



# Perspective

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PSB

## Planting A Tree

Last month, as I was preparing to leave for Israel, a friend asked if I would do something special for him. He wanted me to plant a tree for him in the soil of the Holy Land.

It was such a small act. But to him it signified something lasting. Almost eternal. The little nation, once described by Ben Gurion as "this magnificent pile of rocks," had been denuded by the Turks many centuries ago. But over the last 31 years, since its independence, Jews and Christians from all over the world have been deliberately planting trees. Slowly the earth is turning green. With the trees (which give off oxygen) come clouds. With the clouds, rain. And with the rain, more trees.

Planting a tree is such a small act. Yet there is something eternal about it.

I've been thinking of that this week. We are vacationing at our little place in the mountains of western North Carolina. Just down the road the bulldozers are knocking over the stately white pines and poplars, ripping out the oaks and maples, making way for a new subdivision. I walked down there last night. It was sad. People need a place to live. But I hate to see the

trees go.

This afternoon I spent more than an hour propping up a tall, spindly red oak which had begun to topple toward the driveway. Its roots had been loosened by the spring rains. But with enough braces it will be able to grow — although a bit crooked — until its roots go deep and it can stand alone.

Every single tree is precious. Man needs to think — and pray — before destroying a single one.

Five years ago I was hiding away in this same cabin writing "Into the Glory," a book about a group of missionary jungle pilots. It was early June and I had been writing in solitary for two weeks, trying to complete the manuscript before my family joined me. My old and close friend, Al West, formerly with the Tampa Tribune and then one of my editors at Logos Publishers, flew down from New Jersey to read some of my typed pages and make critical comment. I was glad to see him. Not only was I lonely, but needed some editorial direction.

Late one afternoon we took a walk in the woods behind the cabin. Deep in the forest, on a hillside near a rippling brook, we discovered a huge white oak which had been

felled by lightning. We stood for a long time looking at the downed tree, slain like Goliath before David's sling. The hollow stump showed the lightning had been but the final blow. The tree had long been dying at its marrow.

In the evening silence I stooped and dug a small white pine from the nearby soil. Al, unusually quiet, knelt by the old stump and scooped out the rotting wood with his hands. Gently the two of us planted the tiny tree in the crater. New life out of old.

That was June. The following February my dear friend, at the age of 39, was dead from leukemia. Like the old tree, the marrow of his bones was gone.

Now, every time I return to our cabin I make a special pilgrimage into the woods to see our tree. I went back there last night. The forest was alive in the twilight, the trees were talking like excited friends at a reunion. The little white pine is now almost eight feet tall — strong and sturdy, taking its place in the corporate body — reaching toward heaven.

I touched its trunk. And remembered.

There is something eternal about planting a tree.