

# How Does Your Garden Grow?

*When  
Our Gardens  
Fail*

Habakkuk 3:17-18

**70075**



*Image by Janet Serhan*

**Habakkuk 3:17-18**

**17 Though the fig tree does not bud  
and there are no grapes on the vines,  
though the olive crop fails  
and the fields produce no food,  
though there are no sheep in the pen  
and no cattle in the stalls,**

**18 yet I will rejoice in the Lord,  
I will be joyful in God my Savior.**

**Special Music: "Habakkuk's Song" Dinesh Stephen**

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSEZAJFMe10>**

## A GARDEN FAILS

After having been in her new home for several years, Amanda decided that it was time to embrace one of her long-time dreams. She decided to start a vegetable garden in her back yard. Now, Amanda did not consider herself uneducated or undedicated to her dream, but she had not grown any vegetables since helping her dad with his garden when she was still very young. She remembered her dad taking a hoe and making long rows in the dirt. She had watched as he planted different kinds of seeds and then marked where he had planted them. Then, he watered them generously. That was when her job began. All summer long, she spent time in the garden pulling weeds, removing stones, and keeping everything watered, all under the watchful eye of her father. She also got to help with the harvest of carrots, peas, cucumbers, potatoes, beans, and a few things that she wasn't quite sure she knew the names of.

She took what she had learned from her dad to heart, but rather than doing just as her father had done, and not trusting her own memory, she searched the internet for clues about starting her own garden. She read about raised beds, boxed beds, open beds, vegetables that grew well in her area, fertilizer, tools, and supplies.

When she had finally assembled all the things scattered around her, she filled her garden with rich soil and planted the recommended seeds. Amanda then waited

patiently for her garden to come to fruition. She quickly realized the first point in her folly. There was no little Amanda to come behind her and remove the weeds or pick out the stones. So, she spent a great deal of time dealing with that aspect of her garden. But, truth be told, she just didn't seem to have the green thumb that her father did. She overwatered the carrots and allowed the beans to bake in the sun. When the hail came, she didn't protect the garden in any way. She soon realized that she had planted some of the seeds too early and some of them too late.

So, when fall rolled around, there really wasn't much to harvest. In spite of the time, energy, and money that she had spent, you might say that her garden project was a failure. She looked at the tomatoes, rotten on the vine. The cucumbers that looked more like peppers. Many of the carrots and potatoes had been dug up by local critters. There just really wasn't much to show for all of her hard work.

She called her dad and told him her tale of failure and when she had finished, she heard him say, "But what did you learn?"

That was not what Amanda had expected to hear. She expected her dad to tell her how badly she had messed up, that she was an incompetent gardener. That

she had no business trying to grow vegetables because she just did not have a talent for it.

Instead, he simply asked, “But what did you learn?”

She thought for a moment before replying. “I learned that different vegetables have different needs. That some need to be planted early, but not all of them. I learned how important it was to keep the garden watered and to keep the critters away. I learned that having sunshine is important, but too much sun can be deadly. I learned that harvest times may vary, and different vegetables become ripe at different times. I learned how important it was for the picking of weeds and the removal of stones.”

He dad replied back, “Those are all good lessons, but how do those lessons serve you?”

Amanda gave another long pause. She had already decided to throw in the towel on her garden since she had failed so miserably. And then she saw the real lesson and said to her father, “That next time, I can do better. I will be a better gardener because I failed.”

“I am proud of you, Amanda,” her father said. “I look forward to tasting the vegetable that you will grow next year.”

I visited East Texas a few years back. I drove by that farm that I often talk about. It is out on an old country road, several miles from Cumby, Texas, which is near Sulphur Springs. The property originally belonged to my Grandpa Moss and it is where my mother grew up. Over the years the property had been sold. But, at some point in their lives, my parents had decided to buy it back with the hope of building it up and making it into the dream that they wanted.

On our first trip to the property as a family, my dad picked out the place where he wanted to put a cabin. The house that my mother had grown up in was on the property in another area, but it had long since become a non-viable structure. The nearby barn was also falling apart. But dad knew exactly where he wanted the new cabin to go, and it was that summer that I learned the business end of an idiot stick. The grass was twice as tall as me. There were bushes and trees that had to come down, including bodark trees (nicknamed ironwood for a reason). I learned how to use an axe and a hoe.

