

# GOD'S GARDEN

*how does  
your soul  
grow?*



LENTEN

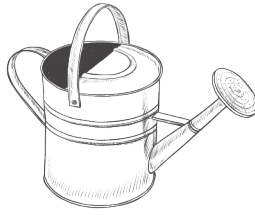
# 2019

DEVOTIONALS

VOLUME V



PSALM 92:13



## A NOTE FROM PASTOR JENN

Dear Lenten Gardeners,

We come to this season of Lent using the metaphor of a garden to dig deep into the work of God in our souls. In John 15, right before his arrest and trial, Jesus walks with the disciples and offers this as a part of his last words to them:

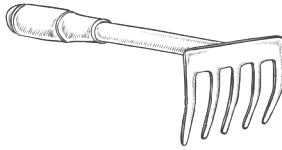
*“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vineyard keeper. 2 He removes any of my branches that don’t produce fruit, and he trims any branch that produces fruit so that it will produce even more fruit. 3 You are already trimmed because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. A branch can’t produce fruit by itself, but must remain in the vine. Likewise, you can’t produce fruit unless you remain in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit. Without me, you can’t do anything. 6 If you don’t remain in me, you will be like a branch that is thrown out and dries up. Those branches are gathered up, thrown into a fire, and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified when you produce much fruit and in this way prove that you are my disciples.”*

These six weeks leading to Easter we will focus on different work of the Gardener or Vineyard Keeper God in our souls. As we make our way with Jesus to the cross and Resurrection, we want to dig in and get our hands dirty into the garden of our faith journey to ensure we are cultivating a spiritual life which bears the fruit of God’s Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. Each week there will be a spiritual discipline to take up as another tool for us to be connected and present with the work of the Great Gardener. We invite you to use this devotional as a starting point for your work of getting your hands dirty so God can grow something glorious on Easter Sunday.

Here’s to the work of growing beauty,

*Jennifer Stiles Williams*

The Rev. Jennifer Stiles Williams  
Lead Pastor



## MARCH 31

*\*\*For the remainder of the week, there will be no devotion or silence prompts. Take the time to spend more time utilizing the lectio divina steps provided on March 25.*

**Prayer: Lord, help me to cultivate my roots in you. Gift my foundation with wisdom and my fruit with abundance. Guide me so that I bend, not fall, when the winds of life blow — for many are the benefits of life with you! Amen**

Read Ezekiel 47. Reflect: Reflect on the importance of water to sustain life. Pray: May we truly appreciate the fact that the presence of God makes the difference between life and death. Act: Act with certainty that “The Lord is there.”



## APRIL 1

Commitment to the spiritual disciplines is hard work. Remaining centered and seeking God each day can have varying results from the same spiritual work.

*“Without hard work, nothing grows but weeds.”* --Gordon B. Hinckley

In farming, the work to control weeds is common, yet backbreaking work. In modern times, we have the benefit of sprays and herbicides to help the process along for us. In Jesus' time, without this help, undetected weeds would grow along with a crop, crowding out healthy, growing plants.

As we grow in God's garden, we are faced with many weeds that threaten to choke out the fruit God has planted. Broken relationships, selfishness, greed, immorality, façade, busyness, vulnerability, shame--what are the weeds in the garden of your soul?

**Prayer: So many weeds grow among the good seed of our lives, Lord. By your Spirit, work within us, guard our hearts, and keep our hope of the harvest alive. Amen.**

*Silence: Today in your time of silence with God, listen for God to show you the weeds that need to be cut back.*

**Read:** Matthew 13:24-58. **Reflect:** Each parable provides food for thought. Weeds grow everywhere: in families, in society, and in the church. **Pray:** In the Lord's prayer, we pray for the coming of God's kingdom. Pay attention to this phase as you say this prayer. **Act:** People contribute to the coming of the reign of God by their actions. Treat all people fairly, without prejudice.

Confession:

Almighty and merciful God,

we know that when we offend another, we offend you.

