

BANNING LIEBSCHER

FOUNDER & PASTOR OF JESUS CULTURE

ROOTED

THE HIDDEN PLACES

WHERE GOD DEVELOPS YOU



Contents

1 Why the Rooted Last	00
2 Thriving in the Process	00
3 The Trust Factor.....	00
4 Nothing to Prove.....	00
5 In Over Your Head...and Loving It	00
6 Beyond the Feelings	00

SOIL 1: INTIMACY

7 Finding God.....	00
8 What to Do When You're Expecting.....	00

SOIL 2: SERVING

9 An Unlikely Marriage	00
10 The Divine Exchange	00

SOIL 3: COMMUNITY

11 When Fish Swim Alone.....	00
12 It's Messy, but It Works	00

Conclusion: Rooted in the Source.....	00
Acknowledgments.....	00

Why the Rooted Last

He shall be like a tree
 Planted by the rivers of water,
 That brings forth its fruit in its season,
 Whose leaf also shall not wither;
 And whatever he does shall prosper.

Psalm 1:3

Deep inside every follower of Jesus is a desire to have a visible, lasting impact in the world. This desire was born in us when we believed the gospel. We who have tasted “the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16) not only want to see that power at work in our lives, but we want to see it working through us, bringing the life and hope of Jesus to a broken world.

This desire for lasting impact is not our idea; it is God’s. In John 15, Jesus announced that He chose and appointed us to *bear fruit*:

I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.... You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. (verses 5, 16, NIV)

If you are a disciple of Christ, then your calling and destiny are to be fruitful. Fruit is not a bunch of spiritual or religious activities like going to church, reading your Bible, keeping the Ten Commandments, or even preaching the gospel. Fruit means that when people taste your life, you taste like Jesus. If you are fully grafted into Jesus, the vine, then He says your life should produce tangible results that make people say, “Now that is Christlike.”

Not only are you chosen and appointed to produce fruit, but Jesus said you are chosen to produce *much* fruit, and not only much fruit, but *fruit that lasts*. There’s a difference between *some* fruit and *much* fruit. God’s plan for your life is not conservative. He’s not satisfied with minimal results. He expects to see much, and you should too. How much do you think you can know Jesus and become like Him? How much do you think you can show Him to the world? He wants that for you and much more. He wants you to bear fruit beyond what you could ask or think.

There’s also a difference between *much* fruit and fruit *that will last*. God isn’t satisfied with temporary results. He’s in the business of permanent change. He’s not looking for a month, or a year or a decade, of you growing more like Jesus and pursuing the things He calls you to do. He’s looking for a lifetime impact, a generational impact, and an eternal impact.

Abundant, enduring fruitfulness is the mandate on your life. Ultimately, enduring fruitfulness in your life and the rest of the body of Christ is the key to seeing nations transformed, cities impacted, and culture shaped. But abundant, enduring fruitfulness will only happen, Jesus says, if you “remain in” Him. What does that mean?

ROOTS BEFORE FRUIT

In the growth cycle of fruit-bearing plants, fruit comes at the very end. The cycle starts with a seed being planted in the ground. When watered, the seed will break open and begin to put down roots. That root system will continue to grow as the seed forms a shoot and eventually breaks through the surface of the soil into air and sunlight. Both the plant and its root system will keep growing until the plant is strong and mature enough to bear fruit. Significantly, in order for a plant to survive, much less bear fruit, its root system has to take up more space underground than the plant takes up above ground. When you look up at one of those immense redwoods in the Avenue of the Giants, for example, you're actually standing on root systems that are wider than those trees are tall. This is the principle of foundations. A foundation always has to be bigger than the thing it is supporting.

Fruitfulness in your life comes about through a similar process. God plants the seed of His word inside you (see Luke 8:11) and waters it with His Holy Spirit, bringing it to life. He begins to give you insight into who He created you to be *in* Him and what He is calling you to do *with* Him. He stirs up that desire in you to have a lasting impact in the world. And then He starts to build a *root system* for that seed in your heart, your internal world.

