

# LIKE A TREE

## PSALM 1:1-3

Notable trees dot the landscape all around the world. “*The Lone Cypress*” on the Northern California coast sits by itself in the rocks, weathering the storms... The world’s largest tree, named “*General Sherman*,” grows in the Sequoia National Park... In 1792 a group of freed slaves, who’d fought in the American Revolution, gathered under “*The Cotton Tree*” in Sierra Leone to thank God for freedom. Today, the tree is a symbol of liberty for West Africans... “*Major Oak*” in Sherwood Forest was recently named Britain’s favorite tree. Legend has it, its hollow trunk was a hide out for Robin Hood and his merry men... And there’s a small forest of trees in southern Lebanon. “*The Cedars of God*” get their name from *Psalm 104*. Solomon used their timber to build God a Temple... **All these trees still stand...**

Yet this morning, I want to talk about another tree more durable and stately than all the above... Like *the Lone Cypress* it thrives in desolate conditions... Like *the giant Sequoia* it’s strong and tall... Like *the Cotton Tree* it grows in the soil of freedom... Like *the Oak in Sherwood Forrest* it’s a place of refuge... and just Like *the Cedars of Lebanon* its timber can be used to build God a Temple... I’m talking about **the tree in Psalm 1**.

It’s actually a metaphor - a picture of the believer in Jesus. For every Christian should spiritually-speaking be like *Psalm 1:3* “**a tree planted by the rivers of water.**” *Our roots deepening, our shoots broadening, our fruits ripening!* Certainly, God wants you and I to **be** just like this **tree!**

We read about it in the first three verses of Psalm 1, *1:1* “**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;** *1:2* **but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.** *1:3* **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 morning I want to share a *tree-mendous* vision for our church. It’s *tree-rific*. I call it, **Tree-ology**.

I don’t want to *bark* at you today - 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, <sup>1:1</sup> “**Blessed is the man...**” The Hebrew word translated <sup>1:1</sup> “**blessed**” means “**happy and prosperous.**” But what makes the term so intriguing is that it’s in the plural. A more literal translation of the word would be, “**happy, happy, happy is the man.**”

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 1, you’ll see that God has three concerns regarding our lives... the believer’s **roots**, our **shoots**, and our **fruits**.

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

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

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

Healthy followers of Jesus and healthy churches, are like this <sup>1:3</sup> “**tree planted by the rivers of water...**”

Our last Vision Sunday was in 2013, ten years ago, and God led me to this passage. I saw in Psalm 1 the purpose and direction for our church. And as I prayed about today God kept bringing me back to these same verses. For our purpose and direction hasn’t changed.

We’ve just been upgraded, **as I’ll explain later.** God still wants *everyone in this church*, and *everyone as this church*, to be <sup>1:3</sup> “**like a tree planted by the waters!**”

Today we’re going to consider what this looks like in real life: to **sink roots**, and **sprout shoots**, and **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 it positions itself in the marketplace... A politician with a clear message positions himself in the minds of the voters... In sports position also matters. The basketball player who gets the rebound isn’t necessarily the guy who jumps the highest, but who’s in the best position...

And the same is true spiritually! To grow healthy you have to plant yourself in the right spot! The blessed person makes deliberate decisions to avoid the way of the wicked, and sink his or her roots - as well as those of their family - beside godly resources and influences.

If you haven’t noticed, the world we live in isn’t exactly sympathetic to Christianity... Perk up in the office break room and the conversation isn’t stirring up people to love

God... Hang out at the gym, or on the street corner, and the chit-chat isn't enhancing purity...

This is why the Psalmist tells us the blessed man <sup>1:1</sup> *"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... who they laugh at...*

Realize a vital 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 matters!

I can be a strongman, but if I stand in a raging river long enough, the current will suck me under. Likewise, *listen to ungodly counsel* and you'll eventually make ungodly choices... *Entertain yourself with sinful stuff* and you'll 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. He gets dragged down by bumbling teammates. Whereas, a mediocre player on a team full of quality performers excels because his mates elevate his game. Success or failure often depends on the folks surrounding you.

And the same is true spiritually. Jesus is at work in every Christian, but where I sink my roots can either *undermined* or *undergird* my relationship with Him. Smart people properly position themselves to grow. They *listen to the right counsel, linger with the right people, and laugh with folks who are really having fun.*

Realize, a tree is not a bush or annual. It's hard to move a tree once it takes root. That's why before you plant, you give serious thought as to where it belongs.

