Supposing Him To Be The Gardener

**John 20:15**  
Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? **She, supposing him to be the gardener,** saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.

Mistaken Identity

- On the stillness of that Easter morning in the aftermath of the resurrection as Mary struggled to come to terms with the fact that she didn’t know where he had gone or what had become of his body.
  - Not fully yet realizing the significance of what had already occurred, not knowing exactly what was going on.
  - A heartbroken Mary stood outside the tomb of her dear Lord and mourned his loss.
  - First he was taken from them and cruelly murdered in spite of all of the good that he had done.
  - His body had been laid in borrowed tomb but now, it seemed, even that was to be taken from them.
  - There was no place to mourn him, no place to pay honor to her Lord, no place left to draw near to him.
  - Standing outside of the tomb, Mary wept, the deep heartbroken sobs of someone who has lost everything.
- In that moment the risen savior chose to reveal himself to her.
  - He needed to send a message to his disciples, he needed someone to proclaim the good news that He was risen.
  - Who better for that task than Mary.
  - So Jesus approached her and even spoke to her, saying, Woman, why are you crying? For whom are you looking?
  - And in that moment, in that solitary moment of great loss and heartfelt sorrow, though she longed to see her Lord again, she did not know him.
  - She had no idea who was standing before her.
  - The confusion of that instant is summed up in the statement of John, she supposed that he was the gardener.
  - What a supposition, in that moment of great sorrow and loss her mind leaped to the most likely scenario.
  - Standing in the midst of a beautifully kept garden, weeping among the skillfully cared for flowers, vines and shrubs, she made the logical leap of faith:
    - Where there is a beautifully appointed garden, there must be a gardener.
    - It was as much a compliment to the garden as it was a case of mistaken identity.
Where there is the beauty and splendor of a magnificent garden there must also be the obvious touch of the gardeners hand.

- Such places don’t happen on their own, such gardens don’t just spring up.
- They are the result of careful crafting and planning.

  - Mary, mistakenly thought that Jesus was the gardener.
  - Our mind reads over that phrase and simply processes it and we move on – she thought he was the gardener.
  - What a foolish woman.
  - What an elementary mistake.
  - She who mourned for her Lord didn’t even recognize him on his resurrection moment.

• If we give that fragment of the 15th verse any attention at all, we tend to focus on how WRONG Mary was.
  - Boy, she blew it.
    - She was very close to Jesus, a devout follower, she probably knew him as well as anyone.
      - Yet, on that resurrection morning, she didn’t recognize him.
  - She supposed that he was the gardener...
    - The truth of the matter, this evening is that she wasn’t nearly as badly mistaken as one might first believe.

• I want to focus, for just a few moments tonight, on how RIGHT she was.
  - There has never been a truer supposition than the one that Mary made on that resurrection morning.
    - In her sorrow, in her moment of mistaken identity, she gauged him for exactly what and who he is.
      - She supposed him to be the gardener and in that moment her spirit made a supposition that was truer and more profound than one might at first realize.

God As Gardener

• The image of God as a gardener is one of the oldest and most prolific images of God in scripture.
  - The pages of the Old Testament are replete with examples of God being cast as the gardener of his creation and the gardener who watches over and crafts the nation of Israel.
    - Much of the Old Testament prophecies follows the imagery of Israel as a vineyard and God as the gardener.
  - From the very beginning, at the very start of scripture the image of God that we first glimpse is the image of a gardener.

• In Genesis 2:8 it was the Lord God that planted a garden eastward in Eden.
  - After completing his grand creation, after populating the earth with every kind of plant imaginable, after creating the incredible beauty of
the wilderness, of the high places and the isolated valleys, still God, ever a God of Order, felt the need to PLANT a garden!

