

Connections

April 2024

Wild by Carol Edwards

Devotion inspired by Sheri's Embrace Life Family Tree drawing, March 2024

The Embrace Life Group has grown into a beautiful community. Most of the members are from outside our church family and have been loved into the fold. To encourage this new family and celebrate what God has done, Sheri created this beautiful Family Tree drawing, each person a part of the tree. As I reflected on this picture, I am in awe of how God has put us all together and what it is that sustains us. What connects us and why it's so important.

The Bible uses lots of objects to describe our character as humans. We are like sheep, soil, clay, dust, flowers, grass, and branches. Not just any branches, but like olive branches. Doing a survey of olive branches and trees in the Bible, you can find beautiful symbolism using the olive tree and how we're like branches.

In the Old Testament, God uses the olive tree as a symbol for the nation of Israel. That He planted the olive tree and called it a "thriving olive tree with fruit beautiful in form" (Jeremiah 11:16).

But the Israelites did not all have faith in God and some worshipped other gods, breaking the terms God had set for them. So, those who left God, God pruned them, broke them off the main tree. Those branches had no faith in God. "he will set it on fire and its branches will be broken," Jeremiah 11:17.

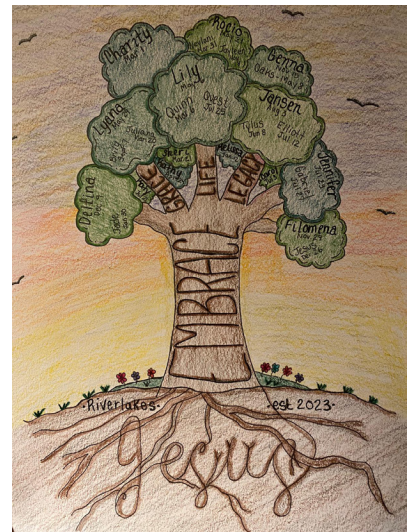
This olive tree, Israel, had a rough go of it, just like we do. I currently have an olive tree that struggles, some of the branches are bare, while other branches are full of green leaves. This tree requires pruning, a breaking off, and needs a reliable water source. Similarly, God's struggling olive tree of a nation, Israel, me, Embrace Life, needed nourishing roots that could tap into an everlasting source of life.

Jesus came and He became that source of life to anyone who would choose to graft into His vine or tree. Romans 11 talks about Christians being grafted into an olive tree to share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, the root supports you.

The Bible says we were like wild olive branches growing out in the world and when we say yes to Jesus, we are grafted into his tree, a cultivated olive tree, one that the Lord planted. A wild branch, must be cut off from the nourishment of the wild tree and be grafted into the tree that is nourished by God. As long as you continue in faith, you'll remain and grow. This tree has Jesus at the root. If the root is holy, so are the branches (Romans 11:16).

When we are grafted in, we are connected. Peter says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people, once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

Once you are grafted in, you become part of the whole life cycle of the tree, soaking up sunshine, producing clean oxygen, making flowers, fruit, but it all needs Jesus to be the root system.



Our job is to TRUST Jesus! Jeremiah 17:8-7, "but blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes, its leaves are always green, it has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

Our other job is to love! The amount of God's love that we allow to flow through our hearts determines the health and productivity of our life. Grafting into the Lord's tree allows us to soak up His goodness, allowing holy water to flow through us, producing good fruit. There is plenty of room in this tree for many wild shoots to graft in.

Ephesians 3:17-18, "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love may have power, together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."

We are encouraged to stay grafted into the tree, for God's sustaining sap, will produce beautiful green leaves, fragrant flowers, and fruit.



Believe it or not, summer is just around the corner!

Grab a girlfriend and attend one of our Women's Summer Bible Studies -- it's a great way to connect! Choose from one of the topical studies of six to eight weeks length. Connect with other women you don't know while immersing yourself in a topic of your personal interest! Be looking on our website, as well as in the May and June *Connections* for more info on start dates, times, and how to sign up.

Counseling Available

 Need Counseling? People Encouraging People is a ministry of trained Biblical Lay Pastoral Counselors to hurting people. PEP counselors draw upon the comfort they have received from God to help others move closer to Jesus in the midst of their problems. When life challenges get tough, are you strong enough to ask for help? Referrals to Christian professional counselors are available as well. Don't let your spiritual and emotional health be threatened. Call 589-9733 x222 for assistance, appointments or referrals.

***Oh sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth!
Sing to the Lord, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples!
For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
he is to be feared above all gods.***

Psalms 96:1-4