

## ***Spiritual Redwoods***

Bob Adams

Images are often powerful reminders of our past. One of my boyhood memories is that of eagerly anticipating the monthly delivery of “National Geographic” magazine. The familiar yellow border outlining an amazing photo was my ticket for travel around the country and the world. It’s a pleasure I enjoy to this day, as one of our family continues give the magazine as a gift each year. I keep them all – now going on 30 years, plus dozens of other pre-1979 issues I have picked up at occasional yard sales (but that’s another story!).



The October 2009 issue has a striking image of a redwood tree on it. As soon as I saw the magazine in its shrink-wrapped shipping bag, I was transported back to first grade show and tell: my crude drawing of a redwood tree, taken from a July 1964 NG story. I filed that thought away, and not long afterwards, had the occasion to visit my boyhood home in Tennessee. I asked my dad about that magazine, and sure enough, he had kept the magazines too! I pulled the issue off the shelf and thumbed through it, gazing again at living giants thousands of years old, comparing them to the same family of trees 45 years later. While I enjoyed that trip down memory lane, there was still something tugging at my thoughts.

When I returned home, I searched my library and found the answer: “Growing Spiritual Redwoods” by William Easum and Thomas Bandy. Published in 1997, it was a striking call for church leaders to understand the new paradigm the church was entering. They likened the healthy church to a redwood tree. I remember reading the text when it first came out, and my copy bore highlighted sections, Post-It® Notes, and scribbles throughout.

Using the metaphor of the redwood tree, the authors described the growing and healthy church as follows:

- They stand taller than any other tree, but their visibility is less a function of the numbers of their adherents, and more the magnitude of their ministries
- They hold aloft an enormous umbrella of intertwined branches, which shelter a huge diversity of life in an atmosphere of peace and mutual respect
- They are resistant to crisis from beyond and disease from within. Political winds do not break them, and ideological fires cannot burn them down
- They put down strong, extensive root systems that intertwine with those of other Redwoods. They draw nutrition from unexpected sources, and reach out into unlikely places
- They regenerate in abundance. Not only do seeds initiate new life across the forest floor, but they sprout vigorously even from the stumps of felled trees

What can you learn from the redwood tree?