

Meeting God in the Garden

Liturgy for Groups

Introduction

The scriptural story reveals that the relationship between humanity and God begins in the Garden of Eden and concludes in a garden where the tree of life provides fruit and healing. In between these two gardens are numerous references and illustrations of God's people being gardeners, planting gardens, and meeting Jesus in a garden. In other words, there is something about being in a garden that draws us near to God. During the month of July, we will focus on meeting God in the Garden and discovering that all of life is spiritual—from what we eat, to how we use our bodies to create food. These things are meant to connect us to the Master Gardener, who invites us to worship with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. At its essence, being with God in the Garden is a way to experience personal spiritual renewal.

Centering Time - *Light a Candle and Read* (2-3 minutes)

- Read Isaiah 51:1-4 (NLT): *“Listen to me, all who hope for deliverance— all who seek the LORD! Consider the rock from which you were cut, the quarry from which you were mined. ² Yes, think about Abraham, your ancestor, and Sarah, who gave birth to your nation. Abraham was only one man when I called him. But when I blessed him, he became a great nation.” ³ The LORD will comfort Israel again and have compassion on her ruins. Her desert will blossom like Eden, her barren wilderness like the garden of the LORD. Joy and gladness will be found there. Songs of thanksgiving will fill the air.”*
- Read the verses again. This time, envision being in the “garden of the Lord” that Isaiah describes (joy, gladness, thankfulness).
- Ask God to comfort you and have compassion on you in the way He promised to Israel.

Corporate Prayer - *Pray Together* (1 minute)

- Lord, as the Master Gardener, in our time together, we ask you to cultivate joy, gladness, and thankfulness in our hearts. Amen.

Scripture References and Sermon Reflections (25 minutes)

During the sermon series, consider meeting in an actual garden as you reflect on the sermon and scripture passages. This could be in someone's backyard or a place like Holcomb Gardens on Butler's campus.

- Scripture:
 - Week 1: Genesis 1-2
 - Week 2: Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20, Luke 8:4-15
 - Week 3: Scripture: John 15
 - Week 4: Scripture: Matthew 13:44-46

- Reflections:
 - How does the garden reference from the scripture reading describe a life connected with God? What is your response to that description? What is God's invitation to you?
 - What needs to be "tilled, planted, watered, or weeded" in your life to experience God's invitation to you?

Spiritual Practices (10 minutes)

Spiritual disciplines can be understood as "garden tools" that help cultivate our souls. As a group, choose one of the [twelve classic spiritual disciplines](#) to try each week of the sermon series. Take time in your group gatherings to share how the discipline impacted your life with God that week. For more information about spiritual disciplines "as tools for tilling," click on [THIS](#) link. This link also provides ways children can engage in spiritual disciplines.

Prayer for One Another (10-15 minutes)

Closing Prayer (1 minute)

*Lord, you are my Master Gardener.
Water my being with your love and your grace
And cultivate patience within me when I expect rapid growth.
Send me rays of Son-light so that I may flourish
And produce much good fruit.
Prune away my desire for perfection
And shape me into the kind of good tree you want me to be.
May I be grateful for the unique gifts you have given me
and share them with those I meet today.*

Taken from Diane Amento Owens, Jesuit Prayer.org.