



The Cross Gardener

Jason F. Wright

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From the *New York Times* bestselling author, an inspiring story of life, love, and moving on.

Married and the father of a young daughter, John Bevan had finally found the traditional family he lacked as an orphaned child. But all that disappears when a fatal car accident steals away his wife-and the unborn child she carried.

Filled with sorrow, John withdraws from life and love. He erects a small cross at the scene of his wife's accident and visits daily, grieving. Then one morning he encounters a young man kneeling before the cross, touching it up with white paint. John's conversations and travels with this mysterious man-known to him only as the Cross Gardener-will forever change his world.

From Jason F. Wright comes a timeless tale that explores the questions we ask when our lives are touched by loss: How do we carry on? And who will show us the way? The answers John Bevan finds illuminate the hope that even in our darkest hours we are not alone.

The Cross Gardener Details

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Laura says

Another great book by Jason F. Wright. I knew there was going to be a twist at the end but I definitely didn't predict what it was! This is about a man, John Bevan, who tragically loses his wife and unborn child in a car accident. He is overcome with grief and finds it hard to accomplish any day-to-day tasks. He visits the crash site often, where he has constructed two white crosses, and one day he meets another man there who is tending to the crosses. At first, John does not want this "Cross Gardener" tending to his crosses. They eventually strike up a friendship, and John learns a great deal about life and death from the man called The Cross Gardener.

Barbara says

This was a read-in-one sitting book. Moving account of man and his daughter following the death of his wife and unborn son in a freak auto accident. I thought I had it all figured out partly through the book, but I was completely wrong.

Jana says

Meh. The writing was too choppy at times...like he wanted to emphasize so many points that there were too many of those one-short-sentence paragraphs. Mostly I felt like I'd read this book before (The Five People You Meet in Heaven; The Peacegiver; Tuesdays With Morrie; Have a Little Faith; The Holy Secret)...I'm not a major fan of the "slightly clueless guy meets wise, mysterious mentor" formula, I guess. It was a sweet book, but it seemed to have an exaggerated sense of its own depth and wisdom.

Tanya says

I started this book just two days before my own family was in an auto collision, so obviously that will shadow my review. I liked the message about Listening that was a theme of this book. I had a hard time with the father being wrapped up in his own grief and not being able to extend himself to his daughter for such a long time. I can understand it considering all he'd been through and that he needed time to fully grieve, but I think if it had been a mother that survived, the daughter would have been assisted in moving through her own grief much sooner. I was totally surprised when the identity of the Cross Gardener was revealed and it was because I was wanting to know his identity that I kept plugging away at this book, despite my own difficulty of dealing with personal injuries, children with their own issues to resolve post-collision, insurance claims, and replacing a totaled car.

Susan says

I am not so sure how scripturally sound this is. The basis of the story is that we all have someone who greets us when we die. We do not die alone. This book would be terrific comfort for someone who has just lost

someone they love. However, I am not sure it is the truth of God that He sends us an angel, someone who has gone on before or not (I need to check through scripture about this). I have always believed through what scripture teaches that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord so I believe that it is always Jesus who greets us. Love to hear anyone else's comments about this. I guess I will just have to wait and see what the truth really is and then I won't be able to tell you but Christ comforts those who mourn and we know this to be true. Perhaps this book is a way of comfort.

Louise says

John Bevan was adopted along with the other older two boys in his family: Scott and Tim. Their adoptive father was an Apple Orchardist with his own father.

This family suffered through a lot of tragedy. John's mother died in a tragic car accident but doctor's were able to save John. John's adoptive Grandpa finally dies and then his college age adopted brother, Tim, who drowned in the Atlantic Ocean died and is just too many losses for such a young man like John to endure.

During high school, John meets Emma Jane and falls in love with her. Somehow he just knows Emma Jane is the woman he's going to marry and he does, eventually. Together they have a beautiful daughter whom they name Lou Lou, a cute, precocious and smart little girl who is the light of their lives. Soon Emma Jane is pregnant again and through ultra-sound learn this new baby is going to be a boy so they name him Willard. Tragically, Emma Jane is in a car accident one night and she dies along with her and John's unborn baby, Willard. Doctor's efforts to deliver Willard are successful but their attempts to save his life are not.

John, filled with overwhelming grief immediately withdraws from all aspects of life and love. He decides to build and erect two crosses at the scene of Emma Jane's accident – one for Emma Jane and one for baby Willard. Leaving Lou Lou behind with Emma Jane's parents, John visits the crosses each and every day in his ever deepening grief and sorrow and when one day he meets a man who appears to be repainting and caring for the crosses John made and erected he begins to have conversations with this strange man whose only name seems to be the "Cross Gardener". Soon John realizes that he is healing more and more with every conversation he has with this man. But...it isn't until they take a journey together that John really comes to see what he must embrace in this world, from the secrets of his past to the sorrow of his wife's passing – if he is to start his life anew. And only as this journey ends does John realize "who" this 'Cross Gardener' may have been all along.

