

'Trees of Life' Lent Course: Week 1 - Thursday

22nd February 2024

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Preacher: Matt Wallace

[0 : 00] Evening everybody, good evening. How are we doing? Good to see you. Welcome to Thursday night. There's a lot of us here. This is good, this is good. So welcome to our Lent course. Lent being a time of year which kind of lends itself really to a chance to reflect on our life and our faith in the weeks running up to Easter.

And it's a mix of teaching, mix of discussion and sharing, chance to pray, might have a song or two some weeks as well. But all very relaxed and hopefully a little bit involved and interactive with each other as well.

So over these next five weeks we're going to be exploring a course that we're calling Trees of Life. We've taken various trees mentioned in the Bible as a way of reflecting on and hopefully growing in our faith.

And yet as we begin, as we kick off, it's good to address perhaps the elephant or at least the trunk in the room by asking of all things, why are we looking at trees? Why trees in particular?

So to help us answer that question, what I'd like us to do is just take a minute or two with who you're sitting with and try to bring to mind any occasion in the Bible when a tree, when leaves, when wood, when fruit is mentioned.

[1 : 26] Try to recall any time anything to do with trees is spoken about. So Old Testament, New Testament, could be stories, parables, imagery, buildings. Feel free to jot them down if you want to as a little group.

And we'll see how many we can come up with and we'll get them down here. So trees and all things related. See how you get on, little brainstorm. All right, so well done, well done.

It's good to see so many thinking faces. So got my Sharpie, trusty flip chart here. Do you want to just shout out, table at a time, two or three things that you've got.

What have you got? Olive trees. Olive trees. Yep, well done. Olives and trees. Yep, well done. What else we got? Yep, Zacchaeus with the sycamore fig tree, wasn't it?

Excuse my dodgy writing. You'll feel Marie's pain now when she has to read my notes that I give to her. What else we got? Palm trees. Yep. Palm sundae and all that.

[2 : 28] Yep. Cedars of Lebanon. Look at this. This is specialist knowledge here. Yep. Cedars of Lebanon. They were what was used to build a temple. Divine and the branches.

The vine and the branches. Well done. Tree of life. Excellence. Tree of life and knowledge of good and evil.

Noah's Ark. Do you know what kind of wood that was, Joan? Go for wood. Yeah, well done. Well done. We have no idea what go for wood is, but that seems to be the closest.

Go for this, go for that, that kind of thing. Mustard. Yeah, mustard seed and tree and all that. Get tree wise men. Round of applause for Anne there.

The tree wise men. Oaks of Mamre. Was that Abraham, I think? Was that? Yep. Burning bush. Yep. Did I hear fig trees as well, someone said?

[3 : 34] The cross. Well done. Yes. Elijah's wood pile. Elijah's wood pile. Lovely. Lovely. Okay. So, trees by rivers.

Yep. Fruits of the spirit. Myrtle. Liking it. Liking it. There was a disciple under a tree. Nathaniel, I think.

What kind of tree was he under? Fig tree. Fig tree. Excellent. Well done. Plank in your eye. This is good. Yep. Planks. Eric Sykes and Tommy Cooper and all that.

Yep. Jesus being the vine and pruning. And I'm nearly out of room, so two more. Two more. Crown of thorns. Crown of thorns. Excellent. Did someone say cypress tree as well?

Well done. Good stuff. Yeah. You got most of the ones that I'd got as well. Well done. Well done. You got Jesse's stump as well. We'll talk about that another week. Maybe it sounds painful, doesn't it? But we'll get on to that.

[4 : 35] I think you cracked it with all them. Brilliant. Brilliant. So, as this will illustrate, and as we'll find out, there are actually over 1,000 mentions in the Bible of trees, branches, wood, leaves, fruit, and so on, which means that if the average Bible has, what, 1,300 pages or so, on every page, every double page that you turn over, it will include something to do with trees.

Trees are mentioned in Genesis chapter 1. They're mentioned in Revelation chapter 22 from the first page of the Bible to the last page of the Bible.

And apart from God and apart from humans, trees are the most frequently mentioned living thing in the Bible.

