

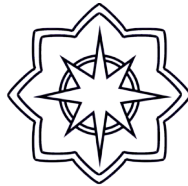
THEOLOGY *of* HOME IV







THEOLOGY *of* HOME IV
ARRANGING *the* SEASONS



EMILY MALLOY

Foreword by

CARRIE GRESS & NOELLE MERING

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*For Timothy Crewe—
your tireless, sacrificial, and loving devotion
made this journey possible.*

Thank you for all of your yeses.

“Never lose an opportunity
of seeing anything beautiful,
for beauty is God’s handwriting.”

–RALPH WALDO EMERSON.



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Preface

Dietrich von Hildebrand mused years ago about craftsmen attending to the smallest details when building cathedrals. As one story goes, a rich man noted a worker giving hours upon hours to carving a tiny bird onto a wood beam that would eventually be covered by the roof. The wealthy man's expressed bewilderment was met by a simple response from the worker. "God sees it," he reminded him with simplicity.

This story illuminates the importance of our hidden lives, when love is poured into details that seemingly go unnoticed. We rightfully marvel at the heroic bravery of martyrs, but we also canonize great souls like Saint Therese of Lisieux whose life was small both in duration and geographical scope, but expansive interiorly with ripples and fruits that we will not know in this life and that are surely unraveling still. Even her moniker, "the Little Flower," ties together this sense of tininess with great expansive love.

Though she is more commonly connected to roses, a less sung flower, lantana, illustrates this tiny and expansive connection quite well. Originally a tropical flower, it is now propagated widely. Its small pops of vibrant colors dot paths and sidewalks in cities and rural towns alike. What appears at first to be a single flower on each stem upon examination turns out to be a host of tiny florets intricately clustered together and unified by one main stem into a little dome shape. It is easy to miss, such that it can take a curious

toddler to stop and crouch and pluck before we really see the design and details. Even then, it is often picked apart in those tiny hands too quickly to preserve.

What are we to make of such things other than that, of course, a loving God who sees and rejoices in the unseen acts of love by us will also certainly have beaten us to the punch? It is fitting that He would create a world with such wonders as large as the ocean and as hidden as tiny, luminescent deep-sea creatures, or the minuscule details of a single, ephemeral lantana stem.

Were we to attempt to sculpt or craft these miniscule details to create one single stem of lantana, it would take painstaking work, be priced accordingly, and then preserved under a cloche. We attempt such detailed love as the woodworker with his bird or the mother with her child, but we casually trample over the detailed handiwork of a single flower that we have no capacity to replicate ourselves.

Perhaps this is one part of why we associate flowers with love: the love a gardener pours into cultivating them, their marking of weddings and funerals alike, and the birthdays and dinners and every holiday in between and around.

In this volume, Emily Malloy explores the vibrancy and life of the garden, and how its incorporation into our homes is more significant than the practical efforts of cutting, arranging, and displaying. Though such work is addressed in these pages as well, it is the deeper questions of life, family, love, and God that animates her work and all of ours as we strive in simple and small ways to layer our lives and homes with the intangibles that turn the stuff of matter into a song.

While there are plenty of good treatments on floral design and garden life, so often the meaning behind their creation is overlooked. We can't think of anyone better to pull together this amazing work. To it, she brings her background in floral arranging, food blogging, photography, her elegant eye, and her devotion to the Faith.

At first glance, a serious treatment of flowers might seem surprising. But like the lantana or the bird carving, real richness can be found in the



seemingly insignificant. Perhaps giving our attention to their details can help make us more attentive to our own—the small stirrings within us and others that connect one to another and to Him, and the details of love that we do well to dignify.

A new way to go deeper into a Theology of Home.

Carrie Gress
Noelle Mering







AN INTRODUCTION

Paperwhites to Pines

The gentle caress of a chilly breeze pushes wisps of hair into my face as I snip paperwhites, marking the celebration of New Year's Eve. Each stem clutches several sweet little fragrant blooms. I take in this delicate beauty with all its lovely details and recall that this little stem was created for joy.

