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Presentation Transcript
Why the Tree?
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The title of this presentation is *Why the Tree?*

Good afternoon, everyone. And hello to all those who are watching in on the Web.

Sometimes people look at our LifeResource Ministries stationery or the Home Page on our Website and they ask us, “Why the Tree?” Well, this tree that is on our Website and our stationery is not just any ordinary tree, let me tell you. It’s a very *special* tree. In fact, it’s a famous tree. It is a tree that has been studied for thousands of years and yet no one has completely understood all about this tree. In this tree there is a lesson for all of humanity – for all the people that have ever lived, for all the people that are living now, and for all the people that are going to live after us – and still no one has understood it. But more to the point, this tree reminds Elaine and me of what we have to do to be successful in our effort to cause change in the church for the church’s children.

Anybody want to take a guess as to which tree it is? It can be found in Psalms 1. It is the introduction to the book of Psalms – the book in the Bible that is about our relationship with God. So the first thing the book of Psalms talks about it is this tree. Let’s read it.

Psa. 1:1 – *Blessed is the man – or the woman – who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of mockers, but his delight is in the law of God, and on His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Not so for the wicked. They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*

Let’s kind of break that down a little bit – look a little more closely at this tree. It tells us, first of all, that a person who studies the way of God and follows it is like a tree planted by a stream. It doesn’t matter whether it rains or not, this tree is supplied with an unseen source of water. It can withstand drought. Its roots grow deep; branches grow broad. It yields a bountiful harvest no matter whether the rain falls or not. It’s impervious to the vagaries of the weather.

What else does this psalm tell us? Well, it tells us that the person who is in this favorable situation is in it because he *wants* to follow God. It says, “He *delights* in it.” When I think of somebody delighting in something, I think of these two friends that I have, who both have a Suzuki Samarais that they have turned into rock crawlers. They spend their weekends and evenings together in the garage, working on their little trucks. They help each other. They have, over the last four or five years, slowly accumulated a small machine shop. They can, pretty much, build anything. One of them has thirty-seven inch tires on this little tiny truck. Of course, once you put big tires like that on a vehicle, it stresses everything in the drive train. So he broke axles. So he went out and put some Toyota truck axles on it. They are always thinking about how they can make their trucks better. They talk about it all the time. They get all excited about it. They’ve come up with some pretty amazing things. They just *delight* in those little trucks. And they *delight* in each other’s company. They have a lot of fun. I know when I am around them, I end up laughing a lot, because they are so funny. And it doesn’t help any that their names are Heath and Keith, right? I mean, they are just hilarious. Part of the fun is watching them be so excited about what they’re doing. Well, the person who wants to be like this strong and productive tree that isn’t bothered by the weather, is somebody who *delights* in God’s way the way my two friends delight in their little trucks. They are totally into it. That’s one of the things that we have to do if we want to be like the tree. That’s what it says, anyway.

What else does it say? Well, it says that the righteous person *meditates* on the law of God day and night – always thinking about how the law of God works, always thinking about how to apply it – how to apply it in *every* situation – trying to learn all the nuances of it. The fact that we have to meditate on it day and night tells us that this is not an easy thing to do – that it is complicated, that there are a lot of subtleties involved in it. And if a person is that excited about following God’s way, then they become connected to God and they become connected to the natural way of things in the world. When that happens, then everything that a person does prospers.

I was watching television one day, and there was a man being interviewed – and I don’t really remember the show or the guy’s name or anything – but I kind of perked up my ears when he mentioned that he read a chapter of the book of Proverbs every day for two years. There are thirty-one chapters in Proverbs, so he read the book of Proverbs twenty-four times in two years. He read it once a month. He said that the result of that kind of delighting in God’s word and that kind of day-and-night, constant, two-year meditation resulted in him becoming wealthy. He said, “I just started to *do* what it said.” Now, that’s easier said than done, because there are a lot of things that you don’t get out of the book of Proverbs if you just read it once, or once every ten years, or once every five years. But when you read it twenty-four times in two years, you start to understand it, I guess. So he just did that and he did what it said. So he meditated over and over again, and very deeply, on what that tiny portion of the Bible meant, got in line with the principles that are there, and wound up wealthy out of it. I don’t think that is why he started to read it, but that’s what happened.

