



July Membership Resource

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In partnership with:





Gardening and Stewardship



About This Resource:

On June 21, we officially entered into summer. Last month's resources offered reflections around vacation and water. Our July resource brings us back to the land and the earth. Over the summer months, many have responsibility to tend the land and grow our food. Farmers - small and big - as well as many individuals in urban, rural, or suburban contexts are planting and harvesting during the summer months.

You will find in this resource an outline for a one-hour gathering around the theme of gardening and stewardship. As part of the material we offer, you will find an original meditation on gardening from Jack Jezreel, a Master Gardener himself!

Gather a group from your community and invite them to share this resource. If you do so, we recommend sending everyone Jack's reflection so they can read it in advance.

You can also experience this material on your own if you prefer.

Resource Links:

An inspirational project on Stewardship Garden: <https://www.ourhabitatgarden.org/>
Chicago-based Advocates for Urban Agriculture: <https://auachicago.org/>
Wikipedia article on urban agriculture: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urban_agriculture



Gardening and Stewardship

What you need:

- A pillar candle & matches
- Copies of Attachments A & B
- Laptop, screen, and speakers
- A bible open to Genesis 2:15

Welcome and Opening Prayer (10 minutes)

Welcome everyone with the following or similar words:

Welcome to this gathering! Let's take time together to think about the relationship between gardening and stewardship, the relationship between God's Creation and our land here and now. Caring about God's Creation is caring about every inch of the land that has been given to us. Can we grow our own food? If we can't, who is growing our food? Who is taking care for our land?

Invite everyone to a moment of silence.

Light a candle and invite participants to share the following prayer by Hildegard of Bingen (see Attachment A):

Leader: *O Eternal Strength,
You ordered all things within your heart.
All things were created through your Word,
Just as you wished.*

Reader 1: *NOW HERE is the image of the power of God...
I am the one whose praise echoes on high.*

Reader 2: *I adorn all the earth.
I am the breeze that nurtures all things green.*

Reader 3: *I encourage blossoms to flourish with ripening fruits.
I am led by the spirit to feed the purest streams.*

Reader 4: *I am the rain coming from the dew that caused the grasses to laugh with
the joy of life.
I am the yearning for good....*



Reader 5: *God's majesty is glorified in the manifestations of every manner of nature's fruitfulness. This is possible, possible through the right and holy utilization of the earth, the earth in which humankind has its source.*

All: *The sum total of heaven and earth, everything in nature, is thus won to use and purpose. It becomes a temple and altar for the service of God.*

Placed in the Garden (20 minutes)

Start by reading the following excerpt from the Book of Genesis:

God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food."

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

—Genesis 1:29-30 + 2:15 (NRSV)

Ask participants to sit comfortably and close their eyes. Ask them to imagine walking into a garden, then prompt their imagination with the following questions; pause after each question to let them visualize themselves in their garden:

1. How do you feel?
2. What is the first thing you notice?
3. If you can pick something, what do you choose to pick?
4. Where is God?

Pause.

Continue with the following words:

According to Genesis, God's Creation resembles a rich and fruitful garden; it is the source of food for all living beings and humankind is in charge of keeping it. The land is for sustenance, the land offers fruit and vegetables and seeds for us to eat. How much land do you see in our communities that are not dedicated to growing food anymore?



Invite people to reflect on this question and offer their observations: what does their neighborhood look like? How many people grow their food? In their city or town, is there any urban gardening happening?

Growing Food (20 minutes)

Read Jack Jezreel's reflections on gardening (**Attachment B**). Once everyone has had a chance to read it (if they haven't read it in advance), start the conversation with one or two of the following or similar questions:

1. What surprised you in this text?
2. Where do you get your food?
3. How do you experience joy around food?
4. Have you ever planted something? How did it feel?
5. What is your understanding of stewardship? Is gardening part of it? How?

Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

Set up your laptop and listen to Wendell Berry read his poem "The Contrariness of the Mad Farmer:" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwopVR1hhMU> (3 minutes 7 seconds).

Pause.

Go around the circle and ask each participant to tell in one word what their expression of contrariness is.

Close your gathering with the following or similar words:

**“Pray’ they said, and I laughed, covering myself in the earth’s brightnesses...”
Let’s pray for the brightness of the earth to last and envelop us and show us the way forward. Amen!**

Extinguish the candle.

If you are interested in furthering the conversation about stewardship, environmental justice, and Christian responsibility consider signing up for Phase 3 of JustFaith, Living Simply: Caring for the Earth. Visit our [page](#) and to learn more and enroll your community for the journey!



