

Epilogue

**Are you growing in the LORD
in spite of what the world
puts in your way?**



**You are not alone; there is
one closer than a brother,
one that loves, gives support
and gives you life!**

Shel Silverstein wrote a book in 1964 called *The Giving Tree* published by Harper and Row. Some, maybe most, may feel it is only a children's book, but that would be an incorrect assumption. You can always tell the good so-called children's books because they are the ones with the great insights for adults.

In *The Giving Tree*, we see the tree giving all it could, no questions asked; the only desire was the wishing for the boy/man to be happy. We could say the tree represents a loving mother or father to the young boy; true loving parents unselfishly give all they can to love and support their children, wishing for their happiness in life. This metaphor would work for me at one level; I clearly have this feeling with my two daughters and my three grandsons. But for this Epilogue, I wish to paint an equally plausible way to look at the tree. I suggest to you, that the tree is "The Father." The Tree represents God, and the boy represents all of mankind.

As the book starts, Shel tells us that the tree loves the boy. The Biblical verse "for God so loved the world" (John 3:16) and "the Father Himself loves you" (John 16:27), makes it plain that God loves mankind. I want you to know that no matter what obstructions are in your way and causing you pain, be they random acts of violence upon you or mistakes of your own making, God does in fact love you! If you will do the following: "Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it." (Psalm 34:14 ESV), then God will clothe you in His grace and forgiveness, no matter what you did. God sent His Son, who was without sin, to take your sins and make them His own, thereby justifying you to stand before God blameless; the question now is: what will you do now knowing of this new chance you've been given by grace, even though you didn't deserve it?

In the beginning, the tree and the boy had a great relationship everyday...every day the boy was in relationship with the God of the universe! The same was true for the first humans, Adam and Eve as they walked with God in the Garden; everyday they had a relationship...God said it was good (Gen. 1:28-31). Shel describes the closeness of God and mankind in terms of the boy playing

with leaves from the tree, climbing the tree's trunk, swinging from the branches, eating the fruit, and playing hide-and-go-seek. The tree provided comfort for the boy, and the boy loved the tree, and the tree was happy. Same goes for God, who will love and provide comfort for those who love Him; the Holy Scriptures tell us that "if anyone loves God, he is known by God" (1 Cor. 8:3). God will not desert a person He knows is trying to know Him; after all, He sent His only beloved Son to justify us before Himself. After going through the agony of the cross for your sake, why would Christ ignore you today? Of course, that makes zero sense, so believe that Jesus loves you and turn your life over to Him.

"Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." (Luke 15:7 ESV).

As time went by and the boy grew older, Shel tells us that the boy started to break off the relationship with the tree and make excuses why he couldn't play anymore. The lure of earthly things started to fill the boy and tell him that to be happy he needed money. Growing older, the young man heard the song of the culture, that is, in order to be happy he needed lots of things. It is the deception of Satan that leads mankind to believe that happiness comes from our stuff. Your money and your stuff will ultimately not make you happy; the pleasure is short lived for the drug of stuff only makes you want more, never to be satisfied. Don't let your stuff become obstacles to the growth of your tree in the LORD.

As the boy grew older and became a man, he takes on more responsibilities and has more desires, all of which now become his daily focus. How many do you know that have gradually drifted away from the church? You miss a couple of Sundays and then it becomes easier and you miss a few more. Without the fellowship of Christian brothers and sisters to help support you in your walk with Christ, more and more other desires will fill your time, and soon your new focus becomes your new norm.

The boy stays away from the tree only to show up when he needs something. What kind of relationship is that? Let's say you have a child, whom you love dearly and your child only calls you when they selfishly need money, not caring anything about you. How do you feel about that situation? Shel tells us the tree was sad.

For personal control over what he thought Jesus should be doing and driven by his greed, Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 26:14). People betray Jesus every day for much less. The Tree is not happy.

As the man developed more wants, more stuff, he became more unhappy and stressed-out about his stuff. Now he needed to get away from his manufactured world in order to be happy, so he thought. The tree gave up her trunk for the man's boat, now only a stump. It had so loved the man that it provided everything it had, all the way down to its trunk.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16 ESV)

Before Christ, God had provided prophets, judges, and kings that spoke for God on earth, trying to reach the people God so loved. It didn't fully work out. Still desiring a relationship with His creation, God sent His Son, the second Person of the Trinity, wanting to reach the people and bring them into relationship with Himself. Surely this will work, but the evil people killed Him. Jesus told us this would happen in the Biblical text:

"And he began to speak to them in parables. "A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country. When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. And he sent another, and him they

killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed. He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard."
(Mark 12:1-8 ESV)

He didn't stay dead for long; God always works His purpose out. Will mankind respond? Will mankind turn from their evil ways and return to the Tree?

As Shel ends his golden book, we find the boy, now an old wrinkled man, so tired by the burdens and obstructions of life, so tired by trying to fight the obstacles the world heaped upon him, that he can only sit and rest. The tree? Still loving the boy/man, the tree graciously still gives a place of rest...on that stump, as the tree gave all it had left to the boy/man out of a continual love, unchanged from the first day when they played together.

So, as we grow tired of fighting to escape the quicksand of our own selfish unsatisfying wants, will we only then turn to God? You may have rejected God, but God still loves you! It is only you that stands in the way of having a relationship with the Savior, Jesus Christ. Don't shake your fist at God, blaming Him for your troubles. Don't yell at God because you believe God deserted you; it is you that deserted God. Don't despair; there is a way for you.

Jesus told us that He was the Truth, the Light, and the Way to eternal salvation (John 14:6). We have all received grace upon grace (John 1:16), so you have another chance; won't you turn toward Jesus Christ, repent from your sins and ask Him to forgive you. He will, you know.

Only the peace of God that passes all understanding can remove your obstacles; this is done by changing your heart and mind in Christ (Philippians 4:7). The more you fight against Jesus, reject God and worship at the altar of "stuff god", the more you desire

and strive for what the world is selling, the desire for more stuff, the more obstacles will be in your path, in your life.

There will one day be a separation of the sheep and the goats; that is, the children of God and the children of Satan (Matt. 25:32-33). Which side will you be on? Jesus tells us about a parable where an enemy (Satan) spread weeds (children of Satan) among a farmer's wheat crop (children of God); what to do? Ruin the wheat to get the weeds out, or just let them grow together, for a future separation on the threshing floor? Jesus told his disciples to let them grow together and that a future separation would take place (Matt. 13:25-40).

Jesus walked this earth, took your sins and paid the price you deserved to pay on the cross, and conquered death in the resurrection, all to show you the way. You too can be grow healthy in spite of the obstacles in your path. It is about choice. How will your tree grow knowing you have this great new chance?

Listen! Jesus is praying for you now! Hear His prayer and invite Him into your life; only Jesus Christ can turn you into "A Different Kind of Tree":

"I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the

world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.”

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17:9-26 ESV)

May the peace of God and God’s grace be with you always; may it also trouble you and impact you to repent and accept Christ as your LORD and Savior this very hour...now, turn to Him, get on your knees and ask Him to take over your life! You will find true peace and comfort, knowing you are loved for all eternity!

Shalom,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Haven D. Mankin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.