

Excerpt



THE
*Well-
Watered
Life*

DEVOTIONAL
JOURNAL



GRETCHEN
SAFFLES

PART 4

GROWING

You can work through this part of the journal in conjunction with chapters 7, 9, and 10 of The Well-Watered Woman.



*I am growing in grace every day
as I seek to know Jesus more.*



Growing:

*1) Increasing in knowledge, understanding,
and spiritual maturity as you seek to
know Jesus*

*2) Cultivating your soul to produce the fruit
of the Spirit*



The seeds that fell among the thorns represent those who hear the message, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life. And so they never grow into maturity. And the seeds that fell on the good soil represent honest, good-hearted people who hear God's word, cling to it, and patiently produce a huge harvest.

LUKE 8:14-15, NLT

We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the LORD, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

2 PETER 3:18





Grow Slow

*The glimmer of the pruning shears
Catches the rays of light.
I cringe as they draw near
And cut me like a knife.*

*Extra branches, dead leaves,
Dried flowers taking up room
Are removed and cut away,
Giving space for more blooms.*

*Growth is not always vertical;
It requires cutting back.
It's taking away what shouldn't stay
To make way for a life without lack.*

*Growth is also horizontal;
It requires stretching out,
Relying upon the help of the Gardener,
The sun, the rain, and drought.*

*Time and time again,
I want to grow faster than I am.
But you can't hurry a flower's bloom—
You wait on God's greater plan.*



*In the waiting and the longing,
Receive the nutrients given
To flourish and keep growing,
To be faithful to God's mission.*

*God's nurturing of our souls
Takes time, pruning, and trust.
Abiding is the way we grow.
Remain in him, we must.*

*Growth is never ending,
And it looks different in every season.
Trust the Gardener's skillful hands—
He is working for a reason.*

*Keep growing, stretching, reaching.
Every moment of the day,
God is working, pruning, teaching.
Follow his Word—the Way.*



GROWING IN GRACE

The most frustrating part of growing a plant from a seed is the waiting. Once the seed is in the dirt, the gardener trusts that it will sprout and grow in time. The gardener can give the plant water and place it in the right conditions, but it's the role of the seed to sprout. Growth can be painfully slow for some plants, sometimes taking years to become truly established in the soil before producing a harvest. Even so, every part of the growth process has a purpose. A seed can't become a tree overnight. It takes time, the changing of seasons, and slow growth to become what it was meant to be.

In your walk with Jesus, pursue a life of growth. Though you might not notice a change in your soul in



a week, growth will become evident over time. When I look back at my journals from my younger years, I can see the ways God was transforming my life and deepening the roots of my faith. And I know that ten years from now, I'll be a different person because God will continue to grow me as he tends the garden of my life.

The apostle Peter ended his letter to the church with this encouragement: "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen" (2 Peter 3:18).

Grow in grace. What does this really mean? According to pastor and author David Mathis, "True stability in the Christian life comes not from planting two feet and holding fast, but from putting one foot in front of the other and moving forward, one grace-empowered step at a time. A stable Christian is a growing Christian."¹ Essentially, to grow in grace is to always be moving toward Christ by knowing his Word. The Word of God never changes, but it will always change you.

Reading, knowing, studying, and believing God's Word is at the heart of growing in grace. Note that Peter said we are to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Grace *and* knowledge. The more you mine the depths of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the more you will grow in knowing his utmost beauty and infinite worth.



Don't settle for anything less. Commit to always grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. Much like a growing seed, the Christian life is not stagnant. Growth may be slow, and it may be invisible, but it's always happening.

DIG DEEPER

Read Ephesians 4:15-16 and Colossians 1:9-12. What do these verses teach about growth?

Read 1 Peter 1:22-25; 2:1-3. What do these passages reveal about the Word of God?

The Word of God is the means by which we grow in grace. The underlying reason Peter reminded the church to grow in grace was to urge them toward a life of longing for Christ, craving him above the things of this world. The goal of spiritual growth is to know Christ more, and this very knowledge is a gift of God's grace.

Excerpt



THE WORD OF GOD
NEVER CHANGES,
BUT IT ALWAYS
CHANGES US.





In what areas of your life do you feel stagnant and need to grow?

What areas of your life need pruning? (For example, how you spend your time, how you spend your money, what you think about, etc.)

Write a prayer of praise and surrender, recognizing that growth is possible only through God's work in your heart. Commit to pursuing Christ and growing in grace every day.



WORD BEFORE WORLD

If you want to know Jesus more, you must be a Well-Watered Woman of the Word. Just as water, sunlight, soil, and fertilizer help a plant to grow, God's Word provides the nourishment and strength our souls need to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. From Genesis to Revelation, every word of Scripture has been divinely inspired and breathed by God. The Old Testament is needed to understand the New Testament, and vice versa. In 2 Timothy 3:16 we read that "all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (NIV). We should seek to know *all* of the Word—from start to finish. If we want to know Jesus more, we have to know the Word, which reveals who he is.

