

## **The Gardener and the Bush**

Have you ever been at the place where being free and "doing your own thing" was more important to you than submitting to God? Did you realize the hidden cost of your freedom was your life? In the end you will not really find freedom, but find death.

Once upon a time in the fall of the year, a gardener planted a bush. It was advertised to be an especially lovely blooming bush and so all winter he looked forward with much anticipation to spring, when it would bloom.

However, in the spring it blossomed in a peculiar way. There was one very large blossom among all the rest which were the normal size. This very large blossom looked around at all the other blossoms and then looked at itself. "Am I not larger and fairer than all the other blossoms? Should it not be my right to rule over them? I cannot rule over them attached to this bush. I will remove myself from this bush and I will be free to dance on the wind and rule over all the other blossoms who will come with me."

He started to talk to the other blossoms. "Come with me. We do not need this bush. It holds us down and confines us. We cannot come and go where we wish. Come with me and leave the bush. We will be free to dance and fly in the wind and do whatever we desire."

The other blossoms heard the words and thought on them. There were two opinions. Some thought they needed the bush in order to continue living. So they gave up their freedom for life. The others chose freedom because they did not think they really needed the bush and could not see how anything as beautiful as they could die anyway.

When the gardener came by to see his beautiful bush the next morning, he was surprised to see about a third of the blossoms missing. Some he found at the base of the bush and thinking this very peculiar, set about to pick them up and throw them out on the compost pile. But the large blossom and many of the others were already gone, blown by the wind, to another part of the garden. The gardener felt somewhat upset by the loss of so many of the beautiful blossoms just as they had opened, but he was already thinking of next year and he had just found out about another bush which had even lovelier, sweet-smelling blossoms than this bush. He had already ordered one and would plant it in the fall.

Spring came again and the new bush grew leaves and buds. Each day the gardener went to see it with eager anticipation. Then the day came, the first blossom opened. It was even more beautiful than the picture in the catalog. He was excited and delighted and planned to show off his magnificent plant to his garden club friends.

But that night the large blossom from the first bush, which was by now all brown and shriveled up, having spent the winter under a pile of leaves, stirred himself and blown by the breeze came to see this new bush which was now such a favorite of the gardener. The large blossom now knew the reality of death for he had lost his beauty and was now dried and ugly, but he was jealous that these new blossoms should receive such praise from the gardener, praise which used to be his and those of his friends now also dried and dead like himself. So he schemed, "I will trick the new blossoms into leaving their bush and then they will become as I am and the gardener will no longer be interested in them."

So the old dried up blossom spoke to the new ones, "Hello up there. What are you doing? Aren't you bored? You can't go anywhere or have any fun. You don't need the bush. Why don't you jump off and come with me? I used to be on a bush too and now I'm free. I dance in the breeze and have a wonderful time."

Now it was too dark for the new blossoms to see the old dried-up large blossom or they would have known better. They couldn't see how ugly he had become and assumed he was still beautiful as they were. And so some agreed and off they sailed in the wind.

When the gardener came the next morning, he noticed a few blossoms missing. "Strange," he thought and went his way. But as the days went on, as soon as a blossom opened, within a day, it was gone. Many were found lying around the base of the bush and the gardener realized this bush had contracted the same disease as the other bush. "I must have missed some of those infected blossoms when I was cleaning up last fall and now the disease has spread to this, my very favorite of all my bushes and plants. This disease must have become more virulent because I lost only a third of the blossoms on my first bush, but it seems that every one of these fall off just as it starts to open. I must find a cure for this disease or I'll have to stop gardening because any other bush I plant will become infected as well."

The disease had gotten so bad by now that the blossoms fell off almost without choosing to. Some were happy to be free and took the first breeze that came to sail away. Others were frightened as they fell and wondered if maybe they shouldn't have stayed on the bush. Others huddling at the base of the bush became scared as they saw themselves withering and drying up. "Oh, I wish there were a way to get back on the bush," they said. "I was so beautiful and full of life then. I still enjoyed swaying in the breeze, and my enjoyment was the delight the gardener had in me. I don't really want to go flying away to the other side of the garden anyway."

So the gardener consulted the state agricultural expert and found that a new treatment had just been released which had been found to be very effective in curing this disease. However, each blossom had to be treated individually, and it was a very time-consuming, painstaking process. The treatment was a red liquid which when applied to the stem of each blossom and applied to the bush allowed the two to grow back together and the blossom to reattach.

The next day, the gardener came to his bush. It was a sad sight. Around the base of the bush was a pile of wilted blossoms waiting to die. Some were just starting to wilt and others were pretty far gone. Patiently he began applying the red liquid to the stems and reattaching them. Immediately they started to perk up, but for those who were very wilted, it would take awhile to regain their former beauty. After awhile, he had all the ones reattached that had remained by the plant. The next day he came back and again, there were new blossoms that had opened during the night and fallen off. He reattached these and every day thereafter until fall, he came and reattached the ones who were willing to give up their freedom for life. The others were blown by the wind and became shriveled, brown, lifeless, and ugly.

And when fall finally came, so enamored of this bush was the gardener, that he covered it to protect from the frost which killed only the disease and did not injure the bush or blossoms. He then dug it up to bring inside for the winter so he could keep the bush with its blossoms alive forever.

Scriptures for discussion:

Isaiah 34:4

Isaiah 14:12-20

Ezekiel 28:12-19

John 15:1-10

Romans 11:17-24