



The Master's Garden

From Seed to Harvest

A Journey Through God's Garden of Grace

The Narrative

"Certainly, it is more important to lead a soul to Christ than to plant a garden, but the planting of a garden can be as holy an act as the winning of a soul."

— A. W. Tozer, The Pursuit of God

FOREWORD

There is something timeless about a garden.

From the opening pages of Scripture to its closing promises, gardens appear repeatedly as places of beauty, growth, renewal, and communion with God. Throughout the Bible, gardens reveal the heart of our Creator and His desire to cultivate life within His people.

This narrative, together with its companion video presentation, explores the profound connection between planting and cultivating a garden and the Lord's work in the life of every believer. Just as a gardener prepares the soil, plants seeds, waters faithfully, prunes carefully, and patiently waits for growth, so God lovingly works within our hearts. He nurtures our faith, removes what hinders spiritual growth, and produces fruit that brings honor and glory to His name.

After more than three years in the making, this journey invites you to slow life's hurried pace and walk quietly through the garden. Listen carefully. Observe thoughtfully. Reflect prayerfully. Allow the beauty of God's creation to draw your attention to the gentle work of the Holy Spirit within your own life.

This is not a study of religion or ritual. Rather, it is an invitation into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.

The garden becomes a sanctuary—a place where we meet Him, worship Him, and discover His presence in fresh and personal ways. Here, amid quiet pathways and blooming flowers, we find rest for weary souls, renewal for troubled hearts, and the peace that comes from abiding in Christ.

Like every garden, our spiritual lives experience seasons of planting, waiting, growth, pruning, and harvest. Yet through every season, the Master Gardener remains faithful. His hands never cease their work. His purposes are always good. His desire is to transform us into the likeness of His Son.

As you meditate on the truths presented throughout these pages, may they become more than words on paper. May they inspire personal Bible study, thoughtful reflection, and a deeper understanding of God's Word. Above all, may they strengthen your daily walk with Jesus Christ.

Ultimately, every pathway in the garden leads to the same destination—the Cross.

There we behold the greatest expression of God's love, revealed through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our salvation. There we discover the source of every blessing, every promise, and every hope. There our hearts are moved to offer praise, honor, and glory to the One who gave Himself for us.

My prayer is that this journey through the garden will draw you closer to the Savior, awaken your awareness of His presence, and fill your heart with gratitude for His transforming grace.

I approach this work with humility and reverence, praying that all who read these pages or view the accompanying presentation will experience God's blessing and inspiration. May every reader be encouraged to offer thanksgiving and praise to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and may each life be transformed according to His perfect will.

*"The kiss of the sun for pardon,
The song of the birds for mirth;
One is nearer God's heart in a garden
Than anywhere else on earth."*

— Dorothy Frances Gurney

CHAPTER ONE

The Beginning

I stood in the curve of a newly graded driveway, surveying nearly one and three-quarter acres of weed-covered ground. At the top of the gently sloping hillside stood our new manufactured home, positioned so that the rear of the house overlooked the property. From the future deck, I imagined gazing across a beautiful flowering garden.

The reality, however, was far from inspiring.

The land was uneven and scarred with red clay, rocky soil, scattered shale, and towering weeds. Grass was almost nonexistent. Standing alone near the center of the property was a single dogwood tree, quietly defying the odds that anything of beauty could survive there.

As I looked over the landscape, I wondered whether a flourishing garden could ever be created on such barren ground. What could possibly grow here? More importantly, would anything thrive?

My doubts made me reluctant to begin.

To put it plainly, I was skeptical.

Looking back, I realize that many people view their own lives in much the same way. They see brokenness instead of beauty. They are burdened by sin, self-doubt, disappointment, and discouragement. They wonder how God could possibly create anything beautiful from the circumstances they face.

Yet that is often the very place where the Lord chooses to begin His work.

God first loved us before we ever loved Him. He demonstrated that love at the Cross, where Jesus Christ willingly gave His life for our redemption.

Gardening was not unfamiliar territory for me. Years earlier, while living on California's beautiful Central Coast, I had designed and maintained an extensive landscape overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Sago palms, native shrubs, flowering plants, and colorful blooms surrounded our home throughout the year. That garden became a labor of love developed over many years.

Creating something comparable in North Carolina appeared almost impossible.

The circumstances that brought us there began with a decision to downsize. My wife, Midge, and I realized we were entering a new season of life. After much prayer and discussion with our son and daughter-in-law, we decided it would be wise to move closer to family.

Leaving California was bittersweet.

We said goodbye to coastal sunsets, ocean breezes, and familiar surroundings. Yet we also stepped forward in faith, trusting that the Lord had prepared something new for us.

Little did I know that His plan included much more than planting a garden.

It would become a living illustration of His work in my own life.

Spiritual Insights

Genesis 2:8

“And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there He put the man whom He had formed.”

The Garden of Eden was far more than a beautiful landscape. It was a place of God’s presence, provision, fellowship, and purpose. Adam was placed there to cultivate it, guard it, and walk in communion with his Creator.

When sin entered the garden, humanity lost that perfect fellowship. Yet throughout Scripture, God continues His work of restoring what was broken.

The story of the Bible begins in a garden and ends with the promise of restored fellowship with God.

Isaiah 51:3

“For the Lord comforts Zion; He comforts all her waste places and makes her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song.”

This promise extends beyond Israel.

No matter how rocky the soil of our lives may seem, God is able to restore it.

He brings beauty where there has been barrenness.

Hope where there has been despair.

Joy where there has been sorrow.

Faith where there has been doubt.

Like the neglected hillside before me, our hearts may appear beyond repair. Yet nothing is impossible for God.

As Jesus declared:

Luke 1:37

“For nothing will be impossible with God.”

The journey of this garden—and the spiritual lessons it reveals—begins with that promise.

Blessing

THE WATER OF GRACE

No garden can flourish without water. Dry soil eventually hardens, leaves wither, and flowers fade.

Our souls are no different.

We were created to be refreshed by the presence of God. His grace flows gently yet powerfully, restoring what is weary, strengthening what is weak, and bringing life where spiritual dryness has settled.

Draw near to Him through prayer, worship, and His Word.

Allow His living water to refresh every corner of your heart.

CHAPTER TWO

Getting Started

Three years have passed since the first shovel of earth was turned to begin the creation of what has become our “Heavenly Hideaway” garden.

Today, the upper deck of our home provides a panoramic view of the landscape below. From this vantage point, we overlook the rose garden, flowering trees, winding stone pathways, fountains, native shrubs, gazebos, and inviting seating areas that encourage visitors to pause, reflect, and enjoy the beauty of God’s creation.

Looking across the garden now, it is difficult to imagine how barren this property once appeared.

When I first stood on this hillside, I doubted that anything beautiful could ever grow there. If someone had shown me a picture of the finished garden before the work began, I probably would have responded with one word:

Impossible.

Yet the garden did not appear all at once.

It developed gradually—one tree, one flower bed, one pathway, one water feature at a time. There was never a detailed master plan spread across a drafting table. Instead, each project naturally led to the next. As the garden matured, new ideas emerged, and the vision continued to unfold.

Looking back, I realize that this gradual process was a blessing.

Had I known from the beginning everything the project would require—its physical demands, financial cost, and countless hours of labor—I might never have begun. Instead, the Lord allowed the vision to unfold one step at a time.

