



Bloom where you are planted

AAIM 2025

Sermon

Bloom Where You Are Planted

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Songs for meditations:

- Anywhere with Jesus – SDAH 508
- My hope is built on nothing less – SDAH 522
- What a friend we have in Jesus – SDAH 499
- Higher ground – SDAH 625
- Work for the night is coming - SDAH 37
- Trust and obey – SDAH 590

Bible reading: 1 Corinthians 7:17

The theme for **AAIM Sabbath** this year is “Bloom where you are planted”, an expression which many have possibly heard before in different circles. Although the expression “to bloom” or “to blossom” conjures up figures of flowers, fruits, abundance or thriving, the essence of the phrase implies triumph over hardship. This phase is seen as an inspirational quote though interpreted to mean different things depending on the circumstances. Legend has it that this quote is credited to Saint Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva (1567-1622).

The modernized quote is, “Bloom where you are planted”. The original quote by Saint Francis de Sales’ is, “Truly charity has no limit; for the love of God has been poured into our hearts by His Spirit dwelling in each one of us, calling us to a life of devotion and inviting us to bloom in the garden where He has planted and directing us to radiate the beauty and spread the fragrance of His Providence.”

Today we have the special AAIM Sabbath, usually set just a few days before the World Commemoration of World AIDS Day, December 1. The AAIM Sabbath has been put aside to draw our attention to the pandemic of HIV/AIDS which continues to take lives and impact so many in mostly negative ways. One may wonder why we pick the theme “Bloom where you are planted” in the context of a raging pandemic responsible for more than 40 million lives and counting. The point is, we need hope, courage, grit, gratitude



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and determination to face this pandemic. We cannot speak of hope and courage unless faced with a challenging situation. In the same manner, the spirit of blooming amid challenges is needed much more now and in the face of pandemics. Yes, today it is about focus on HIV/AIDS, however, pandemics have unfortunately become common occurrence to humanity. Some true to the definition of pandemics are infections like HIV/AIDS and COVID19, yet others are more silent, and lifestyle related like Hypertension, Diabetes and depression. But all of these have some things in common:

- They are life threatening demanding radically changes to prevent from complication and/or having more people affected
- They can make one lose hope in life and even in God
- They make one question themselves of their personal worth/value to themselves, family and community at large.

The call today therefore is for all to make the most of your current circumstances, even if they are challenging. Serve God and humanity in your vicinity within your current circumstances as per 1 Corinthians 7:17. Adapt and learn to be resilient despite your circumstances. Take advantage of the opportunities life present to you.

Let us consider 3 characters in the Bible whose lives illustrate this concept. My prayer is that someone will consider their life/life circumstances and see how they can emulate these historic figures to “bloom” also.

1. JOSEPH, son of Jacob and Rachel: (Genesis 39)

He lost his mother early in life (Rachel died of childbirth when delivering Benjamin, Joseph's young brother). His older brothers hated him to the point of wanting to kill him, even sold him as a slave to foreigners. Joseph had to learn to survive in a foreign country with everything different from his home – language, food, culture, dressing, religion. He had to drop from being a favorite son to less than a servant, a slave with no choice and no status. He became a prisoner in this foreign land falsely accused.

Yet at every phase of his life, he strove to bloom. He became master in Potipher's house (Gen 39:4-6). This means he mastered the language, culture and applied himself to be trusted. Even after being thrown in prison, he again rose to the top to become “monitor” in prison (Gen 39:21-23). “So, the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there”.

Joseph indeed eventually ends up in Pharaoh's palace as second in command for all Egypt. But that was just an icing on the cake that was his well lived life. The blossom of Joseph's life is not his entering the palace, it is his character and lifestyle. He bloomed at every stage of life where he was planted.

What was his secret – His God – “The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.” Gen 39:23. As a plant, Joseph's roots were deeply imbedded in the fountain that is God. Jesus said, “I am the vine and you are the branches, without me you can do nothing” John 15:5. Joseph emulated that and having this connection meant nothing could keep him down...Not sibling hatred, slavery, being a foreigner, or a prisoner.

Is there a Joseph here today who thanks to the disease you are living with is hated by friends, colleagues, family, church members? Sometimes hatred shows itself in milder



forms of stigma and discrimination, exclusion from activity based on your medical status. You can still bloom.

May be another “Joseph” here has been sold into modern day forms of slavery – substance use and addiction (use of drugs, alcohol, tobacco etc); Paul says “..don’t you know that if you give yourselves to one you are his slave?..” Romans 6:16. Perhaps sold into prostitution, sex slavery, enforced marriage; may be stuck in an unloving love relationship because of your HIV/AIDS status and afraid to leave believing you have no options; Or you are stuck in perpetual singlehood yet parent with growing number of children because the potential suitors “runaway” when they find out about your chronic medical status....I say to you “Joseph” (put your name there) you can bloom. Yes, you are broken, but no circumstance is too hard for God to fix. No place is too far away for Him to reach you. Just reach out.