Another thing to think about here is that it says, “The wicked are not like that.” Those who have no interest at all in being like God – those who *mock* God, those who are cruel

and evil – they are *not* like a tree planted by water. They are like grass – totally dependent on the weather and, by nature, short-lived. Here today, gone tomorrow. Dry up in the fall and blow away in the wind. That is what is going to happen to people that are not deep rooted in the way of God.

Now, most of us, I think, are not like either end of that spectrum. Most of the people that I know are not cruel and mean-minded and evil. And neither are they the kind of people that are going to read the book of Proverbs twenty-four times in two years. Most of us kind of fall somewhere in the middle. That’s why we have a variety of problems that we have and the variety of blessings that we have, too. So, what this is really all about – and you can go to the book of Proverbs and it talks about wisdom – and that’s what this tree is all about, too. It’s about the wisdom of God.

I want to tell you a story about a client that I had once. He was a young man who had a pretty decent job, was working on a college degree a few classes at a time – no pressure – had plans for the future, had a girlfriend, had a place to live, had his X-box, his real fast computer. He was a gamer. He had a pretty good life for himself – single guy. He told me one day that a woman was hired where he worked – probably about three years younger than he was – both were out of college – he was twenty-five when this happened. Well, within a few days, she was coming on to him in a very aggressive manner – as in sending him pictures of herself over the phone – (I’m going to use a polite word here) indiscreet photographs – telling him that she was in love with him, and she got way more specific from there. And I said, “So what did you do?” He said, “Well, I was thinking about it.” Here’s what he told me. He said, “I’m not the kind of guy that this happens to. I see women hanging around my boss all the time, because he’s big and buff and good-looking.” He said, “I’m not like that. I usually have to go after the girls that I like. They usually don’t come after me.” I said, “Well, boy, I bet that was pretty flattering – pretty exciting for you – a beautiful, young girl making all these inappropriate suggestions and offers and all of that, telling you she loves you.” “Oh yeah,” he said, “that was awesome.” “So what did you do?” “Well,” he said, “before I could do anything, she told me she was in love with another guy in the department and she moved in with him – or at least she was for awhile. Now she’s living with somebody else that doesn’t work with her.” Of course, all of us here, who have read the book of Proverbs, have met that woman in the pages of it, right? We’ve heard all about her.

Let’s go over to Proverbs 7:4. Here it is talking about wisdom.

Prov. 7:4 – *Say to wisdom, “You are my sister,” and call understanding your kinsman. They will keep you from the adulteress, from the wayward wife and her seductive words. At the window of my house I looked out the lattice and I saw among the simple. I noticed among them a young man, a youth who lacked judgment. He was going down the street near her corner, walking along in the direction of her house as the twilight of the day was fading, as the dark of night set in. Out came a woman to meet him, dressed like a prostitute, with crafty intent. She is loud and defiant. Her feet never stay at home – now in the street, now in the squares, at every corner she lurks. She took hold of him and kissed him, and with a brazen face she said, “I have fellowship offerings at home. Today I fulfilled my vows, so I came out to meet you. I looked for you and I have found you.”* I

think that that is kind of the equivalent to what happened to my young client. “*I have covered my bed with colored linens from Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon.*” Now they just send bad pictures over the telephone. “*Come, let’s drink deep of love till morning. Let’s enjoy ourselves with love.*” “Let’s have recreational sex.” That’s what this is about.

All of us have met this young woman in the pages of the Bible. But my young client had not. He doesn’t study the Bible. He doesn’t know he should. He’s kind of at the mercy of whatever comes along, really, because he’s not been given a heads up, like all of us. Of course, we know that this isn’t just about women that are like that. All girls need to know about guys that are like that, too.

