

Pray for someone who struggles to trust other people or God. Such people usually find that their lives slowly diminish, becoming more hardened and distant from the flourishing, prosperous life that God wants for them. Let your prayers spring from the imagery of a thriving tree contrasted with a parched desert bush.

Jeremiah 17:5-6

⁵ *...Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD.*
⁶ *He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.*

1. Pray for a change of heart (vss 5-6)

Consider the slow but certain curse that most people bring on themselves by lifestyles of self-reliance. They may not seem like a dried up tumbleweed, but there could be patterns of life at work now that will eventually cause their life to wither and slowly decline.

- **For hearts to be open to God.** Ask for a shift of heart, that they will open their beings to relationship with God. Pray that Jesus becomes real to them and that they learn how to rely on God by entrusting themselves to Jesus.
- **For freedom from self-reliance.** Few things weaken people more than self-reliance. Self-dependent lives may be respected in popular culture, but the reality is that such people become hardened and parched and lonely. Pray that God gives your friend a fresh encounter with Christ.
- **For interdependent relationships.** People who live isolated from God eventually become estranged from other people. Ask God to refresh their relationships with genuine love and joy.

Jeremiah 17:7-8

⁷ *But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him.*
⁸ *He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.*

2. Pray for new life springing from a new reliance on God (vss 7-8)

The image of a tree struggling to survive with shallow roots in dry sand will help shape your prayer, but focus on what God desires even more than what people seem to need. God wants them to abound with joy and to live courageously and fruitfully. This is only possible with God as their trust and source of life.

- **For new roots.** Pray for faith to form like tree roots growing quietly but quickly. Pray for a complete, saving faith that establishes them in a living, trusting personal relationship with Christ.
- **For new fruits.** Pray for new interests, new relationships, new desires, and new ways of giving of themselves to others.
- **For fearless strength in tough times.** Imagine the life of God trickling into their mind and soul, like water sustaining a tree. Have they been going through stressful days? Are they likely to encounter even more difficult times? Ask God to give them solid roots now so that in the days ahead they will be able to live with steady, fearless poise.

This prayer session has aspects which will make it graphic but not particularly dramatic. The imagery of withered, nearly rootless plants contrasted with sturdy, thriving trees will help people pray with refreshed vocabulary and clarity. But as helpful as the images can be, the changes you will be praying toward come about slowly. Coach the prayer session to envision long-haul changes with far-reaching ramifications.

Establish the images

Read Jeremiah 17:5-8 aloud. Invite participants to identify what the differences are between the blessed and the cursed. Discuss how the contrasting images may look like in people that they know. One important aspect is how long it usually takes for someone's life to display the features of verses 5 and 6. If participants recognize that there is often a long process for someone's life to wither to the point that they resemble the image in Jeremiah, they are more likely to sense that the image is relevant to the people they know.

Identify who you are praying for

Ask participants to focus their prayers on particular people who have yet to follow Christ and experience the transformation He desires for them. Each participant can name a person, or small groups of two or three people can focus on one person.

Round One: The critical change of heart

Jeremiah makes it clear that self-reliant people experience diminished lives because they divorce themselves from God and His life. Using the points provided, call for prayers that focus on a crucial change of heart to trust God. Ask God to water their lives with His mercy and fresh revelation of Jesus.

Round Two: The ongoing changes of life

Using the imagery of new roots and new fruits can help focus prayers for the reality of conversion. A root system is one of the best images to depict what faith is and how it works. Prayer for fruits focuses prayer on the new life of self-giving and Christ-like character. Self-reliant people often find it difficult or impossible to be generous and other-oriented. Pray for the sheer joy of becoming a fruitful person.

Futile attempts at fear management is often why people turn to themselves and away from God. Ask God to deal with their fears and worries so that they become a strong, steady people in the midst of any set of circumstances. The tendency is to pray that the circumstances would improve. Instead, pray that they become the kind of people that will stand firm in tough situations.

Round Three: Pray for each other

Invite participants to pray for each other. Groups of two or three will work very well. Give them some sample prayers to pray for each other to get them going. For instance you might pray, "Increase _____'s root system. May he/she take in your life richly in the days ahead." Or, "Give _____ faith that will liberate her/him from worry."