- God planted his garden with a purpose in mind, the same thought that dominated Mary’s mind dominated his.
  - Where there is a garden, there must be a gardener!
  - When God made Adam, he made him with a purpose in mind.
  - Beyond the relationship with God, beyond the worship of his creator, God made Adam to be a gardener.
  - It was his job to dress and keep the garden!
- The first man Adam was, for all intents and purposes a gardener.
  - That was his job, that was how he fulfilled his purpose.
    - So it’s not all that strange that, when Mary turned, in her sorrow, and beheld the second man Adam on that resurrection morning that she, unwittingly, perceived a spiritual truth:
      - He, like the first man Adam, is indeed a gardener.
        - We are his garden,
          - our lives are his handiwork
    - We need watering and tending by his constant and gracious care.
      - We need his watchful eye to trim us, shape us, and make us fruitful.
      - He is and always will be the gardener of our soul.
- We see the gardener motif throughout scripture:
  - The book of Isaiah is richly illustrated with the idea that the house of Israel is the vineyard of the Lord and that the men of Israel are his pleasant plants (Isaiah 5:7).
    - The Lord said in Isaiah 27:3, speaking of his vineyard of Israel: “I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.”
      - He is the gardener and we are the plants of his delight!
      - The Lord delighteth himself in watching over us, in keeping us, in watering our souls and in keeping us from harm!
  - She supposed him to be the Gardener and, indeed, he was and is!

Why a Gardener?
- There is no more fitting description of the role that God plays in our lives than that of a gardener.
  - God is not distant or aloof in our lives.
  - He doesn’t sit back from afar and judge us as some cold, detached, unapproachable authority.
  - Rather he is a close and personal force in our lives.
- The image of the gardener perfectly captures the role of God in our lives.
  - The gardener is intimately involved in the growth and development of the plants that are placed under his care.
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- He is closely involved with them, shaping, molding and making the plants, slowly and carefully bringing them into conformity with his plan and purpose.
- The gardener is concerned with that which has been placed under his care,
  - each morning he inspects it,
  - each day he waters and watches over it,
  - and with each evening he brings it a step closer to what he has envisioned for it.
- The gardener is carefully focused on the details,
  - he sees every spot,
  - he’s aware of every blemish,
  - he sees the young tender parasite as it begins to try to graft itself to the vine
  - and he is the caretaker, the protector and the provider.
- He who watches over the vine dresses it daily,
  - removes the blights and blemishes,
  - pinches off the unproductive growth,
  - snips away the deadweight
  - and carefully removes the parasitic vines that would suck the life from the true vine.
- The gardener carefully cultivates the plant, working with a purpose because he has a larger plan in mind.
  - In his mind it’s not just a single vine but a whole vineyard,
    - not just a single plant but a complete garden
    - and the gardener knows right where the plant fits into his master plan for the garden.
  - He doesn’t waste time and energy in misguided efforts.
    - Everything he does to the plant and with the plant is aimed at bring the plant to the fulfillment of a bigger purpose.
- There is no more fitting illustration of our Lord in all of scripture than that of a gardener.
  - This is the role that he plays in each of our lives.
  - He is close and intimately involved in our lives.
  - He is concerned with everything that is happening to us
  - He is focused in on the smallest details
  - He sees every spot, he knows every blemish
  - But rather than condemn us, he ties to purge us
  - Rather than discard us, he carefully tries to nurse us
  - Because He is the gardener, he works in our lives to help us grow to the fullest potential of our lives.
- She supposed him to be the gardener, the one who carefully cultivates growth I each of us,
The one who works his plan in our lives causing us to fit into a larger master plan that is bigger than the scope of our imagination and broader than the limits of our understanding

- He is the gardener – Its an image that is repeated throughout the ministry of Jesus.

