

Three Gardens

Written by Joanna Richards, January 2020©

First performed at Elk Lake Baptist Church, Spring 2022, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Director Notes: This play was written to share the story of God's love for humanity, the challenges humans experience believing God has our best interests at heart, Jesus' demonstration of God's love and his invitation to connect with us and work in our lives today. This play can be adapted to the children/teens/adults you have. The age recommendations are suggestions; a strong young actor can take on a part for an older child. Actions, lighting and music are indicated in brackets and italics.

Actors

Act I

Adam: Teen or Adult

Eve: Teen or Adult

Snake: Teen or Adult

Act II

Jesus: Teen or Adult

Peter: 8 year old and up

James: 8 year old and up

John: 8 year old and up

Snake: same actor as Act 1

Act III

Actor 1: Teen

Actor 2: 10 year old and up

Actor 3: Pre-teen/teen

Actor 4: 10 year old and up

Actor 5: 10 year old and up

Actor 6: 10 year old and up

Gardener/Jesus: same actor as Act II

Set up and Instructions:

This **play** has **three scenes** and is written for **13 actors**.

The **backdrop** is a garden; no set changes are required.

For costumes: Act 1, Adam and Eve wear nude/khaki coloured clothing and the snake wears black with a red belt. Act 2, Jesus, Peter, James and John can wear a simple tunic or other clothing tailored to the time period. Act 3, players wear modern day clothing; the gardener is wearing gardening clothes and has tools.

ACT I: The Garden of Eden

*A child enters, holds up a sign and announces, The Garden of Eden
Adam and Eve enter dressed in nude or khaki coloured clothing.*

Eve: Oh Adam, it's such a lovely day here in the Garden of Eden. I just love spending each day, seeing all the things God has made, giving them names, working the soil and eating the fruit. It's simply magical isn't it?

Adam: It most certainly is Eve. I couldn't agree more. The daylight hours pass so easily, I never feel sad that one day is ending because I know tomorrow will be equally as beautiful. I find such meaning and purpose in tending this garden with you.

Eve: Oh I know, it's as though God tailored this work perfectly to us. I mean, I know we've only known each other for a few months, but it feels like eternity. In the good way. Not like, oh my gosh, it feels like an eternity.

Adam: I feel the same way! The time before you came feels like an eternity, I mean, in the bad way. It was just like, every day I would name animals, tend the soil, eat the fruit, but something was missing. I couldn't put my finger on it.

Eve: I can't even imagine being here without *you*. It must have been positively *dreadful!*

Adam: Well, it wasn't *all* bad. I was able to get quite a bit done, and I never felt tired of talking, and my rib cage somehow felt a little more sturdy. *Eve touches her rib cage at this comment.* But, all in all, it's much better to have you here Eve, so you can celebrate everything I've accomplished in a day.

Eve: *Slight cough.* Don't you mean everything *we've* accomplished dear?

Adam: Oh yes, sorry, *we've* accomplished. Absolutely.

Eve: Well I don't remember what life was like before "*us*".

Adam: I'm sure you don't!

Eve: You're all I've ever known and that's just perfect for me.

Adam: It really is better that we're together.

Eve: Have you seen God today?

Adam: He was walking in the garden earlier, we had a quick check in. He asked about you and which fruits you've been enjoying the most lately.

Eve: He's so thoughtful.

Adam: I let him know you were getting on divinely and that he should connect with you directly as I'm not sure what fruits you like right now.

Eve: *Looking a bit perplexed.* You don't know what fruits I like right now?

Adam: No, why?

Eve: It's just that, I know all of your favourite fruits.

Adam: Go on, no you don't.

Eve: Bananas for breakfast, figs for a mid-morning snack. Mandarines, apples and peaches for lunch, followed by a few grapes around 3, and finally a big bunch of olives and nuts for dinner.

Adam: What can I say, I'm predictable. I like what I like.

Eve: Name my favourite fruit.

Adam: *Looks like he's trying to remember then tries the sounds watching Eve's face.*

Gr...app...ban...pea...fig....olives?

Eve: No Adam. It's not Gr-app-ban-pea-fig-olives. Are olives even a fruit??