We are aware that we have often allowed the shadow of hate  
to cloud our souls, hiding the light from our unseeking eyes.

We have said unpleasant and hurtful things to our brothers and sisters  
when they failed to live up to our expectations.

Grant that we might find that spark of love that ever burns within us,  
the love that you have shown to us even when we failed you.

Fan the embers of that love until it roars again  
in flames of love, peace, and reconciliation.

Forgive us our sin

and help us to forgive those who have sinned against us.

Lead us into new life through your Son Jesus Christ,  
who died for the sins of all. Amen.



## APRIL 2

*"What is a weed? A plant whose virtue have never been discovered."*

*--Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Pulling weeds and planting seeds are the story of life in the garden. We each are lots filled with potential where the fruit of the Holy Spirit can grow or the weeds of selfishness can take over.

In Mark 4, Jesus told us that spiritual fruitfulness or barrenness depended on the soil that received God's word. The worries of this world that cause us to be distracted from time spent with God.

Prayers of confession help to draw us nearer to God by pulling the weeds in our lives to allow the seeds God plants to flourish within us.

The reality is that all soil is prone to weeds. How are you preparing your soul for the Master Gardener? Are you ready for God to visit? Are you ready for how he will cultivate your heart?

**Prayer: O God of peace, who hast taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength; by the might of thy Spirit lift us, we pray thee, to thy presence, where we may be still and know that thou art God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. --The Book of Common Prayer**

*Silence: Today in your time of silence with God, listen for God to be with you.*

**Read:** Mark 4:1-34. **Reflect:** The parable of the sower reflects human life. Everyone faces obstacles in the life of faith. Some days are fruitful (thirty-, sixty-, a hundredfold) and others are not. Think about what you believe and how you live your faith. **Pray:** On a good day, thank God. On a poor day, ask for forgiveness and pray to the Holy Spirit to make the next day more faith filled. **Act:** Each night, examine your conscience on the day that has passed.

Confession:

Almighty and merciful God,

we know that when we offend another, we offend you.

We are aware that we have often allowed the shadow of hate  
to cloud our souls, hiding the light from our unseeking eyes.

We have said unpleasant and hurtful things to our brothers and sisters  
when they failed to live up to our expectations.

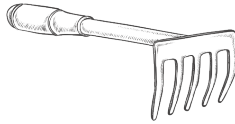
Grant that we might find that spark of love that ever burns within us,  
the love that you have shown to us even when we failed you.

Fan the embers of that love until it roars again  
in flames of love, peace, and reconciliation.

Forgive us our sin

and help us to forgive those who have sinned against us.

Lead us into new life through your Son Jesus Christ,  
who died for the sins of all. Amen.



## APRIL 3

At first, it can be difficult to identify which little sprouts are the plants you intended and which are the evil weeds that will siphon nourishment from your new crop.

*“A good garden may have some weeds.” --Thomas Fuller*

The more gardening a person does, the easier they can spot the sometimes minute differences between the sprouts of the plant you want and the sprouts of the plants you don't want. It's a similar situation in our spiritual lives when it comes to the truth of God's word and the false teachings we might encounter. Those who are new to the faith often have trouble distinguishing between what is real spiritual truth and what is a deception to lead them astray. As believers, we need to know God's voice so well that deviations from God's direction will stand out clearly, and we can turn away from it before it does much damage. Just as there are many weeds threatening our crop, there are many spiritual weeds that threaten our spiritual lives. These spiritual weeds steal what we need to grow and end up stunting our spiritual growth.

Let's train ourselves to spot these types of spiritual weeds and eliminate them as soon as they start—before they can take root and cause any damage.

