

Not of our Choosing

THE TRUE TEST OF A GARDENER IS IN HOW HE OR SHE RESPONDS TO THE PASSING VAGARIES OF NATURE.



Here in the hinterland of the U.S., where meteorological conditions and indigenous fauna can be an immovable force; where one year the rains will leave the garden brimming, and their absence in the next will leave it parched, dry, and hard; where fruit blossoms may

be plentiful on and cherry trees,



the apple, pear but be blown off by strong winds before they

Sow your seed in the morning and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good.

(Ecclesiastes 11:6)

can be pollinated by the bees—here we learn how to plant without knowing what, if anything, will reach fruition.

Here the concept of “sharing” becomes a practical necessity as crops

are planted, in excess,

nibble away new growth wherever

that moles may devour underground flower

protect—such as peas, that grow on twisting,



knowing that rabbits and deer will

they are given the opportunity, and

bulbs and roots. Plantings difficult to

gripping vines—are immediately

set upon by our friends the rabbits as soon as they emerge from the soil.

Rabbits may, as well, help themselves to fast-growing, unprotected radishes. The season's planting may not survive at all.

Last year the cherry tree was loaded for bear. Every fragile blossom became a green seed-beginning of a red cherry, and my mouth was already watering over the pies they would become. But the cherries ripened sporadically, and by the time there were sufficient numbers to pick, the birds had already picked them over. So much for my pies. For just about any crop, temperatures and bugs and birds may steal the fruit before it can be harvested. Early spring temperatures can be deadly: Linda's potatoes, planted around Good Friday, were safe from frost and freezing temperatures so long as they were underground. But just after they emerged from the soil, seeking sunshine and warmth, a killing frost left them blackened. They eventually returned, but the harvest this year will surely be stunted.

One can either whine and whimper uncontrollably, frustrated by the raging unfairness of the natural world so steadfastly aligned against the simple act of growing one's own produce, or one can accept conditions as they are and find a happy, reasonably productive middle ground that affords something for all.

The Lord's Plan

There are no guarantees in the garden. Nor are there any in life.

Raise up a child according to the finest counsel, according to strong Biblical precepts; teach the child how to be discerning, how to run from that which is wrong and embrace that which is right; feed the child with the eternal truth of Scripture, and lead him or her to the saving grace of Christ Jesus—but place no bets on where or what the child will be in ten years.

Design your own life by sound principles, by tried and tested methods for success; live each day by the precepts of God's word; submit to the ministry and counsel of the Spirit—but still, except for your eternal salvation, you will have no guarantees for tomorrow. Instead of the gentle breeze of the Spirit, the strong and buf-

feting winds of Satan may be visited upon your life. Devouring pests of temptation and sin may come and damage whatever progress has been made toward holiness.

The fallen, natural life aside, God Himself may take us in directions heretofore unimagined. Sin is not the only detouring force; God's purposeful campaign for a life may, from a *human* perspective, seem to veer wildly off-course on a disturbingly regular basis. Man, at best, sees only up to the next curve, but our heavenly Father sees not only around the curve, but all the way to the end of the journey—and beyond.

The Lord's plan for an individual in His family can, at times, seem ill-defined, frustrating, capricious, or downright odd.

*If thou but suffer God to guide thee,
And hope in Him through all thy ways,
He'll give thee strength, whate'er betide thee,
And bear thee through the evil days;
Who trusts in God's unchanging love
Builds on the rock that nought can move.*

*What can these anxious cares avail thee,
These never-ceasing moans and sighs?
What can it help if thou bewail thee
O'er each dark moment as it flies?
Our cross and trials do but press
The heavier for our bitterness.*

*Only be still, and wait His leisure
In cheerful hope, with heart content
To take whate'er thy Father's pleasure
And all-discerning love hath sent;
Nor doubt our inmost wants are known
To Him who chose us for His own.*

*Sing, pray, and keep His ways unswerving;
So do thine own part faithfully,
And trust His word,—though undeserving,
Thou yet shalt find it true for thee;
God never yet forsook at need
The soul that trusted Him indeed.*

(George C. Neumark)

That is why our relationship with Him is termed one of faith; we trust that He—and He alone—knows what He is doing.

Not Our Expectations

The true test of a Christian is in how he or

she responds to the playing out of God's will in their life.

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

(James 4:13-14)

When things don't go our way, when our best-laid plans crumble to dust before our very eyes, when that carefully nurtured plant is lost before its fruition—when what lies around the next curve is not just surprising but downright unpleasant, what is our response?

Actually, our "response" should begin *before* the curve.

Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."

(James 4:15)

Even as we are tilling the soil and planting the seeds for this year's garden, we know that the harvest will be not of our choosing. There are too many variables: temperature, rain (or lack thereof), wind, condition of the soil, deer, rabbits, mice, moles, birds... Planning, hard work, fencing, weeding and watering are all necessary and, to a point, profitable. But there is still a lot of faith involved in the autumn harvest.

And if the harvest is poor, it doesn't necessarily mean we are bad gardeners.

God's grace is based on *His* personality—not ours. His mercy, His wisdom and judgment, are based on *His* purity and righteousness—not our behavior. And our tomorrow will be based on His plan, not on our expectations.

Do we then despair, crying, "Why!?" Do we then throw up our hands, exclaiming, "What's the point!?" Do we shake our fist in God's face, demanding, "Do it my way!?"

No, we just keep planting. 