Adam: Why yes Eve, and thanks for asking. The olive is the small, bitter-tasting fruit of the olivetree, *olea europea*. Olives are classified as fruit because they're formed from the ovary of the oliveflower, and they're seed-bearing structures. Those small stones, or pits, could grow into trees if you planted them.

Eve: *Looking frustrated.* How is it possible that you can know *that* much about an olive, and not know that my favourite fruit is the mango. Even a wild guess should have landed you at mango. Everyone's favourite fruit is the mango!

Adam: Who is this "everyone"?

Eve: Gah! It's a figure of speech, to end an argument without having to make a particularly good argument! You know, "Everyone thinks you need a haircut," or "there's no need to balance the budget, everyone agrees."

Adam: Is this hormones talking?

Eve: No Adam, this is not hormones talking. This is your wife, Eve, talking, gently suggesting you care more about your work naming things and tilling the soil than you do about getting to know me. *She stomps off leaving Adam looking perplexed.*

Adam: What just happened there? One minute, everything is good, we're having a nice time, talking about how great the garden is, and the next, I'm in the doghouse because I don't know she likes mangos.... For some reason I'm craving a "guys night" right now. What even is that?

Adam walks offstage confused.

Eve walks on stage talking to herself.

Eve: How could he not know I like mangos? I am, quite literally, the only other person on earth. Gah. *Sighs.* Oh well. At least I know God is interested in me. I'll talk to him about it when we walk later today.

Snake: Hey Eve.

Eve: Oh geez you startled me. I didn't see you there. Hi snake.

Snake: Please, please, call me Lu. I couldn't help overhearing your little lover's quarrel earlier. Can I lend a listening ear?

Eve: Oh, that's kind of you. Well, I think I'm over it, and I'm going to chat with God a bit later, so no, it's ok.

Snake: Well suit yourself. I'm just trying to be a friend in what must feel like a lonely garden at times.

Eve: Lonely. Hmm. I don't think I feel lonely. I just want to be wanted. What is love but being interested in what the other person finds interesting?

Snake: Oh I completely agree. And you're trying so hard.

Eve: I am trying hard. And I love Adam, and I know he loves me. It's just...

Snake: He doesn't make you the priority you deserve. Am I right?

Eve: Yes, you're exactly right. But I should really talk to God about this, I mean, he made us for each other so I'm sure he's got some good advice.

Snake: Oh sure, sure. Very good idea. Maybe just ask him if he had anyone else in mind for you.

Eve: I don't understand. There isn't anyone else for me.

Snake: Perhaps.

Eve: No, literally, there are like no other human beings here.

Snake: How do you know he's not keeping what would truly make you happy from you? For example, what about that tree in the middle of the garden?

Eve: Oh yes, well God did tell us not to eat that one.

Snake: Oh really, did he really say that? So you *know* he's not holding out on you, keeping what would *truly* make you happy from you, and yet, did he really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'

Eve: We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'

Snake: *Stifles a laugh.* You will certainly not die. God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. You will see clearly whether Adam is right for you or not. You will be your own woman. Not just a helper. Not just a companion. Not just a servant. You can decide for yourself what is right and what is wrong. It

will be on your terms. And you can even decide if you want God in *your* picture at all. *He throws her a piece of fruit.*

Sound comes up on the song Adams Rib's. Eve leaves pondering the piece of fruit in her hand.

Lights out.

ACT II: The Garden of Gethsemane

One child enters, holds up a sign and announces, The Garden of Gethsemane

Jesus: *Speaks from off stage.* My friends, tonight I have brought you to the place where we have often met together, talked together and prayed together. But tonight, I need to be alone with the Father. Sit here while I go and pray. Peter, James, John, come with me.

Jesus, Peter, James and John enter.

My friends, my friends, I am deeply, deeply troubled. My soul is overwhelmed. Overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death my brothers.

Peter: Jesus, we are here.

James: Tell us what you need.

John: How can we help you?

Jesus: You are dear friends. Stay here and keep watch with me.

Peter: We will Jesus. We will.

Jesus goes on a little farther and collapses with his face to the ground.

