

GOD'S GARDEN

*how does  
your soul  
grow?*

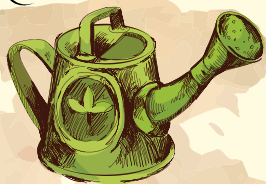


LENTEN

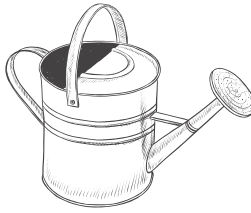
2019

DEVOTIONALS

VOLUME VI



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:

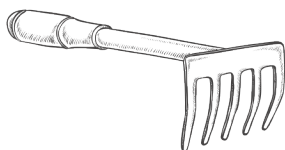
*“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vineyard keeper. 2 He removes any of my branches that don’t produce fruit, and he trims any branch that produces fruit so that it will produce even more fruit. 3 You are already trimmed because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain 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



## 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.



## APRIL 8

We have spent several weeks focusing on spiritual disciplines and preparing our souls for God's work within us. It's overwhelming. You may find yourself saying "I'm too weak for this."

The reality is, all of us as humans, are too weak--more precisely, too human. We are too human to understand the work that God is doing in our lives.

Much of the power of spiritual disciplines comes with the vulnerability it takes to stand before God.

*Silence: Today in your time of silence with God, listen for where God is calling you to be more vulnerable.*

**Read:** Nehemiah 1. **Reflect:** Consider the contrast in this story between the evil that humans bring upon themselves and the response that God makes to those who repent. The prayer of confession strengthens Nehemiah for his task of improving conditions in Jerusalem. **Pray:** A prayer of confession ought to precede a prayer for God's mercy. In your prayer, acknowledge your need for God's forgiveness. **Act:** Prayer empowers the believer for action. Strengthened by the experience of God in prayer consider what you could do to repair the damage caused by sin.

**Confession:** Pray Nehemiah's prayer of confession (Nehemiah 1:4-11)

**Fasting:** In Methodism, fasting is considered one of the Works of Piety. The founder of Methodism, John Wesley fasted before receiving Holy Communion "for the purpose of focusing his attention on God," and asked other Methodist Christians to do the same. In accordance with Scripture and the teachings of the early Methodists, fasting in Methodism is done "from morning until evening"; John Wesley kept a more rigorous Friday Fast, fasting from sundown (on Thursday) until sundown (on Friday) in accordance with the liturgical definition of a day. Think of fasting in this way, "I'm not skipping a meal because in place of that meal I'm actually dining with God."



## APRIL 9

“Ugh. Yikes.” --Anonymous St. Luker asked for thoughts about fasting

Fasting is a daunting prospect. The idea of giving something up, even for God, is hard. And it is not uncommon to be left feeling....well, empty.

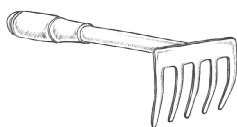
Fasting in our modern context sometimes can become all about the deprivation, and less about how it will draw us closer to God. How can you fight the desires of your wants and needs to more clearly hear what God wants and needs from you? Can you be filled by God when you are feeling empty in the flesh?

*Silence: Today in your time of silence with God, listen for what God wants and needs from you and how you will answer to God and not yourself.*

**Read:** Revelation 1:1-8. **Reflect:** If God be for me who can prevail against me? It often seems that the storm clouds have gathered but that notwithstanding, I take comfort in the thought that Christ will conquer. **Pray:** Lord God, however threatening the sky above me, I put all my trust in you. **Act:** I will resolve to stir up confidence in ultimate victory. Resolve to be on God's side.

**Confession:** O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare those, O God, who confess their faults. Restore those who are penitent; according to Your promises declared unto men in Christ Jesus our Lord. Grant that we may hereafter live a godly life to the glory of His name. Amen.

**Fasting:** Consider fasting a single meal; spend the time you would normally have that meal in prayer and communion with God.



## APRIL 10

Tending a garden is slow and tedious work. Unlike planting or harvesting, tending requires constant attention, nurture, and care.

God tends to us to as a gardener to delicate blossoms. But as inattentive blooms, we fall over, wilt, and are overcome by weeds. No matter how ugly the garden may seem to outsiders, God sees the beauty that has been forgotten.

Spiritual disciplines allow us to flourish under God's agape love. Agape love has the power to exceed all expectations because it is permanent, a love that never disappoints, never diminishes, and never dies. Nothing can separate us from it. Agape was made for us and we were made to thrive under agape.

*Silence: Today in your time of silence with God, listen for agape love.*

**Read:** 1 John 4:7-21. **Reflect:** "Perfect love drives out fear." How does this happen?

**Pray:** Love is relational. If we truly love God, whom we cannot see, then we must love others whom we do see. This is not easy. Pray for the ability to love. **Act:** The standard of love is high. Love needs to be put into practice and perfected. Identify a specific area or relationship in your life that is lacking love.

**Confession:** Unclutter our lives, Lord  
we have too much,  
consume too much,  
expect too much.

Grant us perspective;  
to see this world  
through others' eyes  
than just our own.  
Amen.



