

GARDENS HAVE GARDENERS

R.C. Sproul tells a story in one of his books. Here is my version of this gem of a parable.

Two explorers penetrated a remote area of African jungle. With pangas they had to hack open every meter of the way. Suddenly the bush opened up and a clearing appeared – containing a marvellous garden, half the size of a soccer field. A wide range of fully cultivated plants grew in straight, symmetrical rows. The most beautiful rose bushes, freshly pruned, formed a border right around.

The excited travellers immediately set up camp, waiting for the gardener to appear. They had, after all, not seen fellow human beings for two weeks. But no one turned up. After three days the first explorer suggested that they move on. The second one protested, suggesting that perhaps the gardener was invisible. Maybe he was slipping into the garden during the night. So our two friends set up a wire around the garden. They fastened some empty tins to it that would make a noise should the gardener trip over the wire in the dark.

Nothing happened, however. After another three days the first explorer insisted that they move on. But the second one pleaded: could it not be that this mysterious gardener was not only invisible, but immaterial as well? To this his friend replied: *"What is the difference between an invisible, immaterial gardener - and no gardener at all?"*

The answer is obvious, is it not. The difference is the garden!

Thirty-two years ago I went through a most difficult and traumatic time. I had been a Christian for about 17 years, but this experience shook my faith to the core. I had gone through an extremely difficult time, and in my disillusionment I was bombarded daily by many questions and doubts. *Did God exist? Was He aware of me? Was He in any way involved in my life? How could He allow these things to happen to me? Was my Christianity real?*

So I started thinking through the ABC of my faith again. What did I really believe? What were the foundation stones of my convictions, the non-negotiable absolutes of my life? What were the benchmarks of my faith?

I had to start at the very beginning: Did I really, really believe in God? I had never seen Him, touched Him, smelled Him. How can one believe in such a God?

But then I became aware of the "garden". It was there – unmistakable. Not only could I see the mind-boggling glories of creation around me; my own life had changed completely since becoming a committed Christian. If ever a man understood 2 Cor 5:17, it was me:

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

The "garden" was undeniable – inescapably so! My first benchmark was in position:

God is who He is

the sovereign, omnipotent and eternal uncreated Creator of heaven and earth!

This benchmark has become one of the cornerstones of my life. To this day I have great joy in pondering the glories of creation, and reminisce God's dealings with me and my family over many years. And involved with us, He has truly been! I (with my beloved wife) could spend hour after hour telling memory after memory of 49 years (at the time of writing) of walking with Him – truly our Father, and our heavenly Bridegroom.

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