



THE GARDEN

9 WEEK BIBLE STUDY

embrace

PASTOR SHANNON MAROCCO

You made all the delicate, inner
parts of my body and knit me
together in my mother's womb.
Thank You for making me so
wonderfully complex! Your
workmanship is marvelous--how
well I know it.

PSALM 139:13-14 (TPT)



For we are God's masterpiece.
He has created us anew in Christ
Jesus, so we can do the good things
he planned for us long ago

EPHESIANS 2:10

The Bride & The Bouquet

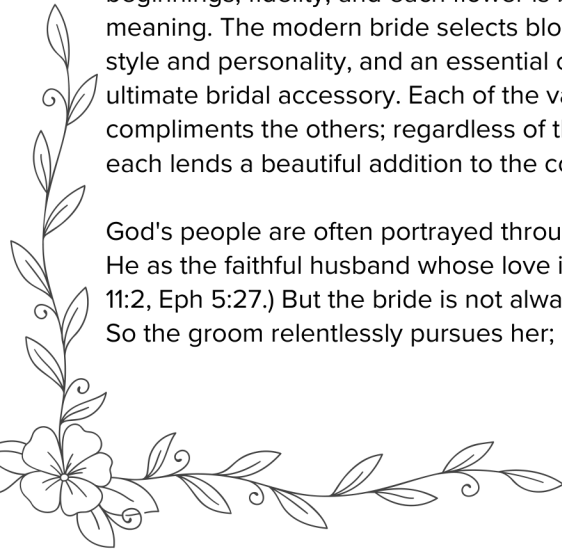
Big Idea

There are over 400,000 flowering plant species across the world, producing various types of blossoms in a vast range of colors, shades, shapes, sizes. It's almost incomprehensible to fathom that each of these flowers is unique in design, fragrance, and molecular structure. Perhaps even more difficult to imagine is a world without them. It would be bland, boring, lacking in color and charm. More perplexing still is the concept that the flowers in all of their complex variety and glorious splendor offer but a glimpse of the beauty of our Creator.

In the same way, we are uniquely crafted, hand-picked, intentionally planted, carefully cultivated, and lovingly tended. God did not make a single mistake when He created you. He made all the delicate, inner parts and made us wonderfully complex (Psalm 139:13-14). Just like every flower, He has clothed you uniquely with His imprint. His beauty is reflected in every facet of your being. As it says in Ephesians 2:10, you are His masterpiece.

In the hand of the Master Gardener preparing a bouquet, we, like individual flowers, are picked, gathered, arranged and secured together. A bride's bouquet on her wedding day is believed to signify new beginnings, fidelity, and each flower is believed to have a specific meaning. The modern bride selects blooms that reflect her personal style and personality, and an essential complement to her gown. It is the ultimate bridal accessory. Each of the varying flowers in a bouquet compliments the others; regardless of their shape, color, size or origin, each lends a beautiful addition to the composition of the whole.

God's people are often portrayed throughout the Bible as a bride, and He as the faithful husband whose love is strong and everlasting. (2 Cor 11:2, Eph 5:27.) But the bride is not always faithful and is easily led astray. So the groom relentlessly pursues her; He refuses to give up on her.



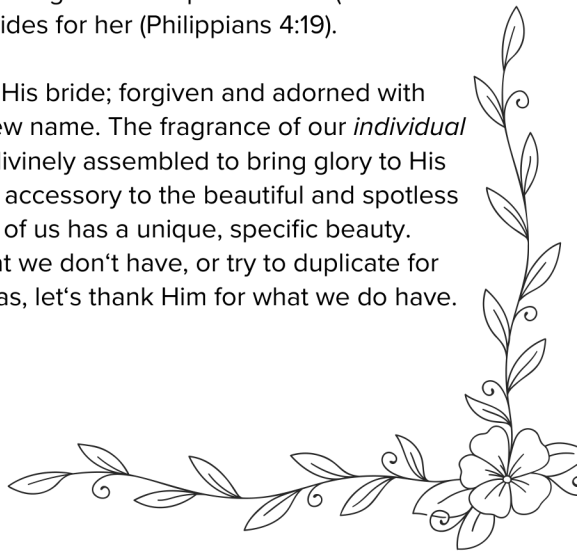
In the end, the groom takes on "robes of flesh," and comes to redeem His bride once and for all so that she can be restored unto Him at the wedding feast (Rev 19:7).

John the Baptist recognizes Jesus as the "bridegroom" and refers to himself as a friend of the groom. "The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete" (John 3:29). Paul explains the mystery of this metaphor in Ephesians 5:25-32 saying that "...Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."

The entire Bible is the love story of a King who creates a paradise for the bride who is the love of His life, only to be rejected by her. He bravely fights to win her back and leaves everything behind to rescue her from herself. He awaits the day when she will make herself ready and she will be restored to Him once for all, and will dwell in His Kingdom forevermore.

If we can grasp the depth of God's love for us, it will transform our lives. When we consider the depth of intimacy between a bride and groom, we glimpse this love more fully. Over and over, the Bible describes the way the bridegroom loves, nourishes and cherishes the bride. The bride is beloved by God (Romans 5:8) and radiantly beautiful (Ephesians 5:27). He knew her before He created her; He set her apart (Jeremiah 1:4-5). He does not leave her alone (Matthew 28:20), He defends and surrounds her (Isaiah 58:8), He strengthens and protects her (2 Thessalonians 3:3), and He provides for her (Philippians 4:19).