A decade ago, when I began working with flowers, I did not understand how they could demonstrate true beauty and accentuate the world's deep longing for it. Nor could I have foreseen how they provide a deepened understanding of the love of God. But in these ten years, He has mercifully shown me the beautiful parallels between flowers and life and the endless lessons nature provides.

Meditating upon the delicate splendor of the lilies of the field, I am reminded that the God who created this immense wonder sees humanity as the pinnacle of His creation. As my scissors cut through the stems of paperwhites, gathered for an arrangement, I think of the floral calendar and remember its botanic beauty. Each flower is a gift of love from the Father to accompany us through the days that accumulate into months. With each season comes a new, lovely fragrant friend to remind us that though time is an uncontrollable force, with it comes endless unique gifts that were unavailable yesterday.

Flowers escort us through time; they have journeyed with all humankind, just as they were there in Eden. In this, flowers point to the innate need for beauty sewn into the foundation of our being. We were formed to reside

with God amid the splendor of the garden. It is intrinsic to the human heart. We see it even in those with a secular worldview who seek to “recharge” in nature. Wittingly or not, mankind’s time in nature is a divine encounter. Flowers represent all that is good and wondrous in nature. And in turn, they serve as a powerful representation of the gifts we receive from God.

Flowers: A Proud Assertion

“Flowers are a proud assertion,” said Ralph Waldo Emerson, “that a ray of beauty outvalues all the utilities of this world.” What is the use of beauty? Beauty has no particular use in terms of concrete measurability, which is why modernity, steeped in utility, seeks to move beyond it. But it is precisely because it is of “no particular use” that it is so crucial. Utility serves some other end, an end that asserts that things are consumables and that humans are merely consumers. Beauty cannot be consumed but only happened upon or created. The eyes that encounter beauty can only be affected and changed by it. As Peter Kreeft has said, “Beauty is the first thing we notice and love.” Saint Thomas Aquinas defined beauty as “that which, upon being seen, pleases.” How could we even begin to quantify that which expands our hearts? Such a thing cannot be measured scientifically.

The beauty of a bloom is not easily measured or controlled. A flower just *is*, and because of its simplicity, we delight in it. Yet it also assists in making tangible in the created world that which is unseen but still *is*. “Beauty contains a summons,” said Dietrich von Hildebrand, “it awakes awe in us; it elevates us above which is base; it fills our hearts with a longing for the eternal beauty of God.” Beauty exists in great cathedrals and works of art, drawing our yearning hearts toward heaven. Yet it also exists in the simple beauty of the flower. God has gifted us a unique opportunity to know Him more deeply through the admiration of the work of His hands. What we cannot see in God we can see in His creation.

Our modern lives are busy. In our harried pace, there is little time to be recollected. Stopping to “smell the roses” makes possible the fulfillment of spiritual needs by meditating upon the transcendent. This slowing permits an encounter with God, rooting us in place, elevating the ordinary.

At Home with Beauty

Among the innate desires of human beings, there are two that supersede the others: the desire for sustenance, and the other for beauty. Without sustenance, we perish. Without beauty, we cease to be human. An ancient Chinese proverb says that “when you only have two pennies left in the world, buy a loaf of bread with one, and a lily with the other.” Master gardener Monty Don states that even in lean times, peasants made sure to always plant flowers in their gardens since they were viewed, too, as a necessity. Their universally beguiling beauty transcends time, culture, and economic status.

“Beauty be not caused—it is.”

—EMILY DICKINSON

Like the peasants, we intuit that our homes should be places not only of sustenance and shelter but also of beauty. Home is foundational in the formation of hearts. This formation has a rippling effect, spilling over to the outside world. Women often possess a unique ability to bring beauty into the home. We set up the house, adorn the walls, and seek to create a backdrop for endless memories. God has done the same for us in the created world. The world is a garden within which He seeks to mold us. We adorn our homes with the same communication of love; through seemingly unimportant external signs, we elicit an inward feeling out of the ordinary.

