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no sprouts—her egg carton was still just several little cups of dirt. I promised her that magic was happening beneath the soil—that this was how God made seeds work. They needed time and nurturing care, and as long as they were getting the nutrients, water, and sun they required, they would eventually turn into plants.

Her patience was rewarded a few days later, when a tiny green shoot appeared in one of the cups of the carton. Oh the excitement! What was it? How big would it grow? How fast would

it grow? How does seeing the plant itself now change the way we care for it?

The same is true of people. They come to us with seeds already sown—sometimes the plants are visible already, but others lie dormant, just soaking up the water, sunlight, and nutrients they need to grow. That is where we come in. We must be good stewards of the gardens—the hearts—we are given to care for so they can bloom and blossom to their full potential. And as we become more familiar with the garden—what all has been planted, and where—we can begin to do the intense and important work of nurturing and landscaping. This means pulling weeds, keeping the birds and destructive insects away, encouraging the tiny shoots as they grow stronger and their roots grow deeper.

And, once we harvest the plants we've tended, it is then time for us to till, dig, and plant seeds of our own.

"Above all, keep loving one another earnestly." (1 Peter 4:8)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Becky St. Clair is a freelance writer living in the Bay Area with her husband and three young children. She's an avid reader with a passion for storytelling, the ocean, Thai curry, rainy days, writing actual letters, and travel, which she unfortunately does rarely. In her free time, Becky enjoys playing percussion with the Pacific Union College Symphonic Winds Ensemble, exploring the California coast, and discovering San Francisco.

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THE HIDDEN LIFE OF SEEDS

BY BECKY ST. CLAIR

Over the course of my adult life I have moved a total of eight times. As anyone who has ever packed up an entire household, shifted it to a new location, and then unpacked it all knows, moving is usually a mix of exhaustion and excitement. The exhaustion, of course, comes from the intense amount of energy it takes to safely package precious items into cardboard boxes and Rubbermaid bins for a trek of either a few miles or a few thousand, added to the stress of starting everything new again when you get to the other side of the move.

But the excitement is what I like to focus on. I love exploring new places—new parks, new restaurants, new museums, new cafes, new walking trails, and

STEWARDSHIP is a total lifestyle. It involves our health, time, talents, environment, relationships, spirituality, and finances.

new places to birdwatch. I love the idea of meeting new people and making new friends and learning new things from them. (Yes, I realize this is a very extroverted way of looking at things.)

This excitement for the “new” goes beyond people and places, though; I also really like setting up a new home. Deciding where to put the furniture, how to organize the pantry, which artwork to hang and where. It’s like a fresh start to be as organized and clever as possible. A new opportunity to set up the perfect comfy corners and welcoming spaces for both family and visitors.

And then there’s the yard.

Someone once advised me not to do anything major in my yard or flower beds for the first year of residence there, simply because there was no way of knowing what was already in place. My job for the first 12 months should simply be caring for the space as it was, not digging, planting, or paving. Waiting a year to do anything gives me the chance to take note of where the hidden life is. In one yard, for example, what I thought was a viney weed turned out to be a gorgeous baby clematis that, the following year, began doing its job of covering the fence with beautiful purple blooms. At another house, which we first occupied in the late summer, I discovered a stunning clump of daffodils in what I thought was a boring, dead corner under a window—but I couldn’t have known that until spring.

Every time I’ve moved into a new home, I’ve loved the year-long excitement of discovering what a previous occupant had left behind for others to enjoy. It’s like an anonymous gift—surprises of color and life appearing out of nowhere; evidence of the work of others, now left to me to tend and nurture. And while I waited for these gifts to show themselves, I simply cared for the space, weeding, raking, and pruning so whatever was dormant in the earth could show itself fully and safely when it was time.

People are gardens, too. Every interaction with another person plants a seed. Some of them sprout quickly, green stems reaching for the sun and leaves unfolding in a beautiful first stretch. Others are more like tulips, daffodils, crocus, and lilies—bulb plants which

require a period of dormancy in order for them to blossom to their full potential.

Most of us know the experience of meeting someone new. Perhaps

it’s a visitor at church, or a new coworker. Maybe it’s another parent at a child’s school, or even a new bank teller, barista, or hairdresser. In any case, it’s important to remember that our job is not to immediately begin planting new seeds and tilling the land for our

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own purposes. James 5:7 says, “See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains.”

When we encounter a new person, it’s impossible to know what seeds have already been sown. It is our job to simply care for the garden of their heart, patiently and lovingly weeding, raking, and pruning, allowing the seeds to be watered through community with fellow believers and with Christ, until we see the hidden life of seeds and bulbs previously planted begin to show themselves.

Last spring, while my children were doing school from home at the start of the pandemic, my daughter’s class started a science unit on seeds. Using the supplies provided by the teacher, we planted a different kind of seed in each section of an old egg carton, and every day, she followed her teacher’s instructions for how to care for the now-hidden seeds. Eagerly, she checked the carton in the window every day, drawing and writing in her science journal what she observed.

After a week or so, my daughter began to get frustrated. There were still

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