**Prayer: Open wide the window of our spirits, O Lord, and fill us full of light; open wide the door of our hearts, that we may receive and entertain thee with all our powers of adoration and love. Amen. --Christina Rossetti**

*Silence: Today in your time of silence with God, listen for which disciplines have been speaking to your heart this season.*

**Read:** Hebrews 4. **Reflect:** Jesus is like us in all things but sin. He can sympathize with us. How can you allow him to bring you to God and God to you? **Pray:** Talk to Jesus about your weaknesses. **Act:** Read Psalm 95 again and again. Write down any thoughts that did not strike you on your first reading.

Confession:

Almighty and merciful God,

we know that when we offend another, we offend you.

We are aware that we have often allowed the shadow of hate  
to cloud our souls, hiding the light from our unseeking eyes.

We have said unpleasant and hurtful things to our brothers and sisters  
when they failed to live up to our expectations.

Grant that we might find that spark of love that ever burns within us,  
the love that you have shown to us even when we failed you.

Fan the embers of that love until it roars again  
in flames of love, peace, and reconciliation.

Forgive us our sin

and help us to forgive those who have sinned against us.

Lead us into new life through your Son Jesus Christ,  
who died for the sins of all. Amen.



## APRIL 4

Sometimes, as an unexperienced gardener, you don't know if the sprouts you see are the seeds that you've planted or weeds taking root in your garden. It is easy to feel discouraged that you've invested significant time and energy on something that goes against your goal.

*"Your mind is the garden, your thoughts are the seeds, you can grow flowers or your can grow weeds." -William Wordsworth*

Do not be dismayed if you feel that your spiritual disciplines are producing only weeds. THAT'S A WEED! Pulling out the weeds of our thoughts that tell us that God's love isn't taking root in us is hard, but continuing the practices of examen, silence, scripture, and confession will help make space for God's garden to grow.

### Prayer:

**Like an ant on a stick both ends of which are burning,  
I go to and fro without knowing what to do,  
And in great despair.  
Like the inescapable shadow that follows me,  
the dead weight of sin haunts me.  
Graciously look upon me.  
Thy love is my refuge. Amen.  
--India, traditional**

*Silence: Today in your time of silence with God, listen for where God is calling your heart.*

**Read:** Matthew 7:13-29. **Reflect:** The future depends on the present. Prayer and good works go together to bring about a good ending. A life well lived is never easy but demands sacrifice. Actions need to be grounded in values and beliefs. **Pray:** Too often people fail to live their faith. Prayer reminds us of what we believe then supports us in living what we believe. **Act:** Listen to everyone, discard a lot, and pay attention to those values and beliefs that you have made your own. Pick something from the Sermon on the Mount that needs to be a part of your life.

### Confession:

Almighty and merciful God,  
we know that when we offend another, we offend you.  
We are aware that we have often allowed the shadow of hate  
to cloud our souls, hiding the light from our unseeking eyes.  
We have said unpleasant and hurtful things to our brothers and sisters  
when they failed to live up to our expectations.  
Grant that we might find that spark of love that ever burns within us,  
the love that you have shown to us even when we failed you.  
Fan the embers of that love until it roars again  
in flames of love, peace, and reconciliation.  
Forgive us our sin  
and help us to forgive those who have sinned against us.  
Lead us into new life through your Son Jesus Christ,  
who died for the sins of all. Amen.



## APRIL 5

The weeds of loneliness can choke out the wheat of connecting with God. That is probably enough said for most of us. Especially if you don't feel connected to people, or you are fearfully clinging to someone right now, you may have pulled up the wheat of your faith a long time ago to get out the tares of loneliness.

We need love. We will take anything. The real thing starts with connecting with God, when prayer has turned our loneliness to solitude. Ask the question, like Jesus prayed, about why you feel disconnected. Embrace the need to stay on the cross of your fears until resurrection comes. That is praying in the weeds.

**Prayer:** Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings, with thy most gracious favor, and further us with thy continual help, that, in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy name, and finally, by thy mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. --Book of Common Prayer (1831)

**Read:** Galatians 5:13-26. **Reflect:** Examine the two lists, the works of selfish desires and the fruits of the Spirit. With which works of selfish desires do you have problems? Which fruits of the Spirit characterize your daily life? What do you need from the Spirit to live according to the Spirit? **Pray:** Virtues develop by establishing habits. Pray for the virtues you need in your personal life. **Act:** Patience and gentleness characterize life in the Spirit. Express these virtues to someone who gives you problems.

