



Dear Friends and Family

I recently read a retelling of the timeless story *The Tale of Three Trees*. This fictitious children's book relates the lofty aspirations of an olive tree, an oak tree, and a pine tree. Each of these trees had a great dream to become something special in life. The olive tree dreamed of becoming a finely crafted treasure chest. It wanted to hold gold, silver, and precious jewels. One day a woodsman chose the one olive tree, out of all the trees in the forest, and cut it down. The olive tree was so thrilled. But as the craftsmen began working on him, the tree realized they weren't making him into a beautiful treasure chest; they were making him into a manger to hold food for dirty, smelly animals. Heartbroken, his dreams were shattered. He felt worthless and demeaned.

Similarly, the oak tree dreamed of becoming part of a huge ship that would carry important kings across the ocean. When the woodsman cut down the oak, he was so excited. But as time went on, he realized the craftsmen weren't making him into a huge ship. They were making him into a tiny fishing boat. He was so discouraged, so disappointed.

The pine tree lived on top of a high mountain. Its only dream was to always stand tall and remind people of God's great creation. But in a split second, a bolt of lightning sent it tumbling to the ground, destroying its dreams. The woodsman came and picked it up and carried it off to the scrap pile.

All three of these trees felt they had lost their value and their worth; they were so discouraged, so disappointed. Not one of their dreams had come to pass. But God had other plans for these trees. Many years later, Mary and Joseph couldn't find any place to give birth to their little baby boy. They finally found a stable, and when Jesus was born they placed Him in a manger made from—you guessed it—the olive tree. The olive tree had wanted to hold precious jewels, but God had better plans, and it now held the greatest treasure of all time, the Son of God.

A few years went by and Jesus grew up. One day He needed a boat to cross to the other side of the lake. He didn't choose a large, fancy ship; He chose a small, simple fishing boat made from—you guessed it—the oak tree. The oak tree wanted to carry important kings across the ocean, but God had better plans. The oak now carried the King of kings.

A few more years went by, and one day some Roman soldiers were rummaging around in the pile of scrap wood where the discarded pine tree lay. That pine tree just knew they were coming to cut him up for firewood. But much

to its surprise, they cut only two small pieces out of it and formed them into a cross. And it was on this pine tree that Jesus was crucified. That tree is still pointing people to God's love and God's compassion to this day.

The point of the classic story is clear: All three trees thought they had lost their value, that their stories were over, yet they became integral parts of the greatest story ever told.

God knows your value; He sees your potential. You may not understand everything you are going through right now. But hold your head up high, knowing that God is in control and He has a great plan and purpose for your life. Your dreams may not have turned out exactly as you'd hoped, but the Bible says that God's ways are better and higher than our ways. Even when everybody else rejects you, remember, God stands before you with His arms open wide. He always accepts you. He always confirms your value. God sees your two good moves! You are His prized possession. No matter what you go through in life, no matter how many disappointments you suffer, your value in God's eyes always remains the same. You will always be the apple of His eye. He will never give up on you, so don't give up on yourself.

I want to take this opportunity, as well, to wish you a prosperous, healthy and happy new year.

Remember you are highly favoured and greatly blessed.

With all my love
Suzanne