

## The Gardener

**Neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow** (1 Corinthians 3:7).

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 3:1-11

**Song:** “The Lord, the Seed of Life, Has Sown”

When I was a little girl, I loved helping my grandmother plant flowers in the spring. As I grew older, I realized I did not have the green thumb my grandmother did. One winter, I noticed a sale on amaryllis bulbs at the store. I knew how beautiful the amaryllis flower was, but I wondered about the skill involved to grow one. I decided to take a chance and brought one home with me. To my surprise, the bulb began to sprout. I had done nothing but place it in soil and give it some water. Every day, I saw new growth. The green stalks shot up, and soon there were four beautiful pink blossoms.

Sometimes we walk through winter seasons in our lives. Things seem dark and God feels distant. Yet we should never give up hope that God is moving and working, even in the darkest of seasons. As we plant the seed of His Word in our hearts, He will cause new life to grow in us. In due season, we will see the fruit that only He can produce.

**Father,** in the midst of my darkest times, help me to trust Your pruning process. I believe I will see the fruit of Your growth in me as I wait on You. In Jesus' name, amen

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## God Looks at the Heart

**As for those who were held in high esteem—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism** (Galatians 2:6).

**Scripture:** Galatians 2:1-10

**Song:** “Lord, I Give You my Heart”

In 1921, a missionary couple named David and Svea Flood left their home in Sweden and traveled to the Belgian Congo (Zaire) in Africa. They felt led by the Lord to take the gospel to the remote village of N’dolera. The chief would not allow them to enter his village, for fear of alienating the gods. The only contact the Floods had with the villagers was a young boy who was allowed to sell them chickens and eggs twice a week. Svea Flood shared the gospel with the young boy, who eventually accepted Jesus as his Savior.

Svea became pregnant, but died after giving birth to a baby girl named Aggie. Years later, Aggie would meet the little boy who had come to know Jesus through her mother. That little boy had grown up and persuaded the chief to let him build a school in the village. Through this school, all the students, their parents, and the chief himself came to know Christ. The boy eventually became the superintendent of the national church of Zaire, representing over 110,000 baptized believers.

By outward circumstances, that little boy could easily have been overlooked, but God saw his heart. Just as God used one little boy from a remote village in Africa, so He can use anyone whose heart is turned to Him.

**Father**, let Your favor rest on us as our hearts are turned to You in love and obedience. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Set Apart

**Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God . . . (Romans 1:1).**

**Scripture:** Romans 1:1-7

**Song:** “Children of the Heavenly Father”

An elementary school student’s family had been torn apart by divorce. In addition, the boy’s father was an alcoholic, so the child knew the pain of rejection and loneliness. To compensate for the hurt he experienced at home, he acted out at school by not following directions and by interrupting lessons. But his teacher gave extra effort and time to encourage the boy and assigned him special jobs at school that gave him a sense of personal value and purpose and a different perspective toward others. In time, he became less disruptive, more confident, and began to find his place.

The great news of the gospel is that we have been chosen and set apart. No longer are we alienated from God, alone, and on our own. Through Jesus, we have been brought into the family of God. We are known and we have a place. In the Old Testament, when God commanded Moses to build the tabernacle, there were certain items that were to be consecrated, or set apart, unto the Lord (Exodus 40:9). Their sole purpose was to be used for service to Him. As children of God, we have been consecrated unto the Lord. Our confidence is found in Christ alone as we are given purpose and identity in Him.

**Father,** thank You for my identity and purpose established in Jesus. Help me remember that I’m set apart for Your service and Your glory. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## The Foolishness of Idolatry

**Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images** (Romans 1:22-23).

**Scripture:** Romans 1:18-23

**Song:** “This Is My Desire”

When I was in graduate school, I had the opportunity to travel to Thailand on a mission trip. While there, I was astonished at the different idols and statues of gods I saw everywhere we went. At one point, our local driver honked at a statue of a god as tall as the building behind it. As he drove by, he shouted a prayer, believing this would bring blessings and keep away curses. On one of our visits to a local village, I met a pastor who had once been a witch doctor. The darkness of witchcraft and idolatry had oppressed him until he heard about God’s gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. He had a revelation of the one true living God, and his mind was set free.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul warned of the futility of idol worship. The more those citizens worshiped idols, the more their hearts were darkened. We wonder how anyone could bow down to a piece of wood, and yet Paul’s warning is for us today as well. Idolatry can take the form of anything we place as too important in our lives. God wants our full devotion. As we surrender to His lordship, He tears down the idols of our hearts, renews our minds, and causes us to be more like Him.

