

GRACE BIBLE CHURCH
Robert R. McLaughlin Bible Ministries

The Tree of Life is a weekly teaching summary.
The Tree of Life from the week ending 09/25/05

What it means to be initiated into the secret of the mystery. Part 25.
This treasure in “earthen vessels” reveals the surpassing greatness of God.

Our Lord Jesus Christ taught some very interesting principles the night before His death, and we have been noting the importance of our relationships with one another. Joh 15:12-18, *“This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends, if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and {that} your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you. This I command you, that you love one another. If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me.”* On that last night our Lord was teaching the importance of impersonal love, an area of great struggle for the Christian.

Mat 11:28-30, *“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light.”* The problem that a lot of people have in relationships is unrealistic expectation. The secret is to learn how to enjoy the things God has blessed you with. Do you really enjoy who you are, and what you have? Sometimes it's easier to love an animal instead of a person because animals are the same every day, but it's sad when people turn to animals over people because of lack of ability to enjoy people relationships. So, what are you waiting for to enjoy life? Some people, believers included, connect happiness with material possessions. Look at what our Lord said in Luk 12:15, *And He said to them, “beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not {even} when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.”*

When you have all the things you think you want, you still don't have what life is all about. Don't trust in people or things to make you happy, they will eventually let you down because they can never live up to your expectations. Psa 118:8-9 says, *It is better to take refuge in the Lord Than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the Lord Than to trust in princes.* Mat 16:26, *“For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”* There is **only one way** to experience happiness, and that is through your relationship with TLJC. Jam 1:2-4 tells us, *Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. Let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete lacking in nothing.*

You don't have to wait for something to make you happy, you can have happiness now while you are in the PPOG, and your life is full of trials. You can find happiness in the struggles of life. Enjoy yourself and be happy as you're trying to attain your goals, you can have a lot of fun and happiness even in the dark times if you are with God. Joy and happiness are available now, not something that you have to wait for until you get older. It is inseparably linked to having and enjoying your relationship with TLJC. The chief end of man is to love God and to enjoy Him forever. It's not simply sacrifice to Him, but to enjoy Him, to laugh with Him, and love your Christian life. God wants you to learn to love and enjoy your relationship with Him now in time. This is why you need to relax, Deu 28:45-47 says, *So all these curses shall come on you and pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you would not obey the Lord your*

God by keeping His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you. And they shall become a sign and a wonder on you and your descendants forever. Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things;

God is more interested in what you think than in what you can do, He wants your thinking, He does not place unrealistic expectations upon us, we do that ourselves. Human limitation is a fact of life, a hard truth that makes life easier when we accept it. 2Co 4:7, *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves;* If anything is to be done, God must do it. The people who work the works of God with joy and a glad heart, are those who realize their overwhelming inadequacy to do the task. 2Co 13:4, *For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, yet we shall live with Him because of the power of God {directed} toward you.*

The problem with many of us is that we're much too gifted; we're dangerously adequate and self-sufficient. Ecc 4:9 says, *Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor.* We gain perspective, objectivity and courage in threatening situations by having somebody by our side. Solomon is saying it's better not to work alone, not to minister alone. It's better to hurt with someone else. The N.T. says the same thing, 1Co 12:13-23, *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body, which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our unseemly members come to have more abundant seemliness, whereas our seemly members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it;*

The greatest man who ever lived sympathizes with us, Heb 4:15, *For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.*

No matter who you are, when the rug gets pulled up from under your life, you cannot go it alone, and stay balanced, *two are better than one!*

"*It is not good for the man to be alone*" says the Lord! This principle rebukes the religious solitaire, that isolated being who belongs to no Church, because no Church is perfect enough for him or her. This is the crowd Paul talked about in 1Co 1:12, *Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."* Surely it is better to belong to an imperfect church than to none at all. A church that, although making mistakes along the way, is still doing what it can to glorify God. Many go on their way, believing in themselves and their own power and personality, relying on their own strength, but self-confidence can be a stumbling block. We're so good at what we do that we're no good at all, so God must frustrate our energy at its source. He wears down our noble determination through the frustrations of life, and He squeezes out of us every piece of our self-confidence by disappointment and defeat. The wheels fall off of our cleverly contrived programs; our dreams go belly up. He teaches us through our failures until we learn that most precious of all God's premises: **We can't, but He can, and therefore we can through Him.** Job 23:14, *For He*

performs what is appointed for me, And many such decrees are with Him. 1Th 5:24, Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.

The demands that have been placed on us are now demands on Him; the pressures and problems are His as well. There are still those problems and difficulties that frustrate us, but they're honorably resolved in His time. We can, in fact, do all things that must be done, through the One who strengthens us, Phi 4:13, *I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.* God's activity through our fragile humanity is our great assurance! To persuade ourselves that we are something when we are nothing is a terrible loss.

Our calendars are filled with appointments, our days are consumed with engagements, and our minds are crammed with projects. We move through the day in our distracted way, assuming that our compulsions and motivations are mandates from God. We accept the esteem that are given to busy people, but when we have time to evaluate what we're doing, it often occurs to us that what we're doing isn't worth doing at all, at least in terms of eternal significance. However, Paul seemed to know exactly what he was doing and believed that what he was doing was thoroughly worthwhile. Look at Acts 20:17-21, *And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Paul was with people and he taught them, those were his primary tasks: befriending others and imparting the truth. This was the essence and genius of his ministry, the blend and balance of what he called *serving the Lord*.

