

Dora and the Garden

Eight-year-old Dora remembered how she had enjoyed helping her parents with chores around the house when she was younger, such as setting the table before meals and sweeping the floor after dinner. She recalled making people happy by smiling and being cheerful. Younger Dora had especially enjoyed making her baby brother, Darren, happy, by playing with him and singing to him. Others would often compliment her on how helpful she was and how they enjoyed her company.

Now that Dora was older, she felt grumpy and couldn't even explain why. It wasn't as fun to make her brother, Darren, laugh, and these days she didn't feel like helping her parents with household chores or cleaning up after herself. Dora wasn't as happy as she used to be, and she didn't understand why.

One night, while lying in bed, Dora began to cry. She wished she could go back to being a sweet, happy girl again. While lamenting her sorry state, she thought she heard a voice speaking in her thoughts. "Pray! Jesus can help you!"

She sat up in her bed and switched on her night light. It must have been her imagination. There was no one else in the room. Dora looked a little puzzled as she sank back onto her pillow.

As soon as she had closed her eyes, she heard the voice again. "Go ahead, pray! Jesus will answer you!"

Dora shot up from her pillow. "Who is that?" she demanded. "Are you trying to tease me?"

She looked all around the room, trying to figure out where the mysterious voice had come from, but again found nothing out of the ordinary. Puzzled, she lay back down. *Maybe I'd better do what the voice says! Maybe I should pray!*



It had been a long time since she had prayed on her own. She used to love to snuggle up in her bed after giving a goodnight kiss to her parents and talk to Jesus as her best friend. She hadn't done that in a long time, and now as she thought about it, she missed the comfort she had found from talking with Jesus.

Dora suddenly felt like she desperately needed someone to talk to, someone who could truly understand her—someone who could explain things to her and help her. She needed her best friend. She needed Jesus. So she started to pray.

“Dear Jesus, I really need You. Please help me to understand why I'm so unhappy. Please, Jesus. ...”

A peaceful feeling suddenly came over her, and her eyelids grew heavy and began to close.

Soon, Dora found herself in a garden. The little wall that surrounded the garden was crumbling away. The pathways and flowerbeds were overgrown with weeds. It was obvious the garden had not been tended in a long time. Dora wondered aloud, “Why doesn't someone take care of this garden?”

“That's what I'd like to know too!” said a spunky little voice behind her. She spun around to see who it was, but no one was there. She looked back the other way and heard the voice speak again, “But you ought to know why ... this is *your* garden!”

Dora turned around and looked straight in the direction she had heard the voice coming from, but still didn't see anyone. “Who's there?” she demanded. “Where are you hiding?”

“I'm not hiding,” answered the voice. “I'm down here, right in front of you.”

Dora looked down to see a single, pale-pink rose barely visible amidst the overgrown grass and weeds that were crowding out the bush. *It couldn't be the rose ... could it?* she thought. She knelt down for a closer look at the rose. It was then that she noticed that the little rose had a smiling face, and it was looking right at her!

“Don't worry, Dora,” said the rose. “You are having a dream. A lot of unusual things can happen in dreams, you know.”



Dora was speechless for a moment, but then mustered up her courage. "This is a dream? But it seems so real!"

"Dreams can sometimes be a reflection of reality," the rose answered. "Maybe that's why it seems so real to you."

"Oh!" said Dora, suddenly remembering that the rose had told her that this was her garden to take care of. "This garden must have been very beautiful once," she said, hoping that the rose would explain more about it.

"Oh, yes!" said the rose, "It was lovely! Mothers would bring their children to play here and grandmothers and grandfathers would come and sit on the benches to enjoy the sight of the happy children playing among the flowers. Hummingbirds and bees would come to suck the sweet nectar of the flowers, and the butterflies would flutter here and there, looking like flying flowers themselves. There were geraniums, daisies, chrysanthemums, azaleas, and roses of all different colors and sizes. Many would pass by to smell the beautiful perfume that we roses exuded."

The rose looked sad; Dora thought she could see a tear rolling down one of its petals. "But now, no one wants to come here. Most of the flowers are dead ... and I will soon be gone too." The rose's poor faded petals hung noticeably lower.

