

# The Christian as a Garden-Maker

by J.R. Miller

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*The true ideal of our life is to be like God, loving beauty and making beauty wherever we go.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:31, Psalm 27:4, Galatians 5:22

**Topics:** "Beauty in Creation", "Cultivating Kindness"

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## Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the beauty of creation as a reflection of God's love and encourages Christians to cultivate beauty in their own lives and surroundings. He illustrates that just as God has adorned the earth with flowers, we are called to create beauty in our hearts and communities, nurturing kindness and love in desolate places. Miller warns against neglecting our own spiritual gardens while focusing on others, urging us to first cultivate our character before reaching out to help those in need. He concludes that true Christ-like love is shown through acts of kindness, especially towards the lonely and neglected, and that our lives should be an oasis of beauty and blessing to others.

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## Transcript

God must love flowers--for he has strewn the earth with them! Everywhere they grow--not only in the garden and conservatory, where they are cultivated by human hands--but in the fields, in the meadows, in the forests, on the mountains, in deep canyons, along water-courses, in all out-of-the-way places, where no gardener cares for them. Flowers growing everywhere in their season, in such profusion--tell us that God loves beauty. They tell us also of his loving thought for us, his children, in so adorning the earth which he has made to be our home. He might have made it a desert, bleak and bare--without beauty to charm our eyes; but instead he has spread loveliness everywhere.

The true ideal of our life--is likeness to God. God loves beauty, and we should love beauty. One repeats a story which shows how one man at least, was affected by the beautiful in nature. One day in the early spring a Scotchman was walking along the side of a mountain, when he came to a hut in which lived an old man he had known a great many years. He saw the old man with his head bowed, and his hat in his hand. He came up and said to him, after a bit: "I did not speak to you, Sandy, because I thought you might be at your prayers." "Well, not exactly that," said the old man, "but I will tell you what I was doing. Every morning for forty years I have taken off my hat here to the beauty of the world."

Beauty wherever it is seen is a reflection of God's face, the shining of heavenly light down upon the earth. Wherever we come upon it--it should touch our hearts with a spirit of reverence. God is near; we are standing in the light of his countenance. The beauty we see everywhere in nature, is the beauty of the

Lord--and we should not only reverence it--but seek to get something of its charm into our own lives. Very fitting is the prayer, "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us."

If we are like God, we will not only love beauty and try to be beautiful in our lives and characters--but will seek also to make beauty wherever we go. We will not only love flowers--but we will endeavor to make flowers bloom wherever we can get them to grow. Everyone who has even a little patch of ground near enough to his hand, should make it as beautiful as possible. Some people do this. If they have only a foot or two of soil in their yard, on the crowded city street, they will find some way to adorn it. If they have no ground where they can get something green to grow, they put boxes of soil in their windows--and make them bits of garden.

Someone has said, that he who makes two blades of grass to grow where only one grew before--is a benefactor. Everyone who makes any spot on this earth a little more beautiful--is a co-worker with God. This is one way of blessing the world which may not often be commended or enjoined in sermons or books of devotion; nevertheless, it is a way of doing good in which everyone should have a part.

We say a man lacks taste who fails to keep in good order the patch of ground about his house, who sets out no shrubbery, no plants, no flowers, and does not keep his lawn neat and beautiful. But it is something worse than lack of taste-- it is lack of grace. All slovenliness, all untidiness, all lack of cleanliness--is sin. Though one has to live in poverty, it is one's duty to make even the barest room--as neat and attractive as possible.

But there are other flowers besides those which in nature are so lovely. Our hearts should be made garden spots--full of beauty and fragrance. We should plant in them--the seeds of lovely things. Our heart gardens need culture. The weeds must be kept down, the soil must be made soft and arable, the fruits of the Spirit must be cultivated. We should begin our garden-making in our own lives. If we cannot make them blossom into loveliness, there is little hope that we can change any other wilderness into a garden. Some people neglect their own heart-culture, in looking after that of their neighbors.