My father. My father. Abba. Dad. If it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. I don't know that I can bear what's coming. Father. *Snake enters.* My own friend has sold me out. I trusted him. I was a friend to him. I gave him the sweetest wine and he is giving me poison in return. Father. Don't leave me.

Snake: You don't have to do this you know. You know as well as I do, God is all powerful. You said yourself, nothing is impossible with God. Surely he can find a way to empty his anger and wrath without involving you, his beloved son. Or doesn't he love you enough to find a way that doesn't involve your suffering?

Jesus: *Ignoring him.* Yet, not as I will Father, but as you will.

Snake: And what about *your* will? What about *your* truth? What about who *you* could become Jesus? Tell me, what is *your* will? *I'd* like to know.

Jesus: *Through gritted teeth.* My will is to do the will of the Father who sent me.

Snake: Is it though? You *have* a will that is not the Father's. Listen to yourself. Love yourself! Jesus, I could be your brother. I would not cause you to suffer in this way. I would let you have a say in choosing your destiny.

Jesus: You are nothing like my brothers.

Snake: No, you're quite right. Your brothers can't even stay awake for one hour to pray with you. *I* would stand by you. Go and see for yourself. *He exits.*

Jesus returns to his disciples and finds them sleeping. He wakes them up.

Jesus: Peter. John. James. I asked you to keep watch with me. Couldn't you stay awake for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

James: Jesus, we are so sorry. It's been a long night, and I had a bad night sleep the last few nights.

Peter: Yes, we are sorry Jesus. I was praying and then I was distracted by something James said earlier, which took me on a thought journey to this place I fished a long time ago where they served the best breakfast sandwiches...

John: *Cuts off Peter.* Sorry. We are all sorry. We will sit up so we stay alert.

Jesus nods and leaves them again. They sit with their backs together to prop each other up, but slowly drift off again.

Jesus: *Kneels back down to pray.* My father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done. *Snake re-enters.* But if it is possible Father, please. Take it. Away. Please, take it.

Snake: Do you know, I also have a cup Jesus. The cup I have is sweet. It will go down easy and you will enjoy the rest of your life. You were a great carpenter. Do you remember *those* days? Before the crowds. Before the teachers of the law hated you. Before the loneliness. You could have a career, a wife, your own children. You could have it all.

Jesus: Whoever does my Father's will is my brother and sister and mother. My family is large, and it is about to get much, *much* larger.

Snake: In the future, *perhaps*. But who truly knows what the future holds? I can satisfy your deepest longings *now* Jesus. You know I can.

Jesus: Get behind me satan. *Snake stumbles back at this statement.* You are a stumbling block to me. You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.

Snake leaves. Jesus gets up and returns to the disciples. He finds them sleeping. At first he looks frustrated but then his face shifts to compassion. He covers them with their cloaks. He returns, puts his face down and prays.

Jesus: My Father. My Father. If it *is* possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.

Snake re-enters

Snake: Ah the cup, the cup, the cup. Jesus, did God *really* say you need to drink this cup? I ask you again, why would a good Father cause his *own* son to suffer like this?

Jesus: Because of you! *You* planted the seed of doubt in Eve's heart in the beginning. *You* made her think God didn't have her best interests at heart. *You* made her think she could be God. *You* lied to her, telling her she would not surely die, when you knew, you *knew*, she would most

certainly die. And all humanity after her. You won that day! You won. But I was there, snake. I saw how it broke my Father's heart. I saw the truth of his love. I saw my calling. I saw how the story would end from that moment. And do you know why snake? Because God knows Eve's favourite fruit is mangos.

Snake: What are you talking about? Everyone's favourite fruit is mangos.

Jesus: No snake. No. Adam's favourite was figs. Peter's favourite is olives, John's is oranges and my mother's is red grapes when they are almost overripe. And what's more, God knows the very number of hairs on their heads. He is *passionate* about them, and he is passionate about me. He knows the love that is and is not in their hearts. And he knows there is no other way to have both justice for all the hatred and ugliness of this world, *and* to have the family he wants, without my death. So to my death I go. This is not about my comfort snake. It is about God's will, and over my dead body, I will get it done. *He looks up.* Father, not my will, but yours be done. Your kingdom come.