Dora was alarmed. "No! No!" she said, "I'll help you! Please, tell me what I can do to help!" The rose looked up, relieved and hopeful.

"To begin with, you need to pull out the weeds that are growing near me," said the rose. "They are hogging the ground and taking much of the nutrition and moisture from the soil that I need."

"Sure!" said Dora, grabbing hold of some weeds and pulling with all her might. But when she looked in her hand, all she held was a bunch of leaves and a bit of stem.

"No, not like that," said the rose patiently. "You have to take hold of the stem near the ground and then pull. If you don't pull the weeds out by the roots, they will grow back."

Dora tried again, grabbing the bottom of the stems right near the earth, and pulling with all her might. Out came a large, ugly weed, including the roots. But, how strange! Just as Dora pulled the weed out of the ground, she felt a pain.

"Ow!" she cried out. Then she leaned over and grabbed another bunch of weeds, and gave a big yank. Again the weeds were pulled out by the roots, and again Dora felt the pain.

“Ow!” she cried again. After a minute, she clenched her teeth and determinedly laid both hands on an even bigger clump of weeds and tugged so hard that she fell over backwards as the roots gave way in her hand.

“Ouch!” she yelled. The rose had been silently watching all this time. Dora looked up at the rose with a puzzled and pained look on her face, as if to say, *What’s happening? I thought I was doing the right thing?*

The rose looked sympathetically down at her. “You have to realize that it sometimes costs to do the right thing. It takes effort to pull out the weeds of your garden, and it will often hurt you a little. But don’t worry, you’ll be glad when you see how much better and more beautiful the garden will look afterwards.”

Just then, a bright ray of sunshine broke through the clouds overhead and shone in Dora’s face. She closed her eyes due to the bright light, and when she opened them again, she found herself back in bed.

“Time to get up, sleepyhead,” her mother called cheerfully. “I think you slept through your alarm. It’s time for breakfast!”

During school, Dora’s thoughts kept wandering back to the garden and her conversation with the rose. She wished she could return to the garden to see what other flowers she could help.

But how could she? It was just a dream! Or was it? Just then she heard the same voice that she’d heard before

she had the dream. “Why don’t you ask Jesus? He’ll help you understand!”

Of course, thought Dora, I will!

That night Dora surprised her mother by getting ready for bed a half hour early.

“That’s unlike you to be eager to go to bed,” said Dora’s mother, giving her a kiss on the forehead.

“I’d just like to go to bed early tonight, Mom. Goodnight!”

“Do you feel all right?”

“I’m fine. I just want to spend some time talking to Jesus before falling asleep,” she said, throwing her arms around her mother and giving her a big kiss before climbing under her blankets.

“Goodnight, dear. It makes me happy to hear you say that and to see you so cheerful,” Dora’s mother said as she left the room.

Dora turned off the light and prayed.

“Dear Jesus, I want to know more about the garden and the rose. Please explain it to me!”

Maybe the dream had something to do with the question I asked Jesus last night before going to sleep, thought Dora. I wonder if it’s an answer to why I’ve been unhappy recently.

“Dear Jesus,” Dora prayed, “please help me understand what the dream has to do with my question! Please, Jesus!”

She heard that mysterious voice in her thoughts again. “This garden is the garden of your heart ... the garden of your heart ... the garden of ...” The words slowly faded away and Dora was fast asleep. She was thrilled to find that she was back in the garden again.

Now I’ll find out all about this mysterious garden, she thought excitedly. Then she remembered what the voice had said as she fell asleep. *This garden is the garden of my heart?* she thought, a little puzzled. *I must ask the rose!*

She ran over to the rose bush and blurted out, “Tell me what it means that this is the garden of my heart? I need to know!”

“Hello, Dora!” called the rose. “It’s nice to see you again. How are you?”

“I’m fine, thank you,” Dora replied somewhat impatiently. The rose remained silent for a minute, and Dora realized that she hadn’t even greeted the rose. “Oh, I’m sorry. I just came barging in here, didn’t I? I was anxious to find out more about this garden. I’m sorry for not greeting you! How are you today?”

“Doing much better since you pulled the weeds from around me,” answered the rose.

“Can you tell me more, please?”



“Ah, you said ‘please.’ I see that you are learning,” the rose said. “I’ll be happy to explain more to you.”

