

GOD'S GARDEN

*how does
your soul
grow?*



LENTEN

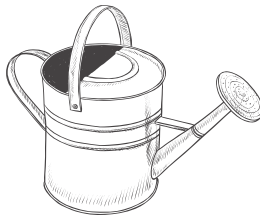
2019

DEVOTIONALS

VOLUME II



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,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jennifer Stiles Williams". The ink is dark and the writing is fluid and personal.

The Rev. Jennifer Stiles Williams
Lead Pastor



MARCH 9

"I'd rather regret the things I've done than regret the things I haven't done"
--Lucille Ball

Spiritual disciplines can become static...we return to the same prayers, bible verses, songs, and practices that we've done hundreds of times. Faithful spiritual practices remain fresh and open for God to move in our lives and breathe into us.

Beware familiarity in your spiritual practice. Returning to the same Bible stories can be a trigger to not reading it closely. Revisit scripture reading through the eyes of Jesus--you may find that this approach invites God to meet you in uncounted ways with unimagined consequences.

Slow down and encounter God, through spiritual disciplines, with the expectation of experiencing the Trinity in new and powerful ways.

Spiritual disciplines allow us to learn anew about the inescapable wonder of God's prevenient and everlasting grace which finds us, feeds us, and employs us each day.





MARCH 10

“To change your life, you need to change your priorities.”

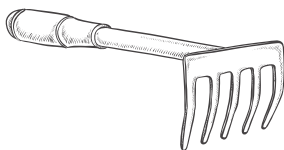
Fasting for Lent often comes down to just eliminating the thing you hold as a guilty pleasure. What would fasting look like if instead you consciously chose to elevate things that are pleasing to God?

Fasting is abstaining from something that we normally do to make space for God. By mindfully removing something AND replacing it with time spent with God shows an intentional prioritizing of God’s place in your life.

“There is a big difference between “CAN’T” and “it just isn’t a high priority.”

Fasting is hard. We develop habits, both positive and negative, because of the emotional reward we receive from them. Our relationship with God isn’t necessarily characterized by rushes of pleasure or reward, but a sense of serenity and joy.





MARCH 11

“When you pray, don’t pour out a flood of empty words, as the Gentiles do. They think that by saying many words they’ll be heard. Don’t be like them, because your Father knows what you need before you ask.” Matthew 6:7-8

Prayer is communication with God. Like any relationship, our relationship needs communication. The communication is not necessary because God needs to hear our requests, but instead because we need to hear from God.

“Relationships cannot grow without the proper amount of communication.”

A natural part of relationships is the making of requests. In fact, the prayer that Jesus taught the disciples in Matthew 6:9-15, commonly known as the Lord’s Prayer, is full of requests. Maturity in prayer goes beyond requests. Imagine a friendship where one party only talks about their needs--not much of a healthy relationship.

As you revisit the Lord’s Prayer today, notice that Jesus’ prayer encourages us to pray beyond our own narrow world and experience. What would your prayers be if you prayed beyond your individual desires--to a reality that is full of God’s presence, forgiveness, provision, and goodness?

How is the soil of your soul today?

Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.





MARCH 12

“Prayer is exhaling the spirit of man and inhaling the spirit of God.”

--Edwin Keith

The Daily Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God’s presence and discern His direction for us. The Examen is an ancient practice in the Church that helps us to create space to see God’s hand at work in our whole experience.

This practice provides a structure with which to approach your prayer:

Presence

God, help me to know your presence with me

Ask yourself: Where do I need God’s presence the most?

Gratitude

God, you pour out your gifts on me, sometimes without my awareness.

Ask yourself: What am I grateful for right now?

Review

God, reveal to me your loving activity in my day

Ask yourself: How have I experienced God’s closeness today?

Repetition

God, guide my awareness to what you wish to show me

Ask yourself: Which moment in my day did God seem to draw my attention to? Why?

Hope

God, I yearn to grow closer to you in love and service.

Ask yourself: How will I live tomorrow anew?

How is the soil of your soul today?





MARCH 13

“My presence speaks volumes before I say a word.” --Mos Def

God’s presence surrounds us each day, but our prayer time can be the most isolating time in our day. As we share the deepest desires of our hearts, pray for ourselves, our loved ones, and our world--God seems the farthest away when we are at our most vulnerable.

The psalmist reminds us in Psalm 139 that “there isn’t a word on my tongue that you don’t already know completely”. Prayer is about opening our eyes to God’s presence, as well as offering our presence to God.

