

# Counseling through Jeremiah 17:5-9

By Wendy Wood



Jeremiah 17:5-6



Jeremiah 17:7-8

Several times throughout scripture God uses the analogy of a tree to explain the life of a believer or an unbeliever. Psalm 1:3 says that a person who delights in the law and meditates on the Word day and night is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields fruit and does not wither. The picture created is that loving the Lord and His word produces a joyful, fruitful, newness of life that is evident to all around. The fruit of this person's life is healthy and plentiful. It is vibrant and alive. Psalm 1 goes on to say that the wicked are like chaff that the wind blows away. Here the person's life is unstable, easily carried away by changing circumstances (wind) and is not rooted in truth. Picture a tumbleweed being blown about the wind down a dusty road. This is not a lively tree, by the remnants of an old life that floats away in the air, or a tumbleweed blown about by the current trends of this age.

Luke 6:43-45 again compares a person's life to fruit trees. The "good" heart, the one who trusts and delights in the Lord, produces good fruit. The good fruit is the fruit of the Spirit and this person's life is characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. Others observing this person see

the difference in how they respond to people and circumstances and notice that Christlikeness is present. But Luke 6 also says that bad fruit comes from a bad heart, or someone who is trusting in themselves rather than God. This person's fruit is more like the fruit of "old man" desires and is anger, anxiety, conflict, lust, greed, and lies. The ugly fruit comes from a hardened heart and is not a pleasant person to be around. Typically, the people coming in for counseling are experiencing "bad fruit" in their lives but don't know what to do about it.

God uses the word pictures of trees to show that what our hearts are worshipping determines the type of fruit or behavior will come out of us. These pictures are very helpful to demonstrate and explain how the fruit in our lives comes directly from the heart. I frequently use Jeremiah 17 as a teaching tool in counseling. This helps the counselee connect the fruit of their life with what their heart (the root) is trusting in, either self or God.

#### *Jeremiah 17:5-6*

*"Thus says the Lord:*

*"Cursed is the man who trusts in man  
and makes flesh his strength,  
whose heart turns away from the Lord.*

*He is like a shrub in the desert,  
and shall not see any good come.*

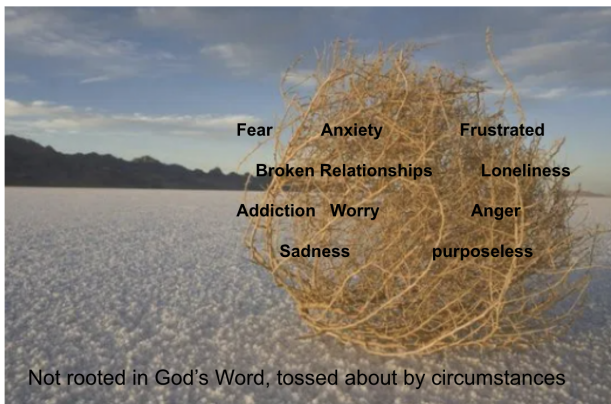
*He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness,  
in an uninhabited salt land."*

Jeremiah 17:5-6 is a man who trusts in himself. He is trying to control his life by working hard to produce the results he wants. This may be a person who gets angry when things don't go as planned or when someone inconveniences him. Trusting in man can also look like needing respect or approval from others. This person must have the love and admiration of his peers or superiors and lives life trying to make himself feel good by getting approval. He is trusting in man to give him worth and value. A person who trusts in man may be all about pleasure and comfort. This person is trusting in what money can provide or what adventures he can pursue for happiness. This man is trusting that temporary happiness is what will make his life meaningful and worth living. The person who trusts in man is not trusting in God. This person has committed two evils, says Jeremiah 2:13. He has forsaken God and is hewing out broken cisterns for himself which holds no water (Jeremiah 2:13). God must be ignored in order to trust in man. Trusting in man will never lead to a full life. It will be the empty pursuit of continually needing more and more of whatever he believes will satisfy him.

This person is like a shrub in the desert. Picture a dead, thorny bush in the heat of Arizona or Texas. This dead bush is prickly and sharp. The ground that this bush is planted in is dry, hard, and salty. There is no life anywhere near this shrub. What does this look like in a person's life? This "shrub" comes into your office as someone who is angry, sad, or anxious. They have spent so much time working to achieve the life they want and cannot understand why things are working for them. The idols of approval, money, pleasure, control, and comfort have not produced what your counselee thought they would deliver and you have a discouraged and frustrated person before you. Relationships are difficult for this person. Anyone or any circumstances that doesn't meet their expectations rubs up against the prickly, sharp thorns of this bush and gets cut. Others experience this person as an



angry, quick tempered, difficult person. The "shrub" person most likely has many broken relationships in their life and is frustrated that life is not going as they thought it should go. They are looking to the wrong sources for life giving water and nutrients. Rather than trusting in God, this person is trying to work their way into joy. Life feels like a parched wilderness. They feel lonely and without hope. There is nothing in their vision that can help their circumstances change. They continue to look to themselves or others to make them happy.



