

THE PROCESS OF INDIVIDUAL GROWTH

By Brenda Spina, M.S., LMFT, LPC

I would like to talk to you about how fruit trees grow. Often I am in awe at how plants survive the winter to return in the warmth of spring, to a lush, green, and for some, a flowering state. It is one of the natural wonders that make me aware of how often God is working in our lives. Here are a few things I've learned from my farming ancestors about plants or trees.

One of the things I remember from one of my maternal uncles who loved farming is that in order for a plant to grow, the seed needs to be planted. Obvious, I know, but hear me out. A fact of growth is that the seed, once planted literally experiences a death of sorts first before the new seedling begins to form underground.

In our daily life, dying to self is not an easy task. It involves allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal to us the attitudes and behaviors we have participated with that are in opposition to the transformation of becoming more like Jesus. Death to self happens slowly at times, and brings a grief response to the surface. I like to call it "Good grief" as it means we have the opportunity to take responsibility for what we have done. It also provides a chance to identify shifts needed with God's help to move towards not repeating the same patterns again.

A fact about the growth process of any plant is that it is initially unseen. It happens underground. First, roots begin to shoot downward and then the plant moves toward the sunlight. Even as the plant eventually becomes visible there is a seemingly start/stop process to the growth. When it seems as if the plant is not changing, the root system however, is growing. This has to happen in order to make the foundation strong enough to support the next spurt of growth. The same is true for us.

It is easy to focus on external expression of what the inward transformation is thought to be. I don't mean outward things are unimportant. I only mean to point out that what Jesus is most interested in is my heart becoming more like His heart. Matters of the heart are not often noted or changes of the heart are not always initially seen on the surface. This is the process where the root system is being built. It is as time passes and "...some plant, some water but God gives the increase..." that change takes place. When relying on outward performance, I can tell you the heart can become a very lonely place. Jesus becomes lonely too...for the real you. The "you" he created you to be.

As the plant grows so do the buds that eventually become blossoms. As you know, the blossoms eventually fall off and give way to un-ripened fruit. All of this takes lots of time. Just as a fruit tree is still a fruit tree even when fruit is not evident, so are we God's own people. The process of transformation sometimes means that we "just be". A fruit tree is just a tree and acts like a tree until it's time for the blossoms and fruit to appear. So it is the same in our walk with the Lord.

In keeping with our metaphor, the fruit comes. In order for fruit to come there is lots of rain (difficult circumstances), fertilizer (unlovely people), and pesticides (Godly correction) that kill off the deadly insects that are used in order to produce a good crop of ripe, mouth-watering fruit. Then there is the sun (the presence of God) with its warmth that helps ripen the fruit so that when we partake of it – YUM!

God manifest your growth in me!

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