

... always know that God has a plan for you.

"Peace," and the storm stopped. At this time, the tree knew that it had carried the King of Kings in its boat.

Finally, someone came and got the third tree. It was carried through the streets as the people mocked the man who was carrying it. When they came to a stop, the man was nailed to the tree and raised in the air to die at the top of a hill. When Sunday came, the tree came to realize that it was strong enough to stand at the top of the hill and be as close to God as was possible because Jesus had been crucified on it.

The moral of this story is that when things don't seem to be going your way, always know that God has a plan for you. If you place your trust in Him, He will give you great gifts. Each of the trees got what they wanted, just not in the way they had imagined. We don't always know what God's plans are for us. We just know that His ways are not our ways, but His ways are always best.⁴

INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT CHRISTMAS TREES

- Christmas trees have been sold in the United States since about 1850.
- This year, 73 million Christmas trees will be planted.
- Christmas trees take about 7-10 years to mature.
- The Christmas tree was first decorated in Riga, Latvia, in 1510.
- The Christmas tree industry employs about 100,000 people.
- The first president to have a Christmas tree in the White House was the 14th president, Franklin Pierce.
- President Coolidge started the tree lighting on the White House lawn in 1923.
- The idea of electric lights for Christmas trees was dreamed up by Thomas Edison's assistant, Edward Johnson.
- An acre of Christmas trees provides for the daily oxygen requirements of 18 people.
- Since 1947, the people of Oslo, Norway, have given a Christmas tree every year to the city of Westminster, England, to thank the British for their help during World War II.
- The National Christmas Tree Association has given a Christmas tree to the president every year since 1966.⁵



Resources

¹Salkeld, Luke. "Christmas tree prices ARE going through the roof but this is just ridiculous." Daily Mail, 15 Dec. 2018, www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1094914/Christmas-tree-prices-ARE-going-roof-just-ridiculous.html.

²"History of Christmas Trees." History.com, www.history.com/topics/christmas/history-of-christmas-trees.

³"Chapter 5: A Christmas Tree." Ellen G. White statements related to the observance of Christmas and holiday gifts, m.egwwritings.org/en/book/757.23#25.

⁴"Three Trees: An Unusual Christmas Story," gospelweb.net, www.gospelweb.net/Christmas/threetreeschristmasstory.htm.

⁵"Christmas Trees & More." University of Illinois Extension, extension.illinois.edu/trees/facts.cfm.

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CHRISTMAS TREE

BY GORDON BOTTING DRPH, CHES, CFC



Several years ago, a man in Bournemouth, England, decided to give his three sons the ultimate Christmas surprise. One of his boys had complained the year before that the family's tree wasn't big enough, so Greg Howe created the ultimate holiday optical illusion—a tree that appeared to grow through several stories of the house and burst through the roof. Howe cut a 35-foot tree into three sections. He set the huge trunk in front of the living room window, the middle section by the window of a bedroom on the second floor, and the tree top on the roof. He decorated the tree with 160 large ornaments and approximately 2,000 lights. "I really wanted to give the kids a Christmas they wouldn't forget," he said.¹

Origins of Christmas Trees

Christmas trees were "invented" in Germany, where Christians decorated their homes with trees during the 16th century. Many credit Martin Luther with the idea of putting lights on

STEWARDSHIP is a total lifestyle. It involves our health, time, talents, environment, relationships, spirituality, and finances.

trees. One night as he was walking home, he saw the stars shining through the branches of the trees in the forest. He wanted to show his family the beautiful image, so he wired candles to the branches of a tree.²

Ellen White and Christmas Trees

Over 40 years ago, when I served as the lead pastor of a medium-sized church in New Zealand, I challenged my congregation to pay off the land for their new church and school by bringing cash gifts and hanging them on a Christmas tree at our final church social for that year. The members rallied to this concept, and we completely paid for our land!

This fundraising concept was nothing new. Ellen White first suggested this idea of making a Christmas tree into a blessing. This is what she said over a hundred years ago:

Christmas is coming. May you all have wisdom to make it a precious season. Let the older church members unite, heart and soul,

with their children in their innocent amusement and recreation, in devising ways and means to show true respect to Jesus by bringing to Him gifts and offerings. Let everyone remember the claims of God. His cause cannot go forward without your aid. Let the gifts you have usually bestowed upon one another be placed in the Lord's treasury. ... In every church let your smaller offerings be placed upon your Christmas tree.

Let the precious emblem "evergreen" suggest the holy work of God and His beneficence to us; and the loving heart-work will be to save other souls who are in darkness. Let your works be in accordance with your faith. ... Let the several churches present to God Christmas trees in every church, and then let them hang thereon the fruits of beneficence and gratitude—offerings coming from willing hearts and hands, fruits that God will accept as an expression of our faith and our great love to Him for the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. Let the evergreen be laden with fruit, rich and pure and holy, acceptable to God. Shall we not have such a Christmas as Heaven can approve?³

May more of our churches follow this advice this coming season!

My Favorite Story of Christmas Trees

The following story can be found with almost identical wording all over the internet. I don't know its author or its origins.

Once there were three trees on a hill in the woods. They were discussing their hopes and dreams when the

first tree said, "Someday I hope to be a treasure chest. I could be filled with gold, silver and precious gems. I could be decorated with intricate carving, and everyone would see the beauty."

Then the second tree said, "Someday I will be a mighty ship. I will take kings and queens across the waters and sail to the corners of the world. Everyone will feel safe in me because of the strength of my hull!"

Finally the third tree said, "I want to grow to be the tallest and straightest tree in the forest. People will see me on top of the hill and look up to my branches and think of the heavens and God and how close to them I am reaching. I will be the greatest tree of all time, and people will always remember me."

After a few years of the trees praying that their dreams would come true, a group of woodsmen came upon the trees. When one came to the first tree he said, "This looks like a strong tree; I think I should be able to sell the wood

to a carpenter," and he began cutting it down. The tree was happy because he knew that the carpenter would make him into a treasure chest.

At the second tree the woodsman said, "This looks like a strong tree; I should be able to sell it to the shipyard." The second tree was happy

because he knew he was on his way to becoming a mighty ship.

When the woodsmen came upon the third tree, the tree was frightened because he knew that if they cut him down his dreams would not come true. One of the woodsmen said, "I don't need anything special from my tree; I'll take this one," and he cut it down.

When the first tree arrived at the carpenter's, he was made into a feed box for animals. He was then placed in a barn and filled with hay. This was not at all what he had prayed for.

The second tree was cut and made into a small fishing boat. His dreams of being a mighty ship and carrying kings had come to an end. The third tree was cut into large pieces and left alone in the dark. The years went by, and the trees forgot about their dreams.

Then one day, a man and woman came to the barn. She gave birth, and they placed the baby in the hay in the feed box that was made from the first tree. The man wished that he could have made a crib for the baby, but this manger would have to do. The tree could feel the importance of this event and knew that it had held the greatest treasure of all time.

Years later, a group of men got in the fishing boat made from the second tree. One of them was tired and went to sleep. While they were out on the water, a great storm arose, and the tree didn't think it was strong enough to keep the men safe. The men woke the sleeping man, and He stood and said,

His dreams of being a mighty ship and carrying kings had come to an end.

Let the precious emblem "evergreen" suggest the holy work of God and His beneficence to us; and the loving heart-work will be to save other souls who are in darkness.

Christmas is coming. May you all have wisdom to make it a precious season.