Confession:

Almighty and merciful God,

we know that when we offend another, we offend you.

We are aware that we have often allowed the shadow of hate  
to cloud our souls, hiding the light from our unseeking eyes.

We have said unpleasant and hurtful things to our brothers and sisters  
when they failed to live up to our expectations.

Grant that we might find that spark of love that ever burns within us,  
the love that you have shown to us even when we failed you.

Fan the embers of that love until it roars again  
in flames of love, peace, and reconciliation.

Forgive us our sin

and help us to forgive those who have sinned against us.

Lead us into new life through your Son Jesus Christ,  
who died for the sins of all. Amen.





## APRIL 6

Kudzu. Dandelions. Weeds. Kudzu and dandelions have a reputation that precedes them. Kudzu is a vine that climbs and coils that is very hard to kill and that thrives even without soil. In a short period of time, kudzu can wrap around a tree and strangle it. Dandelions start as one seemingly lovely flower, but soon is the only thing that you'll see in a field.

Two thoughts to consider about weeds. 1. Weeds always start out small, but ignored will grow into something that is huge and hard to uproot. 2. Weeds will always grow back.

If we let our daily troubles overwhelm us, or we begin to find beauty and comfort in our distractions, our faith becomes stunted and stops growing or worse, withers and dies. Allow Christ and your spiritual disciplines to be your spiritual weed killer. Find time to address your weeds regularly.

*Silence: Today in your time of silence with God, listen for the weeds in your life that are fighting to choke God's garden.*

**Read:** Matthew 6:19-7:12. **Reflect:** How can one live without being anxious about the needs of life? Judging others comes easy. How and when should one person correct another? **Pray:** Life is complicated. People are complicated. Pray for understanding and patience in accepting both life and others, especially those who are close to you and who at times may cause you problems. **Act:** Pay attention to the golden rule. It is not only a religious guide but also one that fits every situation in life, whether overtly religious or not.

Confession:

Almighty and merciful God,

we know that when we offend another, we offend you.

We are aware that we have often allowed the shadow of hate  
to cloud our souls, hiding the light from our unseeking eyes.

We have said unpleasant and hurtful things to our brothers and sisters  
when they failed to live up to our expectations.

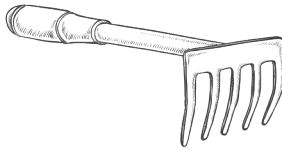
Grant that we might find that spark of love that ever burns within us,  
the love that you have shown to us even when we failed you.

Fan the embers of that love until it roars again  
in flames of love, peace, and reconciliation.

Forgive us our sin

and help us to forgive those who have sinned against us.

Lead us into new life through your Son Jesus Christ,  
who died for the sins of all. Amen.



## APRIL 7

*"Weeds are flowers too, once you get to know them." --AA Milne*

Our lives are created by God much like a garden. A garden is meant to be alive with growth and each garden paints a picture. There are no two gardens alike because trees, plants and grass are alive, and each grow entirely differently. A garden is designed to have needs and when those needs are met, it blossoms and comes into its destiny. The gardener attends to the needs of the garden and a good gardener goes beyond just the needs of the garden. A good gardener holds a vision for the garden and wants to bring it to its full potential not allowing anything to steal or to stop the journey of growth and eventual maturing.

Weeding is necessary to remove those things which would take away the nutrients of the soil or remove the kind of weeds which would bind themselves around healthy plants and choke them.

Many of us feel that we've sown our garden with many tears. We've come up against climatic conditions which are harsh. We've struggled with the hard ground where stones and weeds abound. We've labored in areas where there's seemingly been little fruitfulness and yield. Many times we may have felt that the work of our particular garden was too great.

