

The book cover features a central light-colored rectangular area with text, surrounded by a decorative border of various flowers and greenery. The flowers include orange, red, yellow, and pink blossoms on thin green stems with small leaves. The text is centered on the light area.

GRETCHEN SAFFLES

*Foreword by bestselling author
Ruth Chou Simons*

THE
*Well-
Watered
Woman*

ROOTED IN TRUTH
GROWING IN GRACE
FLOURISHING IN FAITH

If reading your Bible feels dry and heavy, *The Well-Watered Woman* will bring back your passion to connect with Jesus. Nothing on earth is more important than loving and enjoying God through his Word.

JENNIE ALLEN

New York Times bestselling author of *Get Out of Your Head*;
founder and visionary of IF:Gathering

Over the years, Gretchen has been a gift to us. Her honesty, vulnerability, and commitment to follow Christ in life and ministry have encouraged us in our own. *The Well-Watered Woman* is an overflow of Gretchen's life and a new beginning for any soul that feels barren, parched, or unsatisfied. Gretchen's story and words will cause you to love God more and will stir your affections for him.

EMILY JENSEN AND LAURA WIFLER

Coauthors of *Risen Motherhood: Gospel Hope for Everyday Moments*;
cofounders of the Risen Motherhood ministry

We all know that beautiful, flourishing gardens—and lives—don't just happen. Gretchen combines rich, biblical insight with transparent glimpses into her own journey to help dry, parched souls become thriving, life-giving springs. You will find great hope and encouragement in this book as you encounter Jesus in a fresh way.

NANCY DEMOSS WOLGEMUTH

Author and founder/teacher of *Revive Our Hearts*

Gretchen offers a fresh perspective on living a faith-filled life that both revives the dried-up Christian's hope and lets her breathe a sigh of relief. She gives her readers permission to ditch the pursuit of picture-perfect spiritual performance and, instead, embrace authenticity with God so that his presence and his Word can flow down and water the parched, untouched roots of her weary soul.

TITANIA PAIGE

Host of *The Purpose in Purity Podcast* and author of *Come Home: A Redemptive Roadmap from Lust Back to Christ*

If you're weary of the try-harder, do-more, be-better pressures of daily life, don't miss Gretchen Saffles's new book. Gretchen writes with warmth and humility, graciously illuminating our need for the Good News of the gospel. This book overflows with scriptural truths that will refresh your heart, nourish your soul, and point you to Jesus.

MELISSA KRUGER

Director of Women's Initiatives for The Gospel Coalition and author of *Growing Together: Taking Mentoring Beyond Small Talk and Prayer Requests*

As a pastor, I am always looking for resources to help our women grow in Christ. This book both helps women understand their own past, fears, and ungodly desires and offers them a gospel-centered approach to real Christian growth. The illustration comparing growing plants to the Christian life that Gretchen weaves throughout the book is so helpful for every reader, from someone who is just getting to know Christ to a mature follower. I can't wait to recommend this book to every woman in my church, with the great hope that it will help each one become a more Well-Watered Woman.

DR. JASON EDWIN DEES

Pastor, Christ Covenant, Atlanta, Georgia

Whether we realize it or not, we are constantly looking in the wrong places to find satisfaction. This book is an invitation to run to the only Well that will fulfill the deepest longings of our hearts. Gretchen saturated these pages with biblical truth that will revive you! Come thirsty, and expect to be refreshed!

BETSEY GOMEZ

Podcaster, Revive Our Hearts Spanish Outreach

Gretchen Saffles doesn't only teach what it means to be a Well-Watered Woman. She lives it. She isn't perfect, and she'll share her struggles throughout her book. But as you get to know Gretchen, more importantly, you'll get to know Jesus. She desires to be filled each day with God's Word because it is living, active, and profitable for our daily

lives. The best part is that her delight in God's Word will splash on you, leaving you refreshed and renewed to trust in the God who redeems and refreshes our souls.

