

THE ABIDING CHALLENGE

WEEK TWO - DAY ONE

OUR FATHER, THE MASTER GARDENER

KEY SCRIPTURE: John 15:1

READING: Deuteronomy 10:14; Psalm 24:1-2; Jeremiah 29:11

INTRODUCTION

"I am the true Vine, and My Father is the Gardener." John 15:1 NIV
"Whether I'm withering or flourishing, let me remember it is You, Lord, the Head Gardener, who always nourishes and protects." Brenda Wilbee is an award-winning and best-selling author.

The Master Gardener is the one who owns the vineyard, the one who provides the seeds to be planted, the one who prunes, and the one who is in charge. He has the master plan. As the one who owns, tends, and determines what Fruit the garden ought to produce, He is entitled to receive a good return on his investment. God our Father is the intelligent designer, the master architect, the creator of the Heavens and earth, and the possessor of all things. The book of Deuteronomy says: "To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it." Deuteronomy 10:14 NIV and in one of the Psalms of David, he wrote, *"The earth is the LORD's, and the fullness thereof, the world and all who dwell therein. For He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters."* Psalm 24:1-2 ESV

Your life is like a vineyard or garden before the Father, and He is the Head Gardener. As the Master Gardener, God the Father is responsible for tending and keeping you. He is responsible for providing everything that you need so that you may bear the Fruit that He desires. When we recognize and surrender to Him as the Master Gardener of our lives, we will find peace and, subsequently, rest for our souls. God has a plan for your life. It's a waste of time trying to reinvent the wheel. Rather, what you need to do is find out what His plan is and live it. The more you know Him, the more you will trust Him. The more you trust Him, the greater your rest. ABIDING is learning to rest in Him. The scriptures say: "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28 NIV. And in Hebrews, we read: "So, then we must be eager to experience this faith-rest life, so that no one falls short by following the same pattern of doubt and unbelief." Hebrews 4:11 TPT

Scripture is filled with God's promises to provide rest when we seek Him. God is the source of all peace and strength. He created us to be dependent on Him! He is our peace! He is our strength! Many Christians have problems connecting with the Gardener because of the dynamics of their upbringing. They have "father issues." Some may see their earthly fathers as remote or stern, someone to be wary of, so they're afraid to approach the throne. Often, these issues hinder us from recognizing and surrendering to Abba Father, the Master Gardener. Nevertheless, here are five key roles of the Master Gardener to which we must surrender

- **OWNER** – He is the owner, and you are the Branch in His vineyard. He has a plan for your life.

• **PROVIDER** – He provides seeds, water, sun, and fertilizer — everything you, His Branch, need to succeed.

• **PRUNING** – He is responsible for pruning the Branches. He heals and restores you.

• **PROTECTOR** – He builds fences to protect the vineyard from prey. He is your strength and your peace.

• **REWARD** – Harvest, He receives a return [Fruit] on His investment.

As He prunes our lives, we Branches can bear much Fruit — and these Fruits are eternal. Most times when we think of bearing Fruit for God, we only think of the ministries we do, such as evangelism, teaching Bible studies, being a pastor, worship leader, and the like. But the Fruit that the Master Gardener prunes us to bear is borne within, which shapes our character. According to Galatians 5:22 NIV, “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control,” and these must precede the ministries that we do. Let the Master Gardener be the Gardener, and you be the Branch.

RESPOND

• **IS ABBA FATHER THE MASTER GARDENER OF YOUR LIFE?**

• **HOW IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH ABBA FATHER?**

- INTIMATE - I know Him Intimately.
- DISTANT - He feels very distant.
- HEAD KNOWLEDGE - I know of Him but not intimately.
- NO RELATIONSHIP - I don't have a relationship with Him.