Dora made herself comfortable on a wooden bench next to the rose bush and looked at the rose expectantly. “You were very unhappy,” the rose began, “and you asked Jesus why, right?”

Dora nodded.

“Jesus allowed you to come here so that you could see what condition the garden of your heart was in,” said the rose. “You are learning what needs to be corrected in your life, which will also help people to enjoy being around you again.”

It seemed as if a light had turned on for Dora. “You mean that if I clean up my garden, people will like being with me as they used to?”

The rose smiled, “You’re beginning to understand,” said the rose. “You had a good start last night by pulling out a few weeds. Already your mother was pleasantly surprised at the way you kissed her goodnight and didn’t complain about going to bed.”

Dora had another question that puzzled her. “But why did I feel pain when I ripped the weeds out?”

“Ah,” said the rose, “when you pulled out those weeds, did you notice how some of the soil was taken with it?”

Dora nodded her head.

“Well, in a similar way, it costs you to have those weeds pulled out of your life.”

“Oh, I think I understand,” said Dora thoughtfully. “So the weeds are ...”

“... the unloving thoughts about others and selfish deeds, for example,” the rose finished for her. “As you try correcting these things in your thoughts and behavior, then you will see the weeds disappear and your garden will become beautiful once again.”

Dora’s face fell when she looked around to see the garden in such disarray.

“Oh my,” she said. “How will I ever manage? There’s so much to do, it will take me forever!”

“Come, come now. You don’t have to do it alone, you know,” the rose said soothingly. “You can ask your Best Friend. ...”

Drrrrring! Dora sat up in her bed with a start and pushed down the button to stop the alarm. She shook her head to clear her thoughts. *Oh, yes, that’s right. I was in the garden ... there was something I had to do. Oh yes, I had to weed and clean it. But how do I ...?*



Then she remembered what the rose said about her Best Friend. *I guess that means that I should ask Jesus to help me*, she thought. And so she prayed, “Jesus, please help me to clean my garden today. Help me to be cheerful and caring to those around me.”

Just as Dora finished her prayer, a thought came to her that she should make her bed and clean up her room right away, instead of waiting until her mother came to remind her (and often she still didn’t do it even after being reminded). She got to work right away, and soon the room was spick and span—and just in time, as she could hear her mother’s footsteps on the stairs.

“Come on, Dora, you won’t have time for breakfast if ...” Mother never finished the last word. She was so surprised when she saw the tidy room that she stopped in her tracks and stood there with her mouth hanging open.

“Why, you’ve cleaned your room! That’s amazing—I mean, uh, wonderful!” exclaimed her mother.

“I did it to show you that I love you,” said Dora, giving her mother a big hug and a kiss.

This is real fun, she thought.

All day long, Dora looked for nice things to do to make others happy. She had a lot of fun when they all reacted with amazement—much like her mom had that morning. After a while, she began to think about the difference her kindness and cheerful spirit seemed to make. *I never realized that my good or bad actions could affect others so much.*

That night she got ready for bed even earlier than the night before. She couldn’t wait to see the garden and what effect her good deeds had had on it. She lay in her bed with her eyes squeezed shut, doing her best to try to fall asleep, but she couldn’t seem to manage, no matter how hard she tried. Then she again heard the mysterious voice, “If you want to go back to the garden, Jesus will take you there. All you have to do is ask.”



Dora prayed right away, “Dear Jesus, please take me back to the garden. Please!”

Just then a peaceful feeling came over her. She felt as if she was being gently rocked back and forth. She began to relax and close her eyes. When she opened them again, she was sitting on a swing in the corner of the garden, directly across from the rose bush.

“Hello, Dora!”

Dora looked up to see the rose motioning with a leafy hand for her to come over. “Hello!”

“Look!” said the rose. “There are no more weeds here to crowd me out! I’m so glad!”

Dora smiled. It was true. The little patch of ground around the rosebush was now free from weeds. However, when she looked around the garden, she saw that everything else was still the same as it had been before.

“I thought that if I was a good girl, the garden would go back to being beautiful—but it hasn’t,” she said, somewhat disappointed.

“Now, now,” said the rose cheerfully, “you must realize that it took the garden a long time to get into this condition, and it will take some time to get it beautiful again. Don’t be discouraged! Just keep making a little more progress every day.”

