



# **Summer Lovin' Devotions**

## **Week Nine**

### **August 6-12, 2017**



## **Gardening**

As you begin each day: Take some deep breaths and acknowledge that you are in God's presence. As you read, pay attention not just with your mind, but also with your heart. Are there words or phrases that stick out to you? If yes, take time to consider them. Carry the words with you throughout the day and let God continue to work with you on what has been brought to your attention. If you get distracted as you read, that is okay. Use the distractions as a reminder to thank God for those happy distractions and as a reminder to give to God those troubling distractions.

All scripture is from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

## Day 1—God of the Garden: Eden

*On the day the LORD God made earth and sky—<sup>5</sup> before any wild plants appeared on the earth, and before any field crops grew, because the LORD God hadn't yet sent rain on the earth and there was still no human being to farm the fertile land,<sup>6</sup> though a stream rose from the earth and watered all of the fertile land—<sup>7</sup> the LORD God formed the human from the topsoil of the fertile land and blew life's breath into his nostrils. The human came to life.<sup>8</sup> The LORD God planted a garden in Eden in the east and put there the human he had formed.<sup>9</sup> In the fertile land, the LORD God grew every beautiful tree with edible fruit, and also he grew the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. -Genesis 2:4b-9 (CEB)*

As I traveled in the Northern Suburbs of Chicago, I found miles of sprawling properties with immaculate lawns and pristine, colorful gardens. The flower beds often surrounded beautiful homes. Yet, it was the gardens that caught the eye, more than the architecture. Rainbow patterns of blooming flowers and variegated greenery provided the tapestry for the yards around the Garrett Seminary: first the gardens, then the houses.

With God, it all started in the garden. The story of God's people began in the garden. There is not much evidence about the garden in Eden, but we do know, from Genesis 2, that God created...God created plants for eating, plants of beauty, and trees of abundance. It all started in the garden. Scripture tells us that gardens, vegetable and flower, are a sign of the life that God brings to God's people. God loved the garden, and even walked among Eve and Adam in the the garden.

The world in which we live contains all that is needed to sustain life. What are YOU doing to care for God's creation? In what ways does God speak to you in your garden or in nature?

**Prayer:** God of love and life, we thank You for the abundance that surrounds us in creation. Grow in us the garden of Your love and grace, so that we may show that love to others. Amen.

## Day 2—Preparing the Ground

*<sup>11</sup> On that day I will raise up the meeting tent of David that has fallen, and repair its broken places. I will raise up its ruins, and I will rebuild it like a long time ago; <sup>13</sup> The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when the one who plows will overtake the one who gathers, when the one who crushes grapes will overtake the one who sows the seed. The mountains will drip wine, and all the hills will flow with it. <sup>14</sup> I will improve the circumstances of my people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; and they will make gardens and eat their fruit. <sup>15</sup> I will plant them upon their land, and they will never again be plucked up out of the land that I have given them, says the LORD your God. —Amos 9: 11-15*

In the Bible, it all began in the garden with God's voice speaking to create. In our own gardens, it begins with hard work. There is much preparation that goes into getting the ground ready for planting. The weeds must be removed, the soil broken up, and some sort of compost or fertilizer added. It is NOT a one-shot deal! Preparing the ground is something that must be done each spring, and then attended to a number of times during the growing season, and especially after the fall plants have been harvested. The spring preparation is about restoring the soil so that the new seed has the nutrients needed to best achieve the goal of sprouting and producing fruit.

The Amos 9 passage talks of God's promise of restoration for the people of Israel. Once again, the Hebrew people have turned away from God, and the prophet Amos is trying to get them to stop the wickedness and once again worship God. Throughout the Bible, especially among the prophetic writings, there is the promise of God's abundance in the land. That abundance is not just meant for the people in the Bible, but also for those who believe and trust in God.

Like the seeds in the garden, we, too are planted in our community, and God comes among us so that our seeds may

serve God. What ground is God calling you to prepare? What areas in your life need to be prepared better for serving God?

**Prayer:** Creator God, rebuild and restore our lives so that we may better serve You. Prepare the ground in our lives so that God's abundance and love grows in us. Amen.

## Day 3—Planting Seeds

<sup>23</sup> *Jesus replied, "The time has come for the Human One to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> I assure you that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it can only be a single seed. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup> Those who love their lives will lose them, and those who hate their lives in this world will keep them forever.*

<sup>26</sup> *Whoever serves me must follow me. Wherever I am, there my servant will also be. My Father will honor whoever serves me.*  
-John 12:23-26 (CEB)

It's amazing that a tiny seed, when placed in the dark soil, becomes a thriving plant. We do this simple task with a measure of trust, and it makes all the difference. Every seed is different...different sizes, shapes, and fruit that is produced. In the spring, the displays pop up in stores with all sorts of vegetables, flowers, and plants, with colorful pictures of the final product. The packets are important, because the directions on the back tell of the appropriate depth and spacing for the seeds. The DNA contained in each type of seed requires different directions that are critical to the plant germinating.

John 12:23 (see above) talks of how Jesus, "the Human One" had to die in order for God to allow us to have eternal life. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, that happens as God plants seeds in our lives. Growing our own faith requires us to plant seeds. The seeds and directions for germination are contained in the text of the Bible. To disregard the guidance and inspiration in the Bible means we miss out on the ways in which we are called to live as a follower of Jesus Christ. It's not enough to read the Bible. Our

lives as a follower requires more from us. We are called to follow the directions. Our faith grows when we allow our old habits to die in the “soil” so that God can sprout new habits in us.