And the same is true of a Christian. Don't just drift with the tides of popularity. Don't go with the flow. Toilet paper goes with the flow - not a healthy Christian. A wise person chooses to *properly position* their life.

Author Gordon MacDonald writes about a woman he met at an AA group. He figured at 21 she'd been a beauty queen, but now at 35 she looked weathered and haggard. She told her story, *"In the last month I've slept under bridges... been arrested, raped, and 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 that's when an older, rounder gal, sober for a dozen years, put her arm around the newcomer, and spoke gently, *"Honey, you're going to be okay. You're with us now. We can deal with this together. All you have to do is keep coming. Hear*

*me? Keep on coming...*” MacDonald questioned if this woman would’ve been as accepted at the church he pastored, **but** *I know that’s how she’d be treated here.*

For I know our stories. CalvaryCSM is full of formerly broken people who’re being 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 your roots, and healing will begin.*

I like the phrase the psalmist uses for connecting with other believers. He writes, <sup>1:3</sup> *“planted by the rivers.”*

Have you ever *“planted”* a tree? It’s messy. It’s dirty! You dig a hole. Turn over the clay and add potting soil. Then you nestle in the roots, and pat it all down. And likewise when people come together with other people, even with Christians, it often gets dirty and messy.

There can be misunderstandings, bruised feelings, lots of drama - *and nobody likes drama!* But this is what it takes to get <sup>1:3</sup> *“planted.”* You learn to love, forgive, and accept. Here’s the truth: *Either we’re growing together, or we’re probably not growing at all!*

According to the Bible the Christian life is more than just *believing*, it’s also about *belonging*. I pray you’ll sink your roots deeper into this fellowship of believers. *Keep on coming!* Healthy Christians *position properly.*

But they also *progress persistently.* Inspect a tree’s branches and 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. 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 its branches bear the weight of the snow and ice... this tree continues to grow! Yes, it goes through seasons, but it never stops growing.

And this is God's desire for you - not only that you’re *positioned properly*, but you’re *progressing persistently.*

When we’re newly converted to Christ we’re just a seedling. Our branches aren’t strong enough to bear fruit, *not yet*. The sap has to rise. Limbs have to grow.

Sinking roots is just the first step. Proper positioning is necessary, but there’s more... No one becomes godly just by hanging out with godly people. Holiness isn’t like catching a cold. It’s not contagious. You’ve got to grow your own shoots. 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...

The one living thing that may or may not grow to its potential... *is people!* Humans choose. And sadly many choose to be less than God desires them to be. Recall, **lives are not shaped by mysterious forces, lives are shaped by deliberate choices.** *Have you made spiritual growth your priority? Are you about sprouting shoots?*

The psalmist tells us in verse 2, the happy, happy, happy man <sup>1:2</sup> **"delights himself in the Law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night."** His hope and fascination is in God's Word. He goes through the Bible, and the Bible goes through him. He <sup>1:2</sup> **"meditates"** on it by the light of day and under a lamp at night.

Understand, **biblical meditation** is not the same as *eastern meditation*. Rather than put your mind in neutral, and repeat rote chants and mantras - the Christian engages his mind, and opens his heart. We mull over what God has said, and His Spirit enlightens our understanding. Christian meditation is like a cow chewing its cud. As we roll the Bible over and over in our minds, God's Spirit reveals its application. It's this immersion in God's Word that causes us to grow.

Psalm 119:9 is my life verse, <sup>Psalm 119:9</sup> **"How can a young man cleanse his way?"** Notice, he speaks of the young man, not the grandma or toddler, but a hot-headed teenager is the toughest nut to crack! He's the one in need of the heavy-duty cleansing. *So what's the answer?* Verse 9 concludes, <sup>119:9</sup> **"(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!*

I could get fancy and try to draw a crowd with more entertaining services. Red meat politics, conspiracy theories, emotionally-driven worship, prophetic speculation all draw attention. Whereas, three chapters in 1 Thessalonians advertised on the marquee doesn't turn a lot of heads. ***But hey, I'm sick of the shortcuts.***

I've been walking with Jesus for 45 years and I know what it takes for faith to grow. The happy person is he who <sup>Psalm 1:2</sup> **"delights himself in the Law of the LORD."** **And <sup>1:2</sup> "in His law he meditates day and night."** Again, spiritual growth is deliberate. Its rhythm is <sup>1:2</sup> **"day and night."** Not overnight, but <sup>1:2</sup> **"day and night."** It takes daily disciplines.



