

GOD'S GARDEN

*how does
your soul
grow?*



LENTEN

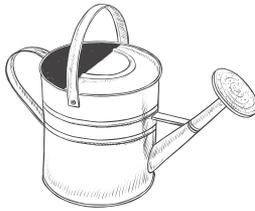
2019

DEVOTIONALS

VOLUME III



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 that reads "Jennifer Stiles Williams".

The Rev. Jennifer Stiles Williams
Lead Pastor



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 God’s 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





MARCH 18

Over the last week, you've been considering the soil of your soul. Has the spiritual discipline of prayer prepared your soul for the seeds that God is planting?

The tiny seed knew that in order to grow, it needed to be dropped in dirt, covered in darkness, and struggle to reach the light.

--Sandra King

Spiritual disciplines can sometimes be hard because of the silence that follows. But the silence is when the seeds begin to sprout. Have you created the space for God's seeds to sprout within you?

For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.

--Lamentations 3:26

This Lent, seek refuge in holy silence. Allow the seeds of God's garden to take root in your soul.

Prayer:

O Lord, I offer you this moment of silence.

This moment is for You.

I consent to Your action

in my mind and in my heart,

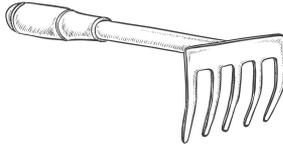
in my will and in my soul.

I welcome Your presence. Amen.

Silence:

Pay attention to what's stirring in your soul. Notice the feelings of desperation and desire that you experience at various times. Instead of trying to suppress or run from those feelings, let them motivate you pursue time with God in silence and solitude.





MARCH 19

We are humans, not machines. We were made for rhythms of silence and noise, community and solitude. It is unhealthy to always have people around, as well as to rarely want them. God made us for cycles and seasons, for routines and cadences.

One of the downsides of technology that lives on our wrists, in our pockets, and everywhere we look is that is we can easily avoid quiet. We are addicted to noise...we flip through the channels on the television and radio rather than just enjoy the silence.

What would your day look like if you turned it all off and took conscious silent time with God?

In the middle of a particularly hectic week or season, it is remarkable how strange, how WONDERFUL, silence can be.

Prayer:

O Lord, I offer you this moment of silence.

This moment is for You.

I offer myself to you patiently, welcoming you here with me.

Amen.

Silence:

Incorporate silence and solitude into your life regularly. Choose a regular time and place to get away from life as usual and spend at least 10 minutes in silence and solitude as often as you can. Express your need for God through a simple prayer and choose a physical position that will enable you to stay alert yet worshipful.





MARCH 20

Silence and solitude can seem out of reach...a practice better reserved for the most religious among or philosophers thinking their deepest thoughts. Silence feels like a luxury that can only be indulged when we face choices with the highest stakes.

“Silence is not empty, it is full of answers.” --Unknown

Spiritual silence is larger than just an absence of noise. It is the absence of human-created stimulus--our gadgets, our gizmos, our thoughts.

“To every thing there is a season and a time and purpose under heaven...a time for keeping silent and a time for speaking...” --Ecclesiastes 3:1,7

In silence, remove the temptation to consume any human created input, including not only audible stimuli, but also the reading of the written word. This act, although very quiet, involves “listening” to the text.

God gives us a yearning for silence...it is there we are most likely to find God.

Prayer:

O Lord, I offer you this moment of silence.

This moment is for You.

I will slow down my thoughts and my imagination,

I will calm down my fears and my emotions,

I come to you with patience and humility,

Show me what you wish. Amen.

Silence:

Overcome resistance. Don't let anything distract you from devoting yourself regularly to times of seeking God in silence and solitude. Entrust each of your current concerns specifically to God in prayer so you can be free to be fully present during solitude and silence. If you're anxious or afraid when you think about spending time in solitude and silence, admit it to God and ask for comfort.





MARCH 21

It is easier to quiet the noise created by others, than the noise that we ourselves create. We must stop all talking and quiet our thoughts. Thoughts come from all directions--thoughts born of our hopes and fears, thoughts that go as quickly as they came. In your time of silence, don't try to hold on to the thoughts for fear that you won't have them again.

Read the parable of the sower at Matthew 13:3-9.

"Wise souls speak loudly in silence." --Dan Goldberg

Our silence feeds the soil of our souls so that God's seeds can produce beyond our wildest imagination. Our noise creates birds, rocks, and thorns that eat the beauty of the seeds God is sowing.

Prayer:

O Lord, I offer you this moment of silence.

This moment is for You.

I lift up my soul to You,

Whispering in my heart and in my mind,

"Here I am! Quiet but attentive to You"

Amen.