KELLY KING

Manager of Magazines/Devotional Publishing and Women's Ministry Training,
Lifeway Christian Resources

The Well-Watered Woman stirred my affections for Jesus and reminded me that following him is a lifestyle, not merely a box to check off on my spiritual to-do list. In this book, Gretchen Saffles points to Christ on every page and, in doing so, invites readers to look to him every moment of every day.

HUNTER BELESS

Founder and executive director of Journeywomen

It takes time for things to grow. Growth in the Christian life is a process too. This book helps define a process of growth, but more important, it helps you see that the destination is not the process but a Person. If you would describe your soul as dry, parched, and in need of water, this book is for you. Even if you are in a great place spiritually, this book will encourage you to keep fighting the fight and living by faith. He is worthy and worth it!

JULIE WOODRUFF

Women's minister, Long Hollow Baptist Church

With gentle words of encouragement and truth, Gretchen takes readers by the hand and leads them on a journey from thirsting for the truth to seeking satisfaction in the Well of God's Word. She has truly walked this journey with humility and has led us all in displaying the testimony of her life with honest vulnerability. Her kindness in coming alongside women brings hope and healing to anyone who is tired of the try-harder life and longs for abundance in Christ alone.

JESSICA MATHISEN

Author of *Already Chosen*

Every season of life has its challenges, but *The Well-Watered Woman* points us to the God of all seasons. With transparent examples from her own life story, Gretchen encourages readers that the Word of God is necessary for our roots to run deep, and she reminds us that joy is only possible through Jesus. Whether you are in a fruitful or dry season, this book directs you to the true Well we must draw from.

DIANNE JAGO

Author of *A Holy Pursuit: How the Gospel Frees Us to Follow and Lay Down Our Dreams*;
founder of Deeply Rooted Magazine

Worn out? Burned out? Desperate for real hope and strength? This book is a lifeline for a generation of women who are experiencing anxiety, burnout, and weariness at record levels. I urgently want to put this gorgeous and timely book into the hands of every Christian woman I know. Don't miss this one.

JENNIFER DUKES LEE

Author of *Growing Slow* and *It's All Under Control*

I'm convinced every woman will find herself on these pages as Gretchen opens our eyes to the reason we feel so dry and tired. If you're thirsty and longing to feel the quench that lasts for more than an episode of your favorite show, pick up this book and be reminded of the everlasting and refreshing hope of the gospel.

VALERIE WOERNER

Owner and creator of Val Marie Paper prayer journals and author of
Grumpy Mom Takes a Holiday

My time with Jesus in the Word is a nonnegotiable in my life. It's the only way I make it through my day with peace and joy. Yet I know many Christian women feel defeated and discouraged in this area of their life. They know they "should" be reading their Bibles, they "should" be praying, but they just can't seem to overcome the stress, guilt, and anxiety bearing down on them. What a gift of grace this book will be for them and every weary soul that picks it up! In *The Well-Watered Woman*, Gretchen has laid

out a compelling and grace-filled vision for a thriving life, one with Jesus at the center. Each chapter is an invitation to find refreshment at the Well, rest in the Word, and purpose in the Way. These simple and profound truths are not burdensome or overwhelming but, rather, simple and strong enough to implement immediately into everyday life. In this book, you'll find refreshment for your soul and the tools to stay that way.

KELLY NEEDHAM

Author of *Friendish: Reclaiming Real Friendship in a Culture of Confusion*

I found myself worshiping the Lord as I was reading these beautiful, truth-filled pages! Gretchen has written the book the world needs right now—an invitation to bloom where we've been planted. *The Well-Watered Woman* is balm for our souls, leading us to drink at the Well that never runs dry. This book will refresh, renew, and ready you for life to the full, right where you are!