There is an important lesson in that.

God often works in our lives the same way.

When we first come to Christ, He rarely reveals the entire journey ahead. Instead, He leads us one faithful step at a time. As we grow in trust and obedience, He continues His transforming work within us.

Many people feel overwhelmed by their past failures, present struggles, or uncertain future. They wonder whether lasting change is possible.

The garden answers that question beautifully.

Transformation rarely happens overnight.

It happens day by day.

One decision.

One prayer.

One act of obedience.

One step of faith at a time.

Just as this barren hillside slowly became a flourishing garden, Christ is able to transform even the most discouraged life into something beautiful for His glory.

He alone holds the master plan.

Our responsibility is simply to trust Him and faithfully follow where He leads.

The chapters that follow describe the development of the garden in greater detail. Each stage of its growth reveals deeper spiritual truths about God's patient work within His children.

As the garden expanded, so did my understanding of His grace.

Perhaps, as you continue reading, you will begin to recognize His handiwork in your own life as well.

Spiritual Insights

COMMIT YOUR PLANS TO THE LORD

Proverbs 16:3

"Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established."

Every worthwhile endeavor begins by placing it into God's hands.

Although I had ideas for the garden, I could never have imagined what it would eventually become. Looking back, I can clearly see the Lord's guidance in countless decisions that seemed ordinary at the time.

How often is that true in our spiritual lives?

We make plans, yet God establishes our steps.

His purposes are always greater than our own.

A WATERED GARDEN

Isaiah 58:11

"And the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters do not fail."

A healthy garden depends upon continual care.

The soil must be nourished.

The weeds removed.

The plants watered.

Likewise, the Christian life flourishes only as we remain connected to Christ.

Through His Word, prayer, worship, and the work of the Holy Spirit, God continually refreshes and strengthens His people.

He does not simply save us and leave us to grow on our own.

He faithfully tends the garden of our hearts.

As believers, we become caretakers of the gifts God has entrusted to us. His living water flows through our lives, refreshing us so that we, in turn, may encourage and bless others.

The more we remain rooted in Him, the more our lives resemble the flourishing garden described by Isaiah.

Blessing

SEEDS OF FAITH

Every magnificent garden begins with something remarkably small—a single seed.

Faith often begins the same way.

Sometimes it is born through a quiet prayer.

Sometimes through a whispered hope.

Sometimes through a simple decision to trust God when nothing else seems certain.

Though hidden beneath the surface, a seed contains the promise of life.

So does faith.

God delights in bringing abundance from humble beginnings.

Offer Him the small seeds of your heart today.

Trust Him with your questions, your fears, and your dreams.

In His perfect time, the Master Gardener will bring forth a harvest far more beautiful than you could ever imagine.

CHAPTER THREE

Breaking Ground

With shovel in hand, I was starting from scratch. There was no formal plan for transforming this barren plot of land into a flourishing garden. It may not have been the ideal approach to landscaping the property, but with determination and enthusiasm, the work began.

The first order of business was to construct a 30-by-15-foot deck attached to the side of the house. It would provide a comfortable place where family and friends could gather to enjoy what I hoped would become a beautiful garden. Even without a detailed blueprint, I could envision a lush landscape filled with flowers, color, and life—a place that could be shared with others. Everything was in place for what promised to be an exciting beginning.

Building a deck, however, was something I had never attempted. I had no experience and very little idea where to begin. After making a few inquiries, I met with a contractor and requested an estimate. When I received the bid, I experienced immediate sticker shock. The projected cost far exceeded what I had anticipated, forcing me to reconsider my options.

After discussing the estimate with my son, we quickly reached the same conclusion: we would build the deck ourselves. It was an ambitious decision that presented a steep learning curve for me. Thankfully, my son's woodworking skills were far more advanced than mine, and his confidence made the challenge seem much more manageable.

Oddly enough, the first shovel of dirt was not turned for a flower bed but for the deck's foundation. Together we dug footing after footing, completing the demanding work one hole at a time. Although it was exhausting, I found myself filled with excitement. We were literally breaking ground, not only for the deck but also for the garden that would soon follow. With each footing completed, the dream became more tangible.

Sometimes the first step toward something beautiful doesn't look beautiful at all. It looks like hard work, uncertainty, and perseverance. Yet every worthwhile project begins with a willingness to break new ground.

Spiritual Insights

Luke 1:37

"For nothing will be impossible with God."

Matthew 19:26

"With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Proverbs 16:3

“Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established.”

THE GARDENER

John 15:1

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the gardener.”

When I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior, my life became a new creation. I was born again—not simply repaired or improved, but completely made new. Like an empty piece of ground waiting to be cultivated, my life was ready for God’s transforming work.

The Christian life is a continual process of sanctification. The Holy Spirit patiently shapes, nurtures, and matures us into the people God has called us to become. Just as I envisioned a thriving garden where there was once only barren soil, God already sees the beauty He intends to produce in each of His children.

As the Master Gardener, the Lord cultivates our hearts. He prepares the soil, plants His truth, removes what hinders growth, and patiently prunes us so that we bear even greater fruit. The absence of my own carefully designed plan never created uncertainty for Him. God’s plans have always been perfect.

With Christ dwelling within me, everything was in place for the Holy Spirit to begin His transforming work. Salvation is God’s free gift of grace, purchased at an immeasurable cost through the sacrifice of His Son on Calvary. Jesus willingly paid a debt we could never repay ourselves. Through His shed blood alone, our sins are forgiven, and we are reconciled to God.

Jesus declared that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. There is no other path to salvation apart from Him.

Just as we dug footings to support the deck, the Holy Spirit establishes a firm foundation in every believer’s life. He prepares the ground, strengthens our faith, and builds within us a life that increasingly reflects the beauty, peace, and fruitfulness of a flourishing garden.

Blessing

THE PATH THROUGH THE GARDEN

Garden paths invite us to slow our pace and notice the beauty we might otherwise overlook. God’s leading often works in much the same way. Rather than revealing our entire journey at once, He faithfully illuminates the next step before us.

As you walk through today, resist the temptation to rush ahead or become anxious about tomorrow. Trust the path God has placed before you. Every step taken in obedience and faith is another step toward His peace, His purpose, and His presence. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

CHAPTER FOUR

Theme And Landscapes

With the deck construction behind us, it felt appropriate to establish an underlying theme for the developing garden. I did not envision a formal garden setting with manicured lawns, boxwood hedges, topiary shrubs, weed-free flower beds, and ornate statuary. This plot of land was not suited for that kind of design, and I was not suited to plant or maintain it.

Instead, I settled on a country theme. No emphasis would be placed on perfectly trimmed grass, precisely shaped shrubs, geometrically arranged pathways, or rigidly structured flower beds. My vision leaned toward a more natural approach—allowing plants, trees, shrubs, and flowers to grow freely, reflecting their native character and full potential. Pruning and shaping would be done gradually, only as needed and as each plant matured.

With this theme in mind, landscaping ideas began to surface. After noticing a windmill on display at a local farm store, it seemed like the perfect starting point for the project. It stood 18 feet tall and was a fully functional windmill. Once again, my son Greg and I strapped on our tool belts and returned to construction mode.