Snake leaves angry. Jesus returns to the disciples and wakes them.

Jesus: Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise. Let us go. My betrayer has come.

Lights fade. Music begins to play. We used the song "The Embrace" from The Chosen soundtrack starting at 1.01 playing through to the end while lifting a screen on stage to reveal the cross.

Act III: The Gardens of Butchart

Director's note: You can tailor the name of this garden to one that is local in your community.

A child enters, holds up a sign and announces, The Gardens of Butchart

Actor 1: What a gorgeous day it is here. I love coming when the tulips have been tucked so neatly together. No weeds.

Actor 6: It's nothing like my yard. How do they do that?

Actor 5: I think they grow them somewhere else and then transplant them.

Actor 2: Really? What a lot of ridiculous work!

Actor 6: It's not even a real garden if it can't grow like that.

Actor 1: But it looks so nice. And like mom always used to say, looking nice is what matters.

Actor 3: Umm....I've never heard that particular saying before.

Actor 5: Yeah, my mom always said, "make sure that you don't just clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside be full of greed and self-indulgence."

Actor 6: And, my mom always used to say, "do your dishes!"

Actor 2: What is it with moms and cleaning!

Actor 4: It's a Mepidemic.

Actor 2: I think you mean epidemic.

Actor 4: Nope. Mepidemic. An epidemic that only applies to moms. Like getting dressed, getting out of the house "on time" and eating vegetables.

Actor 5: They've all got it.

Actor 4: Not only that, in the last 30 years it's spread to become a Depidemic.

Actor 2: Dads have it too? Sounds like a real crisis.

Actor 4: Watch for it, you'll see.

Actor 3: Wait, wait, wait. Back the bus up. I don't think your mom was actually talking about cleaning literal cups. Unless you think greed and self-indulgence can get stuck in a cup.

Actor 5: Depends on the quality of your dishwasher.

Actor 1: I don't know what all the fuss is about. All I said was, it's important to look nice and successful, because that's what people *see*. And if people *see* that you look nice, they will either be jealous or want to look nice too. Either way you win!

Actor 3: Why would you *want* people to be jealous?

Actor 1: Because silly, it means you're better than them!

Actor 2: This may be the strangest conversation I've heard in my life.

Actor 1: It's simple really. Life is about maximizing your enjoyment right? I think *everyone* can agree on that. And how do you know you're happy, unless the people around you either *look* like you or want to be like you.

Actor 6: I gotta say, he makes a compelling argument.

Actor 3: What are you saying? This is not a compelling argument! How can happiness come from either trying to make other people feel bad, or, making everyone like you?

Actor 4: Happiness and contentment comes from embracing God-given uniqueness and purpose. It's the bi-product of a meaningful life.

Actor 3: Exactly. Don't compare yourself to anyone else but test your own actions against your own responsibilities, and take pride in that.

Actor 1: Silly <insert name of Actor 3>. If that were true, why would people spend so much time on social media trying to be like everyone else?

Actor 3: I'm pretty sure you're making my point.

Actor 1: Look. All I'm trying to say is that the secret to "the good life" is to ignore the weeds, get your tulips in a neat little row and ensure everyone can see them. You know, push aside your regrets and foibles and demonstrate your accomplishments. Positive thinking makes for a good life. It's simple brain science. Live out your Linked-In profile <insert name of Actor 3>!

Actor 3: Right. And all I'm trying to say is tulips in a neat little row like that, don't grow in the garden of reality, because in reality, there are weeds. We mess up. We hurt people. We lie to impress or cheat to get ahead, or day-dream about getting rich instead of taking action to make the world better. We grumble and complain. We have weeds. We need the gardener to pull them out.

Actor 6: *Aside to Actor 5.* My yard is almost entirely weeds.

Actor 5: Same. I'm always amazed when any flowers come up between the weeds in my yard.

Actor 1: Why are you so fussed about the darn weeds!

Actor 3: Why aren't you fussed about them!

Actor 1: Because they drag us down! You become what you focus on!

Actor 3: Well on *that* point we can absolutely agree!

Actor 1: Fine!

