



The Living God Ministries, Inc.

Montgomery & Spanish Fort, Alabama

August 30, 2019

Warm hellos to you dear brethren, and spiritual family here on the Coast of the Gulf of Mexico, and scattered children of God.

My wife and I pray and hope this finds you all doing well, and that again your week has been blessed!

The Kind of Tree God Called us to Be

I remember when we first moved to “the South”, it was in May of 2011. We were blessed to find a home in the Charlotte, NC area.

When we came down on a pre-move trip to look for a home and area to live several things were somewhat new to my wife and me. There were a few things we were quickly introduced to, Sweet tea, for instance. We were often offered that before a glass of water or coffee.

On our pastoral visits with brethren and friends we did a lot of sitting on porches and relaxed and still do. We quickly became accustomed to driving on winding, curving, hilly roads with no shoulders, and unmarked lanes. Some of the roads we drove on weren't paved. The red clay and dirt was all new to us.

In many of the quaint little towns we came across tiny country stores, sprawling acres of land, and what caught my attention almost immediately were many front yards proudly displaying a beautiful little tree.

When we purchased our home, one of the first things I noticed was this same species of tree in our own backyard.

It was not native to where I grew up in Nebraska. I'd never seen one.

The first thing I noticed about this tree was its shape. The number of limbs was impressive! This tree looked stately and almost perfect with its appearance.

Our first spring in North Carolina, as we arrived, showed this tree with an abundance of beautiful white flowers! Later that fall it shared leaves of blazing orange, red, and yellow.

Our neighbors conveyed to us that “this tree would reach maturity in literally no time at all compared to the other trees native to this region”, and so for very little investment in time, or money we'd have a beautiful ornamental tree to enhance our yard. But, then one neighbor pointed out what I honestly had no clue about.

I remember well what he said to me, "If you plant any more of these Bradford Pear trees, you'll be really sorry!" "I sure would not want one any more in my yard, what a pain!"

Why? I asked. Let me share some research on the background of this tree.

The Bradford pear was a product of selective breeding many years ago. Someone took a Callery pear tree (native to China and Vietnam) and kept selectively breeding it until the result desired was successful. The Bradford pear, in 1963, was then marketed for about 20 years as one of America's top "ornamental trees". Nurseries carried by the hundreds.

It appears few understood what would take place as the tree matured. As the tree matured, it produced beautiful foliage, appeared to be resilient against different types of disease, grew very quickly, and was tolerant of soil that other trees simply could not grow well in. It was what appeared to be the perfect tree for beautification to a homeowner's landscape and customers quickly had one planted in their yard to display.

Customers then and through the years in the future would learn a lesson the hard way that the Bradford pear had a serious genetic defect by design.

What I noticed almost immediately, having grown up in Nebraska where we really did not have a lot of trees, so I studied the few we did have with keen interest, was that most of its main limbs branched out from the same point on the trunk.

I remember saying, "I've never seen so many limbs on one little tree, how odd!"

Each year, as I trimmed many of the limbs back, the tree continued to grow in height, but the limbs begin to mingle, and choke each other out. The main trunk appeared to barely be able to support so many limbs.

Each time we had a storm, I noticed around the neighborhood that several branches fell off these trees, often entire trees were split in half, and the sound of chainsaws after the storm had passed, became the norm.

It did not take me long to notice these trees were not so pretty after one or two storms, and created a messy yard for many. With this Bradford, the question was "why would anyone actually want this tree?"

One author noted, "This unfixable quirk effectively reduces the useful life of a Bradford pear to about 20 years." So, what I learned was that in spite of its beautiful appearance, the Bradford pear is genetically doomed to crumble with a storm when it comes.

Another interesting observation that many have noted is although the Bradford is a member of the pear family, it doesn't actually produce fruit. I have fond memories as a child in Nebraska

pulling a ripened pear off a fruit tree on many occasions and biting into it and enjoying the treat!

The Callery pear is about the size of a small pebble and feels like you are holding a small piece of wood, (which I might add does not sound like a nice treat to me). What I am told is that the only thing these small pears are good for is producing another tree like the one the fruit came from.

Okay, where am I going with all this about a Bradford pear tree?

