

How Does Your Garden Grow?

*A
Gardener's
Hands*

Proverbs 31:30-31

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**30 Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting;
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.**

**31 Honor her for all that her hands have done,
and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.**

“A Letter to My Mama” Vince Gill

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sd8r7M9GXac>

HANDS

The young man had just returned home from his junior year in college. He had been working so very hard to keep his grades up as prepared for medical school. It hadn't been easy, but truly wanted his dad to be proud of him and did not want to let him down.

His dad joined him at the kitchen table over morning coffee one morning. The young man saw the wrinkles in his dad's face and the skin that had been dried from spending way too many hours in the sun. His dad lifted his coffee cup to his lips and took a swallow. The young man became fascinated when he saw his dad's hands, nimble but so very strong, scarred and tanned, calloused fingers and palms. Why had he not noticed this before?

"What happened to your hands, dad?" the young man blurted out as young men are prone to do, tongue wagging before the brain is engaged. There was no immediate reaction from the father, but then his eyes met the eyes of his son, and with a quirky smile he answered, "Son, let's take a little ride."

He followed his dad out to the rusted, beat up pickup truck and they drove down the road away from the farm and into the nearby town. He was surprised when they pulled into the driveway of the young man's grandmother. Together, they

got out of the truck and walked towards the house. Just beyond the front gate was a most extraordinary garden of both flowers and vegetables, all healthy and cared for with a matching sweet aroma. They turned to climb the steps to the front door but stopped short when they saw the young man's grandmother on her knees tending to a rose bush

The young man thought that this was unseemly. After all, she was almost 80 years old. She noticed them and stopped her work. The young man's dad helped her to her feet and together they all walked up the stairs to the porch where each took a seat.

The elderly woman offered them some cold, sweet tea that she had in a pitcher on a small table and they gladly accepted. She poured them each a glass and then sat back down.

"Now what brings you into town to visit this old woman," his grandmother asked. His dad paused, and with that same quirky smile that he had had at the breakfast table he replied. "The boy wants to know what's wrong with my hands. That alone seemed like a good enough reason to come visit."

Surprised that he had never noticed it before, the young man looked at his grandmother's hands. The fingers were so thin and bony, but calloused. He could see the blood vessels running under the skin, skin that was tanned like his dad's, but with a few more age spots. His dad noticed him staring and shook his head. "Is there a problem, son?"

"Your hands, her hands, they are so calloused and boney. When did that happen? Why didn't I notice?"

The father took his mother's hands into his own and replied, "Son, these hands have planted and nurtured seeds all of her life, and all of that takes its toll on a body. With these hands, your grandmother planted that oak tree out yonder when she was only six. With these hands she raised six children, including me. These hands held your mother when she passed from cancer when you were only five. These hands held you when I could not. These hands stood in the gap when I was overwhelmed. These hands have grown vegetables to feed the hungry and flowers for the residents at the local nursing home. These hands fed and clothed me growing up. These hands wiped my fevered brow when I was sick, held me close when your mother died, prayed for me when I failed and praised God for me when I found my way back to Him. These hands were there to help raise you in the absence of your mother. These hands are beyond beautiful. Every wrinkle, every scratch, every patch of aging skin, every callous is a

reminder to me of the sacrifices and the love that this woman has shown towards me. It is only through the grace of God that my hands are beginning to look much as hers.”

The young man stared down at his own hands, slick and smooth, and suddenly felt shame at this lack of understanding. This woman of God had given so very much of herself for the sake of her family and her community. His father had followed in her footsteps. He suddenly realized that his hands were pristine because his father’s hands and his grandmother’s hands weren’t.”

He hadn’t been to church in a while. He had found himself too busy. But suddenly memories of his grandmother taking him church and the messages he had heard came drifting into his mind. “I am the vine, you are the branches.” “Jesus paid it all.” “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” “Wash me and I will be whiter than snow.”

His hands were pristine because someone else had done the work, willingly paid the price, dedicated themselves to lifting him and bringing him opportunity. Lesson learned. Now it was time to work on his own soul and start using his own hands to accomplish God’s will in his community.