Your heart is your point of connection with Jesus—the place where you become rooted in your relationship with Him. He wants to develop His heart-to-heart connection with you to the point where you become fully united with Him, where you think like He thinks, want what He wants, speak like He speaks, and do what He does. This is what it means to remain in Him. Only when you remain in Him will you produce fruit that lasts.

For you to bear abundant, enduring fruit, God needs to make you bigger on the inside than you are on the outside. You have to let Him build your root system in secret before He leads you into making a visible impact in the world. In his book *Power Through Prayer*, E. M. Bounds, one of the foremost authors on prayer, said, “The man—God’s man—is made in the closet. His life and his profoundest convictions were born in his secret communion with God.”

DAVID’S ROOT SYSTEM

If you study in Scripture those who had a lasting impact, you will find that God led them through a season of preparation. For Joseph, that season lasted about thirteen years. Moses had to spend forty years shepherding in the wilderness before he was ready to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Jesus Himself spent thirty years preparing for His three years of ministry—the most impactful ministry in history.

Of all the people in the Bible who bore lasting fruit, however, David is unique, not just because of his incredible legacy, but also because of the depth of insight the Bible gives us into how God established roots in David’s life.

The highlights of David’s legacy are so impressive that a whole book on them wouldn’t do them justice. Within his lifetime, he ushered in the golden age of Israel and established a brand-new culture of worship in the nation. Beyond his lifetime, the blessing on David’s throne affected God’s dealings with every king of Israel and Judah who came after him. The promised Messiah, Jesus, is called the Son of David and sits on the throne of David (see Luke 1:32). The psalms David wrote became a central part of worship for Jews and, later, Christians. In other words, every day for thousands of years, millions of people around the world have quoted, prayed, meditated on, and worshiped God with David’s words. Finally,

David was a prototype of New Testament believers, particularly because of his unique intimacy with God and his understanding that God desired a pure heart more than “sacrifice and offering” (Psalm 40:6). Every person on the planet, especially every Christian, has been impacted by the life of David. He bore lasting fruit that continues to this day and will continue into eternity.

Yet we can trace all of that fruit back to a single moment, the moment in which God planted a seed in David’s life. This moment took place when he was young—probably between ten and thirteen years old—and it was pretty dramatic. The prophet Samuel, who at that time in Israel was like Billy Graham, the president, and Bono all wrapped into one, showed up at David’s house and announced that he had come to anoint the next king of Israel. David’s dad, Jesse, didn’t even think to call David in from the field, because Jesse naturally assumed that his youngest could not be the one destined for kingship when David had far more suitable older brothers to fill the role. Samuel surveyed Jesse’s tall, handsome sons and thought, *One of these has to be the king*. Yet one by one, each of David’s seven brothers stood before Samuel, and the prophet heard the Lord say, “He’s not the one.”

In the midst of this selection process, the Lord spoke a word to Samuel that we often pull out and quote: “The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7, NIV). God was saying, “I’m looking for someone who will let Me grow him on the inside before I grow him on the outside.” He didn’t want another King Saul. Saul looked like a king, but he wasn’t sufficiently rooted in God’s heart to lead a nation in God’s way. God wanted a man He could groom for the kingship from a young age, a man who would actually *last* in that role for a lifetime and establish the nation on a firm foundation of faithfulness to God.

None of Jesse’s older sons had what God was looking for. So the prophet asked, “Did we miss anyone?” They reluctantly called their little brother in from the field, and when Samuel saw him, he said, “There’s the king.” He anointed David with oil, and the Holy Spirit came on David in power, watering the seed of God’s word and causing it to grow (see verse 13).

From that point, God began to build David’s roots—a journey we will be exploring in more detail throughout this book. Only when that journey was complete did God’s word come true:

When all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, the king made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel.

David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years. (2 Samuel 5:3–4, NIV)

Thirty years old! You do the math. God took somewhere between seventeen and twenty years to build roots in David and get him ready to bear visible fruit.