LARA CASEY

Bestselling author of *Make it Happen*, *Cultivate*, and *Gracie's Garden*

For every woman who feels thirsty and dry and a little bit empty, *The Well-Watered Woman* offers a taste of Living Water from a Well that will never run dry. Through her own transparent journey, Gretchen points us to Jesus and the life-giving relationship he longs to have with every one of us. So grateful for this beautiful book!

JOANNA WEAVER

Bestselling author of *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World: Finding Intimacy with God in the Busyness of Life*

For the woman who is dried up, worn out, and barely holding on, *The Well-Watered Woman* speaks directly to the core. Gretchen's personal story of letting Christ grow her up, expand her roots, and satisfy her soul will inspire readers to let God do the same in their own hearts. If you're ready to truly experience the gospel's promise, this book is for you.

PHYLICIA MASONHEIMER

National bestselling author of *Stop Calling Me Beautiful*

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Visit the author's website at wellwateredwomen.com.

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The Well-Watered Woman: Rooted in Truth, Growing in Grace, Flourishing in Faith

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Designed by Libby Dykstra

Edited by Stephanie Rische

Published in association with William K. Jensen Literary Agency, 119 Bampton Court, Eugene, Oregon 97404.

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ISBN 978-1-4964-4545-2

Printed in China

27	26	25	24	23	22	21
7	6	5	4	3	2	1



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FOREWORD



I used to think I was the only one who struggled to read my Bible.

I'd look at godly women I admired but didn't know personally and fill in my own narrative of what it must be like to have her vibrant relationship with God:

She must spend three hours a day studying her Bible.

I bet she has memorized long sections of Scripture.

Her kids don't fuss and fight while she's trying to read her Bible.

She probably doesn't get distracted like I do.

How does she get so much out of the Bible?

Something must be wrong with me.

Isn't it just like the enemy to derail us from the prize of knowing Jesus with the mirage of "doing it right"? When people learn that I paint Scripture and write for Christian women, they always assume that spending time in the Word comes easily or

naturally for me. They imagine me sitting on the back porch, lingering luxuriously with my Bible and commentaries open—while birds chirp, worship songs play, and a paintbrush loaded with fresh watercolor paint waits at the ready in case I get inspired. And sometimes they are right (perhaps once or twice a year). But most days, time with God and his Word looks more like this:

Rubbing the tired out of my eyes, praying first for desire (and confessing my lack), opening my Bible only to set it down to work through a disruption from the kids, returning once again, jotting down some notes, underlining a passage I don't understand, putting the dog out (again), and coming back to it several hours later, forgetting where I started that morning.

Some days . . . some seasons . . . are just not visibly flush with flashy and fragrant blooms.

Years ago, while watering my not-yet-blooming plants on the windowsill, I jotted down these words that formed in my heart: You don't have to be blooming to be growing. I was in an achy growing season—one that felt endlessly filled with weeding, pruning, watering, cultivating. And not many blooms.

It was in that season that the Lord taught me to long for him more than productivity. He showed me the richness of his provision when I wanted quick results. He stilled my heart with reminders of my identity in Christ when I thought I needed to secure my identity elsewhere. He opened my eyes to his

faithfulness even in my faithlessness. God grew me in the midst of a non-blooming season by instructing me through his Word.

It was around that same season that Gretchen and I first met each other online. Though it was years before we met in person, we knew we were kindred sisters in the Lord, eager to use our gifts and talents to direct many hearts back to Christ. We're both creatives, watching for ways God declares his glory and draws us to himself through beauty, creation, and his Word.

For years, I've watched Gretchen lead and lean into the mission of encouraging women to dig deeply into the Word of God. I've seen her model this, share vulnerably through difficult seasons, and consistently point others to God's faithfulness. God has written a story in and through her that is not about her but about God's tending and care. And through these pages, Gretchen leads us again and again back to the only source for life and godliness—the living water of God's Word.

The Bible isn't a formula, a quick fix, or a self-help strategy plan; it is a life-transforming love letter from the heart of God to you and me. In an age where so many seek to better themselves through worldly methods, we as Christ-followers must cling to this truth: "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever" (Isaiah 40:8).

