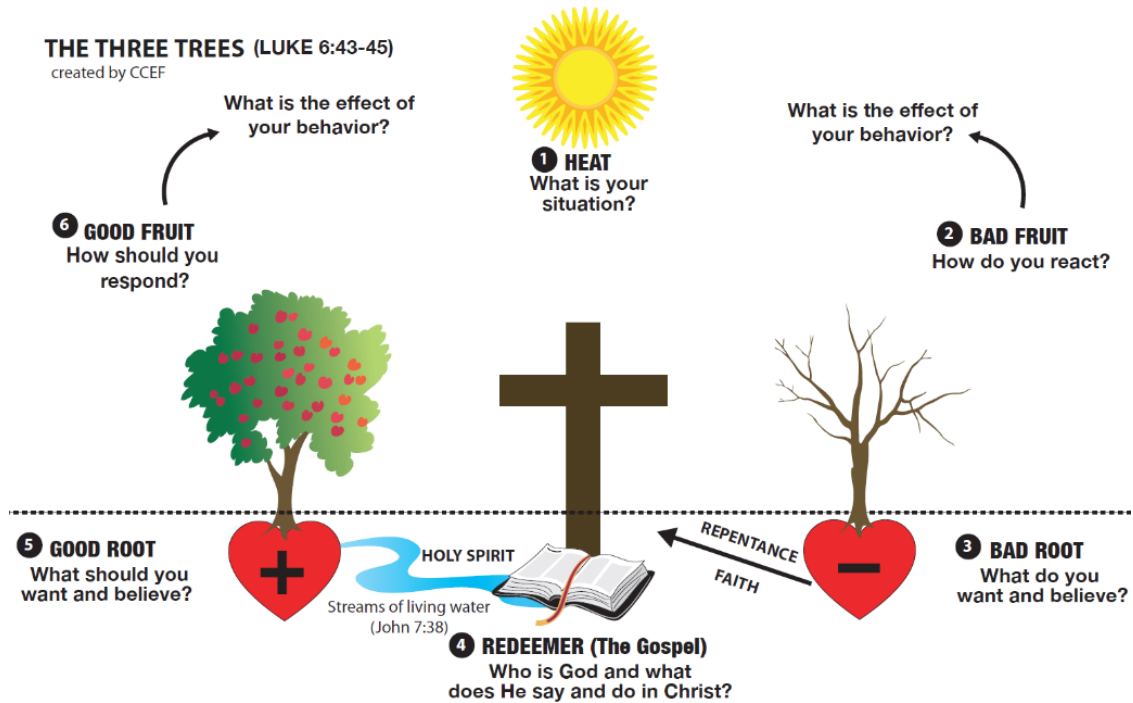


# THREE TREES



This illustration will help you rethink the root causes of your feelings and behaviors and the hope for lasting change that does not depend on people, or your circumstances changing for you to experience inner peace and joy.

**Luke 6:43-45**, "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briers. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of."

**HEAT** (What is your situation?) We are always reacting to things that are happening around us. Whether it is the scorching heat of difficulty or the unexpected rain of blessing, you are always responding to whatever is coming down on you. The Bible presents a shockingly real picture of a fallen world. It is honest about the things that happen here.

**THORNS** (How do you react? What do you want, and believe?) You and I are never really passive. We are always acting, reacting, and responding to the "heat" (or "rain") in our lives. Maybe it's a tough boss or a crazy extended family. Perhaps it is a rebellious child or a chronic sickness. Maybe it's a new career opportunity or a newly acquired inheritance. Whatever it is, the Bible helps us to see how we react to the "heat," in our hearts and our outward behavior. It reminds us that sinners tend to respond to the fallen world sinfully and each reaction yields a harvest of consequences. Scripture also makes it clear that these responses are not forced on us by the pressures of the situation. Rather, they flow out of the thoughts and motives of our hearts.

**CROSS** (Who is God, and what does he say and do in Christ?) The God of the Bible presents himself as “an ever-present help in trouble.” The ultimate example is Christ, who came to a fallen world to live, die, and rise again. He gave us everything we need to respond in a godly way to what we face daily. The promise of the cross is not just renewed strength or enhanced wisdom; it is a new heart that begins to evidence new strength and wisdom in the face of daily trials and blessings. Christ, the Redeemer, gives us himself and in so doing remakes us from the inside out. Each of us is in the process of being remade to reflect the character of Jesus himself. This is truly amazing! His patience, love, mercy, courage, boldness, justice, and grace can be expressed more and more in and through us as we grow into his likeness.