“Isn’t there anything I can do to make it happen faster?” asked Dora.

“Well,” said the rose, “now that you mention it, yes, there is something you can do. Since the ground is quite hard, it makes it difficult for you to pull the weeds out. I suggest you try softening the ground first by putting water on it.”

“All right,” said Dora. “But where do I get water? The fountain is dry.”

“The best place to find water is directly from the source—God’s Word,” answered the rose.

“Water in God’s Word?” asked Dora, scratching her head.

“Yes, my dear,” said the rose. “Remember, this is the garden of your heart, and the only water that will soften the ground of your heart is the water of the Word of God.”



“If you water your heart every day with God’s Word, it will soften your heart so it becomes easier to pull out all those ugly weeds. God’s Word will also water the plants and bring the flowers back to life!”

“The rain and snow come down from the heavens and stay on the ground to water the earth. They cause the grain to grow, producing seed for the farmer and bread for the hungry.

“It is the same with my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it.”
(Isaiah 55:10–11 NLT)

Dora recalled how when her parents had first presented her with a children’s Bible, she looked forward to reading from it every night before going to sleep. She also smiled as she thought of some of the fun times she had with her father while they watched Bible movies together. Then she felt sad when she remembered that the last time her father wanted to watch a Bible movie with her she had pouted.

Now, as she looked around the garden, she could see that the “water” of the Word was what was missing in her life. She felt a renewed desire to study God’s Word once again. And with that thought, Dora found herself back in her bed.

Dora looked at the clock; she still had a bit of time before her mother would call her for



breakfast. *Good!* she thought, *I have to find some water right away*, she thought as she jumped out of bed.

At the bottom of her closet she found her Bible. Next to it was a notebook of Bible verses she had at one time memorized with her mother. *Oh good, I can review these while I clean my room!*

“Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.”¹ *So that’s what that means. God’s Word will bring me joy!*

While Dora dressed for the day, made her bed, and straightened her room she started to sing, “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God...” When Dora’s mother came to call her for breakfast, she was amazed to find Dora not only awake and dressed, but dancing around the room in high spirits.

“Good morning, dear,” said Mother. “I see you are a happy one this morning!”

Dora stopped her dancing. “Good morning, Mom. I decided to review some of the Bible verses we memorized together.”

“That’s wonderful, Dora,” Mother replied, more impressed than ever. “It’s obvious it was a great way for you to start the day!”

“It sure was!” responded Dora.

“Mom, do you think we could read some Bible stories together sometimes like we used to?”

“Of course we can! I would love that,” answered Mother. “Okay, off to breakfast or you’ll be late!” she added, tweaking Dora’s nose playfully.

All day long Dora kept thinking about what she could do to put what she had read that morning into

practice. Every time she felt like doing something unkind or saying something mean or grumpy, she was reminded of a verse she had reviewed that morning. “Let us love one another: for love is of God”² she would repeat to herself, and she’d think of something nice to say instead.

It took quite an effort on her part, as she had gotten so used to being grumpy. But although it was difficult, and sometimes she’d fall back into her grumpy ways, as the day went on, she saw that she was improving.

That evening, she and her mother cuddled up in her bed and read some stories from the New Testament together. It was fun for Dora to once again hear about the miracles and helpful things Jesus did for people.

“I want to be like Jesus, Mom,” Dora commented after they had finished reading. “I want to love people and be a help to them, too.”

“Oh, honey, that’s just wonderful,” her mom replied, giving her a hug and kiss. “I’m so proud of you!”

Dora went to bed that night thinking of her mother’s words. As she closed her eyes, she felt content. She knew she was changing. Soon, she was sound asleep.

² 1 John 4:7 KJV

When she opened her eyes, she found herself skipping down the path of the garden again. The large weeds that had been growing between the flat stones had disappeared, and as she looked closer, she noticed that the stones were a pale mauve (which just happened to be Dora's favorite color).

"Oh, what beautiful stones," she mused out loud. Dora now stood in front of the rose bush, and the rose spoke up to answer her.

"You'll be amazed at the treasures you will find hidden under the remaining weeds. And look, the fountain has water again!" the rose said happily.

