

# Plant and Grow Joyful Love

Psalm 139:1-18 & Matthew 6:25-34

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God's creation is full of inspirations. Jesus compared himself to a rock, the firm foundation which we should build our lives upon. The Psalmist sings, "God you are my rock of refuge and my strong fortress." God's steadfast love endures forever. Jesus will always be our refuge and strength.

The psalmist sings how God is with us everywhere and always. **Psalm 139:1-18 MSG "God, investigate my life; get all the facts firsthand. I am an open book to you; even from a distance, you know what I am thinking. You know when I leave and when I get back; I am never out of your sight. You know everything I am going to say before I start the first sentence. I look behind me and you are there, then up ahead and you are there, too—your reassuring presence, coming and going. This is too much, too wonderful—I cannot take it all in! Is there any place I can go to avoid your Spirit? to be out of your sight? If I climb to the sky, you are there! If I go underground, you are there! If I flew on morning's wings to the far western horizon, You would find me in a minute—you are already there waiting!**

**Then I said to myself, "Oh, God even sees me in the dark! At night I am immersed in the light!" It is a fact: darkness is not dark to you; night and day, darkness and light, they are all the same to you. Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out; you formed me in my mother's womb. I thank you, High God—you are breathtaking! Body and soul, I am marvelously made! I worship in adoration—what a creation!**

**You know me inside and out, you know every bone in my body; You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing into something. Like an open book, you watched me grow; all the stages of my life were spread out before you, The days of my life all prepared before I had even lived one day. Your thoughts—how rare, how beautiful! God, I will never comprehend them! I could not even begin to count them—any more than I could count the sand of the sea."**

Creation speaks of the grandeur of God, mighty mountains, grand canyons, splendid waterfalls, twinkling stars. Creation speaks of the grandeur of God in the tiniest details that cause life to flourish. In the soil microbes that are giving soil structure and fertility to enable plants to thrive. God's creation displays a snippet of God's power, wind, water, sunlight. God's creation gives us a hint of God's magnificence, the array of colors, the diversity of shapes, plants, and animals in abundant variety.

When we savor the grandeur of love in love's infinite forms and strive to love others, we become like a vibrant towering tree planted along an ever-nourishing river bearing abundant fruit. Our quest to perceive God roots us in our eternal home with God and all the saints, it nourishes us through the worst drought, it shines endless love to transform us and the world.

Most of the details, vastness, and love all around us, we don't even notice. Take for instance corn. Have you marveled at the way God wonderfully and creatively made the corn plant? On my family's dairy farm, corn was a primary feedstuff. Our livelihood depended on corn. At UW River Falls I spent an entire trimester studying corn. We talked about corn, experimented with corn, dissected corn and my favorite part, taste testing different varieties of corn.

Corn is an amazing plant. There are over 3,500 uses for corn. Corn is grown all over the world except in Antarctica. In just a few months, a tiny corn seed can grow as high as 15 feet and one seed can yield over 2,000 new seeds. The average ear of corn has 800 kernels in 16 rows. Each kernel must be individually pollinated. The pollen must fall from the tassel and land on the silk and then the spec of pollen is drawn down the silk to produce each kernel. If a single silk is damaged or a grain of pollen fails to land on the silk, or the silk tube becomes clogged or if there is insufficient moisture to draw the pollen down the silk then there is a missing kernel. With all the potential pollination problems, a full ear of corn is a miracle.

Even a seemingly simple plant like corn God made with great complexity, creativity, and adaptability. Jesus said, "If God so clothes the grass of the field (corn is a member of the grass family), which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven will God not much more clothe you."

God made a simple grass like corn adaptable and durable to feed animals, to provide an abundance of products to enhance our life, to delight our tastebuds, to play with corn, makes mazes out of fields and I enjoy the beauty of cornfields. I once thought it was a myth, however I can confirm when conditions are ideal in the evening

you can hear corn grow. God gives us corn. Farmer prepares the soil, plant the seeds and care for the corn. God gives us love. God ensures that love endures forever, and love is always growing. God hopes we will plant, tend, and grow even more love.

