Tree of Life Exercise

Basic Concept

In the Tree of Life Exercise, you will create a visual metaphor in which a tree represents various aspects of your life—past, present, and future. You don’t have to be a talented artist to do this exercise; being honest with yourself and others is far more important.

Use the supplies provided to draw a tree, including roots, trunk, branches, leaves, and fruit. You might even consider drawing a compost pile nearby. Each element of the tree represents something about you. Whatever you choose to include will tell you—and others—something about the forces that have shaped you, where you see yourself now, and what you hope to become.

Elements of Your Tree of Life

1. Compost Heap: Label the compost heap with anything that creates negative thoughts or poor self-esteem. They may be places, problems, experiences, people, or anything else. They are the things with which you no longer want to define yourself.

2. Roots: Label the roots with places, people, and experiences from your past that have had a positive impact on you as you grew up. This may be the place to identify your family, church tradition, cultural group, or anything that shaped you.

3. Ground: Label the ground with the people, places, activities, and other things that you choose to do on a regular basis because they nurture your livelihood. It’s probably best not to include the things you must do; include only that which gives you life and joy.

4. Trunk: Label the trunk with the skills and values that define who you in the present. Choose the most important of these, the ones at which you excel and the ones that others regularly recognize in you.

5. Branches: Label your branches with your hopes, dreams, and wishes. These may be personal, family, or communal ones. They may be short-term or long term. Whatever is most important to you as you look toward the future.

6. Leaves: Label the leaves of your tree with people who are important to you now, and likely will remain important as you pursue the hopes, dreams, and wishes that you
identified.

7. Fruit or Flowers: Label the fruit or flowers on your tree with the legacies that you hope to leave behind. You may want to think specifically about the people you identified in your leaves when you do so.

Sharing Your Tree of Life

The visual metaphor that you have created aims at supporting you as you tell your story. In this case, you are being asked to share your story with the other members of your group. In doing so, you may want to indicate how you see your past, present, and future including your studies at Christian Theological Seminary.

Going Deeper

Many who have completed this exercise have seen that it is only the beginning for them. Some have chosen to go deeper into this self-exploration by journaling, writing letters to those who show up in their compost pile or tree, express themselves further through art, meditation, and many other ways.

Of course, you are encouraged to continue clarifying your personal story.