Too many are so busy in finding weeds and briars in other people's lives--that they have no time to keep the weeds and briars out of their own life gardens. Our own hearts and characters should have our first care, for they are our own responsibility, and no others.

Then while looking well to our own gardens we should make at least one little corner of this world somewhat lovelier, a sweeter, better place to live in.

If causing a blade of grass to grow where there was none before, is something worth while, something that redeems a life from uselessness, how much nobler a work it is, how much more worth while it is, to put a new touch of Christ-likeness into an immortal life, or to start a blessing in a community which will stay there and multiply itself in good forever!

Lovely as flowers are, wherever seen, even in greatest luxuriance, they never seem so beautiful as when they are found in desolate and dreary places. When the mountain-climber comes upon some dainty flower on a crag, surrounded by unmelting snows--he is affected almost to reverence. Humboldt tells of being deeply touched and impressed, by finding a beautiful flower on the edge of the crater of Mount Vesuvius. In a little hollow in the lava, ashes and dust had settled, and when rain had fallen--there was a cupful of rich soil ready. Then a bird or the wind had borne a seed and dropped it in this bit of garden on the crater's lip, and a sweet flower grew there. No wonder the great traveler was so moved by such a glimpse of

beauty--in such a place.

As we go through the world, we come now and then upon human lives which seem almost utterly dreary and desolate in their condition or in their circumstances. Sorrow or sin has stripped them bare. Yet there is scarcely one such life in which we may not, if we will, cause a flower to bloom. If only we will show thoughtful sympathy, or do some gentle kindness, we will plant a spray of beauty, amid the lava and ashes.

Some of us are ready always to do good and helpful things for those who already have abundance of comfort and happiness in their lives--but we are not so ready to reach out our hand to those whose lives are dreary and empty. We should remember that the most Christ-like love--is that which seeks to serve and help those, whom others are likely to neglect. The divinest garden work we can do, is to get flowers to bloom on the edge of craters. If you know a life that is dreary, that seems utterly desolate and alone--do what you can to get a bit of bloom planted in it.

These are the lives, too, that most need our gentle ministries. Thoughtful love discriminates, giving its best--to those who have greatest lack. If we know a person for whom no other will probably care, to whom no one is likely to give attention--that is the one to whom we should especially show kindness. When one seems alone and without friends, a stranger, or shy and reserved in any company--if we would show the most Christ-like love--that is the one we should turn to with special interest.

The other evening at a Commencement, there were a number of graduates, bright, happy girls. Most of them had many friends, and on this glad occasion, received many tokens of love--flowers and books and other presents. Among them, however, there was one girl from a distant part of the country, an orphan, without brother or sister or any relative. Being also of a quiet, retiring disposition, she had not made many friends during her stay in the school. One lady connected with the institution, however, knowing that this Southern girl would not likely receive many tokens of interest and affection, while her classmates would be well remembered, quietly arranged that a number of friends should send flowers and other graduation presents to her. So it came about, that on the happy occasion no girl in the class received more attention than she did, and thus she was made in a measure, to forget her loneliness. Thoughtful love continually finds opportunity for such kindness, which means far more than when attention is shown to those who have many friends.

There is a legend of Jesus, which says that as he walked away from his grave, on the morning of his resurrection, sweet flowers grew in the path behind him. The legend is true in a spiritual sense--wherever his footsteps have pressed the earth, all these nineteen centuries, flowers have sprung up--flowers of love, of kindness, of gentleness, of thoughtfulness. We represent Christ today, and if we fail to make little garden spots round about us where we live and where we work--we are not fulfilling our mission, nor obeying the teaching that we should be in the world--what he was in the world, repeating his life of love among men. It costs but a little to be a true blessing to others.

Selfishness does no garden-making, plants no flowers anywhere. But if we truly love Christ--we will have his love in our hearts. Then we shall live not to be ministered unto--but to minister, and living thus we shall be a blessing wherever we go.

Travelers in the desert know afar off when they are approaching a well of water. They know it by the trees that grow about it. So, wherever a true friend of Christ lives, there is an oasis--a little spot of beauty, a place of fragrance!

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