When we arrange flowers, we gather what exists in nature to create a new reality. Flower arrangements, like cathedrals, draw our hearts toward the transcendent. Using the created materials in conjunction with each other forms a new whole that draws our minds and hearts to the one who created each

piece. A stone alone is an ordinary object, but when arranged in harmony and order with other materials, it creates magnificent cathedrals that aid in the contemplation of the One who created and willed not just the stone but also the artists. So, too, as we contemplate the beauty of a flower, we comprehend through the delicate nature of each petal, stock, stamen, that God is intentional with every intricate detail. Like the building of a great cathedral, the building of a flower arrangement, stem by stem, creates a masterpiece. The layers of foliage are the stonewall backdrop, the supporting flowers are like the buttresses, all working in harmony to showcase the focal blooms which sit like stained-glass windows. Creative works pay powerful homage to the Creator, opening a new door to the transcendent.

“One can dream so much better in a room
where there are pretty things.”

—LUCY MAUD MONTGOMERY

Design articles often speak of the importance of bringing the outside in. Less common is an acknowledgment that we were created for the experience of beauty. Without this deep understanding of the importance of beauty in our lives, and consequently, within our homes, these articles remain superficial. When we bring nature inside, however, we create a new Eden within our homes where our Lord can reside. A home can be a sacred place filled with ordinary glimpses of hidden life. As we permit flowers to be a part of daily life, we can contemplatively reside within our homes and pause—even if just for a moment—at the sight of beauty. Their fleeting nature prompts us



to stop, reflect, and gaze, however briefly. In these moments of stillness, the Lord works.

This book is meant to rekindle the deep relationship between women and those most treasured fruits of nature: flowers. It is meant to remind us to bask in the beauty of this great gift. The waters of the world, the fruit-bearing tree, and the blooming rose provide abundant life and nourishment not for themselves but for every living thing.

I stoop down one last time to take in the sweet scent of paperwhite flowers poking through the chilled earth. It is amazing to sense the intensity of fragrance emitted by just one tiny bloom.

A gift for the New Year.

Many say time is a thief, but when viewed through the seasonal lens of ever-changing gifts, it accrues. As the paperwhites fade, we get the buzz and bloom of spring, the swelter of summer, and the marveling death of autumn. When the calendar year ends, we deck the halls of our domestic churches with fragrant pine and red ribbons. All the time that passes between paperwhites and pines reminds us of the transformative power of beauty.

Journey with me through the seasons, marveling in God's gift of flowers.



WINTER





A deep stillness envelopes the earth in winter. Even though winter is different for each climate, much of the refrain remains the same: dormancy, hibernation, silence. In some regions of the world, there are a few brave, though scarce, flowers to welcome the outdoor wanderer. Under the crisp, frost-bitten landscape, pansies, leucojum, snowdrops, camellias, and hellebores perfume the thin, cold air.

It may seem strange to begin a floral book with the season devoid of flowers. An argument can be made that such a book should begin with spring, a time of birth, a season of the loveliest flowers. I would argue, however, that it feels as if we were skipping over the difficult moments and heading straight to the easiest, which hardly serves as a realistic reflection of life. The warmth of a spring sun means so much more after the cold. With each February day, our hearts steadily grow in anticipation of verdant pastures. March's arrival brings the desire to a fever pitch, setting a meditative framework as we see the wonder of growth in places that once laid barren.

The rhythm of the seasons enhances our anticipation of what is not present. In it, we can marvel and find joy in the arrangement of God's created order. Creation isn't a series of accidents or coincidences but structured with divine intentionality. Nature and its beauty are a conglomeration of extraordinary solos within various movements that come together to form a symphony, a love song from a Father to His children.

Living with an intentional view of the seasons cultivates patience in the onlooker, a patience that spills over into various aspects of life by living in the present season and the fruits it brings. We wait, knowing what is to come. A bud opens to a flower only once and at a particular time of the year. Though a season may seem short to us, all that nature does is according to an ordained purpose, and is, therefore, always on time. Unlike a mother who is always harried for time, in the seasons, we witness the miraculous because nature never rushes. It is always on time. The lesson is clear: each life happens only once and is timed for a purpose.

With the daily deliveries of flowers from South America, Africa, and Europe, we forget that specific flowers only bloom at certain times. I am an advocate for seasonal blooms, growing or buying. Often emphasized are the environmental benefits of seeking seasonality in arranging—but I want to dig a little deeper (forgive the pun) to consider the importance of waiting and seeing specific beauty blooming in its own time.

“In the cold solitude of winter, I thank the Lord
for this opportunity for reflection.”

—WINSLOW HOMER

There is so much more to flowers than meets the eye. They speak to deeper realities often overlooked, such as our innate need for beauty; a flower’s ability to make beauty accessible fills that deep-seated need. As we become acutely aware in winter, it is in the absence and reemergence of something that we often come to recognize its value. Beauty without meaning can be superficial, but we enter a deeper, transcendent reality when it has a purpose—namely, willing the best of the other.





The Catholic Church is a home for seasonal living. The liturgical calendar dissects the year into six seasons to help us focus and be present. During certain seasons, the parts of the Mass slightly change, but the visuals—linens and vestment colors and so much more—often point to the time of year. The liturgical calendar marks time, as does nature. People used to regularly speak of saints' feasts as calendar markers, such as Michaelmas, when referring to the times of year. The rhythm of the seasons dictates life—as do the seasons of fasting and feasting. These small shifts in routine—for instance seeing a priest in red vestments—help our focus hone in on the present moment.

“Adopt the pace of nature;
her secret is patience.”

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

The domestic church also lives a life of cycles that mimic the Mother Church, as it too is a sacred space. Home life also has its rhythm—summertime freedom marked by jumping through sprinklers differs from the cozy enjoyment of fireside cocoa. We also can have a rhythm to the life of our home accentuated by flowers. Seasonality dictates the backdrop. A simple vase of flowers signifies the time of year while enhancing the beauty of the life lived within the home sanctuary. A seasonally lived life does wonders for the ability to savor the present.

Despite the absence of flowers in winter, a different kind of beauty abounds. Though I long for the wonder of the diverse types of fritillaria blooms with their unmatched shapes and form, I have come to appreciate the unique loveliness of this season. Frost and snow on last summer's flowers sit like sculptures dotting the landscape. Birds perching on branches and

their humble little nests are more evident, no longer hidden by leaves. Trellises lie bare in anticipation of being overrun by climbing flowers. It is a time of waiting and watching, because we know that soon the flowers will come. The barrenness seeds our hope. As we turn through the pages of winter, we witness the slow reawakening of nature and the beauty it possesses.

When we live life in this manner, we attune our hearts and senses to the splendor that is right outside the door. Each month contains within it a beautiful story of the natural world, ranging from region to region and changing daily, though always remaining the same in its parade through time. This is a beauty far from mundane. How joyful are those first rays of light after a rainy and moody sky? Again, we see this pattern mimicked in our spiritual life when, after an arid winter of the soul, we are given a grace of consolation. A deeper appreciation of the seasons, with its cycles, is born within us in the stillness of the winter.

The Home Florist's Tool Kit

Arranging flowers at home is simple; all we need are a few items that fill the home florist's tool kit and the knowledge of each item's proper use. For many joyful years, I worked at a bustling flower shop in Philadelphia. I began as an apprentice whose main job was to sweep the shop floors and “process” flowers as they arrived. Over time, I worked my way up the ladder to manage the flower shop and design weddings. At the flower shop, each florist would have a tool kit (and would often don a tool belt as we worked) that held the tools needed to create an arrangement. Such a kit (and belt) can be easily replicated at home.

In my early days as a professional florist, I was only permitted to use a knife to remove leaves and thorns, give fresh cuts to the bottoms of stems, and arrange flowers. Fortunately, snips have come such a long way that they have replaced a knife and band-aids, as rose stems weren't the only recipients of fresh cuts! The sharpness of any item—whether a paring knife, snips, or pruner—is critical. It prevents the stems from being crushed while being cut.