Much more, perhaps surprisingly, than animals or creatures. So, you get God, humans, and trees as living things mentioned in that order. Now, with the Old Testament, first half of the Bible, that was originally written in Hebrew.

And the interesting thing, I think, is that the Hebrew word that we translate as tree is this word, pronounced ets. Eights. You want to do a bit of Hebrew?

[5 : 53] One, two, three. Eights. Excellent. Excellent. Now, why is that little word interesting? Well, in Hebrew, this word, ets, it's very flexible. So, it can refer to a tree or a bush or a vine, but it can also refer to wood or timber or planks.

So, when you cut down a tree, ets, you still have ets, wood. Same kind of word. Okay. So, yes, in the Hebrew language, you've got many different words with different types or species of trees.

But in Hebrew, there's actually very little differentiation between a living tree and dead wood, between a tree, a bush, and a vine.

They can all be rooted in this word, ets. Now, why is that idea important, perhaps, as we kick off? Well, given that trees and tree-related stuff, given that ets-related stuff is pretty much on every page of the Bible, what we see as we take the Bible story as a whole is that various tree-related themes and patterns and connections emerge.

So, trees, wood, leaves, fruit, the writers of the Bible, and through that, God, I'd say, wants us to make connections between these tree elements in order to better understand the bigger picture of our life and our faith.

[7 : 25] And that's why, over these next few weeks, we're going to be focusing on various different trees and tree-related stuff in order to hopefully allow those connections to deepen not just our knowledge, but our faith and our trust in God as well.

So, does that sound all right? Mm-hmm. Tremendous. Excellent. All right. So, first up. I have. That's my only one for the night.

Yeah. So, let's start at the beginning, which is a very good place to start. And that means in Genesis, chapter 1, we get the first mention of trees.

Now, they're mentioned as part of the creation poem. Indeed, this is what God did on the third day of that creation story. We're told this.

Then God said, let the land produce vegetation, seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.

[8 : 28] So, with trees in mind in particular, when you hear that being read, when you read that, what sticks out to you? What's your first kind of impression?

What's the first thing that says, ah, okay. Seeds. Spot. Excellent. Now, seeds and the bearing of fruit with seed in it.

Let's think about the bearing of the fruit in particular, because the fruit has the seeds in it, and the seeds are the trees and the plants of the next generation coming.

That's on day three of this creation poem. But by way of comparison with this day three, let's look at what happens on day six, because we're told this.

So, God created humankind in his own image, blessed them, and said to them, be fruitful and increase in number.

[9 : 25] So, again, what do you notice here? What sticks out to you here, perhaps? Fruitful. Excellent. Yeah. Be fruitful. Again, it's this idea of bear fruit, increasing number, produce seed, offspring, the next generation.

It's as if, it seems, in Genesis chapter one, straight away, we're meant to put together trees bearing fruit, bearing seeds, and so on, and humans bearing fruit, bearing seeds.

We're meant to see a creative connection between trees and humans from the word go. The same language is used of each of them. Now, by way of underlining this, though, let's see how the second creation story in Genesis, because there are two creation stories in Genesis.

This time from chapter two. Let's see how this one explains things. So, in this one, we read this. Now, no shrub had yet appeared on the earth, and no plant had yet sprung up.

But the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

[10 : 44] So, this second creation story. Whereas trees come first in the first creation story in Genesis chapter one, in this second story from Genesis chapter two, it seems there were no trees before God makes a human.

A difference, I guess, which kind of implies that we're to read these creation stories as stories, not as scientific explanations for how the world began. Was it trees first?

Was it humans first? Was it humans first? Was it trees first? That's not the point, it seems, in these stories. Rather, with this story mode in mind, in this passage here, how do we read that the man was made?

How is the man formed? Yeah, by God. And how does he do it? From the dust, yeah, out of the ground. So, in the next verse though, after this man has been formed out of the ground, trees do appear.

And this is what we read. Now, the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden. And there, he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground.

[11 : 58] Trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. And so, where did these trees appear from? Ground, yeah. Same place, out of the ground.