As a younger Christian, I didn't read the Old Testament much. As a matter of fact, for a significant season in my life, I avoided reading the Old Testament at all costs because I didn't understand it. I didn't realize that I was missing amazing opportunities to see the beauty of Christ revealed in all of Scripture.

After Jesus' resurrection, Scripture records his interaction with two of his followers: "Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27, NLT). Jesus showed the disciples that all of Scripture is ultimately about him. He



is our Savior, Creator, and Redeemer. We should read all of the Word with a desire to know him more.

DIG DEEPER

What keeps you from spending time in God's Word? Write down any fears, hurdles, or struggles that prevent you from opening and studying Scripture.

Have you read through the entire Bible?

If your answer is no, don't be discouraged! Instead, commit now to reading through all of God's Word. Over time, you will see the thread of the story of Jesus woven throughout the entire Bible.

A WELL-WATERED WOMAN OF THE WORD

John 1:1-4 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men." John's mention of "the Word" is a reference to Jesus. Jesus is the Word of God made manifest. In order to know Christ, we must know the Word.



Make it a priority to be a woman of the Word, reading God's Word in its entirety. This will take time, but it's time well spent! At the end of this book, you'll find every book of the Bible laid out, with each chapter to mark off as you read. This will serve as a visual aid to encourage you to continue your pursuit of Christ through reading his Word.

God never changes; he's the same throughout all of the Bible. His character is proven, and his Word is invaluable—a priceless treasure, a bottomless well. Drink deeply from the well of God's Word. Put the Word before the world each day, and be satisfied with the Living Water that always satisfies and never runs dry: Jesus.

DIG DEEPER

Look up 2 Timothy 3:16-17, and write it in the space provided.



What do these verses teach about the Word of God?

Read Hebrews 4:12, and write what this verse reveals about the Word.

Allow the living and active Word of God to penetrate your soul and produce spiritual fruit that lasts for all eternity! On page 252, you will find a checklist of the chapters in each book of the Bible. You can use this to encourage you to read all of Scripture and help you keep track of what you've read. You can refer back to this on a daily basis.



BOOK MENTORS

Along with reading the Good Book (the inspired Word of God), it's also important to read good books that will encourage you in your walk of faith. Daily Bible reading and study should always come first on your priority list of books to read, but God will also use other books to stir your heart for him and his Word.

If you don't consider yourself a reader, you are not alone! To be honest, I used to avoid reading at all costs. It wasn't until after college that I learned the joy and importance of reading. Since I began picking up books that sparked my curiosity, I haven't been able to put them down. Over the years, God has used many writers to "mentor" me and equip me to better know his Word and live it out.

The reading of good books leads to changed lives. But first, we must be willing to make time for reading. When I heard Jay Strack say this at a conference years ago, it challenged me to become a reader: "You will be the same person ten years from now except for the books you read, the places you go, the people you meet, and the Scripture you memorize." It's true: growth doesn't happen by accident; it happens on purpose.

Use the following pages to help you practice the discipline of reading. This section will help you track your progress and better retain what you read.

