

# The Giving Tree

Many illustrators have articulated one or more of the great grace lessons that can be learned from the classic children's tale *The Giving Tree*.

*The Giving Tree* is a children's picture book written and illustrated by Shel Silverstein. First published in 1964 by Harper & Row, it has become one of Silverstein's best-known titles and has been translated into numerous languages.

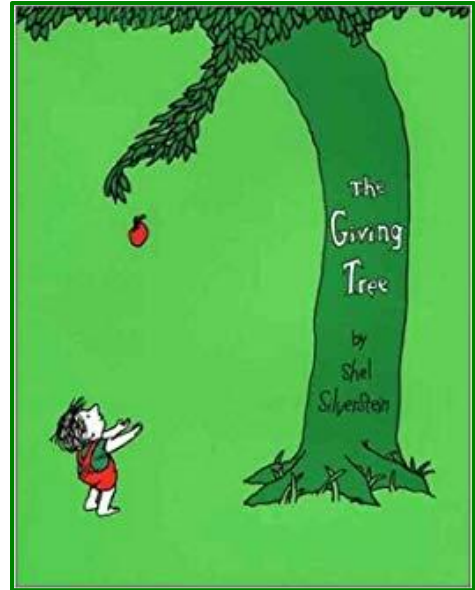
If you have yet to read it, the story chronicles the life of a young boy who is befriended by a very generous tree. As a child, the boy plays in its branches, and the tree, we are told, "was happy."

As he grew, the boy lay in its shade and carved his initials in its bark, and the tree "was happy."

As a young man, he cut branches from the tree to build himself a house, and the tree "was happy."

As an older man, he needed to get away from the cares of life, so he chopped down the tree and made a boat to sail away, and still the tree "was happy."

Finally, as an old man, worn and tired, he returned to the tree to find nothing but a stump. As he wondered of what use it could now be, the tree spoke to the weary old man.



"Well," said the tree, "an old stump is good for sitting and resting. Come, Boy, sit down. Sit down and rest."

And the boy did. And the tree "was happy."

Silverstein had difficulty finding a publisher for *The Giving Tree*. An editor at Simon & Schuster rejected the book's manuscript because he felt it was "too sad" for children and "too simple" for adults. Silverstein was encouraged to approach Ursula Nordstrom, who was a publisher with Harper & Row.

Interest in the book increased by word of mouth; for example, in churches it was hailed as a parable on the joys of giving. As of 2001, more than 5 million copies of the book had been sold, placing it 14<sup>th</sup> on a list of hardcover *All-Time Bestselling Children's Books* from *Publishers Weekly*. By 2011, more than 8.5 million copies of the book had been sold.

(more)

Critics have long decried the simplicity of another story – the gospel message. It's too easy, they claim. Surely if salvation were to be offered of God, it would come fraught with great effort and striving. But it is indeed a simple message.

Paul and Silas, imprisoned for sharing their faith in Christ, began praying and singing hymns to God at midnight. A great earthquake shook the foundations of the prison, the doors were opened, and everyone's chains were loosed.

The keeper of the prison ran in, fell down before Paul and Silas and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"



So they said: *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household* (Acts 16:31 NKJV).

How simple is that?

Don't balk at the greatest story of all time – the gift offered in the real Giving Tree – the cross of Christ!

– Beecher Hunter