Same place that the man is made from. So, again, in both of these creation stories, it seems we're meant to associate humans and trees. Sharing a common origin, if you like, both being brought out the ground by God.

And perhaps, as we'll see over the coming weeks, both sharing a common destiny as well. But what's interesting, I think, is that this very early kind of instinctive association of humans and trees in Genesis, well, that's been increasingly backed up as we learn more about our life in general and how it's sustained.

For example, I know it's getting late on a Thursday night. I don't want to go school science-y lessons on us. But if you remember, back in the day, perhaps, from school biology lessons, this word photosynthesis, the way in which trees take in carbon dioxide and water and they use the energy of the sun to convert this into chemical compounds, such as sugars that feed the tree.

Now, Genesis, as we read, told us that the trees were good for food, which is a bit of an understatement because pretty much every species ultimately depends on the energy, the calories that trees and plants produce, either eating directly from them or feeding on the animals that do, from the tiniest of plants to the biggest of trees.

[13 : 41] But as we know, as a by-product of all this photosynthesis stuff, we also know that oxygen is released by the tree. Oxygen, on which life, especially us as humans, depend.

And then we breathe out more carbon dioxide, which the trees process. And so this relationship, this cycle of life between us and trees continues. But no trees, no food, no oxygen, no life.

We are totally connected to trees for our very existence. What's more, even the tubes of our lungs, which take in oxygen that the trees produce, have a similar structure to the branches of the trees, which take in carbon dioxide.

This is a sort of x-ray scan of the human lung. Looks even better upside down. Now, if I hadn't told you what that was, you'd think that was a negative image of trees, wouldn't you?

But no, they're lungs. That's the sort of branches of our lungs. So, just as Genesis says, we as humans are intrinsically connected to, and even we could say like trees.

[14 : 57] Well, that's interesting because us humans being like trees, that's a theme which is picked up not just in Genesis, but elsewhere in the Bible.

So, another question for us. Where else in the Bible, other than Genesis, do we see humans being likened to trees?

Dave, what have we got? The miracle the Jews performed to the blind man, where he seems to have two goats, that didn't fit in the miracle. He saw men's trees walking.

He did indeed. Excellent. You might have read my script here. This is very good. This is very good. Yeah, the man says, Jesus heals him in two parts. He says, I see people like trees walking initially, sort of a blurry kind of eye.

And we think this kind of miracle is perhaps Jesus' way of healing him in a kind of progressive, revealing kind of way. Sometimes we get half a picture of what God's doing. He does a bit more, and then we can see more clearly.

[15 : 56] But yeah, I see people like trees walking. There might be something in that as we go through as well. Where else, where else do we see humans being likened to trees?

Yeah, spot on. Yep, I'm the vine, you are the branches, says Jesus. And we'll come on to that in the weeks to come. But yep, nice, Barbara. Thank you. Any other thoughts on how humans get likened to trees elsewhere in the Bible?

I've got a couple here. So this is from Psalm 92. It says, The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree. They shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

Palm tree, as some of us mentioned, we associate it perhaps most closely with Palm Sunday. But flourishing like a palm tree, that was the idea. Palm tree was a sign of freedom that people would wave. And perhaps that's what the righteous shall flourish like.

We're free to be ourselves under God. And then they shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Cedars of Lebanon. I think Jan mentioned it. Didn't you, Jan? Yeah, yeah. They were famous for being incredibly tall trees like that one there.

[17 : 01] And they were used for the building of the temple. Very strong trees. They shall grow as strong as a cedar in Lebanon. And that's one way in which humans are compared to trees.

But in other ways, Ganesh from Jeremiah says this, But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream.

Doesn't fear when heat comes. Its leaves are always green. Has no worries. Australian termed it. Has no worries in a year of drought. And never fails to bear fruit.

And that verse from Jeremiah is itself an echo of perhaps a slightly more famous bit from Psalm chapter 1. Starts at the very beginning of all the Psalms. Blessed is the one whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on his law day and night.

That person is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever they do prospers.