I'd like to draw several analogies. Over the years I've mentioned that God sometimes describes His children in terms of a tree. The Bible is filled with examples of the importance of trees. David was inspired to write in Psalm 92:13-15:

*Those who are planted in the house of the Lord
Shall flourish in the courts of our God.
They shall still bear fruit in old age;
They shall be fresh and flourishing,
To declare that the Lord is upright;
He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.*

I don't see here a description of the Bradford pear.

We're told we will be flourishing in our old age? A Bradford does not make it to old age at all. It does not flourish and bear fruit. It honestly really only has its appearance of beauty. That is not kind of tree we read in these verses.

We could surmise that there's a reason that, among the pages of God's Word, you won't find any reference to the *Pyrus calleryana* or Bradford pear tree.

What I did find was more than a just few mentions of the *Olea europaea*, or olive tree.

My wife and I first came in contact with the Olive Tree while traveling to Israel back in about 1994. I found it fascinating, and remember eating an olive from its branches that was not yet cured. A learning curve for sure.

The olive tree's characteristics are the virtually the exact opposite of the Bradford pear.

The Bradford tree displays a "ta-da!" appearance, the Olive tree tends to go for the gnarly or twisted look.

The Bradford has a useful lifespan of maybe 20 years while the olive tree outlasts entire civilizations. The Bradford Tree's fruit is essentially useless to anyone but itself, while the olive or fruit that is produced from its branches is edible and also used in creating olive oil, one of the world's useful and highly valued resource.

So let's take a look at these two trees, the Bradford and Olive, and see if their differences reveal a picture of *"The Kind of Tree God Called us to Be"*.

We Need to Solidly Anchor Ourselves to all of God's Word

We've learned that the key structural problem of the Bradford pear is the location of its branches and how they are attached. The main branches of the tree tend to naturally shoot from the same location on the trunk, putting most all of the stress on one single area. As the limbs grow larger, the problem worsens, until one day they break. One tiny storm, or breeze and the tree becomes broken and no longer the pretty tree it once was.

Think about this, what would our life be like if we focused on only *one* of the truths God's given in His Word?

I've noticed over the years, when I mention having a Bible Study about "prophecy", the attendance increases quite noticeably. When holding a Public Bible Lecture, this topic allowed standing room only, all the seats filled.

What if you or I were to dedicate all of our study time to prophecy? Prophecy in the morning, afternoon, and at night—our spiritual diet was all prophecy, all the time.

We might end up with a pretty good grasp of the chronology of what's prophesied to happen, but would we really understand it?

What if we strove constantly to tithe as God commands, but knew little about worshiping God and keeping His Sabbath Day holy?

What if we knew the importance of repentance, but little about permitting God to live in us and a relationship with Him? (Gal 2:20)

In these examples, it doesn't matter how firm our grasp is on that one aspect of God's truth—our life will be lacking because we've ignored all of God's truth in His Word.

What you or I have essentially done is attached all our branches to one single part of the trunk of God's Word, instead of seeking to cover as much of the trunk as possible. God uses trunks, trees etc. to clearly show us what His desire is for us.

Perhaps when a Sabbath-related work challenge or trial comes, our understanding of simply tithing won't help, and could cause us to break just like the branches of a Bradford when a storm comes.

Olive trees, on the other hand, are very different and in a promising way. Their trunks grow to be strong and solid, their root system is extensive, and their branches are secured in many locations to the trunk, not just one.

I reflect on the words of Paul to the young evangelist Timothy, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17, emphasis added).

If we wish to be complete, equipped, and sturdy, we must ensure we are internalizing all of God's truth, all of His Word, *not* just one or two.

God Desires a Tree that Bears Fruit, not "Ta-Da!"

As I mentioned, the Bradford is pretty, no doubt about that.

So many yards contain one because its owners like how it looks. It's attractive.

The problem is, all that "Ta-Da!" and "Wow!" doesn't make the tree useful, rather just something nice to observe and notice. What does God say about just "looking good"?

You and I as Disciples of Christ are expected to produce fruit, as John the Baptist declared, "even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:10).

Unless you and I are continually bearing fruit, and good fruit, we will be of little use to God or anyone else for that matter.

The tiny, wood-like fruit that comes from the Bradford pear isn't good fruit. It's really not edible, and you can't do much with it. It's pretty much useless, except in the form of a seed for producing another Bradford tree.

