



This morning I want to wrap up our Summer series, where we have been looking at images found in scripture that have their origin in nature that can affect our everyday lives. I want to end our series by telling you one of my favourite stories; a story that my dad read to me when I was young. As I tell you the story it may bring back memories of when you read this story or saw it in a movie. It is a story about a Secret garden.

The story begins as a young girl, named Mary Lennox, arrives in England following her parent's death from cholera in India. She has come to live with her rich, yet miserable Uncle. As she arrives at his mansion she realizes that there are two mysteries. First, something strange is going on in the house because she hears the sound of crying coming from the upper floors of the house every night. And secondly, as she begins to explore her new surroundings she discovers that out back of the house is a huge 9 ft. brick wall covered with ivy, hiding something inside.

As she asks what was inside, the servants, in hushed voices whisper, *"That is the hidden garden. You see, many years ago the Master had a beautiful wife that he loved deeply. Together, they built a beautiful garden full of rose bushes, flower gardens, plum trees with every kind of flower and bush you could imagine. Together, hand in hand, each evening they would walk in the garden, just two people desperately in love, enjoying each other and in time, a baby was born. The Master was so happy. His favourite thing in the whole world was to be with those he loved in his garden paradise. Each day found them together in the garden. Then 10 years ago, tragedy struck, a branch which held up the swing, broke off of the tree and the Master's wife died. The Master was shattered so he ordered the garden sealed so that no one could ever enter it again and then he threw away the key. And no one has been in the garden since that day"*.

The story was all the little girl needed to hear. Her new mission in life was to find a way into the garden. First, she tried to find the gate by going around and around the garden. She even tried to climb the fence but no matter what she tried to do, the hidden garden remained sealed and out of her reach. Until, one day, as she moved some leaves aside, there in front of her was the gate. But it was locked with a huge padlock.

She looked everywhere trying to find a key, until one day she watched a robin pecking away in the dirt and there in the dirt was a key. She grabbed the key, ran to the gate, pushed it into the lock and to her amazement, after much effort she was able to pry open the giant gate and slip into the garden. The garden looked awful for it had been abandoned for 10 long years. The weeds had taken over the branches gone untrimmed; it was a disaster!

Remembering, how beautiful they had said the garden had been she began to work, digging, trimming and weeding. And, then, in the middle of her adventure, the first mystery fell into place as she also discovered that the noise that she had been hearing at night was coming from her Uncle's sickly son. The story goes on to tell how eventually she ends up bringing the wheelchair-bound sickly boy into the garden and together with a friend they undertook the job of restoring the garden. After many days of hard work, the garden began to bloom again. All the while, as they continued to work, they kept their actions a secret. Amazingly, in the warmth of that special place, the sick boy found health again and the garden was restored to its initial beauty. Then one day, they forgot to close the gate behind them and her Uncle, the man who had locked the garden, saw the gate open and walked in. As he looked around, the old

memories of walking in the garden, hand in hand with his wife came flooding back; they had been the happiest time of his life. But his eyes filled with tears as he remembered the tragedy of what had happened in the garden. Of his broken heart, his crushed dreams, his sickly son and how he had sealed it the garden because he couldn't take the pain of that had died in that garden. He was just about to shout in anger, when he looked around and saw, the restored beauty of the garden. Then, before his eyes he watched as his estranged son stood up from his wheelchair and took his first step toward him. The father ran to his son and hugged him. And the dream which had been lost became a reality once again.

Now, the garden is always open, and again the father walks with his children, hand in hand, in the cool of the evening, smelling the roses and enjoying their special times together. The relationship with his healed son has been re-established because one person found the key to restoring the beauty and wonder of the hidden garden.

Have you heard that story before? Do you know where it is from? I'm not sure if the author knew or not, but she simply been re-telling the biblical story that begins in Genesis and ends in Revelation. It is the story of God's relationship with man, for the theme of the whole Bible in a nutshell is about God's passion to do what it takes to re-establish a garden relationship with mankind.

## **I. Looking at What the First Garden was Really Like**

I believe if you were to ask God what His favourite memory was, He would point to Genesis 3:8, where it talks about how God '*walked in the garden in the cool of the day*', with Adam and Eve. This is one of the key passages in all of scripture, for it talks about one of God's favourite moments in all of time.

I believe at the very beginning of time, long before the world existed, God had an idea in His mind; it was that He wanted to walk and talk with mankind in the cool of the evening in a special garden. If you read Genesis 1 and 2 you will see that the whole creation account leads toward this precious time where God walked with man in the garden. It would seem that this idea excited God so much that He went to work creating a world (light out of darkness and land out of the sea) to place that garden in. He created land to live on, fruits trees and vegetation in the garden to sustain them and then finally, He created a man and woman to meet with Him in that garden. He made this man and woman in such a way that they would be like God to some degree (the Bible says this in Genesis 1:27; 2:4-7 that we are made in the image of God – some of His own characteristics became a part of how God designed us). God then placed the Tree of Life in the middle of the garden so that man and woman would not die because God wanted this special friendship with mankind to go on eternally. Then with real delight and expectation, God came to meet Adam & Eve each evening in this beautiful garden and they walked and talked together and shared at a deep intimate level.

This happened night after night. For how long? We don't know but both God and man loved the way things were. Without being sacrilegious, I believe this was that moment in time when God was His happiest. I say that because I believe that all of the creation account leads to these special walks.