With the help of a rented cherry picker, we installed the windmill over a two-day period. Suspended inside the structure, I added an eight-foot stainless steel wind chime. With even the slightest breeze, the blades of the windmill would turn gracefully into the wind, setting the chimes in motion. Their tones carried beautifully across the hillside.

At its base, we placed a large six-foot metal rooster painted in bright red, yellow, blue, and green. It welcomed visitors with a cheerful presence—offering an imagined “good morning” no matter the time of day. I have to admit, I loved that bird.

The windmill quickly became the focal point of the landscape, providing a striking backdrop for everything that would follow in the garden's development.

SPIRITUAL INSIGHTS: GETTING READY FOR GROWTH

The theme of the garden would continue to expand over time—growing, evolving, and maturing as described in the chapters ahead.

Jeremiah 29:11

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

The connection between what God creates in nature and what He designs in our lives is not difficult to see. His divine plans form a bridge we are invited to trust. Crossing that bridge requires faith—a willingness to respond to the Holy Spirit's conviction and step into the family of God through repentance and belief.

Spiritually speaking, we cannot stand halfway across that chasm. A single step of faith is required. In the same way, a seed must be planted before anything can grow. Without planting, there is nothing to cultivate. The same truth applies to our spiritual lives.

Proverbs 16:9

“The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.”

Colossians 1:10

“So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”

As the garden matures, pruning becomes necessary. Dead or unproductive growth must be removed so that healthier growth can flourish. In the same way, the Lord’s pruning in our lives—though often painful—is essential. He removes attitudes, distractions, and attachments that hinder spiritual growth.

What remains after His pruning produces greater fruit, allowing us to walk more fully in a life that pleases Jesus Christ.

Blessing

THE PRUNING OF LOVE

A wise gardener prunes even healthy branches so that greater fruit may develop. Though the cut may seem severe, it is always an act of care.

There are seasons when God removes distractions, habits, or attachments that interfere with our growth. What may feel like loss is often preparation. Trust the hand of the Gardener who sees what we cannot yet see—the beauty and fruitfulness that lie ahead.

CHAPTER FIVE

Trees, Trees, Glorious Trees

With a sigh, I read the following from a placard that would be posted in the garden gazebo: “A SOCIETY GROWS GREAT WHEN OLD MEN PLANT TREES IN WHOSE SHADE THEY KNOW THEY SHALL NEVER SIT,” by Pastor Loyson, 1866. During a pause for reflection at age 77, soon to be 78, the likelihood that I would be savoring any of that shade from the trees I would plant was doubtful.

Oh, ye of little faith! There are many wonderful Biblical characters who exemplified great faith in coping with more dire circumstances than my desire for the experience of relaxing in the shade. Without going into all the details of those figures whom God empowered to face incredible challenges, I would reference a few for your review: Ruth, Moses, Job, Abraham, Noah, Daniel, and the Apostle Paul.

At my age, in order for me to enjoy any shade provided by the trees I was planting, two possible outcomes came to mind. My life expectancy needed to be increased, or the trees would have to grow at an accelerated rate beyond that prescribed by nature. Both outcomes were out of my control. The Lord would deal with my doubts regarding the shade question in a surprising way. That I will share in a future chapter.

Time to plant some trees. Borrowing Greg’s truck, I made my way to the local nursery. In the coming months, which turned into years, these trips developed the characteristics of a pilgrimage. At the nursery, I purchased six Redbud trees and thirteen Emerald Green Arborvitae trees. These trees were on the higher end of maturity, much larger specimens than those offered by the rest of the nursery inventory. That, of course, would garner a higher price. In the back of my mind, I reasoned that was easily justifiable after making a quick calculation concerning the shade issue previously mentioned.

Added to the order were 20 bags of soil amendment, five bags of drainage rock, and a bag of starter fertilizer. The salesperson happily rang in the order at the sales terminal. With the familiar ticking sound of the advancing receipt, the total was revealed.

“Would that be check or credit card?”

Looking over the total, I debated whether a trip to the credit union to check our savings account might be in order.

WOW! It was very apparent on this first purchase of the trees for the garden that this was going to get expensive!

Returning to the property, it was a herculean effort unloading and placing the trees along the drive for planting. They were to be planted on the curvature of the drive, approximately 100 feet long. The salesperson at the nursery supplied detailed instructions for planting to affirm the best results for the newly acquired trees to thrive. I appreciated that. Considering their expense, it was very prudent on the nursery's part and would avert the return of any dead trees, avoiding the possibility of a disgruntled customer.

For these larger trees, the instructions called for the dug hole to be approximately two feet deep and, at the very least, two times the width of the root ball. In this case, an 18- to 20-inch root ball would equate to a three- to three-and-a-half-foot-wide hole. That's a sizeable hole for sure, and I needed to dig 19 of them.

Gazing at the lineup of trees, I was somewhat dismayed, realizing how much effort would be needed for their planting.

Placing the heel of my boot on the kick plate of the shovel, I began to dig. I slightly jumped up, leveraging my weight downward to force the blade of the shovel into the earth. It penetrated a meager half-inch and was immediately repelled by the hard shale just under the grass. This challenging start left me visualizing the energy and persistence that would be needed to accomplish my first efforts in planting the trees for the garden.

After the first attempt with the shovel, it was evident a superior tool was needed to break up the shale. Commence the use of the rock bar, designed to break up shale among other things. It's a six-foot-long steel bar weighing in excess of twenty pounds, with a pointed and blunt end. Luckily, we just happened to have one. All that was needed for its operation was to raise the bar a couple of feet in the air, then strike it down on the unyielding shale. Repeat that over and over again until the shale is shattered.

Altogether, an intense operation! With the shale broken up, its removal was done one shovel full at a time to achieve the proper dimensions for planting. You can imagine the physical suffering endured after a full day of breaking up the earth, with just three holes produced for all the work involved. I was already exhausted, and the project was just getting started. Not accustomed to this physical exercise, my body was aching.

There must be an easier way?

Upon contacting the nursery, I raised that very question. Their response was offered to me with another question:

"Do you have an auger?"

I did not, and their recommendation was to purchase one at the local farm store. Off I went to get the gas-powered auger, an unexpected expense, one of many that would pop up going forward.

With auger in hand, fuel, and operating instructions, I headed back to the site. Assured I had the right tool, I was no longer exhausted and had renewed energy. I found myself enthusiastically humming “The Dwarf’s Marching Song”: “Hi Ho, Hi Ho, it’s off to work I go!”

Unfortunately, the auger was not the panacea promised by the nursery person. However, it did offer a big improvement in getting those aggravating holes dug. A couple of drawbacks surfaced right away with its use. You had to be very careful because of the danger involved, with the possibility of injuring your feet due to its tendency to jump around when breaking through the layer of shale. Regulating the throttle speed as the auger screw penetrated downward was very important when encountering large rocks and roots.

I learned this the hard way, hitting a large rock at full throttle! The auger violently twisted, throwing me to the ground and almost breaking my wrist. Thankfully, it had an automatic shut-off switch, or it might have chopped me up on the way to the ground.

Another striking flaw was in its design and manufacture. The parts used to build it were of low quality, which was an indication of why it had a cheaper sales price of just \$225. That fact will become abundantly clear with the useful life of the auger greatly diminished as you read on.