**FRUIT** (Seek God in repentance and faith. Respond with love.) Because of what Christ has done, we can respond to the same old pressures in a brand-new way. Out of hearts renewed by him, we behave differently in response to the circumstances of life. These new responses produce a harvest of fruitful consequences in our lives and the lives of others

**Jeremiah 17:5–10** The Bible typically uses concrete images to illustrate spiritual truths. Jeremiah 17:5–10 is a good example. Look at the main images in this passage. In verse 8, the image of Heat is used to describe life in a fallen world. In verse 6 the image of a Thorn Bush in the wasteland represents the ungodly person who turns away from the Lord. In verses 5 and 7, there is a clear reference to the Lord. He is the Redeemer who comforts, cleanses, and empowers those who humbly trust in him. We represent this part of the passage by the Cross to capture the redemptive activity of God on our behalf. In verses 7 and 8, the image of a Fruitful Tree emerges, representing the godly person who trusts in the Lord. In the midst of these images, verses 9 and 10 show us a God who does not simply focus on our behavior. Though he does not ignore behavior, his focus is on our hearts. He is the searcher of hearts because they are central in the change process he undertakes as our Redeemer. This gives us a simple but helpful view of life that involves four basic elements described metaphorically.

We have the **HEAT**. This is the person’s situation—the real world with all of its difficulties, blessings, temptations and enticements.

We have **THORNS** (the bush)—the person’s ungodly response to the situation. This includes behavior, the heart that drives the behavior, and the consequences that follow.

We have the **CROSS**—that is, the presence of God in all his redemptive glory and love. He brings comfort, cleansing, and power to change.

Finally, we have **FRUIT**—the person’s new, godly response to the situation as a result of God’s redemptive power at work in the heart. This includes behavior, the heart renewed by grace, and the consequences that follow. Thus we have a simple biblical picture that captures the major elements of change in the midst of life: HEAT-THORNS-CROSS-FRUIT

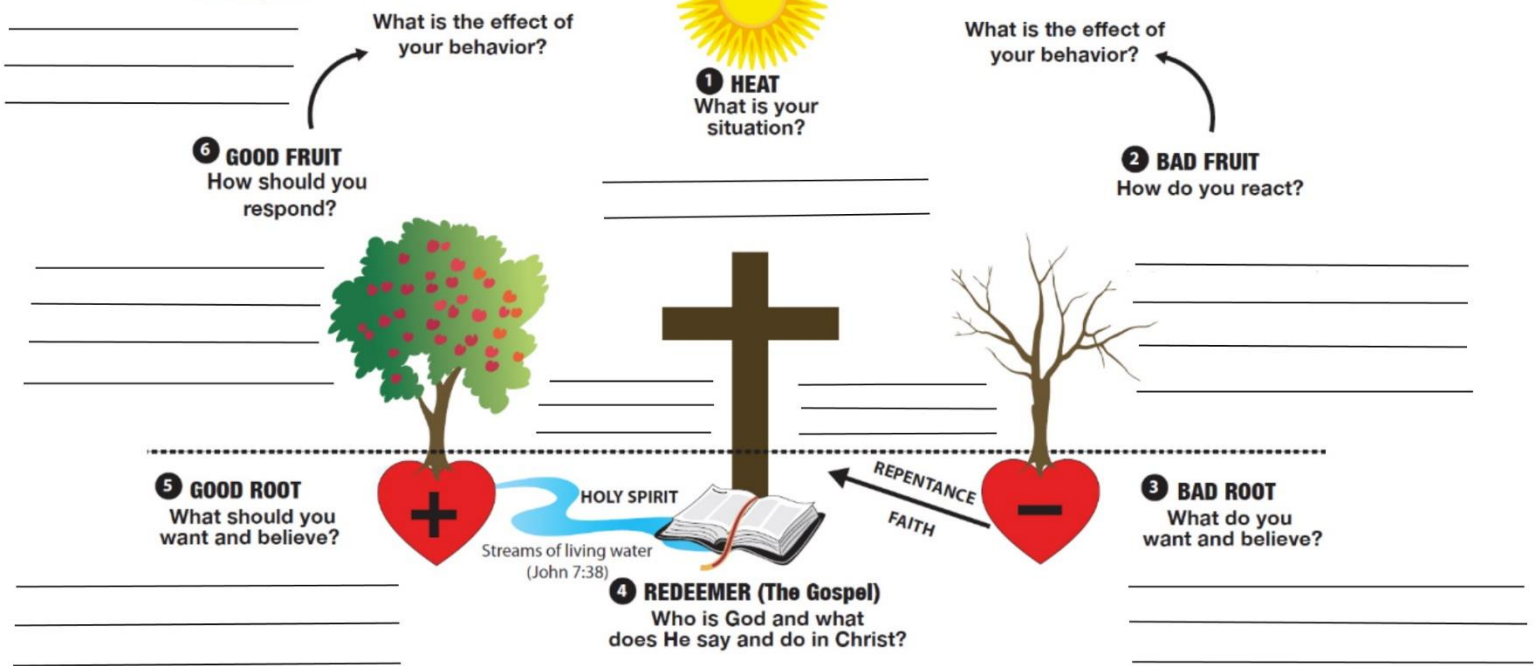
**After reading through this description of the Three Trees, what stood out to you? Where do you feel convicted? What questions does it bring up for you?**

Read through the story of Jonah in the old testament.