In gardening, presence is required for a beautiful healthy garden. In the garden of our soul, we must be mindful to continue to show up to and join with God in close relationship.

How is the soil of your soul today?

Prayer:

Give us, O Lord, steadfast hearts, which no unworthy thought can drag downward, unconquered hearts, which no tribulation can wear out, upright hearts, which no unworthy purpose may tempt aside. Bestow upon us also, O Lord our God, understanding to know you, diligence to seek you, wisdom to find you, a faithfulness that may finally embrace you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

--Thomas Aquinas





MARCH 14

Sometimes, in order to examine ourselves, we need to talk to our own souls. The Psalms are full of ideas on how to do this. Take, for example, Psalm 103:1-5:

*Let my whole being bless the Lord!
Let everything inside me bless his holy name!
Let my whole being bless the Lord
And never forget all his good deeds:
how God forgives all your sins,
heals all your sickness,
saves your life from the pit,
crowns you with faithful love and compassion,
and satisfies you with plenty of good things so that your mouth is made fresh like
an eagle's.*

This helps us put things into perspective. Examining ourselves helps us realize how blessed we have been and leads us directly to gratitude. If nothing else today, remember all that God has already done for you. Now...

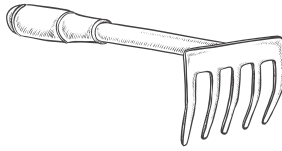
How is the soil of your soul today?

Prayer:

I am no longer my own, but thine. Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt. Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be employed by thee or brought low for thee. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal. And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it. And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

--Wesleyan Covenant Prayer





MARCH 15

The God who formed us in our mother's womb knows everything about us! There is no hiding. Reviewing is about realizing this and being honest with God.

Psalm 139:1-4 says:

*God, investigate my life;
get all the facts firsthand.
I'm an open book to you;
even from a distance, you know what I'm thinking.
You know when I leave and when I get back;
I'm never out of your sight.
You know everything I'm going to say
before I start the first sentence.*

The Psalm ends with these words:

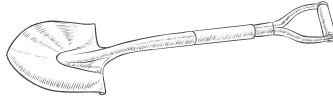
*Investigate my life, O God,
Find out everything about me;
Cross-examine and test me,
Get a clear picture of what I'm about;
See for yourself whether I've done anything wrong –
then guide me on the road to eternal life.*

How is the soil of your soul today?

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.





MARCH 16

God, reveal to me your love each day.

As we look back on each day, we can often be jaded by the dirt and muck of the world, so much so that we are unable to go back and review the beauty of God's love.

“His disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, ‘You have been given the mysteries of God’s kingdom, but these mysteries come to everyone in parables so *that when they see, they can’t see, and when they hear, they can’t understand.*’“ Luke 8:9-10

Spiritual disciplines are hard. We are reminded of them and they become an easy habit...until we start to forget. The vicious cycle of forgetfulness is started by the failure to get back to it. Keeping faithful to our practices: read the Bible, listen for God, rest, or prayer does wonders for our spiritual lives.

The soil of our souls becomes fertile...until we start to forget. Remember to seek God each day to revisit the power of His love.

How is the soil of your soul today?

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 G. Rossetti





MARCH 17

“To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow.” --Audrey Hepburn

Hope in prayer is so much more than sharing the dreams of your heart. Praying in hope is also about expressing your desire to be more the way that God would have you be each day. How is God working to change your heart toward those in His kingdom you may not see as clearly? How is God working this soil of your soul to ensure that you are prepared for more?

Even before we respond to God in hope, God had hope for us. As Methodists, we understand that God’s grace comes to us before we even knew of God’s love. God is able to look at our lives and see the beauty of what we are and what we can be.

As we continue to focus on spiritual disciplines, prayer is one of the foundations of the garden of our souls.

How is the soil of your soul today?

Prayer:

**O Great Spirit,
whose breath gives life to the world,
and whose voice is heard in the soft breeze:**

We need your strength and wisdom.

**Cause us to walk in beauty. Give us eyes
ever to behold the red and purple sunset.
Make us wise so that we may understand
what you have taught us.**

**Help us learn the lessons you have hidden
in every leaf and rock.**

**Make us always ready to come to you
with clean hands and steady eyes,
so when life fades, like the fading sunset, our spirits may come to you
without shame.**

Amen.

--Traditional Native American Prayer



FREE EVENT!

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, and a sensory friendly area for children with special needs.

*Pre-register for your event wristband
and view more information at
st.lukes.org/easterfest.*

(RSVP requested but not required.)



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