

Gardener of My Soul

by Debbie Bailey

Jesus Christ is our Master Gardener, cultivating and growing us through our spiritual journey.

Duration: 58:57

Scripture: Genesis 2:8-9, Psalm 23:1-3, Psalm 139:23-24, Psalm 147:3, Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, Matthew 6:33, John 15:1-2

Topics: "Soul Of Man"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the concept of the Garden of Eden and the forbidden fruit. They emphasize the importance of finding rest in the Garden and knowing that we are forgiven. The speaker then relates their own garden to the order, design, and beauty of creation, highlighting the role of the Creator. They encourage the audience to tend to their own gardens, both metaphorically and literally, with the guidance of Jesus Christ. The sermon concludes with a reminder that there is a time for everything and that God has designed the timing for all aspects of life.

Transcript

You're going to multitask today. Can you do that? We've just had a wonderful presentation by Trish. You're having a wonderful lunch.

And now I'm going to ask you to listen to me, to participate with me, to sing with me. And by the way, if you can find the opportunity to chew, you may do that also. Most people who work outdoors with plants call themselves gardeners.

Do we have any gardeners in here? A few. I spend a lot of time in my yard, but I really don't consider myself a gardener. But, because I spend an enormous amount of time out in my yard, I am, thank you very much, a self-ordained yarder.

I'm here to tell you that Jesus Christ is my master gardener. About a year ago, I wrote a presentation, and it was entitled, Planting and Cultivating Your Memory Garden, Your Life. I wrote it for activity professionals.

It was for a conference that that title fit. So I wrote the title, and I got to present, Planting and Cultivating Your Memory Garden, Your Life. Now, isn't that nice? First of all, there's too many words in that title.

It's kind of like when you put on shoes, and the size is right, but they don't exactly fit. Anybody had that experience? The size might be right, but there's something about the shoes that's not exactly right. And

this time, my presentation of thoughts has been triggered while in my yard, feels like my bedroom slippers.

This is the right title, Gardener of My Soul. Christ is the master gardener. And I'm still in my yard, and we're a year later, and I am now turned inside out, upside down, because God is tilling me, filling me, cultivating me, and sowing in me His seeds to grow.

There are no boundaries, and there are no edges. I expect His design for me to grow forever, throughout eternity. And as I flourish and bloom and strive to continue to grow in Him, I have an increasing realization that He is totally the gardener of my soul, the lover of my life for eternity.

Don't you agree that Gardener of My Soul is a much better title too? So, it is out of this overflow that I am sharing with you today. And again, this is the one that should have been written. The Lord speaks of gardens throughout the Bible.

So I'm going to ask you now to spend some time individually with Him in the garden. Ask you now also to prepare your heart to meet His heart there in the garden. I heard a song entitled Healer of My Heart not long ago, and it completely resonated with my heart of how I feel when I'm in my yard.

So I'm going to ask you to very prayerfully meditate upon the song that you are going to now listen to. Healer of My Heart God of light Take away the dark of night Fill me with your pure delight Touch me with your hand God of grace Flow into this lonely place Listen as your children pray Take me as I am Healer of my heart Lover of my soul Maker of the stars, the earth, the sky Come and make me whole Savior of this world My voice praises you alone Healer of my soul Lead me to the deepest well Drinking from your cup Prince of peace Forever live inside of me Keeper of eternity O Lord, revive me with your touch Healer of my heart Lover of my soul Maker of the stars, the earth, the sky Come and make me whole Savior of this world My voice praises you alone Healer of my heart Lover of my soul Healer of my heart Lover of my soul Healer of my heart Maker of the stars, the earth, the sky Come and make me whole Savior of this world My voice praises you Lover of my soul Isn't that a beautiful song? Stay in this place that you're in. Stay there.

When I heard this, I never forgot the feel of it. A lot of healing as well as instruction has taken place in my yard. You may or may not have the same connection with your yard, but there's certainly some place in your life where you can relate.

Please go to that place. Is it in books? Is it in your den? Wherever your private sanctuary is, visualize that place now as we enter into his presence. In my yard, I've been taught many lessons.

The plants and the grass and the trees all seem to have something in store for me to learn. And by the way, the book that I'm writing is just mine. Pine needles, roses, crabgrass, everything has seemed to speak to me.