When Moses told Israel to take possession of the land of Canaan, he said in Deuteronomy 7:22, *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 God's promise of victory occurs "little by little." Total victory wouldn't happen overnight. And likewise, our spiritual progress is step by step - it's measured over weeks, months, and 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 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 - it takes patience, and lots and lots of endurance.*

Before James Garfield was elected president of the United States, he was chancellor of Hiram College in Ohio. A friend of Garfield's, who's 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."

Solid spiritual growth requires time and consistency. It takes *Psalm 1:2* "day and night, day and night, day and night." Often we get impatient. Spiritual growth seems oh, so slow - but hang in there - you're making progress.

Here's a vital principle, "Nothing that doesn't occur daily will ever dominate your life." It's the *day after day* that creates grooves in our psyche. Ever hear 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 101 days, but the point is don't give up! Stick with it.

You don't reap a crop the day after you sow the seed. You water, weed, and wait. In time it sprouts.

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 developed by meditating day and night on God's Word. It's my goal and prayer that everyone who attends Calvary will *sink deep roots, sprout big shoots, and bear delicious fruit.*

For healthy followers of Jesus are like this tree in Psalm 1. Positioned properly, progressing persistently, and productive perennially - they bear fruits.

Jesus and His disciples were once walking through Jerusalem; when they noticed a fig tree with no fruit. This tree had a trunk, as well as plenty of branches and leaves, *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 with leaves, or stand tall, or stay green - fig trees were created for one purpose - to produce figs. And this is true of Christians.

How many of you have ever eaten fruitcake at Christmas? (Raise your hand). How many of you like it? Far less than ate it. I got a Top 10 list. Here're the Top Ten ideas 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."

Hey, sometimes people find alternate uses, but a fruitcake is intended to be eaten!... Likewise Christians have an intended purpose! According to verse 3, God expects us to <sup>1:3</sup> *"bring forth fruit."* We're to bear the graces of Jesus - love, joy, peace, self-control, etc. **And** we're to do good works that serve others. God's purpose for us is to *glorify Him* and *impact people*. He wants our lives to count for Him in time and eternity.

In contrast, the psalmist says the <sup>1:1</sup> *"ungodly,"* the person without God, has no purpose at all. Verse 6 puts it, he's <sup>1:4</sup> *"like the chaff which the wind drives away."*

A piece of chaff or a dry leaf on a windy day 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. Folks today are just *"coasting."* They take life as it come and slowly slide downhill.

Once, a little girl asked her Mom, "Is God as big as the universe?" The mother replied, *"Yes, He is."* "And 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 the little girl's head. Finally she concluded, *"If Jesus is as big as the universe and if He lives in my tiny heart; that means, you'll see Him shining through!"*

And the world's most brilliant theologian couldn't have stated it any better. When we come to Jesus, He not only begins to *live in us*, He also *shines through us*

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 ultimately getting a person to heaven! **Can there be a greater thrill?** *Here's a reason to roll out of bed in the morning and even iron a shirt!* When we touch people we are impacting eternity!

Our purpose at CalvaryCSM is to show our friends, our community, our world *that God is alive and well, that the Bible is for today, and that it's cool to be a Christian.* We want folks to know that real love, peace, and joy are found in Jesus. God's purpose for us is not just to take up space, or look pretty, but to bear **fruit!**

Our vision at CalvaryCSM is for you to be like <sup>1:3</sup> **"a tree planted by rivers of water."** **Positioned properly, progressing persistently, productive perennially.** *Are you sinking roots, sprouting shoots, and bearing fruits?*

**But there's more!** For it's not just our goal for you individually to be like a tree, but for all of us collectively, as a church, to be like <sup>1:3</sup> **"a tree planted by rivers of water."** Add <sup>1:3</sup> **"tree"** to the list of biblical idioms for the Church. We're *the bride of Christ, body of Christ, holy Temple, living stones, and* <sup>1:3</sup> **"a tree planted by the river."**

CalvaryCSM should be like a tree! **And we are.** This church is now a 43 year old tree. *(Not too old for a tree, but not a mere sapling either.)* We've had time to sink some deep **roots**. And we've grown some broad **shoots**. And we've been blessed with delicious **fruits**.