Dora looked up to see the fountain with water shooting forth in all directions, splashing and creating a beautiful effect, as if the water was dancing.

"Oh," said Dora, awed by the beauty of this sight. "When I first saw it, I would have never thought it could look so beautiful!" She looked around the garden, taking note of all the things that still needed to be done. *The bench needs varnish. The walls need to be repaired, and there are still weeds in a few places.*

"Tell me," said Dora, turning to the rose again. "What's the best way I can go about cleaning the rest of the garden? I'm eager to see what other treasures there are!"

"Let me see," answered the rose, placing her leafy hand on what might have been her chin. "You've been kinder and more loving,



you've been reading the Word, hmmm ... I know! I suggest you ask the Voice!" the rose said triumphantly.

Dora looked surprised. "You know about the Voice that speaks to me?" she asked, dumbfounded.

The rose smiled knowingly. "Yes, yes, my dear. I know all about it. The Voice and I are great friends."

Dora suddenly sat up with a start. The alarm had woken her again, and she was back in her room, lying in her bed. The early morning sun streamed through her window. *Oh, great*, she murmured within herself. *Now I'll have to wait another whole day before finding out where this Voice is coming from. I almost found out!* She sat there with a grumpy look on her face.

"Cheer up, and have patience," spoke the Voice to her heart.

"All right," Dora agreed. She got out of bed, determined to be cheerful, even though she didn't feel like it. She remembered what the rose had said about asking the Voice what more she could do. Suddenly, she heard the Voice again. "If you will be quiet and listen, I'll whisper things to your heart."

And that's what Dora did. Throughout the day, she took time to listen, to find out what the Voice would tell her. All day long she found many opportunities to be kind and loving to people, to lend a helping hand to someone when they needed help, and to speak an encouraging word to someone who was having a difficult time. Whenever the Voice spoke to her, she would hear encouraging, loving tips about what to say, who to go to, and who needed help.

The day passed quickly, and soon Dora found herself snuggled up in her bed. Mother came to kiss her goodnight and tuck her in.

"Sweet dreams and goodnight, honey!" she said sweetly. Dora giggled with anticipation. *I'm sure going to have sweet dreams tonight—very sweet dreams!* She closed her eyes and the very next instant she was standing directly in front of the rose bush.

The rose smiled broadly at her. "Look over there," said the rose, as she pointed to where the old rusty swing used to be. Dora turned, but the old swing was no longer there. Instead, in its place stood a new one, with beautiful cushions and a canopy overhead.

Right away Dora's eyes were drawn toward the man who sat on the swing, who had such kind eyes and a beautiful smile.

The man held out His hand and called her by name. She slowly walked toward Him, overwhelmed by the sight. She placed her hand in His, but couldn't find any words to say. Finally, she managed to whisper, "The Voice. ... It was You, wasn't it, Jesus?"

"Yes, My dear friend, it's Me," He said, taking her hand in His. "Come, sit beside Me and let's talk about whatever your heart desires to discuss. As a best friend, I want to be with you all the time, to help you and make you happy."

“Oh, Jesus!” was all Dora could say. She hugged Him tightly.

“Look at your garden, Dora,” He said with a twinkle in His eye.

Dora glanced around and was happy to see the garden clean now, with no weeds. The wall had been repaired, the bench repainted, and many new and different flowers of varied colors blossomed in the formerly weed-filled flowerbeds.

“Oh!” exclaimed Dora. “It’s just beautiful! Thank You so much! You did it all, didn’t You, Jesus?”

“How did you know?” Jesus smiled, His eyes shining at her wonder and surprise.

“Oh, it would have taken me forever to get it this way. I never could have done it so quickly,” she answered.

“You’re right. I cleaned it up for you because you pleased Me by obeying My voice when I spoke to you.

In order to keep it nice, now you’ll have to be faithful to water, weed, and clean it every day, and make sure to call for Me whenever you need help.”

“I will, Jesus. I promise,” Dora said, as she rested her head on His shoulder. She had never felt so happy and blissful in her whole life.

Then Jesus spoke again. “Would you like Me to tell you a story?” Dora didn’t move but simply nodded her head. And so He began, “There once was a garden. ...”



“Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you”
(John 15:3 ESV).