And I'm learning and I'm writing because that's where my sanctuary is. Wherever yours is, stay there now. God knows that I love all the wonders of nature.

And so it is in that forum for learning that I listen. I lean into his Holy Spirit. In my yard, God reminds me of opportunities he has provided for me in the past.

One of his greatest blessings was to give me a wonderful earthly father. My father was also, by the way, a wonderful gardener. That was his business, lawn and garden business.

In the hymn, Hymn of Promise, the sentiment is expressed about how the Lord's revelations to us are so beautifully displayed in his perfect time. I want you now to sing with me. And as we do, I want you to completely commit to opening your hearts fully to know and walk out with what the Lord had designed for you during this time.

We're going to sing the Hymn of Promise. Please look at these words like you never have before. In the bulb there is a flower, in the seed an apple tree.

In cocoons a hidden promise, butterflies will soon be free. In the cold and snow of winter, there's a spring that waits to be unrevealed. Until its season, something God alone can see.

There's a song in every silence, seeking word and melody. There's a dawn in every darkness, bringing hope to you and me. From the past will come the future, what it holds a mystery.

Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see. In our end is our beginning, in our time infinity. In our doubt there is believing, in our life eternity.

In our death a resurrection, at the last a victory. Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see. Remember this, there is a beginning and an ending to all things.

Everything in the middle is called living. My yard reminds me that God has designed the timing for all of life. It is more really than any of us can comprehend.

The scripture in Ecclesiastes reminds us, of course, that there is a time for everything. During each season, the Lord gives me a visual aid in my yard that parallels with that scripture in Ecclesiastes. Thank you for staying in this place now.

I can feel it in the room that God has designed for you. So, absorb the scripture. There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven.

A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to uproot. A time to kill and a time to heal.

A time to tear down and a time to build. A time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to mourn and a time to dance.

A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them. A time to embrace and a time to refrain. A time to search and a time to give up.

A time to keep and a time to throw away. A time to tear and a time to mend. A time to be silent and a time to speak.

Amen. In the Bible, gardens have been used many times for settings for events, for prayer, for instruction. And throughout time, we have used the metaphor of the garden to describe life circumstances.

How does your garden grow? Remember that with cockle shells and silver bells all in a row? Today, we're doing a self-reflective exercise to look at your spiritual garden. What do you do to grow your spiritual life? What are the triggers that spurt that growth? We know the answers we're supposed to give to that question, don't we? We're here, it's Tuesday morning, we're attending WOW. Those are good answers, aren't they? But very specifically, what does it look like for you? What does your individual stamp look like? Let me ask you this.

When was Christ truly your lily of the valley? When was the last time that he was your personal rose of Sharon? How does your garden grow? When was the last time you sprouted a new bloom? A garden is a well-defined region, and the words garden and yard come from the same root word. I know that because my Latin English teacher friend told me that. She's part of my garden.

That table is part of my garden. A yard is also a unit of measure, and that's what we're doing today. We're measuring.

Take today as your opportunity, your personal opportunity, to take a spiritual measure. We are measuring where we are, perhaps where we have been, where we would like to be, but better yet, where God would like us to be. I can feel a lot of measuring going on.

The Lord is so delighted with that. Thank you. Initially, the Garden of Eden was a perfect place to be.

Imagine a perfect garden. In your mind's eye, what does that perfect garden look like? Can you visualize that? For Adam and Eve, it was perfection because they walked in the presence of the Lord. They experienced peace, and they experienced joy.

The bond created by God between Adam and Eve was physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual. It was really perfect until they blew it. The brokenness of humanity began in the Garden of Eden, and it will never be restored until the second coming of Christ.

But until that time, there are lessons in the garden that Christ wants us to learn. Christ is the tree of life, and yes, when we eat from it, we understand what it is to truly live. But how many times have we been lured by the delectability of that forbidden fruit? Today, we can remind ourselves that we can rest in the garden and know that we're forgiven.

When I look at my garden, I see order, design, beauty, life, my heritage, but most importantly, my Creator, our Creator. When I designed my yard, I did it with the resources that I knew were available. I consulted with a landscaper to make sure that everything in my yard would grow from spring to fall.

Something would always be in bloom. So with that in mind, my yard has a plan. It has an order.