Fear      Anxiety      Frustrated  
 Broken Relationships      Loneliness  
 Addiction      Worry      Anger  
 Sadness      purposeless

**Trusts in Man or Self (trusts that control, respect, comfort, or other idol will work for him.**

VS 5-6  
 Trusts in man, uninhabited salt land, doesn't see good come, parched places, shallow or no roots in God's Word

Contrast this shrub with this description of a beautiful tree.

*Jeremiah 17:8-9*

*"Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord,  
 whose trust is the Lord.  
 He is like a tree planted by water,  
 that sends out its roots by the stream,  
 and does not fear when heat comes,  
 for its leaves remain green,  
 and is not anxious in the year of drought,*

*for it does not cease to bear fruit.”*

This person is trusting in the Lord. This person’s heart is planted in the life giving water of Christ and His gospel hope. The one who trusts in the Lord spends time in God’s presence in prayer and in His word so that his thoughts, desires, and emotions are shaped by the glorious truths about God. This person searches God’s word for God’s character, promises, and grace. He spends time talking to God and committing to trust His will and plan for his life. This person gets up each day and thinks and prays about how he can please God.

This person’s life is characterized by the fruit of Christlikeness. This person is patient in their speech and responses. This person is loving and seeks to serve others. This person is faithful to keep his word, even when it is inconvenient. This person gives thoughtful, gracious responses when others are rude or unkind. This person still sins. Trusting in the Lord is never going to be perfect and complete while we live under the curse of sin. But this person is quicker to repent and enjoys the freedom from enslavement to sin that Christ has purchased on the cross. This person produces fruit consistently and others experience joy and grace in their presence. This person is being transformed from one degree of glory to the next (2 Corinthians 3:18). Whether his circumstances are good or difficult, in drought or plenty, this person experiences peace within his soul because he knows the One who is sovereign and good. There is no need to be anxious when trusting in God.

**Heat = Circumstances**  
Both trees experience the same circumstances, but respond differently!



**Trusts in the Lord (lives as God calls him to trusting in God's plan over his own**

VS 7-8

Planted by LIVING water, deep roots, leaves remain green, doesn't fear circumstances, bears good fruit, remains steadfast in strong winds and weather

Both of these trees experience heat. Picture a sun shining on these trees. The tree in the desert is already dead and the hot sun just perpetuates the deadness of the shrub. The tree that is planted by the water uses the sunlight to grow and produce more fruit. The heat or sun represents our circumstances. The “heat” may be the inconvenience of traffic or a toddler having a bad day. The “heat” may be an illness or the loss of a job. The “heat” may be a huge blessing of a bonus at work or an unexpected promotion. The “heat” may be a child’s success at school

or the pregnancy that's been hoped for for years. The sun or heat represents all the different circumstances that happen throughout life.

The person who trusts in man responds to his circumstances as if he is in control. When circumstances are difficult, he is angry and anxious and responds with prickly behavior. He desperately tries to regain control by barking out orders to others or throwing himself into a new plan that will produce the wanted results. When his circumstances are good, he takes credit for all the hard work he has done and glories in his own achievement, not giving thanks to the Giver of all gifts.

The person who trusts in the Lord responds differently to heat. When circumstances are difficult, the one who trusts in the Lord prays and digs into God's word to understand their situation from a biblical perspective. He talks to God, pours out his heart to God, and commits to trust God and His will for his life. When circumstances are good and a blessing, this person who trusts in the Lord is thankful and gives God the praise and gratitude for His blessings.

*Jeremiah 17:9*

*The heart is deceitful above all things,  
and desperately sick;  
who can understand it?*

Because we live under the curse of sin, our hearts are deceitful! We are easily fooled into thinking we are trusting in the Lord when, in fact, we are trusting in man. We read our bibles, go to church, and participate in a small group, so, of course, we are trusting in God. Don't be so sure. Ask God to search your heart and reveal any offensive way in you (Psalm 139:23). Prayerfully ask God to reveal to you where you are truly putting your trust in the moment to moment interactions and responses you have. As you walk with your counselee through the first few sessions, it will be helpful to keep this passage in mind, and frequently ask these questions.

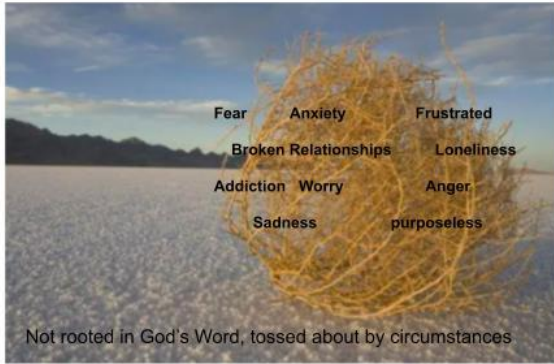
As you describe these two types of people, ask your counselee:

1. Which type of tree characterizes your life most of the time?
2. What is the "heat" you are experiencing right now in your life?

3. What words and actions come out of you in the “heat” moments?
4. What emotions do you experience frequently?
5. What thoughts repeat in your mind when difficult situations arise?
6. How are you trusting in man?

### Jeremiah 17:5-10

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