A soul anchored to the hope found in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ will always bloom where it's planted. That's my only hope. That is Gretchen's only hope. My prayer

for you, as you begin this journey through the pages of this book, is that you, too, will find your hope in Christ—sustained by his Word, transformed into his likeness, and flourishing with fruitful blooms in due season—beginning right where you are.

RUTH CHOU SIMONS

Author of *GraceLaced* and *Beholding and Becoming*;
founder of GraceLaced.com



INTRODUCTION

BEGINNING AT THE END

Life on Earth matters not because it's the only life we have, but precisely because it isn't—it's the beginning of a life that will continue without end.

RANDY ALCORN

She was precariously close to dying when I found her, holding on to her last gasps of life, limp from dehydration and neglect. It looked like revival was hopeless. I picked her up tenderly, rushing to the kitchen sink to get the water she needed. Only time would tell if my little plant would make it, so I began the wait.

I felt a pang of guilt as I glanced at the fallen, shriveled-up leaves. I'd placed my dainty speckled plant haphazardly in the corner of an upstairs room where the blinds often remained shut. I'd forgotten all about her as I rushed about my busy schedule—caring for my little ones, tending to my work, keeping up my home, and trying to survive the daily grind. In many ways, my life was like that plant when I found it on the brink

of death. As my little houseplant wilted from a lack of attention, light, and water, I was languishing too. On the outside, my life looked like it was in order, but my soul wasn't getting the care it needed. Anxiety lurked around every corner, and I found myself facing fears and relentless what-ifs.

This wasn't the first time I'd found myself shriveling, dried up, and wilting. My plant served as a poignant reminder that the well-watered life doesn't happen by accident, and it doesn't happen overnight either. Rather, the well-watered life must be fought for, invested in, and tended to with love. It's the kind of life we were created to live, and it's the kind of life Jesus came to give.

The work of God's redemption in our lives is a slow-moving journey that takes place in mostly unseen ways. Growth is rarely glamorous; instead, it's forged in the rocky hills of hardship, the valleys of suffering, and the foggy paths of waiting. It's marked by a gradual movement toward Christ in the middle of the messy, mundane moments of life. If you expect life to be perfect, you will be let down every time. But if you embrace the struggle, eyes glued to Jesus, you will surrender to your Savior and find in him the perfection you long for. He's working in your waiting, creating a masterpiece out of your mess. In other words: life won't ever be easy, but God is always good.

WHEN YOU REACH THE END

Like my poor plant, you may have hit a spot in your life that feels like an ending. There are no signs of hope, and revival

seems like a long shot at best. I don't know what your ending is—maybe it's the end of a season or the end of a relationship. Maybe you're facing what feels like a dead end, or you're at the crossroads of a decision you need to make. You may be nearing (or at) the end of your own abilities or resources or the end of a dream you once cherished. Or maybe you're at the end of your rope, wondering how God's goodness will prevail in the darkness of life.

But there's a hidden gift that comes with endings. With every ending comes a new beginning. When you reach the end, you're given a fresh opportunity to begin again. It's only when you reach your end, when you're dried up and shriveling, that you realize where real life comes from in the first place. We can never know the joy of flourishing without experiencing the despair of languishing. Apart from Jesus, we are spiritually dead, lifeless, overcome by the weeds of sin. But when we come to the end of ourselves, we can commit fully to Christ, and we can be made new and set free.

Every ending in my own life has brought about a new beginning that wouldn't have been possible without the closing of a previous chapter. The end of my pride brings humility. The end of jealousy brings love. The end of a season brings a new opportunity to see God's faithfulness. It's in these endings that true life begins. Every ending I've faced on earth isn't really the end of my story; it's the beginning of knowing Jesus more fully—an arrow pointing me to the hopeful end that's still to come.