We may not be able to see it but the tears of struggle and pain are having their effect. They are producing something underground which is taking root and shape.

**Prayer: Lord Jesus, please help me to identify the weeds of my soul and to put the axe to the root. Help me to allow Your law of sowing and reaping to take place in my life so it can become the garden of fruitfulness You designed it to be and in due season I will reap with shouts of joy. This is Your promise to me today. Amen.**

**Read:** Ecclesiastes 3. **Reflect:** The Teacher says, "God has made everything fitting in its time, but has also placed eternity in their hearts, without enabling them to discover what God has done from beginning to end." St. Augustine reflected this when he wrote: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in you." **Pray:** The ambiguities of life invite us to stand before God in humble confidence. Ask God to grant you the trust and courage you need to live faithfully and wisely. **Act:** The order in the natural world suggests that is not haphazard. This realization can provide you with a sense of security within the world.

Confession:

Almighty and merciful God,

we know that when we offend another, we offend you.

We are aware that we have often allowed the shadow of hate  
to cloud our souls, hiding the light from our unseeking eyes.

We have said unpleasant and hurtful things to our brothers and sisters  
when they failed to live up to our expectations.

Grant that we might find that spark of love that ever burns within us,  
the love that you have shown to us even when we failed you.

Fan the embers of that love until it roars again  
in flames of love, peace, and reconciliation.

Forgive us our sin

and help us to forgive those who have sinned against us.

Lead us into new life through your Son Jesus Christ,  
who died for the sins of all. Amen.

# PRAYER LABYRINTH

All Are Welcome

## Open in the Sanctuary Now Through April 12

Monday/Wednesday/Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Sundays from 1:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

## Open in the Building C Attic April 14 to April 21

Daily from 7:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

*Special hours Sunday, April 21 (Easter Sunday):*

7:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

The Labyrinth is an ancient tool used for prayer and meditation. It is not a maze or a puzzle to be solved. You do not get lost in it. It is an intentional prayer walk along a canvas path on the floor. There will be stations around the labyrinth guiding you through the journey. Instructions will be provided to guide you through the walk. Silence and reverence is appreciated. The Labyrinth walk is for people of all ages and parents are encouraged to accompany children. St. Luke's Prayer Labyrinth is free so come and find the quiet center in the crowded lives we live.



# EASTER FEST

SUNDAY, APRIL 14

**3:00 P.M. - 5:30 P.M.**  
**ON THE ST. LUKE'S CAMPUS**

*Families will enjoy inflatables, pony rides, a petting zoo, an Easter Egg Carnival, crafts for all ages, food available for purchase, handmade gifts for purchase to support children in Rwanda, and a sensory friendly area for children with special needs.*

*Pre-register and sign up to volunteer at [st.lukes.org/easterfest](http://st.lukes.org/easterfest).*

## JOIN US FOR HOLY WEEK

### PALM SUNDAY, APRIL 14

Traditional Services in the Sanctuary at 8:00 a.m., 9:30 a.m., and 11:00 a.m.  
Contemporary Services in Founder's Hall at 9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.

### HOLY THURSDAY, APRIL 18

A combined service in Founder's Hall at 7:00 p.m.

### GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 19

A combined service in the Sanctuary at 6:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

### EASTER, APRIL 21

Traditional Services in the Sanctuary at 7:30 a.m., 8:45 a.m., 10:00 a.m., and 11:15 a.m.  
Contemporary Services in Founder's Hall at 9:00 a.m., 10:15 a.m., and 11:30 a.m.

### PRAYER LABYRINTH IN THE ATTIC OF BUILDING C

Palm Sunday to Holy Thursday 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Good Friday 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Saturday, April 20 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (noon)

**ST LUKE'S**  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

4851 S. Apopka-Vineland Road  
Orlando, Florida 32819  
407.876.4991  
[www.st.lukes.org](http://www.st.lukes.org)