Dad had the cabin brought in and placed on the area that I had helped clear. When we first started out, the dirt road did not hold up well in storms, so dad paid to have it oiled. He learned to use a divining rod and had a well drilled at the place the rod told him was best. It wasn't the best well and the water was full of minerals. But it was water. Dad paid to have electricity brought in. Poles had to

be placed and lines run. He built an outhouse for our 'convenience'. Then, he and I built a pole barn. I learned to drive a tractor. I helped plant an orchard. Dad also got into bee keeping. There was a lot going on, on our little farm.

But dad passed away when I was a senior in college. I left school and returned to Fort Worth to spend time with him before he passed. But dad's dream was not my dream and so the farm began to deteriorate. When my mother passed, my sister and I sold the property. We simply did not understand all the tax implications and leasing options that my dad had known. I miss that property that really only lives on in my sister's and my memories, although we have people in our lives that pop up once in a while and say things like, "Hey, do you remember that time when we visited the farm, and your dad took us fishing at the pond and your mom cooked us a meal on that wood cook stove?"

So yes, I drove by the old farm a few years ago, and all of that work that we had done was history. I could not see the cabin for all the grass and trees grown up around it. It was like it had never been there. The farm had failed from lack of care, but I'm not sure anyone was really to blame. Still, if someone had the patience and perseverance of my dad, it could most certainly make a comeback.

Today, we celebrate Pentecost, the birth of the church. A time when the disciples gathered in Jerusalem and the Holy Spirit came to them and enabled them to reach out to people from all nations in their own languages.

Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus promised the apostles that this would happen.

We read in **Acts 1:4-5**

**On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command:**

**“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days, you will be baptized with Holy Spirit.”**

This is Jesus’ way of telling them that the garden has been planted and they were about to have the ability to reap the harvest. And this promise is fulfilled in:

**Acts 2:1-4**

- 1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.**
- 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.**
- 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.**
- 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them.**

How does all this fit into our passage today from Habakkuk? Let's get a little background on Habakkuk. Habakkuk lived during the reign of Jehoiakim. The kingdom of Israel had already been split into two kingdoms, the northern kingdom known as Israel which later would be known as Samaria and the southern kingdom known as Judah or Judea. Jehoiakim was the son of Josiah, who was the last significant king of Judah. The northern kingdom had already been conquered by the Syrians. If you remember us talking about Josiah, you will recall that it was during his reign that the Book of Law (probably the book of Deuteronomy) was found during restoration of the Temple. It had been lost for a very long time. But Josiah was a good king and brought the people of Judah back to the Lord, destroying the foreign gods, their temples, and their priests.

At the same time, Egypt had joined forces with Syria in order to stop the Babylonian expansion, but in order to get their armies up to Syria, they had to travel through Judah. Josiah staunchly refused to let them come through and was killed in one of the battles with the Egyptians

Josiah had two sons, Johanan and Eliakim. Johanan came to the throne upon Josiah's death, but Pharaoh Necho wanted to make an example of him and also have someone more friendly to his cause on the throne. So, when Egypt conquered Judah about three months later, Johanan was sent back to Egypt and Pharaoh installed Eliakim on the throne and changed his name to Jehoiakim.



**Jehoiakim was an evil king and treated his people with disdain. Slave labor and overburdening taxes were common. The people have been driven by Jehoiakim to worship false prophets. The worship of Jehovah had diminished almost to obscurity. It was during this time that Habakkuk lived.**

**Habakkuk is a minor prophet. Minor prophets are not inconsequential prophets, but we tend to not hear about them as much. Habakkuk is different from most prophets in that he isn't running around Judah crying out for repentance or trying to move them in a given direction. The book of Habakkuk is more about his personal reflection during these harsh times and God's response to those reflections.**

**When Habakkuk is writing our scripture for today, he is living in this despondent, depressing land, which had once been a gemstone in the region under the protection and providence of Jehovah. He is feeling the pain and angst of a land once devoted to God, now trampled and in turmoil. He is trying to understand God's reasoning and where it will all lead. He is not very happy with God's answer, because God tells Habakkuk that it is only going to get worse before it gets better. The Babylonians are coming, and the might of the combined armies of Syria and Egypt will be unable to prevent the Babylonian incursion. Habakkuk readily admits that life under Babylonian rule will be far worse than life under Egyptian and Syrian rule.**

**It is in this time of despair and hardship, Habakkuk writes to us:**

**Habakkuk 3:17-18**

**17 Though the fig tree does not bud  
and there are no grapes on the vines,  
though the olive crop fails  
and the fields produce no food,  
though there are no sheep in the pen  
and no cattle in the stalls,  
18 yet I will rejoice in the Lord,  
I will be joyful in God my Savior.**

**In other words, the garden is failing. Not only that, it will be destroyed, and life is going to be harder than it already is. The world as they know it is coming to an end. Nothing will be growing in this garden. There will be no sustenance. There will be tremendous hardship and no reward for their efforts. There will be even greater suffering.**

**But this story, is not about Habakkuk trying to bring God's children back into the fold or change God's mind. It is about trying to comprehend how all this suffering could serve any purpose and Habakkuk admits that he doesn't**

understand God's reasoning. Just that he and the people around him are swimming in a pool filled with hopelessness.

