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# the last word

by Jamie Buckingham

## A Tale Of Two Trees

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Last summer we had a miracle take place near our pasture fence. A huge plant grew up almost overnight. I first noticed it in June as its broad, green leaves towered above the pasture grass. By the end of August it was more than six feet tall with a trunk as big around as my wrist. If ever a plant had an "anointing," this one did.

One September afternoon I was helping my son string barbed wire and we came to the "miracle plant." But when I brushed against it—it fell over. I checked it out and discovered it had no substance. It looked big and strong, but it was made of some kind of fluffy fiber. It had a crusty bark but the interior was mostly air.

No anointing. All puff.

Besides that, it had no root system. It just went down into the ground about two inches and there was a wad of fibers about the size of my fist. When the summer rains had ceased, and the water level in the ground had dropped, the plant had died. It still gave the impression of life, but since there was no surface nourishment, it perished. When I came along and exerted just the smallest stress—it fell over.

The next day my son Tim came along on the tractor mower and ran over it. It disintegrated into nothing. Now it is as though it never was—existing only as a sad memory of the tragedy of fast growth.

As I write this I can look through my studio window and see a row of ornamental palm trees which were planted along our front drive three years ago. They are still the same height as when they were planted. I mentioned this to the nursery man and he just grinned:

"You're too impatient. They know better than to go up until their roots have gone down."

A few minutes ago I went outside to look at them. Interesting. For the first time in three years, there are new, green shoots coming from the center.

Trees that last, I understand, have as many roots underground as they have branches above ground.

Sidney Lanier wrote of this 100

years ago when he commented on the salt water marshes near Brunswick, Georgia.

*"By so many roots as the marshgrass sends in the sod*

*I will heartily lay me a-hold on the greatness of God."*

A friend called last night. He is the pastor of one of the fastest-growing churches in America. He wanted me to come and speak at a giant rally in his city.

I refused. But I did agree to come and spend several evenings with the elders and leaders in his church.

"But we need to attract even more people," he lamented.

"No," I said. "You need to build relationships so when the people come your structure won't topple over on top of you."

He wanted to tell me about the money flowing in, the packed auditorium, the new sound system and the traveling musical groups. But my concern was different. Do the people love one another with a covenant love? Do they trust their leaders? Are they a forgiving people? Are they tolerant of sinners?

Could this possibly be a summer weed—rather than a rugged palm which takes time to grow roots deep into the underground rivers of life?

What would you do if you discovered that within 50 days your congregation would grow from 120 timid souls to more than 3,000 Spirit-baptized zealots? I know what the average American pastor would do. But when that happened in Acts 2, God had more sense than to forewarn the leaders. So, instead of building a building, they built a church.

I've watched too many ministries sprout—rather than grow. My prayer for those which still exist is that God will prune them quickly. Otherwise the slightest pressure will knock them down.

I guess it all depends on what you want to produce. It takes forty years to grow an oak tree. But you can have a pumpkin—a big one at that—in three months. The difference: one has substance and the fiber is tough. The other is big—and full of nothing.

It's a matter of roots.

