The Tale of Three Trees

A Traditional Folktale
Retold by Angela Elwell Hunt
Illustrations by Tim Jonke

The Tale of Three Trees by Angela Elwell Hunt is a beautiful story for both children and adults about the life, ministry, persecution, crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is a beautiful tale to be told anytime but especially at Christmas and Easter.

“Illustrations by Tim Jonke” this is vastly understating the compassionate power and impact of his art.

Teach them to your children and to their children after them.

Deuteronomy 4:9

When Bad Thing Happen To Good Trees
Study Guide by Osten Aune

Bible Basics
Layers of Understanding
"When Bad Things Happen to Good Trees"


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Angela Elwell Hunt did NOT write the Bible Basics... The Three Trees Companion Study Guide. In no way do we imply that this book was written by Angela Elwell Hunt, authorized, endorsed, or affiliated with the author.

Bible Basics... The Three Trees Companion Study Guide was written by lay-people who love God; written for lay-people who love God.

Bible Basics... The Three Trees Companion Study Guide was written to coincide with the "The Three Trees" retold by Angela Elwell Hunt to enhance the reading and study of Angela Elwell Hunt’s book, which we highly recommend.

Thank you, Osten Aune Bible Basics… Layers of Understanding

When Bad Thing Happen To Good Trees Study Guide written by Osten Aune
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A Children’s Book

The *Tale of Three Trees*; the fact that this is a children’s book does not diminish the power and impact of the story of Jesus Christ.

1st Tree – The Birth of Jesus Christ
2nd Tree – Ministry of Jesus Christ
3rd Tree – Persecution, Crucifixion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

“Let the little children come to me....”

The story of Jesus and the little children is told in three gospels of the New Testament:

*Mark 10:13-16*
*Matthew 19:13-15*
*Luke 18:15-17*

The Little Children and Jesus

*Mark 10:13-16*

People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.
The kingdom of God belongs to those who, like children, are prepared to receive the kingdom as a gift from God.

*Mark 10:14 NIV note*

like a little child. With total dependence, full trust, frank openness, and complete sincerity.

*Luke 18:17 NTV Note*

- **but the disciples rebuked them.** The disciples were in a position of authority; probably well intentioned, but they were wrong! Are we ever like this in church?

  “I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

*Mark 10:15*
Dear Lord,

Open our eyes to see Your miracles; like little children.
Open our ears to hear Your Word; like little children.
Open our minds to Your understanding; like little children.
Open our hearts and fill them with Your love and forgiveness; like little children.

Amen
• “Once upon a mountaintop, three little trees stood and dreamed of what they wanted to become when they grew up.”

Is this unlike what we all do when we are children? How have your childlike dreams changed?

• The first tree wanted to “hold treasure” and “to be covered with gold and filled with precious stones.” The first tree wanted to be “the most beautiful treasure chest in the world.”

The first tree’s dreams were of self-interest and selfish. The first tree dreamed of wealth. Have we ever done this?

“You cannot serve both God and Money.”

Matthew 6:24

For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.

1 Timothy 6:10

“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed, a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

Luke 12:15

Whoever loves money never has enough money; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.

Ecclesiastes 5:10

How does this differ with, “Our Daily Bread?”
“I want to be covered with gold and filled with precious stones.” This sounds like a dream of conspicuous, indulgent wealth.

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Matthew 4:4
Luke 4:4

…Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Other wise I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.

Proverbs 30:8-9
“Vanity”  
C. Allen Gilbert

“I will be the most beautiful treasure chest in the world.” Vanity, prestige, appearances were of the most importance. The first tree saw itself “better” than everyone else and only thought of itself.
“Do not store for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Matthew 6:19-21

- The second tree wanted, “to be a strong sailing ship. I want to travel mighty waters and carry powerful kings, I will be the strongest ship in the world.”

“I will be the strongest ship in the world.”
The second tree wanted to be strong, independent, and self-reliant. How is this much different from us?
The second tree was self-centered and didn’t need anybody.
The second tree was so confident he didn’t even need God.
The second tree seemed to be “drunk with ambition.”

“I want to travel mighty waters…..”
The second tree wanted to be “in charge” and “powerful.”
The second tree wanted to be able to conquer all obstacles by itself.