• **LIST SOME REASONS WHY IT'S DIFFICULT TO SURRENDER TO THE ROLE OF THE MASTER GARDENER.**

Lord, thank You for the pruning and purging in my life. Continue to shape me and mold me according to Your perfect will that I may bear much Fruit. I surrender to You as the Master Gardener of my life. Help me to trust You completely, knowing that You are in absolute control. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Deuteronomy 10:14; Psalm 24:1-2; Jeremiah 29:11; Hebrews 4:9

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THE ABIDING CHALLENGE

WEEK TWO - DAY TWO

YOU WERE CREATED ON PURPOSE, FOR A PURPOSE

KEY SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 2:10 Amp

READING: Ephesians 2:10; Psalm 139:13-16; Jeremiah 1:5

INTRODUCTION

“For we are His workmanship [His own masterpiece, a work of art], created in Christ Jesus [reborn from above — spiritually transformed, renewed, ready to be used] for good works, which God prepared [for us] beforehand [taking paths which He set], so that we would walk in them [living the good life which He prearranged and made ready for us].” Ephesians 2:10 AMP

You were created on purpose, for a purpose! This means that a very intentional God created you in your mother’s womb with a purpose already in mind. Not only did He have a purpose in mind, but every one of your days was written down in His book before one of them came to be! (Psalm 139:13-16). God didn’t make a mistake when He made you, and He considers your contribution and purpose extremely valuable and necessary! Often, we have a hard time believing God has a purpose for our lives because of our past, our background, our upbringing, the way we look, or our personality. But Romans 8 makes God’s intentions clear:

“And we know [with great confidence] that God [who is deeply concerned about us] causes all things to work together [as a plan] for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to His plan and purpose.” Romans 8:28 AMP

Every part of your life has purpose, even the difficult times that you would rather rewrite. He will turn them around and use them for His glory! Not that God authored hardship or pain, but He sees it, and when we hand it over to Him, He gives beauty for ashes. Personally, the very things that I despised about myself or my life growing up as a child have made me into the person that I am. They forged me, and even the things I may have wanted to change, God has used to serve His purposes in my life!

So, be encouraged today that God created you with a seed of purpose on the inside of you, and when you come to know Jesus, that purpose comes to life, and everything begins to make sense. Your contribution in life is just that — YOURS! Your perspective, your experience, your uniqueness all for a purpose! So, embrace the fact that God is crazy about you, He believes in you, and He has designed a specific plan that only you are equipped to fulfill! You were created on purpose for a purpose, so own it! Here are 10 scriptures that are proof.

1. He knitted you together before you came into this world.

“I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.” Psalms 139:14-15 NKJV

2. He already loved you before He created you.

"Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; Before you were born, I sanctified you; I ordained (something special for you) you a prophet to the nations." Jeremiah 1:5 NKJV

3. He wrote your destiny in His book: There is a record about You!

"Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." Psalms 139:16 NIV

4. He has already devised a plan for your life.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11 NIV

5. He already refers to you as being wonderfully made.

"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well." Psalms 139:14 NIV

6. He already knew your name even before it was decided.

"I will do the very thing you have asked because I am pleased with you, and I know you by name." Exodus 33:17 NIV

7. No one can stop what He has in store for you.

"Who is he who speaks, and it comes to pass, when the Lord has not commanded it?" Lamentations 3:37 NKJV

8. He knows and has seen all your life's struggles.

"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." Hebrews 4:13 NIV

9. He is aware of what you are going through.

"For a man's ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and He ponders all his paths." Proverbs 5:21 NKJV

10. He will always be with you for the rest of your life.

"I am your God and will take care of you until you are old and your hair is gray. I made you and will care for you; I will give you help and rescue you." Isaiah 46:4 GNT

I encourage you to take a moment to reflect on what you have just read. Every day you when you wake up in the morning, thank God for His plans for your life. Be optimistic for a better tomorrow and know you were created with purpose and for a purpose. Do not think that your life is meaningless. You were created for a special reason, which is only known to the Most High God, and you will live it out when you let Him be the Gardener of your life.

RESPOND

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Meditate on the scriptures below and let the Lord speak to your heart. To meditate, you need to: memorize, analyze, visualize, and personalize.