Then complete the Three Trees diagram from his perspective.

# JONAH'S THREE TREES

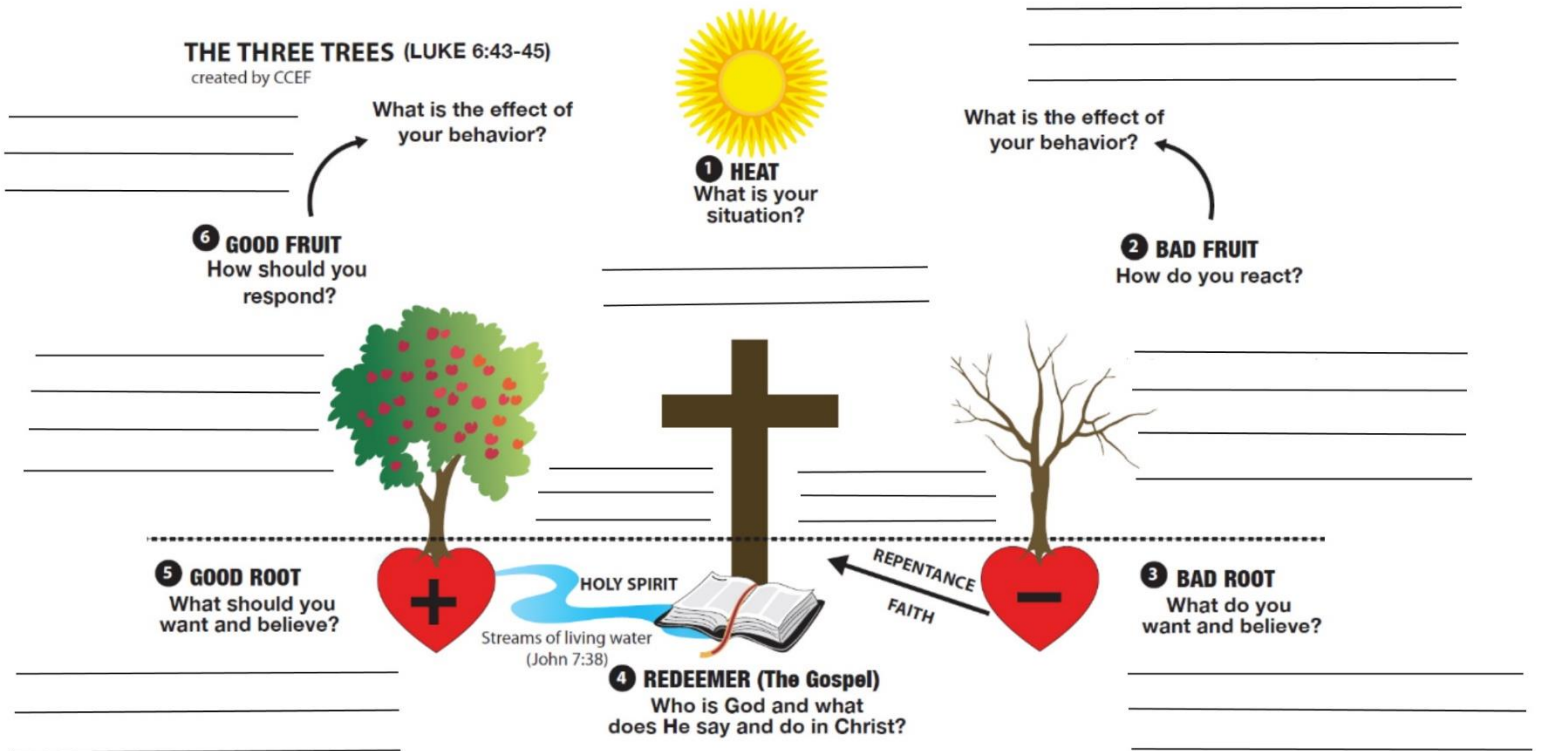
**THE THREE TREES (LUKE 6:43-45)**  
created by CCEF



In what ways can you relate to Jonah's roots and fruit?

Now consider a recent "heat" in your own life and complete the diagram with that situation in mind.

# THREE TREES



What was it like working through this exercise? What thoughts did you have about it? What emotions did you sense?

What encouraged you? challenged you? What questions did it bring up for you?

Write a short note to God, let him know what you noticed about yourself, what you noticed about him. Tell him something you are thankful for after completing this exercise and tell him something you need help with.