In a push to bring this chapter to an end, let me finish with this closing. After completing the 19 holes, I went on to plant over 100 additional trees, with about half of them using the help of the auger and the remainder done by rock bar and shovel. The reason for this outcome was that I managed to burn up three augers facilitating the planting. Unfortunately, the store was not too cheerful about refunding their cost.

On the final return, the clerk inquired if I was trying to bore through granite. Jokingly, he suggested a backhoe should be brought to the site.

Finally, with the holes dug, the drainage rock placed in the bottom, the root ball broken up, the trees lightly watered and fertilized, and the holes backfilled with amended soil, the trees were planted.

At the culmination of the tree planting, the garden displayed over 100 beautiful new trees, many of them flowering varieties. They included Dogwood, Redbud, Flowering Ornamental Peach, Japanese Cherry, Tulip Tree, Crabapple, Crepe Myrtle, Magnolia, along with Birch, Red Maple, Italian Cypress, Golden Maple, Cypress, Pine, and Weeping Willow.

This chapter is rich with symbolism, nuances, and lessons that will be highlighted in the Spiritual Insights. We now move on to the rose garden in Chapter 6.

Spiritual Insights

Isaiah 61:11

“For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations.”

First, the trees depicted in this chapter needed to be planted. They must be rooted in good soil and properly cultivated to thrive. As followers of Christ, we flourish through the Lord’s cultivating a relationship with us in His garden. That cultivation and the connection with God for the believer are fulfilled by reading His Word, worship, and an active prayer life.

Our hearts become fertile ground to receive His everyday blessings and grace, enabling Him to work in us and through us. He has sent the Holy Spirit to nourish, water, and grow us, drawing us closer to Jesus.

The Lord is in control of all creation and nature, including our nurturing and spiritual growth. We are like saplings in preparation to grow stronger in Christ—a gradual progression comparable to the growth of a tree. Any righteousness that manifests itself in our lives is caused by Him. That righteousness is impossible to gain through our own efforts.

2 Corinthians 5:17

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

REMOVING THE SHALE FROM MY LIFE

With the preparation for planting the trees, it became obvious that the process would not be pain-free and would require a fair amount of time to accomplish. Developing patience will be a key attribute in our walk as we trust His timing. He is never late or early and always arrives at the right moment.

Breaking ground to remove my old nature has been gradual and ongoing, definitely involving some pain. Our sinful nature is taken away with God’s planting of a new nature, beginning with a spiritual transformation. That transformation sets us on a path to grow as one of His children.

Galatians 6:9

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

The moments of doubt faced concerning the difficulties in planting the trees, coupled with the following question—would I live long enough to relax under their shade as they matured?—present an opportunity for my faith to grow stronger long after the decision to plant the garden. The beauty of the harvest I have reaped is worth all the effort brought forth in its creation.

Romans 8:18

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the joy that is to be revealed to us.”

Romans 5:3

“Not only that, but we rejoice in our suffering, knowing that suffering produces endurance.”

The physical suffering I experienced during the ground preparation for the tree planting has been a constant throughout the creation of the garden. Many of the aches and pains can be attributed to my age and the physical demands required by the work. Regardless, consider it all joy.

Suffering and trials are not pleasant. They are used by God for growth, to build character and increase our faith. All of that takes place with the result of moving believers to be more like Christ.

We are never alone in our trials and struggles. He is always there. For me, His glory is revealed while walking through the garden. I'm able to commune with Him there—a living sanctuary.

Blessing

SEASONS OF GROWTH

The garden teaches us that every season has its purpose. Spring awakens, summer strengthens, autumn gathers, and winter prepares. The soul also journeys through changing seasons. Times of joy and times of waiting each carry blessings known to God. When the path feels uncertain, remember that the Gardener never abandons His work. Even in the coldest season, He is preparing new life.

CHAPTER SIX

The Rose Of Sharon Resides In My Rose Garden

(In the Garden, by Charles Austin Miles, has the lyrics, “He walks with me and He talks with me.” I so much embrace those lyrics.)

In early spring, it was planting time again. The trees that were planted last season revealed an abundance of new buds and growth. The winter months had not caused them any noticeable damage. What a wonderful start to spring. They were thriving.

My truck was on autopilot, traveling west on I-40 en route to the local garden center, where the first purchase of roses would transpire. The center had just received a new shipment from the growers. The selection was a fabulous display presented over several raised platforms.

“Oh, goody!”

There were several varieties available, with a multitude of colors to choose from. The colors ranged from vibrant deep reds, soft purples, pale pinks, bright yellows, exquisite salmon, dazzling whites, along with other combinations where the edges of the petals were accented with different colors.

It’s fascinating to me how the horticulturists are able to develop and cultivate all the varieties with a myriad of colors. Wandering through this rose inventory, the surroundings offered up irresistible urgings to make a purchase. A quote you may have heard often is, “I was like a kid in a candy store,” and purchase I did!

Back home with my treasure, the planting of the rose garden commenced in earnest. Thankfully, this digging was much less strenuous than the three-foot holes required for the trees. The condition of the soil was less challenging as well, changing from shale to clumpy red clay.

In the course of two planting seasons, the rose garden spread, encompassing an area of over 100 feet in length with approximately 135 rose plants. Purposely, I did not cut back or shape the bushes, allowing them to fill in the space, with some growing nearly 12 feet high and climbing up the birdhouse poles.

There were several varieties, including Tree Roses, Hybrid Tea, ground cover, Peace, Climbing, Gallica, and Miniature, displaying a kaleidoscope of color when in bloom.

This was a real rose garden! I could not help but think that it rivaled that of the DuPont Longwood Gardens I once visited in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania.

Faithfully, I spend time in the garden enjoying what God has created. It provides love and nourishment for my spirit. Like the garden, we flourish and grow.

THE PENDING ATTACK!!!

This idyllic setting was invaded by an infestation of Japanese beetles! For rose bushes, that can be a devastating pestilence requiring immediate attention to repel these invasive insects.

First appearing as just a few with their destructive eating habits, the rose petals and buds began to disappear. Their numbers rapidly increased, multiplying into the hundreds as the weather heated up.

Several methods can be used to eradicate the infestation, some more effective than others. The one that worked best for me was very labor-intensive. It involved taking a quart-sized open container filled halfway with soapy water. The rose bloom infested with beetles would be placed over the container and shaken until the beetles fell into the soapy water and died.

I exercised this remedy twice a day during the summer season, going from one bloom to another, traversing the entire length of the garden. On each occasion, it was not unusual to accumulate up to 50 beetles in the container, which equates to thousands by the end of summer.

Thankfully, by late August, those numbers gradually declined. Even with that sustained effort, the beetles still managed to riddle many of the plant's blooms and buds with ugly holes.

The treatment that worked the best was the ground application of Milky Spore in late winter, killing them off at the larval stage. The coming spring and early summer showed no resurgence of the dreadful insects.

THE GANG OF DEER

The next potential menace to the safeguarding of thousands of blooms was that of the deer population in our area. My first-hand experience with the White-Tailed Deer that decimated my rose garden happened in California.

Living on the coast, the climate was perfect for growing roses. At the time, I was working in the valley and had a two-hour commute back and forth a couple of times a week. When at home, I spent a lot of time working the garden, which included a section of twenty rose bushes.

