

A TEACHING FROM THE BRANCH OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

A Contrary Spirit

On Being Planted in One House and Watered by Another

Lucky Mahlasela

branchofrighteousness.org

Introduction

It is possible to belong to a house and rarely be fed by it. You will find this person in almost every congregation: present in the building, listed as a member, known by name — but the overwhelming share of what actually forms them, week to week, is arriving from somewhere else. Another preacher's livestream. Another group's voice notes. A different altar, a different emphasis, a different spirit, absorbed daily, while the place they are planted receives only their attendance.

This is not, at first, a dramatic problem. No vows are broken. No one leaves. But something begins to shift underneath the surface — a subtle resistance to correction, a habit of measuring the house against “how they do it elsewhere,” a language and rhythm that increasingly belongs to a different stream. Scripture has a picture for exactly this condition, and it starts, fittingly, with a tree and a river.

The Anchor Text

JEREMIAH 17:5–8 (KJV)

“Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.”

Notice what the blessed tree is not merely doing. It is not simply *planted* — plenty of dead and struggling trees are planted somewhere. It is planted *by the waters*, and its roots spread out *by the river*. The location of the planting and the location of the watering are the same place. That single detail is the whole teaching in miniature.

Two Things This Text Won't Let Us Miss

The source determines the season

The tree by the river “shall not see when heat cometh” and “shall not be careful in the year of drought.” Its fruitfulness is not a personality trait. It is a direct consequence of where its roots actually reach. A person's spiritual fruit, in the same way, is rarely a mystery — it is usually a fairly

accurate report of where they have actually been drawing their life from, regardless of where their name is recorded.

Every root reaches for something — the question is what

The text is not warning us against dependency. Roots are supposed to reach; that is their design. The warning is aimed at the man who “trusteth in man” and whose “heart departeth from the LORD” — a heart that has quietly relocated its source while the planting stayed put. This is why the picture of “a contrary spirit” is more precise than simply calling someone unfaithful. They have not necessarily left. Their roots have.

A Necessary Clarification: Watering Is Not the Problem

1 CORINTHIANS 3:6–9 (KJV)

“I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase... For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building.”

This matters, because the teaching is easy to misapply into isolationism — as if hearing any voice outside your own house were itself the danger. Paul corrects that reading before it can take hold: he planted, Apollos watered, and both were “labourers together” in the very same field. Multiple voices watering the same planting, in agreement with it and strengthening it, is not division. It is exactly how a field is meant to grow.

The danger this teaching names is not *outside* input. It is *contrary* input — water drawn from a source that pulls against the field you are actually planted in, rather than deepening it.

Defining a Contrary Spirit

Paul gives us the word itself in Galatians: “the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are *contrary* the one to the other” (Galatians 5:17). *Contrary* does not mean merely different. It means actively opposing — working against. On that definition:

A contrary spirit is the instability that grows in someone who is planted in one house but habitually watered by another — not always through rebellion, but through a slow relocation of trust, until the two sources begin to pull against each other inside a single life.

In practice, it tends to show up in three recognisable ways:

Correction meets resistance

Not open defiance, usually — something quieter. A word from leadership lands, and instead of settling, it is measured against a different voice first, one that was never in the room. James calls this condition plainly: “a double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8).

Elsewhere becomes the standard

The house’s teaching, rhythm, and language start being quietly compared to “how it’s done” wherever the real watering happens. Not always spoken aloud, but present in the tone of every comparison — the sense that the true standard lives somewhere else, and this house is simply where attendance happens to occur.

Instability wears the costume of depth

Paul warns of being “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14). A person drawing from several contrary streams can appear well-fed — full of language, quotes, and opinions — while actually being the very thing Paul describes: unrooted, wind-driven, mistaking motion for maturity.

What to Do With This

This is not a call to cut off every outside voice, and it is not a demand for blind loyalty regardless of what a house actually teaches. It is a call to *congruence* — to let the place you are planted and the place you are watered be, in substance, the same field. Before receiving regularly from any voice outside your own house, a simple test is worth asking honestly:

Does this water deepen the roots I already have here, or does it quietly compete with them?

Jesus put the same principle even more simply: “I am the vine, ye are the branches... abide in me, and I in you... for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:4–5). A branch can remain physically attached and still fail to abide, if what is actually feeding it comes from anywhere but the vine it is joined to.

For Reflection

1. Where does most of your spiritual nourishment actually come from in a given week — and is it the same place you are planted?

2. When correction comes from where you are planted, what is the first voice you measure it against?
 3. Is there language, comparison, or an unspoken “standard” you carry from elsewhere into how you engage with your own house?
 4. What would it look like, this month, to let the water and the planting become one field again?
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A Closing Word

A contrary spirit rarely announces itself. It arrives quietly, one borrowed standard at a time, until a person can be fully present in a room and still be rooted somewhere else entirely. The remedy is not suspicion of every outside voice, but honesty about which river your roots have actually learned to reach for — and the humility to let the place God planted you become, again, the place that waters you.

*“He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season”
(Psalm 1:3).*

Let where you are planted be where you are watered.