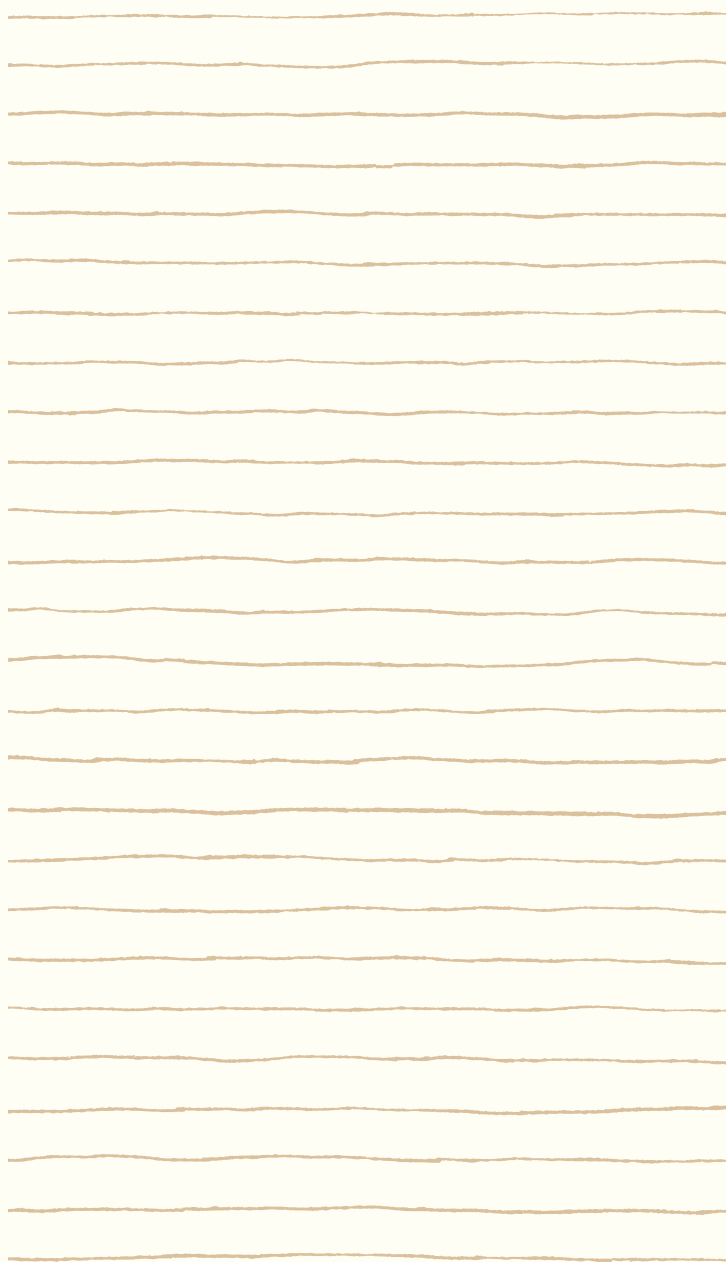


Remember, the most important book of all is the Bible, God's Word. Make it your aim to read books that will deepen your walk with Jesus and your understanding of the Bible. This will make the reading of good books produce a greater harvest in your heart and life.

Books to Read

In the space below, make a list of books you hope to read. This will be a list you can refer back to as you continue to read and mark off books.

On the Shelf





In the space below, write the books you read and some reflections about each one.

BOOK I READ:

DATE COMPLETED:

What I learned (one takeaway):

How this book changed my perspective:

Rating: ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

BOOK I READ:

DATE COMPLETED:

What I learned (one takeaway):

How this book changed my perspective:

Rating: ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆



BOOK I READ:

DATE COMPLETED:

What I learned (one takeaway):

How this book changed my perspective:

Rating: ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

BOOK I READ:

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What I learned (one takeaway):

How this book changed my perspective:

Rating: ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆





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DATE COMPLETED:

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How this book changed my perspective:

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Excerpt



JESUS OVERCAME
WHAT WOULD
OTHERWISE
OVERCOME US
APART FROM HIS
SUSTAINING GRACE.





ABIDE

An important part of spiritual growth is pruning, the process of cutting back what is harmful or unnecessary. Sometimes pruning looks counterproductive, especially to a gardening novice. In order for trees and shrubs to grow strong and healthy in the spring, their dead branches need to be removed in winter. Our Knock Out Rose bush gets trimmed almost to a stump in February to encourage new growth come warmer weather. The pruning of the bush actually enables it to produce more blooms. Even though it looks like we're diminishing the plant, cutting it back leads to better growth. The same is true in your walk with Jesus.

As Jesus gave his "farewell discourse" before taking up the cross, he urged the disciples to abide in him (see John 15). To abide means to remain; to make oneself at home; to dwell. In order to abide in Christ, we must remain in his Word. It is his Word in our hearts that prunes our sinful nature to grow the fruit of the Spirit. In my book *The Well-Watered Woman*, I share an acronym I created to better understand what it looks like to abide in Christ.





Accept pruning.

Believe his Word.

Identify false vines.

Delight in Jesus.

Endure with joy.

DIG DEEPER

With the following questions, we will learn to view our circumstances through the lens of abiding and see the greater work God is doing within us.

Accept Pruning

Read John 15:1-2. What do these verses teach about pruning?

Now read Galatians 5:16-26. What are the desires of the flesh Paul described?





What is the fruit of the Spirit?

What areas of your life are in need of pruning for more spiritual fruit to be produced?

Believe His Word

Read John 15:3-7. What do these verses teach about the Word?

Now read John 7:38; Romans 9:33; and 1 John 5:1. What do these verses teach about believing God's Word?

Are there any truths in God's Word you have a hard time believing? What are they?



Take time to write down Scripture that pertains to what you're having a hard time believing, and ask God to turn your unbelief to belief. A great tool to use is the concordance in your Bible. It will help you find passages relating to your struggle or the lies you're believing.

A series of approximately 20 horizontal, hand-drawn lines in a light brown or tan color, intended for writing.



Identify False Vines

Read John 15:1-5 again. What do these verses teach about Jesus being the “True Vine”?

