The background is a watercolor illustration. At the top, there's a silhouette of a person with long hair, possibly a woman, looking down. The background is a mix of light and dark teal/green washes. A white, torn-edge paper strip runs horizontally across the middle. The title 'IN PURSUIT' is centered in a dark blue, serif font, with a thin horizontal line underneath it. Below the line, the subtitle 'FINDING GOD IN THE GARDEN' is centered in a smaller, dark blue, sans-serif font. At the bottom right, the author's name 'becky LEACH' is written in a dark blue, serif font, with 'becky' in lowercase and 'LEACH' in uppercase.

IN PURSUIT

FINDING GOD IN THE GARDEN

becky
LEACH

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FINDING GOD IN THE GARDEN

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LEACH

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from HOLY BIBLE : NEW AMERICAN STANDARD VERSION.

Hello, sweet reader!

It is my joy and incredible blessing to walk with you these next seven days In pursuit of finding God in nature. My desire for this journey, is for us to see God's hand in all of creation. I want us to remember God's faithfulness in every rain storm, every gust of wind, in every sunset and sunrise.

As I have fallen in love with all things gardening, God has brought these sweet passages of scripture to life for me revealing so much of how our relationship should be with God, the Perfect Gardener.

I pray that as you close the last page of this short book that your walk with God will be refreshed and renewed. That you'll see a tree thrashing in the wind and see God cheering you on. That you will walk across a stream rushing with water and recall God's continued faithfulness. And that you won't be able to look at dry cracks in the ground without asking God for the next rain, *knowing* that He will deliver.

I pray that you find as much encouragement in these short lessons as I have and that we would all come out well - watered women.

Blessings,

Becky



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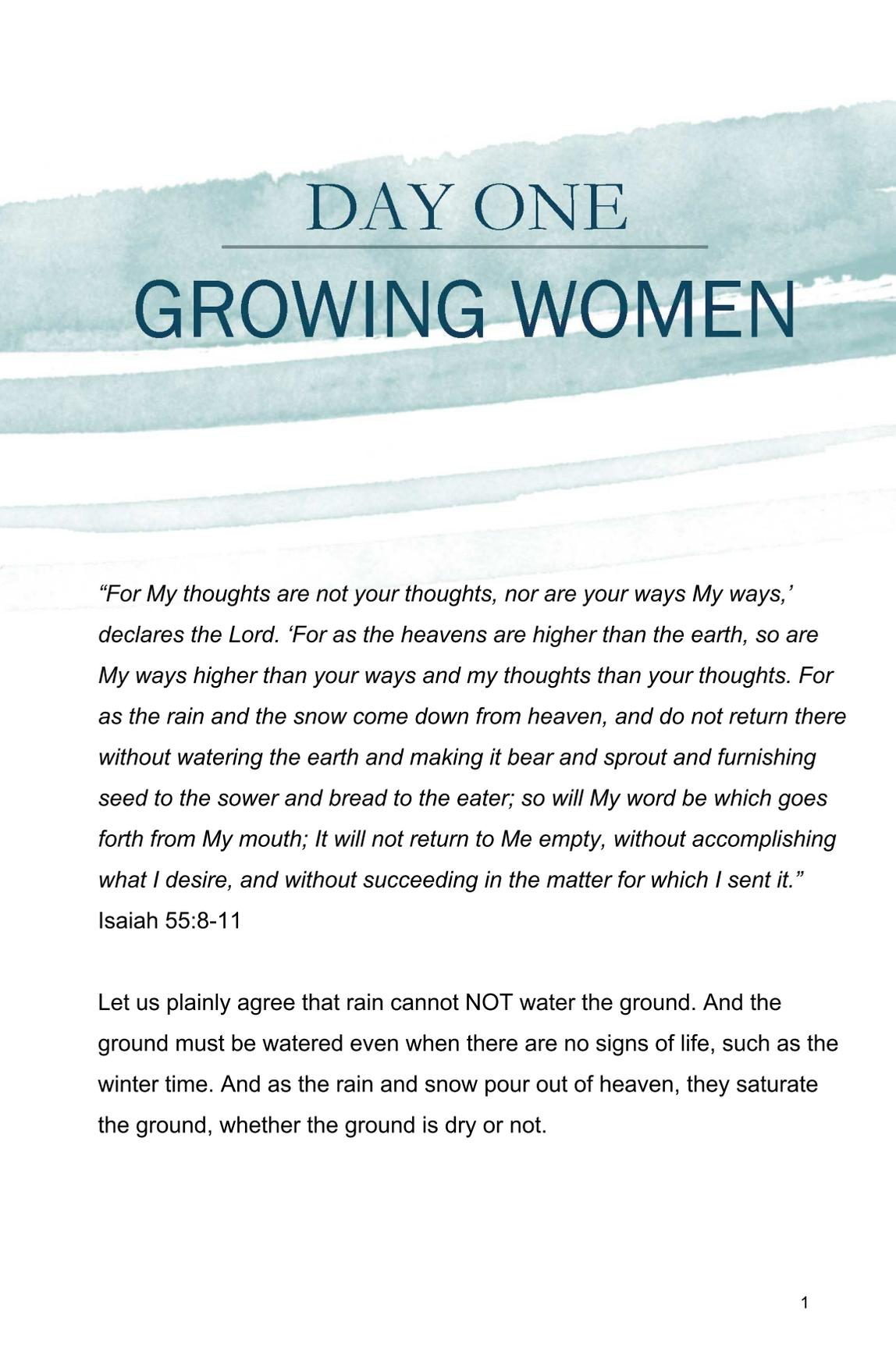
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DAY ONE

GROWING WOMEN

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”

Isaiah 55:8-11

Let us plainly agree that rain cannot NOT water the ground. And the ground must be watered even when there are no signs of life, such as the winter time. And as the rain and snow pour out of heaven, they saturate the ground, whether the ground is dry or not.

Could I suggest to you today, that when we are walking through seasons of drought, dryness or despair that *something* is being built underneath the surface of our lives. Character is being built, patience is being built, integrity is being built.

The ground in this scripture represents believers and the rain is God's Word. We are born dry ground into this fallen world. No amount of rain will change that we would eventually dry out without it, but **the longer we go without rain, the dryer we become, right?**

Think about what it's like to water *really* dry ground.

