

When You Feel Dead on the Inside

When my wife and I moved into our current home, we planted several trees. Three years later, they are looking really good—except for one. Six of the trees are starting to look full (and not like they were planted last month). Even the mailman stopped and complimented me on the trees.

But there's that one sad-looking tree. It's done well for two years, but this season, it acts like it's still January. My wife and I have debated the state of this tree. Is it dead or alive? About the time we determined it'll need to be replaced in the Fall, a tiny twig popped up with a couple of leaves. *Wait? What? Leaves??*



The tree hasn't progressed beyond that, but I'm giving it some extra love and attention right now. It's being watered in a way that is making the other trees jealous. *"Humpf! That tree certainly seems to be more poplar these days."* (Sorry. Bad pun.) The verdict is still out on this tree, but I'm doing what I can to strengthen what remains.

In His message to the church in Sardis, Jesus called on them to "be alert and strengthen what remains" (Rev. 3:2). Like my sad little tree, here was a church that was either dead or about to die.

Scholars debate this passage because Jesus said to the church "you are dead" (v. 1), but in the next verse, He told them to strengthen what is about to die. Was the church in Sardis dead or only close to death? Regardless of where one falls in this discussion, the point is the same: Jesus doesn't want a dead church! He wants us to become a strong church for His glory.

Jesus' call for alertness and revitalization is a call for all churches. Even the strongest churches need to stay alert so that they do not devolve into dying churches.

This is also a call that we, as followers of Christ, need to take to heart. The church slips into poor spiritual health when its members do the same. Am I staying alert and doing all I can to strengthen myself in Christ?

Let's be honest: we can look good on the outside but be decaying on the inside. On any given Sunday, the church can be filled with individuals with hair combed, a Bible in hand, and a smile on the face. We can join in the discussion during Bible study and come off sounding smart and spiritual, but those around us have no idea how spiritually anemic we feel. But we know—and God certainly knows. "I know your works; you have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead" (v.1).

If you feel this way, I offer you the same solution I am giving my tree: water. My tree needs water; so do you.

"For I will pour water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your descendants and my blessing on your offspring" (Isa. 44:3).

What Isaiah prophesied was the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives; God Himself indwelling us to refresh and nourish us. Don't just take it from me. Jesus said so!

"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. The one who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within him.' He said this about the Spirit" (John 7:37-39).

"But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up in him for eternal life" (4:14).

We must be ever dependent on Christ to work in us and through us by the power of His Holy Spirit. When we live our lives filled with His Spirit (Eph. 5:18), there is no room for the emptiness and deadness we experience when we live for ourselves. For me personally, that means I come to the well daily. I begin my day with God's Word—a focus on Him—and a prayer for Him to be in charge as Lord of my life. That focus refreshes me and keeps me alive!



Let's be the people of God who have a reputation for being alive because we *are* alive! "Be alert and strengthen what remains."