



MY FATHER IS THE GARDENER

A while ago, our family had the interesting opportunity of living in China for a few years. This was while our sons were in elementary school and junior high. It was certainly a broadening time for all of us and not without its challenges, not so much for our children since they were pretty young. For them, coming back was a greater challenge.

But for me, despite my welcoming the opportunity to live in another country and experience life in a vastly different culture, I was caught off guard by just how different it was – not the Chinese culture, but the expat culture.

We lived in an expat community among some very nice people from the United States and all over the world. There was an active women's group, and it was interesting to get to know women from so many different backgrounds and countries as we played racquet sports, had cooking classes, played bridge, went shopping, and planned community and kids' activities. There were also other believers there, and we worshipped together on Sunday evenings. The women had a Bible study on Monday mornings, and I helped with kids' afterschool Bible clubs for grades K-8.

Overall, it was a wonderful time. We all grew a lot by getting to do this. But as time wore on, the strain of so much leisure and, honestly, social activity began to take its toll on me. I felt spiritually disjointed even though I was active in the believing community. My faith, though solid, seemed distant and unreal. I was consumed with anxious thoughts and undefined fears. I found it increasingly hard to function. I felt like I was tangled up in a garden hopelessly choked with weeds. In fact, I expressed it just that way in prayer one day. "Oh Lord," I cried out, "I am so overgrown with weeds in my heart and mind. If only there was a gardener who could help me." Immediately, it was like Jesus answered me. "My Father is the Gardener." These words, found in John 15:1, gave me such comfort. "Of course," I thought, "Jesus is the true vine and His Father is the Gardener. He will help me."

In the days following, these words and others gave me hope and sustained me through the weeding process. It wasn't an overnight journey, but eventually, the Lord led me out of that dark place and into a place of fruitfulness and rest. During that time, hard as it was, God used it for my good. He showed me again how faithful He is, how He always knows right where I am, and that He leads us through dark times, not to lose us but to draw us nearer to Himself!