Our front yard is a steep hill. Late in the summer the grass withers and is deader than a doorknob in the August heat. When our sprinklers come on once a week, our grass is desperate for a good soaking of water. But instead of *soaking* into the ground, it runs off pretty quickly at first. **It takes a little bit of water initially to begin the soaking in process.**

This is true of our spiritual lives too. We have to *continue* getting in the Word, day after day after day in order to get the full soaking of the rain. Even when our lives are dusty, cracked and broken; because there is still life that can spring forth from underneath.

When we continually sit under the rain, He begins filling in the barren spots. It doesn't happen overnight like we would like, but it's the *continual* watering that provides new life.

When we decide to get watered, we start sinking into the Word that He has given us, which He just told us will not be sent out and not accomplish what He wants it to.

Think about that for just a second. God sent His Word for us to know Him better. To get to know His character, who He is, who we are, what He is capable of.

He is telling us that every time we read the Word of God, it is as if we are watering our souls.

But if you're like me, you can get impatient. When I plant seeds, I keep watering the ground but days and days pass by before there is even the slightest sign of life. Think about planting tulip bulbs. It is MONTHS before those flowers sprout up, right? And in that time what is happening to the ground that we can see? Rain, sunshine, rain, sunshine. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.

Life is *always* happening underneath the surface.

But He also just told us that His ways aren't our ways - His are higher than ours. **We don't understand the life that is developing**

when it rains. We cannot possibly comprehend that God takes even the driest ground and as He brings forth rain, He resurrects what seemed dead.

What needs resurrecting in your life today? What areas are in desperate need of Holy Water?

A lot of us get caught up in bearing fruit in our lives, right? We are taught as believers that our job is to bear the fruits of the spirit for the glory of the Lord. But an important lesson for me out of this passage is that prior to bearing fruit, we must first sprout.

The scripture says that the water makes the earth “bear and sprout”. The word used for ‘bear’ here, originally comes from a Hebrew word that quite literally means “*to cause*”. What this verse is telling us is that once the rain has saturated the earth, it then *causes* it to spout; ultimately providing both seeds to the sower and bread to the eater.

The water provides food but it also provides seed for future crops and even *more* farmers. Sitting underneath the rain, allowing it all to soak in not only affects us spiritually, but can eventually affect other believers, enabling them to plant and sprout more!

So why do I often stop the work of watering the ground *before* the sprout even comes? Or even stop after the sprout comes but prior to

the fruit? **When did we start placing more value on the end result than on the process of learning and growing?**

The lessons are in the growth, not the fruit. The fruit is the result of *learning* the lessons.

I know it's frustrating to feel dry and broken! It can feel weary, long and stagnant! But be encouraged that every bit of rain is working in your dustiness! Just as the sprout comes before the fruit, the tree has to grow before it blossoms! The fruit grows in accordance with the strength of the plant! The stronger the plant, the more plentiful the fruit! Don't get frustrated that you're working on a sprout and not an oak tree! The Oak tree *will* come!

THOUGHTS TO PONDER ::

Are you doing a good job getting into the Word on a consistent basis? Why or why not?

What can you change in your daily routine in order to get watered more?

BONUS :: Listen to "*There is a Cloud*" by Elevation Worship

DAY TWO

SEED-PLANTING WOMEN

“What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.” 1 Corinthians 3:5-7

When I was in college a friend who was close to me started to live a lifestyle that was unworthy of him. He partied too hard, he left the church and all of the friends that went along with it and ended up essentially on his own for the better part of ten years.

It broke my heart in two, as it did so many other people who were near to him during that time. I prayed harder in that situation than I had ever prayed before. I reached out to him, I struggled to encourage him, often regrettably feeling self-righteous, and I even fought to pray for him in my



frustration.

In the end, he continued to run his own way.

What was I doing wrong? Why wouldn't he listen to me?

Have you ever felt this way about someone in your life? Have you ever had a friend continue to make bad choice after bad choice only to end up in the depths of despair with not even one desire to get out?

It is completely frustrating! I have found that as Christian women, we tend to want to nurture these lost souls back to health - or be the ones responsible for leading them to Christ in the first place.

It's a tough thing to admit, but just as this passage tells us, spiritual growth is out of our control. We need to care less about *who* is responsible for someone else's spiritual success.

What I have realized over time is that I play a particular role in evangelism. My job is to plant seeds and then water them. **I cannot - no matter how hard I try - control the growth.**

Two years ago my garden was such a disaster. It was my first year planting a lot, and I could not get things to grow no matter how much (or little) I watered. No matter how much I pruned or fertilized. Part

of that was ignorance on my part. I needed to use the method of trial and error to sort some things out, of course, but I also became very aware that I am not in control of what grows and what doesn't. **Only God is.**

Such is the same with our relationships with non-believers or even believers who aren't seeking to grow spiritually.

We cannot control what happens in their relationship with God.

That is up to the Holy Spirit. When we accept that, evangelism becomes so much easier! We are only in charge of planting seeds and watering them. Whatever grows from that process is under God's authority and His alone.

That might seem discouraging to you today if you've been in prayer for someone to come to know the Lord in a personal way. I know for years with my friend it was extremely frustrating for me. I often asked the Lord, "why can't he just believe like the rest of us do?!" But that wasn't His plan.

I write this from a place of healing this morning, and I realize with a heavy heart that might not be where you are. I truly understand how *heavy* that is. I understand the grieving you feel and the burden you carry as you pray for that person, seeking to plant and water and plant and water.

Let me encourage you today with that we might not be *THE* seed that starts to bloom, but that's okay. There was a point in time when I had to accept the fact that it might not be MY words that caused a heart change and I became okay with that - **because I *just* wanted the heart change.** That doesn't mean that my million prayers and carefully chosen words weren't necessary or ordained.

"Now he who plants and he who waters are one, but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor." 1 Corinthians 3:8

We are all members of the body of Christ - we are *one*. It doesn't mean that one is better than the other, only that we all serve a unique purpose and we are all serving for His glory. God uses us in His timing, not in our own. **All He asks us of us is to be obedient and to walk in His purposes today.**

THOUGHTS TO PONDER ::

What seeds can you plant today?

Whose spiritual growth are you territorial over? Why?