[18 : 07] That person. The one who delights in the law. The teaching of the Lord. That person is like a tree planted by God. And it's a fruitful tree. It's a fruit tree. But a tree if we notice.

This bit here. It yields its fruit it says. In season. And that to me is an interesting idea that suggests that there's a time of year even a time of life when we'll be really fruitful when there's a sort of abundant crop of productivity and creativity and sort of inspired stuff in our lives.

But it also implies that at other times in our lives we won't be fruitful. Not so fruitful at least. Our leaves don't wither. You know. We're still alive and well.

We're still doing okay. We're still hopefully delighting and meditating on God's ways. But according to this psalm which kicks off the whole of the psalms our fruitfulness would seem to be seasonal.

Now with that idea of seasonal fruitfulness in mind some questions for us to consider around our tables. So if we think of fruitfulness as how productive and creative and making a difference perhaps we feel you can share this in as much personal detail or surface stuff as you feel comfortable.

[19 : 33] But when have you felt most fruitful in your life so far? Equally. When have you felt least fruitful? Looking back.

What do you put these times down to? How do you account for your fruitfulness or lack of it in certain times? But then the fourth question. Try and get down to this one if you can.

What positives might there be to a season of what we might call dormancy or fruitlessness? That kind of winter in a fruit season.

What positives might there be to a time when we don't seem to be bearing fruit? I've attacked all those questions. We'll take a bit of time with this because I appreciate they might unpack some stuff we want to share and then maybe we'll get some feedback on that.

But if you want to grab a drink, do feel free. But if you can tackle these questions around your tables and then we'll get back in sort of a quarter of an hour, 20 minutes or something, that'll be great. Thanks very much everyone.

[20 : 35] Thank you. So we're recording the audio of this tonight and it'll go out on YouTube and on the church website as services do. Be good to get a little bit of feedback from folks if you wish.

If you don't want your particular contribution to go online, that's more than fine. Perhaps just let me know and I can edit it out or put a chipmunk voice on yours or something to make you sound not like yourself.

Your choice. But if you want to share, it'd be really nice because I know obviously a lot of us are in groups of folks who we might be familiar with. It'd be nice if everyone else can hear a bit of our stories perhaps as well just for a few minutes.

So when have you felt most fruitful in your life so far and what might you put that fruitfulness at the time down to? Anyone want to be brave and share a fruitful time of your life?

Marg's going to get fruity for a start. Thank you. The most fruitful time for me was school, working at King Eddies in Litchfield. I absolutely loved my time there.

[21 : 36] We had a group of people, including Helen, who we used to pray before school. The kids knew who to come to if they wanted to come and have half an hour and sit beside me.

I'd got a cross on my desk that they used to hold from time to time. We were good witnesses. We did good things in that school, the group of people that were there with Helen and Ruth Ball.

There were other Christians there too. Paul Cotton was one of them. We just got together when we felt school needed prayer. We got together and prayed and it made a difference.

It did make a difference. I cried when I left. I miss it now. I'm not so fruitful because I can't see all these kids. The least fruitful is that when there has been stuff going on in my life where there's no room for him.

When there's chuntering going on and all that kind of stuff. Years ago, Rob White said, you can't have all this stuff going on in your life, in your heart, because there's not room for him.

[22 : 44] I came home and apologised to lots of people and now I'll make sure I've got room for him in my life. It's nice to share with you guys how much I love him. Well done, well done.

Thanks, Mark. Thank you. So, just to, if I've heard you correctly then, so the least fruitful times are when God gets squeezed out by other stuff. And the most fruitful, it seems, there's various factors.

It's partly having other Jesus people to do life with and to pray with, but it's also having the opportunity being part of a community where you can encounter people who you can serve and give to as well.

Good witnesses as well. So, yeah, iron sharpens iron kind of idea of you all being in it together. Good stuff. Thanks, Mark. What have we got, Barbara-Ann? My most fruitful time was, I was a hospital porter at Stafford.

Nobody likes being in hospital or going. And I used to have the ability to make people laugh. You know, the consultants used to say, God, we can hear you, but we can see you.