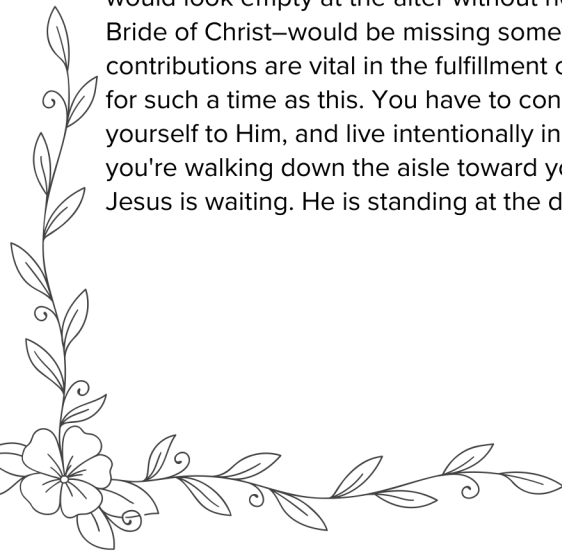
We the Church, *collectively*, are His bride; forgiven and adorned with white, redeemed and given a new name. The fragrance of our *individual* lives is like the bridal bouquet, divinely assembled to bring glory to His name, and serve as the ultimate accessory to the beautiful and spotless bride on her wedding day. Each of us has a unique, specific beauty. Rather than complain about what we don't have, or try to duplicate for ourselves what someone else has, let's thank Him for what we do have.



As individuals, we must make a choice to either compare or champion, criticize or comfort. Let's embrace our distinctive gifts and quirky variations. Let's allow the Master Gardener access to our lives, so that we can fulfill the purpose for which He created us. May our lives be a sweet-smelling fragrance to the Lord, and an attractive representation to unbelievers of the goodness of God our Savior. As we surrender our individual gifts to Him, and allow Him to use them for His glory, He'll reveal to us His Master Work, and we'll understand the part we play in His ultimate love story.

And now finally, "Those who are loved by God [that's you, friend], let His love continually pour from you to one another, because God is love. Everyone who loves is fathered by God and experiences an intimate knowledge of Him. The one who doesn't love has yet to know God, for God is love. The light of God's love shined within us when He sent His matchless Son into the world so that we might live through Him. This is love: He loved us long before we loved Him. It was His love, not ours. He proved it by sending His Son to be the pleasing sacrificial offering to take away our sins. Delightful loved ones, if He loved us with such a tremendous love, then "loving one another" should be our way of life! No one has ever gazed upon the fullness of God's splendor. But if we love one another, God makes His permanent home in us, and we make our permanent home in Him, and His love is brought to its full expression in us." 1 John 4:7-13 (TPT)

Take a moment to envision a bridal bouquet, adorned with the assortment of colors, shapes, sizes, scents. Just as the bride's arms would look empty at the alter without her bouquet, so the church—the Bride of Christ—would be missing something without you. Your contributions are vital in the fulfillment of God's design. He created you for such a time as this. You have to consciously decide to surrender yourself to Him, and live intentionally in His presence. Today, walk as if you're walking down the aisle toward your eagerly-awaiting bridegroom. Jesus is waiting. He is standing at the door and knocking.



Discussion

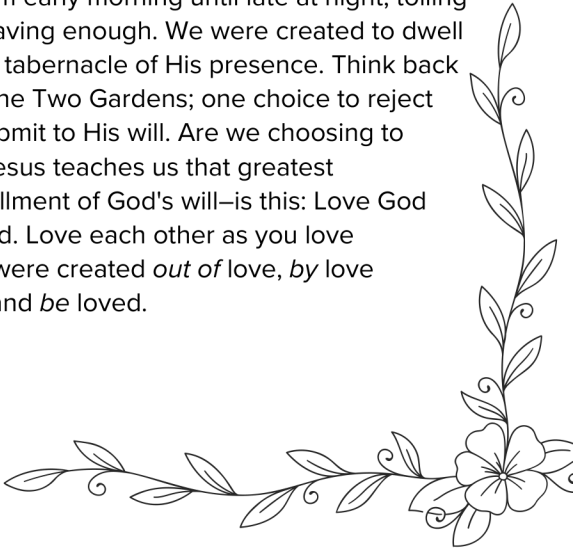
What makes you notably different and beautiful? Share three special things about yourself to the group. How do your individual qualities compliment the women in your group?

How can you better collaborate & celebrate with other women rather than falling into the comparison trap?

List three areas where you can activate the gifts God has given you to make a difference (in your home, your church, your community).

Takeaway

The final lesson we can take from the Tale of Two Gardens is the answer to mankind’s most burning question: why am I here? We weren't put here to work senselessly from early morning until late at night, toiling to make a living for fear of not having enough. We were created to dwell with the Master Gardener, in the tabernacle of His presence. Think back to the choices made in each of the Two Gardens; one choice to reject God's command, the other to submit to His will. Are we choosing to surrender our lives to His will? Jesus teaches us that greatest commandment—the ultimate fulfillment of God's will—is this: Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. Love each other as you love yourselves (Matt 22:34-40). We were created *out of love, by love* Himself, with a purpose *to love and be loved*.





My Beloved,

Of all My creations, none match the beauty and the care by which you were made. Crafted for an ordained purpose, divinely fashioned by My guiding hand, I call you, my Sweet, to be brave and courageous as you step into this garden of destiny I have created for you. Linger over the fragrant blossoms in blooming season, embrace the thorns as a much needed part of growth toward deeper beauty and maturity at the hand of this trusted Gardener.

In fallow season, when waiting seems unbearable,
I am there.

In seeding season, when your soil of comfort is
disturbed as a new thing is planted in you,
I am there.

In pruning season, when the dying and fruitless
parts of you are painfully removed,
I am there.

In harvest season, when your fruit brings you
inexpressible joy,
I am there.

You are My handiwork.

I call you Mine, and I am Yours.