

## Watered Garden in the Holy Spirit

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Grace and peace to you in this New Year and this season of Epiphany.

We begin this year thinking about life. Biologists tell us that life, at its most fundamental level, is impossible without water. It is the “universal solvent,” a substance so unique it defies the normal rules of physics. Unlike almost any other liquid, when water freezes, it becomes less dense and floats. This simple property is why life survives; in the dead of winter, the ice on top of a lake protects the liquid life beneath it.

Water also has a “high specific heat,” meaning it absorbs the shocks of temperature change, keeping our cells stable when the world outside turns harsh. In short, water doesn’t just sustain life. It protects it and stabilizes it. Without it, we don’t merely languish; we cease to be.

I’m reminded of a sight I saw during a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. As we traveled through the stark, dust-colored landscape of the Negev Desert, a place where the sun seems to consume everything, we suddenly came upon a kibbutz. It was a jarring, beautiful sight. In the middle of that parched wilderness stood a massive collective farm, an oasis of deep greens and vibrant citrus trees. They didn’t survive because the desert had changed; they survived because of a sophisticated irrigation system piping in water from faraway sources. Through “drip irrigation,” every plant received a constant, quiet, life-giving flow. It was, quite literally, a watered garden in a place that should have been a graveyard.

The prophet Jeremiah speaks to a people who had been living in a spiritual desert. They were in exile, hearts heavy with loss. Yet in the midst of that dryness, Jeremiah brings a vision of restoration:

*“Their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again.”* (v. 12)

Before the garden is watered, there is mourning. Jeremiah envisions the turning of sorrow into joy, the movement from a parched heart to a flourishing soul.

And here we are, in the quiet days after the holidays. For many, January feels spiritually dry, like the air outside, cold and thin. The rush of December gives way to silence, and we start to see the cracks in our own soil: exhaustion, loneliness, or worry about the year to come.

We often try to water ourselves. We make resolutions, buy planners, and write goals. We think if we just organize more efficiently or exercise more faithfully, we will finally feel renewed. But too often, our self-help becomes like a desert mirage. We still feel thirsty. We still languish.

Jeremiah reminds us that the source of renewal isn't our own effort. It's God's presence flowing into the dry places of our lives. We are not self-irrigating gardens. We are beloved soil, waiting for grace.

When we turn to the letter to the Ephesians, Paul describes this same outpouring. *"In Christ,"* Paul says, *"we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us"* (vv. 7–8).

What a word, "lavished." Paul doesn't describe a trickle. He describes an abundance, an overflowing stream. This is not drip irrigation; it's a flood. The season of Epiphany celebrates revelation, light that uncovers what was hidden. The mystery revealed is that the Holy Spirit is not merely given to us but sealed within us. Every believer has become a dwelling place of the Spirit. This Spirit is the living water Christ spoke of, the same water that turns barren hearts into gardens.

Think about it: a garden cannot water itself. It depends on a source beyond its borders. Likewise, our spiritual growth is not produced by striving, but by abiding, by staying rooted in the One who sends the rain. When we let the Holy Spirit flow freely, our bitterness softens. Our disappointments gain perspective. We start noticing buds of grace growing in places we thought were dead. This is the lavish pouring of the Spirit, the life we cannot engineer and the joy we cannot manufacture.

Jeremiah goes on to describe the people's transformation: "*They shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord*" (v. 12).

Radiance, that's Epiphany light! The same light that guided the Magi now reflects from the faces of those renewed by grace. This radiance doesn't depend on perfect circumstances. In fact, the people Jeremiah addressed were still on the journey home when he spoke these words. But even amid the uncertainty, they discovered joy.

When the Holy Spirit waters the soul, we don't just survive. We shine. And that radiance is contagious. Others begin to notice the peace, the patience, and the quiet confidence that only divine living water can produce. Paul describes this through another image: the Spirit is the "*pledge of our inheritance.*" That means our identity and our worth are secure. Like a garden rooted beside a stream, we endure the seasons of drought because we draw from a deeper source.

So, as we begin 2026, the promise is not that we will avoid hardship, but that the Holy Spirit will sustain us through it. This Spirit enables us to bloom in every climate, through joy and through suffering.

Jeremiah's vision is about transformation. God promises to gather the scattered and make them flourish. "*Their young women shall rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry*" (v.13). Notice that: every generation is included.

That's a hopeful word for a congregation like ours. We might look around and see our size or our limitations. But the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is still watering God's garden today. The Spirit has not dried up. The church is meant to be a living oasis, a community where weary souls find refreshment and where compassion flows freely. Our calling this year is not to compete with the world's shallow definitions of growth. Our calling is to be faithful soil, open, receptive, and ready for the Spirit's rain.

So, what does it mean, practically, to live as a "watered garden"?

It means leaning into prayer, not as a duty, but as the way our roots drink deeply from the Spirit.

It means choosing trust over anxiety when life feels uncertain.

It means letting gratitude blossom even in ordinary, suburban days.

It means allowing the Spirit to transform us, so our relationships bear the fruit of kindness and patience.

As we practice these things, we discover that the water flowing into us begins to flow through us. We become channels of grace, watering the world with acts of mercy and justice.

Friends, this year, don't aim to be a "better version" of yourself. Aim to be a watered garden. Stop carrying the heavy watering cans of your own expectations, guilt, or perfectionism. Instead, open your heart to the lavish downpour of the Holy Spirit, which Paul says has already been sealed within you.

The Spirit is God's guarantee that the best is yet to come. Even when the landscape of your life feels barren, something divine is already growing beneath the surface.

In this new year, may we walk by the brooks of living water. May our lives reflect the goodness of the Holy One. And may the Holy Spirit make our souls like watered gardens—radiant, resilient, and at peace. Amen.