Paul reminds us of TLJC, Emmanuel, (God with us), who spent a seemingly inordinate amount of time eating, fishing, strolling by the sea, chatting, teaching, going to parties, being neighborly. You would think both Paul and Jesus would get on with it, since there was so much to do. But neither of them was wasting time, they were making friends. Pro 18:24, *A man that desires friends must show himself friendly.* Friendship entails telling another person what we ourselves have come to know about God, nothing more and nothing less. As God teaches us new things about Himself we must give those truths away. Like Jonathan, who went to David at Horesh and **helped him find strength in God** (1Sa 23:16). A real friend is one who leaves another with a word that strengthens his grip on God. Befriending, then, is more than mere togetherness and small talk; it means sharing in some way what we've heard from God. We won't always do it well; some of us are not especially articulate. But even an awkwardly spoken word is better than no word at all. Even the comment that seems inept can be a source of strength. Even if no fruit is immediately gathered, and our friend seems no closer to God, something has happened: A seed has been planted and the life in that seed will cause it to grow. As our Lord promised in Isa 55:11, *"My word will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it,"*

Befriending and imparting takes hard work to maintain that balance. Some of us tend to be reflective, engaging in books and other quiet activities; others of us are more active, preferring to be with people. We're naturally inclined toward one mode or the other. But God can curb and discipline our natural tendencies. He wants symmetry for our lives, and therefore, if we ask Him to level out our lives, He will. But the fundamentals apply: The simplest things are often the most spiritual things. This is why our Lord taught His disciples what He did the night before His death concerning impersonal love and relationships.

Let's note some principles regarding impersonal love.

- 1) Impersonal love emphasizes the subject while personal love emphasizes the object. 2) Impersonal love demands we operate on our own norms and standards.

3) Impersonal love is a command in which all members of the human race in your periphery are the objects. This is why impersonal love is commanded to the members of the royal family of God. Joh 15:12, *this is my commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.* Joh 15:17, *this I command you, that you love one another.* 1Pe 2:17, *honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king* [Impersonal unconditional love]. 1Jo 3:23, *and this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.* 4) Impersonal love excludes emotion, while personal love has great emotional function. 5) Impersonal love emphasizes the integrity of the subject, while personal love emphasizes the attractiveness of the object. You never reduce yourself to the norms and standards of those who attack, malign you. 6) Impersonal love excludes carrying a grudge. You do not retaliate or seek revenge if wronged. Impersonal love is taught in Rom 12:17- 21, *Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.* Impersonal love demands grace orientation and grace as the procedure and policy. Retaliation interferes with the justice of God punishing others, and lowers the believer to the level of his antagonist. The royal family honor code demands the high standards of grace orientation. 7) Impersonal love among believers includes respect for the imputed perfect righteousness residing in others. Since the perfect righteousness of God resides in every believer, impersonal love respects other believers on that basis. 8) Impersonal love is the relaxed mental attitude from the filling of the Holy Spirit rather than overt friendliness or gushy hypocrisy. Rom 5:5; Gal 5:22 both teach that the filling of the Holy Spirit produces impersonal love. 9) Under impersonal love the believer functions under his own standards rather than being influenced by flattery, attraction, attention, or reciprocation. 10) Not only does impersonal love exclude mental attitude sins and verbal sins, but demands toleration, respect for privacy and avoidance of distracting anyone from doctrine.

Pride is one of the things that can inhibit our spiritual life. Luk 14:8-11, *"When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, and he who invited you both shall come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted."*

Pride inhibits our spiritual life and relationship with others. As Solomon says in Pro 13:10, *Through presumption comes nothing but strife, But with those who receive counsel is wisdom.*

Pride is a terrible trait, manifesting itself in our insisting on recognition, wanting to be noticed, longing for prominence, acting smart when we're consulted or advised. It displays itself when we resist authority or become angry and defensive when crossed or challenged; when we harbor grudges, nurse grievances, or wallow in self-pity. It's the drive behind our tendency for associating with the rich and famous rather than the little people who make up most of our world.

Humility means being led downward. It means being content when others are elevated above us, and letting others advance even at our own expense. It means being glad when someone else is preferred. It means accepting every humiliation, and looking upon every person who demeans us as a means of grace to humble us. God accepts such humbling as the proof that our whole heart desires it.

Joh 3:30 is the attitude every Christian should have, ***"He must increase, but I must decrease."*** In humbling yourself you are imitating and using the same means that TLJC used. You are

walking in His way and therefore in the truth, and you are in the right state to receive life and impart it to others.

The best means for this is walking in His way. He came down to the level of men by the Incarnation. 2CO 8:9, *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.* The beginning place for all of us, then, is to learn humility from TLJC: By coming to Him and asking for His help we'll become more like Him, and we'll find that rest of which He speaks- rest from all the ambitious striving that makes us so weary and familiar and worn out.

Compassion for others comes from being humbled and grows through our own suffering. In fact, personal pain is a prerequisite for consoling others.

Our wounds are not always scratches; sometimes they're deep, but God cares and cures. When earthly comforts fail us, He gives us that **eternal encouragement**. 2Th 2:15-17, *So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions or the doctrines which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.*

Pain moves us closer to God and we gain His perspective on our broken dreams; we get His comfort; *"by his wounds we are healed,"* (Isa 53:5). We understand, and people are helped by our understanding and identification with what they are going through. Thus, by our wounds others are healed. His caring produces in us a caring for others. His compassion rubs off on us; His love becomes ours. Our love through His love grows mighty, 1Jo 4:19, ***We love, because He first loved us.***