Jesus’ reference to being the True Vine goes back to the prophet Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 2:21). Jeremiah described Israel as a vine that God had planted, but this vine didn’t produce the harvest God desired. Christ came as the True Vine, the only Deliverer and Savior. Any other vine we attach ourselves to for comfort, peace, or joy is a false vine that yields no lasting spiritual fruit. In order to cling to the True Vine, Jesus, we must identify any false vines we’re clinging to, cut our attachments to them, and cling to Christ.

What are some false vines you find yourself holding on to (for example, possessions, position, appearance, work, money, etc.)?



Make it a practice to repent of false vines you're clinging to so you can cling to Christ, the True Vine. Our souls are prone to wander, but Christ is faithful even when we are faithless (see 2 Timothy 2:13). The True Vine is always available; abide in him.

Delight in Jesus

Read John 15:8-10. What do these verses reveal about the delight of abiding in Jesus?

Delighting in Jesus is enjoying him. We can enjoy Christ by giving thanks for all he has provided for us. Delighting in Jesus looks like noticing him in all things, praising him, and practicing his presence.

Make a list of things in this world that point you to Christ.



How can you make it a daily practice to delight yourself in Christ?

Endure with Joy

Read John 15:11-13. What do these verses teach about joy?

No Christian is immune to suffering. Jesus told his disciples, “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Because Christ went before us—carrying the cross, being crucified in our place, and conquering the grave—we, too, can endure suffering with joy.

Read Hebrews 12:1-3. What does this passage reveal about enduring suffering with joy?



Read 1 Peter 5:10-11, and write this passage as a prayer and a reminder to your heart that God is always at work—when we’re pruned, when we wait, when we suffer, and when we endure.

THINK TRUE THOUGHTS

What you think about will impact the course of your day . . . and your entire life. The average person thinks about forty-eight thoughts per minute, all of which add up to nearly seventy thousand thoughts per day.² In order to continue growing in grace, we must make it a habit to take our thoughts captive to obey Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 10:4-6 (NIV), Paul writes:

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.



We're fighting a spiritual battle, but we've been given all we need to fight victoriously through Christ. The more you hide the Word in your heart, the better you'll be able to identify wayward thoughts and destroy every argument that sets itself up against the truth of God. Taking thoughts captive is something we learn, and it's a discipline we're always growing in.

In order to take our thoughts captive, we need to be aware of what we're actually thinking. Thoughts can't be taken captive if they aren't first noticed for what they are—truth or lies. Many times we don't even notice a thought until we've been overcome by a feeling. Our feelings are tied to our thoughts and beliefs. What we feel and mull over constantly indicates what's at the root of our thoughts. We can fight against the lies of the enemy with the truth of God's Word.

Our feelings won't always align with the truth. That's why it's vital to learn to preach truth to our hearts—even when we don't *feel* like it. As Christ-followers, we can live by what we know to be true. We can preach to our feelings with the truth and hope of the gospel. Remember, though, that our feelings and emotions aren't evil. They were created by God for a purpose. It is what we do *in response* to our feelings that makes the difference.

On the following pages, you'll be given space to practice taking your thoughts captive to obey Christ.



You can return to this section when the lies start to overtake your peace and identity in Christ. The lies of the enemy have to bow to the truth of Jesus, so preach truth to your heart every day. As you take your thoughts captive, you'll be more and more captivated by Christ.

DIG DEEPER

Andrew Murray once said, "What a difference it would make if we could take time every morning to focus on the thought: *Christ is in me.*"³ When wayward thoughts come, instead of focusing on how you feel, speak the truth to yourself about who Jesus is. Focus your gaze on Christ, who paid it all and is enough.

Truth trumps feelings. The next time you're tempted to believe what you feel, respond with, "But I know . . ." Here are a couple of examples:

- I feel like I'm not good enough, but I know Jesus is enough and he is faithful. He's enough for my shortcomings. He's enough for my weaknesses.
- I feel like a failure, but I know I am redeemed in Christ and made whole in him.

Use this template to take your thoughts and feelings captive and start believing the truth of God's Word.



I feel:

but I know:

I feel:

but I know:

I feel:

but I know:





I feel:

but I know:

I feel:

but I know:

I feel:

but I know:





I feel:

but I know:

I feel:

but I know:

I feel:

but I know:





I feel:

but I know:

I feel:

but I know:

I feel:

but I know:





WE FIGHT
FROM THE VICTORY
OF JESUS,
NOT *FOR* VICTORY.





I feel:

but I know:

I feel:

but I know:

I feel:

but I know:





I feel:

but I know:

I feel:

but I know:

I feel:

but I know:





I feel:

but I know:

I feel:

but I know:

I feel:

but I know:





I feel:

but I know:

I feel:

but I know:

I feel:

but I know:

