

**BENEFITS OF SPIRITUAL FITNESS TO THOSE CLOSE TO YOU**  
**Psalm 1:1-4 (especially 3b)**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Some people can look at a leaf and tell you the variety of the tree that produced it. I've never been any good at that.

Like many of the rest of you, when I was in high school, I had to make a leaf collection for biology class. I made the collection and got a grade. (Probably a mediocre collection and a passable grade.) But I didn't learn anything that stuck. I still can't tell one tree from another by looking at leaves.

But while I can't tell one tree from another by looking at the leaves, I can tell a few things by looking at the leaf on a tree: in the right season of the year, I can tell if the tree is alive; I can tell if it is likely to survive and I can tell if it is a place where the weary can revive.

Psalm 1 speaks of a person who is like a tree with leaves that are ever green.

*<sup>1</sup> Blessed is the man  
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked  
or stand in the way of sinners  
or sit in the seat of mockers.  
<sup>2</sup> But his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.  
<sup>3</sup> He is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in season  
and whose leaf does not wither.  
Whatever he does prospers.*

The psalmist says that the person who is blessed and who is a blessing is the one who is like a tree planted by a flowing stream. That tree yields fruit in season and that tree's leaf never withers.

For the ancients, tree leaves were important and for a variety of reasons. Today, we are going to look at some of the value of tree leaves in the time that Psalm 1 was written.

**I. ENCOURAGING LEAVES**

Leaves on trees were often a source of encouragement to people in Biblical times. Take for instance, Noah.

Genesis 8 records that after Noah built the ark, boarded it and floated on the surface of the waters for 150 days, the ark came to rest on the top of Mount Ararat. Eight months after Noah and his family entered the

ark...eight months after God shut the door to the ark...eight months after the rain began, Noah got an encouraging sign. Noah released a dove from the window of the ark and it came back carrying a fresh olive branch. That olive branch was a sign to Noah that the floodwaters had receded and that life had returned to the earth. The olive branch was a symbol of God's deliverance and a source of encouragement to Noah and his family.

Many years later, when the Hebrew people left their bondage as slaves in Egypt, Moses led them through the wilderness for more than forty years. During that time, finding sources of fresh water for 2.5 million people became a concern for the Hebrews. God always provided but the people had to trust Him. During those long hot days in arid places, the sight of a grove of trees in full leaf would have been a real source of encouragement for the weary traveler. Trees don't have leaves if they don't have water so the appearance of trees on the horizon would have lifted the spirits of the camp of Israel.

In the same way that nomads living in the hostile desert found leaves to be encouraging because they were evidence that the tree had roots into fresh water, likewise the appearance of our Christian lives should be a similar encouragement to those who see us. Those closest to us should be able to tell that we have deep roots in the living water of Jesus Christ.

- When others wilt under the sweltering onslaught of discouraging news reports and disappointing economic indicators, we do not because our roots are not drawing their life from the things of this world.
- When others wither in the searing heat of criticism, ridicule, disparagement and derision, we do not because we do not derive our support from what other people think.
- When others weaken in the scorching blaze of Satan's attack, we stand strong, renewed by a veritable stream of refreshment provided by the LORD, Himself.

In these troubled times, in these restless days, in this anxious age, the people who are nearest and dearest to you need someone to strengthen them. The evidence that you have the Lord to draw upon will be an encouragement to them.

The New Testament introduces us to a man who had that kind of an effect on people. He was from the island of Cyprus and his given name was Joseph. But everyone called him Barnabas, which means Son of Encouragement. You see, he was such a positive person to be around that people called him that.

And don't you think that when his friends were discouraged, depressed, dispirited and down that they went looking for Barnabas so he could lift their spirits? The man described in Psalm 1 is like that. And you should

be like that, too. You can be if you resolve not to walk according to what the wicked teach, not position yourself in the places that sinners frequent and not hang out with the disrespectful. You can be a refreshing and encouraging influence on those closest to you.

## **II. HEALING LEAVES**

Many leaves are known to contain medicinal properties. The aloe plant, for instance, is renowned for its curative qualities. The foxglove plant is the source of digitalis, an extract that is still used in the treatment of certain heart ailments.

The leaves of some trees are the source for some popular remedies. Eucalyptus leaves supply an oil that is used as a component in numerous pharmaceutical preparations to relieve the symptoms of colds and flu. You will find eucalyptus oil in cough drops, lozenges, ointments and inhalants. Eucalyptus oil has antibacterial effects on certain strains of bacteria in the respiratory tract. Inhaled eucalyptus oil vapor is a decongestant and is a treatment for bronchitis. This same eucalyptus oil controls airway mucus and asthma. And it stimulates the body's immune system.