Actor 3: Fine!

Silence.

Actor 2: What just happened?

Actor 6: I think they are agreeing to disagree.

Actor 3: <*Insert name of Actor 1*>. If you don't get the gardener to deal with your weeds, your tulips won't last. If you ignore them, they will take over. Not right away, but little by little, they will destroy your garden.

Actor 5: *Aside.* I don't think they're talking about flowers.

Actor 2: Definitely not.

Actor 1: I just want to focus on the flowers ok? Is that so wrong?

Actor 4: Well, I guess it's a choice.

Actor 3: You can admit your need for the gardener, and deal with the weeds, or pretend your garden is ok without him and let the whole thing be destroyed. *Everyone but Actor 1 exits.*

Gardener enters. This is the same character that played Jesus, only dressed as a gardener.

Gardener: Did I hear someone mention a need for a gardener?

Actor 1: Ah, yeah, maybe. Not sure. How do you feel about weeding?

Gardener: Weeding! My specialty in fact. Love weeding.

Actor 1: Seriously? Who loves weeding?

Gardener: I discovered the ultimate weed killer a few years back. It's made an eternity of difference.

Actor 1: Wow. Is it organic? I don't do pesticides.

Gardener: 100% organic. 100% renewable. 100% accessible.

Actor 1: Go on! Nothing is *that* good. What's it called?

Gardener: Love.

Actor 1: That's the brand?

Gardener: Nope.

Actor 1: You mean, love love?

Gardener: You got it.

Actor 1: Are we in a Disney movie ending? How the heck does love get rid of weeds?

Gardener: Love stops you from feeding the weeds.

Actor 1: *Sounding affronted.* I'm not feeding the weeds.

Gardener: Oh really? Any bitterness kicking around? Resentment about your circumstances? Deeply rooted beliefs about being worthless or unworthy? Fear? Anxiety? Self-worship?

Actor 1: *Aside.* It's like this guy's been reading my journal.

Gardener: Weed feeders the lot of them. And here's the kicker. If you focus on *looking* good, it actually allows the weed-feeders to grow, because they're always crouching at the door, threatening to undo your perfect image.

Actor 1: What can love do?

Gardener: Why love not only covers over a multitude of weeds, it can uproot them where they stand, because it chokes out their nutrients. Envy, hatred, self-indulgence, greed, apathy, none of it can survive when soaked in love, because none of those things make sense anymore.

Actor 1: Where do I get it?

Gardener: From me. I bought it. Enough for every garden. Incredibly expensive (*he points to the marks in his hands*) but it was worth it.

Actor 1: Well why are there still weeds around then? If it's so great, wouldn't everyone have it?

Gardener: You have to ask for it.

Actor 1: That's it?

Gardener: That's it. You have to ask. It's free, but you have to demonstrate enough understanding of your garden to know you need it from me. It's the first step in getting your soil back in shape so we can start growing love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Actor 1: What if I like my garden the way it is? You know, familiar.

Gardener: If you choose your way over mine, I will give it to you. The choice is always yours. The freedom to choose is the only way for love to exist. It's been that way since the beginning of gardens.

Actor 1: *Deep breath. Smiles.* Where do we start?

Gardener: I'm so glad you asked! Right here, right now. You come to me, spend time with me, tell me everything you're thinking and feeling, without holding back. Then, listen for my advice, and above all, listen for my love. It will make you strong, content and guard you against wasting your precious life on short-term pleasantries.

Actor 1: You want to hear all the garbage in my life? That's going to be a bit of a dumpster fire.

Gardener: Believe me, I can handle it.

Actor 1: How often should I come?

Gardener: How often do you get hungry?

Actor 1: At least three times a day, sometimes more.

Gardener: Whenever you get physically hungry, you can use that as a reminder that I'm here, every day, ready for you, hoping you'll come. *He starts to leave. Then pauses.* Oh I almost forgot. *Tosses Actor 1 a mango and exits.*

Actor 1: A mango. My favourite. How did he know?

Lights out.

You can simply end the play here or play "Good Good Father" in the dark to allow the audience time to sit with the meaning for a few moments before bringing the lights back up.