## APRIL 11

It is time to get a new outlook on fasting. When practiced the right way, fasting is something that everyone should enjoy. That's right...enjoy! Fasting is for every follower of Jesus. Too many people fast with a strict mind-set that focuses on abstaining. The fasting I am talking about is different. Of course it involves abstaining from food, but the mindset is completely different. It is possible to have minimum physical emptiness with maximum spiritual fullness.

Fasting is one of the most powerful spiritual weapons believers can use. Maybe you've never done it before. There is a serious misconception that fasting is for serious, super Christians or only for times of crisis. Some even think fasting is only an Old Testament thing. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:16, "When you fast." He did not say if you fast! There is a closeness to God that you simply will not experience from prayer or personal devotions alone. You must fast. You get a revelation of God's Word when you fast that you simply cannot get any other way. Disconnecting from the distractions of the world through fasting, and connecting into the power and presence of God through prayer, brings a supernatural freshness and newness to our souls.

*Silence: Today in your time of silence with God, listen for God's guidance about how fasting can tend to your soul.*

**Read:** Nehemiah 6. **Reflect:** It is ironic that attempting to do good for the greatest number of people engenders opposition. Usually this opposition comes from those who believe that their interests would be harmed by efforts to contribute to the common good. How do you react when your status, power, or wealth is threatened? **Pray:** Pray for an end to the opposition to justice for the poor. **Act:** Show your solidarity with people who work to bring about necessary change in society. Your standing with them will boost their morale and contribute to the creation of a just society.

**Confession:** Lord we confess that we suffer today because of sin, both the sins we have chosen and the sins committed against us. We have done things we should not have done, and we have neglected to do those things we should have done. Save us from ourselves; save us from the forces of Evil in this world. Amen.

**Fasting:** Today, fast from busyness. Work as is your custom, but refrain from filling your time idly and refocus that time on God.



## APRIL 12

Why do we fast? You can do it for the right reasons or the wrong reasons. I want to make it clear that under the New Covenant, fasting is not to get God to change His mind about something. Fasting is also not something we do to obtain favor or forgiveness. After you receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, your past, present and future sins have already been forgiven! You don't need to fast to obtain favor or receive mercy, because through Jesus you live in a continual state of God's mercy. Instead, fasting is a way of celebrating the goodness of God and that because of Jesus, we have already received God's mercy, forgiveness and favor.

Under the Old Covenant, the entire mindset was to "do in order to become." But under the New Covenant, the operating principle is "you already are, therefore act like it" --- rejoice and celebrate that Christ has set you free.

You don't have to fast for mercy, instead, celebrate the mercy given to you as a free gift through your relationship with Christ. Under the New Covenant you don't fast to obtain the Lord's favor because you perpetually live in the favor of the Lord. Do you see the difference?

Fasting is not about mourning or sadness, but it is about celebrating the goodness of God.

*Silence: Today, enter silence with God with no expectations. Allow yourself to be with God alone.*

**Read:** Matthew 6:1-18. **Reflect:** How do charity, prayer, and fasting form part of my everyday life? Notice how the prayer that Jesus taught us first praises God and then asks for something (bread and forgiveness in the measure in which we forgive) and finally ends with the hope that we may never be in a situation we cannot handle.

**Pray:** Pray the Lord's Prayer slowly, paying attention to each part of it. **Act:** When you pray the Lord's Prayer, especially in church, be aware of the fact that in praying it you are united with all Christians throughout the world.

**Fasting:** Make sure that as you fast you reflect and journal on the goodness, favor and forgiveness of God.





## APRIL 13

The fourth chapter of Matthew contains this famous interaction between Jesus and Satan in the wilderness. Jesus was of course just finishing a forty day fast, and “was hungry” (Matthew 4:2). What Jesus affirms in this interchange is an eternal truth and one that still bears upon our lives today: food isn’t the only thing that sustains us.

When we fast, we are forcing ourselves into a position of weakness and humility. God obviously designed us to take in life-giving nourishment through food and water, but as we are fasting, we focus upon the deep truth that God’s word is actually more vital to our living than bread! This is a lesson not learned lightly though, but through experience.

You see, we are generally controlled greatly by our bodily impulses. Impulses to eat, sleep, drink, or even go to the restroom. But when we fast, we deny our flesh control over this extremely important aspect of our life. As we hunger for food, we are constantly aware of our weakness.

*Silence: Today in your silence with God, listen for what temptation God may calling you away from.*

**Read:** Matthew 4:1-11. **Reflect:** These temptations affect everyone. Which temptations affect me and what do I do about them? **Pray:** The Holy Spirit assists us in dealing with all temptations. With prayer we can overcome any temptation even if it takes a long time and significant effort. **Act:** Recognize the temptation (pleasure, power, or failure to accept responsibility for your actions) that causes you the most trouble and take steps to deal with it.

**Confession:** Pray a portion of Psalm 37: I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.” And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Amen.

**Fasting:** Consider the role fasting has in your life ongoing.



# 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)

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