The Patient Gardener – Matthew 13:24-30

- We find Him represented as the patient gardener in Matthew 13, where He lets the tares grow in the midst of the wheat.
  - Lets them grow side by side, tares and wheat mingled together.
    - Not because he cares about the tares but because he cherishes the wheat.
  - He allows them to develop right beside one another, not for the benefit of the tares but, rather, in order to protect the wheat.
- The patient gardener recognizes that, given time, the wheat will distinguish itself from the tares.
  - And He looks at the big picture.
    - He has a plan that is bigger than the moment.
      - His focus is somewhere down the road when fruitfulness distinguishes the good from the bad.
  - So he lets them grow, side by side,
    - not because he can’t tell the difference between tares and wheat
      - but because to remove the tares would damage the wheat.
    - So, with the best interest of the wheat in mind, the patient gardener lets time do its grand work.
- I want you to know something tonight, He is the gardener in your life and He love you!
  - He cares about your life.
  - He cares enough for you to let the wheat and the tares grow side by side.
- God is the patient gardener.
  - Sometimes he lets some things grow in the field of your life that were planted by your enemy
    - because he knows that, given time, the good is going to outshine the bad.
  - He doesn’t rush in, with haste, and begin to tear the tares from the ground,
    - Even though sometimes that’s what we want him to do.
    - But he restrains himself, biding his time, working his plan with patience
      - because he’s more concerned with you and your development than he is with the destruction of the tares that have cropped up in your life.
• He’s more concerned with keeping you and preserving you than he is with destroying the tares.
  ▪ Sometimes we mistake God’s patience for his approval.
    ▪ Tares are tares and that’s all they will ever be.
    ▪ They will never be fruitful, no benefit will ever come from them.
  ▪ Just because the gardener doesn’t rush to remove them from your field doesn’t mean that he condones of them,
    ▪ it only means that he is patiently nurturing you towards a day when there will, most certainly, come a separation between the wheat and the tares in your life.
  ▪ And god’s more concerned with your development up to that time than he is with the harmful removal of tares in the fields.
  ▪ He’s the gardener, he’s a patient and just gardener!

• In Luke chapter 13 Jesus shares the story of the merciful gardener.
• There was a fig tree that had been planted in the corner of a garden.
  o This was a common agricultural practice of the day,
    ▪ vineyards often take a hint of the flavor of whatever fruit tree they share the ground with,
    ▪ so the gardener would plant fig trees in the corners of the vineyard to influence the flavor of figs to his vineyard.
  o It takes three years for one of these fig trees to begin to produce fruit
    ▪ but, in the story that Jesus tells,
    ▪ the master of the vineyard has come on three consecutive fruit bearing years seeking fruit from the fig tree,
    ▪ which tells us that this fig tree has been growing in the corner of the vineyard for 6 unfruitful years.
  o Finally, in frustration, the master turns to the gardener with an exasperated cry,
    ▪ “This unproductive tree is wasting the ground,
    ▪ it is occupying a space where a productive tree might grow.
    ▪ It is a waste of my time, my soil, my resources and my patience – CUT IT DOWN!”
• But the merciful gardener lifts his voice and makes an impassioned plea for one more year.
  o Give me a chance, he says, to dig around its roots and to fertilize it.
    ▪ Give me one more year to shower the tree with my personal attention and let me see if I can make the tree fruitful.
  o It was a miracle of mercy;
    ▪ the tree had been given plenty of time to produce fruit.
    ▪ The odds were against the gardener,
• if the tree hadn’t produced in the first 6 years of its life a drastic change was unlikely.
  ▪ But the merciful gardener pleads against the judgment,
    • give me just one more year,
    • give me just one more season,
    • give me another opportunity.
  ▪ With an optimism that only a gardener possesses,
    • he looks at the unfruitful with confidence,
    • believing that he can cause fruit to grow where it has never grown before.
• I want you to know tonight that Jesus is your merciful gardener!
  o He pays personal attention to your life.
    ▪ The merciful gardener said, give it one more year and I will shower it with special attention,
    ▪ I will take my own hands and dig around the roots,
    ▪ I will pack those roots with nutrients and fertilizer,
    ▪ I will make sure it receives the water and sunlight that it needs to be productive.
  o God is very hands-on in your life.
    ▪ He wants you to be fruitful for his kingdom.
      • He wants your life to be productive for the glory of God.
  o And friend, he doesn’t want you to ever face judgment for stubborn unfruitfulness.
    ▪ To that end, the gardener will go to work in your life.
      • He will dig around your roots,
        o he will make sure you have what you need to be fruitful,
        ▪ he will insure that you receive what you need to survive.
    ▪ It’s got to be an unsettling thing to have your roots uncovered, to have all of the old soil, with its depleted nutrients, carried away.
      • The work of the gardener in your life isn’t always pleasant but it is continuously profitable!
        o He won’t give up on you easy,
        o he won’t sit idly by and watch you rush towards judgment.
      • He intervenes, in his gracious mercy,
        o he begins to root around in your life.
          ▪ Stirring up some old established things.
        o Exposing the roots of your unfruitfulness,
          ▪ washing them in tender care and planting them again in fresh, nutrition rich, well fertilized soil!
  ▪ Why? Because God loves you!
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- He wants you to make it!
- He delights in your fruitfulness and concerns himself with the lack thereof.
- He is the gardener of your soul!