How are you working effectively in the body of Christ?

"Call to me &
I will answer
you, and tell
you GREAT and
mighty things
you do NOT know."
Jer. 33:3



DAY THREE

WORSHIPPING WOMEN

We're introduced to the prophet Habakkuk as He complains to God that he is observing sickening violence, injustice and blatant sinfulness. He says *“destruction and violence are before me; strife exists and contention arises. Therefore the law is ignored and justice is never upheld...”* (Habakkuk 1:3) before he continues on in his rant to the Lord.

This sounds a lot like today!

But God is so gracious to him though and responds almost immediately : *“Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days - you would not believe if you were told.”* (Habakkuk 1:5)

God then goes on to give Habakkuk just a small glimpse of what He is

going to do to restore righteousness to Judah. Let me go ahead and warn you though, *it's horrible*. God allows *more* violence and bloodshed as He breaks the people in order to bring them back to Him. He raises up an enemy to “march throughout the earth” and take over their land and cause more destruction *prior* to restoring them.

This seems to be a biblical pattern, doesn't it? For the Israelites, for the Judeans, for us.

Follow God, fall away, receive discipline, repent, turn back, be restored.

It's a cycle that I so wish I could break, friend. It's one that makes me feel like I'm banging my head against the wall! It's a pattern that makes me want to scream at people in scripture “Don't you see??? Stop turning around - the Egyptians don't love you, but God does! Stop making idols! Stop doing this - just let God provide, y'all!”

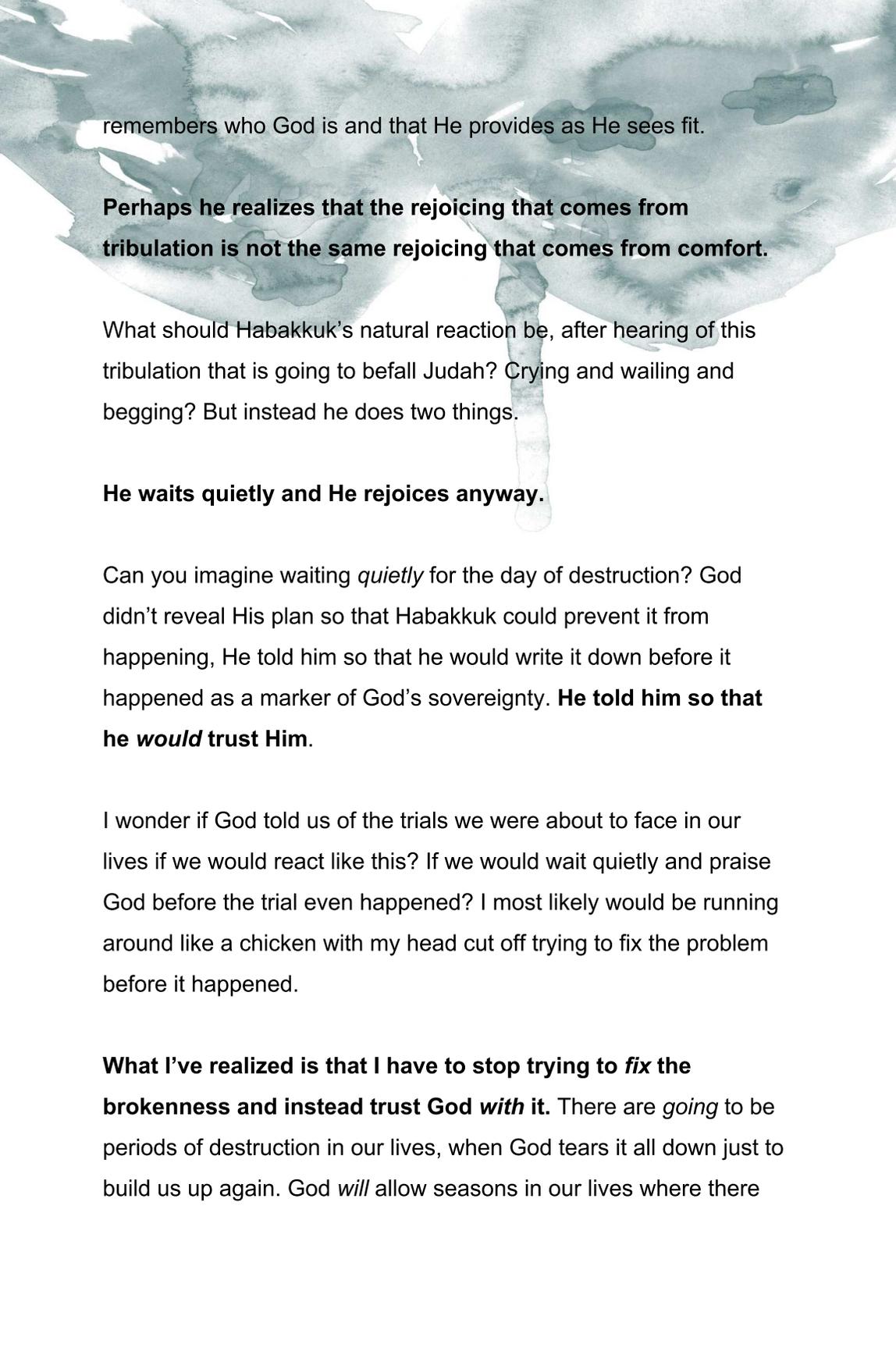
But of course, I do the same thing on a *daily* basis. Maybe that's why it drives me bonkers when I read about it. Because if the Israelites can't get it right in 2,000 years, is there any hope for me to get it right just in my lifetime?

The glorious thing in this cycle, though, is that brokenness leads to restoration, every single time. We don't understand it, we don't want it, but it's God's divine design to humble us into repentance so that we grow closer to Him.

What I love about this story is that Habakkuk doesn't shy away from questioning God about this process. He doesn't gloss over what's about to happen to the people in "his flock" but instead tells God all his concerns, doubts and questions. At the end of the book, after being told of the destruction that is about to take place around him, Habakkuk cries out to the Lord begging him to remember mercy in His wrath. (Habakkuk 3:1).