**Father,** forgive me for setting up idols in my heart. I choose to worship You, and You alone. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## A Renewed Mind

**Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient** (Romans 1:28, *KJV*).

**Scripture:** Romans 1:24-32

**Song:** “Refiner’s Fire”

Precious metals such as gold and silver must go through a refining process to remove any impurities before they are turned into something beautiful. In ancient times, to purify a metal, a craftsman would sit next to a hot fire, stirring and skimming impurities that had risen to the top of the molten metal. Metal such as silver that was unable to be purified was considered worthless, or reprobate. Jeremiah compared Israel to “reprobate silver” because of the people’s refusal to repent and turn back to God (Jeremiah 6:30, *KJV*).

Paul speaks of those who did not like to retain God in their minds. It seems as though there is a direct correlation between an unrenewed mind and a reprobate mind. Those with reprobate minds had allowed sin to rule them, and so God gave them over to what they wanted. As reprobate silver is unable to be refined, the people Paul refers to were unable to be refined because of their ongoing hatred toward God.

Those who genuinely follow Christ will never need to worry about having a reprobate mind. God has given us His Spirit, and as we spend time studying and meditating on His Word, He renews our minds. As our minds are renewed, we will reflect Christ in all we say and do.

**Father,** thank You for Your Spirit that gives life. Renew my mind daily as I plant myself in Your Word. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## The Salt of the Earth

**[God] rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless (2 Peter 2:7).**

**Scripture:** 2 Peter 2:4-9

**Song:** “Salt of the Earth”

Salt was valuable in New Testament times. It was used much as it still is today. However, people of the first century would add salt to dried animal droppings. They would use the animal droppings as fuel in their dome-shaped ovens made of hardened mud. The salt added to the animal droppings would produce a chemical reaction when placed in the fire, causing them to burn longer and hotter. But, over time salt can lose its effectiveness and not even be fit to mix with the animal manure. It would then be tossed out.

Peter speaks of righteous men, such as Noah and Lot, who found themselves “mixed” with depraved and sinful people. The righteous were salt, living among unrighteousness in the land. Such lawlessness was distressing to the righteous men, and surely to God, but God did not lose sight of His own followers. Their righteousness burned brightly in the mix of evil.

Jesus called His disciples to be the “salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13). He even warned against losing our saltiness. To lose our saltiness is to no longer have a distinctive Christian identity. May we be careful not to assimilate the values of the secular culture around us while still sharing the good news with those who desperately need to hear it.

**Father**, help us to remain effective for Your glory as we are in this world but not of it. In Jesus' name, amen.

## A Great Inheritance

**In the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last (Romans 1:17).**

**Scripture:** Romans 1:8-17

**Song:** “Who You Say I Am”

Christine was adopted when she was a young girl. Her birth mother made the difficult choice to give Christine to a family who could provide and care for her in ways she could not. Christine was adopted by a loving, Christian couple who took her to church and raised her to know Jesus. But from a young age, Christine struggled with feelings of rejection and insecurity. Even though her parents loved her and provided for her unconditionally, she struggled to receive their love and acceptance.

Christine was the only child to her adopted parents, and as her parents grew older, they drew up a will. Because Christine had the legal last name of her father, all of his inheritance would go to her. Christine’s legal standing entitled her to the rights of her family’s heritage. She did not have to work to earn her inheritance; it came freely through the name given to her.

Jesus met the legal requirements of the law. He took the punishment for our sins, and in exchange He gives us His righteousness. Those who place their faith in Jesus have right standing before God, accepted as a part of His family and given rights to His inheritance. We can stand secure in our identity as children of God under the covering of Jesus’ righteousness.

**Father,** thank You for sending Your Son to take my sin and give me His righteousness. I receive it by faith. In Jesus’ name, amen.