t be swayed from your faith by mere intellectual arguments”. I was directed to a website by a friend that asked a lot of different questions about God. For example, “If God created everything, and God is “good” which is the opposite of “evil”, is God capable of creating “evil”. And if God didn’t create evil, where did it come from? And since the Bible states

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that nothing came into creation except BY God, doesn't that say God had to create “evil”.

The website then takes you down a series of true and false statements trying to get you to reason your way to an answer. I found that every question lead you to conclude that God either doesn't exist, or God is not all powerful. The outcome was always damaging to your faith in God, or Jesus. This is the type of philosophy we are being warned about, intellectual arguments that try to persuade you away from your faith.

Listed next is “empty deceit”. I think this is pretty simple. The best example is FLATTERY. Telling people things they want to hear, for some ulterior motive. The old time “used car salesman” stereotype is a good example. You get in the car and they tell you, “You look great sitting behind the wheel.” The deceit is that they only want to sell the car. Telling you that the car makes you look good, diverts your attention away from the fact that the car is blowing blue smoke when you start it. “Looking good” becomes more important than the fact that the engine needs an overhaul.

Next, “according to human traditions”. The Pharisees wrote many, many rules and laws that essentially took the Jews “captive” with human traditions. They were so concerned with following every command that God had laid down for them and they were determined to do it right. I'm sure it all started with the best intentions. Because obeying God was at the top of their list for daily living. Let's look at the 4th commandment as an example. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." So the

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Pharisees did their best to determine how to follow this commandment in the strictest way. So if God says, “you can’t work on the Sabbath” the obvious question is “what is work?” Well, it’s the things you do every day to earn a living. In that day, it would be manual labor. So no manual labor. And manual labor requires being very physically active. So how much physical activity can you do, before it becomes too much like “work”? Well if walking 1000 steps is physically draining, perhaps 1000 steps is too much like work. So does 500 steps constitute “work”? If not, how about 600? If yes, then let’s look at 550. And so on...

This is what the Pharisees debated over. Their intentions were good, but their rules seem insane (from a 21st century viewpoint). But this is the heavy burden Jesus talks about when he says the Pharisees burden the people with their man-made rules and traditions.

Finally, “according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ”. This one took a little research to understand. What I found is that it is almost “anti-science”. Paul is warning us to not always believe what we see and hear. Sometimes we need to rely on faith and ignore the things going on around us. I have noticed so many people predicting the end of the world because they are so upset about the current political landscape. I have found that, while I am somewhat vocal on my opinions on politics, I am never “afraid” of where our country is headed. I don’t worry about WHO is president, or WHO is in Congress. My roots in Christ Jesus give me peace and I know I don’t need to worry about it. I still vote, and I still speak out, but I am not “fearful”. My faith is God and Jesus, not who’s in office at the moment.

My roots keep me steady.

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Colossians 2:6-19 (NRSV)

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To me, this is what being “rooted” in Christ Jesus is all about. As each of us cultivates our relationship with Christ, as we strengthen our roots in God, we waver less, and we love more.

Jesus said, “They will know us by our fruits”.

Without good roots, fruit trees produce substandard fruit.

So what’s the best way to produce good fruit? Concentrate on tending to our roots!