John 15
- In John 15 Jesus addresses the role of God as the gardener in our lives and shares with us two ways that he works in us.
  - John 15:2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.
- He tells us in the second verse of that chapter that the gardener of our lives cuts off the branches that bears no fruit.
  - He searches each life and finds the branches that are unproductive.
    - There are some things in my life that simply aren't fruitful.
    - There are some things within us that simply won't ever glorify God.
  - And when we let the gardener begin to work in our lives he will search us out, isolate those unfruitful branches and cut them off!
    - It's not always a pleasant process, it's not always an easy thing.
      - But we need the minister of the gardener in our lives!
      - We need God to cut some things away!
  - The gardener removes those things because they waste nutrients.
    - They sap us of our energy
      - They diminish our spiritual effectiveness
        - They hinder our productive growth by wasting energy on unproductive growth.
  - There are some things in our lives that simply need to be cut off, that absolutely need to be taken away.
- This cutting that Jesus references is the process of removing dead limbs.
  - There are some dead things in our lives that need to be cut off.
    - There are some traits and characteristics of the old man that don't need to be given the chance to revive.
      - They are a burden to our spirituality.
      - They diminish our effectiveness as Christians.
      - They sap from us the much needed strength and encouragement of God's presence.
  - And the gardener, if we will allow him, works in our lives to cut those things off, to take them away!
    - We really need to part with some things in our lives!
      - We really need to let some things be taken away.
  - Carefully and with a greater purpose in mind, the gardener begins to bring the vine under the careful, severing influence of the shears,
    - removing the old man,
    - removing the old tendencies,
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- removing past influence,
  - and shaping us to fulfill his purpose in our lives.
  - Some folks continually struggle to live for God because they never allow the Holy Ghost to sever the dead branches from their life.
  - They never let the gardener do his good work within them.
- They tell me that, in the art of gardening, dead branches are worse than fruitlessness.
  - Dead branches harbor disease.
  - Dead branches harbor decay.
    - There are things in our lives, vestiges of the men and women that we were before God saved us, that desperately need to be cut off.
    - If we continue to allow those things to influence our lives, they will sap us of our spiritual effectiveness, they will drain from us our spiritual life, they will plant disease and decay in our soul.
  - There are hurts we need to allow the Lord to cut off!
    - There is bitterness that needs to parted with.
    - There are past disappointments that the gardener needs to overcome in your life.
- She supposed him to be the gardener
  - And tonight we desperately need the work of the gardener in our lives!

- Another aspect of the ministry of the gardener according to Jesus in John 15:2 is the process of pruning.
  - The gardener doesn’t stop with just removing the old, unproductive branches from our lives.
    - When he finds a fruitful branch, he examines it, and he cleanses and repeatedly prunes every branch to make I bear more and richer and more excellent fruit!
  - God wants you to grow in fruitfulness!
  - He wants you to grow in the Lord and to that end, the gardener examines even the fruitful, productive life and begins to prune it.
    - Sometimes we get caught in a rut, sometimes we feel like we are just getting nowhere fast.
    - Not involved in gross sin, not invested in carnal pursuits.
    - Just not growing like we know we should
- Let me tell you what we need, we need the gardener to begin to prune our lives!
  - We need the ministry of the pruning shears!
  - There are things in our lives that hinder our fruitfulness.
  - There are things in our lives that are obstacles to spiritual growth.
  - There not always sins, sometimes they are just weights.
  - The kind of weights that Paul said “do so easily beset us.”
• The kind of things that, for some reason or another, we just tolerate in our lives!

