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Dear Friends,

A mighty oak tree lived proudly on the bank of a beautiful lake. His age and stature gave him great status in the local wildlife community. When storms would come with great winds the oak tree would lean into the wind and smile at his great strength to withstand the forces of nature. Often after a storm he would mock the lowly cattails who had suffered from the wind storm. They would be a tangled mess; with some reeds broken and others still standing. Those in better shape would encourage their less fortunate friends and in time all got back to swaying in the breeze. The old oak made fun of their seeming weakness and felt his life was superior and told them so. But one day a great hurricane came to the lake with fierce winds that blew with force even stronger than the great oak tree. He felt his roots tearing and fell to the ground. His rigid strength was also the cause of his defeat. As he lay there dying, he saw the lowly cattails beginning to recover from the mess caused by the great storm.

This application is important because there are two kinds of strength in this story. First is unbending strength, a stiffness that comes with needing to be superior and in control. Some Christians suffer greatly because of their unwillingness to learn from the winds of life (circumstances). Proverbs 12:15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice. Because of their unwillingness to learn from the problems they face their suffering is often tragic and God allows it to happen! Many times in counseling we see this as people are busy denying responsibility and only blaming others. Proverbs 18:2 A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.

The second kind of strength is the ability to be flexible as the cattails in our story. Flexible people learn from their mistakes and are open to Gods guidance to repair any damage and move on with their life. This gives them courage to try again and as they learn from mistakes their confidence allows them to try new things. Learning to not make the same mistakes can cause us to not afraid to try new things! This makes life an adventure instead of a chore! Proverbs 1:5 Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtains guidance. Proverbs 9:9 Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser...

Debi and I stayed busy in 2019. Together we spent time with 235 people and counseled about 800 hours. Our clients have changed over the years and now we are seeing more young people. Currently we are both seeing young teens struggling with all kinds of problems. You might think these are all public school kids but not true! I have worked with Christian school kids as well as home schoolers. Generation X is made up of young people from about 15 to 25 and it appears they are struggling with depression and suicide thoughts in significant numbers. If you have young adults and teens in your life please don't ignore subtle signs of withdrawal and mood changes. They live in a different world with the social media influence very strong in their lives.

2019 has been an interesting year! With rumors of our retirement, not true yet, and age related health issues life has taken on new dimensions. I recently heard that one of the great skills of thriving in this complex world is the ability to adapt to your new normal. I recently had a discussion with a man about my age and he made the strangest statement. He said, "I'm not old!" I looked him up and down and replied, "You haven't looked in the mirror lately have you?" Adapting to reality is hard for some of us but to thrive requires owning the truth about age and ability.

God Bless you for praying for us and the work we do at Alpha. We couldn't do it without you!

*Richard*