You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant…..”

Deuteronomy 8:17-18
“… and carry powerful kings.”
The second tree wanted to be with the rich and the powerful; no concern for the poor and the weak! The second tree wanted to be with the elite, the privileged, ”the cream of the crop,” and wanted to “rub elbows with the right people.” The second tree was arrogant, full of pride, and wanted to be unsinkable like the “Titanic.”

The first and second trees only had selfish, self-interest motives; no concern or compassion for others!

The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.

Proverbs 29:7
• The third tree didn’t want to leave the mountaintop at all!
What is this meaning of this?
Was the third tree being stubborn or devoted?

As commendable was the third trees motives where; God had
greater plans unimagined and undreamed of by the third tree!

“I want to grow so tall that when people stop and look at me they
will raise their eyes to heaven and think of God. I will be the tallest
tree in the world!”

“I want to grow so tall…”
The third tree wanted its’ “faith” to grow.

Did the third tree want to do everything by itself?

Did the third tree want to be the “center” of attention?

“I will be the tallest tree in the world!”
Could the third tree’s attitude been interpreted/misinterpreted as
being self-righteous and prideful; even judgmental to others?
The Great Commission

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV)

“… when people stop and look at me they will raise their eyes to heaven and think of God.”

The third tree wanted to evangelize, point the way to God.
The third tree wanted to bring others to God!

It is the responsibility of all Christians to testify and proclaim the Word of God and the Good News of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world, to all unbelievers.

“… when people stop and look at me….”
The third tree wanted to be a good example, obediently, and humbly following God. The third tree wanted to be recognized as a Christian by its’ good deeds.

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

James 2:26

Could the third tree ever be misinterpreted as self-righteous and judgmental?
The third tree first thought of God and then thought of others. The third tree was a good example of a Christian not being selfish and having compassion for others!

Jesus replied:

“’Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ this is the first and greatest commandment.

And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Matthew 22:37

- Years passed.

The wicked and the righteous all received the same gifts from God: rain and sunshine. The wicked and the righteous all received the same good and bad weather.

“God causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the wicked.”

Matthew 5:45 adapted

- The woodcutters came and cut down all three trees; even the third tree, which didn’t want to leave the mountaintop at all!

- The wicked seemed to prosper, as the righteous seemed to be cut down! The third tree’s dreams were shattered! Bad Things Happen to Good Trees!

But for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

Psalm 73:2-3

Bible Basics… a closer look 14 When Bad Things Happen To Good Trees
Not one of the three trees realized their dreams!

- The first tree was not turned into a beautiful treasure chest, but was made into a “feed box” a food trough for animals to eat out of.

- The second tree was not built into a mighty sailing ship, but was built into a small smelly fishing boat, too small to sail on the ocean.

- The third tree was “confused” when it was cut down!

*When Bad Things Happen to Good People* by Harold S. Kushner.

Did the third tree ever have doubts? Did the third tree ever lose its faith? Did the third tree trust in God to provide, to answer its prayers?

Do you think that the third tree’s story is similar to what happened to Job? Do you think that the third tree could have felt like Job?

The third tree felt lost, alone, and abandoned; the third tree was suffering. The third tree was losing hope; losing faith!

Do you think that the third tree felt that it was a failure in serving God through its’ ministry and mission to the world?

What were the third tree’s ministry and mission to the world?

**But all things are possible in Jesus Christ!**

- TIME PASSED.

The three trees nearly forgot their dreams.
But all things are possible in Jesus Christ!

- Mother Mary placed Baby Jesus in the manger. “And suddenly the first tree knew he was holding the greatest treasure in the world.” – Jesus Christ! This great treasure is a “free gift” to those who will reach out and accept it.

A Sinner’s Prayer
To accept this great gift of salvation, to be Saved, all you have to do is believe with all your heart and confess with your mouth this short prayer:

Dear God,

I am a sinner. I am sorry for my sins.
Please forgive me. I believe that Jesus Christ is your Son.
I believe that Jesus Christ died for my sins.
I want to invite Him into my life.
I want to trust Him as my Savior
and follow Him as my Lord,
from this day forward and forevermore.
In Jesus’ name.