1. He knitted you together before you came into this world. Psalms 139:14-15 NIV

2. He already loved you before He created you. Jeremiah 1:5

3. He wrote your destiny in His book: There is a record about you! Psalms 139:16 AMP

4. He made you stand out. Galatians 1:15

5. He has already devised a plan for your life. Jeremiah 29:11 AMP

6. He knows our ways and directs our steps. Proverbs 16:9 EVS

7. No one can stop what He has in store for you. Lamentations 3:37

8. He knows and has seen all your life's struggles. Hebrews 4:13

9. He is aware of what you are going through. Proverbs 5:21

10. He will always be with you for the rest of your life. Isaiah 46:4

THE ABIDING CHALLENGE

WEEK TWO - DAY THREE

THE MASTER GARDENER DIRECTS AND UPHOLDS YOUR LIFE

KEY SCRIPTURE: Psalm 139:3-5 TLB

READING: Psalm 139:3-5; Daniel 4:35; Proverbs 19:21 AMP; Colossians 1:17

INTRODUCTION

“You chart the path ahead of me and tell me where to stop and rest. Every moment you know where I am. You know what I am going to say before I even say it. You both precede and follow me and place your Hand of blessing on my head.” Psalm 139:3-5 TLB

God’s providence refers to His wise and personal acts, whereby He creates and controls circumstances to direct history according to His predetermined plan, all for His glory and the benefit of His people. As Christians, we live in the flow of history and are moved by the circumstances He controls, for the Lord “does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” Daniel 4:35 NASB. Providence is normally defined in Christian theology as the unceasing activity of the Creator whereby, in overflowing bounty and goodwill, Psalm 145:9. He upholds His creatures in ordered existence (Acts 17:28; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3) and guides, governs all events, circumstances and free acts of men and directs everything to its appointed goal, for His own glory - Ephesians 1:9-12.

We have far less control than we want to admit and far more freedom than we ever imagined. In conclusion, let’s ponder over these three verses of scripture, considering God’s providence. Remember, the Gardener owns the vineyard, and He cares for every Branch in His vineyard. He is at work in you and upholds and directs your life.

“Many plans are in a man’s mind, but it is the Lord’s purpose for him that will stand (be carried out).” Proverbs 19:21 AMP

“A man’s heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.” Proverbs 16:9 NKJV

“For it is [not your strength, but it is] God who is effectively at work in you, both to will and to work [that is, strengthening, energizing, and creating in you the longing and the ability to fulfill your purpose] for His good pleasure.” Philippians 2:13 AMP

PERSONAL REFECTION

Meditate on Romans 8:28 and let the Lord speak to your heart. To meditate, you need to memorize, analyze, visualize, and personalize. Consider these three translations:

Amplified Bible

“And we know [with great confidence] that God [who is deeply concerned about us] causes all things to work together [as a plan] for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to His plan and purpose.”

EASY – Easy English Bible

“We know that God works to help those people who love Him. He uses everything that happens to them to bring something good. He does this for those people that He has chosen to serve Him.”

The Passion Translation

“So, we are convinced that every detail of our lives is continually woven together for good, for we are His lovers who have been called to fulfill His designed purpose.”

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THE ABIDING CHALLENGE

WEEK TWO - DAY FOUR

MASTER GARDENER IS AWARE OF EVERY DETAIL OF YOUR LIFE

KEY SCRIPTURE: Luke 12:6-7

READING: Hebrews 4:13; Psalm 37:23-25; Psalm 139:1-6

INTRODUCTION

“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” Luke 12:6-7 NIV

The Master Gardener is aware of every detail of your life. The scripture tells us that “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight” Hebrews 4:13 NIV and that God knows “when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.” Psalm 139:1-6 ESV. He directs the steps of the godly and delights in every detail of their lives (Psalm 37:23-25 AMP. Consider how remarkable it is that God would even number the hairs on our head, and He keeps our tears in a bottle.

Some may think God doesn’t care what happens to us. Often, it feels as if we have fallen through the cracks, that the universe is so huge and we’re so small, why should God worry about us at all? We think He’s too big to be interested in what happens to us, and we’re on our own, the Master Gardener of our lives. That is so far from the truth. If God were like us — limited, and able to concentrate on only a few things at a time — then it might be right; He probably wouldn’t care about us. After all, you and I can barely keep track of what’s happening in our own lives, let alone what’s happening to everyone else. But God isn’t like this! We are limited — but He is not. We can’t keep track of everything that’s happening — but He can. He is so great that He knows about even the smallest details of your life. The Bible says, “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account” Hebrews 4:13 NIV. The influential 20th-century Christian author, A.W. Tozer, put it this way: “God’s sovereign control is complete, not partial. It governs every aspect of nature, history, and personal life. All of life, down to the tying of shoelaces and the brushing of teeth, is directed by God.”

