

Remember the Iris



Painting by Nila Sando, Ryan's grandmother

It was one of those perfect spring days that beckons you to the outdoors and play in the dirt! I had a huge area in our backyard that needed immediate attention. The original owners of the home had devoted years to a landscaping project that truly made the place a glorious display of God's beauty. We had just moved into the house and the yard was now in a shambles. The intermediate owner of the home was not into yard work and had actually tilled up all the flowers and left nothing but a tangle weeds! I had purchased several large flats of starter plants and was working busily to get them in the ground while the weather was good.

Ryan, my five-year-old son, played on the swing set within easy view while I finished up planting the last of the flower bed. He watched me for a few minutes before saying he was bored and asked me stop and play with him. I told him we would do something together as soon as I finished but I needed fifteen minutes to finish this project. I explained the baby plants would die if I did not get them planted quickly. I gave him several ideas to occupy himself until I was done. He walked away without further argument.

By the time I finished, Ryan had gone inside to play in his room. As I headed to the house, I saw all of the buds of a beautiful patch of purple irises laying all over the ground. They had been just ready to bloom! They were the only flowers that had survived the previous owners' negligence. I knew immediately this was an act of revenge on my son's part because I had not dropped what I was doing to play with him. My initial thought was to bring him back to the scene of his crime and spank him. He hadn't had very many spankings in his life, but this was a deliberate and destructive act of rebellion! Instead, on my way to the house, I prayed for wisdom. This behavior was alarming! The LORD gave me clear directions! I know it was the LORD because I never would have thought of what He told me to do. He told me to bring Ryan out and show him the beautiful irises already blooming in the next-door neighbor's yard. So with my anger gone, I showed Ryan the irises and explained that ours would not

turn into beautiful flowers because he had snipped off all of the buds. As per my directions from the Lord, I gave him a trash bag and told him he needed to pick up every single bud and count them.

When I came back a few minutes later, Ryan had done what he was told but to my surprise, he was crying. These were big, heartfelt cries of sorrow and desolation. He told me he was so sorry! He continued to cry in a most inconsolable manner. This was something I had never witnessed in my son's response to correction. He was a good little boy and did not exhibit a lot of bad behavior. In this case, it was clear God was convicting him regarding what had been in his heart. God revealed to him the roots of this behavior in a way I never could have done! Ryan fully comprehended it wasn't me he had hurt, but he had destroyed a precious gift from God! He was filled with guilt. He was desperate for comfort because he didn't know how to tell God how sorry he was for what he was and what he had done. It reminded me of when David prayed his prayer of repentance in Ps. 51. "Against You, and You only have I sinned!"

I felt the Holy Spirit giving me words about the Good News of Jesus death so our sins could be forgiven from that "awful, yucky feeling" for the wrong things in our heart called sin. His concern was clearly not only for what he had done, but the condition of his heart that made him do it. I told him when we confess our sin, God promises to forgive us and will also take away that awful feeling of guilt and sadness for what we have done. He clearly understood when I explained that God can give him a new heart and make him into a new person! He prayed with me and asked Jesus to forgive him not just for this, but for other "bad things" he did. I told him he could be sure God forgave him and that I did, too. I told him whenever he saw the irises in the spring, he should always remember that God makes all things new and gives us a new start.

There was a true, deep change in Ryan's heart from that day forward that others noticed immediately. I have thought many times how easily I could have missed this golden moment God had planned for him, if I had not prayed and followed the Lord's instructions for disciplining him. I think with each bud he picked up and put in the trash bag, the Holy Spirit was speaking to his heart. I was reminded that the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. I was angry over the waste and his unwillingness to wait fifteen minutes, but God saw a little boy who needed to know Him and find forgiveness at a deeper level. The time we spent talking about the sacrifice Jesus made could not have been more meaningful without his immediate act of destruction. He really understood! Our relationship was strengthened and he embraced the truth of God's love and forgiveness in a way I would not have thought possible at his age.