Amen

That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Romans 10:9-10

The first tree saw Jesus and was filled with grace, the Holy Spirit, and faith, and was Reborn anew! New eyes to see; new ears to hear…. The first tree surrendered itself to Christ!
• Jesus calms the storm on the small fishing boat.
   “And suddenly the second tree knew he was carrying the King of heaven and earth.” The second tree was now carrying the greatest king of all, Jesus Christ; the King of Kings.

The second tree saw Jesus and was filled with grace, the Holy Spirit, and faith, and was Reborn anew! New eyes to see; new ears to hear….

• The second tree was completely transformed into a new creation, but on the outside the second tree was still a small smelly fishing boat, too small to sail on the ocean. The big difference now is that the second tree is now working for God; doing the work God has planned for him. The second tree now had a servant’s heart.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for man. Since you know that you will receive your inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord you are serving.

Colossians 3:23-25

“Suddenly,” “Immediately” Things can happen quickly with Jesus Christ!

According to the Gospel of Mark the conversions of Saul/Paul and Zacchaeus were immediate.
• The third tree on “Good Friday” Jesus was nailed to the cross, the Passion of Jesus Christ.

The third tree was confused and did not understand!
“The third tree “shuddered when soldiers nailed a man’s hands to her.” The third tree “felt ugly, harsh, and cruel.”
The third tree shared in the persecution and death of Jesus Christ.

• “But on Sunday morning…..” Easter:
“It made the first tree beautiful.”
“It made the second tree strong.”
“**And every time people thought of the third tree, they would think of God.**”
All three of the trees were reborn, made into something new, and shared in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ!

“That was better than being the tallest tree in the world.”

There is probably nothing uglier than Jesus Christ crucified and nailed to the cross, but Jesus can turn the ugliest thing into something beautiful! No matter how ugly your life has been, you can turn your life around through Jesus Christ. Now when we look at a crucifix, the cross we think of God’s love, grace, and forgiveness; we remember Jesus’ obedience to God, His loving service and sacrifice for others, and we look for the Hope we have in Jesus Christ for life everlasting.
None of the three trees realized their dreams, but all of their dreams were vastly overshadowed and answered beyond their highest expectations. The three trees dreams and even their prayers were too small. God answered larger, bigger, and wider than they ever imagined! God’s grace is God’s love beckoning and bringing us to Him. We need to remember that God’s grace is God’s love given to us that we did not earn or deserve. Grace.

**No eye has seen,**
**no ear has heard,**
**no mind has conceived**
what God has prepared for those
who love him.

1 Corinthians 2:9

Command those that are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

1 Timothy 6:17-19
Did the three trees do anything to deserve, earn, or merit the blessings, which were bestowed to them? No.

Everything which the three trees received was a Gift from God; God’s Grace!

Even though some people had cut them down and hurt them, God used all of these experiences for good!

God is with us when we are cut down.
God is with us when we suffer.

This story shows how God does not guarantee for us an easy path, no troubles, no hard work, no setbacks, no pain, and no heartache. But God does promise to be with us through our heartaches, problems, and sufferings. God keeps His promises; God is ever faithful. Consider the promises God made to Abraham.

Isn’t it amazing what we can learn from children?
Isn’t it amazing what we can learn from a children’s book?

*THE TREE TREES*
A Traditional Folktale
Retold by Angela Elwell Hunt
Illustrations by Tim Jonke
“I am the true vine, and my Father is the Gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”

*John 15:1-2*

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

*John 15:5*
Let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth.

Psalm 96:11-13

Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightening and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds, kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, young men and maidens, old men and children. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.

Psalm 148:7-13
Trees

Just a few examples.