WHO MAKES THE PLANS?

“The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.”
Proverbs 16:1 ESV

“The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord [this is what really happens] establishes his steps.” Proverbs 16:9 ESV

“Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.”
Proverbs 19:21ESV

“A man’s steps are from the Lord; how then can man understand His way?” Proverbs 20:24
ESV

“The works of His hands are faithful and just; all His precepts are trustworthy.” Psalm
111:7 ESV

“Be my rock of refuge, to which I can always go; give the command to save me, for you
are my rock and my fortress.” Psalm 71:3 NIV

RESPOND

PERSONAL REFECTION

Meditate on the scriptures below and let the Lord speak to your heart.

God cares about every detail of your life.

Do you agree? Yes or No

He collects every tear in a bottle. Psalm 56:8

Do you agree? Yes or No

He numbers every hair on your head. Luke 12:7

Do you agree? Yes or No

He knows every hurt in your heart. [Psalm 34:18]

Do you agree? Yes or No

In conclusion, I love the thought that God — the Creator of the universe, who has the whole world to take care of, who gave His only Son and owes me nothing—still cares so much about me and the piddling worries of my daily life. That’s amazing! He is the Lover of my soul, the Nurturer of my spirit, and the Giver of bread from Heaven.

"You have searched me, Lord, and you know me...You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord". - Psalm 139:1-6

THE ABIDING CHALLENGE

WEEK TWO - DAY FIVE

THE MASTER GARDENER LOVES YOU UNCONDITIONALLY

KEY SCRIPTURE: 1 John 4:16

READING: John 15:9-10; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; 1 John 4:8

INTRODUCTION

“And so, we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.” 1 John 4:16 NIV

“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.” John 15:9-10 NKJV

What comes to mind when you hear the phrase “unconditional love”? Maybe unconditional love sounds like a wonderful, comforting thing. Or perhaps, when you hear those words together, some may doubt that such a thing truly exists.

Imperfect Examples of Love

If I had to guess, all of us could probably think of a time when love came with conditions. You thought a person would stay around forever, but then they left. A parent praised you only when you performed well in school, but became angry when you failed. Your best friend stopped hanging out with you when they started a new relationship. You opened up and told someone at your church your struggles, but then they judged you for it. Everyone’s story is different, but at one time or another, someone we loved or trusted has let us down. And often, we project that onto God and allow our painful experiences with people to shape our view of God’s love for us. Honestly, it’s difficult for many to believe that God’s love is unconditional and has no strings attached. If you can relate at all, here is the truth I want you to hear, that I need you to hear today: **God loves you unconditionally.**

GOD’S PERFECT LOVE

God does not have love, **HE IS LOVE!** God’s love is unwavering for you. Nothing you could do, say, or even think can keep you from the love of God. The Lord isn’t worried about you being perfect. God won’t leave you when you make a mistake or fail. He isn’t determining His love for you by how often you pray or read your Bible. God loves you as you are right now in this moment more than He ever has, and nothing will ever change His love. The Bible describes characteristics of love:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NIV.

- **God's love is like an ocean. You can see its beginning, but not its end.** — Pastor Rick Warren, author of “The Purpose-Driven
- **The shape of true love isn't a diamond. It's a cross.** — Alicia Bruxvoort
- **God loves each of us as if there were only one of us.** — Saint Augustine, a third-century Christian theologian whose writings have endured
- **Though our feelings come and go, God's love for us does not.** — C.S. Lewis
- **God loves us too much to indulge our every whim.** — Max Lucado
- **God carries your picture in His wallet.** — Tony Campolo
[Isaiah 49:16 NIV says, “I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.”]
- **God and love are synonymous. Love is not an attribute of God; it is God; whatever God is, love is.** — Oswald Chambers, a Scottish evangelist best known for his devotional “My Utmost for His Highest.”
- **“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”** 1 John 4:8 NIV

Write your thoughts about the quotes above.

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