It always has color. And there's always evidence of beginnings and endings, seasons. I have an exercise that I'd like you to do.

It's in your handout, and if you didn't get one, maybe if you raise your hand, we can pass some more out. I want you to think of your three favorite plants. There is a worksheet that I would like you to write down your favorite plants and think about, and we'll talk about them a bit.

I'm going to put on some music now, one song through, and it's not about how well you draw. Nobody's going to look at it, I promise. Let's see.

I have some pictures of my yard up here, and I find it interesting. I just took them recently, and I asked my husband to go out and just get some updated shots of what was in bloom. And so I was very careful to say, OK, get these pansies now, and OK, I want you to get the Russian sage.

And he went to Walgreens, and I said, well, how did they turn out? And he said, well, all of them that had you in them were good. And I said, well, you weren't supposed to be taking them of me. I was talking about the flowers.

And then I realized, what a gift, because he was looking at me, and all I was doing was thinking about the flowers. And if you think about where you have your focus, there's quite a message in that, isn't there? If I had thought about, gee, I'm going to put these up on a poster for WOW Women, I wouldn't have worn the clothes that I mow the lawn in. Never entered my mind.

I appreciate that my husband is part of my garden. That was a time when he was blooming. Sometimes he's the thorn.

So you've written down your three flowers that came to your mind today. How are you similar to those flowers? How do you see God's design for you in those flowers? What does that inspire in you? I asked myself these three questions, and the particular day that I did this, three flowers came to mind. Hyacinths, pansies, and orchids.

They're all very different, aren't they? I'd like you to think about this exercise and probably not finish it here. Take it home. But I'd like to illustrate for you how I went through this exercise.

So we'll start with the pansies first. Anybody in here have pansies as one of theirs? Wow, the village people. My mothers.

Pansies, I like to think that pansies have faces. Do you think that when you look at them? They have faces. With regard to the Lord's direction for me, I think that he wants me to be a leader.

I think that he wants me to have a face. But believe it or not, my basic nature is kind of shy. In fact, I dropped out of performance and music school because I never wanted to stand up and sing in front of anybody.

Boy, have times changed. I know the Lord wants me to have a face. I also know that I think in visual terms.

When I think of different names, for instance, of our creator, I often have a desire for a visual image. I've asked lots of people, when you say God, what do you see? Do you need to see anything? I do. When I say Father, I need to see Father.

I often envision a dove when I hear the Holy Spirit in music. The characteristics then, you get the idea of what we're trying to do. They speak to me and provide images to increase my understanding for the design that I am supposed to honor.

Let's take another flower, the orchid. How many orchids did we have? There are thousands of varieties of orchids. And they appear to be common.

But that does not detract from the fact that they're exquisite, aren't they? They appear fragile. They're not. They stay in bloom for months, usually.

And they require very, very little tending. At least that's been my circumstance. On the other hand, don't they look like prima donna plants? They do.

So they look like prima donnas, but they're really very low maintenance. On the other hand, they either seem to grow or not. They seem to be very dependent upon being in the right place.

I have a friend who had a stalk sit on her desk for three years. And she said, I don't know why it won't grow, but I don't want to throw it out. And she moved, so she gave it to me.

I have wonderful windows in my house. It's nothing I did. I put it in the right place.

It's been blooming ever since. It's gorgeous. We all know that God is everywhere, don't we? And as we experience his presence, it's extraordinary.

But we also know that it takes being in the right place. He's happy you're in this place right now. Can you feel it? Now, what about hyacinths? Any hyacinths in here? Hyacinths have virtually nothing particularly outstanding about their blossoms.

They're just a lot of them. Do you agree with that? The outstanding thing about hyacinths is what? Yes, their fragrance. You remember it, don't you? It's distinct.

Question. How does the essence of Christ manifest itself in you? What about your character reflects your maker? What fragrance do you leave? When was the last time you experienced our maker's fragrance? All flowers are heliotropines, meaning they follow the sun. Helios is the Greek word for sun.

Thank you, Martha. And tropine is the Greek for turn. Obvious question.

What do you follow? What makes you turn? Where would you like to turn? Why haven't you? When will you? Do you trust Christ to navigate and take control of all your turns? For the past three years, my yard has been my healing place. It has been the place where God has been speaking to me through the flowers and the trees. It has been a place of respite until recently.

