



CULTIVATING THE GARDEN AS *GOD INTENDED*

It wasn't the spilled milk, the potty-training accident or even the wrangling of three littles into snowsuits that undid me. It was the subtle belief that if I could manage things a little more efficiently — if they could be quieter so I could read, sleep longer so I could finish my prayer and interrupt me less so I could complete my workout — then things would feel more in control. Then I would be more calm, more patient, more prayerful and more at peace.

Somewhere along the way, I started to believe that these interruptions — precious little souls, mind you, souls I've been entrusted with — were, in some way, denying me fullness of autonomy. The funny thing is, in a sense, that is, of course, true. But what the enemy loves to do is take a small truth and twist it, distort it. So, in that truth, the lie that I'm missing out, being denied a better portion, started to take root.

In many ways, I was trying

to live my life like I had before I had children, squeezing them into it, rather than surrendering to this season, rather than being at peace with unfinished to-do lists, interrupted plans and dreams and goals deferred.

I didn't even realize the idol of self-sufficiency was occupying my heart until my husband gave me a loving, but challenging, word on my attitude — on my scorekeeping and negativity,



and the way it impacted our family. As he spoke, I stayed uncharacteristically quiet, not because he was being unkind, but because I knew, deep in my heart, that everything he was saying was true.

For a long time, I'd been contemplating the realization that each of us, but in a unique way, mothers, have been entrusted with the power to cultivate the gardens of our homes, to shape the climate of our homes and the

dispositions of our family members, by our own virtue — or lack thereof.

More than once, I found myself lingering over the words of *Prov 31:25-28*, “Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her,” and knew that I was falling short of the model of goodness to which God was calling me. In part, I think, because I resented how much influence I'd been given.

As I sat with my husband's words, and asked the Lord to reveal what idol I had been worshipping, I opened to *Gen 1* and began praying with the very first words of Scripture. In the beginning, God entrusts humanity with the task of cultivating, of preparing and developing, the world around them. Not to control it, not to perfect it — for it is already good — but to tend to it, patiently but attentively.

They say mindset changes everything. I wondered what would happen if, for a week, and then perhaps all of Lent, instead of being overwhelmed by my calling, I surrendered to it.

What would happen if I saw the interruptions, these little crosses, as joys set before me (*Heb 12:2*), something I was being offered instead of denied? What would happen if I simply chose to stop complaining, asking the Lord to set a guard over my lips (*Ps 141:3*)? Would my actions, my heart, my family be impacted

FOOD FOR THOUGHT OR JOURNALING:

- What idols might be shaping your heart? Are there areas where you rely more on your own efficiency, control or self-sufficiency than on God?
- Where is God calling you to cultivate, rather than control?
- How do you respond to the little crosses in your day?

by these two simple choices? Would the garden of our home bear more fruit?

In just one week, my husband, unaware that I had decided to embark on this small mission to not complain, said to me, “Maybe what I said last week wasn't fair. Maybe it was just a hard week. Or maybe it's because you've gotten outside every day this week. But your attitude has been so positive lately.”

I smiled. No doubt the fresh air helps. But truly, it was his words that opened up my heart, and listening to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, to act on that word.

We're still in Lent, but I'm eager to see the fruit that is born, not just come Easter Sunday, but in the days and weeks beyond. No doubt I'll stumble. No doubt I'll need to

return to these words again and recommit myself to this holy work.

Early motherhood (which, honestly, I'm still very much in) is teaching me, at least to some extent, to let go of the lie that my worth is found in what I can produce, in how much I can accomplish in a day.

Our holiest work, the work God asks of us, is often hidden, mundane and small. There's no paper trail, no completed checklist, no applause or “like” or “A+” circled neatly in red, to give us a rush of approval and sense of victory. And sometimes we look a heck of a lot messier than when the day began.

But here, the sacred is born again and again. Here we meet the Sculptor's knife and are shaped more perfectly into His image. ■

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