*"I heard and my inward parts trembled, at the sound my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, and in my place I tremble. Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress, for the people to arise who will invade us. Though the fig tree should not blossom and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold and there be no cattle in the stalls, **yet I will exult in the Lord**, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and He has made my feet like hinds' feet, and makes me walk on my high places." Habakkuk 3:16-19*

Even after all that, He chooses exultation. Habakkuk chooses to let God to be God and trusts Him completely, all while waiting on judgement to come. He acknowledges the value in brokenness. He

The background of the page is a light blue and green watercolor wash. In the center, there is a faint, light-colored map of the Middle East, showing the outlines of the Arabian Peninsula, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Red Sea. The watercolor has a soft, painterly texture with various shades of teal and light blue.

remembers who God is and that He provides as He sees fit.

Perhaps he realizes that the rejoicing that comes from tribulation is not the same rejoicing that comes from comfort.

What should Habakkuk's natural reaction be, after hearing of this tribulation that is going to befall Judah? Crying and wailing and begging? But instead he does two things.

He waits quietly and He rejoices anyway.

Can you imagine waiting *quietly* for the day of destruction? God didn't reveal His plan so that Habakkuk could prevent it from happening, He told him so that he would write it down before it happened as a marker of God's sovereignty. **He told him so that he *would* trust Him.**

I wonder if God told us of the trials we were about to face in our lives if we would react like this? If we would wait quietly and praise God before the trial even happened? I most likely would be running around like a chicken with my head cut off trying to fix the problem before it happened.

What I've realized is that I have to stop trying to *fix* the brokenness and instead trust God *with* it. There are *going* to be periods of destruction in our lives, when God tears it all down just to build us up again. God *will* allow seasons in our lives where there

will be fruitlessness. Whether it is driven from choices we have made or whether it is driven from living in a fallen world is not for me to say, but I have to get it through my thick skull that God knows what He's doing.

It is in those very seasons that I have a choice to make. Will I choose to dwell on the destruction or will I dwell on the One Who *controls* the destruction?

What will I see when I look at my circumstances today? Will I see God failing to come through or will I instead look expectantly for Him to deliver?

Will I wonder why is God punishing me or will I instead receive discipline and correction with a soft spirit?

If I choose to see the lack, then I fail to acknowledge God as sovereign and provides the abundance. If all I see is dryness, I fail to see what is happening underneath the surface. I fail to see the lessons of pruning, abiding and waiting. I fail to see that God is working in our midst, that He has given me all that I need for today, even if I don't see it in front of me.

But if I instead choose to acknowledge that God is capable of doing something astonishing in my midst, that He is breaking me or allowing a season of discipline in my life *then* I see God for who He

is. Faithful, loving, good, pure. I might not understand His ways, but I start to understand His character.

My prayer for us today is that we look at our lives and see the fig tree without the blossom and not feel as though God has left us, but that God is working somewhere in our midst. That we wouldn't dwell on the have nots but instead focus on what *will be* in due time.

And that we always remember that we serve a God who desires good for us and glory for Himself.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER ::

Where do you see God's hand working in your midst today?

What negatives do you tend to dwell on in your life? Choose to combat those with positives instead!



DAY FOUR

FRUITFUL WOMEN

“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.” John 15:2

Walking into the garden is one of my very favorite times of my day. What makes it even better is when I begin to harvest fruit from the plants. Every day feels like a new adventure and it gives me a tremendous (and scary, maybe) amount of joy.

But last year, although I would consider it a successful year, I had a few issues with my tomato plants. We were getting hundreds of cherry tomatoes.... maybe close to 1000 when it was all said and done. But the vine had gotten vastly overgrown and was spilling over the sides of the cage and out to the limits of my garden.

Although there were hundreds of blooms and tomatoes on the plant at a time, the leaves started to turn brown and wither, and eventually die off. I was sure that the entire plant was dying.

But as the weeks went by, I continued to get new blooms, new tomatoes and even new leaves growing - although more leaves were withering and dying. It had me puzzled and it truly bothered me, as crazy as it may seem!

My dad, also an avid gardener as well, came over one night to look at my prized jewel. I told him I couldn't figure out what was wrong with my plant, I had tried everything!

“Becky, it looks great to me! Look at all that fruit! Your goal isn't for it to look pretty, your goal is to produce fruit! It looks like it's doing it's job to me!”

The goal is to produce fruit - not for it to look pretty while doing so.

Producing fruit in our lives can be *ugly*, friend. When I think about how much fruit this one plant was producing, it is no wonder that the leaves would wither and fall away before making new ones. She was weary while producing that much fruit.

I love the picture that God painted for me here in this little tomato

plant. We go through fruitful seasons of our life, where we are producing an absurd amount of fruit. We might be serving in a sacrificial way, we might be loving on a needy family, we might teach a Bible study, we gather women of faith together. There are so many ways that we produce fruit and naturally, we will go through seasons of producing more fruit than others.

And sometimes, in the most fruitful of seasons, our souls can get weary! I think that's the most natural thing, though. That is why Jesus had to remind us, "*Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.*" Galatians 6:9. Just think about it, if that was a *natural* reaction for us, God wouldn't have to remind us of that.

The most important question we can ask ourselves here is what do we *do* when we grow weary? When our leaves start withering up and dying off? What is a picture of how much more our life needs pruning during fruitful seasons?

We can then either *accept* the pruning or will we *settle* for *less* fruit?

Pruning can look different in everyone's lives. For me it has taken on many different roles throughout various seasons, but here are a few examples:

When God calls me to walk through a season of pruning -

I have stepped away from leadership roles that took up time

God has cut out unhealthy friendships

I have paired down my yeses

I have cut out netflix (*I know, right?*)

He has called me away from volunteer positions

Could it be that our most fruitful seasons are also the ones where God finds it most necessary to cut away the excess so that we have more time to press into Him?

Sometimes pruning results from bad choices but sometimes pruning results from making a *better* choice.