But let’s think about this girl for a minute. That’s what I said to my client after he had, pretty much, exhausted all of his explanatory material. I said, “She is different. She is not like your girlfriend, or like your mother, or like the other women that you work with, or like most women that you know. Or is she?” He said, “No!” I said, “Most women will not have indiscriminate sex with people they hardly know. They want a long-term relationship. They want commitment. They want to be proper. They want to guard their reputation. The vast majority of women we know would never, never, *never* send an indiscreet picture of themselves to *anybody* over the phone. Right?” “Yes!” So I said to him, “So it is safe to say, ‘There is something *seriously* wrong with this woman.’ Let’s see, she has trouble modulating her emotions. In a month, she’s made offers to you, and slept with two guys you know of. She engages in high-risk behavior. She is promiscuous. She is manipulative. She is *really* bad news! I’ve got a book over there on my shelf – *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. She’s in there.” See, it made more sense to him for me to tell him that she was in *that* book than in the book you and I read. Right? But you can find her in there under *Borderline Personality Disorder*, right? And I said, “I am so glad you didn’t have a chance to get involved with her, because *she is crazy!*” He loves movies, so I said, “Did you ever see the movie, *Fatal Attraction*?” Oh yes, he’d seen that.

Okay, so with my client, I was always trying to get him to tell me about his dreams. And he always said he *didn’t* dream – or couldn’t remember them. Well, the next week – the very next week – he came in, he sat down, and the first thing he said was, “I had a really bizarre dream last night and I just can’t figure it out.” I said, “Oh?” He said, “Yeah, I was driving down this big, wide, straight highway. It was bright and sunny. And for some reason, I took a turn off the road down this little lane. It gradually got more and more narrow and winding and overgrown, and finally...,” he said, “This is weird. I was in somebody’s garage in this car. And all their garage stuff was all around me. And I looked in the rear view mirror and I saw a woman’s face. It really startled me. And then I looked around outside the car. And when I looked back in the mirror again, she was gone! Is that weird, or what,” he said. I said, “What was it like when you woke up?” He said, “Huuuuuhhh...” That’s what he did. “Terrifying experience.” He said, “Yeah, what does that mean?” He said, “I just can’t figure it out.” I said, “Well, what is a road?” He said, “What do you mean?” “When you think of a road, what does it usually symbolize?” “Well, kind of like the road of life?” I said, “Okay. And what would going off the road mean?” “You mean, like a detour?” I said, “Yeah. Like taking a detour.” I said, “What

was it like in the garage?” He said, “Like I didn’t belong there. It wasn’t my place.” And then I said, “And then the woman disappeared.” And he said, “Yeah, that really creeped me out.” “So can you think of anything like that in your life?” Not a thing. I said, “You were recently going along the road of life, and it was wide and straight and well lit, and then you thought about taking a detour with you-know-who.” “Ah!” He got it! “And then she disappeared.” And he said, “That’s amazing!” And I said, “You woke up in a cold sweat, but you really got off easy on that one. You did. And the fact that you woke up terrified is a *really* good sign, because you had plenty to be frightened of – because you were ready to get in a world of hurt.” He said, “Yeah, I know.”

So he met the girl from Proverbs. I have to find a way to talk Bible to my clients without letting them know that is what I’m doing. The Bible is just *full* of common sense wisdom, isn’t it, about how to live your life. It’s like a lamp to show us the way. We *know* what kind of problems promiscuous sex can cause people, and so we, generally, try to stay away from that, but there are lots of people that have never met that girl in the pages of the Bible. So that’s one of the things that the tree is about.

Now, the other thing I want to talk about is that sometimes the truth that we find connected to the tree in the word of God is not really that obvious to us – that clear-cut. Sometimes it really is subtle. I’m going to tell you a couple of stories now to show you how subtle it can be.

I’ve told this story before. In fact, I told about it in the very first presentation I ever did for LifeResource Ministries – the story about a woman who caught her sixty-five-year-old husband in the attic wearing a formal gown, high heels and dress gloves up to his elbows. He was a cross-dresser. She had been married to him for forty years and she didn’t know that he had this problem. What causes a man to want to do that? How, exactly, does that happen? Well, she told him that if he was going to stay married to her, he was going to have to get that problem resolved. So he went into therapy, because he loved her and he wanted to stay with her. And as months in therapy wore on, he began to remember things about his past that he had pushed way back. He had a little sister when he was a child, and they used to like to play dress-up. One day she was wearing a formal gown and he was wearing a suit and tie and they were playing in their house. And like kids do, they got bored with their play and decided to go across the street and gather some walnuts. They had an orchard there. And they didn’t bother to change their clothes. They just went. After they gathered some nuts, she put them in the lap of her long gown and started to carry them back across the street. She didn’t look and she was hit by a car and killed – right in front of him. The way his parents managed the situation was to exclude him from the funeral. They thought it would be too hard on him. Within a week, everything that had been hers was removed from the house – all her clothes, all pictures – and they never spoke of her again – at least, in his presence. After he grew up, he found himself with a bizarre and unexplainable compulsion to wear women’s formal attire. Is that weird, or what? He was not allowed to mourn and to grieve normally. So he found this twisted, pathological way of memorializing his little sister by developing a compulsion to wear formal clothing, like she wore when she died.