These were Heirloom Roses, some call old garden roses, known for their rich fragrance and large, beautiful blooms. I nurtured those plants for two growing seasons and was rewarded with a bounty of breathtaking blooms to enjoy.

At work, when talking with my wife, she casually gazed out of our bedroom window and was shocked. She told me the deer had decimated the rose garden overnight without one bloom left on any of the plants.

She was shocked, but I was mad, taking me three days to get over the carnage inflicted upon our rose garden.

There are plenty of deer throughout our area. Knowing that, I did not want to risk offering a smorgasbord of rose blooms to the local herbivore. A hedge of protection needed to be in place to ward off any would-be grazers.

A fence needed to be erected. I thought about strapping on the tool belt again, but it was decided to hire the pros for this one. Within a week, a vinyl three-rail fence was installed surrounding the garden, which was a deterrent to keep the deer out.

Three years have passed since the installation, and I'm delighted to report that the deer have been kept at bay and the roses are lavishly blooming. This hedge of protection is working.

Spiritual Insights

Song of Solomon 2:12

"The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land."

Springtime in the garden is spectacular, the roses in particular. The beauty of the Lord's creation is reflected in all of nature, including ourselves. We can exhibit that beauty by welcoming His character and love into our lives.

John 15:5

"I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, He it is that bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing."

Just as the horticulturists develop and cultivate the plants, for us to grow, we need to draw closer to Christ, and He will take it from there.

"In a life apart from Christ, there is no ability to produce spiritual fruit."

1 Corinthians 12:12

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ."

There are many varieties and colors of roses. They all remain in the rose family. We are many members of Christ's body, all shapes and sizes with varied gifts bestowed upon each of us. Paul points out that we, the church, are Christ's body.

Luke 10:19

"Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will hurt you."

Like the devastating attack of the Japanese beetles, we will also face attacks, often manifesting themselves in layers from seemingly small to overwhelming. Satan wants to stop God's purpose in our lives. As with the beetles, it was not a question of if they would show up, but rather when they would appear, seeking out their favorite food.

That holds true for Satan—not if, but when. His attack zeros in on our lives, carried out with shrewdness, and it will be relentless. Just like taking action to eradicate the beetle infestation, we also have to take action to defeat him.

We should never take him lightly, as we are no match for him by using our human abilities. There is a supernatural battle taking place all around us; it's spiritual warfare. Cling to the Word of God, knowing Christ has defeated Satan at the Cross.

1 John 4:4

“Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”

1 Peter 5:8

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

After my experience with the deer in California, I was certainly going to be very watchful for them here. God's Word makes it very clear that we need to be diligent concerning the enemy and how we defend against him. Ephesians 6:10–20 gives definitive direction, instructing believers to put on the armor of God to ward off the attacks of the devil.

Job 1:10

“Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.”

The new fencing provides the needed protection to defend against the pillaging deer. With prayer, we ask God to surround and protect us. We are to employ the armor of God in our daily lives.

Psalm 61:2–3, ESV

“From the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I, for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy.”

I cannot add anything to that.

Blessing

FLOWERS OF GRATITUDE

A garden filled with blossoms brings delight to all who enter. Gratitude is one of the most beautiful flowers the soul can cultivate. Each expression of thanks opens the heart to God's goodness and transforms ordinary moments into sacred gifts.

Today, notice the blessings around you—the sunlight, the kindness of others, the breath within you—and let thanksgiving bloom.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Expanding The Maturing Garden

With the starter garden established and thriving, it was time to move forward with additional planting. By this point, I had gained basic gardening experience, but the work ahead required greater discernment—what to plant, where to plant it, when to plant it, and how to care for each addition once it was in the ground.

Over the course of several months and many trips to the garden center, I selected a wide variety of plants to fill the remaining spaces in the garden. These included azaleas, chrysanthemums, Japanese holly, butterfly bushes, hydrangeas, jasmine, wisteria, camellias, gardenias, forsythia, lilies, as well as various tropicals and perennials for the flower beds.

Each plant required different preparation—soil conditioning, spacing, watering schedules, fertilization, and seasonal timing. Nothing was uniform. Each had its own needs and rhythm. Once planted, they would move through all four seasons, and with them came the ongoing responsibility of cultivation and care.

In many ways, this mirrored spiritual growth. Our lives also move through seasons—planting, waiting, growing, pruning, and harvesting. Spiritual maturity does not happen overnight. Just as a garden requires good soil, sunlight, water, and care, so too does a growing believer require the nourishment of God's Word, prayer, and fellowship.

As Scripture describes, new believers begin with “milk” and gradually grow toward solid food. Jesus Christ, seated at the right hand of the Father, remains our advocate and guide, while the Holy Spirit works within us to shape, strengthen, and mature our faith.

Spiritual Insights

Genesis 2:15 reminds us that God placed Adam in the garden to work it and care for it. Work itself is not a burden outside God's design—it is part of His original purpose for humanity. In the same way, tending the garden became both labor and stewardship.

Matthew 13:23 illustrates the importance of good soil—hearts that receive the Word and bear fruit in varying measure. Spiritual growth depends not only on hearing, but on understanding and abiding.

1 Peter 2:2 compares believers to newborn infants desiring pure spiritual milk so that they may grow into salvation. Growth is a process—gradual, intentional, and sustained by God's grace.

Blessing

THE ETERNAL GARDEN

Every earthly garden is only a reflection of something greater. Its beauty points beyond itself to the Creator who formed it. The hope of faith is not limited to the seasons of this life, but extends to eternal fellowship with God. As beauty surrounds us here, it gently reminds us of the greater garden where life, peace, and joy will never fade.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Pathways And Water Features

As the garden matured, pathways were introduced to provide access to its many viewing areas. These paths cut through slopes, curved along hillsides, and led visitors gently through the landscape. Handrails were added in places where the terrain was uneven, offering stability and confidence as one moved through the garden.

Following these pathways revealed the full scope of the garden's design. After years of planting, labor, and cultivation, what once seemed impossible had become visible reality. The transformation was complete in stages, but together they formed a unified whole.

Spiritual Insights

In the same way, God provides pathways in our lives. His Word acts as both direction and support, guiding our steps and steadying us when the ground becomes uncertain.

Psalm 119:105 declares that His Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Without His guidance, the path is unclear; with it, each step becomes illuminated.

Acts 2:28 speaks of the “paths of life” filled with gladness in His presence. There is joy not only in arriving, but in walking with Him along the way.

Walking through the garden, I often sensed a quiet awareness of His presence—like a companion on the path. In those moments, the garden became more than a place; it became fellowship.

WATER FEATURES

The experience of the garden deepened further with the addition of water features. The sound of flowing water from fountains and a water tower brought a new dimension of peace. It softened the atmosphere, inviting stillness and reflection.

There is something deeply calming about water in motion. It draws attention without demanding it, and it speaks without words. As Herman Melville observed, meditation and water seem inseparably linked. The garden became a place not only of sight, but of sound and presence.

Penelope Hobhouse once noted that a garden should satisfy not only the eye, but also the mind and senses—the rustle of leaves, the texture beneath one's feet, and the sound of water all contribute to its fullness. These elements together create an experience that goes beyond visual beauty.

In this setting, the steady sound of water became a reminder of renewal. It called attention to God's ongoing work—refreshing, restoring, and sustaining life.

