

I love plants! Although any plant has a valuable lesson to teach us about rest, my favorite plants are the oxalis and amaryllis. The oxalis opens its leaves in the day and closes them at night (sleep?), and the amaryllis relies upon a period of dormancy (2 months without water or sun) in order to produce bloom stalks.

Oxalis (a pic of the oxalis my mother gave me):





Amaryllis (two bulbs I was able to get to reflower after a period of dormancy):





God created the Sabbath on the 7th day because he knew that we would need a rest day! Rich Villodas beautifully illustrates this point in his book, [*The Deeply Formed Life*](#):

“Sabbath is a gift that precedes work and enables us to work. Just look at the first day of rest. God created the world in six days (see Genesis 1). On the sixth day, he created Adam and Eve. Their first day was the seventh day, which was the day God created rest. They began with a Sabbath, out of which they worked. As with God’s grace, rest is never a reward; it’s a gift (p. 33, Villodas).”

I bring this up again (you might remember the quote from my second newsletter on “Rest and Grace”, 1/12/24) because the environment within which Adam and Eve rested, lived, and worked was a garden. I am grateful to God that His fingerprints are still upon nature despite the entrance of sin into the world. You don’t have to spend too long around plants in all their beauty, biodiversity, and complexity to begin to ponder—maybe even acknowledge?—the existence of God.

A. J. Swoboda eloquently writes about Sabbath and its relationship to the earth in his deeply insightful book, [*Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power Of Rest In A Nonstop World*](#):

“Sabbath is, at its core, an ecological principle. This is not accidental. God intentionally designed and created the world in a manner that would allow for the flourishing of all. There were no mistakes in his created realm. Long before we started burning out, long before the land started dying, long before disaster struck—there was God! The world that God created is beautiful, intricate, and interconnected. And part of that interconnected beauty is the need for rest (p. 126, Swoboda).”

Plants remind me of God’s intentional design of interconnectivity; plants inhale carbon dioxide that you and I exhale, and you and I inhale oxygen that plants exhale. Wow! If that doesn’t get you excited about plants, I don’t know what will! In my conversations with people I have met people who self-identify as having green thumbs or black thumbs—people who have a seeming ability or inability to care for plants. As someone who was not always good with plants and has worked up to more advanced tasks such as repotting, pruning, and propagation, I argue that it’s less about thumb colors and more about slowing down to care for something outside ourselves. House plants, gardens, etc. are a reminder that we each have an integral role to play in the world, and that if we don’t do our part, indeed, even if we don’t do anything, the result is not that nothing will grow. On the contrary, weeds will grow, and the ecological harmony of our lives will be disturbed.

When you slow down to connect with and care for someone—even something (plants!)—you image God! Swoboda puts it this way:

“The Triune God—Father, Son, and Spirit—is not the relationship of three beings who at some point became friends and brought their powers together to create the world. The Triune Godhead is coeternal. God is, in himself, relational. The world was created by a triune relationship. Borrowing philosophical language, God is ontologically relationship—that is, God does not have relationships; God is relationship (p. 67).”

The Triune God IS “being in relationship” and like it or not, as human beings we are in a relationship—a relationship to each other, a relationship to God, a relationship to plants, and in a relationship to the earth!

The Temple Takeaway:

Got plants? Write back. Which ones? Send pics. Got Netflix? Check out [“Kiss the ground”](#), a hopeful yet sobering film that speaks to our collective human agency in reversing the damaging effects of climate change. For a moving film about a man who adopted over a thousand children, and established a microclimate by planting over 1.5 billion trees (you read that right; don't worry, he had help!), check out [Mully](#).