A PASSION FOR ROOTS

My early twenties were a season of seed planting in my life. At the time, I was serving as youth pastor at Bethel Church in Redding, California, where exciting things were happening. By the hundreds, people were coming to know God, coming back to God, receiving healing of their hearts, minds, and bodies, and being filled with incredible joy and hunger for more of Him. The environment seemed to stir and awaken people’s hopes and dreams for what

God wanted to do in and through their lives. It showed up in our sermons, our prayers, our worship songs, and our conversations—everyone was catching a vision for something God was calling them to do.

I was no different. I dreamed about the impact I would have on the world. Practically every minister who came through town and preached at our church called me out in meetings to confirm what God was calling me to do and pray things over me regarding my future. It felt like I was being barraged with encouraging words from people about my destiny. It was both exhilarating and terrifying to grab hold of the vision God was building in my heart and say, “Yes, God! Let’s do this!”

Funny enough, however, no one praying over me added, “By the way, it will be twenty years before you start to scratch the surface of the things I’m telling you about.” I wouldn’t have believed them if they had. I was passionate and committed. I thought I was ready to step into the vision and be fruitful!

I now recognize that what I thought was readiness was actually the Holy Spirit coming into my life to water the seeds that were being planted and causing them to start forming roots. The vision God put in my heart was, in fact, to serve and equip believers to impact cities and nations for the kingdom. I wanted to be part of leading a generation to make Jesus famous and to shift our culture by putting His love and truth on display. The problem was that I did not yet understand what lasting impact was or how God brings it about. I hadn’t really discovered the biblical model for how God prepares us for fruitfulness. When I read the stories of Abraham, Joseph, David, and other great saints, as well as Jesus Himself, and saw how long it took them to get where they were going, I thought, *Twenty years? You’ve got to be kidding me!*

Thankfully, both for my sake and the sake of those I was leading and equipping as a pastor, God shifted my perspective and showed me how critical it is for Him to build us on the inside first. The more I studied, observed, and experienced, the more it became clear to me that lasting fruit only comes through the long journey of putting our roots down deep in Jesus. Without deep roots, there is no fruit, and if there is fruit, it’s not the kind that lasts.

My passion for roots has especially grown from watching what happens to people who are rootless. Jesus described them in the parable of the sower:

But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. (Luke 8:13–14)

These people initially received the word with joy. They had a sense of excitement and anticipation for the vision God had planted in their hearts. Yet they did not allow the Gardener to come in and remove the rocks and weeds from the soil of their hearts. They did not allow Him to cultivate roots in their lives, and as a result, the word either died off or never bore any lasting fruit.

In the last twenty years, my position as a leader has grown from youth pastor to director of a worship-conference movement (Jesus Culture) to lead pastor of a church (Jesus Culture Sacramento). In these roles I have had the privilege of interacting with so many people who are trying to navigate their journeys of growth in God. I can tell you that as a pastor, nothing is more heartbreaking than watching the seed of passion and vision either die off or be strangled in people who were once running hard after God. Sadly, I have watched many Christians over the years fall into compromise, give up on their calling, or walk away from

God entirely because they never allowed Him to make their internal world a place where His word could thrive.

On the other hand, nothing is more thrilling and satisfying than watching people who choose to yield, to embrace the journey of learning to remain in Christ and let Him establish their root system in secret. There is something truly supernatural about these people and what comes out of their lives. They taste like Jesus.

REDEFINING SUCCESS

When I was in my teens and twenties, I was amazed when people set out to run after their dreams or pursue a call from God. I celebrated their passion and faith to step out and risk everything for Him. Don't get me wrong. I still celebrate those moments and cheer people on as they start running their race. But I no longer have the same sense of awe and anticipation in those moments because I've realized something.

Anybody can start a race.

The real question over our lives is not how strong we will begin our race to pursue God's call but how strong we will finish it. There are far fewer finishers out there than beginners. Finishers are *impressive*. Why? Because they see what so many don't see: God's version of success is infinitely superior to the world's version of success.

God's version of success looks like building our lives on eternal things for eternal things. Anything less does not impress Him and shouldn't impress us. Unfortunately, many believers today don't live with forty years in mind, let alone eternity. One of my deepest concerns with the church is how hung up we have become with short-term successes that don't impress God one bit. We measure our success only by numbers—numbers that measure popularity and material success. People are looking at things like numbers of Twitter followers, Facebook likes, book sales, conference attendees, or warm bodies in the pews on Sunday morning as signs of success. While these numbers may show us some aspects of the impact we are having, they can't be our only measure of success.