• If we are gonna become more productive, if we are gonna become what he has called us to be,
  o We need the ministry of the gardener in our lives!
  o We need him to prune some things in our hearts.
  o We need him to walk with us through our homes
  o We need the gardener!

• Pruning can be painful, but nothing in our live is more productive than when god takes out the pruning shears and begins to cut some things away.
  o Its never a comfortable process, its never a pleasant experience, but WE NEED THE MINISTRY OF THE GARDENER IN OUR LIVES!

• God, as our gardener, if we will submit ourselves to him,
  o casts his careful eye over our live and hones in on some things that are counterproductive in us.
    ▪ He finds some attitudes that are hindering our spiritual pride, and he begins to cut those things away.
    ▪ He finds some egotistical tendencies, some pride that has sprung up and he begins to cut that thing away.
    ▪ He finds some places in our lives where we are dominated by self and selfishness and he goes to work with his pruning shears and cuts hose things away!

• Pruning is never easy on the one being pruned!
  o Relationships are severed
  o Job situations are changed
  o Directions are altered
  o Pain, sorrow, sickness and suffering seem to be a part of the pruning process in our lives.
  o Loss and disappointments, frustrated ambitions and thwarted goals, sometimes we are trying to take ourselves in a direction that is contrary to God’s plan and out come the pruning shears,
    ▪ Carefully, with loving kindness, he prunes us and shapes us and makes us into what he would have us to be!

• I’ll b the first to say that its not easy, but we need the gardener!
  o We need him to work in our lives!

Application
• The ministry of the gardener is how the divine hand of God shapes us into what he has desired for us to be.
  o God interacts with our lives.
  o God sows us special attention and showers us with careful, loving, and even sometimes painful care,
  o All for the purpose of making us more productive for his kingdom.
  o All for the purpose of preserving our souls!
• An unpruned vine will develop long rambling branches that will produce little or no fruit.
  o But the gardener, in his loving kindness, cuts some things away, removes some dead branches, severs some errant sprouts and makes us to be productive in his garden!
• John 15:8 gives us a glimpse into the heart of the gardener, He takes personal pride in his garden!
  o When we produce fruit, he is honored and glorified!
    ▪ The proof of discipleship is the bearing of fruit and when we bear fruit in our lives, God, the gardener, gets all of the credit!
    ▪ This is why he works in our lives,
      • this is why he showers us with personal care and attention,
      • this is why he digs around our roots and trims our branches –
        o because he gets the glory when our lives are spiritually productive!
    ▪ Its all about glorifying Him!
• Tonight we are in a season of sacrifice; and we are inviting the gardener to work in our lives.
  o Tonight I’m asking you as a church to submit yourself to the one that shapes and fashions your life
  o Let him cut away the dead things
  o Let him dig around your roots
  o Let him trim and prune your life
  o Submit your self to him and let him work in your life so that you may be more productive for the kingdom
    ▪ So that this church might be more productive!

Close
• Humanity was created in a garden,
  o we fell into sin in a garden,
  o in judgement we were driven from the garden.
    ▪ On that day a prophecy was made that the seed of a woman would purchase our redemption.
    ▪ And he did.
  o Jesus Christ was born of a woman, and, as the savior of the world
    ▪ He agonized in a garden
    ▪ He died near a garden
    ▪ He was buried in a garden
    ▪ He was resurrected in a garden
  o And there he was recognized for who he really is
    ▪ She supposing him to be the gardener saw him for who he really is.
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- He is the gardener in our lives and tonight I want to encourage you to let him work in you.
  - In this season of sacrifice, he will deal with you
  - He will challenge you
  - He will cut some things off from you
    • SUBMIT YOURSELF TO HIM AND LET HIM DO HIS PERFECT WORK IN YOUR LIFE
- He is the gardener!