But here's a question: **how tall does a tree grow?** Answer: **As tall as it can!** *Which means we're not done yet!* If we all catch a common vision, and work together **our roots** can grow deeper, **our shoots** can reach wider, **our fruits** can multiply in tastier bunches!

Do you realize that our church now has **roots** in this community? Deep roots that come with a reputation.

Recently, I got an invite from one of our local High School principals to attend a meeting of community pastors. I've been to such meetings before and always felt like the odd man out. They'd ask, **"Who are you?"** *But not this time.* I was the senior guy there. I honestly felt like my perspective wasn't just tolerated, but it was valued. It dawned on me, the new respect I felt was a result of the deep roots we've sunk in this community.

It use to be I'd tell someone I pastor Calvary Chapel and a quizzical look would come over their face. Nine times out of ten, they'd ask, **"what's a Calvary Chapel?"** But



not today. Now they'll say, "I've heard of that. Or "I know someone who went there. Or "I attended once."

The other day at the golf course, a man approached me and asked if I'd like to play in his group. He then called me by name, "Pastor Sandy." This *man* was a *kid* who attended CCCS 15 years ago. Our church is no longer the unknown. *We've finally sunk some roots.*

In the early years of our church the closest Calvary Chapel was in upstate New York. When we heard Pastor Chuck was speaking at their conference, three of us jumped in James' pick-up truck and drove to Rochester to hang out with the Calvary guys. All the way up I-75 we rotated, two of us would sit in the cab, while one of us laid on an air mattress in the bed of the truck... ***Hey, we were desperate for fellowship!***

But now fast forward 40 years and new Calvary Chapels are starting up around us, yet today there's <sup>1:3</sup> ***"a tree planted by the rivers of water"*** where they can come and find refreshment. CalvaryCSM is that tree, and desperate brothers now jump in their pick-up trucks to come to Lilburn, GA. *They tap into our roots.*

In fact, there's not a week goes by that we don't get a call from another pastor with a need, or question, or who asks for advice. They call us only because we're the ones with roots. We've been here a while, and whatever it is they're facing we've probably faced it as well. I've heard it over and over, ***"Why should we reinvent the wheel. Just tell us how you guys do it."***

I say to other pastors all the time, planting a Calvary Chapel was two things for me. It was *extremely difficult* and it was *terribly lonely*. And today it's still extremely difficult, maybe even more so - but it doesn't have to be lonely any more. There's a tree with strong roots.

And I have a long list of pioneer saints to thank for our current position. Believers who went where no man had gone before! Our first five years we met in a warehouse without central heat. We warmed the place with construction blowers. We were filled with the fresh wind of the Holy Spirit... *and the fumes of kerosene.*

Folks even put up with the long-winded ramblings of a young pastor still learning from his mistakes. All he had going for him was his faithfulness to God's Word.

You see, the people who came to CalvaryCSM in those days did so **not** because of what it was, *but because of what it could be*. All we had was a vision, but we believed and supported that vision... *I'm talking to some of you who are still with us. Thank you so much.* Together we've sunk **roots** that now has this church strategically positioned to make a vital impact.

And CalvaryCSM has sprouted [shoots](#). Our ministry continues to grow and expand. The Lord is adding to our church and multiplying our ministry both inside and outside our four walls. I teach at conferences and retreats across the country. Radio stations are adding us to their line-up. We're on multiple internet outlets.

Pastor James sits on the board of several Calvary Chapels in our area. Kathy and Alli minister at Ladies' events. Matt is a leader of worship leaders. Calvary Chapel Christian School had a full enrollment this year.

Ministries for men, women, youth, children, singles, married with kids, Free Indeed, Helping Hands, the Old Farts (*I mean Old Folks*) happen regularly. We touch hundreds of lives in meaningful ways every week.

It's like the tree behind the clubhouse at the Augusta National Golf Club. It's called [The Big Oak tree](#). It's 150 years old. It's multiple limbs stretch out in all directions. And for one week each year the golf world gathers in its shade. Reporters and sportswriters and players and coaches and PGA officials hobnob under its branches.

And our church is like [The Big Oak tree](#). For one week in July, 500 teenagers from smaller Calvarys all over the Deep South come to an event unavailable to them at their church. Wherever I go now, I have adults come up to me and tell me they attended our youth conference back in \_\_\_\_, and their life was changed.

