



## The Roots of Character

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Discover the Phoenix Region Magazine Volume 3 Issue 1, Published on June 19, 2012

[www.adalifequest.com](http://www.adalifequest.com)

Have you ever experienced times when you felt like a bare tree...dried up and lifeless? Then, just when you think there's no hope, a glimmer of possibility emerges like the tiny shoot of a new leaf breaking through the tips of its branches.

Most of us experience seasons or cycles at different times in our lives. Recognizing that this is a natural part of the human experience can help us, especially when we go through times when we feel dormant, bare, and dried up. A seemingly lifeless tree will eventually show signs of life with beautiful fresh leaves if cared for properly during dormant cycles. In our lives, during these times, it's important that we also continue to take care of ourselves; maybe do some "pruning" and recharging to help us get through. It's helpful to not over- react to these natural cycles, but recognize these times help deepen the roots of our character.

In many ways, there are parallels between our lives and trees.

### SUPPORT, WATER AND ENCOURAGEMENT

As we are growing, we need extra support around us the way a tree needs stakes in the ground to help provide stability. During critical times of growth, trees need more water. Steady slow drips are most effective in seeping down to the deepest roots. Steady "drips" of encouragement seep down into our soul and help us stay strong in times of drought.

### SUN AND CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

Along with water, sunlight is important to the growth of a tree. The balance of warmth and light is also critical...not too much and not too little. Life's early years are filled with trial and error. Too much constructive feedback, in the way of criticism, can lead to a spirit that feels dry and brittle. At the

same time, it is difficult to really grow and learn without feedback. Constructive feedback will help us grow stronger, and help us weather the storms of life.

### WIND AND CHALLENGES

Trees and their roots actually become stronger with the force of the wind. Tree's roots reach down deeper, gripping and holding on. A certain degree of steady, but light wind is most common; yet there are also times of strong winds. There are times of calm in our lives, but it's the times of challenge that can cause the most significant growth. Having a stabilizing support system, during these times, can help us bend without breaking.

### PRUNING AND CLEANING HOUSE

If two trees of the same kind are planted at the same time, the tree that is carefully pruned throughout its life will ultimately be the stronger and healthier tree that produces more fruit. Even during this process, there are times when the early fruit needs to be removed so the remaining fruit has room and resources to grow. Occasionally, some fruit needs to be sacrificed to save a limb from snapping and breaking or perhaps even destroying the entire tree.

The process of "pruning" in our lives is not pleasant! It's easy to get bogged down with too much stuff, too much to do, too much dysfunction...or even too much good stuff. Cleaning house can include eliminating unhealthy habits, relationships, and stuff that stifles us, saps all our strength and/or can cause us to snap. This can be a painful process. Just assessing when to prune...where it's most needed...and how to accomplish this effectively is half the battle. You will feel stronger and healthier when you're done.

### FRUIT AND GIVING BACK

Trees that bear fruit or blooms can take many years to start showing any signs of this natural process. Impatient planters may become discouraged at the length of time required to start reaping their harvest. Steady care of a tree can eventually lead to an abundance of fruit that will last a lifetime.

We produce "fruit" when we give back to others. We can give back by sharing our time, wisdom, love, encouragement and resources. Steady self-care and giving to others can eventually lead to an abundance of wisdom and victory that helps multiply our own fruit in due time.

### ROOTS AND CHARACTER

Trees that receive a combination of sunlight, water, wind and support produce roots that continue to grow deeper and stronger. These, in turn, make the tree sturdier and better prepared to handle times of heavy winds or drought. In the same way, balance in our lives is so critical.

A healthy combination of constructive feedback, encouragement, pruning and even challenges, with support, help us grow stronger, and build a sturdy foundation for our **Roots of Character**.

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