



# Flourish

Deovtions from the Garden  
to Help You Thrive

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## INTRODUCTION

Within driving distance of our home is a fabulous botanical garden. Bursting with flowers and plants in every shade of green, this garden is one of my favorite places. Tension seeps from my shoulders the minute I step onto the property.

Something about nature soothes my soul and draws my heart heavenward.

I'm attempting to create a little piece of paradise in my own yard, though I readily admit I'm not the best of gardeners. I'm much better at killing plants than cultivating them. Still, I'm determined to grow (pardon the pun) in my horticultural skills.

God and I have had some deep conversations in the garden. Spiritual parallels abound where plants thrive. In the week ahead, we'll explore some of these garden truths as I share my life's journey from surviving toward thriving.

If you long for the abundant life and ache for more than white-knuckled obedience, I invite you to join me in the garden as we look at ways to flourish from the inside out.



Day One  
ROOTED IN LOVE

*Just keep swimming. Just keep swimming, swimming, swimming...*

Dori's words from Pixar's Finding Nemo were like my mantra the year after my third child was born. Her inability to sleep through the night, along with my middle child's night terrors, caused the little sleep I got to be fragmented and restless.

The nights were oh, so long, and the days even longer.

*Just keep swimming . . . Make the next meal. Change the next diaper. Settle the next sibling squabble. You can do this. Bedtime's just six hours away.*

Guilt hung like a millstone around my neck.

*I should have gotten up earlier for a longer time with God. What's happening to my discipline?*

*I shouldn't have snapped at my kids. They didn't mean to spill the entire bottle of salad dressing.*

*I should feel happy. I love my kids and wouldn't wish their little years away.*

*Or would I?*

Seasoned parents said these years would fly by. That if I blinked, they'd be gone. Sometimes I tried blinking really fast, but the days continued to drag.

Outwardly, I plodded along, doing my best to keep up with all the things. But inside I steadily withered away. The abundant life Jesus promised seemed like a distant dream—a nice ideal, but certainly not my reality.

Then a series of events accelerated my inward shriveling. Within six months, our marriage hit an all-time low, I experienced intense burnout, and a spiritual leader's betrayal left me questioning everything I believed. I felt like a failure in nearly every area of my life.

Yet there, in my driest of seasons, I discovered true grace—God's favorable inclination toward those who don't deserve it.



Oh, I'd heard about grace. I'd sung about it and even accepted it when I responded to Jesus as a five-year-old church kid.

But until my carefully cultivated good-girl life withered, I didn't realize how amazing grace truly is. When all I had to offer Jesus was my nothingness, I discovered grace is not only for the repentant sinner turning to Jesus for salvation, but also for people like me—a child of God trying desperately to hold her Christian life together.

When Jesus stepped onto my scene, or into my life's garden, He brought with Him with zero condemnation. He didn't scold me for failing to produce fruit or for questioning what I believed. Instead, He allowed me to experience His acceptance as I never had before. He dazzled me with His tenderness, His open-hearted welcome, and His compassionate understanding.

Like a wise and gentle Gardener, God showed me I'd rooted my Christian walk in the wrong place—in what I should do *for* Him, instead of

what Jesus *had already done* for me. He took me, a shriveled-up plant, and transplanted me into new soil—the life-giving soil of His incomprehensible love.

Everything began to change.

Instead of focusing on a list of do's and don'ts, I was free to relate to the God who calls me *Beloved*.

Instead of submitting to the demands of white-knuckled duty or soul-numbing guilt, I surrendered to God's love as my daily compelling motivation.

Instead of swinging between feeling acceptable or unworthy based on my performance, I found rest in His unchanging acceptance because of Christ's performance on my behalf.

This new perspective grounded me in the only soil fertile enough to produce a flourishing life.

It dispelled the pressure to hurry up and fix myself. It wiped clean the spiritual to-do list by which I had measured my worth. It set me free to respond to the God who has poured His love into

my heart.

