

The Surprising Similarities of a Healthy Tree and a Good Man

Psalm 1:1-3

The life of a tree and the life of a man have remarkable similarities. Of course there is no perfect metaphor and this one doesn't run the same all the way through. Beginning with the obvious, a tree, while it is alive, is not a sentient breathing being with complex feelings and story.

And a tree spends its life in one spot. A man, geographically, usually moves around.

But the more time I spent considering not the differences, but the similarities of a healthy tree and a good man — the list grew and grew and it became conspicuous to me how much they have in common.

Before taking a look at them, there is one question I would like to keep alive and return to throughout the process:

What needs restoring?

I work with men, not trees. I cannot ask a tree what restoration it needs because it cannot answer. But a man can. Don't worry if it doesn't make a lot of sense right now. I'll return to it as we look at the similarities.

There can be very obvious signs of restoration needed in both. It doesn't take much investigation when a branch is broken off or bark is missing on a tree to know something is wrong. Seeing a man broken can be so conspicuous he leaves a trail of pain behind him. Just ask those closest to him.

More often than not the similarities need to be drawn out and they aren't too obvious. So let's take a look.

The Life of a Tree, the Life of a Man: Similarities and Parallels

Tree: It needs to be planted in the ground, nourished and protected.

Man: A boy needs a loving home to come from

What needs restoring?

A baby cannot even arrive in the world without the safe and nourishing environment of his mother's womb. And it goes without saying, if a baby isn't loved on, fed and played with, he will not be healthy. There are unfortunate studies of babies being left without being picked up and played with where they end up sick or even dying. This stage of a boy's life needs the reassurance of love and presence from mom and dad, or at least a parent figure. You may not remember this far back, but it's important to find out because it might just unlock a key area in your current life.

Questions to be considered for this restoration to begin:

- Do I know what life was like when I was a baby?
- Was I born into a healthy family with two parents?
- Was there fighting? Negligence? Indifference? Violence?

Roots: Two Views

VIEW ONE

Tree: Deep roots underneath finding both the nourishment and strength of the ancient earth

Man: Roots for a man is the soil from which his life came – his family and family history

What needs restoring?

Like the one previous, this quality is essential for a tree to find itself where it is meant to be, where the best possible underlying structure will serve as an anchor. Realizing of course not every man comes from a rich and strong family history, this history does inform his life today. For example, if early life included a father or father figure who said and did all the wrong things, the man might make a pact with himself to not be like this person.

Questions to be considered for this restoration are:

- Are my family roots healthy – how does my family history inspire me?
- What are the pitfalls to avoid in my family history?
- How much influence does my family history have on my current life?

VIEW TWO

Tree: Deep roots serve as the unseen stability keeping a tree in place

Man: Unspoken values form a root system keeping a man in place morally, ethically and socially

What needs restoring?

Roots are stability. When a man's world around him is wind, seasons and change, roots keep him in place where he will find the best environment (mostly unseen by others) to continue to endure what's going on all around.

Questions to be considered for this restoration are:

- What are my deepest held values informing all my major life decisions?
- Why are those values so important to me?
- At what stage in life did I begin believing in those values?

Tree: Ecosystem

Man: Family and circles of trust and intimacy

What needs restoring?

Like any ecosystem, there's more going on than with just the man. More than what he had or has control over. A family of origin, for example, no one can choose. But what family he himself starts is definitely within a man's reach.

Questions to be considered for this restoration are:

- Do I have a circle of other men I can trust?
- What does my wife or girlfriend say about me?
- How deep are my friendships?

Tree: Bark

Man: Thick skin and a callous mind. Unique look, identifier.

What needs restoring?

The tree's bark often distinguishes it from other trees, but not always. Especially when a tree doesn't have any identifying leaves on it, it's usually first noticed when up close to one. But more than anything, the bark is a tree's main form of protection. When healthy, it can keep moisture and sap in, getting it to where it needs to go and protect from the elements. This may sound counter-intuitive, but a man's "skin" has the same function. I am definitely not talking about a person's derma. I am talking about emotional toughness. Mental strength. It's the perseverance a guy needs to finish a degree, become a father, raise children, navigate failure, graduate basic military training, or any number of tests he faces. Tip: read [this post](#) about David Goggins and having a callous mind.

Questions to be considered for this restoration are:

- How quick do I put up my defenses when conflict arises?
- Is anger usually a first emotional response to when I don't get my own way?
- Is quitting often the first option I choose when faced with a challenge?

Tree: Shade for those below

Man: Protection for the weak and innocent

What needs restoring?

If a man has never seen how to protect the weak, it's difficult to expect him to know how to. And yet, instinctively, he knows his role is one of protector. This can happen when a man becomes a father for the first time – the intuitive understanding to somehow protect those little ones and their mother helps with the nerves and gives him focus. While sharing a home with a bride is a mutual act of patience, courage and endurance, the man should be able to shield his family from the heavy blows of life with his own emotional and spiritual maturity.

Questions to be considered for this restoration are:

- How do I protect my own heart?
- What are the different ways to protect those I love?
- What's at stake if those I love aren't protected?

Tree: Strong

Man: Strong

What needs restoring?

Most trees are able to withstand a lot. They are durable and remain in place not for weeks, but years and in some cases, centuries. Why? Because they are strong. Men were built for strength. Out of a place of strength men should be the protector. It's not just physical strength, but an all-encompassing strength, fed by strong roots, nourished by replenishing water and nutrients, humbly reaching upward for as much sun as possible. So many factors go into a man's strength, no one method or resource is the single source of it.

Questions to be considered for this restoration are:

- When do I feel at my weakest?
- What can I do to build all of my strength?
- How is my courage related to building my strength?

Tree: Weathered

Man: Patient endurance

What needs restoring?

No tree is perfect. Spend enough time around an aged tree, and you will see evidence of an endurance that has helped it be what is. The bark is uneven. The trunk may even be bent because the earth beneath it. Not all branches have leaves or needles. A man who has lived, learns patient endurance because of what has happened to him, and most importantly, how he has responded those events. This is one characteristic of a man developed over time. Normally, a young man doesn't possess this deeper quality simply because he hasn't lived long enough. The man with years of patient endurance behind him can be for his ecosystem and environment the one place people see an example to follow and be around.

Questions to be considered for this restoration are:

- What big life lessons have I learned through bad decisions?
- Where in my life do I need to develop more patience?
- Who stands to benefit in my ecosystem from my patient endurance?

Tree: Bend, not break

Man: Flexible. "Values, like a rock. Adaptability, like a current."

Tree: Blossoms

Man: People want to be around him

Tree: Doesn't grow fast

Man: He is patient with himself and those around him

Tree: Gentle among surroundings

Man: Gentle to the most needing him

Tree: Fruit

Man: Fruit for life, flavor, color, not hurried, but over time and again and again (seasons)

Tree: Covering from rain, snow, scorching sun

Man: Different forms of protection: physical, spiritual, emotional

Tree: Upward and outward growth

Man: Predictable in a good way: reliable and always seeking better way to do so

Tree: Unique

Man: Unique

Tree: Grows in groves and forest

Man: Relationship and community essential

Tree: Made into something else

Man: Sacrifice for the next generation

Tree: Its ultimate purpose is to help its ecosystem

Man: A healthy man gives away his strength, resource and purpose

Tree: Will die someday, but serves additional purpose in death (soil, seed, wood)

Man: The resurrected man, the man who gives all (Galatians 2:20, John 12:24-25)