[23 : 56] So, that was really uplifting. And when I helped children learning to read at a school, again, the sense of achievement and fulfilment on both them counts so different, one with children and one with the adults.

And I think the worst time is life. Sometimes life comes in and throws you on a hell of a curveball. But I often say, the Lord will only put so much on us and he'll take the rest.

Thanks, Barbara. Thank you. Thank you. So, yeah, if we put it down. So, using your gifts. Gift of the gab.

Gift of humour. You are a funny lady. This is good. This is good. Yeah. But also, it's not just what you say. It's what you listen, isn't it? As well, what the kids are reading as well. So, it's using both. So, yeah, God using your personality, your gifts for fruitfulness.

Yeah. Brilliant. Fantastic. Thanks, Barbara. All right. Someone else. Whenever you sort of felt most fruitful, you can go on to Least Fruitful as well.

[25 : 07] And what do you put that down to at the time? Okay. In terms of being fruitful, I mean, there's been lots of times, but I did just say one of the, if I was asked what was one of the best things I've done in my life, obviously it's Alicia.

I think most people will agree if they're a parent. But we were also just saying that Soul Survivor and having that opportunity the first year to take 25 of them, I think. And to see young people, you know, I know about my faith, but to see young people are just buzzing, absolutely buzzing.

And there's like 500 of them in a room that are just jumping to praise and worship. It just, it gives you goosebumps. It really does. So to be part of that was incredible.

So again, it's that, what I'm hearing is, again, it's that sense of community that Margo's alluding to, of being together, being part of a, if you want to talk about fruitfulness, being part of an orchard rather than a single fruit tree, I guess.

It's that kind of idea, isn't it, of being together. Yeah. Good stuff. All right. Thank you. Someone else. We've got Barbara. We were talking about what times might we be less fruitful.

[26 : 15] And we started talking about the COVID time when we were all staying on our own or with our family at home. And there's a different fruitfulness we came across in that way, which is when the fruits of the Spirit grow in yourself, for yourself.

So then we concluded that sometimes we do need the quietness, which is not necessarily a dormancy. But it leads to contemplation, more prayer, maybe healing and waiting for God and the Spirit comes.

And that can also be a time of fruitfulness. Yeah. COVID was a strange time, wasn't it? Different people felt different things in terms of how their faith grew or was challenged.

Without the ability to have that community meeting together in person, a lot of us, I know, found out struggle. But equally, a lot of us found new depths, I suppose, with God in that time.

And I guess that's what Barbara is alluding to. I know for me, COVID was probably the time I felt most fruitful in my life. Because of what we were able to do as a church, the practical sort of difference of getting food to people and meeting the sort of front-facing needs of folks.

[27 : 31] That was, for me, that was the quantifiable, qualifiable, actually hands-on stuff. And almost when COVID stopped and we got back together, I enjoyed being together. But that buzz of everyday interaction with people and meeting immediate needs, that frizzled a little bit for me.

And it's been a while to sort of get back up again post-COVID. But I was lucky. I was a key worker in COVID. I could get out and about and see people. I wasn't trapped at home like others would have felt.

But yeah, COVID is an interesting time. And we'll come on to that idea of fruitfulness in the inner side of things in a moment a bit as well. All right. Someone else. Here we go.

Who had the hand up? Sean. Great. Our group, we were more general rather than specific. And just picking up on what you said about, for you, that was the thing.

We were thinking about if you're a round peg and a round hole, you're being fruitful. And that's you are fulfilled then. So fruitfulness and fulfillment are quite linked.

[28 : 36] And we've got another people and tree for you. So Isaiah 55, trees of the hills. She'll clap in the hands. We just thought we'd throw that in. Well done. Well done. Yeah. So round pegs, round hole.

We might say right fruit, right tree. Banana trees don't go oranges and that kind of stuff. So it's being in the right place at the right time in the right way that God equips us for. Yeah.

Thank you. Someone else? Anyone else want to share what you put that down to, Phil? It's been good to hear in our group that a few people have said that they felt the most fruitful since they've been coming to this church.