Opening Prayer Attachment A

- Leader:** O Eternal Strength,
You ordered all things within your heart.
All things were created through your Word,
Just as you wished.
- Reader 1:** NOW HERE is the image of the power of God...
I am the one whose praise echoes on high.
- Reader 2:** I adorn all the earth.
I am the breeze that nurtures all things green.
- Reader 3:** I encourage blossoms to flourish with ripening fruits.
I am led by the spirit to feed the purest streams.
- Reader 4:** I am the rain coming from the dew that caused the grasses to laugh with the
joy of life.
I am the yearning for good....
- Reader 5:** God's majesty is glorified in the manifestations of every manner of nature's
fruitfulness.
This is possible, possible through the right and holy utilization of the earth,
the earth in which humankind has its source.
- All:** The sum total of heaven and earth, everything in nature, is thus won to use
and purpose.
It becomes a temple and altar for the service of God.
Amen.

—Prayer written by Hildegard of Bingen



Gardening Tips by Jack Jezreel Attachment B

When we leave the garden,
the terms of our gardening
instruct us with a standard
for the balance of the day.

Use what is available close to home.

Use what ultimately will decay profitably.

Notice and embrace the complex and deeper pleasures
Of doing simple and basic things.

School ourselves in the necessarily complicated:
The politics and economics of the origins and processes
Of what we take from this world.

Grow morally, buy morally, build morally,
With the standard of morality ultimately being the standard of the common good:
that is, the flourishing
of ourselves,
of our grandchildren who will survive us,
and of soil, water and air that will survive our grandchildren.

I had never planted a seed in my life until the summer of 1985. I was almost 30 years old. But the experience of working on an organic vegetable farm that year was one of the most satisfying, interesting, and important choices I have made in my life. And the determination to grow food has been a passion that has stayed with me ever since.

I have not discovered anything else that is nearly as complex and interesting as farming/gardening because good agriculture is mostly a study of nature and how to work with it. I have grown to love the hope associated with planting, the excitement of harvesting, and the pleasure of going to bed dog-tired. I love to spend the day outdoors, to listen to the songs of birds, to notice the sky and the movements of the seasons. I experience something so profoundly joyful and compelling in my relationship to land that I am tempted to call it an experience of the divine.



I grow food because it is work that is absolutely necessary for our survival. I plant, cultivate and harvest because I want to take care of the land, to leave it in better condition than I found it—this is also necessary for our survival. I garden because I want a relationship to the world as it is given to us by the Creator: green, fertile, and wondrously alive. I grow food because it is daily an occasion of awe.

And I grow food because I love to eat food.

I am confident that life is meant to include some pleasures and that the most satisfying pleasures are ones that are simply had: conversation, walking, noticing nature, reading, friendship. *And* eating. Food is not only necessary, it is fabulous.

Over the last 100 years our relationship to food has changed dramatically, a change that has no historical precedent on a societal scale. Specifically, this change has meant the disassociation of household—of everyday life—from the growing or raising of food. Whereas our great grandparents raised a great deal of their food (80% of the U.S. population lived on farms in 1870), only a few of us today know even how to plant a tomato. The upshot is that our relationship to food is very short-term: we buy it one day, eat it the next, without any understanding of the complex, fragile and wonderful process that brought it into being.

A very hopeful sign is the swelling interest in gardening over the last two decades. Growing one's own food is frequently described not only in terms of hobby but of spirituality. Why? Because of the deep satisfactions it offers. Growing one's own food is fun, interesting, puzzling, challenging, empowering and skill-building. It is spiritually satisfying to do work that is obviously useful; it is spiritually and physically satisfying to use one's body in a productive way.

Growing one's own food can also be delicious. One of the diminishment of pleasure afforded by supermarket cuisine is the absence of freshness and, consequently, flavor. Last winter, we harvested carrots that were exceptionally flavorful and sweet; the fall frosts had changed some of the starch in the carrots into sugar. Never had I eaten such carrots!

I wonder, too, if the disassociation from the growing of our own food has meant the diminishment of the pleasure of hospitality. Inviting friends to the table used to be an invitation to the gift of a meal that represented a season of work. Meal discussions certainly included the expertise of the cook, but also of the gardener and the techniques used to grow and preserve the garden's bounty. Perhaps I overstate here, but it has seemed to me that there is an added pleasure in the dining room when guests are informed that the vegetables have been grown in the backyard. Somehow the intimacy between us and our food plays into the intimacy of sharing it. I love sharing food that I have grown. I love receiving food that others have grown.

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Finally, to be related to food as it is being grown means we are in some kind of knowledge-building relationship with creation. That should mean that we become students of soil health, plant health, human health. It is intrinsically satisfying to begin to understand ourselves in the context of what keeps us alive. To grow a tomato plant is to begin to understand soil fertility, insects both harmful and beneficial, seasons, weather, biology and nutrition. It is to be introduced to the craftsmanship of good tools, the study of minerals and the relationship between death (compost) and life (a healthy garden). It is interesting, complex and delightful.

This July evening, Maggie and I will share food we have grown in our backyard. It is simple food: kale, potatoes, beets and onions, with raspberries for dessert. It is food we have known, have worked at, have enjoyed looking at as it has grown, and now share between us. God's blessing is our pleasure.



Jack Jezreel is the founder of JustFaith Ministries, visit our [page](#) to learn more about his journey. Here, Jack is standing in his garden with his wife Maggie!