You will be so totally surprised by the ending of this story and to find out "who" the 'Cross Gardener' is.

Jason F. Wright's ability to write stories of the heart is phenomenal and reminds me a lot of Richard Paul Evans. I've read some of Wright's other novels like 'The Christmas Sweater' and the 'Wednesday Letters' and each was as truthful and touching as this one!! This is a story that everyone, young and old, will enjoy and it will satisfy and leave you with a lot to think about.

Paul Pessolano says

Jason F. Wright is the New York Times Bestselling author of "The Wednesday Letters", "The Christmas Jars", and co-author of "The Christmas Sweater".

"The Cross Gardener" is a very unusual story, a very moving story, and a story that looks at questions that many of us have asked ourselves over and over again.

John Bevan was born on the night his mother was killed in an automobile accident. He was moved from foster home to foster home, and finally found a loving home on an apple orchard run by Wayne Bevan.

John marries his high school sweetheart and becomes the father to a daughter. His life is shattered again when his father dies. He inherits the orchard and settles down to a good life with his wife and daughter. Tragedy strikes again when his wife and unborn son are killed in an automobile accident.

John, immersed in sorrow and self pity, retreats from life and love. The orchard falls into disrepair and more importantly he becomes removed from his daughter.

John erects small crosses at the scene of the accident and visits every day. Finding himself at the probably the lowest point of his life he finds a young man attending to the crosses, both cleaning the area around them and painting them.

The cross gardener engages in conversation with John and they visit other memorials while the cross gardenere works to change the bleak world that John is now living in.

A wonderful look at how tragic losses can change our lives and how one can find hope by listening and trusting in others.

The cross gardener is revealed at the end of the book and I am sure it will come as a surprise to you.

If you have had tragic losses in your life or know someone who has, this book will provide comfort and hope.

Andrea says

Tearjerker would be an understated way to describe *The Cross Gardener*. Just when I thought I was finished crying, I'd start all over again. My poor, poofy eyes and stuffy nose.

The Cross Gardener tells the emotional story of John Bevan. The details of his birth and then adoption were given factually. Although the birth story wasn't happy, it was a detail. But, Jason F. Wright painted a picture of John's adolescence and young adulthood that drew me in.

I was heartbroken when John's wife and baby died in a car accident. I mourned along with him and his daughter. I was curious about the cross gardener. I worried about John, and hoped that Lou Lou would start talking again.

A very touching story about love and loss, hope and living.

Dana Burgess says

On the cover, Don Piper is quoted: "Fresh and spiritual". I would have said: "Predictable and sappy". But

that is not necessarily a bad thing as I would have been saying it through the runny nose and streaming tears on the airplane with the other passengers looking at me like I had lost it. "The Cross Gardener" is an exploration of loss, of grief, and of survival. It is christian fiction and, therefore, also an exploration of spirituality and God's role in the lives of believers and non-believers alike.

Unlike much of the christian literature I have read, 'The Cross Gardener' does not come off as some evangelical preacher's attempt to convert the reader. That doesn't mean that Jason Wright doesn't try and teach the reader - or perhaps better said - lead the reader to an understanding of his own personal beliefs using the novel as a vehicle. He does. But the religious tract does come off as more of an exploration than as Bible thumping.

The novel reminded me very much of 'A Walk to Remember' by Nicholas Sparks. Religious girl meets non-religious boy, they fall in love, their perfect life is torn apart by means beyond their control, life goes on. (there are no spoilers there. That much you could get from the back of the book.) Unlike 'A Walk to Remember', 'The Cross Gardener' follows the events following the tearing apart of the perfect life. I really loved how Mr. Wright focused on men, and especially on fathers and their influence on the lives around them.

Like I said, it is sappy and predictable - it is also lovely and emotional; sweet and naive with no edge. After reading the last page, wipe away the tears, heave a big sigh, smile a little and walk away with a heart that feels just a little lighter - right over to the man in your life and give him a well deserved hug.

Karen says

After reading other reviews, I wonder if I am souless for not liking this book. I prefer that spiritual books either be realistic or allegorical. I do not like books that mix the two genres. Wright tells the story of a modern man who loses his wife and struggles to find his way in the wake of her passing. Fantastic things happen that step too far away from reality (and into allegory) for me.

CS Lewis mastered each of these genres without mixing them. His book A Grief Observed is basically journal entries penned after his wife Joy died. They are heart-wrenchingly honest accounts of his struggles to find God in the absence of his most beloved wife. Lewis also wrote allegorical works such as The Great Divorce, Screwtape Letters and the Narnia novels. In these books he describes spiritual principles in symbols and one-dimensional characters in such a way that many people can apply them to their particular lives. However, they do not expect to ride a bus to heaven, to overhear a demon and his nephew conspire, or to see Christ strolling through the woods in lion form. The allegorical genre tells the reader, "These things should not be taken literally." When realism and allegory mix, it's very hard for the reader to know what they might encounter in their own spiritual quest as literal, and what is just an idea cloaked in a concrete object.