Such tools become an extension of the florist. They do the work our hands are incapable of. There are only a handful of items needed, and they can easily be found in most homes:

- *Pruners* or *clippers* are a great tool to use to cut thick stems or branches. They are a well-rounded, all-purpose item and can be used across the full floral spectrum. Having a sharp cutting tool on hand to cut stems is better than typical paper scissors since trying to cut thicker stems can break the scissors and crush the stems. Always make sure to clean your pruners or clippers after use to ensure that no bacteria grows and spreads.

- *Flower snips* are wonderful to have on hand for trimming more delicate stemmed flowers because they tend to be a great deal sharper than typical pruners. Their scissor shape makes for a comfortable and familiar process of trimming stems. Like pruners or clippers, it's good to consistently keep your flower snips clean. And a paring knife if you are a daring purist!
- There are several forms of *floral tape* available to purchase, and each has a different use. Waterproof tape is a must-have item when arranging in wide-mouthed containers, whether you are forming a grid to hold flowers or to secure balled-up chicken wire. There is also a floral tape with a unique adhesive that is used when constructing bouquets, boutonnieres, and flower crowns. While not a necessity, it can be great to have available should you decide to make a flower crown for a May crowning. It should be noted that this type of tape is not waterproof and, therefore, not helpful in the use of securing flowers in wide-mouthed container arrangements.
- *Wires* are great to have available for several uses. Coated wire and/or a 26-gauge wire are useful in the construction of boutonnieres, garlands, swags, and flower crowns. They have even been wonderfully helpful in reinforcing or repairing injured flower stems.
- *Chicken wire* has become one of the most prominent ways of supporting flowers in wide-mouthed containers. Bowls, urns, and other large opening vases can be difficult to arrange without some sort of mechanism to hold the flowers in place. Chicken wire is also extremely helpful in creating hanging wall installations, as it is lightweight and easy



to work with. All you need is a small spool of chicken wire. Coated wire is best because it doesn't rust, but traditional metal chicken wire works just as well.

- *Frogs* are equally helpful in holding the stems in wide-mouthed containers, like chicken wire. They are adhered to the bottom center of the vessel with a putty. The prongs of the frog pierce and hold the bottom of the flowers in place.
- *Wire cutters* are a necessity when trimming chicken wire down to size. I have used (and damaged!) perfectly good pruners by cutting chicken wire down, but it was extremely difficult.
- Tucking in a pack of *rubber bands* is great in the florist's toolbox to help secure bouquets and gather bunches of stems to hang to dry.

Other items that are more outside the box but still helpful to have as you dive deeper into floral design include:

- *Sheet moss* is always added to my recommendations of helpful items to have on hand. It is not a typical inclusion for a florist tool kit, but it really should be a staple in every home. Moss is useful in so many ways: I've used it to hide chicken wire in less dense flower arrangements, as a floral foam alternative, to wrap the exterior of vases to give an arrangement a "woodland" appearance, tucked it into grapevine wreaths, and so much more. Very few things give a more natural, grown appearance to a design than beautiful green sheet moss.



EDLINGS

- A *Lazy Susan* is another great bonus item to have on hand for floral design. Placing your vase on top of the turntable makes it easier to obtain a constant 360-degree view of your design.

While I have used floral foam a great deal in my years of arranging, I have moved away from using it unless necessary (summer outdoor wedding receptions with floral hanging installations wouldn't survive long without it). Chicken wire shaped into a ball and placed into a vase has become a more popular option, and for a good reason. Chicken wire has staying power and is a more sustainable and economical way of arranging flowers since wet floral foam has a once-and-done usage, and is considered toxic. Moreover, arranging flowers in wide-mouthed urns, bowls, and containers is much easier with the chicken wire and frog structure and secured with a bit of floral tape. Not all vases require a structural element to hold flowers, only wide-mouthed containers like bowls and urns.

These items needed for a home florist kit can be sourced online, at garden centers, or in most flower shops. Very little is required for success in floral design; it is one of the most accessible creative outlets to undertake as it demands very little investment. The reward floral design provides, however, is excellent!