Further, eucalyptus oil also has anti-inflammatory and analgesic qualities as a topically applied liniment ingredient. Eucalyptus oil is also frequently used in personal hygiene products such as toothpastes and soaps because of its antimicrobial properties. It can also be applied to wounds to prevent infection.

That is just eucalyptus leaves. Scores of other tree leaves are used medicinally and have been for centuries.

While many leaves have therapeutic properties, the leaves of the olive tree were particularly prized for the curative qualities. The benefits of olive leaf extract have been well known in Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries for centuries.

The benefits of olive leaf extract include protecting the body from viruses, bacteria or retroviruses, treating existing viruses including herpes and shingles, improving circulation, treating colds, flu and pneumonia, aiding as a diuretic and digestive aid, preventing intestinal muscle spasms, preventing infection and decreasing chronic fatigue syndrome by increasing energy and the overall sense of well-being.

The New York University School of Medicine and the University of Durban-Westville in South Africa have both done exhaustive and definitive studies on the benefits of olive leaf extract and they have shown the positive medical properties of this oil.

While all of this research and its results may be fairly new to us, the benefits of tree leaves to the ailing have long been known. And the use of leaves to help heal has long been practiced. So when the psalmist writes about the person who refuses to follow the advice of the wicked or take up the positions of the sinners or settle in among the disrespectful and when he says that they are like a tree whose leaf never wilts, withers or weakens, he is, in part, writing about the healing effect that Godly people have on the sickness of the world around them.

Perhaps you have heard and read of the controversy that followed some remarks by network news anchor, Brit Hume. Earlier this month, commenting on the Tiger Woods sex scandal and the golfer's numerous affairs, Hume observed:

*"Tiger Woods will recover as a golfer. Whether he can recover as a person I think is a very open question, and it's a tragic situation for him. I think he's lost his family, it's not clear to me if he'll be able to have a relationship with his children, but the Tiger Woods that emerges once the news value dies out of this scandal -- the extent to which he can recover -- seems to me to depend on his faith. He's said to be a Buddhist; I don't think that faith offers the kind of forgiveness and redemption that is offered by the Christian faith. So my message to Tiger would be, 'Tiger, turn to the Christian faith and you can make a total recovery and be a great example to the world.'"*

Brit Hume has been excoriated by many high-profile media personalities. In this climate of tolerance when people want to believe that any religion is as good as any other religion and that what people believe doesn't really make any difference, Hume's outspoken advocacy of Christianity will seem sharp to most. It is sharp. It is as sharp as a scalpel and will hopefully be as effective.

People, as Christians, we should have a healing influence on those close to us. Sometimes that means we need to be like a soothing balm and other times like a sharpened scalpel. Surgery isn't always painless and medicine rarely tastes good but it is often necessary for the healing to begin. Our culture is terminally ill and God's people need to have a healing influence on it or it will die.

### **III. SHELTERING LEAVES**

Another welcome function of the leaves of a tree is shade. Do you remember a time or a place without air conditioning? I can vividly recall my grandfather's two-story farmhouse in Douglas County. It was surrounded by tall and leafy shade trees. My brother and I would play beneath the shelter of those trees. My grandmother would sit under those

trees to snap beans or pop peas. Grandpa and Uncle Denny would relax under those trees after a hot day in the fields.

If you are too young to remember a house without air conditioning, maybe you remember how welcome shade was at church camp, at 4-H camp or in a city park. Trees extract their refreshment from the moisture they draw from the soil and then they, in turn, provide refreshment with their shade.

In the same way, spiritually vital people derive their refreshment from being rooted deep in the Living Water of Jesus Christ and his word. Then they, in turn, supply refreshment and protection to the people around them. God's people are to be a welcome relief and a protective shelter in our worn and weary world.

In Isaiah 25, the prophet penned a psalm of praise to God. Among other things, he said:

*You have been a refuge for the poor,  
A refuge for the needy in his distress,  
A shelter from the storm  
And a shade from the heat.*

When God's people took the lead in providing relief after the earthquake in Haiti, we were being sheltering leaves. When God's people not only took the lead but have remained the longest in the cleanup after Hurricane Katrina, we were being sheltering leaves. When God's people initiated, led and followed through on the benefit for Bill Densmore – and when we do the same in a special offering for Caralyn Riley, you know we are being sheltering leaves. That is our calling and, if we are Christians, that is our character.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

In Psalm 1, the poet makes it very clear that the person who is like a tree with leaves that never wither, is the one who is like a tree planted by the flowing stream of fresh waters. This morning, I am inviting you to come to the waters and root deeply into him so you can be a blessing in a world where there is a world of need. Will you come to him who is the Living Water so he can make you a blessing to those whose lives you touch? Come as we sing.

**INVITATION:** #670 – *“Make Me a Blessing”*