



*Eve Garrison*

It's good to be sharing thoughts with you again! This week's writing comes from last summer's discoveries. I had a strange neurological illness that put me in a spot where my heart and mind had to be seriously still. I had to lay aside all electronics, and even conversation with people, because my brain couldn't handle the activity. Doctors couldn't decide what happened and even argued over the diagnosis. It was as though I was forced into a type of fast I had needed for quite some time, and I am thankful!

My husband set up a canopy and placed furniture out on the deck so I could have space alone, separate from our home business, to rest and reflect while enjoying my garden. I placed a bird house on the corner and enjoyed watching two generations of house sparrows grow. What healing and lessons God has in store through nature! I hope I can convey some of those lessons to you this week.

My home is in Pratt, Kansas, with my husband, Greg, and our three kids who are finding their way into adulthood. We continue to call Pratt Friends Church our family.

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 73:21–26*

I had missed a few days getting out into the garden. One of my zinnia plants looked sickly and dying, so I watered and fertilized with compost. It wasn't long before it grew beautifully. I related to that plant, because I, too, felt weak, sickly, and malnourished. The Lord spoke to me through that plant. I needed reminders like that to practice solitude, be still, and let him work in me. I am already rooted in the solid ground in which God planted me—I am already his child—but there are times my spirit needs more strengthening.

Being still was necessary to accept the living water God poured into me. I needed to soak in the light he was shining on my heart through solitude. Finally, it was a reminder I needed to allow what appeared rotten in my life (like compost) to enrich me. Job loss, chronic illness, and misunderstanding are not exactly what I would choose to nourish my soul!

Suffering comes in many forms, yet for myself, I have discovered it's my deepest place of peace when I trust the Father to use it for his means and my best growth. It's moments like these that strip me of all else but God and open my awareness of his strength working in me. Truly, I am weak, but he is strong. And in my weakness, his grace shines, and I understand love.

*SONG: Be Still My Soul (Kari Jobe)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you, Lord, for being the "strength of my heart and my portion forever," that my soul may grow in health.*

—Eve Garrison

*BIBLE READING: Ephesians 1:3–14*

After investigating—hopping into the wooden makeshift house, peering in and out of the hole and around it—he was finally satisfied. A male sparrow hopped to the tip of a weather station pole secured beside the little house and began his call. Day after day he performed his little routine, jumping back and forth from rooftop to pole, into the open doorway and out, calling patiently, seeking the one who would partner with him to create a family.

In such a way, our Lord Jesus woos us. He calls and tugs on our hearts, never giving up. He longs for his bride, the church, to make a home with him. He longs to partner with us individually and in community to build the kingdom of heaven. He has prepared the perfect place for us and has an open door. He has created a place of safety and desires us to join him. Are we willing?

Often we may struggle to believe we matter or make a difference in God's plans. But my question is, would we feel any tug or wonder on our hearts if we didn't matter? He has chosen us to be his. He has called us to be his friends and disciples to make a difference. He stood at the door with the gift of forgiveness in his hands, and now he wants us to share it with others.

*SONG: Closer to Your Heart (Kari Jobe)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, thank you for choosing and calling my heart for a purpose greater than I could dream.*

—Eve Garrison

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 31:1–5*

A sparrow union began, and preparations were quickly underway as the birds worked diligently to find perfect bedding for the nest. Papa bird found several ordinary brown feathers; however, when mama bird found the most beautiful, large, white feather, she just had to have it! I spied her attempting to carry the prize as she hopped from branch to branch in a nearby tree. It was awkward as she tried to navigate the best solution for getting it home. Just as she thought she had everything under control, the burden became unmanageable, and the feather began to plummet. She called out a low desperate cry to her mate. He quickly swooped in, just in time to save the feather from the ground and placed it in the nest.

What a beautiful picture of the Lord's love. We often take on burdens that are too heavy, thinking we can manage alone. Like the pretty feather, we are drawn by "beautiful" projects or situations, not taking time to think of consequences of overload. Whatever it looks like, we deceive ourselves into thinking we can manage without God's help.

In God's great mercy, he swoops down and picks up heavy burdens as we call out for help. He carries them onward and takes care of the need. Let's hope that next time, we remember not to take on a load that God has not given us.