And on a larger scale, the end of our time on earth means the best beginning of all. In the end, every wrong will be made right, every pain healed, every suffering redeemed, and every hardship relieved. Every tear will be wiped away, every question answered, every desert turned into a fruitful garden, and every broken heart mended (see Revelation 21:1-6). The end of the story is even better than the beginning, and it's full of hope.

So if you feel you're at your end, or nearing your end, you're actually in the perfect place. Because it's in your ending that you will find the perfect beginning in Christ.

FOR THE WOMAN WHO FEELS DRIED UP

I wrote this book for the woman who is in need of a fresh start. She feels discouraged by the lack of growth in her faith. She's tired of trying to prove herself and feels stuck in the mud of the mundane. She attends church but finds her Bible collecting dust on a shelf during the week. She wants to go deeper and love Jesus more, but she doesn't know *how* to move forward. She feels parched on the inside.

This book is for the woman who desires abundant life in Christ but also finds herself craving more of this world—more affirmation, more money, more accomplishments, more pleasure. She is hungry to embrace Christ's grace, but she struggles to live this out when her child is throwing a tantrum, when her roommate betrays her, when her coworker gossips about her, or when her emotions rage and throw their own tantrum.

I wrote this for the woman who has come to the end of her rope so many times that she's almost ready to let go. She finds herself trudging along on the hamster wheel of life, using up all her energy but getting nowhere. She doesn't know how to get from the dried-up life to the overflowing life Jesus offers.

I wrote this book for every woman who wants more of Jesus in her everyday life but struggles to live out this desire.

But I also wrote it for me because I am this woman. I'm the woman who has run tirelessly for a prize that's out of reach and ultimately unsatisfying. I'm the woman who has searched for meaning and purpose in what I can accomplish, only to be left empty handed. I'm the woman who is breathless and exhausted from chasing after perfection. I'm the woman who has tried drinking from an empty well, aching for living water while gulping down fear, anxiety, and panic.

I'm the dried-up woman.

THE WELL-WATERED WOMAN: WHO IS SHE?

I can pretty much guarantee none of us set out on a path to become shriveled up and at the end of ourselves. It happens gradually, and one day we're shocked to discover just how desperate and thirsty we are. I know this has been the case for me.

I grew up in the church, but in my early twenties, I found myself still unsure of what it looks like to follow Jesus in everyday life. I wanted more than just an "open your Bible once a week and then let it collect dust" kind of faith. The Jesus I read

about in the Bible was either worth everything or worth nothing. Living as if he were only worth “something” just wouldn’t cut it. I found myself craving not just a few drops of water every once in a while but a deep, soul-nourishing, life-giving stream.

I’ve learned that it’s impossible to become a flourishing, deeply rooted woman simply by opening my Bible every so often. I can’t expect to thrive when my thirsty soul is trying to sip from empty wells throughout the day, while the well of living water beckons me to come and drink the truth that satisfies forever. As my sad little plant reminds me, becoming a Well-Watered Woman isn’t a goal I check off my to-do list once; rather, it’s a way of life.

The Well-Watered Woman isn’t the perfect woman. She’s fueled by the undeserved grace of God, not by her ambitions to be a “good girl.” She recognizes that the good within her comes from God alone (see Psalm 16:2; Galatians 5:22-23). Jesus has set her free from her past mistakes, and she lives as a new creation (see 2 Corinthians 5:17). He has given her a fresh start, and his mercy propels her forward in love and obedience each day. She has come to the end of herself and found a new beginning in Jesus. Her future is secure, and her new life is most hopeful of all—eternity with Christ.

The goal of the Well-Watered Woman isn’t to *be* someone but to *know* someone—the one who changes everything. Her ambitions and dreams are being transformed by Jesus as he shows her, day by day, the better way to live. As she makes it

her daily pursuit to know Jesus, she becomes the someone God created her to be: the Well-Watered Woman.

