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## Trees

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## Trees

Trees continually grow. When they stop growing, they die. Like trees, we also grow, as long as we live. We do not increase in height; we certainly do not put out additional appendages, such as arms or legs, but even physically our bodies continually grow new cells that replace old ones. But, as embodied spirits, the main area of growth is not physical, but in our thoughts, values and motives and in the ways we fulfill our purpose in life.

Most of us enjoy the presence of trees in all their variety. They are not only pleasing to our eyes, but also connect us with nature. We perceive more than the bark and branches, roots and leaves, and are at times moved with appreciation for the gift of life even in a form so apparently different from our own. We plant trees, and nurture them, but we do not make them. Like trees, we too are not self-created. Though we are unique individuals, we are communal and interdependent, which often brings us much joy and pleasure, though at other times sadness and pain as well. Through our interactions in all manner of relationships, we can recognize our own connection with nature – human nature.

Though we appreciate the beauty of shrubs, flowers and grasses, trees are easier to identify with as individuals. We can see in them many qualities that we value highly. Trees remain steadfast in all kinds of weather, favorable and unfavorable; they do not try to appear as any other tree, but retain all their own characteristics whether they are in an urban or country environment. We admire in trees some of what we respect in one another: continually adapting to present circumstances, always reaching for the light, no matter what the surroundings, and never ceasing to grow.

Though trees do not of themselves move from place to place as we do, yet we use the metaphor of “grow where you are planted” in praise of the human virtue of being one’s self in all the unchanging or unchangeable personal qualities that are ours, as well as within the circumstances of our environment. Trees are not considered “stubborn” for being the kind that they are, nor are we, when we make decisions according to the values that make us who we are. We adapt, we change, we learn through experience, but the “tree rings” of our growth are manifested by the way we take responsibility for all that we say and do.

We do not expect to live as long as oak trees or giant sequoias, but we hope to proceed to a mode of life in which we will at last be able to fully appreciate all of God’s creation, and relate in utter clarity with the very Person of God. For now, we can appreciate the gift we have, as our kind of creature, that enables us to look at trees with our eyes, but move from

physical sight to internal thoughts and uses of imagination that characterize our ongoing human growth. Our roots are directly in God, while we are yet part of this earth; our growth is not primarily towards the light of the sun, but into the very person of God.

Trees turn out beautifully as long as they are within the proper environment. Our beauty depends upon our freely chosen response to God.