Spiritual Insights

Psalm 65:9 reminds us that God waters the earth and enriches it abundantly. Water is a symbol of His provision and sustaining power.

Isaiah 12:3 speaks of drawing water with joy from the wells of salvation. Joy is not manufactured; it is received from God's own supply.

Isaiah 55:1 extends an invitation to all who thirst to come freely and receive. God's grace is not earned—it is given.

Acts 22:16 uses water as a symbol of cleansing and new life, pointing to the outward expression of inward transformation through faith in Christ.

In Scripture, water consistently represents life, cleansing, renewal, and the sustaining presence of God. In the garden, the sound of flowing water became a living reminder of that truth.

From the beginning of creation—when the Spirit of God hovered over the waters—God has used water as a symbol of His presence and creative power.

Blessing

THE QUIET GARDEN

In the stillness of the garden, God often speaks without words. Growth is not always visible or dramatic; much of it happens quietly beneath the surface. Like a seed developing in the soil, spiritual growth unfolds in ways only the Gardener fully sees. Trust the unseen work of God—He is faithful in every season.

CHAPTER NINE

THE FOUR R'S: REST, REFLECTION, RENEWAL, AND REVERENCE

Theme — Rest

“Relief or freedom, especially from anything that worries, troubles, or disturbs. Mental or spiritual calm, tranquility.”

In the case of the garden, I am able to experience peace and encouragement in God's presence. The seating areas created throughout the garden provide a space to physically recharge one's energy and, at my age, I utilize them frequently. As voiced in the above definition, mental rest is equally, or perhaps more essentially, revealed and exhibited in a Christ-centered life.

That space found within the garden is ideal for quiet time spent with the Creator. We pray and commune with Him without the reply of an audible voice. We hear through our spirit. He lovingly cares for us during this time of rest.

He will provide aid, comfort, support, and relief for whatever we may be experiencing. We can truly find rest in Him. We are to seek God at all times. Always pray and not lose heart is what Jesus directed His disciples to do in the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1.

Taking time to rest is essential in our daily lives.

The Lord rested on the seventh day, as we read in Genesis 2:2. His rest was not because He was tired or weary; He does not grow tired or weary (Isaiah 40:28). He rested to stop and enjoy what He had created. That day was made Holy. Because we are not God, we need physical rest. But we also need to learn to stop—to pause from the demands of life and take time to enjoy the beauty, stillness, and quiet peace of the garden. In doing so, we may discover that the garden is not only a place to work, but also a place to rest, reflect, and draw closer to the One who created it.

Spiritual Insights

Matthew 11:28

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

“An invitation to trust Jesus personally.”

Mark 6:31

“And He said to them, come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.”

“Jesus sent His disciples away to rest after they proclaimed His teaching.”

The garden provides a great place to meditate on the Word and Jesus' teaching.

1 Thessalonians 5:17

“Pray without ceasing.”

We are to pray, and the garden offers a quiet place where you can retreat to your prayer closet.

Psalm 23:1–3

“The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.”

“Green pastures and still waters are peaceful places for rest and feeding. This is restoration, refreshment, and revival of the soul (or life), meaning the returning of life or vitality. He will lead the believer’s life on a path of moral direction toward righteousness. It is a blessing and is true to His character.”

Join your Shepherd in the stillness and quiet of the garden.

Theme — Reflection

“A thought, idea, or opinion formed for a remark made as a result of meditation. A thought that occurs when thinking about, or considering, something.”

The preceding chapters offer a vast amount of information that certainly can and should be thought about and considered. In my case, the garden has provided the idyllic setting to refresh the progression of my relationship and walk with Jesus. I use the garden experience to accomplish just that.

The inspiration has been ongoing, taking root in my heart. The garden environment is not the only locale where that might be fulfilled. We have an omnipresent God who is accessible and obtainable, with no restrictions concerning time or location.

You may connect with Him while walking on the beach, driving your car, hiking in the mountains, attending a church service, or in any place you find yourself throughout your day.

The most significant step along your path in connecting with Him is to be available, slowing down your life to receive His blessing and direction. Don’t ignore the promptings and convictions of the Holy Spirit.

The following Bible verses are offered for you to examine and reflect upon.

Spiritual Insights

Deuteronomy 31:6

“Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.”

A command directed to Joshua. As believers, we are not to worry or fear. Our God, “Yahweh-Jireh” (the Lord will provide).

John 8:32

“And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

“Jesus is speaking about one way to know the truth. Reflect on believing and obeying His Word. You will free yourself from guilt and sinful patterns.”

Matthew 7:7

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”

“Come to Him in humility with your need. Seeking in prayer and knocking with perseverance. Be confident that the Father will provide what is best for you according to His sovereign will. This is a practice I engage in frequently from my garden bench.”

Ecclesiastes 3:1

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under Heaven.”

So true for the growth in the garden. For us, there is an appropriate occasion for every human event or activity. Stay connected to the source, our Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:7

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”

We can live life confidently, trusting God’s promises for the future, even though we cannot yet see the results He has in store for us.

1 Corinthians 3:6–7

“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”

True for the garden, true for our lives also.

Romans 5:3–5

“Not only that, but we rejoice in our suffering, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

When I examine the suffering in my life, past and present, I find the cause of that suffering can be narrowed down to the following: “Having what you don’t want and wanting what you don’t have.”

Give that quote some thought in relation to the tribulations, trials, and suffering you may be experiencing in your life. Christ can intervene when coping with those conditions.

Theme — Renewal

Renewal refers to the act or process of making something new, fresh, or strong again. It can also refer to the revival of interest in a particular subject or activity.

From Bible Hub: “Biblical renewal encompassed both spiritual and physical aspects, highlighting God’s role in restoring and transforming lives. It is a central theme in the Christian faith, emphasizing hope and the possibility of new beginnings through Christ.”

The birds sing from the trees in the garden while the morning is still dark. They instinctively know the light that greets the dawn is on its way. The light ushers in a new day, an awakening where the Lord provides all they need for survival.

Faith is exhibited through song and flight. God cares for the birds; how much more for us as one of His children.

Matthew 6:26

“Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”

We are created in the image of God. The animals are not. He loved us so much, He gave His Son to die for our sins.

I promised a response to my lack of faith and how the Lord surprised me regarding being able to sit in the shade of the young trees that were planted in Chapter 5. Two possible solutions were mentioned that would prove Loyson’s observation incorrect. The trees would have to grow at an accelerated rate, and my life expectancy would have to increase. I noted both were out of my control.

The results that came about prove that renewal and growth of one’s faith can happen even in the smallest events of life that are not tied to mountain-top experiences, highlighting the following quote: “Life isn’t made of the mountain peaks but the walks between them.”

In the case of the tree growth, they were expected to grow three to five feet per year. Some have doubled that growth, reaching twenty feet in height, and one particular birch is nearing thirty feet in height. This growth has been extraordinary considering the size of the trees when planted.

Concerning my life expectancy, I am excited to report that my last doctor’s visit and lab work indicate a marked improvement concerning my heart condition, along with the best reported diabetic numbers in years. I can’t help but believe these results bode well for increasing my time here.

Added to that, with the accelerated tree growth, I’m assured a shady spot to sit in this summer.