And that's really encouraging. Their faith was there before they came to this church. But coming here enabled them to be fruitful. And that's been the story of our life as well.

We've been kept within the branches. We've been able to be in this environment of worship and praise and people that we meet here every week.

[29 : 35] And it's kept us in a good place, I think. And it's good to hear that the people in our group have said that that's where they've been the most fruitful since they've been attending this church.

So I think that's good. Can I just finish that? I wasn't going to say anything, but I will. Yeah. I think, looking back at fruitful times, I think for us in our younger years, when we first encountered the Holy Spirit, we were on fire for God.

We couldn't stop. We were bouncing off the walls. We were speaking to people. We were ministering to people. It was something that was like having an injection in our lives.

And, you know, it was new then. And without the Holy Spirit, I think it's very difficult to be fruitful. I think that we all need that spirit, don't we, to do the work that God has already prepared for us to do.

So when we're doing it, that's when we feel fruitful. But I think without the Holy Spirit in our lives, I think it's hard work. And it's not really his work. Thank you.

[30 : 48] Thank you. Yeah. I mean, it's the fruit of the Spirit, isn't it? It's not necessarily our fruit, even though we have a personal side to it. Thank you. Yeah. And in context, it's key, it seems, for feeling in the right community and feeling fruitful in the right place.

Yeah. Thank you. All right. Question four, then. What positives, and Barbara began to touch on this, what positives might there be to a season of dormancy or apparent fruitlessness?

What have you sort of discussed about this? What have you found? The positives of not necessarily exhibiting or being able to identify fruitfulness in your life.

Yeah. Cheers, Kim. I think one of the things I thought about this was actually dormancy isn't death. For a seed, a tree seed, it's a time where it gains its energy.

It just stops and gains its energy to then blossom out when the season is right. And sometimes you might feel fruitless in a particular time.

[31 : 55] But in retrospect, you look back on that time and you think, no, actually, I was quite fruitful there. I just didn't realise it at the time. And I was talking about there's been two times in my Christian life that I've been through a desert experience where I felt very much on my own.

No God, nobody's speaking to me, you know, I can't hear God, I can't feel his presence, I can't, whatever. And it's only when I've looked back and thought that's probably when God was the closest to me that he's ever been, or that I felt that he's ever been, but I didn't feel him at the time.

And the things that I learned from that period of dormancy, or what was perceived fruitlessness at the time, was probably quite a fruitful time, certainly in my spiritual growth.

Thank you. I like that. Dormancy is not death. Yeah, it's good. And you notice all the daffodils beginning to come up. You know, you deadhead the daffodils, but you've got to leave the leaves on, haven't you, to feed the bulbs so that they're stronger and bigger next year.

It might not be the glamorous flower, but the green stuff is still doing all the photosynthesis and helping that bulb to get stronger for the next season when it will flower again.

[33 : 07] Dave. I think if you look at the season of the fruit, the dormancy for me is a time of contemplation and a time of learning, because then you grow into the fruitful season.

Yeah, you've got to have something to give out, haven't you, if you're going to be supplied yourself. Thanks, Dave. Cheers, Trish. We felt that sometimes a season of dormancy is enforced on you because of circumstances or illness or things going on in life that you can't cope with anything else.

You can't do anything else. You just have to literally get through every day. And although you need God to help you do that, you don't feel as though you can give anything out to anybody else.

But that's, at the end of that, it's a bit like Lisa talked about a waterfall, I suppose, where the water gathers at the top of the waterfall.

And then, at some point, it bursts over the waterfall and it's fruitful and it's active and everything. But there is a time when it's just gathering and it's slow and you can't do anything else but just gather yourself together.

[34 : 24] And that's important too. Thank you. Thanks, Trish. Thanks, Lisa. Yeah. There's a kindness, it seems, to God, not whip cracking and driving us all the time. If you're feeling fatigued, you're feeling fatigued.

And Jesus rested. Jesus fell asleep in a storm. He must have been knackered. So there's a sense of dormancy for Jesus at times as well. Any other thoughts on the positivity that might come with times of dormancy or power of fruitlessness?