Tree of Knowledge  
Tree of Life  
Absalom’s hair got caught in a tree  
He is like a tree planted by streams  
But I am like an Olive tree  
Righteous will flourish like a palm tree  
Climbed a Sycamore tree to see him  
Killed by hanging him on a tree  
Then all of the trees of the forest will sing  
Of heaven is like a mustard seed  
Have faith as small as a mustard seed  
The bush was on fire but it did not burn up  
Who appeared to him in the bush  
As for man, his days are like grass  
And all their glory is like the flower  
He makes me lie down in green pastures  
Consider how the lilies grow  
Lover- Like a lily among thorns

Genesis 2:9
Genesis 2:9
2 Samuel 18:9
Psalms 1:3
Psalms 52:8
Psalms 92:12
Luke 19:4
Acts 5:30
Psalms 96:12
Matthew 13:31
Matthew 17:20
Exodus 3:2
Acts 7:35
Psalms 103:15
Isaiah 40:6
Psalm 23:2
Luke 12:27
Song of Songs 2:2

Trees are blessed and are precious to God. Remember that some trees living today were seedlings during the lifetime of Jesus Christ!

Remember: This Tale of Three Trees Study Guide is not the definitive study guide for this book. Scholars have been studying the parables of Jesus Christ for centuries to discover their deeper meanings. The best thing about reading the Tale of Three Trees is that each time you read it you discover new and deeper meanings.

- Osten Aune
There are many examples of seeds, grass, weeds, flowers, bushes, and trees used as metaphors in the Bible. These were things people were familiar with during biblical times.

**The Parable of the Sower**

Matthew 13:1-23
Also Luke 8: 1-15

Matthew 13:3-9

Then he told them of many things in a parable, “A farmer went out to sow some seed. As he was scattering seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.

Some fell in the rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.

Others fell among the thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.

Still other seed fell on good soil. Where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear.”
Jesus tells the meaning of the parable:

*Matthew 13:18*

“listen to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in the heart. This is the seed sown along the path.

- the birds came and ate it up.

The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives the joy. But since he has no root, he last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”
The Parable of the Mustard Seed
Matthew 13:31-32

Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.”

- Although the kingdom will seem to have an insignificant beginning, it will eventually spread throughout the world.
  NIV note Matthew 13:31-32

- The smallest... the largest The mustard seed is not the smallest seed known today, but it was the smallest seed used by Palestinian farmers and gardeners, and under favorable conditions the plant could reach some ten feet in height.
  NIV note Matthew 13:31-32

- ...and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches. When the tree grows and matures it becomes a blessing to others (the birds).

Matthew 17:20

Jesus replied, “Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing is impossible for you.”

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. God called to him from within the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.”

Exodus 3:1-4 adapted
Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

*Genesis 2:8-9*

And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”

*Genesis 2:16-17*

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;
let the sea resound, and all that is in it;
let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them.
Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy;
they will sing before the lord, for he comes,
he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples in his truth.

*Psalm 96:11-13*
Blessed are those who trust in the Lord…. They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they go right on producing delicious fruit.

Jeremiah 17:7-8 (NLT)
Zacchaeus the Tax Collector  
*Luke 19:1-10*

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately, I must stay at your house today.” So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be a guest of a sinner.”

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Look! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will repay back four times the amount.”

Jesus said to him, “*Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.*”

Zacchaeus literally “went out on a limb” for Jesus. Zaccheus was a small man in stature, when Jesus was passing by, Zacchaeus climbed up a Sycamore tree to be able to see Jesus over the crowds of people. Zacchaeus may have looked silly to the crowds up in a tree, but Zacchaeus didn’t care (much like Bartimaeus when he called out to Jesus as the crowd rebuked him). Zacchaeus is an example of how sometimes a Christian may look silly and ridiculous to non-believers. Following Jesus may not be following the crowd or be popular.

*Luke 19:1-10*
It is easy to confuse the story of Saul/Paul the tax collector and the story of Zacchaeus the tax collector. They were both called by Jesus; and both Paul and Zacchaeus immediately came to the invitation of Jesus Christ and followed Him.

- All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be a guest of a sinner.”

**Jesus Came for Sinners**

But the Pharisees (Priest) and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”

Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call on the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

*Luke 5:30-31*

Jesus is the “Great Physician” who heals our brokenness.

Church is not a courtroom to judge sinners.
Church is not a social club for saints.
Church is a hospital to heal sinners!
“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

The Parable of the Lost Sheep
Luke 15:3-7

Then Jesus told them in a parable: “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says. “Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.”

I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over nine-nine righteous persons who did not need to repent.”

Remember, Jesus is the “Good Shepherd” who lay down his life for his sheep.