Then for a week in September again we turn into [The Big Oak tree](#). Weary pastors fellowship and renew their devotion to the Master in the shade of this church. Watch them, they drag in *burned out* and leave *fired up*. They're refreshed most by the way you serve them.

It happened again this January when worship leaders gathered, some from California. They told us it was the best conference they've ever attended. It blew my mind. Calvary Chapel began in Southern California. For years I'd go to California to be refreshed. Now Calvarys from California are coming under our Big Oak tree to find some refreshment. *We've sprouted shoots*.

With the addition of our cabin we're again sprouting new shoots. We're hosting cabin conferences - small overnight gatherings for select pastors, and assistant pastors, and worship leaders, and who knows what other groups of ministry leaders we'll host in the future.

And we continue to grow shoots. Last fall we bought the Killian Hill property. We hope it'll become a shade tree for young people who want to prepare themselves for ministry. In 1980 I went all the way to Southern California to learn about Calvary Chapel and attend the Bible College. How cool if we can now plant a CC Bible School in GA. *We're like a tree stretching out its limbs*.

Realize, every church has a specific calling from God. No matter its size all churches have limited resources, but face unlimited needs and opportunities. Thus, we all need specific vision from God. We need to know our niche. Where to put our time, energy, effort.

Some churches major on foreign missions, or urban outreach, or Christian education - and we are active in all those areas. But over the years God has used CalvaryCSM most effectively to minister to ministries.

God has positioned us to encourage other church leaders. And this is exciting. Its exponential ministry. For when we encourage a pastor and his wife, we're ultimately encouraging the entire church he pastors.

Please, remember this the next time we host a conference and ask for volunteers! You're not just scooping fried beans and rice or mopping a floor - you are helping your church fulfill its very strategic mission.

And finally, our church is like a tree bearing good **fruit**. In 1995 we built this building. And in one of our prayer times the Lord gave us a prophecy. Haggai 2:9, [Haggai 2:9](#) "The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former," says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace...' This building would be a place of peace.

Look on the back walkway and you'll see where I etched Haggai 2:9 into the wet cement. And it's proven true. Troubled minds and broken marriages have been healed here. Folks have found love, acceptance, even family here. This church is a tree with healing **fruit**.

As we noted earlier, hurting people who *keep on coming* get helped here. *Sink roots and sprout shoots*, and you end up reaping what you sow - you *bear fruits*.

And in so many ways the reaping for us is now! Many of you made sacrifices to come to CalvaryCSM. At the time, we lacked the activities other churches offered, but you were hungry for God's Word and God's grace. *Our mission was more important than your convenience*; so you sunk roots and grew with us.

Now today, as a result we have a place where our kids and grandkids can be fed, grow, and serve - a solid place to invite our neighbors and know they'll be exposed to a Christianity full of grace and truth.

Talk about fruit, Nicki Snipes built up her faith while in our youth group, now her church supports her family on the mission field... Demetrius and Alissa Fields attended CCCS as kids. Last week they enrolled their daughter, Tessa, in the same school. Our church is reaping 2nd and 3rd generation fruit and its super cool.

And when it comes to fruit, it's amazing what we've seen the last three years with our finances. In our first forty years our largest annual offering came in 2020, during the pandemic! *Talk about God's faithfulness!* And the annual offerings have only increased since.

The other day I was sharing this blessing with a group of pastors when it hit me. I've wondered, *why now? What accounts for this sudden increase?* That's when the Lord spoke to me, "*Sandy, I'm answering prayers that were prayed 40 years ago.*" It's taken time. But *sinking roots and sprouting shoots is bearing fruits.*

And this gives me hope for the answer to another prayer I've been praying for a long, long time. I want this church to be a model of racial harmony in our city.

For too long, racial groups in our society have focused on their own diversity, and found it easier and more comfortable to worship with folks like themselves. Yet for Christians this is a cop out. Our unifier, King Jesus, is stronger than our diversity. Our loyalty to Him trumps our diversity and calls us to unity. Please join me in praying for the unity the Gospel makes possible.

This morning we've covered some sound tree-ology.

We want you to be like a tree: *sink roots, sprout shoots, bear fruits...* Get yourself positioned - do what it takes to grow - and you'll bear fruit that'll glorify God.

And as a church we also want to be like a tree - with **stable roots** - **shade-giving shoots** - and **spiritual fruits** of all kind. We hope you'll join with us and be a strong part of what we all can do together for God.