



# THE GARDENER

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## **READING:**

John 15:1-8

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

## DAY 1 - HE FEEDS

Despite variable evidence we are coming into Springtime and things are starting to grow. This reminds us that growth is a sign of life and happens fairly automatically in the natural world. It also reminds us that we should be growing as Christians. We should be moulding more into the image of Christ, we should find ourselves able to trust Jesus more or we should find ourselves more capable of receiving the peace, grace and love of God.

The great thing is that we have someone who is helping us in all this. There is a gardener! In the natural world the gardener's job is to help the plants to grow – to use all his skill and knowledge into providing the best environment and conditions for fruitfulness. Folks – let us not forget that God is our gardener. He is Lord and still in charge and to help us grow he has given us food – His Word. Let's come afresh to God's word today – let's read it, let's believe it, let's live it. This makes all the difference.

**Job:** Open the bible today. Read a passage and without analysing it too deeply just let the words sink into your spirit. Believe what God is telling you and think of changes you could make as a response.

## DAY 2 - HE WATERS

It is possible for the human body to live for up to two months without food but the maximum time without water is about four days. In the bible Jesus used the image of water to illustrate the Holy Spirit and the quickening life of God that can be in us. I also know that if you leave cut flowers without water they wither pretty quickly.

In the passage from John 15 which we are looking at this week Jesus makes it clear that we must “remain in him”. We must allow the life-giving sap to flow into us – this keeps us strong and prevents wilting. The passage makes it abundantly clear that we are meant to live in union with Christ and connected to him. Everything we do should be enhanced and empowered by him, and that if we do this, we will bear fruit for his glory.

The great thing is, again, that we have a gardener who is wanting and willing to supply the water! The Holy Spirit has been poured out and He is accessible to every Christian who asks.

**Job:** Ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit again today. In a plant the flow of sap is continual – there is fresh sap for every second of the day. This is how it should be with the Holy Spirit – He wants to constantly flow into us empowering us to do God’s will.

## DAY 3 - HE WEEDS

One thing that the gardener may not have so much control over is the emergence of weeds alongside the plants he is growing. He knows, however, that if the weeds are allowed to keep growing they will compete with his plants for nutrients and water. He has a clear response to this and that is to pull the weeds out of the ground!

There can be things in our world that are draining to our spiritual life. It may be sin or bad habits but could also be milder things that just distract us. We must understand, however, that these things will, to a greater or lesser extent, weaken us as Christians. We should spend some time thinking and asking God to reveal any “weeds” that should be pulled up. If we are aware of any or God reveals some, then we should try to put an end to them. The benefits of this can be felt quickly as we feel stronger and more assured.

**Prayer:** Dear God – help me! Reveal to me anything that is not helping me in my spiritual life. Gently guide me to see that things can change and then give me the strength to change them.

## DAY 4 - HE PRUNES

Ok – so now the rubber hits the road, as they say! Pruning is an important part of gardening if the gardener wants more growth and more fruit. I know, even from my limited gardening experience, that once you cut back a tree or bush it paves the way for more abundant and more healthy results. There are parts of plants that are drying up and really just being “carried” by them without them contributing anything significant. When they are removed more of the precious sap can be directed to the fruitful parts.

God does this in our lives. (OW!) There are things that he just wants to cut away. They are not necessarily bad or sinful and we may even think that they are fruitful. We may not want to lose them and may not understand what God is doing. But as Paul explains to us in Hebrews 12 we should throw off everything that “hinders”. Paul uses the analogy of a runner only carrying what is absolutely necessary for the task ahead – then the runner can operate with maximum effectiveness.

Are there things that you feel God has taken away from you? Have you felt the pain when this has taken place? If so be encouraged – God has done it so that you can bear more abundant fruit in the mission he has called you to.

## DAY 5 - HE POSITIONS

In my view this is one of the most important things that the gardener does. He can have the best plant, he can feed and water it, he can prune it and cut it back, but if it is in the wrong place, it may not grow well. All plants need particular amounts of sun and shade, they have preferred temperatures and wind conditions, and they all have ideal soil types. The expert gardener knows this and positions each plant accordingly.

God knows this is true for us too. He knows what is needed to make us “flourish”, and he has the power to position us correctly. We need, therefore, to have faith that God has placed us just where he wants us and that we can prosper where he has put us. We may find this hard because the place where we are is particularly difficult, but we should remember that “good timber does not grow with ease; the stronger the wind, the stronger the trees.”

**Prayer:** Father God I do believe that you are in control. I understand that you have complete control over my life and can provide all the conditions to allow me to prosper and flourish. I pray you help me to be all you want me to be in the place you have positioned me, and I give you permission, as the ultimate gardener, to do whatever you want in my life so that I can bear abundant fruit. I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.