Special Note on Resentment

When renewal is being fulfilled in a believer’s life, the one great hindrance to its achievement is the sin of resentment. It is referred to in at least 50 verses in the Bible, with the Scriptures warning against fostering it in your life.

As a Christian, I have personally struggled with the effects of resentment, not only in the past, but even now as a follower of Christ.

It is an emotion and feeling all too common in our daily lives. It is not pleasing to the Lord and obstructs the work of the Holy Spirit. Resentment may be focused toward family members, close friends, business associates, and even our church family members. Nothing is off limits to where it may raise its ugly head.

It steals one's joy and well-being, along with being detrimental to your relationship with Christ.

The following is a harsh quote showing just how destructive it is:

"Resentment is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die. It doesn't hurt them; it only hurts you. You pay the price for your anger by allowing it to live in your head."

Pride is the seasoning the enemy generously adds to the stew of resentment. It simmers just below the surface before boiling up, releasing sour flavors, curdled textures, and bitterness to ruin the dish.

Pride is the devil's sharpest and most-used arrow in his quiver to slow or derail a believer's walk. He wants to direct you to worldly passions and temptations. He is a liar.

The sin of pride feeds resentment, keeping multitudes in bondage and depriving them of salvation and a close relationship with God. Through the love of Jesus, while exercising forgiveness and repentance, resentment can be eliminated from your life.

Spiritual Insights

Ephesians 4:26–27

"Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil."

Proverbs 19:11

"Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is His glory to overlook an offense."

Ephesians 4:31

"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice."

Colossians 3:13

"Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against the other, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must forgive."

TRUE REPENTANCE CAN CANCEL OUT RESENTMENT

The act of repentance is affirmed extensively through scores of biblical Scriptures.

When first becoming a Christian, you ask to be forgiven for your sins. Many mistakenly think that confession provides a blanket covering for all sin, with little need to address ongoing true repentance. Conversely, at the time, was the confession actually true repentance?

There are pastors and theologians who doubt the validity of reciting the sinner's prayer. That is questioned due to the perceived lack of repentance by the person superficially reciting it. I leave that up to the Lord.

If the conversion is real, you will see a change in the person's life and know them by their fruits. There can be no true faith that fails to produce works. The faith that saves, as both Paul and James affirm, embraces the truth of the Gospel and acts accordingly.

Genuine repentance has to take place within your heart. A salvation-scripted prayer does not guarantee that a person will be born again.

True repentance is a turning away from sin and actions displeasing to the Lord. It has a greater significance than just being sorry and should lead to a changed life in Christ. Our repentance is very much a part of preparing us to receive the Lord's salvation, mercy, and grace offered at the Cross.

The Lord desires a relationship with us, His children, and if we fall away, He wants us back. It's never too late to renew it. True repentance will help you to forgive others as He has forgiven us. It sets in motion the very renewal spoken of in this chapter and the Scriptures that support it.

Sadly, our flesh is reluctant to admit the need for repentance, with the old nature not wanting to let go of habits and the sin it relishes. The devil is always there to support and encourage the desires of the flesh.

We must die to self. To live is Christ; to die is gain.

During quiet time spent in the garden, the Holy Spirit intercedes with my spirit to move me to true repentance. I ask that sin and behaviors not pleasing to the Lord be identified in my life so I may join with the Spirit in repentance to be forgiven.

There is wonderful comfort knowing that the Lord forgives and treats my discretions like they never happened. True repentance provides unsurpassed fellowship and joy with the Lord.

Spiritual Insights

Acts 3:19

"Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out."

Luke 5:32

"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Luke 24:47

“And that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem.”

Matthew 4:17

“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

The following Scriptures embody the state of renewal in the believer's life.

Isaiah 60:13

“The glory of Lebanon shall come to you. The cypress, the plane, and the pine, to beautify the place of my sanctuary, and I will make the place of my feet glorious.”

This is God fulfilling His promises to Abraham. We also can count on those promises.

Isaiah 4:6

“There will be a booth for shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.”

God's people will be forever protected from all distress.

2 Corinthians 5:17

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

Isaiah 40:31

“But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”

Romans 12:2

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Ephesians 4:22–23

“To put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds.”

Psalms 51:10

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

Lamentations 5:21

“Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored! Renew our days as of old.”

“Renewal and restoration rely on a right relationship with God. He is the only one who can provide restoration.”

The grounds of the garden and the serenity offered there provide a perfect setting to begin a renewal in your life, gaining a closer relationship with Christ.

Theme — Reverence

As we embark on the finish of Chapter 9, bringing this narrative to a close, how fitting it is to offer reverence to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Bible Hub: “Reverence in biblical context refers to a profound respect and awe of God, His Word, and His ordinances, reflecting an inward attitude of the heart that acknowledges God’s supreme authority and holiness. It is often expressed through worship, obedience, and a humble submission to God.”

I am humbled walking through the garden and marvel at the Lord’s beautiful creation. My emotions are overflowing with gratitude, thanksgiving, praise, and joy.

The garden has become a place of holy ground, for where He is, is holy. Each visit offers me the opportunity to seek His counsel, along with cherishing the awareness of His presence.

Awareness is the best gift we can give ourselves.

“He walks with me and He talks with me.”

Truly, I am one of His own.

DIRECT CONNECTIONS AND METAPHORS RELATED TO THE LORD’S WORK AND GUIDANCE IN OUR LIVES, DEPICTING THE CULTIVATION AND NURTURING THAT TAKES PLACE IN A GARDEN

PARABLE OF THE SOWER

Matthew 13:1–23

This parable is a powerful example given by Jesus, showing how people respond to the spoken Word of Jesus and the Bible today.

The first type of soil is hard ground, depicting a person who hears the Gospel but does not accept it. Rocky soil represents how seeds that fall on rocky soil may quickly grow but don’t survive because they fail to develop deep roots. When new believers face trials or suffering, their faith and connection with God weakens because they lack a deeper foundation.

Spending time and prayer in the garden strengthens that connection and relationship, helping us to dig deeper in creating a stronger foundation for our faith. Like the garden, our spiritual growth requires nurturing, watering, and care in developing a deeper understanding of God’s truth.

By reflecting on and embracing our relationship with Christ, along with the help of the Holy Spirit, we foster the assurance of spiritual growth. It roots itself deeply in our lives as an ongoing process.

Thorny ground is where the seed takes root but is taken over by the weeds, competing for the water and nutrients offered by poor-quality soil. For the believer, they become distracted by worldly riches, lusts, and unaddressed sin in their lives. They know the truth of the Gospel but are unable to grow because their hearts and minds have been taken over by the desires of the world.

The good soil in the garden is amended, fertilized, moistened, and turned to promote thriving growth for what is planted. In comparison, hearing and receiving the Word of God, along with good discipleship—that's the fertilizer—supports robust growth and faith in the believer's life.

True salvation shows a love for the Word and the desire to obey it, which will correspondingly produce good fruit.

TURNING OVER THE SOIL FOR PLANTING

Part of the renewal in our lives, like the soil, is that our hearts need nurturing to grow and bear fruit. The seeds and plants need good soil, water, and care to produce good growth. Similarly, believers' hearts are fed through prayer, reading the Word, and worship.