I began to thrive when I embraced the truth that I am already accepted by a Father who treasures me.

How's the soil of your soul today? If you're shriveling inside, here's my prayer for you: "I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:17b-19 NIV).

For Further Reading:

Ephesians 1:1-14, 3:14-21

Prayer of Response:

Personalize Ephesians 3:17-19, putting your name in place of every "you" or "your."

Day Two  
KNOWING THE GARDENER

“Did you spend time with Jesus today?”

My pre-teen self dreaded that question, but without fail, the youth leader asked me every time I saw her. I always gave an excuse—I didn’t get up early enough that morning. I was too tired the night before. Day after day, the cycle repeated itself until weeks had passed without me opening my Bible outside of church.

After months of this embarrassing dialog, I made a life-changing decision—I would prioritize daily time with God. The youth leader was right. This was an important spiritual discipline, just as daily water is essential to a garden’s growth.

So I read and I studied. I prayed and I memorized Scripture. For more than two decades, I kept up those spiritual disciplines, trying never to miss a day.

And I thought I knew God, the Gardener, pretty well.

Imagine my surprise, then, when life fell apart. When I physically couldn't get up for long times of Bible study and prayer. When panic attacks left me gasping for breath on the side of the road in the driver's seat of my car. When depression crushed me, and I wished I could curl up in a dark room and sleep away the pain.

Imagine my surprise when God accepted me. I was broken, weary, surrounded by the fragments of my faith.

But I was *His*.

His treasure. His chosen one. His daughter, bought with His Son's blood. He let me feel His delight. He quieted my restless heart with His love. He reminded me that He was singing over me with joy.

I'd studied the Bible for years, but somehow, I'd missed this kind of grace.

I thought my Gardener only smiled at me when I was bearing lots of good fruit. I'd believed His favor was only directed toward me when I made all the right choices and kept up with my spiritual to do list.

*Who is this God who dazzles my soul? How can One so perfect draw me close when I'm worlds away from the perfection I thought He demands?*

God's response in that season revealed some serious misconceptions I had about His character. Thirty years into knowing Him as my Savior, He took me back to the basics and gave me a chance to start over.

I put aside the spiritual to-do list and set my heart on one thing—knowing God as authentically as I could.

Instead of reading my Bible because God required it of me, I read to discover His heart. I picked a “Read through the Bible” plan which gave me freedom to read at my own pace and began slowly working my way through Scripture with a

single goal—to understand what He reveals about Himself. I asked His Spirit to teach me and wrote down everything I learned, from Genesis to Malachi, from Matthew to Revelation.

It took me seven years and five journals to get through the whole Bible, but oh, how my perspective changed. I saw a God who is holy and just—yes, absolutely. But One who is equally full of love and grace. One whose first response to humankind is not anger, but patience. One who loves so relentlessly that He Himself would satisfy the demands of justice so we could be forgiven and reconciled to Him.

In all my years of studying the Bible, nothing has so satisfied my soul as reading with the goal of knowing God.

Oh, He lovingly points out sin along the way, just as a wise gardener pulls weeds and prunes fruitless vines. He directs me toward changes His Spirit wants to make in my life. He gives insight on specific issues and speaks to topics on my

heart. But these are the overflow of our relationship rather than the goal of my “quiet time.”

Knowing God—this has become the focal point of my life.

And the more intimately I know Him, the more I trust Him. The more I trust the Gardener, the more my soul flourishes under His tender care.

“The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing” (Zephaniah 3:17 NKJV).

For Further Reading:  
Philippians 3:1-14

Prayer of Response:

*Lord, thank You for calling me Your own, for singing over me with joy. Quiet my restless heart. Shift my focus from what I should do for You to simply knowing and loving You.*



Day Three  
CONNECTED TO THE VINE

Several years ago, my friend offered me some shoots from her blackberry vine. I had no idea if I could keep them alive, but I love blackberries, so I was eager to try. She brought me several little branches that had sprouted up next to her thriving vine. I placed the pot in my garden where my irrigation system (ahem, super basic backyard sprinkler) would water them every day.