As my eyes surveyed my yard this summer of 2007, I have for the first time seen work. To pull weeds, to thatch dry spots in the grass, to prune away dead branches, and believe it or not, I hand-turned all of the mulch in my yard. In Genesis, the Garden of Eden as described, in Genesis 2.15, the Lord took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

To work it and take care of it. And that's what I've been doing this summer of 2007. Working and taking care of my yard.

Working and taking care of myself. It is by God's grace that as I tend to these tasks, thank you Lord, he meets me there and takes care of me. I'm going to play another song for you, it's called the Garden Song.

And again, this was another time when my husband was being a blossom. I said, I need a Garden Song. Do you have any ideas? And he said, yes, the Garden Song.

And I said, really? Yes. Peter, Paul, and Mary wrote a Garden Song. And it talks about the inch by inch care.

Needed to make our gardens, our lives, grow. The metaphor is obvious. So I will ask you to stay in this place that you're in.

And thoughtfully listen to the lyrics of this song. I believe they are on your handout, so watch them carefully. I've also left some questions there for you.

That if you'd like to review them while you're listening to the lyrics, it might help you to stay in this very connected spot. ■ Inch by inch, row by row, I'm going to make this garden grow. All it takes is a rake and a hoe and a piece of fertile ground.

Inch by inch, row by row, Someone bless these seeds I sow. Someone warm them from below, Till the rain come tumbling down. Pulling wheels and picking stones, We are made of dreams and bones.

I feel the need to grow my own, Cause the time is close at hand. Time is close at hand. For grain, sun and rain, I'll find my way in nature's chain.

I'll tune my body and my brain To the music of the land. Come on and sing it with me. Inch by inch, row by row, I'm going to make this garden grow.

All it takes is a rake and a hoe and a piece of fertile ground. Inch by inch, row by row, Someone bless these seeds I sow. Someone warm them from below, Till the rain come tumbling down.

So plant your rose straight and long, And temper them with prayer and song. And mother earth can keep you strong If you give her love and care. Now let it grow, watch it humbly, From his perch in yonder tree.

In my garden I'm his prison, Feathered thief of man. Acapella now. Inch by inch, row by row, I'm going to make this garden grow.

All it takes is a rake and a hoe and a piece of fertile ground. A little louder now. Inch by inch, row by row, Someone bless these seeds I sow.

Someone warm them from below, Till the rain come tumbling down. Inch by inch, row by row, Someone bless these seeds I sow. Someone warm them from below, Till the rain come tumbling down.

Isn't that a neat song? So how do these lyrics relate to your walk with the Lord? One of the questions on your handout, on a personal level, what does inch by inch mean to you? How do you measure your spiritual walk? Or do you? What personal application do you have for the words like rake and hoe? What are the rakes and the hoes in your spiritual journey? What's required for your ground to be fertile? What are the weeds and the stones in your life? Big questions. I invite you to take home this worksheet, reflect upon these questions, and grow with them. What does your inch by inch, step by step, spiritual journey look like? As I think about the Garden of Gethsemane and how the Lord's sweat was like drops of blood flowing to the ground, as He prayed to His Father, I aggrieve about the enormously difficult time that was.

Christ was empty and broken as He totally yielded His Spirit to His Father. At the point of that total surrender, He fulfilled the destiny to become our Savior, the Savior of the world. My yard has been the place that the Lord divinely decided for me to do my grief work.

My father went to be with the Lord on March 1st, 2004. My father was the rock of my life, my entire life. My father told me I was a winner and that he adored me every time he spoke to me.

What a gift. And when he died, I was so sad. It was something that I had never experienced, a tremendous loss.

My dad owned a lawn and garden business, and I grew up working in the yard with him. Losing my dad was profound, and I still have days where waves of sadness come over me, and they try to overwhelm me. But I am leaning on the fact and into the fact that the Lord is my solid rock, my sure foundation, a constant source in times of trouble.

Initially, my yard was designed to be a tribute to my father. I dug up my entire front yard when I returned from my dad's memorial service. It is where I rest.

It is where I hide. It is where I commune and I work. It is where the healer of my heart tends to my heart.