But you know what happened. God gave man only one rule; don't eat from a certain tree in the garden (Genesis 2:17,18) for if you do, you will gain a knowledge of both what is good and what is evil. God knew before hand that human nature seems to always lean toward doing what we are told not to do but He also knew that unless we

had the free will to decide how to act in life, we wouldn't have the free will necessary to choose to love God as well. So He took a chance on us and as we know from Genesis 3, man choose to do what was wrong in the sight of God. They ate from that tree and the result was that the walks in the garden stopped and the tenderness and closeness of their fellowship with God was shattered. So God, with a broken heart, realized He had to lock up the garden (Genesis 3:23). Because if man stayed in the garden, verse 22 says that he would continue to have access to the Tree of Life and live eternally. And God knew that it would be disastrous to have man with his life bent toward doing evil, living eternally. Could you imagine how terrible it would be to have a world where Hitlers and Jack the Rippers and even us with our propensity to do what is wrong would live forever? So God sent an angel to guard the gate of the garden and man was locked out. I believe the very heart of God was broken that day.

Milton said, "*Paradise was lost to man and the fellowship of the garden was taken from God.*" The first reality was that the beauty of the garden and the fellowship of the garden were destroyed so the gate was closed and barred.

## **II. Looking at the Stubborn Love of God**

A few years ago, during the Johnson flood, as the water rose, and properties were destroyed one of the only places where it was safe on the top of houses. In the middle of the flood, two teenagers climbed up on a roof top and then sat there, watching the water rush by, pushing in its wake – cars, trees and all kinds of things. All of sudden, they noticed a hat go up stream, stop, then float back downstream, only to move in a straight line back up stream again! As this kept happening one of the boys, in astonishment, pointed and said, "*Do you see that hat?*" To which his friend replied, "*Oh, that's Uncle Louie. He's so stubborn; he said he was going to cut the grass come hell or high water.*"

If you think Uncle Louie was stubborn, let me remind you of the stubbornness of God. I believe God's central goal in all of scripture, for all of eternity, is to have a garden relationship with us, as human beings. And despite the fact that sin, hell, high water and a snake in the garden came along, God was determined to do whatever it took to re-establish the garden relationship which He had experienced in the garden. For I believe that even before the garden door was locked, God had a plan.

Genesis 3:15 – the plan was born. His Son was to come to provide the key to unlock the garden for us. The Old Testament is the on-going story of God setting the ground work for that plan. Nothing; not even the Israelite's disobedience could stop that plan from happening. For, one Christmas morning, a child was born and the road to the cross began. God knew that a sacrifice must be made so that the sins of man could be paid for. And in Jesus it was. Romans 5:19, "*For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.*" The Easter story is the story of God doing what was necessary to pay for the sins of mankind, which kept us out of a garden relationship with God. What did it take?

In order to be the KEY to our salvation, Jesus was denied by a friend, mocked by soldiers - received 39 lashes on his back, and stumbled his way toward Calvary. At Calvary there was the ring of the Hammer, the dripping of blood and the experience of overwhelming pain. Then God placed on the sinless Lamb of God, every sin our world had devised. Every sin you and I have committed. And finally, God turned His back,

walked away and the eternal God in Jesus died. The cost was paid for the sin in the garden. AND THEN on that first Easter Sunday morning, Jesus shattered death, threw back the tomb stone and stood before His disciples. In His hand, He held the key to the garden. Only this time it was for a different garden.

The Bible begins in Genesis 1 and 2 describing the first garden –the Garden of Eden. The Bible ends in Revelation in the last two chapters back in the garden again. Only, it is a new and improved Garden. Remember John 14, when Jesus left this world, He said He was going to prepare a place for us? (John 14:1 - 3,6) Revelation 21 tells us about this New Garden He has prepared for us.

- Revelation 21:2 & 3, *"I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."* Before, God just came to walk with Adam in the evening but in the future He will dwell with us all the time.
- Revelation 21:4 & 5, *"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.""* There will be no more pain, no more death and no more sorrow.
- Revelation 21:9 - 25, *"One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal ...The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there."* The garden gates will never be locked again.

- Revelation 22: 1- 4, *“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding it’s fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.”* Did you notice that the tree of life is mentioned again ... and again we will have access to it so we can eternally be in an ever deepening relationship with our God.

If you look at scriptures, you will see the entire Bible is bookended with pictures of 2 Gardens. The first is the Garden of Eden, where God, Adam and Eve walked hand in hand in the cool of the evening in intimate fellowship and great joy. The last two chapters of the Bible describe a different garden in the glorious setting of a New Jerusalem. It will be the place where all those who believe in God will live eternally. A place where there will be no more sickness, sadness, sin or death. A place where we will have the opportunity of eternally walking with our God in intimacy in the cool of eternity - all because Jesus, on that first Easter became the key that opened this new garden to us.

I felt it was only right that as I ended this short summer series of beautiful hikes and scenes from nature that I end with the most beautiful place God ever created on earth - the garden of Eden, placed beside the most beautiful garden in the Universe which will be the Eternal home of those who are true followers of God. And remind you and I that the key to being part of this eternal garden living is a relationship with Jesus who made all this possible. We need to be overwhelmed by what God did so we could have a relationship with Him and make sure that we not only accept Jesus as the key to our walk with God but daily, take time to practice walking with Him.

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