

Garden to Garden - Part 5

Personal Devotional

Day 1: The Power of True Repentance

"Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. Joel 2:12-13

Regret is a powerful emotion that can weigh heavily on our hearts. It is a reminder of our imperfections and the mistakes we have made. However, regret alone is not enough. Our regret must lead to repentance and faith in Jesus. Judas Iscariot experienced deep regret after betraying Jesus (Matthew 27:3-5), but he failed to turn to Jesus for forgiveness. True repentance involves acknowledging our sins, seeking forgiveness, and making restitution where possible. But none of those actions will save us apart from trusting in the saving work of Jesus Christ. We must repent and run to Him, and not away from Him. When we turn to God with a repentant heart, we find forgiveness, healing, and a new beginning.

Reflection: Is there an area in your life where you feel regret? Will you repent and turn to Jesus today?



Prayer Focus: Pray that God will show you any area of your life that is causing regret. Pray also for the courage to repent and turn to Jesus.



Day 2: The Emptiness of Religion Without Christ

"See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority." **Colossians 2:8-10**

Religion, when practiced without a genuine relationship with Christ, is empty and powerless. Judas sought solace in religious leaders who could not offer him the hope and forgiveness he needed because they did not have hope and forgiveness themselves. Judas' story highlights the futility of seeking peace with God and the removal of guilt and shame apart from Christ. True hope and peace are found only at the feet of Jesus. Any attempt to find redemption apart from Christ will ultimately lead to emptiness and despair.

Reflection: Are you seeking peace with God through empty religious practices rather than a relationship with Christ? What steps will you take to deepen your relationship with Jesus today?

Prayer Focus: Pray that God would help you to see the foolishness of empty religion and the beauty of a relationship with Jesus.



Day 3: Choosing Life in the Face of Despair

"The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit." **Psalm 34:18**

Suicide is a tragic end that leaves behind immense pain and sorrow. As Pastor Joel reminded us "death is not our savior; Jesus is." The story of Peter's restoration (John 21:15–19) reminds us that there is always another choice, another way out. Jesus offers hope even in our darkest moments. When you feel despair, remember that Jesus is the source of life and light. He offers life in the face of death and light in the darkest of days.

Reflection: In moments of despair, where do you turn for hope and comfort? Is there someone in your life that needs a reminder of the life and light found in Jesus?

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Lord would lead your heart to seek and find Jesus in the darkest of times. Pray that He would lead you in the path of someone who needs to be reminded of the light and life that Jesus offers.



Day 4: The Danger of Hypocrisy and Self-Righteousness

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." **Matthew 23:27-28**

The actions of the religious leaders in the story of Judas reveal the hypocrisy and foolishness of a life without Christ. They were willing to betray an innocent man but refused to put the blood money back in the treasury because it was tainted (Matthew 27:6). The hypocrisy of the religious leaders serves as a warning. Self-righteousness and hypocrisy lead to spiritual blindness and separation from God. Let us guard against the foolishness of self-righteousness, and let us examine our hearts and actions to ensure they reflect the truth of Jesus.

Reflection: Are there areas in your life where you may be acting hypocritically or self-righteously? How can you align your actions with the truth and love of Christ today?

Prayer Focus: Pray the Lord will bring to mind any way you may be acting hypocritically or self-righteously. Pray for a heart of repentance and trust in Christ.



Day 5: Trusting the Potter's Sovereign Plan

"But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand." **Isaiah 64:8**

Despite the chaos and darkness, God, the Potter, is at work shaping our lives for His perfect purposes. The fulfilled prophecy in the story of Judas (Matthew 27:9-10) reminds us that God is in control, even when we cannot see it. Trusting in the Potter's plan, we can find hope and assurance that He will bring beauty and value from the "wet dirt" of our lives, transforming our pain and sorrow into something good and purposeful. When we trust in God's sovereign plan, we can rest in the knowledge that He is working all things together for His glory and our good.

Reflection: In what areas of your life do you struggle to trust that God is at work? What steps can you take today to demonstrate trust in His good plan?

Prayer Focus: Pray for God to give you a glimpse of the work He's doing in and around your life. Pray for patience as God, the Potter, does His good work.

