

My wife was fascinated with her family background when she discovered two relatives had been passengers on Mayflower, and one was a principal in the Salem witchcraft trials. Her research didn't change who she was but added color to her past and made names on a piece of paper come to life. Is learning about our roots simply a selfish waste of time, or does learning about our past help us with considering what we will leave behind to others?

Many of us remember the mini-series "Roots?" That was a powerful dramatization of author Alex Haley's family history, from Africa to the U.S. From slavery to freedom. Where are your roots? Your country of origin? Your family's life journey? While fascinating, discoveries, the past has no life for today's living.

Where do your roots draw life from today? All living things need their own roots for nourishment, life, and growth. Whatever roots touch, they absorb. Good nutrients result in rich fruit. Polluted soil or water means death. As we look at Jeremiah, we remember that the Jewish people were obsessed with roots.

They memorized family trees. Celebrated their chosen-ness. Worshipped in a temple planned and built by the greatest kings of all! Despite such origins, one day they found themselves sitting in exile in a strange land. They had great roots -- but the fruit was bitter and didn't look like it had in the past. (Isn't there familiarity in such feelings? Who doesn't know what that feels like -- how confusing it can be to faith.)

What had gone so wrong? Jeremiah said they were rooted in "things" rather than in God. *Rather than see blessings as gifts to be shared, they selfishly saw them as personal rewards.* As they lifted their roots from God's love, and instead wrapped them around brick and stone, image and ritual, slowly they were separated from the nourishment which had brought them so far!

My dad annually planted tomato seeds in coffee cans, put them under grow lights to get them ready to transplant into his garden in the spring. In the same way when plants become root-bound we put them in bigger pot, or failing to thrive we might transplant into the shade or maybe the sun, depending on which they need most.

That is what God did in Old Testament as Israel was sent into exile. What appeared as a tragic defeat actually was a *rescue-by-transplant*. God pulled their roots from the land and lives that had become so familiar and moved them into exile; that they might rediscover lasting life is only found in God! *As they rooted themselves in Him, exile (appearing at first as a curse) became a true and powerful blessing of life.* They learned the most important factor in life was to be rooted, by faith, in God! (That overcame multiple difficulties of climate and location.)

We understand this confusion! Who would SEEK illness, or grief, or poverty -- all situations we label as "curse?" And who would AVOID wealth, or bountiful harvests, or daily laughter -- gifts we label as "blessing?" Yet in the sermon from Luke 6, Jesus spoke of blessing where we would say "curse!" and curses where we would assume "blessing." *Why can't God just give us what we want and protect us from what we fear?*

Why can't each have all they want and never struggle with what we fear? To ask such questions is to silence the message, to miss the point Jesus proclaims.

We tend to focus on events, things, needs -- the fruits of life. Jesus focuses on what is buried. What is hidden! Think about the miracle of life and how a plan draws nourishment from outside itself ... through its roots. Jesus asks us to examine our **roots**. For where our roots are planted determines what life or death flows through our veins. Where do we draw the nourishment and life that nourishes our gifts? That gives us the strength to develop those gifts and ripen them for service? That gives flavor and texture to each moment of our living and every action of our lives.

God's promise is that when we are empty, he will fill us back up. And when we are full, selfish, and fearful of sharing or emptying is when a transplant might be most helpful.

The greatest gift of creation is that God allowed us the ability to choose a location for our roots. He gave us free will. He said "any place in the garden" you may seek for nourishment, except for one. If you plant your roots in that place, you shall surely die! We know the rest. And when the choice in the Garden was to wrap roots around self-centered desires and needs rather than trusting in God's loving gifts, life became confusing, and pain filled. And no matter what, each life ended with death.

As Jesus spoke his words of blessing and curse, he promised what his ultimate act of re-creation would be. Returning to the earth in which our rootless lives end, he would conquer the idolatrous choice that separates us from God and life. In John's Gospel, he would say, *"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains alone, but if it dies it bears much fruit!"*

Soon we will watch as seeds, trapped by the darkness and cold of winter, send out roots. Seeds have disappeared and the miracle of life will ensure that new plants will emerge. (Like Jesus -- on Easter!) A new life as a counterweight to heavy hearts.

What the world sees as grief we see as joy. What the world sees as failure, we see as victory. And nothing can ever again separate us from God's love.

"How Should We Then Live?" (A title of a great book by Francis Schaefer, but also the point of Jesus' words of blessing and curse. *Will we plant roots in what will give us everything we need, or will we plant roots in what will give us everything we want?*

Which voice in the garden will we listen to? The voice of God, or the voice that tempts us to make ourselves into a "god?" Weekly we encounter the results of nations and people whose lives are torn and twisted by the scandals of earthly wisdom and shallow-rooted selfish living. We hear clearly the tempting choices that are offered -- the ends justify the means. As long as we "get what we want" and are "blessed as we deserve" it doesn't matter what we do or how we live. Is that "fertile soil" of Gospel, or the twisted logic of that serpent from the Garden?

The point of the Gospel is simple. *Whatever gifts or pain we encounter, as our roots (or lifeline) are firmly wrapped around the saving love of Jesus, even curse will become blessing! And each blessing will become a gift shared by those around us! And all will*

glorify God and draw other roots into his love! How then shall we live? Where will your roots be planted? In God's gifts and abundant love there is incredibly fertile soil.

May God grant you the wisdom to be rooted in him, the strength to hang on to him, and the blessing of serving others! As your life derives its abundance from him even curses will find a blessed purpose and there will be no confusion as to the purpose or plan of the incredible blessings that surround your living. It's all about ROOTS! - tws