

GOD'S GARDEN

*how does
your soul
grow?*

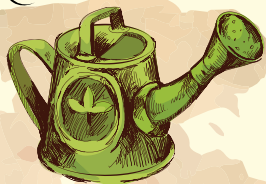


LENTEN

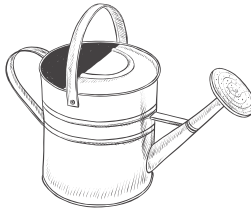
2019

DEVOTIONALS

VOLUME IV



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 R. Stiles Williams

The Rev. Jennifer Stiles Williams
Lead Pastor



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.





MARCH 25

“A tree with strong roots laughs at storms.” --Malay proverb

Have you ever noticed a young tree that is held up by stakes and ropes while it's roots burrow deeper and deeper? It is held steady against the wind and the rain, if they are removed it is only a matter of time before it is taken away by the elements.

The thing about those trees is they are like us in our faith journey. Without feeding our roots, through prayer and scripture, we will often find that we are creating lots of leafy foliage, but our roots are only tiny shoots searching for nutrients and water.

Continued practice of spiritual disciplines allows our roots to grow to anchor us through all of the storms of life.

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.

Silence: Today in your time of silence with God, listen for the food God has for your soul.

What is Lectio Divina? Lectio Divina is a reflective reading of the Bible to lead us into prayer. There are 4 steps:

- **Read** a Bible passage slowly and thoughtfully
- Take time to **Reflect** and think about the meaning of that text to you as a reader
- **Pray** for God to bring its message or wisdom to fruit in you
- **Act** on what you should do in your own life as a result--what does the scripture challenge you to change or improve in your own life.

Lectio divina is simple to do and can be done anywhere that there is quiet and peace. Practice lectio today by walking through steps using your favorite Bible passage. How does your understanding of the scripture change through reading scripture this way?





MARCH 26

Have you ever found yourself sitting in church, feeling a bit restless searching for some reassurance that God has heard your prayers, that God hasn't forgotten you sitting alone in your seat?

"God is silent in the Bible more than he speaks. While he is silent, he is never still"
--Unknown

God often finds ways to communicate with us, even through the words of the Bible written generations ago. By revisiting the Bible often, we are able to "hear" God speaking even when we least expect it.

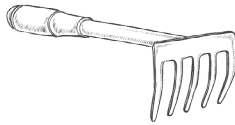
God spoke to Levi while he worked, not waiting for a designated prayer time or season when he chose to walk closer to God. Are you finding roots and listening with your heart?

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

Silence: Focus on creating a silent heart today so that God's love can take root in you.

Read: Luke 5:27-39. **Reflect:** on the swift way in which Levi drops everything to follow Jesus as an example of the readiness we should have in hearkening to Jesus—no dragging of feet. **Pray:** that God grant you a heart of readiness to do God's bidding, anytime and anywhere. **Act:** it may be that for a while you have been inspired to do a particular good and brave act, but you have been delaying. Do it now, today, stop waiting.





MARCH 27

Roots serve two important functions. They give a tree stability, enabling it to stand in fierce storms, and they provide nutrients from the soil.

Church worship services are one place for rich nutrients. But roots need more than pockets of good soil. A spiritually healthy root system will find nourishment in the ordinary. After all, God's goodness is there. All that is good is God's gift to us, and it exists to make God known to us.

"There is no blade of grass, there is no color in this world, that is not intended for us to rejoice." --John Calvin

Our lives are to be deeply rooted in Christ so that we may stand firm and bear much fruit.

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: James 2:14-26. James addresses the relationship between faith and good works. He argues that for faith to be alive, it has to be expressed in good works.

Reflect: James is quite clear about the importance of good works. Compare James

2:21-23 with Romans 4:23. **Pray:** Almighty God, thank you for the graces and blessings you have so generously given me. Grant that I will always share with

others and assist those in need. **Act:** Do good.





MARCH 28

***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: Hosea 14. **Reflect:** What powers do I rely upon for salvation? To what extent do I put all my trust in the work of my own hands? In the work of others' hands? What would it mean for me to return to the Lord? **Pray:** Lord, be my dew that I may strike root, put forth shoots, blossom, and bear you abundant fruit. **Act:** As I go about my day, I will be mindful of the Lord's presence with me to save and to bear fruit.





MARCH 29

***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: Isaiah 1:21-31. **Reflect:** No matter what you've done, there is always a chance to make amends. Think of other encouraging Bible stories about a return to faithfulness. **Pray:** We pray that we may always have the ability to change our hearts. **Act:** A change of heart is expressed in our actions toward our sisters and brothers.





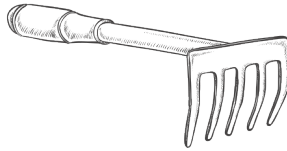
MARCH 30

***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: Psalm 22. **Reflect:** Am I afraid to pray all of this psalm, including, at times, the opening words? **Pray:** My God, I place all of my fears and temptations before you. Please hear me so that I may proclaim to others your goodness. **Act:** I will not fail to share with others what God has done for me.





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:** 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:** with certainty that “The Lord is there.”



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
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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