



Plants for Reflection: Lily

Lilies are a group of flowering plants grown from bulbs. They have a significant place in the culture and literature of many parts of the world. They typically grow up to six feet in height with large often fragrant flowers. In Victorian England they were used to portray love and affection and are often used at funerals to symbolise this.

Bible Passage: Song of Songs 2:1 (NRSV*)

I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.

The Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon) is a collection of love songs expressed with such fearlessness of language that many readers may find shocking. The unrestrained style of human love has led both Jews and Christians to search for the hidden meaning beneath the poetry.

One interpretation sees these love songs as God's dealings with his beloved people Israel and Christ's relationship with the Church. While human love may become broken and selfish the sacrificial love of God creates the opportunity for us all to experience and be changed by God's real passion for each and every one of us. Love and death are both very natural occasions when this relationship can be experienced.

Reflection: Death

The Song of Songs reflects the strong passion of human love with all its passion and depth. Death too, can produce such a profound sense of loss and grief that it can overwhelm us. We feel love and grief physically in our bodies and emotionally in our mental health.

The pain of death flows from a real sense of loss and wondering if there is any meaningful existence beyond death.

The Bible story begins with God creating the world and the universe. He makes a solemn promise (Covenant) with Israel that he will be their God and they will be his people. Jesus reaffirms this promise by saying he will be with us to the end of all time. On the first Easter Day Jesus rose from the dead offering eternal life to all. The power of love has destroyed death forever.

* New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicised Edition, © 1989, 1995, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

We have nothing to fear when we realise God's love has been with us from the very beginning. It is the same love we experience when we embrace the love of our life. No person, no soul, is lost to God. God's love and delight is to be with each one of us in life and in death. All existence is the language of love.

Prayer

Gentle God, you have been there since the beginning moving through time and space. Yours is the source of eternal light and love in our universe. As a creator and Father, you know what brokenness and death feels like. To see things of beauty destroyed by greed and malice. To watch a child broken and die upon the Cross through human violence.

God of understanding, come to us in our moments of grief, anger and doubt and enfold us in the love of your eternal presence. Help us to know that you understand how painful life can be; the crushing darkness of depression and the inability to move because we have lost a loved one or our job or our self-esteem.

Speak to us as Jesus did to Mary outside the empty tomb on that first Easter Day, that our hearts may be open to the invitation to have life in all its fullness in this world and the next. Generously pour out your Holy Spirit that the light of your passionate love may grow deep within our hearts. We ask this in Jesus's name.

Amen.

For further support and resources

There are many Bereavement Counselling Services as well as help from the NHS. Cruse Bereavement Support can be contacted on 0808 808 1677.

Talking about death can be very difficult, especially with children. Doris Stickney's book *Water Bugs and Dragonflies – Explaining Death to Children* is a useful resource. (Bloomsbury, 2019)

John Wyatt's book *Dying Well – Dying Faithfully* is a helpful exploration of death and culture. (IVP, 2018)