My mother, Everree Moss Wellborn, passed away on July 7, 1988. She was 67 years of age. Mom, my sister and I, had lost dad in 78. Both mom and dad fought and lost their battles to lung cancer. Our grandparents and our great-grandparents had already long passed as well. So, when our mother passed, something greater seemed to have died as well. It was like our tether to previous generations had been severed. I, for one, was too young and ignorant to truly understand what that meant. My sister, who is three years younger than me, had a better grasp on the reality of that situation. Probably because she had been so involved in caring for my mother. Mom and I weren't close and I wasn't very involved in her care. I was young, stupid and self-involved. I had my own family to care for and, to my shame, I didn't work hard enough to resolve the differences between mother and myself. It is a guilt I still carry and I really struggle to leave it at the foot of the cross.

My mother loved to work in the yard. Both she and my dad had a green thumb. We always had honeysuckle and roses growing up. We had an orchard at our farm in East Texas as well. But it took a lot of hard work. Hard work that I did not appreciate at the time but have since grown to appreciate. It is through the gardening and orchard care that I learned about the physical needs of nurturing.

I fear for our younger generations today. Fear that they, for the most part, do not appreciate the soil that God has made us caretakers of. I grew up with the scent of freshly prepared soil at both the farm and our home in Fort Worth. I grew to love that scent. I appreciate running my fingers through rich, textured soil, ready for planting. Kids today seldom understand how soil can smell fresh and clean, just like the scent of freshness that comes just before a rain.

On this Mother's day, I think about my mother's hands, strong, firm, scarred and so very symbolic of the hard life that she had and how much she had sacrificed for her family. While many gardens are literal, the greatest gardens on this planet are the gardens of a mother's nurturing of her family.

We live in a different world today. According to the Census data of 2019, there are 15.76 million children in the US living with a single mom. Over 11% of the population are single mothers, mothers struggling to raise their children in a single parent household. Those mothers are just as engaged in nurturing their children as mothers in two-parent households and almost 25% of those mothers are trying to do so with an income that is well below the poverty level. Covid has made those numbers go even farther in the wrong direction. There is not an official count at this time, but so many of those mothers had to leave their jobs to

take care of their children throughout this crises, because there were no options for daycare.

But that is what mothers do. No wonder their hands look so very tired and frail. They are holding onto hope by their fingernails just trying to put food on the table.

My mother's mother passed away when she was eleven and she was forced to take on the wifely duties around the house overrun with boys. In some ways it made her hard. When nurturing comes with such high sacrifice, it is bound to make you hard. When times get tough, you can count on mothers to step up their game. It is who they are.

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The truth that we find in this passage has not changed since the day it was written. How often have we heard a new mother tell her own mother, “I am so sorry. I never understood until now?”

And gentlemen, no matter how gentle, gracious, and nurturing you are, you will never understand the significance or the struggles of motherhood. If your mother is still with you, you should be praising her name constantly. If you and your wife have children, lift that woman with every ounce of your being and never, ever take her for granted.

There is an old Jewish proverb that states:

“God could not be everywhere and therefore he made mothers.”

In reality, the love that God has for us can be seen exemplified in a mother’s love for her children, that willingness to sacrifice everything to provide a nurturing environment for her children. God sacrificed His son so that we could have that same nurturing relationship with Him. And He did it without asking us if it was alright. That is love that knows no bounds.

I understand that Mother's Day is a commercialized holiday, that it is a profit center for many companies. But that doesn't make the celebration a bad thing. If anything, it focusses our attention on something we often have a tendency to forget. It's not about the cards, or the flowers, or the candy, or breakfast in bed, or the jewelry; although those things are appreciated. What mother's really want is being acknowledge every day for their continued sacrifice.

They do not make that sacrifice for the praise it will bring, but because it is built into their nature. It's just nice to know that someone notices and cares enough to acknowledge it. Is it so hard to thank our mother's and our wives? Is it so difficult for us to concede that sometimes, more often than we care to admit, we take them for granted?

The father took his mothers's hands into his own and replied, "Son, these hands have planted and nurtured seeds all of her life, and all of that takes its toll on a body. With these hands, your grandmother planted that oak tree out yonder when she was only six. With these hands she raised six children, including me. These hands held your mother when she passed from cancer when you were only five. These hands held you when I could not. These hands stood in the gap when I was overwhelmed. These hands have grown vegetables to feed the hungry and flowers for the residents at the local nursing home. These hands fed and

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AMEN

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