Garden Retreat with the Gardener

Part 2 — The Invitation to Commitment

God the Father is the Gardener, and Jesus is the Vine. Unless we are a branch in Him and serving Our Father's purposes we cannot be fruitful. The following guided retreat will help you be re-aligned in every area of life – to Him. (See John 15:1–5)

Are you ready to know more of God's love for you through Christ, and to surrender to the work of God in love?

Preparation in Spirit and in Truth

Surrender your will — we need to prepare ourselves by giving Him permission to do a new work in us.

> *'*Come Lord Jesus. Forgive me for battening down the hatches and not trusting you in every area of my life*.' Amen*

Jesus says in Revelation 3:19–20: *'Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.'* He is saying this to believers, which means you and I.

Plan to set aside a time each day — ideally for 4 weeks between Easter and Pentecost, or even before Christmas. Decide how long you can spend each day and prepare others in your life that you would like to do this. Maybe you will need to get up half an hour earlier. God will give you grace and love, and bless and provide for you if you do. If you are very busy simply ask God to make spaces but don't be surprised when He answers the prayer and be ready to respond.

Decide on a quiet space — have a Bible and a journal/notebook and pen/pencil prepared. Believe you will receive from God and honour His Word – and what the Holy Spirit reveals. Write the answers that come to you in the journal. Disciple – means discipline. In Christ is neither male nor female. Let us grow in grace simply to try this.

Be prepared to persevere — even if an exercise challenges you, and you are aware of pain, or anger with God, or others. It is better to let the Holy Spirit into darkness than let it niggle away in the subconscious.

> *'Indeed the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You.'* Psalm 139:12 (NKJV)

Remember to give thanks. ‘All things turn together for good for the sake of those who love the Lord’.

> *‘As I’ve spent time on the exercises, I’ve found a deeper awareness of what God can do in a retreat for me.’*
>
> Janet Waithaka

Enter into this as an act of love for God, love for yourself, and love for the world. Let God deal with any lack of love. You may find it easier to read the whole thing through at least once before you start committing to responding in any exercises.

Be prepared to open up to all the exercises over each week, though repeat 1 and 2 each day. Only through prayer and praise can we hear the Holy Spirit. (“*Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.”*Psalm 100:4 (NKJV)). But if God keeps you on any one of these ‘exercises’ – so be it. You may have more time on some days, less on others, so do what you have time for – in gentleness – not striving.

May God bless and refresh you and may your Light shine. You are a child of God.

Prayer and Meditation: Come Lord Jesus

7 Spiritual exercises to open your heart to the work of the Gardener

1. Make a prayer asking Jesus to lead you and guide you in this re-commitment to life in Him through the Holy Spirit. Write it down. Pray it each day.

2. Pray slowly and thoughtfully the prayer of St Paul for the Ephesians, Chapter 3:14–21.

3. Write three things that have changed in you in the last year through the love, word and Presence of Jesus – (if you can't remember anything ask the Holy Spirit to remind you over the next few days.) Praise and thank God for His redeeming love.

4. Read Philippians 4:13: 'I can do all things through the strength of Him who lives within me..' Ask the Holy Spirit EACH time you do this exercise, to tell or show you what 'strength' He gives you. Just one each day is enough for you to rejoice in and lean on.

5. Write down three things, events or people in your life (present or past) that you want to thank God for. You may find you make a new list every time you do this exercise. But thank Him for each thing. Allow Him to show you the gifts He has given through these things/people.

6. Write down three things/situations/events that in the 'human' you have found difficult if not impossible to bear.

God asks us to thank Him in (and for) all things. Thank Him every day till the end of the time you have allotted to do this in each of these situations above . (Again you may find grace to put new things down each time you do this exercise.)

Allow Him to bring healing, forgiveness and change to your understanding and response to these events. Don't worry about tears or anger as you thank God, just invite Jesus in to the situation. (Write down the situations I needed to ask Jesus in to bring me courage, or forgiveness or willingness to persevere – or to be willing to do forgive or do things God's way….).

Note: If you find something impossible to forgive initially – still praise God for bringing you through, and maybe you will find you become willing to be willing to forgive. If

you turn to Him in all things, that is sufficient for God to do a new work. He just wants to be the bearer of all your trials and- through Christ, your suffering.

'In God alone I put my trust.'

Come Lord Jesus who forgave those who crucified You. **Allow Him to open your mind to the gifts He has given you through the trial with these things/people.**

(Some of the events and people which were in this category in my life are now in the list in Exercise 5 because they led me to know more of Jesus and the love of God!! – but it was Jesus that brought about the change. I was simply obedient to thank Him. MC)

(Psalm 139:7–12 – 'Where can I go from Your Spirit....')

7. Bible Reading — 'The word of the Lord is true'

You may already be doing Bible readings. Fit the following in as you are able.

Start by reading Matthew 5:1–12 (the Beatitudes) **or your own readings**, and **ask the Holy Spirit to teach you how they relate to you and your walk with God.**

What disbelief do you need to let go of? How does He want to bless you with His love and Presence? What do you need to release into His Trust in the Father?

Read at least 2 psalms each day you do this exercise and **keep a note of what they tell you** about the love of God and His care for the needy, widow, poor, orphan and for faithful and obedient servants ..

And what do they tell you about the 'wicked, self-centred, prideful and God's treatment of them?

Now we come to understand why the psalmist says, 'A broken and a contrite heart God will not despise'..... (Psalm 51:17)

a) Is there anything in you that is crying out .. 'How long O Lord, how long?' — 'Come Lord Jesus'.

b) Does the Word convict you of any behaviour or thinking that you need to repent of before Jesus?

> *'Lord Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner.'*

Receive His love and healing, **and His love and forgiveness**. Give the Glory to God.

Thank God for the time spent with Him and His Word and ask the Holy Spirit to seal the work done; ask to take His Presence with you into the day, that you live in and for His love and Word. Amen.

The Last Three Days

On the LAST THREE DAYS make time to Praise God for His faithful love and Word. Listen in your heart and write down what you believe God is saying to you or asking of you at this stage of your life in Him? How is He asking you to let your Light Shine before men? He is your Light.

Glory to God for His Love, and for your perseverance.

Would you like to keep becoming more alive to the Mystery of your inner Life hidden in Christ, in God?

Have you shared what you discovered about yourself, God and the work of the Holy Spirit during the retreat? Would you like to?

Would you like to go further in discovering the mystery of His Love, releasing control to God and becoming His servant/Child/mediator in the world?

Lets also explore how we can live out Micah 6:8 — 'do justly, loving mercy and walk humbly with our God' — one day at a time.

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