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There's something about trees that I so much enjoy
 Their shade offered on a hot sunny afternoon
 Or leaves dancing in the morning sun
 Maybe it's oxygen that fills my lungs, a gift in
 exchange for my breath I give to trees
 Or maybe it's the colors that dance to the ground as
 cool winds sweep leaves away
 It could be the gift of wooden furniture that fills my
 house
 Or wooden projects crafted in my basement
 workshop
 There's something about trees that sustain my life,
 reminding me I'm rooted and grounded in love.

The writer to the Colossians may have also been thinking about trees as he encouraged his listeners to be rooted in Christ, built up in faith. In describing their rootedness, he used the Greek word **ρίζω** (*rhizoo*), which means "cause to strike root, to strengthen with roots, to render firm, cause a person or a thing to be thoroughly grounded."

If you like working with plants, you may recognize the English word linked to this Greek word: *rhizome*. This part of a plant grows below the surface

of the ground, gathering nutrients and water to sustain it. Similar to a root system, the tuberous rhizome structure spreads out horizontally rather than sending a deep tap root into the ground. If you separate a rhizome from the main stem, each piece can grow into a new plant.

It appears that some in the early church were trying to separate themselves by creating conflict, but the writer warns them not to get caught up with their ideas. *The Message* Bible translates the warning as, "Watch out for people who try to dazzle you with big words and intellectual double-talk. They want to drag you off into endless arguments that never amount to anything." Have you ever known someone who likes to argue just for the sake of arguing, trying to prove a point that makes no sense?

The letter then warned its readers to not worry about those who say they have to follow certain rules or ways of worship. What's important is to be rooted in Christ, connected to the body of Christ.

Sometimes we envision trees as solitary plants, growing independently from one another. We can't imagine them forming any type of community, for



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have you ever seen a tree walk over to connect with another tree. Why would the writer to Colossians use the imagery of roots, for they are solitary, right?

Suzanne Simard, however, has changed our view. She's a forest ecologist who has explored the network below the ground: the mycorrhizal networks, which is



a webbing of thready fungi...expanding beyond tree roots, fastening trees to one another in the soil...a cross-hatching of fungal fibers, milk-pale, inky, or translucent. To the trees' advantage, these organic structures act as conduits for shuttling water, carbon, nitrogen, and biochemical information...between trees of the same species...and even between trees of different species.¹

In a similar way, the letter to the Colossians reminded them that they are all interconnected, a vast network of faithful people striving to live their lives rooted and grounded, not by fungi, but through the love of Christ.

The writer of Colossians then invited his listeners to see the bigger picture, way beyond the network of trees. Just look at the universe. *The Message Bible* uses this modern translation of a portion of the letter:

Everything of God gets expressed in [Christ], so you can see and hear him clearly. You don't need a telescope, a microscope, or a horoscope to realize the fullness of Christ, and the emptiness of the universe without him. (2:9-10)

Although a telescope is not required to view our connection to Christ, a telescope can give us a bigger picture of the vastness of the universe, a largely empty space that goes on seemingly forever. The recent images from the James Webb telescope have provided us an enormous picture of the universe, letting us see into the sky father than we ever have before.

Imagine looking into the night sky with your arm outstretched, your fingers holding a tiny speck of sand. Using the James Webb telescope, this tiny speck of space shows an image of thousands of galaxies, with some having formed billions of years ago. We're a tiny speck in the universe, and yet, we are interconnected to this vastness through God's Spirit, an energy that binds all creation together.



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Writer Diana Butler Bass recalled a family trip as a child to Wyoming where she first experienced a night sky without the interference of artificial lights.

The sky was pulsating with millions of stars, more stars than I had ever seen...The words of an old hymn sounded in my mind: "Consider all the worlds thy hands have made."

Consider. Indeed, the word *consider*... comes from the French and literally means to "observe the stars"...That night in Wyoming, I understood that the sky was much more than I knew...I considered not only my strange insignificance, but I considered God, the one who is Light and made the lights.²

Years later as an adult, she reflected on the idea that we all originated from a single big bang at the beginning of the universe. She wrote, "everything that exists was created at the same time; thus all things are connected by virtue of being made of the same matter."³

As the astronomer Carl Sagan explained, "The cosmos is within us. We are made of star-stuff. We are a way for the universe to know itself."

Knowing yourself and knowing the universe are ways to know God, for God is within you and surrounds you into the vastness of space. While looking into the night sky, maybe you have experienced a sense of awe, the transcendent experience of feeling connected to Someone much bigger than yourself.

Just look around. So many ways to sense God's presence.

Stars. Reminding us we interconnected from the beginning.

Trees. Reminding us we are connected to Christ through the invisible Spirit, just as trees are interconnected through a network underground. Trees are grounded in the soil, and as the writer to the Colossians has reminded us, you and I are rooted in Christ.



¹ Rebecca Giggs, "A Better Way to Look at Trees," July/Aug. 2021, www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/07/social-trees-meg-lowman-suzanne-simard/619015/

² Diana Butler Bass, *Grounded: Finding God in the World a Spiritual Revolution*, 101.

³ Bass, 107.