WATCHING THE BEES AND BUTTERFLIES DRAW NECTAR FROM THE BUTTERFLY BUSHES

The nectar is the provision nature provides for them. They hover and feed on that nectar. Jesus is our provision and is the nectar that restores our soul and strength. Sent by God, He is the fountain from which we draw nourishment and refreshment.

HEARING AND VIEWING A WEDGE OF CANADIAN GEESE FLYING OVERHEAD

There is a richness in viewing their V formation, with them noisily calling out from above. Their form is graceful while, at the same time, very functional for migration.

The geese move with the changing seasons in search of better conditions to sustain them. The Bible teaches that we are to exhibit empathy to those who come into our path seeking better opportunities. We should extend warmth and hospitality to strangers.

I like to think of the V in the formation as a sign claiming victory in Jesus.

THE FRAGRANCE OF ROSES

The smelling of roses prompts us to value the little things in life. They display God's created beauty in nature and, in the case of the rose, we are able to breathe in its fragrance.

In the Scriptures, it symbolizes the presence of holiness and divine love. Our walk with the Lord should exemplify the "fragrance of the knowledge of God" to others.

WALKING PATHWAYS IN THE LIGHT OF DAY OR ILLUMINATED IN THE DARK

Following the stone pathways in the garden, we are assuredly guided to experience all the beauty of the garden. The addition of LED lighting illuminates the path, enabling safety for our steps.

The Lord provides guidance during times of joy or sorrow. He is ever-present, whether in the light of day or the darkness of night. He is there for hope and renewal and provides strength regardless of what circumstances you may be experiencing.

Just as the garden renews itself in the spring, we can count on the reassurance and guidance that produces the harmony God creates in our lives.

WINDMILL TURNING, WIND-SPINNERS SPINNING, AND WIND CHIMES CHIMING

On a windy day, I'm captivated watching the power of the wind spin the blades of the windmill, as well as causing the wind-spinners to wildly spin as if they want to take flight.

The wind chimes ring out like the bells of a church steeple. Their soothing tones bring a calm and peace to the garden, inviting the Lord to dwell with us there.

With reverence, my spirit communes with the Holy Spirit. The melody created by the chimes initiates a call that I respond to with reverence.

God controls the wind that powers the windmills. Even though we don't see it, the wind is there, fulfilling a purpose. God is the "Wind Beneath Our Wings," and like the windmill and spinners shaping and positioning themselves to catch the wind, the Lord positions and shapes our sanctification.

His plan is far better than what we might conceive for ourselves as we learn to lean on Him.

WATER TOWER AND FOUNTAINS

The sounds of cascading water resonate throughout the garden, bestowing a spiritual gift to those who hear. God's blessing and grace are linked to fountains of living water.

Water is essential for physical life and, at the same time, it plays an important role in our spiritual life. It symbolizes refreshment to our body, mind, and soul. "Fountains represent life, purity, and divine provision." "The joy we share as we tarry there."

EPILOGUE

In the course of this narrative and the three-year period of planting and cultivating the garden, I am in awe of God's beautiful creation. For anyone to imagine His creation is just a result of random nature or some cosmic force is nonsensical.

We have a watch; there is a watchmaker. A building stands before us; there is an architect and a builder. We receive care and treatment for illnesses provided by physicians. All this is in place, not by accident, but by our Lord's loving, divine hand.

Strolling the pathways of the garden, I stopped to smell the roses and observed the bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds sipping the nectar of the flowers. Sitting beneath the trees, I enjoy listening to the flowing waters of the fountains. While resting in the viewing areas, I love being serenaded by the sweet-sounding wind chimes.

While relaxing in the gazebo and enjoying a cold lemonade, I acknowledge His blessings, realizing I've fallen in love with this garden, which is His creation.

The implications of that love go far deeper as I recognize I have actually fallen in love with Him. I am able to approach Him as a friend, enjoying a beloved relationship through connection, prayer, and worship, knowing I will see and be with Him in eternity.

We can be secure in Christ because of the Cross at Calvary and what happened there. The joy, connection, and relationship with Jesus experienced in this garden narrative would not be possible without returning to what took place at Calvary.

PARAPHRASING OF MATTHEW 26, JOHN 18, AND JOHN 19:41

Prior to the crucifixion, Jesus met and prayed with the disciples in a garden. At Gethsemane, the garden was in the olive groves known for the oil press where olive oil was prepared. He prayed, "Let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

He was betrayed by Judas and arrested in a garden across the Brook of Kidron. The garden tomb of Joseph of Arimathea is where He was buried and the site of His resurrection and first appearance.

MERCY AND GRACE MEAN CALVARY

John MacArthur: The submission of Christ to the will of God provided righteousness for us. We are not our own. We are bought with a price. He redeemed us. Christ was a ransom price paid to God to secure us.

A. W. Tozer's Perspective on the Cross: It represents a complete surrender and death to self. It demands that individuals abandon their old lives and embrace a new life in Christ. The Cross does not compromise: It signifies the end of the old self and the beginning of a new existence.

Tozer's teachings encourage a return to fundamental truths of the Cross, urging believers to live out their faith with authenticity and commitment.

RUN BACK TO THE CROSS

THAT CROSS: Where repentance, acceptance, and believing obtain forgiveness and salvation. (The beginning.)

THAT CROSS: Where following, obedience, and surrender bring transformation, relationship, and sanctification. (We gain strength for service and love for Christ through God's Word.)

THAT CROSS: Where death ushers in new birth. (We become part of the family of God.)

THAT CROSS: Where Satan was defeated and Jesus' power remains undefeated. (We occupy the high ground, battle-ready for victory.)

THAT CROSS: Where God's love and grace abound and, as believers in Him, rivers of living water will flow through us. (Our thirst is quenched and we are spiritually fed and nourished.)

THAT CROSS: Made it possible for us to receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit with His power that guides and equips us in our daily lives. (Comforting as He guides our path to an abundant life.)

THE TRUMPET CALLS OUT

As this quiet trumpet calls across the distance, may it remind us of the greatest act of love the world has ever known.

There are moments when words are no longer enough, moments when only silence can prepare the heart to listen. That takes place during quiet walks through the garden.

Before the empty tomb, there was an old rugged Cross. On that Cross, Jesus stretched out His hands in perfect love.

To His disciples, all seemed lost.

Heaven had not spoken yet.

Jesus rose in power and glory.

The Master still walks among His garden.

He finds us in barren places.

He loosens the hardened soil of our hearts.

He removes the weeds that choke out faith.

He plants His Word within us.

He waters us with His grace.

He patiently prunes our lives so that, in His perfect time, we may bear fruit for His glory.

The risen Christ calls every heart into a living relationship with Him. Not simply to admire the garden, but to be transformed by the Master's hand.

One day this life will be finished. Faith will become sight. The tools of the garden will be laid down. The trumpet will sound, and every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.

Until that day, we remain rooted in His love, bearing fruit to bring honor and glory to His name.

The Cross was not the end, but the beginning. We are born again.

THE CROSS IS EVERYTHING AND ALL-ENCOMPASSING

Embrace the Cross for the sacrifice made there, offering atonement for our sins.

**WE ARE HERE TO HONOR, PRAISE, AND BRING GLORY TO OUR LORD AND
SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST.**

**THE LORD CONTINUES HIS FAITHFUL WORK FROM SEED TO HARVEST IN OUR
LIVES**