The fruit that comes from the olive tree, on the other hand, is vital to the production of olive oil, a treasured resource.

The olive tree is spoken of around 25 times in God's Word and mentions olive oil more than 160 times. It was a key ingredient in making meals (1 Kings 17:12), valuable enough to pay off debts (2 Kings 4:7), and it was used by God to consecrate (Exodus 29:7). These things mentioned were possible because the olive tree produces *good fruit*.

In our nightly fellowships with the *Living God Ministries*, we often discuss the question, “what’s the difference between spiritual good and bad fruit?”

We recently read in one of our studies, what God says about such in Galatians 5:19-23. We can see that *the works of the flesh are like the fruit of the Bradford pear—not really beneficial to others and only good for creating more of itself.*

The fruit of the Spirit, on the other side of the coin, benefits not only those who produce it, but all those who partake of it. Amazing what God living IN us can produce as we yield to His Spirit. It’s the difference between fornicating and being faithful, between hatred and love, between ungodly wrath and self-control.

Good fruit is going to prepare us for and direct us to His Kingdom; the other toward the final judgment of God and in some cases the lake of fire.

It’s clear from His Word, that God isn’t interested in trees that simply “look nice” yet don’t produce good fruit.

Even if you or I are the prettiest lawn ornament, if we aren’t producing fruit that reveals God’s Spirit actively growing in our life, we aren’t the kind of tree God called us to and desires us to be.

Bearing Godly Fruit with Growth Takes Time

One reason Bradfords are so popular is they grow quickly!

If you want a tree that grows to maturity quickly, a Bradford is perfect for you. We live in a society that wants instant this or that. Growing up I had never heard of the term “24-7”. The invention of the internet gave rapid and immediate response a whole new definition.

The Bradford is also known for quickly breaking and-or falling to pieces, in fact it’s known within the tree industry as the “*self-destructing tree.*” In the short term, a Bradford produces fantastic results. In the long term though, well it falls short, way short.

Going back to the olive tree, we are looking at a huge investment in time. Very few want to wait, to invest in time. Most want things in today’s world now.

The Olive tree won’t become mature for about 20 years, and it won’t produce its best olives until it closer to the 35-year age. Thirty five years seems like a very long time, unless you’ve already lived past that.

By the time a Bradford pear has grown and died, an olive tree (if planted at the same time) will only just be at the stage of maturity.

Curiously as well, while an olive tree's optimal harvest begins at age 35, it doesn't terminate until around age 150. The olive tree's output outlasts almost six times that of the lifespan of a Bradford.

And, the olive tree doesn't stop producing at 150, 200 or even 300 years. If properly taken care of, an olive tree can last several thousand years. The olive tree of *Vouves*, on the island of Crete, is estimated to be 3,000 years old, and still produces fruit.

In Palestine, an olive tree known as *Al Badawi* ("The Big One") has been dated between 5-6,000 years old. These trees are known to be resistant to drought, diseases, and fire, and despite having outlived civilizations, are still able to produce fruit.

What's the lesson for you and me? Our walk on this path to His Kingdom isn't traveled by just growing as big and as fast as we can.

Oh yes, a Bradford pear has incredible growth in a short time, but not solid, good growth that lasts. The tree in my back yard tripled in size within a short time period!

Many olive trees have stood while nations rose and fell. The Bradford struggles to outlast the life of one human.

God is looking for children who "still bear fruit in old age" (Psalm 92:14), and the olive tree of *Vouves* and *Al Badawi* are both old enough to have been around when these inspired Psalms were written. Oh, if they could talk what a story they would tell!

The Big Difference between these Two Trees

Back in Genesis we learn a huge lesson from 2 trees. Here we examine two other trees.

As spiritual trees, God desires us to grow into sturdy olive trees, not flimsy, "Ta-Da!" Bradford trees.

So what enables us to have the kind of continual spiritual growth that sets the olive tree apart from the Bradford tree? Here's a scripture that illuminates.

(Isaiah 40:29-31)

He gives power to the weak,

And to those who have no might He increases strength.

Even the youths shall faint and be weary,

And the young men shall utterly fall,

*But those who wait on the Lord
Shall renew their strength;
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint.*

A spiritual Bradford is blinded to God's overall big picture, in focusing on just appearing beautiful, it simply does not endure.

