

How Does Your Garden Grow?

LaBreeska Hemphill



*“Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord...and their soul shall be as a **watered garden**” (Jeremiah 31:12).*

Summer is past and so are the lush green gardens that stretch along the highways covering many fields and meadows. There is hardly anything more appealing than a flourishing, well-tended garden. Joel and I are constantly admiring beautiful crops as we travel cross-country and it has a way of lifting our spirits, it makes us know how blessed this country is.

With that in mind I want to tell you about a man that had such a garden and on a warm summer day was out working in it. With a hoe in hand he was loosening the soil around the tender plants, weeding, digging, and watering. Drenched in sweat he happened to look up and find his neighbor watching. The neighbor was enjoying the shade of a big oak tree and leaning against the fence. It was plain to see that he was admiring the man's garden. With a smile he said to the gardener, “my, the Lord sure has given you a beautiful garden.”

The gardener straightened up and studied for a moment, then he replied, “yes, He sure has. But you should have seen it last year when the Lord had it by Himself.” The gardener's answer wasn't disrespectful. It was reality. There are things that God does for us, and things that He *helps* us do.

There is a Scripture that tells about the apostles, “*who went forth and preached everywhere, **the Lord working with them***” (Mark 16:20). That shows that the Lord blesses our efforts, but **we** must make the effort. Whether we realize it or not, each of us has a garden to tend and it's none other than our hearts. The writer of Hebrews knew that. He admonishes us with these words:

*“Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any **root of bitterness** springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled”
(Hebrews 14:15).*

Then Solomon warns us:

*“**Keep thy heart** with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life”
(Proverbs 4:23).*

These men are telling us to tend our hearts as if they were gardens. Keep the **weeds** from growing there and pull them out by the **root!** Just like a garden produces **the issues of life**, so does our heart! Luke said:

*“A good man out of the **good treasures of his heart** bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasures of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: **for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh**” (Luke 6:35).*

A well-tended heart is not much different than a well-tended garden. It causes others to look on with admiration, like the neighbor across the fence. He could see the results of the gardener's labor and it brought joy to his heart. What he hadn't considered was the hours of care and toil that the man had spent cultivating that garden.

Everyone loves to be around a person with a beautiful heart, one that is kind and considerate of others. When you leave the presence of such a one, you've been uplifted rather than saddened and disheartened. But that kind of heart doesn't just happen. It isn't easy to come by and takes a lot of work. A person that has a heart that is free of bitterness has been diligent with the care of it. That kind of heart has been watered with tears of repentance when they've wronged someone. It has been fed by the word of God and nurtured by the Holy Spirit. It has been weeded by digging up any root of bitterness that might spring up caused by an offence.

The Bible says that *offences will come*, so we all have a reason to be offended from time to time. Some offences come from just an insensitive remark by a friend. Other times it is a genuine offence such as the assassination of our character, or even a physical assault.

But if we harbor these offences, no matter how large or small, it becomes a root of bitterness that springs up into a huge tree and overshadows every area of our lives. Here is a sobering thought, at some point our offenders may have repented to the Lord and found forgiveness while we, the offended, are still nursing a grudge and allowing it to choke the joy right out of us. We often say “life is too short” to live it in a certain manner. But Joel and I have improved that saying. We say “life is too **long** to live it miserable.”

There are a lot of things that others can take from us. But no one can take our good conscience toward the Lord unless we allow them to. We can choose to keep our hearts. It is an effort, but one worth making. The good news is that we are not responsible for someone else's heart, just our own. That simplifies life for me. There will surely be times that we have to go to someone and apologize for an offence but it's up to that individual to accept or reject our apology. Everyone has to tend their own heart garden and keep it free of bitter weeds and we must pull them out by the roots!

*“And **thou shalt be like a watered garden**, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not” (Isaiah 58:11).*

My prayer:

Lord help me keep a pure heart before you and my fellowman. Help me stay awake spiritually so that the enemy of my soul cannot slip in unaware and sow tares in my garden. I want a beautiful heart, one that is well-kept and free of any root of bitterness. Thank you Lord for strength to do these things, in Jesus name I pray. Amen