*SONG: Come as You Are (Crowder)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, I'm sorry for the load I take on that is not meant to be mine. Thank you for being my hero, hearing my cries, and rescuing me.*

—Eve Garrison

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 81:8–16*

When the sparrow babies hatched, I could barely hear little cheeps from their frail, naked bodies as I placed my ear on their outside wall. As they grew older, tiny squeaks became loud, hungry chirping I could hear several feet away through my kitchen window. If they weren't sleeping or swallowing, they were crying out for food! Mama and papa sparrow worked tirelessly to satisfy. The minute the babies sensed food, they opened their mouths wide in anticipation. Even as I approached the nest, the birds opened their beaks, hoping for a treat. They didn't question the giver or doubt where their food would come from. They were open in readiness and trust toward their providers.

I wonder how much we hunger for our Father in heaven to satisfy. How strong is our desire and trust that he will provide what is good? Do we anticipate with joy that our hearts will be filled and overflowing with his care? What if our faith that God as our good Father will provide became as instinctive as a baby bird's cries for food?

Oh, may we hunger deeply for what our Father gives. May we open wide our mouths and allow the Lord to satisfy our deepest needs. May we trust him fully like small children (or baby birds!).

*SONG: Hungry (Falling on My Knees) (Kathryn Scott)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, here I am with the mouth of my heart wide open. I know you can fill my heart to satisfaction!*

—Eve Garrison

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 91:1–16*

I often peered in at the baby sparrows, attempting to record on camera the different stages of development. What a surprise one day to find papa bird sitting on them! Safe and secure, the little ones cuddled together under his wings. Think of how gentle papa bird was, sitting on those wee ones. It amazes me just how much these two birds involved with their offspring, and what an example it is of God's character toward us.

Throughout nature, God reveals this kind of gentleness and protection. The lioness who could easily kill her cubs puts up with their playful nibbles. The father emperor penguin gently holds his egg atop his feet to protect it from the instant kill of the Antarctica ice.

Then think of our all-powerful, all-consuming, all-mighty God himself. His power is so great, he tore down walls of Jericho, split the Red Sea, and walked on water. Yet he is willing to be our place of safety and refuge. He desires to protect and bring peace to our weary days.

Are you in need of his refuge? "But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you" (Psalm 5:11).

*SONG: Under His Wings*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, thank you for being my safe place.*

—Eve Garrison

*BIBLE READING: Colossians 1:3–14*

Every summer we have a female cardinal who flies from mirror to mirror on our vehicles, attempting to go after the other bird in the mirror. She does this for several days, and we laugh at such a silly creature getting nowhere with her pecking.

We are like the cardinal in the mirror. We return over and over to the mirror of our lives. We scrutinize what is going on and how we can improve things. We look to our own wisdom and understanding over and again, thinking it will be different the next time. This is often defined as insanity. Webster calls insanity extreme foolishness or irrationality.

In the meantime, the accuser of our heart laughs and tears down what we have done, pointing out what silly humans we are. He reminds us of the judgments we have placed on ourselves for years. And even though we know we need help, we feel ashamed to ask for it.

In today's Scripture, Paul is praying for wisdom for the Colossians. We can take that same prayer for ourselves in faith, seeking God's perfect wisdom above our own. The wisdom given may come in a form we didn't expect. It may mean we are to quiet our hearts and simply let the Lord work. Whatever the answer, finding our Father's wisdom takes us out of the entrapping circle of insanity and on to the straight path of freedom and joy.

*SONG: Be Thou My Vision (especially stanza 2)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, fill me with "the knowledge of your will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding," that I may walk out of my own foolishness.*

—Eve Garrison

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 40:1–8*

One stormy weekend, after borrowing my father-in-law's truck while our SUV was being repaired, Greg and I headed out to return the truck. He went on ahead and gave me specific instructions to follow to avoid potentially treacherous roads. I thought I listened carefully, but I misunderstood and ended up on the one road he knew would be the worst—the muddiest I had ever experienced. I actually believed I was going where he instructed me, and even though my boys insisted I had made a mistake, I kept moving forward. Slipping and sliding across a little country bridge, I managed to land in a ditch, just inches from a barbed wire fence and buried deep in muck. It was so deep that my father-in-law had to use his enormous tractor to pull us out. It was a slow, methodical process as we climbed a steep hill to solid, level ground. Thankfully, my kind and patient husband took the wheel and chuckled rather than chewing me out.

Sometimes I become confused or stubborn. Either I don't listen to God's instructions carefully, or I ignore the warnings of accountability partners. When I realize I've landed in the muck of sin and ugly habits, God has to methodically—and sometimes painfully—pull me out. It may be a long process, but relief and joy will be at the top of the solid path with him. I'm thankful for his grace.

*SONG: The Solid Rock*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, thank you for your patience and kindness toward me at all times. Please keep me on solid ground.*

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