In Isaiah 40, it's the young men who "shall utterly fall." A spiritual olive tree finds its strength "waiting on the Lord".

Through continual study in the Word of God, communicating with God in prayer, and communication with one another and through the continual producing of Godly fruit, we show ourselves approved by God. And through continual service to our Creator and one another we renew our strength, becoming a spiritual tree that stands strong after others have faded from memory.

The trees that are "planted in the house of the Lord" and who "flourish in the courts of our God" will not be like Bradford pears.

Let's you and I be *The Kind of Tree God Called us to Be*.

May we look forward with a thankful and joyful heart to these upcoming Feasts of the Lord, and trust Him to be with us through these weeks ahead! Stand strong my friends!

...as I close this letter, as I do every Friday evening...as we enter His Sabbath...reflect on this with me, will you?

And again, may God continue to richly bless you. Our prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Please do pray for us as well.

-Scott Hoefker (Pastor and wife (Gayle) The Living God Ministries Gulf Coast)

The schedule for this week's Sabbath is:

August 30th / Friday: Gifts for the Lord/ Praises/Gifts and Prayers to welcome God's Sabbath
7:00 pm (via Teleconference live connect with Stephen Glover and Friends.)

August 31st / Saturday: Spirit and Truth Worship Services 10:15 am, with local services held in Montgomery with the message by Stephen Glover. (All others are welcomed and encouraged to connect live to Worship Services via our normal phone conference). Local services will be held in Spanish Fort this Sabbath as well. [This Sabbath the Living God Ministries in Montgomery will *combine* with the Church of God International in our normal meeting hall.]

August 31st / Saturday: Sabbath Fellowship Study (Interactive Bible Discussion) **4:00 pm** from Montgomery. (connecting live with all others via telephone conference).

Next Sabbath's Schedule:

September 6th / Friday: Gifts for the Lord/ Praises/Gifts and Prayers to welcome God's Sabbath 7:00 pm (via Teleconference live connect) with Stephen Glover and friends.

September 7th / Saturday: Spirit and Truth Worship Services 10:15 a.m., with local services held in Montgomery with the message by Whit Moorer (All are welcome and encouraged to connect live to Worship Services via our normal phone conference). Sabbath Services for our congregation in Spanish Fort will be held in Mobile at 10:00 a.m. where we will combine with the *Church of God Mobile, Sabbath Day*.

September 7th / Saturday: Sabbath Fellowship (interactive Bible Discussion) 4:00 pm *from* Montgomery with Whit Moorer (connect live to all others via telephone conference).

Telephone Ministry (English): Call **1-712-770-4700**; then, when asked, enter Code **112165 #** to join.
(Note: All callers are muted and must press *6 to comment and *6 to resume mute.)
All times are listed in Central Standard Time zone.

Our Daily Bread Recordings

Sunday through Saturday / Our Daily Bread [listen anytime 24/7 to a recorded 15 minute message] Call 1-712-770-4709 (note this call in number is different and ends in "9"), then when asked, enter code 112165# [reference code numbers are on "Spiritual Fellowship Opportunities" on this website <http://www.tlgministriesgc.org> or at "Resources/Archives" on <http://www.haggai114.net>]

Daily Fellowship Opportunities

Sunday – Friday / **Morning Sacrifice** (Prayers & Scripture Reading) at 6:00 a.m.
Sundays / **History & Background of the Gospels** (Interactive) at 6:30 p.m. [Scott & Friends]

Mondays / Africa Discipleship at 7:00 a.m. [Glovers & Moses]

Almond Branch Fellowship at 6:30 p.m. (Interactive) (Stephen & Friends)

Tuesdays / **Haggai Fellowship** (Interactive) at 6:30 p.m. (Interactive) [Stephen & Friends]

Wednesdays / Africa Discipleship at 7:00 a.m. [Glovers & Moses]

1st & 3rd Wednesday / **Sons of God Fellowship** (Young men training) at 6:30 p.m. [Stephen

& Friends]

2nd & 4th Wednesday / **Lydian's Fellowship** (Ladies) at 6:30 p.m. [Esther/Gayle & Friends]

Thursdays / **Mt. Carmel Fellowship** (Interactive) at 6:30 p.m. [Hoefkers & Friends]

Scott Hoefker, Pastor

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