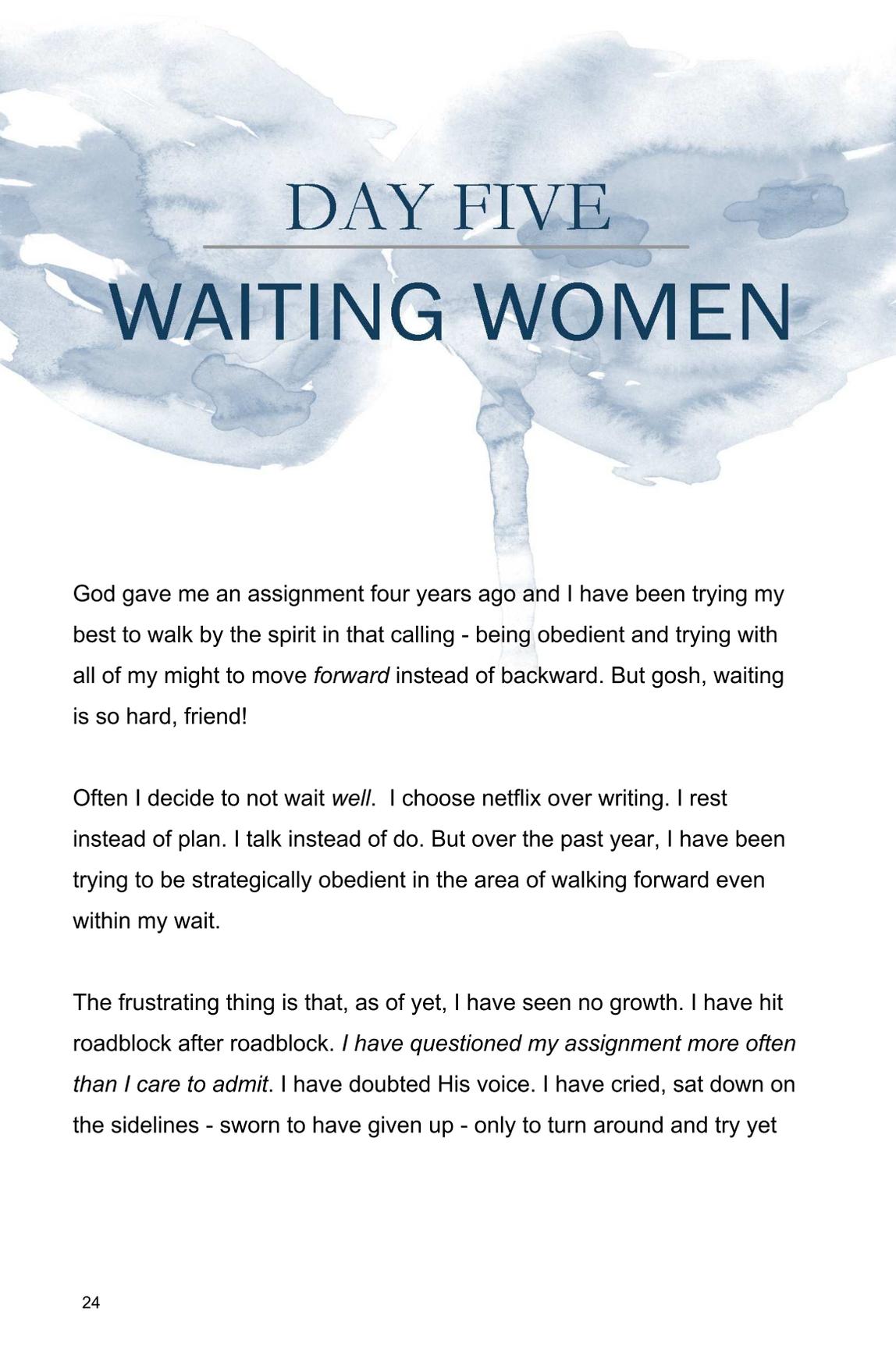
What might this pruning look like in your life today? Are there activities or even relationships that you need to forsake today so that you might spend more time pressing into the Father, resulting in *much* fruit?

This isn't just about making life more *simple*. This is about God asking you to cut out things so that you have more time for the things He's *called* you to.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER ::

What are you choosing over Him today? Could it be that your fruit is limited because you are not allowing His pruning in your life?

Do you find yourself walking through a season of fruitfulness or a season of drought? How can you allow some pruning to push you further in your relationship with God?



DAY FIVE

WAITING WOMEN

God gave me an assignment four years ago and I have been trying my best to walk by the spirit in that calling - being obedient and trying with all of my might to move *forward* instead of backward. But gosh, waiting is so hard, friend!

Often I decide to not wait *well*. I choose netflix over writing. I rest instead of plan. I talk instead of do. But over the past year, I have been trying to be strategically obedient in the area of walking forward even within my wait.

The frustrating thing is that, as of yet, I have seen no growth. I have hit roadblock after roadblock. *I have questioned my assignment more often than I care to admit*. I have doubted His voice. I have cried, sat down on the sidelines - sworn to have given up - only to turn around and try yet

again.

Have I seen seeds of His faithfulness along the journey?
Absolutely. Has my assignment come to fruition? Not yet. Have
I seen His hand of blessing on this road? Yes. Do I feel like I'm
headed the right way? Most definitely.

Waiting is a roller coaster of victory and frustration, seeing Him yet questioning Him. Most days I try to look for the treasures - some days, they're harder to find than others. But other days, a lot of other days, actually, I get frustrated that God seems to be playing hide and seek with my life.

The thing that I **know** is that sometimes He stays silent so that I seek Him *more*. So that I experience the promise : "seek me and find me, ask and the door will be opened for you." Of course, He is *always* there - as I eventually see. **But, friend, the seeking can be frustrating.** The asking is long. And, at least for me, the wait can become thick and heavy.

The book of Isaiah has become such a dear book to me in seasons of waiting because God showed up among these pages last summer as I walked through a spiritual wilderness. It was *then* that I was deeply questioning my calling and feeling an inadequacy that threatened to take over my soul.

God met me in Isaiah.

At first, I thought it was *such* a strange book! I mean, it seems pretty prophetic and even sort of elusive. What is with all the analogies anyway? It feels like Isaiah is speaking in tongues, y'all. But when I sat in the book - in the chapters that I believe God prompted me to study, He filled my soul in a fresh way, affirming my calling, who I am and how much He loves me.

So it is not by accident that as I find myself discouraged in my wait, I end up back in Isaiah this morning when God decides to bring His Word to life.

God is speaking to Israel's return after having been exiled - saying they will have a *clear* road in front of them as they *return* to Him.