For two years I waited, almost tossing them in the trash more than once. It appeared I'd done what I often do—killed the poor little plants.

Then one day, they began to put out leaves. Maybe they weren't dead after all. I transplanted them from their pot to one of my raised garden beds. The sun shone on them every day. The sprinkler watered them all summer long.

Still no fruit.

The following year, however, the plants went crazy. My husband built a trellis to keep the vines in the bed, and we watched with amazement as the buds blossomed into flowers, the flowers became green berries, and the green berries ripened into juicy black fruit.

At first, I rationed those ripe berries. I collected fruit for several days until I finally had enough to make a cobbler. Little did I know those vines would grow heavy with berries once they really started producing. By the end of the summer, we froze them because we just couldn't eat any more.

I love watching plants flourish as God designed them. Our gardening Father loves enabling us to thrive, too. Yet what's easy to see in the garden can be hard to remember in the Christian life: we can only thrive as we live connected to our Source.

In John 15, Jesus uses the picture of a vine and branches to talk about the importance of abiding in Him. The vine is the life source for each branch, connecting it to the soil's nutrients and carrying

life-giving food throughout the plant. Without this connection, no branch can survive, much less produce berries.

I've seen this time and again in my own little garden. When I cut a branch from the vine, within a day that branch shrivels and dies. Producing fruit is an absolute impossibility, for the life of the vine is what creates fruit on the branches.

Jesus is our vine, and we are His branches. As He lives His life through us, we will flourish. His Spirit's fruit will grow in and through us. If we try to produce fruit *for* God, however, we'll wonder why we feel dry and empty inside, and why this Christian life is so ridiculously hard.

Human effort cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit. We can do lots of good works, but good works are not the same as spiritual fruit.

As I mentioned in the previous devotion, for many years I maintained the discipline of daily Bible reading and prayer. When I closed my Bible each day, practically speaking, I ended my

connection to Christ. I tried hard to be loving and joyful, peace-filled, patient and kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled, yet I struggled to maintain this try-hard life. I wondered at Jesus' offer of abundant life and secretly doubted His promise of soul rest for the weary. I even remember being reluctant to share the gospel with my friends because, inwardly, I felt bad inviting them to the burdensome life I was living.

After my good-girl life fell apart, God shifted my perspective on how to live the Christian life. He taught me that daily life is about *relating* to Him, not *behaving for* Him. From the overflow of this relationship, He produces the fruit of His Spirit through my yielded life.

So whether I'm reading the Bible or cooking dinner, I can engage in conversation with Him. When I struggle to handle a difficult situation, I can pray for wisdom and respond however He directs me. When I run on fumes and act out of my emptiness, I can ask His Spirit to fill me and

help me live beyond my feelings in the moment.

Walking through life connected to His Spirit—this is the only source of our thriving. And because He is Emmanuel—God with us—we can live in the reality of His presence every moment of every day.

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the Vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:4-5 ESV).

For Further Reading:

John 15:1-17

Prayer of Response:

*Lord, You are both the Gardener of my heart and the Vine who is my Source. Teach me to walk with You in the everyday. Renew my thinking so my life can be transformed. Produce Your abundant fruit through me. Help me live connected to You so I can flourish.*

Day Four  
CELEBRATING GROWTH

Something round, and green, and very tiny caught my eye as I meandered through my garden beds one summer morning. I leaned in for a closer look. Peering back at me was our first cherry tomato.

My breath caught, and I smiled. Such a small piece of fruit, yet so full of promise.

