



Caring for the Garden of the Heart

WE WELCOME THE SPRING SEASON and its promise of renewal and restoration with anticipation and excitement. Our hearts grow lighter as we shed the heavy layers of winter. With the warm weather approaching, many start preparing to grow beautiful gardens. Both novice and seasoned gardeners understand the importance of planning, good soil, water, and lots of sunlight. These elements work together to bring new life after the winter chill that causes the overgrowth of weeds, dead plants, and debris. Once removed, the soil must be "turned" and primed for new growth to yield lush trees, aromatic herbs, vegetative plants, green plants, and fragrant blooming flowers. If ignored, weeds will steal nutrients, sun, and water from desirable plants, causing them to die, wither, grow abnormally, or reduce your harvest.

Every heart represents a "little garden" that is "wild, wonderful, unique, and perfectly in process." Our hearts require attention because our attitudes and actions are the harvests that grow out of it. The heart refers to the core of the whole person, representing one's thoughts, passions, and emotions. Our "little gardens" are sensitive to the stresses and strains of difficult seasons and harsh environments. Therefore, you must guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Diligently examine the weeds and debris of negative thoughts, distorted beliefs, old wounds, strife, division or unforgiveness that will prevent your garden from flourishing.

These weeds can produce "bitter" roots that affect the whole body and everything around it. We should "make every effort to live in peace with everyone... See to it that no

one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many." "Bitterness" comes from the Greek word "pikria" and means acrimony, anger, harshness, discontentment, or quick-tempered. They are intrusive, insidious, reproduce quickly, and their root systems run deep. Weeds of bitterness ruin our ability to enjoy the benefits of God's grace. The only way to protect the heart from them is to identify them and proactively pull them out by the roots. Weeding is necessary, but it is not a favorable task. It can be an uncomfortable and painful process that requires proactive dedication. You must dig deep and ask yourself, "What is the root of the fruit that I am producing?" Look for patterns or habits in your life that have brought you fear, doubt, rejection, heartache, jealousy, or anger.

"WHAT IS THE ROOT OF THE FRUIT THAT I AM PRODUCING?"

The good news is the growing season of our little garden never ends. In the garden of every heart, there is room for growth and healing, which are evidence of the transformation to spiritual and emotional maturity. Our little gardens should produce the good fruit of character and virtues called the Fruit of the Spirit. A heart that is cared for and nurtured with truth results in a renewal process that produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. So fellowship with God in your private garden as His peace calms the most challenging storms. God's love, truth, and peace can fill the garden of our hearts, creating a beautiful display of his grace in our lives. ☺

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