"For you will go out with joy and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thorn bush the cypress will come up, and instead of the nettle the myrtle will come up, and it will be a memorial to the Lord, for an everlasting sign which will not be cut off." Isaiah 55:5

Does this refresh you in your wait today? At some point, in God's timing, instead of the thorn bush, the cypress will come up and instead of the nettle the myrtle will come up. Then we will be able to

set a memorial to the Lord.

Isn't that a beautiful picture of waiting? It's all in God's timing!

Right now it feels like with every step I take, a thorn bush is in front of me, an obstacle is up ahead or a boulder is thrown in my path.

But ONE day, that won't be the case anymore.

Think about the trees clapping for you as you walk out your wait!
Picture the hills outside your window as breaking forth in shouts of joy for you - spurring you on to keep moving forward in your calling!
God is with us, even in seasons of longing!

You are not alone in your wait, sweet friend!

"For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God... but if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it." Romans 8:19, 23

We are *all* waiting. When I start thinking my wait is long, I find it oddly encouraging that *all* of creation has been waiting *much* longer.

I am actually not sure if this makes me feel like my wait will *never* be over, but I was - and am - extremely thankful that God decided to meet me *in* my wait with divine words of encouragement. I pray that

these verses speak to your wait just the same!

What if we could look to creation and remember that we are *all* waiting for His return together, and there will be a million and one little waits between now and then. Would that bring a sense of togetherness to our longing? I think it just might!

A precious friend asked me to name one person in the bible who hasn't waited. *Just one*. The only ones we could think of were the disciples. But we were wrong, because as soon as Jesus died on the cross they began their wait to see him again. They hoped he was coming in their lifetime - as do we!

What I love most here is that the Greek word for hope in this verse doesn't mean "I wonder if it'll happen" like we use it in our modern day English language. It actually means that there is *confidence* in their hope - that they *know* it will happen.

What if we would hope like that, especially in our wait?

Let's hope for God to show up for each of us today! Not a hope that lacks confidence, but a hope that is assured that He will come for us! Look out your window and remember the trees and the hills! Remember His faithfulness of yesterday and know that His faithfulness will meet you today!

I want to wait well, don't you? Yes, I long for the day that I see fruit in the path He has sent me on and even more than that I long for the day of Christ's return! We all do.

But in the meantime, I want to be found faithfully waiting for Him. I will choose to press on even as the thorn bush continues to come up. I will look for the trees to clap their hands and the mountains break forth in shouts of joy.

God is good. Even in the wait.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER ::

What are you waiting for today? Write it down, pray over it and then surrender it.

What are you doing to either distract you from your wait, rush through your wait or sit on the sidelines during your wait? How can you change those things today?

BONUS :: Listen to "Draw Me Ever Nearer" by The Gettys





DAY SIX

TRUSTING WOMEN

“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose trust is the Lord. For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit.”

Jeremiah 17:7-8

I was going on a walk Sunday afternoon when I walked pass this awesome creek in our neighborhood. Our kids just *love* to walk down to it and cross over the rocks in the middle - especially when it's rushing water! In the spring time, it's generally full because of all of the rain, but when summer arrives, it quickly settles into a slow movement of water.

As I walked, I noticed the trees growing next to the creek. First of all, there are a *lot* of trees by the creek. In fact, now that I am noticing this, *whenever* there is a creek, there are generally trees planted right next to

it, right?

Just a few years ago, we were going through an *extreme* drought in Texas. There was only an average of 14.8 inches of rain across the state for the entire year! We lost several hedges and various plants in our yard, not to mention almost *all* of our grass.

Yet these trees by the stream remain steady.

I don't know about you, but I have walked through some seriously dry times in my spiritual life. Some were areas of discipline that God needed to deal with, but were simply seasons of refinement from the Lord. **I got stuck in the dry and barren wilderness for so long because I did not choose *trust*.** I did not focus on the Lord's leading but was instead overcome with depression, sadness and anxiety.

Every single Christian will walk through seasons of drought. Yet God graciously tells us here that when we trust in God, we can be like those trees by the creek. We can continue to bear fruit *even* when I walk through those seasons.

The word used for Trust here literally means "*to have confidence in.*"

It made me think : do I have *confidence* in the Lord? Do I have confidence that He will do what He says that He will do?

I'm sad to admit, friend, that more often than not, I choose doubt over trust. I let my thoughts wander back to moments of longing for something *other* instead of letting my thoughts take root in the Truth of scripture.

It doesn't matter who I *think* He is (or isn't) if I already *know* who He is.

In order to trust God - to have confidence in Him and His promises we have to do three things :

First, we have to know who God really is. He is faithful. He is loving. He is mighty. He is victorious. He overcomes. **We cannot just *assume* these things, but we must KNOW them with confidence, and we must know Him personally.**

When we assume things are true simply because we've always been taught them, Satan can use this same *assumption* to weasel his way into our thoughts. That's how he worked with Eve in the garden of Eden. He began his temptation by asking her, "did God *really* say?" That's exactly how he still works with us. He is crafty, smart and manipulative; the *only* way to maintain confidence in the Lord is to *know* who He is for ourself.

Second, we have to *know* who WE are. We are sinners saved by a gracious God. We are loved by our Father and, covered by the

blood of His Son, we are now blameless in His sight. **We no longer need to worry about our past sins and regrets because they are forgiven by the blood of Jesus.** We do not need to carry the baggage of our past with us, do not let Satan tell you otherwise! We are His children the minute we ask Jesus to rule over our lives and our hearts. It's done. It is finished. There is no questioning whether or not we are going to be in Heaven with Him - **we ARE.** We are now part of the Kingdom of Heaven and we are *royalty*.

We must have confidence that we are God's children so that we can not only survive, but thrive, during the dry seasons of our lives.

If we trust God and know who we are, when we walk through times of barrenness, trials or longing we don't waste time on thoughts like "I am unworthy, I am inadequate, I am too far gone" but we can instead continue producing fruit as our heads are held high in the Lord.

In order to be the tree planted by the water, **we also must know His promises.** This is the most important lesson I am learning about trust. God overwhelmingly tells us in scripture to trust Him and promises all sorts of blessing, peace and contentment *through* that trust. But when we journey through the stillness, silence or loneliness, how quickly we forget what He said He will do for us.