While I stood staring, it was as if God showed up in my garden. *Look how excited you are over that tiny tomato, He spoke to my heart. You can't eat it yet—it's nowhere near ripe. Yet you're thrilled to see your plant's growth.*

*Why don't you think I respond similarly when I see small growth in your life?*

*You're so frustrated when you fail to live up to your expectations, and you assume I feel the same way. But I don't expect you to be complete and mature right now, any more than a gardener looks for fully ripe fruit days after planting a seed.*

Tears pooled in my eyes as the truth of this God-encounter rooted itself in my soul.

He's not in a hurry as He produces His Spirit's fruit in my life.

But so often, I am.

I look down the road to the person I want to become, to spiritual and emotional maturity, and I feel discouraged at how far I have to go.

I'm angry with myself when I give in to temptation, and I struggle to rest in the forgiveness Jesus bought with His blood.

I'm undone by the disapproval of others, as if my identity rests on what other people think of me.

I try to fix myself so I'll feel acceptable to God.

Yet all along, He invites me to rest through the process. To trust He's at work and respond to His Spirit. To focus on relating to Jesus, rather than on myself and my shortcomings.

It's easy to confuse spiritual growth with

perfectionism.

We can look at verses like Matthew 5:48 (NIV), “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect,” and think God is concerned with our good behavior above all else. Yet, in the Bible’s original Greek, the word “perfect” signifies completion and maturity—something which happens over time.

Growth is a process, and spiritual growth is no exception. It’ll take a lifetime for us to become the masterpieces God is crafting us into. All the while, He rejoices when He sees us growing, even when the growth seems small.

Second Corinthians 3:18 (ESV) says we are “being transformed into [God’s] image from one degree of glory to another.” Little by little, one choice at a time, we’re being changed to look more and more like Jesus.

Did you notice the passive tense of the verb in this last Bible verse? We’re *being transformed*. Oh, the beauty of these life-infusing words. It’s not up



to us to change ourselves. We are *being* made new, and God's indwelling Spirit is the One doing the transformation. He Himself is the active force behind our renewal.

He calls us, not to change ourselves, but to respond as His Spirit works in us from the inside out.

Where do you feel stuck today? Are there sin struggles you can't seem to shake? Are you emotionally paralyzed by a situation that keeps repeating itself? Do buried dreams and unfulfilled longings crowd out your joy?

I invite you to confidently pour out your heart to God right now. Tell Him what frustrates you. Confess those sins that cling like thorny vines to your soul. Lay bare every emotion and each longing of your heart.

He already knows, but He welcomes you to come close and whisper everything your heart carries. Nothing surprises Him. Nothing changes His love for you or causes Him to push you away

as you come to Him (even if your faith is as tiny as the smallest seed).

Now grab a piece of paper and ask Him to show you where He's at work in your life. Write down everything He shows you—no matter how small the growth may seem.

God is always up to great good in our lives, even when people or circumstances are not. He uses life events and human choices to mature and strengthen us, weaving beauty into even the most ugly and painful places.

Now that you've poured out your heart, and God's shown you where He's at work, thank Him for His transforming presence in your life. Join Him in celebrating your growth.

“And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue His work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns” (Philippians 1:6 NLT).

For Further Reading:

Psalm 62:8, 142:2

Nehemiah 8:10

Romans 8, 12:1-2

Hebrews 4:16

Prayer of Response:

*Thank You, Lord, for rejoicing over the growth in my life. Thank you for being my Source and for being gentle with me as I mature. Sometimes I feel that for every step forward I take, I stumble backward two. How gracious and patient You are. Open my eyes to see where You're at work. Help me recognize how I'm being transformed and enable me to rejoice along the way.*

Day Five  
GROWING IN THE LIGHT

*Location, location, location.*

We often hear this phrase in the real estate market, but it also applies to choosing the perfect spot for a garden. And had I been thinking of that, we might not have purchased our current house. Back then, however, I had no interest in gardening. We had plenty of other “must haves” as we selected our home.

Several years later, when I decided to try growing things, I realized we had no good spot to plant. One side of the yard is always shady, and our kids play in the backyard. The other side drops off in a steep slope to the street below, leaving little space at the top. It does, however, provide a great place for terracing, so my accommodating husband built me several raised beds there.