Silence:

Seek rest for your body, mind, and soul. Pray for the wisdom you need to recognize when you've become dangerously tired – exhausted by life's demands, to the point where you can't hear God's voice speaking to you. Accept God's invitation to rest in God's presence during solitude and silence. Rather than showing up tired for your special meetings with God, give your body the rest it needs by getting enough sleep and exercise, eating well, and drinking water regularly. While you're spending time in solitude and silence, take deep breaths and let the peace of God's presence fill your body. Let go of concerns that your mind is trying to hold onto during solitude and silence by opening yourself up to the revelation that comes from beyond your mind – from God, who can speak to you about things that your mind can't figure out, but your spirit can hear. Ask God to help you quiet your mind and listen with your spirit, trusting that God will respond to your prayer by speaking to you. If grief is weighing on your soul, confess it to God. When your soul feels grateful for God's love, express that gratitude to God.



MARCH 22

As we wait to see the seeds that God plants in our souls, we are invited to the uncomfortable practice of listening for God in the silence.

So far this Lent, we have been practicing the disciplines of prayer and silence. Throughout 1 and 2 Samuel, David takes requests to the Lord and waits for the answers—he learned long before that he could not listen too much for the Lord.

We face endless spiritual and physical needs and opportunities that provide us with a chance to seek God and silently wait for his response. But in our noisiness, we have developed a discomfiting habit of jumping into to finish the thoughts of others and answering our own questions before the other person has a chance.

How often have you done this to God?

How often do you cut God off assuming, “I already know what the Lord will say”?

Prayer:

O Lord, I offer you this moment of silence.

This moment is for You.

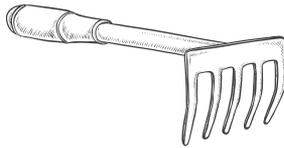
Fill this silence in ways I’ve never imagined.

Reveal Your heart to me as I turn my heart over to you. Amen.

Silence:

Let emptiness lead you to God’s fulfillment. Don’t try to deny or avoid the emptiness you feel inside sometimes. Instead, recognize that emptiness can be good when it motivates you to turn to God to seek fulfillment during your times of solitude and silence. So feel the pain of your emptiness as it carves out space in your soul for you to receive more of God’s presence.





MARCH 23

Starting a garden with seeds is so frustrating.

You work hard to ensure that the soil is ready, then you lovingly place the seeds and cover them with the dark earth. Then you wait, and wait, and wait.

Spiritual disciplines are similar. We pray and prepare the soil of our soul, we turn over to God all that we are and all that is in us for God's Kingdom. God plants seeds: seeds of mercy and compassion, seeds of justice and holy discontent, seeds of love and kindness.

"When you take time with God and listen to His voice, He renews your strength and enables you to handle life" --Joyce Meyer

It takes time for God's seeds to work...examen, silence, scripture, prayer, fasting...each discipline we explore this Lent gives us the food to feed God's seeds in our lives in this season and every season of our lives.

Prayer:

O Lord, I offer you this moment of silence.

This moment is for You.

**Lord, help me to cultivate a desire to pray,
reflect and hear you in the silence.**

**Give me joy in the moments of stillness each day and be more engaged
with you.**

Amen.

Silence:

Face yourself as you really are, and let God help you. Rather than hiding from God, denying who you are, or trying to control what others think of you, allow the truth of who you are to surface during solitude and silence – and face the reality of the person you see, flaws and all. Then remember that God loves you deeply and unconditionally, and ask Him to meet you right where you are and help you grow more into the person He wants you to become. Use whatever painful new knowledge you've gained about yourself to repent from sin and grow closer to God, with the confidence that He will help you every step of the way. Keep in mind that God is for you, with you, and in you when you open yourself up to His powerful presence. So give yourself completely to God, who loves you just as you are but also loves you too much to let you stay as you are.



MARCH 24

Have you begun to welcome small times of silence in your day?

You are one week in to creating a habit of silence with God each day. Science says that 21 days is the magic number.

While you may not have created a full-blown habit just yet, you may be feeling the seeds God is spreading begin to take root in your soul. God's greatest gift to us is time...time to become who he has created us to be and to produce His fruit. What matters is what goes down deep in the silence... our roots, the unseen grounding of our souls.

"God speaks in the silence of the heart. Listening is the beginning of prayer."
--Mother Teresa

There are some things we can attain through hard work and determination, but becoming our truest, most fruitful self comes through time spent with Christ.

Prayer:

O Lord, I offer you this moment of silence.

This moment is for You.

Thank you for always meeting me in the silence. Amen.

Silence:

Let the love that you experience in solitude and silence pour out into other people's lives. Each time that you return to life in community with other people after spending time in solitude and silence, draw upon the love that God has given you to love others by speaking kind and encouraging words and serving others when they need help with something. Take what God has given you during your meetings in solitude and silence and use it to bless others when you're with them.



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.

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
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