When we take our eyes off of Him and put them onto our circumstances, our situation becomes bigger than it was ever intended to be. We have to fill our hearts with the promises of God to remain steady during difficult seasons. The Bible is full of His promises, all we have to do is read them, claim them and live like we believe them!

I am so challenged by this lesson, friend! The bottom line is that I want to be prepared for the next season of drought to enter my life, don't you? I want to know that I can be that tree firmly planted by the living water! Get after Him today so we can be planted together!

THOUGHTS TO PONDER ::

Take a moment and list all of the things that God is to you. (i.e., steady, faithful, etc.)

Now, take a moment and list all of the reasons you can trust Him! List all the ways you've seen Him come through in your life!

He will deliver you. (Ps 91:14)

PROMISES OF GOD

He will shelter you. (Ps 61:3)

He will keep you in “perfect peace”. (Is. 26:3)

He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:7)

He will never leave you or forsake you. (Heb. 13:5)

He will be with you, always, to the end of the age. (Mat. 28:20)

You are justified by Him by His grace. (Romans 3:24)

You have access into grace. (Romans 5:2)

All things work together for your good. (Romans 8:28)

God has created good works to walk in today. (Eph 2:10)

You are being transformed into His likeness. (2 Cor 3:17)

God won't let you be tempted beyond what you can endure. (1 Cor.
10:13)

He will supply all of your needs (Phil. 4:19)

His grace is sufficient for you. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

You can approach God with freedom and confidence. (Eph 3:12)

He has given you a spirit of power, love and self discipline. (2 Tim
1:7)

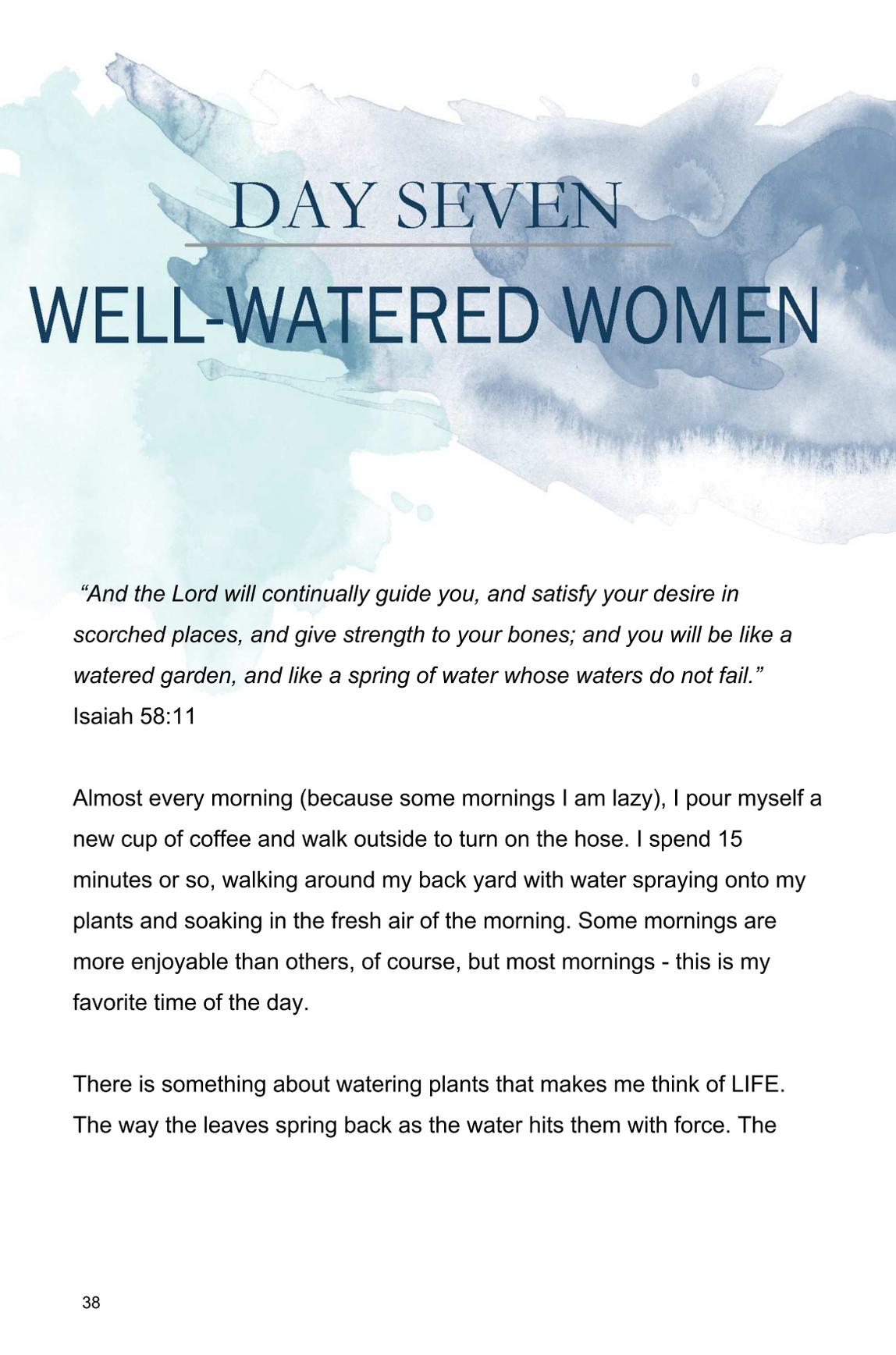
He will give you wisdom when you ask. (James 1:5)

He will draw near to you when you draw near to him. (James 4:8)

Nothing will separate you from the love of Christ. (Romans 8:35)

He is faithful and will sanctify you. (1 Thes 5:24)





DAY SEVEN

WELL-WATERED WOMEN

“And the Lord will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.”

Isaiah 58:11

Almost every morning (because some mornings I am lazy), I pour myself a new cup of coffee and walk outside to turn on the hose. I spend 15 minutes or so, walking around my back yard with water spraying onto my plants and soaking in the fresh air of the morning. Some mornings are more enjoyable than others, of course, but most mornings - this is my favorite time of the day.

There is something about watering plants that makes me think of LIFE. The way the leaves spring back as the water hits them with force. The

way the flowers blow in the wind. And then the dew droplets that are left after I am done that glisten in the sun, the ground now soaked with water... with *life*.