BRING YOUR EMPTY CUP

Ultimately, being “well watered” isn’t just about getting adequate water; it’s also about *where* it’s coming from. If our thirst is temporarily satisfied by water from a polluted source, we won’t grow and flourish even if the soil is wet. For the Well-Watered Woman, Jesus himself is the Well she drinks from daily. He’s her source of hope, healing, peace, and purpose. He’s the living water who satisfies the thirsty soul forever and fills her empty cup.

The Well-Watered Woman can’t exist apart from God’s grace. I know because I’ve tried. I used to attempt to fill my cup from the dried-up wells and empty promises of this world. I sought purpose and happiness in what I achieved, but no matter how hard I tried, it was never enough. I put all my energy into being liked by others, but they were never satisfied. I craved what this world has to offer, but it never provided peace. It was only when I looked to Jesus that I found the satisfaction I longed for.

The promise in Isaiah 58:11 changed everything for me. The first time I read this passage, it seemed too good to be true: “The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail” (NIV). This verse comes in the context of God calling the

Israelites from a dried-up life to a life of obedience and abundance in him.

At the time I read this, I was trudging through a dark night of the soul. On the outside, I looked like I had things together, but on the inside, I was drying up. I relied on the “good” I could find in myself rather than the goodness of God, and I was withering in a sun-scorched land.

But Jesus didn’t leave me there. He opened my eyes, and I saw myself as the dried-up woman in John 4—the one who met Jesus at the well and received his offer of water from a Well that never dries up. This woman had been pursuing water from a temporary source, but that didn’t stop Jesus from pursuing her. And it didn’t stop him from pursuing me, either. He offered me living water just as he did for the woman at the well, and I haven’t been the same since.

So if your cup is empty, you’re in the right place. You have to know you’re thirsty before you can drink from the Well that always satisfies and never runs dry.

IN SEARCH OF A GOOD ENDING

Throughout this book, we will go on a journey of growing in Christ—a journey toward the well-watered life. This book is broken down into three different sections that characterize the Well-Watered Woman: “The Well,” “The Word,” and “The Way.”

“The Well” is the starting point, where the gospel is planted in your life and your roots take hold in the truth. It’s here that

your identity becomes grounded in the gospel—where you begin to grasp who God is and the reality of who you are in him. The soil of your soul will be cultivated so you can learn to be more than “okay” in Christ, what it means to die to yourself, and to find joy and purpose right where you’re planted.

The next section, “The Word,” represents growth in Christ. The Well-Watered Woman is *always* growing, changing, and being transformed into Jesus’ likeness. Jesus, who is the Word, is our source for growth. You’ll discover what it means to put the Word before the world, to stir your affections for Jesus, and to preach Truth with a capital *T* to your heart.

The last section, “The Way,” represents blooming and flourishing in Christ. We’ll look at how obedience and love for Jesus affect the way we think, act, and go about our daily life. This is where what has been planted and nurtured begins to produce fruit, the natural outcome of a well-watered life.

At the beginning of each chapter, you’ll find “The Story of a Thirsty Woman.” These stories are composites of real struggles we face as women. The details of your own story will vary, but I hope you will relate to the feelings at the core of these stories, because the dried-up woman is you, and she is me. We have all been dried up at some point, but Jesus doesn’t want us to stay there. He came to offer us abundant life in him. By the end of each chapter, my hope is that you’ll see how this woman (who represents all of us) can be transformed into the Well-Watered Woman as she finds her hope in Jesus.

YOUR FRESH START BEGINS NOW

Miraculously, less than twenty-four hours after I watered my neglected plant, it revived. As I type these words, she sits by an open window, upright, healthy, and growing. This plant was given a new beginning, a fresh start. So it is with your own story. You may be dried up right now, but that doesn't have to be your final destination. Along this journey, there is grace to be grasped, hope to be held, peace to be found, and promises to be mined.