Along with measuring success by short-term results, we are also measuring our significance by appearances, that is, the visible highlights of lives we see on social-media posts. If there was ever a more unstable source upon which to establish our significance, it's comparing our lives to others', especially through the images we see on Facebook and Instagram. Looking at someone's life through moments captured in photographs is like looking at an iceberg from the deck of the *Titanic*. You really have no idea what you're seeing because only a small part is visible. I know this because I'm fully aware that my social-media posts are all highlights. I post when my kids look adorable holding ice-cream cones or when the room is full of people at a conference I'm leading, not when I'm trying not to scream at my kids because they won't go to bed or when half the seats at the conference are empty.

To be clear, there's nothing wrong with our desire for significance, but there's everything wrong with where we are looking to define our significance. Similarly, there's nothing wrong with our desire for success, but there is a lot wrong with how we are defining and measuring success. Much of the church is looking in the direction exactly opposite to where we are supposed to be fixing our gaze:

We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:18, NASB)

Neither appearances nor short-term success impress God. He looks at the heart, and He is looking for fruit that lasts. When we stand before Him at the end of our lives, the only thing that will matter is whether our hearts were aligned with His and we have long-term fruit. We want to live in such a way that we will hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matthew 25:21, 23, NIV). That’s the success that must motivate us to embrace His process of building roots in our lives.

TRUST AND THE THREE SOILS

I am passionate about calling and equipping believers to embrace and thrive in God’s root-building process. The purpose of this book is to look at Scripture and learn what to expect as God works to establish deep roots in you. I want to do all I can to eliminate the confusion and anxiety over why things in your life don’t look the way you think they should look and to free you in the knowledge that you are right where you’re supposed to be. I want to set you up to recognize and work with God as He builds you so that you don’t resist Him.

As we journey together through this book, we are going to study the life of David and look at the different elements God developed in his root system during nearly two decades of process and preparation. The main thing God wanted David to be rooted in was a deep trust in Him. For God to establish this abiding trust in David’s life, He had to prepare him in three different *soils*.

The first soil is the *soil of intimacy*. As a shepherd in the field, David built a relationship with God in prayer and worship, and dependence on God as he fought private battles with lions and bears. In the field, David developed a secret-place lifestyle.

The second soil is the *soil of service*. As he served his father, brothers, and King Saul, David took a posture of humility that positioned him to receive God’s grace. In serving, David chose to trust God to promote him rather than take matters into his own hands and try to fulfill the word on his life through self-promotion.

The third soil is the *soil of community*. When four hundred men joined David in the cave of Adullam, he learned what it meant to be a leader of men. He learned to trust his friends and brothers as well as God, learned to encourage and inspire, learned to take hits, learned to model a standard of honor, and learned to lead with a vision.

Each of these soils provided different but equally necessary ingredients to develop and strengthen David’s root system of trust in God. After twenty years of being planted in these soils, David had a root system ready to sustain the weight of God’s bringing to pass the calling over his life. Because David trusted God, God could trust David with a nation.

If David needed to be planted in these three soils, so do you. But the good news is that you don’t really need to go anywhere to find these soils. God didn’t anoint David and then say, “Let’s get you to the castle and then you can start growing.” He started the process right where David was and got him to where he needed to be. In the same way, you are where you are because God has planted you there. God can grow roots of trust in you at whatever job you have, at home raising children or preaching to the masses in India. He already has you positioned to find the soils of intimacy, service, and community right where you are.

God always develops us before He develops our vision. If we don’t understand this, we will resist Him, get frustrated, and ultimately end up disappointed and disillusioned. But if we expect and embrace God’s root-building process in our lives, guess what? We will not only set ourselves up for future success, but we will set ourselves up to thrive in that process.

So let's embrace the process. We can't afford to settle for the lure of short-term success or a moment of popularity. Let's choose to be finishers. Let's choose to be those who are rooted.