2. RUTH, the Moabitess (Ruth 1-4)

Her story record starts where things are bad. She has lost both her husband and father in-law at a time where a woman had no status in society and needed a male figure to give her legitimacy. She opts to go with her mother-in -law Naomi to a foreign land out of love. Sometimes love can be very costly. In Israel she has bad circumstances, a foreigner from a group of people that Israelites did not associate with (Deuteronomy 23:3), a widower to a destitute mother. Her only means of survival is to glean the fields. Gleaning means picking up a few leftover ears of grain after the harvest was done. Basically, picking up what was left behind at harvest, be it forgotten or discarded. This is what Ruth had to survive on. Yet we see her very diligent at what she does to the point of being noticed by rich farmer Boaz. As we know ultimately Ruth gets married to Boaz. Boaz would not have noticed Ruth had she stayed home feeling sorry for herself at what life had thrown her way. She got up and decided to be the best her in that circumstance. To bloom where you are means to put down roots where you really are rather than longing for someplace else. Look for ways to grow, to bless, to engage, to participate, as Ruth did.

Is there a widow here or an orphan? Unfortunately death is real when we are dealing with chronic diseases. Even in the advent of ARVs and many advances in medicine, death still happens. In fact according to UNAIDS, as of December 2024, there were 13.8 million children under the age of 18years who had lost one or both parents due to HIV/AIDS. But having been left behind by loved ones should not make us give up on our lives. We must weep indeed, but as the Bible says “Do not weep like those who do not believe” 1 Thessalonians 4:13. God has a thousand ways to provide for His erring children. You need to get up and stop feeling sorry for yourself. Look around and see where God has planted you. What can you do to start your process of blooming? Can you be a grandmother to some child in the neighbourhood. It doesn't take much, in many countries like Lesotho and Cameroon AAIM has Grandmother's clubs. These offer fortitude, love and a listening ear to younger ones. Many of the grandmother's are widows with no education or economic activity. But they embrace what they have – age, cultural knowledge, love and time. They make themselves available for the young around them. They are blooming right where they are planted. What will be your story?



3. PAUL , the Apostle previously named Saul. (Acts 8:1-24; Acts 13:9)

He was an educated man. Well-read and well placed in society. Known for his piety and zeal to enforce the law to death. After meeting Christ, he found himself an outcast. Unwanted by the people he previously worked with, even hunted as a traitor; not fully trusted by the brethren whose new faith he had embraced. Without a family or acceptance he was a lonely man. Eventually he ends up in prison sentenced to death.

But Paul blooms where ever he finds himself. It was because he was so good at what he did that the high priests trusted him to carry out the mission of hunting Christians. He may have been on the wrong course but he truly followed the saying “whatever your hands find to do, do it with all your might”. Jesus acknowledged the diligence and sincerity of Saul doing what he believed in. LORD Jesus set Paul on the right direction and Paul flourished even more so.

While in prison, Paul demonstrated to us that his enthusiasm for work was not because things were easy or he had freedom. Look at how many letters he wrote while in literal chains. We are all encouraged by words like “who can separate us from the love of Christ....” Romans 8:35-39. Do we realise that this deep faith came from a depth of anguish of a man who had lost everything, but God. Even in the worst of living circumstances with no material possession and freedom lost, Paul still blossomed. You and I have freedom, and no matter how materially challenged we are, we all have more than Paul had. Why can we not bloom?

CONCLUSION:

Blooming where you are planted is about growing and maturing in the good seasons of life and the tough seasons of life. Even when we don't always have a choice in where we are planted.

We reach higher levels of spiritual maturity when our faith is tested..

All of us have different circumstances. May be you are like Joseph, Ruth, or Paul. Challenged at home, socially despised for your status – an ex prisoner, a mother with a child born out of wedlock, a divorcee, a mentally unwell person, a person living with disability, a person living with HIV/AIDS , an alcoholic, a drug addict etc. There is no state in which God cannot reach you. Reach out to Him and get nourished so you too can BLOOM. Stop focussing on what you lost, but look at who you are now, what do you have at this point. It may be only a piece of farm land, may be the simple roof over your head, dedicate that to God and tell HIM you want to bloom right where He has planted you.

But remember, no one blooms overnight; it's a process. Blooming with grace also means being gracious, patient, and kind to those around us. When Joseph flourished, he shared what he had with his brothers instead of harbouring bitterness toward them.

God calls us to be His witnesses wherever we go. When we bloom in tough situations, we show others that our strength comes from God. Our lives testify to God's faithfulness, resilience, and grace. As Matthew 5:16 says, “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Whether in a season of waiting, dealing with hardships, or adjusting to a new situation, blooming where we are planted lets others see God's love at work in us. It's not always easy, but by trusting in God and staying rooted in His Word, we can thrive and reflect His glory no matter where we are.

I will go!!



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