Sorry. Yes, Ron. We were talking about the fact that sometimes when you go through a period of dormancy yourself, it leaves an opportunity for other people to, for their fruit to flourish.

So you step back and other people come forward. It's like the canopy of trees, isn't it, where there's a gap. The leaves will follow through. Yeah. Thanks, Ron. Good stuff. All right.

Thanks very much, everyone. Thank you. And we'll try and have decent times of sort of sharing and discussion each week as we go through. But final few thoughts, really, for this evening.

[35 : 31] If we return to that Genesis stuff about creation and thinking about humans and trees and fruit in particular, we're going to take a look again at some of Genesis chapter 2 with a little video version of the story.

So let's have a look at this. Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden, and there he put the man he had formed.

The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground, trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And the Lord God commanded the man, you are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

For when you eat from it, you will certainly die. The Lord God said, It is not good for the man to be alone.

[36 : 53] I will make a helper suitable for him. Now the snake was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made.

He said to the woman, Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden? You will not certainly die, the snake said to the woman. For God knows that when you eat from it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some. And ate it.

She also gave some to her husband who was with her. And he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked.

So they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the Lord God said to the woman, What is this you have done?

[38 : 45] The woman said, The snake deceived me, and I ate. And the Lord God said, The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil.

He must not be allowed to reach out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat and live forever. So the Lord God banished him from the garden of Eden, to work the ground from which he had been taken.

See, these two trees, the man and the woman, are told by God about. Trees known as the tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And they're invited to eat from all the trees in the garden, including the tree of life, but told not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

What's this about, as a story? But a tree of life, it seems, represents God, and the life which God brings.

[39 : 51] It's a tree which sustains life. We might say eternal life, even. And so just as the humans in the Bible are likened to trees, so here it seems God is also represented by a tree, the tree of life, situated at the center of the garden.

So effectively, it seems, God's way of saying, feed off me, you know, eat my fruit, the fruit, we might say, of God's spirit. What's more, to go back to the idea of oxygen and breath, it's interesting, it's God, the tree of life, that gives life, life which God gives to Adam by breathing oxygen into his lungs.

But then next to this tree of life, we're told, is another tree, this tree of the knowledge of good and evil, more of a mouthful of a name, except this is the tree which God tells the humans not to eat from.

Why? Well, because, as the name suggests, this is a tree not about life, but about being able to decide what's right and what's wrong.

You know, in other words, eating from that tree will mean that these two humans don't trust God for life. They instead trust their own wisdom, deciding for themselves how to live, thinking that they know better than God.

[41 : 18] And that self-trust, that leads not to life, but to destruction. And so Adam and Eve, as they come to be known in the story, it's interesting.

Name Adam means human, Eve means life, because it seems they're representative of human life on earth. Well, these two represent also, though, a choice, a choice that all of us of humans have to make.

You know, do we live life God's way, trust in God's wisdom, and eat from God's tree of life? Or do we do things our way, trust in our own wisdom, and eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

This, this choice, we might say this test, is actually a theme which will run all through the Bible story of God's relationship with humans.

It's a choice, which as we'll see over the coming weeks, is also continually connected to and represented by trees.

[42 : 27] So we'll leave it there for tonight with that idea of a choice, being a theme in the tree human story, which will go forward. But just to summarize really what we've been looking at, tonight.

So, we saw initially, trees, bushes, wood, and fruit, they're found all through the Bible. Humans and trees are deeply connected.

In the Bible, humans are like trees, called to bear good fruit in season. But God is also like a tree, the ultimate tree, offering us life and fruit, which sustains us.

And so, God gives us a choice between the fruit he offers us and the fruit we take. You know, a choice between God's ways or our own ways.

And this choice, this test, especially in the context of trees, is a theme, as I say, which we'll see continues all the way through the Bible and the human experiences with God, more of which we'll pick up next week.

[43 : 34] so, we'll press pause on thinking about trees and all such stuff tonight, and we'll pick up the story next week. and we'll see you next week.

So, let's go. Let's go. Let's go. Let's go.