

I have a very special garden of memories. As I grew up, I worked it as best I could by trying to be friendly to others. But I was very much a social moron, and I made a lot of mistakes. I cringe when I think of them, knowing that I cannot reverse their effect. Each interaction became a seed planted that grew into a resident of my ever-expanding gourd garden. Each had a name of someone that I once knew, or at least tried to get to know. I wondered if perhaps they contained the thoughts of others about us over the years – the number, quality, and frequency of them. The development of these things occurred throughout my life, but the relationships with the longest terms, high school, college, etc., were of the most interest to me.

I look back on this after decades, and I now realize how important it is for me to know how each of these veggies have grown (and what is inside them). My garden patch is well populated with items of all different sizes, due to the various levels and characteristics of past relationships. There were all different varieties of gourds: some with warts, some with “legs”, and all with various combinations of colors including black, green, white, yellow, and orange. But I wondered if the characteristics of the outside reflected what was actually inside.

After my 50th high school reunion, I began to wonder more and more about the fruit growing in my garden. I had hoped that they contained precious memories and positive expectations, both mine and theirs. But after all the years that had gone by, I was somewhat in doubt as I considered my field of produce.

Looking back at my “patch” I could see various shapes and sizes of the produce, which bore evidence of the relationships that I had developed throughout the years. I had always considered that there were people who would have in some way still felt a (good) connection between us, but it was not always easy to determine the “health” of these relationships. I knew for sure that in cases I needed closure, and though I had received that in some cases, that didn’t really mean that there was anything special there that had lasted through the years. There was still a great amount of uncertainty in most of them.

I discussed these thoughts with my scientist friend, who was eventually able to develop an instrument with the capability of providing an image of the contents, allowing us to see them without the need for opening them. It was something like shining a light behind an egg to see what is within. He brought the instrument to my place to evaluate the pumpkin patch. We viewed a couple of items, and though the image was sometimes foggy, the evaluation of the contents eventually became clear to me. It was amazing that in some way the name of the person related to the pumpkin was determined by the viewing system.

I used the viewer to examine these from time to time. I could not possibly deal with all of the information if I worked a complete harvest. Generally, I used it when circumstances cause me to meet someone from the past, have some interaction with them, or even just remember them for some reason.

Some of the products of my garden were completely empty shells. This was extremely disappointing after thinking there was something of value in the relationships even after all these years. But no growth at all had occurred to fill the inside. There was nothing of value, and no seeds at all. They were evidently not viable even from the beginning. These were very much a disappointment to me, as I had considered that many an old schoolmate would remember me with some fondness.

Others that I looked at were not empty – at least there was some interaction to be considered, though it could be good or bad (or even neutral). Some were partially filled, and some were near to bursting the walls (indicating a very strong relationship of some kind).

Several I looked at had gone very bad inside, and I thought that perhaps that the cause was some slight or offense from the past that had festered over time; the separation continued to increase. For a few, there was no visibility at all, as the interior was completely black and opaque. There was certainly not even a trace of love there. In one or two, the rottenness had permeated the wall and had infected other gourds that were nearby.

I wondered how much of the stunted growth or internal decay was due to my own lack of care. I knew that some of the bad results had to be my own fault. I had made many mistakes in my dealings with people, especially in my youth. I began to feel a little like Pepe Le Pew when he realized that he was actually a skunk (not a cat), and no one wanted to be near him¹.

There was a tremendous feeling of disappointment after looking through most of the shells. Did they represent lost friendships, or friendships that had never developed at all? I found that external size or shape or coloring² was not a good indicator of what lay within.

I considered the parallel of my thoughts to the parable of the sower, and the different kinds of soil that represented different responses of people to the Word of God, and thus to Jesus. The responses to Jesus were quite varied, as well. The parallel is related to the different responses of people to me. In my case there were different seeds as well as different soils, and the environment nurtured new plants very differently (shade, sun, nourishment, etc.). And perhaps the rocks, briars, and hard, dry soil were all my fault.

Throughout the years these relationships grew or died inside their shells. All the while the grower expected them to result in good fruit. I remembered the disappointment of Jesus when there were no figs on the fig tree³, and His parable where the fig tree was given one more year of careful tending to see if it would produce good figs⁴. In a similar way, God gave Jeremiah a vision of good and bad figs and expressed similar disappointment with the bad ones⁵.

Yet there were some of the shells that had good inside them. It was such a pleasure to find these, and I valued them so much more because of the contrast to those that were so disappointing.

There was one container that was very large and even seemed to glow⁶, and in viewing it I realized that this one represented God's presence and His offer of the deepest relationship possible. I realized that this was the greatest treasure of them all⁷.

In my initial consideration of all of this I concentrated on how my personal relationships grew or shrank with time. But as I got older, I realized that it is not just the "garden" that grows – it has been my own inner self as well.

1. "What?" ... "Nooo!"; what would Pepe think now of those who accuse him of "aggressive sexual behavior, not just having a bad smell.
2. Think of Jesus' interpretation of white-washed walls (Matthew 23:27).
3. Mark 11:13ff.
4. Luke 13:6ff
5. Jeremiah 24
6. John 8:12
7. Is it wrong to think here of Linus' Great Pumpkin?