

The TRUNK of the tree expresses the strength of discipleship: this incorporates the work of God in our lives (spiritual rebirth, gifts/fruit of the Spirit) and our response & co-operation with the Lord through the five NT purposes of worship, belonging, growing, serving, and mission ("go"-ing). This is the CORPORATE dimension of Christianity, the togetherness of Church community which gives mutual support. As with a tree, the "life" flows upward from the roots via the trunk to the branches, leaves, flowers and fruit. Simply being well-rooted is not enough- life has dynamic purpose. **Have you discovered your life-purpose in Christ?**

There are many different BRANCHES, but all are connected to the ROOT and are offshoots of the TRUNK. These are the ways in which faith is expressed and applied in personal growth, corporate service, theological truth, and active holiness. We have different gifts and character that equip us for particular service- not everyone can or should try to be an "expert" in every branch of faith- AND we need other Christians whose makeup complements our weaker areas. There is room for the varying traditions of churchmanship, which are frequently based on personal preferences, habit, and historical factors more than on crucial theological principles. God seems to be better able to cope with our church varieties than we are!

Trees go through SEASONS OF LIFE and so do disciples. If we don't understand this fact, we may struggle (or else unfairly criticise others) when life is not a victorious procession. A LIVING MODEL of Christian discipleship allows for the tough times (Winter), growth and newness (Spring), maturity (Summer) and change/rest (Autumn).

It recognises that the life of faith is a paradox: it is simultaneously difficult and joyful. Psalm 1v3 sets the tone for a real-life faith as expressed in the rest of Psalms and in the life & teaching of Jesus; life-giving water welling up in the follower and in the Church.

What will YOU do with this "Life Tree" model?

What are your areas of strength and weakness? Where do you need to grow, or express your faith practically or spiritually? You are personally responsible for acting out your faith, with the Holy Spirit's infilling.

What discipleship training do you need? How can the local church help? Courses on evangelism, debt advice, Bible study, prayer/spirituality, politics, parenting, creation care, could all form part of the BIG picture.

What will YOUR Life Tree look like this year... And next... ???



The Life Tree

Richard Starling

Trees feature significantly in the Bible, from the Garden of Eden to the hope of John's Revelation. Trees are a symbol of life.

"One picture is worth a thousand words..."

I designed a visual image of discipleship to help Christians become holy, mission-oriented, growing believers who have a clear purpose **and** are nice to live with!

A mature Christian life shows integrity and the inter-connectedness of the various expressions of faith-in-action. Often, Christians focus on one aspect of the whole: evangelicals stress the Bible, charismatics stress the Spirit, contemplatives stress prayerfulness, and activists stress justice... In championing their cause they may fail to appreciate the contribution and focus of other believers, and have often sought to force all Christians into their own priority or tradition.

One result is undervaluing the positive contribution of others who are very much part of the Kingdom of God, and we may downplay the vocation and service of believers who are involved in different but important "branches" of applied faith. For example, the sad mistrust between Christians who want to "preach the Gospel" and those who want to "practice mercy and justice"...

We need to recover the compassionately-active, passionately-preached Christianity of the New Testament and of Lord Shaftesbury or William Wilberforce. This is not to ignore our real distinctiveness, or say everything is equal in priority; there is a need for clear conviction and assurance, but this has to be lived out with grace and compassion. *Jesus, full of grace and truth...*

Discipleship is a LIVING faith, a dynamic expression of Christlikeness and righteousness. It should be firmly rooted - with our TAP ROOT into God through Christ, salvation/reconciliation through what God has done for us; then rooted into Word and Spirit, God's revelation; and supported by our spirituality/prayer/rule of life. As we mature in faith, we become more deeply rooted and therefore well-connected to Christ and the Kingdom.

Deep Roots, Wide Branches