What habits in your life must die to give God soil to germinate new habits? How hard is it for you to let go of the old habits? Why are you clinging so tightly to those things when they prevent you from getting closer to God?

**Prayer:** God of Life, You have placed all we need for life in the shell of a tiny seed. You have also placed all we need for eternal life in the life, death, and resurrection of Your Son, Jesus. Thank you for the gift of life on this earth and in the life to come. Amen.

## Day 4—Tending the Garden

<sup>30</sup> *I happened upon the field of a lazy person, by the vineyard of one with no sense. <sup>31</sup> Thorns grew all over it; weeds covered the ground, and the stone wall was falling down. <sup>32</sup> I observed this and took it to heart; I saw it and learned a lesson. <sup>33</sup> “A little sleep, a little slumber, a little lying down with folded arms” <sup>34</sup> and poverty will come on you like a prowler, deprivation like a man with a shield. -Proverbs 24:30-34 (CEB)*

When I left for seminary, I had spent the weeks leading up to the departure finishing the course work. That left very little time to tend my gardens. As a result they were full of weeds when I returned. Weeds choke off the growth of the plants and reduce the yield. If left too long, the weeds take over completely, and the hard work of the spring preparation and planting was a waste. Weeding, watering, and overall tending of the garden is very important.

Our faith requires tending, as well. When one spends too much time absent from worship; too many days without talking to God in prayer; too little time spent reading scripture; when our lives become overrun

with meaningless worldly activities, we become distracted from our intimate relationship with God. Satan is ever ready to swoop in and take up our time for selfish things. Satan is the thorns and weeds that Proverbs 24:31 speaks of. These “thorns” tear down the walls of our relationship with Christ, ever distracting us from the life that is in God.

What weeds or distractions need to be pruned or removed from your life in order to better grow your relationship with God? What is one thing you can do this week to tend to your life?

**Prayer:** Loving God, help me tend to the garden of my faith. Prune out the weeds that distract me from You. Amen.

## Day 5—Times of Drought

*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.* -Isaiah 58:11 (ESV)

It was only a couple of years ago that Eastern Iowa was experiencing a severe drought. The parched ground was scarred with deep cracks in the hard dirt. The grass and plants turned a dull shade of brown, and trees began to lose their leaves well ahead of the fall changes. As clouds drifted across the sky, they were vacant of the much-needed precipitation that people longed for. Often in times of drought the water table lowers and there are bans on watering lawns and washing cars. These “scorched places” found in Isaiah 58 describe the barrenness left by the drought.

In chapter 58 Isaiah isn’t talking so much about environmental drought, but of spiritual drought... those times in life when God seems absent. Have there been times in your life when your faith seemed distant? Have there been times in your life when you longed to hear God, yet God remained silent? Maybe now is one of those times. Yet, God is still near. Isaiah reminds us that even in times of drought, “*the Lord will guide you continually.*” The Lord’s love and faithfulness are “*like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.*”

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, I invite You into the drought of my days. Spring forth in me, the water of Your refreshment and love. Amen.

## **Day 6—God of the Garden: Gethsemane**

<sup>36</sup> *Then Jesus went with his disciples to a garden in a place called Gethsemane. He said to the disciples, “Stay here while I go and pray over there.”* <sup>37</sup> *When he took Peter and Zebedee’s two sons, he began to feel sad and anxious.* <sup>38</sup> *Then he said to them, “I’m very sad. It’s as if I’m dying. Stay here and keep alert with me.”* <sup>39</sup> *Then he went a short distance farther and fell on his face and prayed, “My Father, if it’s possible, take this cup of suffering away from me. However—not what I want but what you want.”* - *Matthew 26: 36-39*

It all began in the garden of Eden with Eve and Adam. Throughout history, God’s presence and love never left the people, even though the people seemed to turn away from God. God’s work showed up again and again. We find God in a garden, the one in Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed before His betrayal. On the night that Jesus was betrayed, after having a meal with His disciples in the Upper Room, went to the garden to pray. For Jesus, all of His days were leading up to the events of these last days. Giving one’s self up to death, even when motivated by pure love, is a daunting call. Even Jesus asked if there was another way, *“take this cup of suffering away from me.”* But, in the end there wasn’t. He surrendered his life for us.

I take great comfort in the fact that Jesus displayed human honesty in the garden. If his suffering seemed like too much for him, and he expressed his desire for another way to God, then we can too. What a beautiful model of prayer.

What trials have you been through that you wanted to turn out another way? What suffering have you endured in your life? Do you think it is appropriate to tell God you want another way—that you’re tired of the suffering?

We don’t always get away from our troubles without pain, Jesus didn’t either. But, because of God’s great love for us, we do have the hope

and promise of everything being sorted out in the end. God's final garden is described in Revelation 22. A beautiful place with the tree of life, where there is no more suffering.

**Prayer:** God of comfort, even though You don't always intervene to change our circumstances, we thank You for showing us how to be honest with You. We give thanks for your presence with us, especially in the midst of suffering. As you lead us toward the final garden, show us our part in caring for those who suffer. Amen.