Inch by inch, row by row. As an activity professional at the Village at Skyline, a retirement community, we have loss regularly, every week. Repeatedly, I have experienced and heard that the unspoken words are often the loudest ones.

So continuing our metaphor of the garden, let's think about trees. Often trees are an integral part of gardens. Let's think about oak trees.

Oak trees are strong and sturdy and deeply rooted. In Isaiah 61.3, we learn that they, the anointed, will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of His splendor. Sitting under an oak tree is very comforting, isn't it? There is a solace and a peace that stills the soul and often summons strength from within.

Think about the last time you had an experience like that, sitting under one of those big trees. Are you recalling it? Perhaps it is your nature to provide that kind of feeling of comfort and protection for another. Perhaps you know someone who does that for you.

About 35 years ago, a friend and I sat together for over two hours. We didn't say one word, and I still remember it was one of the best conversations I ever had. Tier II dear oak friends did the same for me, the same kind of tending when my father died.

I remember they just came in and sat and cried. They're my forever oak friends. When was the last time you were an oak for someone? An oak scripture might be Psalm 23.

As you dwell with the Lord in the lovely green pastures, we can experience the peace that only God, our shepherd, can offer. Many questions enter my mind as I tend to my yard. Stay in your yard now and personalize the following questions.

Together, let's probe deeper during this meditation time in the garden. Most plants need water. What does your fresh water look like? How is Christ your living water? Specifically, what does that mean for you? How often do you really drink of his spirit? What prompts you? What delays you? Where do you drink? Walks? Talks? Prayer? What feeds you? The following reading was sent to me from my friend via the internet.

But I'm absolutely positive it was really sent for you too. God and I raised a flower bed. He really did the most, I guess.

He used his soil, his air, his water, his life, and his son. The part seems so trivial that I said, Lord, you take those bulbs and make them grow right there in the box out in the garage. You don't need me.

You can do it by yourself. Oh, no, he said. I want to do my part.

I am waiting to begin. But you must do yours too. You have to dig the bed, bury the bulbs, pull the weeds.

So I did my feeble part, and God took the bulb and burst it with life, fed it with soil, showered it with rain, drew it with sunshine until we had a beautiful flower. Then he said, your life is like a garden, and if you'd like, we'll make it a beautiful thing. I'll furnish the soil of grace, the sunshine of love, the rains of blessing, the wonder of life.

But you must do the digging. Lord, I said, you go ahead and make me what you want me to be. Make me a saint.

Give me great faith. Fill me with compassion. Oh, no, he said.

You've got to keep your heart tilled, hoe the weeds of evil, chop away the second best. I'll make you anything, pure, clean, noble, useful, anything, but only if you dig. So we have planted many questions today, and I hope that you will tend well to the seeds.

They can lie dormant in the ground, or you can water them with your talents and your abilities, your relationships. They will flourish. How you integrate your new seeds with your God-established design will determine the degree of wonder and the depth of relationship with your maker on this wonderful spiritual journey.

Thoughtfully imagine how you will enrich already fertile soil, inch by inch, row by row. As we tend to our gardens, we do so in the light of his son, Jesus Christ. It is there where we realize that the purpose of life is to discover the gifts that God has entrusted to us.

We find meaning in our life as we become his servants and give those gifts away. As I was working in my yard, the Lord gave me the music and the lyrics to the last song now. Some of you heard it last season.

If you would like to sing along with it, it would be just fine with me. We're going to put it up on the screen. It is entitled, A Year Ago He Gave This to Me on August 6th, Gardener of My Soul.

And finally now, I've written the presentation to go along with it, Gardener of My Soul. Here we go. Sweet Lord, and the whole earth sings.

Echoes from heaven ring. All the world sings, declaring your glory. Sing alleluia, sing alleluia.

Father, creator, almighty God. My soul, so you worded me, oh Lord. My Lord, sweet Lord.

To you, fill me and make me new. As I sing for you, declaring your glory. Sing alleluia, sing alleluia.

It's been my privilege and joy to share this time with you. What a privilege it is to share the Lord's presence in our garden time together now that we've had. I pray that you will go home and you will thoughtfully reflect upon the inch by inch, row by row, work that the Lord is delighting to do with you.

God bless you and thank you for your attention.

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