

I know I'm not alone in this. I know I'm not the only one who took on some sort of new activity during the Pandemic because we were home all the time. While some took on running, or cleaning the garage out, or perhaps even knitting...I took on gardening. I took these little seeds, lovingly germinated them in the Instant Pot and planted them in the freshly toiled soil in my raised garden bed that my husband built for me. I took great pleasure in watching my baby plants sprout. It was a process that took patience. Every day I would stroll out in the morning with my cup of coffee and watch for signs of the little green sprouts which would become my cucumbers, beans, peas, or my favorite...a perfect little pumpkin. I gently tugged any weed out that threatened my baby seedlings. Faithfully watering them throughout the long dry Summer. Allowing the water to seep deep to the little seeds, even when I wasn't sure what was going on under the ground and whether they had survived the planting process. I was intentional and careful with my "plant babies" watching them grow and flourish with a happy heart, and then harvesting my precious garden with so much care. It was so satisfying and joy giving.

And then a whole year passed, and this Summer arrived, and things have changed again. The pandemic has seemingly gone away, and we are no longer home all the time together. Instead, we are busier and our hearts are distracted by all of the things in our lives that have so easily snuck back into our lives. So, what of my garden this year? Well, it's not so lovingly tended any more. I've no seeds that I've germinated planted with care. I've not planted, visited, watered, and lovingly tended. You would imagine that my garden might be barren, empty, and full of weeds. And it might be so...

However...All the work I invested in my garden last year has allowed seeds that I didn't purposely plant to spring back to life. My marigolds, which last year I had planted to prevent pests, came back in full bloom all over the whole garden making my garden a lush wonderland! The strawberry plants which had failed last year came back to thrive! We have gorgeous strawberries to eat without investing a moments work! I even have one little pea plant which has made its way back all on its own, sprouting and growing, and maybe it might even produce some yummy peas in time. Of course, the weeds made their way back too, so I've managed to spend a few moments weeding here and there. By investing those minutes in weeding I've been rewarded with a flourishing garden that has allowed my heart to flourish as well.

As our hearts and lives get busier with post pandemic life, what will we allow to take root and flourish in our hearts? It's surprisingly easy to fall back into that distracted state of busyness. Lack of focus in any one area because we are busy in all the areas. God falls into the back seat because we're too distracted to notice. Our hearts become hardened, and the weeds pop up taking root. We're no longer intentional in caring for the garden of our hearts. Worry, anxiety, anger, frustration, disappointment begin to take root and flourish. But, just like my surprise garden, God is there. Working. Waiting. Seeking our attention. Calling us by name. When we stop and look to see what He has to whisper into our hearts we will discover the joy and love that He has for us. The words of His love are like those strawberries on the plants I didn't tend, waiting to be harvested. The beautiful Marigolds like the work of His hands are blossoming everywhere in front of my eyes, but will I stop, rest, and soak in their beauty? Will I stop to recognize the work of His hands? He is inviting us into His presence. He is calling us, come to Him so that He can fill our hearts with the joy that we seek so that our heart will flourish in His beauty.

In John 7: 37-38 Jesus extends an invitation to our dry gardens ***"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."***

Devotional – *Planted in Joy* by Captain Aimee Docherty

Let's take a deep drink and allow the waters of His love to refresh our soil, bathe our dry roots, and restore our wilting hearts. Let's take a deep drink and find healing and wholeness where we feel dry and distracted, let's take a deep drink and find love blossom in replacement of anger, let's take a deep drink of His water and find Salvation take root and grow in the unlikeliest places. Let's take a deep drink and allow our garden to blossom and bloom so that others can see His work in our lives and might know His beauty.