Because this novel had some one-dimensional characters, some very strong symbols, and many passages that were sermon-esque, I felt the quality was too much like a flannel board story. I applaud Wright in his efforts to offer solace to those who grieve, but his comfort comes from doctrine that has no biblical support and from (fictional) experiences that I have never heard anyone describe as real. Thus, they offer me no real hope. I like the ideas behind the fantastical elements, but because they are mixed in with apple orchards, highways and blue jeans, some may be tempted to look for their literal existence. From my experience human spirituality is more complex, subtle and pedestrian.

Laurie says

The Cross Gardener is a beautiful tale of love, loss and the desire to move forward in life. John Bevan has a unique story. Born under dire circumstances, adopted into a comfortable home and loved by a wonderful girl, Bevan finally believed he was living in heaven on earth until a fateful day in August changed his world. The love of his life and center of his world, his wife Emma Jane, and their unborn child Willard are killed in a car accident while John and his young daughter Lou Lou watch. This sudden tragedy sets their lives into a tailspin and John is lost in grief for Emma Jane and Willard. Following the only path that he knows, John makes two wooden crosses and places them at the accident site making it a ritual to visit daily. This continues endlessly while life around him moves forward leaving him and his little girl behind. This endless cycle is interrupted when John arrives for his visit to the accident site and a man is there caretaking the area. Initially, John is appalled but this stranger slowly takes him on a journey that he will never forget leading him on a remarkable path back to the life he nearly left behind.

This book is Wright's best work to date. Breathtaking in its simplicity and stunning in its beauty, The Cross Gardener draws you in until curiosity overwhelms you. The ideas that Wright puts forth are heartwarming and the characters are so easy to identify with that you feel like you are present in their lives. John Bevan is an amazing leading man. His journey through life is more difficult than some but his natural grace in dealing with most situations makes his failure to cope with his wife's passing feel more tragic. His ever-present yet absent daughter Lou Lou breaks a readers heart and his surrounding family who steadfastly urge him forward give the story a balance that would otherwise be lacking. The setting of the apple orchard is vividly written and feels like a perfect location for a book like this to unfold. While the plot moves slowly, it never feels tired and the introduction of the Cross Gardener and revelation of his identity are exquisitely timed. I was often moved to tears while reading this story and feel that it can be a comfort and joy to anyone who has lost someone. Written from the Christian perspective, it is a poignant tale of belief, strength and life that swept me off my feet. I would highly recommend this book to those who enjoy Christian fiction and also to those who are simply looking for a lovely story.

Lori Donovan says

This was a book that kept my interest all the way till the end. I found it very uplifting leaving me feeling very content. It made me think about people I have lost and life and death but in a very spiritual way. It made me think about the little signs that I receive that show me those that have passed are still with me and not that far away!

Deanna says

Generally, I like books that are funny or have an overall happy atmosphere. If that's you, too, skip this one. But if grief is (or has been) your constant companion, this one has some wonderful moments and lessons. I cried periodically all through this thoughtful book. It had some funny moments, but not enough to lift you out of its solemnness. A young man loses his wife and unborn child -- not a spoiler, this much is on the dust cover. He has a 5-year-old daughter who also survives, but he is so devastated he can't care for her properly and may lose her to caring relatives. His exploration of loss, life, death, eternity and the healing power of faith in eternity consume the rest of the book. Each character is well drawn and most of them have flaws that make them realistic. I have felt grief this deep (as has everyone who lives long enough on this earth), just not for this long, thank heaven, because of my faith, so I could relate to the character. But it made me remember those deepest moments of grief, so the pain is relived. Very worth reading -- but read something light right

after you finish this one.

Gail says

I almost didn't read this because of a review I read but I didn't have anything else to read. We each deal with grief in a different way but having to deal with a child's grief is beyond comprehension. I could feel his pain and struggle to cope with a loss.

Kristina Graybill says

One thing about being simplistically spiritual in my own way is that I believe there is a purpose for everyone whether it is in our mortal life or after death, and in this journey called life, we are never truly alone in the world. This book says exactly that without getting religiously boring.

I would have given this book 5 stars, but the ending ended very abruptly. I had to re read the last 5 pages to make sure I didn't miss anything the Cross Gardner had to share about his true identity. I felt his brief explanation as to who he is did not live up to the actual mouth dropping twist of finding out what his identity was. It was as if I was hiking a not so steep mountain, that once I had reached the top, was left kinda hanging on the edge as if I expected there to be something more. The ending could have easily been another 20 pages of explaining how the Cross Gardener was, in a sense, a reincarnated soul and becoming so in such a short period of time for what age he appeared to be (as it was evident the cross Gardner was able to be physically interactive with other characters who played a brief role in the book).
