

JOURNEY TO THE CROSS

Living Water For The Journey.

By Pastor Jennifer Alessio

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I love roses.

I love their sweet, fragrant, completely rose smell. I love their blooms and truly enjoy every stage of the flowering process. The buds bring a much-needed pop of color to the neutral brown and green plant. Then the buds open to a truly stunning, lasting flower.

They require pruning, which my husband reminds me of when I ask if we can put a few of my

favorite flowering plants in our yard. I have assured him that I will handle the pruning, at least most of the time...

The only problem is that I haven't cared for roses before. So, I need to take the time to prepare myself before I embark on this new endeavor. I need to research how to care for them in every season and growth pattern. I need to purchase the right food, soil, and shears, and I need to be willing to put in the

work that is necessary for healthy plants.

If I do not put in the necessary work, the roses will be wild and sick. If I do put in the hard work, the roses have the potential to be stunning. At least that is what I have learned.

I am a self-taught, novice gardener. Everything that I know about gardening I have learned from reading books, scouring

the internet, and gleaning from gardening television shows. Yes, I watch them and, yes, I realize that most people find this boring. I enjoy gardening, but I don't always have great results. I am just ok at growing vegetables, better at succulents (trust me, this is not hard) and so-so on other plants.

Still, I truly love the gardening process. Every crispy, fried plant is an opportunity to learn and try again.

I don't let failing stop me, because when I garden, I feel close to my Father God, the Creator of all things.

There is just something about working soil and caring for my yard, that brings joy and peace to my soul. Jesus reminded me recently that my spiritual life, the condition of my heart and relationship with Him, is much like my garden.

For me to have a thriving and satisfying relationship with Him, I need to put in the work.

It is up to me to intentionally create space to meet with Him in silence and solitude, so that I can hear Him whisper to my heart and provide me with the nourishment and living water that my soul desperately needs.

Jesus tells us in John 4:14,

“...those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life,” (NLT).

However, much like I find myself neglecting my vegetable garden in the heat of summer, my soul is often distracted by the thrills and needs of this world. Rather than looking to Jesus to meet my needs, I have been scrolling on social media more than I would

care to admit. Scrolling first thing in the morning, scrolling during moments of frustration and boredom, scrolling during commercial breaks, and scrolling before bed.

The Holy Spirit recently whispered to my heart that He would like me to fast social media from now until Easter. I am embarrassed to admit that this is proving to be harder for me than it should be.

The Good News is that Jesus provides us with a beautiful example of how we should balance the needs of others and our need to spend time with Him. Jesus, who is fully God and fully human, takes time away from the needs of others and goes away to a quiet place to spend time with His Father (Mark 1:35).

He often rose early, while everyone else was still sleeping, and separated from the group to commune with His Father.

Then, he went about doing the business that His father had for him. I don't know about you, but this is easier said than done.

Sometimes when I rise early, other family members awake earlier than expected, wanting to connect with me. Sometimes, my desire to scroll on social media wins out and I am forced to rush through my prayer and Bible reading. Other times something unexpected comes up and I need to move my time with

Jesus to later in the day. But, just like my gardening, my time with Jesus is a discipline worth pursuing because

my relationship with Jesus is essential to every other aspect of my life.

When my spiritual life is vibrant, my relationships are healthy, I make better choices, and I experience more peace and joy.

Where do you seek fulfillment outside of Jesus?

Maybe you turn to binge watching television, shopping, numbing, video games, or even idolizing a relationship. The truth is that no relationship or thing will ever bring us the healing, peace, satisfaction, purpose, and joy that a vibrant and healthy relationship with Jesus will bring.

During your devotional time, ask Jesus what relationship or thing in your life is distracting you from your relationship with Him.

Then, ask Jesus what He would like you to stop doing and to start doing so that you can

grow

deeper

in your

relationship

with Him.