And then, out of that murky, terrifying water, Habakkuk give us a strange response. He isn't screaming at God in anger or frustration, in spite of the fact that he probably has some of those feeling stirring around inside of him. No. What he says is:

**“yet I will rejoice in the Lord,**

**I will be joyful in God my Savior.”**

This garden is failing and I don't think it will ever come back to its former glory but:

**“yet I will rejoice in the Lord,**

**I will be joyful in God my Savior.”**

I am working my fingers to the bone. I am weary beyond reason. Nothing will grow!

**“yet I will rejoice in the Lord,**

**I will be joyful in God my Savior.”**

**There are no figs, grapes or olives. No cattle, sheep, or food:**

**“yet I will rejoice in the Lord,**

**I will be joyful in God my Savior.”**

**I cannot restore the harvest of past crops. I can't renew the garden. I can't, I can't, I can't, I can't:**

**“yet I will rejoice in the Lord,**

**I will be joyful in God my Savior.”**

**Our church may be small in number. There may be more work than is possible for us to complete. The path ahead may seem dark. We may fall short. Our garden may have weeds and stones.**

**“yet I will rejoice in the Lord,**

**I will be joyful in God my Savior.”**

**The Apostle Paul started fourteen churches that we are aware of. And those churches started more churches. But today, not one of those original fourteen churches is viable. Do we consider Paul a failure for his efforts? It is because Paul had the insight, perseverance, and patience to start and grow those fourteen churches that we see his footprints around the world today.**

**Those apostles waiting in Jerusalem for the gift of the Holy Spirit, all of them suffered a martyr's death but one. Do we consider their ministries failures?**

**Peter spread the word throughout Asia Minor and into Rome.**

**Andrew spread the word around the Black Sea and Armenia as well as Asia Minor and Greece.**

**James, the brother of John, is said to have spread the word throughout Spain.**

**John, the beloved, was the least traveled Apostle. He traveled with Peter to Samaria. He was later exiled to the island of Patmos and spent the end of his life in Ephesus. But he gave us the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation.**

**James, the son of Alphaeus remained in Jerusalem and was stoned to death by an angry mob.**

**Phillip traveled to Samaria and Gaza and encountered the Ethiopian financial minister. He was heavily involved in ministry in Asia Minor.**

**Thomas traveled beyond the limits of the Roman Empire. He went to Turkey, Armenia, India, and possibly Punjab**

**Matthew ministered to the Jewish communities in Palestine. Some believe that he was martyred in Ethiopia.**

**Simon took the word to Africa, Egypt, and possibly Great Britain**

**Jude delivered the message to Osroene and Armenia.**

**Matthias ministered along the Black Sea and Armenia.**

**Though all but John died a horrific martyr's death, we cannot see them as failures. For it is through their dedication and sacrifice that we have the church today and the message of Christ still stands.**

**What seemed like the garden's end for Christianity, became a catalyst for rebirth and growth. It's not what the garden looks like or if we believe that it fails. Because that is a very narrow way of looking at the world, especially when we can't see beyond the hate, violence, and grief that surrounds us. We tend to forget that there were so many times in history that the church could have been driven into the ground, the garden overgrown, the crops destroyed. But the viability of the church continues to overcome against all the odds. There's a reason for that.**

**You see, the source of the garden, the seeds for the garden, the nutrients for the garden, the sun for the garden, all reside in our own hearts and souls, placed there by God for the edification and the feeding of His children. We are all imbued with the Holy Spirit. We have to stop staring at what we believe is a dead garden just because it doesn't meet up with our standards and expectations. It's not about our standards and expectations. They don't really matter. We need to put the focus where focus is due.**

**“yet I will rejoice in the Lord,**

**I will be joyful in God my Savior.”**

**So, instead thinking how pathetic our attempts at gardening are, we need listen as God whispers to us “But what have you learned?” and then replant and start again. That is the way of true gardeners.**

**AMEN**

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