Flourishing in Jesus is about leaving behind a shallow faith for a deeper walk with him. He isn't just a part of who you are; he *is* your life (see Colossians 3:4). Pursuing Jesus isn't about attaining perfection or arriving at a specific destination. It's not about having your life put together or avoiding suffering and struggles. It's about finding unending hope, peace, and strength in Jesus so you can conquer the challenges you face and flourish right where you've been planted. As a Well-Watered Woman, you won't have a perfect life, but it will be full of hope, brimming with purpose, and fueled by grace.

Because of Christ, your story has been rewritten, redefined, and redeemed. Your ultimate goal is a well-watered, abundant, and overflowing life. So don't waste your time dwelling on how shriveled up your faith has become. Instead, drink deeply from the Well and embrace the glory of a fresh start.

PART ONE

THE WELL



*Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst;
but the water that I will give him will become in him
a well of water springing up to eternal life.*

JOHN 4:13-14, NASB (EMPHASIS ADDED)

JESUS, THE WELL, fills the empty void in our souls. He meets us right where we are—in sin, shame, and suffering—and offers us salvation.

The Well represents the moment you meet Jesus and surrender your life to him. You coming to the Well isn't a one-time event. Our hearts become thirsty and parched every day, and only Jesus offers the kind of living water that always satisfies. No matter how empty your cup is, the Well is always brimming. The Well-Watered Woman pours herself out each day and returns to the Well over and over to meet with Jesus. No matter where she is on her journey, the Well is always available for refreshment and revival. Whether she finds herself in a season of plenty or a season of drought, she runs to the Well of living water for true soul satisfaction—and her very survival.

Your faith journey begins when the gospel seed is planted in your heart and takes root in the soil of your soul. When God plants the seed, he calls you to die to yourself in order to embrace new life in him. The deepening of your faith roots is a continual process of growing in the knowledge of who God is and how knowing him changes everything about your life.

Throughout Scripture, the well is a symbol of abundance, provision, and life. Just as wells provide for a practical need—water for the physically thirsty—they point to Christ, who supplies living water for the thirsty soul. When planted by God in the barren soul, the seed of the gospel satisfies and sustains the Well-Watered Woman through life's suffering, storms, and celebrations.

Meet Me at the Grace Well

*Meet me at the Grace Well,
Where living waters flow,
To quench your thirsty heart
And satisfy your soul.*

*Come just as you are,
Broken, beaten, bruised.
Receive his endless love
And listen to Good News.*

*Bring your empty cup,
The one you've tried to fill
With treasures of this world,
Leaving you empty still.*

*It's not the water you know;
It's the water he freely gives.
It will revive your dead soul
So you can truly live.*

*Drink deeply from this Well
That never will run dry.
Hold tightly to his Word of truth,
Then worship with your life.*



CHAPTER 1

I'M NOT OKAY. IS THAT OKAY?

The deepest root of womanhood is hope in God.

JOHN PIPER

The Story of a Thirsty Woman

She was a far cry from being “okay.” For years, she tried to act as if she had it all together, putting on a smile as a Band-Aid against the hurt invading her soul. She ignored the brokenness that screamed for attention from deep within, and she became a pro at faking an “I’m fine” response to people’s questions about how she was doing. Until . . . everything shattered. She could no longer wear a mask of perfection. She didn’t even know how to put it on anymore. Her roots were shallow, and when the winds of change came, her tornado-like emotions blew her over. She finally admitted to herself and to the Lord, *I’m not okay*. But the question begged to be answered: *Is it okay for a Christian not to be okay?* She looked to Jesus and was surprised by the response.

AS I SAT IN THE OFFICE, I glanced around at the various plants growing in their respective clay pots. They looked no different from the week before, but still, they were alive and there was growth happening that was unseen by my human eye. These slow-growing plants felt like comrades to me. They reminded me of my own soul.

