

## GOD, THE LANDSCAPE GARDENER

### JAMES 1 v 21

**So get rid of every filthy habit and all wicked conduct. Submit to God and accept the word that he plants in your hearts, which is able to save you.**

Perhaps you are a keen gardener. You love to spend many hours working in the garden at your home. I have to confess I'm not much of a gardener. I was more at home working in a field than working in a garden. I have known a few landscape gardeners. I am fascinated by their job. I came across this job description of landscape gardeners; **"Landscape gardeners are the creative and practical workhorses who create functional, beautiful and relaxing gardens for all kinds of clients, from local councils and universities to private companies and individual customers. Using their talent for design and passion for practical work, landscape gardeners are responsible for designing, crafting, regenerating and maintaining outside spaces"**. Landscape gardeners meet their clients to discuss their wants for a project. They produce sketches and designs. After this is agreed they hire equipment and materials such as wood chippings, pebbles, cement and soil. Landscape gardeners are not scared of getting their hands dirty. They are involved planting trees, bushes, flowers, shrubs and all kinds of other greenery. They are also responsible for treating lawns and soil with nourishing chemicals.

James introduces us to a landscape gardener; James 1 v 21. Eugene Peterson in The Message paraphrases the verse; **"So throw all spoiled virtue and cancerous evil in the garbage. In simple humility, let our gardener, God, landscape you with the Word, making a salvation-garden of your life"**. James is telling us that God is like a landscape gardener, and we are like a garden. We are familiar with an over-grown garden which is one that has been neglected for a long time. The grass is long, the plants are overgrown, the bushes and shrubs have become thick and the whole garden needs a face lift.

**Firstly, there is something we need to remove.** Recovering an overgrown garden requires the removal of lots of weeds and all kinds of waste. The first step is to remove any rogue plants or dead bushes that may have appeared or have underperformed. Some edging needs to be done to identify areas that need most attention. All the old roots need to be dug out to prevent re-sprouting. All the waste in the garden has to be removed.

James tells us that the garden of our lives is overgrown. There is a lot of waste that needs to be removed; v 21a. James is very blunt. He doesn't mince his words. He calls sin 'moral filth'. It could also be called 'spoiled virtue' and 'cancerous evil'. The modern church glosses over sin. The word 'sin' is rarely used in some Christian circles. James tells us what it really is. We associate moral filth with some very bad sins that nasty people in society commit. We are appalled when we hear about them. But surely 'moral filth' doesn't apply to good Christians like us. James was writing to Christians. What he says does apply to us. If we look closely at the garden of our lives we may find selfish attitudes, proud thoughts and wrongful actions. Later in his letter James lists some examples of the moral filth that appears in the lives of Christians; an

unwillingness to listen, sins of the tongue and unrighteous, unjustified anger. James doesn't pass over these things as if they were of little importance. He calls them 'moral filth'. Charles Wesley has these lines in one of his hymns; **"Cleanse me from every sinful thought, From all the filth of self and pride"**. We need to pray these words over and over again so that we can have a clean out; a time to get rid of all the accumulated rubbish in our lives.

James also speaks of 'the evil that is so prevalent'. What he is saying is that we should get rid of every trace of sin that remains and that includes everything in our lives that shows evidence of the old nature. James is concerned with the depth of sin; that the old nature remains, hidden deep in our personalities. Unless we allow God, the landscape gardener, to deal with our old rotten nature the garden of our lives will be more overgrown.

**Secondly, there is something we need to receive.** Once the waste in an overgrown garden has been completely removed, the landscape gardener is ready to plant new shrubs and bushes, construct rockeries, build fences, erect gazebos and position patio slabs. Within a short time, the garden is unrecognisable. It is pleasant to view and shows evidence of creative work.

James tells us what we need if the garden of our lives is to look attractive; v 21b. The Greek word James uses for 'planted' is 'emphytos'. It refers to something that has become implanted. What James is suggesting by describing 'the word' in this way is that Christians must not think they are done with the word of God after it has saved them. The 'word' becomes a permanent, inseparable part of Christians, a commanding and guiding presence within them. The command to receive the implanted word is not a command to be converted, but to accept its precepts as binding and to seek to live by them. Douglas Moo wrote; **"Christians who have truly been 'born again' demonstrate that the Word has transformed them by their humble acceptance of that Word as their authority and guide for life"**.

What state is the garden of your life in? It may be badly overgrown. You need God, the landscape gardener, to get to work in your life. He has his work cut out. God wants to make a salvation-garden of your life.