

## Preparing for New Life

Depending on where you live, you are in the final days of winter. The days are getting longer and warmer. My wife has uncovered some of our garden fruits and has started weeding the flower beds in front of the house. It is a time when we need to make an intentional effort to prepare for Spring. The preparation may have started months ago when Kathy began to nurture seedlings in the warmth of our sunroom, watering them frequently. In time, they will be transplanted outside – but not until the soil is ready.

It is also a time of planning. What do we want to grow in each area of the garden? It takes work. A successful garden doesn't happen by itself.

As the ground thaws, it is time to weed—removing the obstacles that would later inhibit the growth of flowers, fruits, and vegetables. The soil will be tilled, and the dirt will be turned over. Next comes fertilization, planting of seeds, watering and sometimes additional fertilizer. It is all in anticipation of the abundance of life to come.



We have begun the season of Lent in the church year. We know that Easter is coming. Lent is a 40-day period that begins on Ash Wednesday and ends at sundown on Maundy Thursday. Lent is also a time of preparation for Easter with prayer, fasting, and repentance.

Fasting is our way of emulating Jesus' fasting in the wilderness for 40 days. *At once, the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.*" (Mark 1:12-13). Our symbolic fasting may involve giving up chocolate, TV watching, or bad habits.

Just as the gardener begins to plan for their garden, we need to plan for our spiritual growth. Spiritual growth doesn't happen on its own, but takes an intentional effort and setting aside time. Many Christians live differently during the Lenten season. Some Christians make an effort to be more intentional with prayer, church attendance, or reading God's Word. Just as the gardener clears the dead grass and weeds to promote growth, we remove things from our lives to make more room for God. The soil is turned over, just as we turn over "a new leaf" when we forgo things we enjoy but know need changing. The gardener plants the seeds and fertilizes the soil, while the Christian promotes spiritual growth by seeking to be closer to God through time and attention to Him. It is not a "one and done" proposition. It takes frequent watering to nourish the new plants, just as our efforts in the 40 days of Lent nourish our spiritual life.

God offers to transplant you into His Garden of eternal life. It is worth the effort.

**Question:** What are you doing this year to prepare for the new life that Jesus offers you through the resurrection and the hope for eternal life?

**Prayer for Lent:** *Whatever I can give up for Lent will never match what you gave. I'm not able to do what you have done, and my small actions serve only as desperate wildflowers waving in an open field of your mercy, in surrender to your majesty. As I clear away distractions that you invite me to let go of, bear my prayer of gratitude. Thank you for the ultimate sacrifice of your only Son, Jesus, so that I can know that no matter what the world tempts me with...there is power to overcome. In Jesus' name, Amen.*