Well, what does that have to do with the tree or the Bible? Well, the connection is very subtle. His parents broke God's laws in so many ways there. They were not attuned to their son's needs. And we can understand that. They were grieving, too. But he still didn't get what he needed from them. And that caused big problems for him later in his life. Solomon said that there is a time for everything under the sun. And one of the things he mentions is that there is a time to mourn. And when we don't do that, or when we don't allow our children to do that, then it comes back in mysterious, subtle ways and causes trouble later on. God tells us that if we don't obey Him, madness is one of the curses that comes from that. We think about, "Thou shalt not kill," "Thou shalt not commit adultery," but it goes so much deeper than that. All of those laws talk about how to take care of people. And that is what they...put themselves ahead of him. That's what happened. One of the hardest things for an adult to face is a child in pain – of any kind. They were in pain themselves, so they just shut down. And they shut him down, too.

Another story. A man and woman came to me once. They had a son who was bringing girls home to sleep with him. He seemed to know how to find that Proverbs 7 girl all the time. He also had a very serious medical condition that required careful attention. Sometimes he would forget to take care of it and his parents would come home and find him unconscious and near death on the floor in their house. Why was this happening? Both his parents were mystified and frustrated, but most of all, they were afraid. They were afraid that he was going to do something stupid and wind up dead. Well, as things began to unfold, it came out that his mother had suffered acute anxiety from the time that she was young. She had been treating it with medication, but never talked about her childhood or what had happened to her, and had come to discover that she was very much neglected as a child. So she tried to fill that void by having a child. She tried to care for her son in the way she had never been cared for. So her care was actually a reactionary kind of care. It wasn't about what the boy needed. It was about what *she* needed to feel good. She cared for her son the way that she had wanted to be cared for, but she way overdid it. So she smothered and overcontrolled him. Her husband couldn't get her to stop. So he knew what was wrong. The boy, even though he was eighteen-years-old, was still acting out the family dynamic, and causing incredible anxiety and anger in his parents, and doing all these outrageous things to draw attention to this problem he had. His mother resisted treatment. She refused to talk about her own issues or even admit that she was a part of the problem. We know why. It was because she was afraid. She didn't want to have to dig around in all that. But she was also, because of that, not willing to do what she needed to do to take care of her son. That stubborn, unwillingness to change is not a part of God's way, is it? Putting yourself, and protecting yourself, ahead of taking care of your children is *not* God's way.

Sometimes the things we do hurt others and they are completely unintentional, but because we're not able, or willing, to apply the Bible in our lives in a very subtle way – at a very deep level – we have problems. And we cause our children to have problems, too. So subtle causes are a problem – require not major changes, but subtle changes, and affect subtle solutions. You know, these parents really only need to make a very few, subtle changes and the whole thing will turn around. And it won't take long to do it either. All they need to do is gradually start letting go and turning responsibility over to him for himself. And if they would do that, he would come around quickly – not so much

doing things differently, in this case, but to simply *stop* doing some things that they are currently doing. And, quite often, that is the way it is.

