

Lessons from a Christmas Tree

Once there was a woman who loved the Lord. One of her favorite holidays of the year was Christmas and the birth of her Savior. Every year she and her family would go into the woods and select their Christmas tree. Now, her family's tradition was that each person would have a year when only they selected the tree. Each of her three children had chosen trees when it was their year and each had been unique. None of them had been perfectly shaped, but she said nothing because their family rule forbade her from doing so. She could offer suggestions of trees as they wandered through the woods, but the choosing was left up to the person whose turn it was to select the tree. Usually they would spend one or two hours finding the one that suited the seeker. Her family also had the tradition of taking their Christmas tree after it had served its purpose for the season and making it into a walking stick to be used by the one who chose it. Everyone looked forward to the year it was their turn.

Well, one year her husband's turn came. He too, anticipated finding the "perfect" tree. As they began to walk through the snow and trees the woman tried to envision the kind of tree her husband would choose. They began their hike not far from the road and many people had been through the area in the past to find a tree. She could tell, because the trees left were disfigured and twisted, missing branches on one side, or half dead. She mentally prepared herself for a long hike to find the right tree.

However, only five minutes into their Christmas tree trek, her husband announced he had chosen his tree. She looked to see what could possibly be a beautiful tree amongst the ones she had seen so far, and as she turned she saw her husband holding onto a very tall, skinny tree. It was missing branches in several places and all the branches were very short. It had some branches that were dead or dying. She stared as he shook his tree proudly and declared, "This is the one!"

"You can't be serious!" the woman shouted, "Let's keep looking," and she began to walk away. But her husband emphatically said, "No. It's my turn to choose and this is the one I want. It will make a great walking stick. Look at the trunk. It's sturdy and straight and is long enough to make a good walking stick for me," and he began to place the bright orange tag on the tree to mark it before he cut it down. The woman, seeing her husband was serious, began to become angry that he would deliberately choose such an ugly tree and came close to tears. "How could he do such a thing? How could he make her put such a tree in her home. Who would admire such a tree?" she thought to herself. But the Lord spoke to her and said, "It is his turn. Your family rule forbids you from interfering and he is your husband. Be an example of humility for your children." By then, the children had made their way over to see their dad's tree. Their reactions were similar to their mother's. They could not believe this was the one. Two of them resigned themselves to the situation, but one was very angry at his father and would not even speak to him! The wife was determined to be a positive example to her children and reminded them that they each chose their tree and no one became angry at them because they didn't like their choice. She said, "It's Dad's year and he chose this one."

It'll be fine."

The man used his ax and cut the tree down while his family looked on, stunned. It was so skinny and light the youngest child could have carried it to the car, but the husband picked it up and headed back. The family could do nothing but follow. They tied their tree to the top of the car and began their journey home. As they drove, people in other cars would drive past and stare. Some even laughed. The wife could hardly believe this was happening. How could she decorate such a thing? All her ornaments wouldn't even fit and most of the branches wouldn't hold the heavier ones. What would she say to those who came to their home and saw their tree? On the way home, the husband spoke of putting little red or blue balls on the tree and where it would fit in their living room.

When they arrived home, the family found a spot in the livingroom where the tree would go. It ended up in a place that caused it to be one of the first things anyone saw as they entered the home. They pulled out the boxes of ornaments they had used for years and began to decorate the tree. Everyone soon realized that all their ornaments would not fit on such a tree and they began to decide which of the ornaments were the most important and meaningful. It forced them to ponder the meaning and value of each ornament. They soon decided that their Christmas nail was essential and that was placed on the only sturdy branch of the tree. Each important ornament came after that until the tree could hold no more and the rest were tucked away for another year.

As the decorating continued, the woman realized many things. Her husband had chosen this tree not with it's temporary use in mind as a Christmas tree, but with it's more lasting purpose: that of a walking stick. She began to look past the branches to the substance which gave the tree it's shape and realized that it was sturdy, the right diameter, and the right height for her husband to be able to use it. It was quite straight, more so than others they had chosen in the past. She could see his foresight and wisdom in his choice.

She also looked at her ornaments differently. Which one's were the most important? Which had the most meaning? Some were very beautiful, but had only been bought because they were beautiful. They had no sentimental attachment or personal meaning. They weren't made by precious little hands and given to her as a gift. She had been made to "distill down" until only the important and meaningful remained.

As she saw the delight on her husband's face as their tree glowed with lights and began to come alive with the adornments, the wife realized the joy in seeing his pleasure. She also saw her children realize the tree's own unique beauty and character. She discovered that each of them, herself included, began to take pride in the tree and giggle at what people would think. Their tree was different and others would notice. They decided that was a good thing!

As various people came to their home over the holiday, the reaction was varied. Some eyed it with disapproval and suspicion. Some looked on in disbelief that anyone would

actually choose such a tree. Some even came in and thought it was wonderful and could see it's beauty in spite of it's shortcomings of a "perfect" tree. But EVERYONE noticed it and saw that it was different.

God taught the woman many things that season. First, she was chosen by God, for a purpose, in spite of her "shortcomings." God has a job for her and sees her as fit for the task. She can trust that God knows what he's doing and follow his lead even if it's not a typical path.

"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." Eph. 1:4

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Eph. 2:10

Second, she learned the value of examining her life to see what was most important. Those things that pleased the Lord and gave glory to him had to come first. Her family had to come next. The rest was either chaff to be thrown to the wind or grain that would settle in and find it's place around the rest.

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things." Phil 4:8

"And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God..." Col. 1:10

"...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..." Heb. 12:1-2

Third, she learned that submission to God always brings wisdom, peace, and joy. What she might have missed out on had she argued with her husband or demanded her own way!

"But he gives more grace. That is why Scripture says: God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves, then, to God...Come near to God and he will come near to you." James 4:6-8

Christ's birth we celebrate was by no means a birth with earthly pomp and circumstance. God chose a select few, Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds to share in the delight of the birth. He did not choose the expected, but surprised the world with the lowly, the despised, and the foolish to show His power and glory. This was done so no one could boast in themselves-not Mary or Joseph, and not ourselves in our salvation. It was and is only the work of God.

Scripture says, "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-and the things that are not-to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." 1 Cor 1:27-31.

This woman knows that God loves her and holds her close because he desires her to learn lessons He has just for her. Like the lesson from the Christmas tree.