Water is a necessity in order to sustain life, right? This is true of humans as much as it is true for most plants. Water is vital to ultimate survival.

But most plants can survive at least few days without *substantial* watering. For example, If I leave for the weekend and water the garden real good on Friday morning, by the time I get back on Sunday evening they may be dry and sad looking, but they're still alive. If I do that a handful of times, it's okay, but if I did that *every* weekend the plants wouldn't bounce back as quickly.

That's kind of how we are in our spiritual life, right? We miss one quiet time or two and we don't necessarily feel the effect of it. But as that becomes habit, it's not as easy to soak it all in and the lack of consistency eventually begins to dry our leaves out, rots our fruit and after a long period of time can even kill the entire plant.

But, I want to be this watered garden spoken of here in Isaiah, don't you?

This phrase rolls over me and over me. I close my eyes and picture what my garden looks like immediately after I water it. Full of life from the roots to the leaves. Fruitful and bountiful. Abounding with lushness.

This promise is beautiful, but what came before the “*and*”?

It turns out that Isaiah is talking yet again to God’s chosen people, the Israelites. They have been fasting and saying “God, look at us. See? We’re fasting! Hear our cries!” **But there was no heart change.** They were frustrated that there was no response from God to their religious acts of righteousness. They were confused on where God was and conflicted as to why He wasn’t showing up when they were doing and saying all of the right things.

And then eventually, God begins to respond. And they are shouting “FINALLY, Lord!!! You hear us!”

But Isaiah points out to them “Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist. **You do not fast like you do today to make your voice heard on high.**” vs. 4

Scripture tells us that they had been fasting for religious righteousness. Essentially that means they were faking it! (Not that we ever do anything like that, of course.) Even though they appeared to be going about fasting, God had not heard their cries.

All because they were not been truly repentant in their hearts for their sin.

But this day would be different. This day they were fasting with sincerity. They were fasting and praying so that their voices would be heard not so that they would appear religious. They *actually* wanted God to listen to them.

“Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked, to cover him; and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light will break out like the dawn, and your recovery will speedily spring forth ;and your righteousness will go before you; the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

Then you will call and the Lord will answer; you will cry, and He will say, “Here I am.” If you remove the yoke from your midst, the point of the finger and speaking wickedness, and if you give yourself to the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness and your gloom will become like midday.” Isaiah 58:6-10

Don't you see? It's only *after* all of this breaking that the light will come forth and we will be like the watered garden! Only after we

admit our sins, turn away and walk directly in relationship with our Father will He hear our cries and send us an abundance of rain so that we can be like a garden freshly watered!

This garden represents a woman who is completely sold out to the Lord, doing everything in her power to turn away from unhealthy habits and live on fire for the Lord.

This woman feeds the hungry and puts others first. This woman sees needs and sets out to meet them. This woman is broken over her sin. This woman is sincere about gathering people in her home for the purpose of shelter and breaking bread. This woman has a light that will rise in the darkness because she has sought after the Lord genuinely, consistently and thoroughly.

She doesn't become well watered overnight. It comes *after* watering time and time and time again! We must be consistent and sincere as we seek the Lord, friend! Checking it off our list isn't the same thing as sincerely sitting with the Father for a few moments in the morning before a busy day!

Let's commit to whole-heartedly seek the Lord for the next thirty days together and see what happens! Let's become these well-watered women and pour out God's love to the needy and afflicted around us!

THOUGHTS TO PONDER ::

What keeps you from genuinely seeking God's voice consistently?

How can you prioritize your time differently over the next thirty days to sit with the Lord daily? What will that time look like? Don't make this time regimented, rather make a plan so that you'll stick to it!





QUIET TIME TIPS

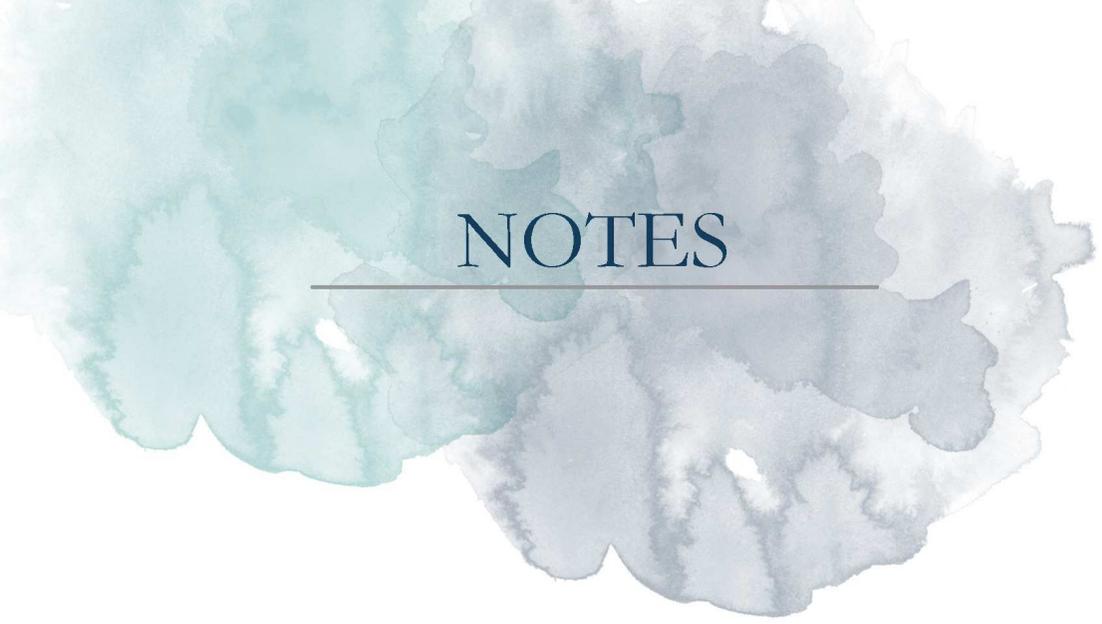
Sit down at the same time every day.

Know what you're going to read.

Keep a prayer journal.

Start with worship music.

**Set an alarm on your phone so you don't keep
checking the time!**



NOTES