Corn is incredibly diverse. There are thousands upon thousands of varieties of corn. Every year on our small farm we would plant around a dozen different varieties of corn. We would carefully match the strength of a particular corn variety with the soil type, planting time and its use. Some corn varieties are great for silage corn, some for shell corn. Some corn flourishes in clay soil, others in sandy soil. We planted some corn that liked hot, dry summers and some that liked cool wet summers. We planted three types of sweet corn for our family and friends to enjoy; a quick maturing small eared sweet corn to give us the first fresh corn of the summer, a moderate maturing corn and then there was the late maturing, super sweet, high yielding sweet corn that was my favorite. Our extended family would come and together we would freeze huge chest freezers full of corn enough for everyone for a year. Farmers match the strength of the corn variety with the conditions and the intended use of the corn.

A corn inspiration is to grow your strengths. A recent Gallup poll found that 88% of people are trying to grow their weaknesses, while only 12 are trying to grow their strengths. Abundant life often grows from celebrating your strengths, growing them, and sharing them. What are your strengths? How are you growing your strengths? Somewhere along the way some people get confused instead of celebrating their unique gifts they lament their weaknesses. Our media tends to tell us what is wrong with the world and people rather than all that is right and beautiful. What are your family's strengths? What things do you enjoy doing together? How can you grow your family's strength? Affirm the strengths you see in others. Everywhere Jesus went he forgave people's sins, their weakness, then he helped them realize, celebrate, and develop their strengths. Each disciple had different strengths, so Jesus sent them out to different types of ministries. God has given you a strength that only you have and the people around you need. Cultivate your strengths.

How effective would a football team be if the lineman and the wide receivers switched positions? A great coach helps players excel at developing their strengths and puts the players in positions and design plays that utilize their strengths.

You are marvelously made. God intricately handcrafted you to yield abundant love. God has given you unique gifts and amazing strengths; build on them, share them and delight in the way you are marvelously made.

Jesus said, **Matthew 6:25-34 MSG** **"If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship, it follows that you do not fuss about what is on the table at mealtimes or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to God than birds. 'Has anyone by fussing in front of the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? All this time and money wasted on fashion—do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them. 'If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers—most of which are never even seen—don't you think God will attend to you, take pride in you, do God's best for you? What I am trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God's giving. People who do not know God and the way God works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how God works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Do not worry about missing out. You will find all your everyday human concerns will be met.' 'Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.'"**

It is easy to worry today. We are bombarded with media and politicians that scream at us to worry. Too often our conversations are negative, discussing our weakness and our problems instead of our strengths and solutions.

Jesus advises us to relax, live in the present and let go of worry about tomorrow. When you are becoming afraid and anxious go for a walk, look at pictures of creation watch a nature show, savor the beauty of creation, enjoy your favorite spot, delight in your favorite activity. The solidity of rocks, the magnificence of trees, the growth of corn. God has created and sustains the cosmos. You and all people are marvelous, wonderfully made by God, capable of creating abundant goodness.

Is God calling you to lead a transformation of humanity from fighting over our weaknesses to celebrating our strengths, a transformation from worry to love? Before you can lead others partner with God in transforming yourself. Diminish your worry by growing your love.

Supreme Court Justice Ruth said, "Fight for the things that you care about but do it in a way that will lead others to join you." Let go of who you are against. What are you for? Affirm the strengths in everyone, in our country. Instead of complaining about our weakness, celebrate strengths, build on our strengths.

I confess that I sometimes fuel my worry by reading news on the internet, looking at posts on social media and participating in conversation that are negative. I need to be intentional in shifting my focus to looking for the good. In a conversation asking, "what do you care about?" often shifts the conversation. Find common ground. Discuss solutions that each person can implement right now.

When I start to worry, I shift my thinking to you and all the loving things you do. Instead of listening to someone demonize a group of people, I think about the people I know in that group and the loving things they are doing and the great gifts they possess. I read stories from Remember Niger, Houses for Haiti, Group Workcamps, Habitat for Humanity. Sometimes I google "organizations that do good" to learn more about the wonderful things loving people are doing around the world. I ponder how love that I shared has grown and been passed on to others. I learn more about leaders like Ruth Bader Ginsburg noticing how their love has transformed the world into a more loving place. All of us have weakness and make mistakes. Let them go. Build on strengths. Celebrate accomplishments.

God is our rock. We are wonderfully made. We can choose to build on our strengths to transform our lives, our country, and our world. Amen