Well, what does the tree have to do with our ministry – with LifeResource Ministries? Well, we know that the Church of God, along with all the churches in Western culture – we’re not really that different.... What was it that Paul said? “We know that these same afflictions are accomplished by our brethren in the world.” That’s true. All the churches in Western culture are losing children left and right. It’s like the body has suffered arterial bleeding and the life’s blood of the church is leaking away. And it’s causing great weakness. We can think of the church, if we’d like to, as a tree. The tree is a very complex, interrelated system. The church is like that, too, isn’t it? It’s like an organism. Everybody affects everyone else in the group. Every part is dependent on every other part. Isn’t that biblical? Yes, it is. We’ve read that in Ephesians, haven’t we? Our children have been negatively affected by the way we, as parents, live our lives and do church. Our children have been affected by us, as congregational members, and us, as ministers. And many of them, over the years, have become discouraged spiritually.

People say, “Well, I see lots of kids in the church.” Yeah, there are some. But it’s not the ones that you *see* that have suffered this kind of problem. It’s the ones that you *don’t* see. So these children that you don’t see have become discouraged spiritually, and they’re not deep-rooted trees planted by a stream, but like grass that is dried up and blown away in the wind. They’re gone.

What has caused this situation? Well, it’s subtle. And it’s complex. And it’s hard to pin down. And that’s why we need to *delight* in the law of God and to meditate on it day and night to *understand* what needs to happen – to find the answers, to find what to do – so that we can prosper as a church.

Let’s go to Malachi 2:13 to verse 15. We’ve read a lot, in LifeResource Ministries, from the New Testament about this, but let’s think about it from an Old Testament perspective. God says to Israel – and Israel is what? The church in the wilderness, right? Many of the things that apply to them apply to us, too. He says:

Mal. 2:13-15 – *You flood the LORD’s alter with tears. You weep and wail great crocodile tears for show, because He no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. And you ask, “Why?” It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has He not made them one. In flesh and spirit they are His. And why one? Because He was seeking Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.*

We read this and we just don’t get it. When a couple in Western culture has a child, they do it because *they* want a child. What does God have to do with that? It’s *our* kid. That’s how we think about it. They don’t stop to think that the reason that God created marriage and procreation is so that *He* could have children. And *our* job is put *their needs ahead of ours*. So that couple that I mentioned earlier, should they have the chance to see that their

personal problems have caused problems for their son, they are obligated by the law of God to resolve those problems so they can begin treating their son the way he needs to be treated. People who are having marital problems are obligated to resolve those problems so that their children won't have to be burdened with that.

Now I know it takes two to do that. And I know that sometimes it is so terrible that people would all be greatly relieved if there could be a separation – I'm not so pie-in-the-sky about that – but this is what God tells us. And the thing that we need to focus on is that God looks at this whole thing of family and church *way* differently than we do. He's always thinking about the ultimate, underlying goal. And for Him, that underlying goal is produce more children.

Now, you can take that application and you can extrapolate it from the nuclear family to the church family and back again. We need to know why we have a church, why we *are* a church. And the purpose of the church, as we have said, is to produce Godly offspring. We call it disciple-making in the New Testament. And part of that field that is white with harvest, that Jesus talked about, includes our children. If we're doing something that discourages them, then it is up to us to fix it.

How do I know that? Well, the millstone story teaches us that, too, doesn't it? Jesus said, "If you offend children, you'd be better off to hang a millstone around your neck and jump in the sea." So our job is to create an environment – we've called it the relational field – that nurtures children so they are *not* offended, and so they do not feel the need to go off in search of spiritual nourishment somewhere else. How do we do that? Well, exactly how is not the purpose of this presentation. We've talked a lot about fixing the complex system called the church and we do it every time we get up to speak in LifeResource Ministries. We have over a hundred and ten presentations that talk about only that. Do we know everything that can be done? No! But we know some things. And if we start working on those, I'm sure they will lead to others. And we know that when they are applied, those things cause positive change in the church for the children.

So that's what the tree is all about. When you go to the Website and you see the tree, that's why it's there. When you get a letter from us with the tree at the top, that's what it is about. That's what we're thinking about. When you see the tree, you can know it's a picture of a spiritually healthy person, a spiritually healthy family, a spiritually healthy church nourished from an *unseen* source, because it's *close* to the source. And that source is God. Health comes when we delight to learn how to apply the subtleties of the laws of God in our life. And when we're willing to do that, then whatever we do, prospers. We produce fruit – Godly offspring – God's primary goal – not because we're great, but because God watches over us and nourishes us like the tree that is planted by a river.