We've grown many plants in those beds over the years—tomatoes, blackberries, flowers, and herbs. No matter what grows there, each plant enjoys unhindered access to the sun's life-giving rays.

What a fitting picture of the way God created us to flourish.

At salvation, He brought us from darkness into the light of His Son's kingdom (Colossians 1:13). He adopted us into His family and renamed us *children of light* (Romans 8:15, 1 Thessalonians 5:5). His finished work is our past tense reality.

In the present, His Spirit continually shines His light in our hearts (2 Corinthians 4:6). He pushes out the darkness which used to be our way of life (1 John 2:8). He causes us to reflect His light more and more (2 Corinthians 3:18). Through our ongoing relationship with Him, we learn to walk as the children of light He says we are (Ephesians 5:18).

One of the clearest proofs of this ongoing

process is the love with which we treat one another. In fact, love is so central to our new life that First John says it's impossible to simultaneously live in God's light and hate a brother or sister in Christ (1 John 2:9). As God is love, so we, His children, will love one another as we walk in His light (1 John 2:10).

Which all sounds really nice on paper.

Living it out in the everyday, well, that's an entirely different story.

Some people are easy to love, especially those who've been loved well throughout their lives. Others are anything but easy. They wear their wounds on the outside and hurt others because of the hurt they carry with them.

How then do we love when everything in us wants to reject, retaliate, or run away?

Our starting place must always be with Jesus. He loved us first when we were unlovely, his enemies because of our sin (1 John 4:10, Romans 5:8-10). In love, He set aside heaven to step into

humanity and pay for our wrongdoing (Philippians 2:5-11). He shone His light in our hearts so we could see His beauty and respond to His grace (2 Corinthians 4:6, Acts 16:14). He forgave our sin—past, present, and future (Hebrews 10:17, Acts 10:43, Colossians 2:13, Psalm 103:12).

He did all this entirely out of His own goodness. Nothing in us merited His affection (Ephesians 2:8-9). He simply chose to love us and make us His own—recipients no longer of wrath, but of mercy (Ephesians 1:4-6).

Because we've received this grace, because His love is in our hearts, we can love others (1 John 4:19).

Yet here's where it's easy to get off course.

God never calls us to simply muster up as much niceness as we can, to try hard to hold our tongues, to mask our true feelings behind plastered-on smiles.

No, it isn't good behavior alone that pleases

God, but faith (Hebrews 11:6). Faith that looks to God's Spirit as our only Source of love. Faith that recognizes we can't love anyone on our own the way Jesus does. Faith that surrenders to the God of love and cooperates with His Spirit as He loves others through us (Galatians 2:20).

Faith expressing itself as love—this is what pleases God (Galatians 5:6).

It bears mentioning though, that love, God's love, often looks different than we think it would. We desperately need His Spirit to guide us in living out His love in the everyday.

Sometimes I'm fed up with being kind and ready to walk away. I want to cut off a relationship and call it boundary-setting. Yet Jesus directs me to forgive . . . again. He tells me that relationships aren't disposable and reminds me He's a God of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

Sometimes I fail to speak the truth and say I'm



being nice. I avoid conversations in the name of keeping the peace. Yet Jesus reminds me He's not given me a spirit of timidity, but one of power, love, and of self-control (2 Timothy 1:7). He instructs me to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

Sometimes I say yes to one more obligation and scold myself when I feel resentment growing inside. I call it self-sacrifice, rather than recognizing it as people-pleasing (Galatians 1:10). Jesus tells me it's time to practice gracious boundary setting.

God loves us, and He wants to teach us to love well. This can be difficult, but it's never impossible, because the God of love lives within us through His Holy Spirit. Like a garden thriving in the sun, He causes us to flourish as He shines His light in our lives .

He directs us in how to love, empowers us to show love, and refills us when we feel empty of love.

