

HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?

By **ANDY MCCLISH**

In the spring of year when many people just naturally feel like tilling soil, planting things, and growing things. The weather has turned warmer, the sun seems to shine more, and all of God's wonderful creation has come back to life. Whether it's vegetables, flowers, shrubs, or trees, it's fun and rewarding to improve the look and smell of things around the house and yard. One part of this process that's not pleasant, however, is the never-ending battle against weeds, grass, and other assorted pests.

It doesn't seem to matter how careful we are to start out with pure soil, some impurities always find their way into it. If that weren't enough, the impurities always seem to grow much faster than the plants **we** want to cultivate. If given half a chance, in fact, the weeds will take over, and the only way to prevent this from happening is to watch for the weeds and then constantly remove them—one way or another. If we don't do something (dig, chop, pull, or poison), the weeds will be there. At the same time, that which we have planted must be given constant nourishment and encouragement to grow. Otherwise, nothing worthwhile will be produced and the whole process will have been a waste of time and effort.

This example from the physical realm can and should serve to remind us that we all have spiritual "gardens" (i.e., our souls) and that our spiritual gardens are subject to many of the same types of forces and tendencies which operate in the physical world. As Christians, we should all be very much interested in cultivating the growth of good things within our souls (good thoughts, good attitudes, good habits, etc.). However,

common sense should tell us (if nothing else does) that we can never hope to have good things growing within us if we never **plant** them in the first place.

Jesus taught us that the Word of God is the seed which we must plant in our souls (cf. Luke 8:4-11) if we want to be productive in His kingdom. This seed, when properly cultivated, will produce the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22–23) and will grow into “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Pet. 3:1–7). Of course, it would be very naïve to think that our spiritual gardens will never be plagued by “weeds,” just as our physical gardens are. Upon honest reflection, we must all acknowledge the existence of some of these unwanted growths (such as pride, envy, lust, and doubt, to name a few of the major varieties) in our souls. If we don’t wage a constant, militant war against them, the weeds will inevitably take over and completely choke out what we had intended to grow (cf. Mat. 13:22).

Furthermore, just as in the physical realm, the seed which we plant (the Truth of God’s Word) must be given constant encouragement and opportunity to grow and to be productive. Both nature and the soul abhor a vacuum. In other words, not only must the bad be rooted out—it must be replaced with the good (cf. Mat. 12:43ff). Unlike the example from the physical world, however, our work in our spiritual gardens is not a seasonal activity. It is a day-by-day, hour-by-hour occupation from which we cannot relax, if we hope to produce anything worthwhile in the Lord’s kingdom.

How does your garden grow? The answer depends on a willingness to make every single day a concentrated effort to **encourage** the right kind of growth and **discourage** the wrong kind of growth. Our regularly scheduled Bible classes on Sundays and Wednesdays are an excellent opportunity to cultivate the right kind of

growth in our lives. Those who teach these classes should be recognized and appreciated for their hard work and dedication. They should also be supported by the faithful attendance of every able-bodied member of God's family. Growing in Christ is not an option, it's an obligation; but an obligation in which we are blessed by fulfilling it.