When we truly believe and experience His love, we can pass on that love to others.

“For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8 ESV).

For Further Reading:

Ephesians 5:1-21

1 John 2

2 Corinthians 4:6-7

Prayer of Response:

*Father, what great love You've lavished on me. Thank You for loving me first and for making me Your own. Because You've given me your Spirit, I know I can love others. Teach me how to do this. Continue changing me from the inside out so I look more and more like Jesus. Help me rest in Your love and freely give it away. I love You.*

Day Six  
ROOM TO THRIVE

As I mentioned in the previous devotion, our garden grows on the side of a hill. At the time of this writing, my handy hubby is rebuilding our existing raised beds and adding a few more. Our long-term plan includes a total of nine beds—three rows of three beds stepping down the hill with little walkways and small stairsteps in between. Sounds lovely, doesn't it?

As soon as he finished the first two beds, I headed straight to our neighborhood nursery for seedlings to plant an herb garden. I couldn't wait to get them into our fresh soil.

Perusing the aisles of herbs, I selected some common ones—basil, dill, sage. I also grabbed a few unusual beauties—fragrant lemon verbena, African blue basil, and a pineapple sage with bright red flowers.

Then I noticed the lemongrass. I love its flavor in Thai food, so I put the tiny plant in my cart and made my way to the checkout.

Back home, I carefully placed the seedlings in my new garden beds. Everything looked perfect.

What I didn't know is that lemongrass doesn't stay small. As the weeks passed, the plant grew bigger and bigger until it threatened to take over half of the garden bed. The neighboring verbena, hidden in its shadow, sent out spindly branches in search of the sun.

Eventually, the lemongrass became so large I had to give it a pot of its own. What a difference this move made. The herbs that struggled to grow in its shadow could now bask in the sun and soak up water and nutrients.

I learned an important lesson through this process. If I want a thriving garden, each plant needs plenty of space.

Sometimes my life feels like an overcrowded garden – full of lots of good things, each simple

enough on its own, but together they can become suffocating. Some days, I find I'm so used to running busy it's hard to be still when I have the opportunity. I feel weary to my core as I try to keep up with life's demands.

Like the verbena plant, I'm surviving, but just barely. Maybe someday life will slow down, and I'll know what it's like to thrive. Meanwhile, my inner life is shriveling because I've failed to leave room for the things which feed my soul.

Maybe you can relate?

Jesus spoke to this human struggle when He walked our planet. He noticed busy Martha (Luke 10:38-42). He had compassion on the downcast crowds (Matthew 9:36). He called out to the weary, inviting them to trade their burdens for His rest. His invitation still rings true today.

“Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for

your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and my load is not heavy to carry” (Matthew 11:28-30 NET).

Come. Take. Learn. Find.

These action words center on relationship. *Come* to Him. *Take* His yoke. *Learn* from Him. *Find* rest through knowing Him.

As we experience His rest and discover the beauty of His heart, we learn to trust Him. Our faith, at its core, is a relationship of trust. It begins at salvation, when we first believe in Christ, and deepens throughout life as we get to know Him better and experience His faithfulness.

Trust is an interesting word in the Bible. One resource I studied describes one of the Hebrew words for trust as “the sense of well-being which results from knowing that the ‘rug won’t be pulled out from under you.”[1] It’s a confident expectation, the feeling of being safe, a carelessness born from a sense of

security.

I don't know about you, but this doesn't always characterize my relationship with God. I'm prone to worry more than to pray. I try to fix things before waiting on God. I want a contingency plan just in case He doesn't come through.

Yet still God is still faithful. He's committed to cultivating my faith. He's not in a hurry as He continually draws my wandering heart to Himself.

This growth takes time and is cultivated in moments of emotional honesty with God. Repeatedly in Scripture, the people of God describe their struggles as they pour out their hearts to Him. They express their emotions and even their doubts.

Then they make a choice.

“Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God” (Psalm 42:5, 11, 43:5 NIV).

Like my little plants in their newly crafted garden beds, our souls need space to flourish. We need unhurried time for communing with God (though this may look different in our various life seasons). We need breathing room to process our emotions honestly and settle our hearts in His trustworthiness. We need His Spirit's renewal each and every day (2 Corinthians 4:16).

As we're creating our schedules and planning our days, may we consciously leave margin for our souls. May we live by His gentle guidance rather than being driven by duty or shame. May we prioritize soul care, pressing pause when we notice our hearts growing restless (Psalm 116:7).

Ultimately, let's allow God's peace to rule in our hearts, overflowing into our relationships and our daily lives (Colossians 3:15.)

“Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they that wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run



and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint”  
(Isaiah 40:30-31 NASB).

For Further Reading:

Luke 10:38-42

Isaiah 30:1-15, 40:28-31

Prayer of Response:

*Lord, how I want to know You. Teach me to wait on You, to prioritize stillness, and to listen to Your Spirit’s still, small voice. Remind me to make room for things that feed my soul. Grow my trust and confidence in You. Help me live each day in connected relationship with You.*

Day Seven  
THE FLOURISHING LIFE

I love an inviting front porch—one that speaks welcome and beckons visitors inside. Of all the ways to cultivate this feel, adding potted plants and hanging flowers is one of my favorites. In an instant, they transform a basic entryway into a space of color and beauty.

Trouble is, on my front porch, the loveliness doesn't last long. I notoriously kill the plants there by neglecting to water them. Though I'm hopeful when I fill my grandmother's plant stand with spring beauties, they languish as my excitement over new flowers wears off.

Several years ago, my neighbor gave me an amaryllis which she'd cultivated especially for me. Recognizing the love she'd put into this gift, I received it with both thankfulness and uncertainty, wondering if I'd be able to keep it alive.

I put it on my porch and faithfully watered it—for a little while. As life's busyness and summer's heat increased, I forgot about the amaryllis (and all the other unfortunate plants on the front porch.)

When I remembered, however, I knew something had to change. This plant was too special to stay on the front porch. Despite my best intentions, it would never flourish there.

So, I moved it to my garden.

In the garden, plants flourish thanks to a faithful water timer. This timer makes sure they get watered every single morning, regardless of how long it's been since our last rain.

In the Bible, God portrays those who trust Him as well-watered, thriving trees:

- “That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers” (Psalm 1:3 NIV).

- “But the godly will flourish like palm trees and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon. For they are transplanted to the Lord’s own house. They flourish in the courts of God. Even in old age they will still produce fruit; they will remain vital and green” (Psalm 92:12-14 NLT).
- “They will be like a tree planted near a stream whose roots spread out toward the water. It has nothing to fear when the heat comes. Its leaves are always green. It has no need to be concerned in a year of drought. It does not stop bearing fruit” (Jeremiah 17:8 NET).

In all three cases, we see a thriving tree—firmly rooted and filled with vitality. This tree never outgrows fruit bearing, and its leaves never dry up.

It’s not that summer’s heat doesn’t come. Seasons of drought are assumed. Yet, the tree flourishes in every season because of where it’s

planted—by streams of water.

Fresh, flowing, abundant water.

*Living waters.*

“In Hebrew culture, the term ‘living waters’ described pure, flowing water.”[1] It “bubbled up from the recesses of the earth and continued to flow even when other streams dried up.”[2]

Because of the term’s everyday usage in Bible times, *living water* was also used to describe God, the One who gives continual soul satisfaction. (See Jeremiah 2:13, 17:13.)

Jesus picked up this analogy when He offered true relief to thirsty souls.

To the crowd of religious worshippers in Jerusalem He cried out, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’ (But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive)” (John 7:37-38 NASB).

And to the cast-away woman of Samaria, Jesus

promised, “Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14 NIV).

To all who will come, Jesus offers true refreshment—the living water of His Holy Spirit. He Himself will satisfy our deepest thirst.

Yet His promise includes more than soul satisfaction. This living water, Jesus said, would well up as eternal life inside believers.

This is where it’s easy to get a bit lost, because eternal life is often defined as “living forever” or “going to heaven when we die.”

If this is all it means, how can eternal life bubble up inside us now?

Turns out, the meaning of eternal life is far richer than the simple definition we often use. “Eternal life is not simply the quantity (how long) but also the quality of life (how good).”[3] It speaks of “a fullness or genuineness of life.”[4]

And it isn’t something we must wait for until

we die. On the contrary, eternal life is our current possession, a gift Jesus gave us the moment we came to Him in faith. “For all who presently believe in Christ, there is eternal life to be presently enjoyed. . . The happiness, satisfaction, freedom, confidence, comfort, and humility that come to the believer are the beams that radiate from the center of the gospel.”[3]

The gospel—the astounding invitation to peace with God through faith in Jesus—offers us eternal life (Romans 5:1-2). When we respond to this gospel, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us, bringing His full and genuine life.

From that moment on, everything changes.

Like the languishing amaryllis moved from my porch to the garden, our souls receive access to an abundant spring of new life.

No longer must we live needy, trying to fill our emptiness through people or things. Instead, we can experience abundant life as we’re continually nourished by the Holy Spirit (John 10:10). We can

live relationally with Christ, rather than striving to keep up with the “try-harder” life (John 17:3).

We can run to God confidently at any time because He knows us, accepts us, and welcomes us close (Hebrews 4:16).

This is eternal life, the life God’s Spirit gives us as we come to Him and drink deeply, over and over again.

His presence living within us is our ongoing source of thriving.

How would you describe the condition of your soul? Are you like my porch plants on day four of my forgetfulness, trying desperately to survive summer’s heat? Or do you continually receive nourishment from the living water of God’s Spirit?

May we drink deeply, continually, of God’s indwelling Spirit. May His eternal life in us produce His Spirit’s fruit through us.



For Further Reading:

Psalm 1, 92

John 4:4-42, 7:37-39, 17:1-3

Prayer of Response:

*Lord, thank You for sending Your Spirit to live within me. Thank you that I never face life alone. In seasons of joy and seasons of pain, may I continually look to You as my Source of thriving. Remind me to come to You continually and live in ongoing friendship with You.*

## CONCLUSION

Our God has positioned us to flourish from the inside out. In love, He rooted us in relationship with Himself. Like a master gardener cultivating his plants, He nurtures us with wisdom. He connects us to His Son as branches joined to a vine, and He celebrates growth in our lives. He shines His light in our hearts and teaches us to walk as children of light. He leads us in creating space for the things that feed our souls.

All this is ours because His Spirit lives inside us—the Living Water who nourishes our hearts and gives us eternal life.

Through our relationship with God, we can thrive, not just survive. Hard times will come as surely as storms, heat, and bugs come to my garden.

But ours is a good and skillful Gardener. He never leaves us to fend for ourselves. He's always at work—tending and mending as He cultivates

beauty in the garden of our lives. He welcomes us to share life with Him—to learn from Him, get to know His heart, and let Him express His character through us. He's not in a hurry as He changes us from the inside out. And as He lives His eternal life through us, He'll use us to draw others into a life-giving relationship with Him, as well.

I pray this week in the garden has refreshed your soul. May our life-giving Creator cause you to flourish as you walk through life with Him.



## NOTES

### Day Six:

[1]#982, Lexical Aids to the Old Testament in the Key Word Study Bible

### Day Seven:

[1]<https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/living-water-en-gedi>

[2]<https://jewsforjesus.org/publications/issues/issue-s-vo6-no7/sukkot-a-promise-of-living-water/>

[3]<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/erik-raymond/what-does-it-mean-to-have-eternal-life/>

[4]<https://www.compellingtruth.org/what-is-eternal-life.html>