More often than not, I feel as if nothing is changing, as if I'm still stuck where I was last week and the week before that. But in reality, there's unseen change happening; there's growth beneath the surface. Through the hard questions and wrestlings of life, my roots are growing deeper. To be honest, I wish the growth was faster, more visible, more obvious. I wish I didn't need to sit in the office of a Christian counselor, seeking healing and understanding for my broken emotions and beliefs.

"How are you doing?" she asked.

Immediately the tears started to fall from my eyes. Her simple question opened a floodgate of turmoil that had been dammed up in my soul. The tears continued to flow as I unloaded the burdens, worries, and fears that overwhelmed my heart.

Ever since I had my first panic attack, it felt like my identity was in shambles. I lived each day as only a shadow of who I used to be. At the time, I didn't realize that through the undoing of my life, God was actually putting me back together again. Every tear that fell reflected not only my brokenness but also God's inner healing.

It's as if the tears were my soul's way of watering what God

was doing inside of me. Without the rain falling, there can be no deepening of the roots, no growth for the plant. Without the tears falling, there can be no deepening of our faith, no growth in Christ. Tears can be a downpour that God uses to grow, nourish, and heal us from the inside out.

“I’m not doing okay,” I confessed through embarrassed sobs. “And that’s *not* okay.”

“Isn’t it?” she asked. “You know, it’s okay for a Christian to not be okay.”

Those words were hard for me to believe. Is it really okay to not be okay? I’d never heard this before, but for the first time, I felt the freedom to breathe. I’d spent most of my life striving after perfection, trying to be okay all the time, while the whole time I was sinking. This was turning out to be a suffocating pursuit.

As tears flooded my eyes, I recognized that it wasn’t just that day I wasn’t okay. I actually hadn’t been okay for several years. I’d tried to cover up the gaping wounds of my soul, hoping it would make the bleeding stop, when I needed deeper healing that would mend the underlying root of my wound.

I was overcommitted, overwhelmed, overstimulated, and overtired—and I was over it. I knew something needed to change, but I didn’t know where to go from there. The shallow roots of my heart had been plucked up by the storms of life, and I felt like I was being thrown around by gale-force winds. In the root system of my beliefs, I didn’t think it was okay to not be okay, and I was falling apart.

HOW ARE YOU—REALLY?

If someone were to ask you how you're doing, what would you say? I have a hunch most of us default to something like "Good" or "Fine" or maybe even "Good but tired." We're breathing; we're alive. Therefore, we must be "good." Yet if you're like me, you're also a tad (okay, a lot) overwhelmed, you have a long to-do list to tackle, and you're physically, emotionally, and spiritually weary.

"Good" or "fine" is often what we say when we don't want to let someone in to see what's *really* going on inside. We're trying to move the conversation on to the next thing while ignoring the fact that we're being tossed around by the circumstances of our lives. The truth is, we live most of our days in between where "fine" meets exhausted, rushed, tired, and at the end of ourselves.

So how are you right now—*really*? Are you being tossed around by the stress of never-ending to-do lists? By despair and hopelessness? By self-pity and comparison? By the pressure to do better and achieve more? By piles of dirty dishes that seem to yell, "You are not in control!"? By the pursuit of success—trying hard but never arriving? By the reality of what it means to hold on to hope in a world that often feels hopeless?

If we have rooted ourselves in the shallow soil of this world—in what we do and what we can accomplish in life—we will struggle to survive the storms. Only when we're rooted in Christ can we experience a life that is real, secure, and free.

THE TALE OF A BLACK THUMB

I have to admit that I feel a little bit like a phony writing this book when I've got a track record of being a plant killer. The number of succulents and "easy to maintain" houseplants that have faced their last moments in my home is embarrassingly large. Nevertheless, I always learn lessons from these little plants, especially the ones that have the tenacity to survive.

When my husband, Greg, and I lived in the hills of Tennessee, a local plant nursery was right down the street from our home. I'd stop by occasionally to grab a new plant (or two) to replace the ones I'd killed. Around this time, a friend gave me a packet of zinnia seeds. The illustration on the front of the package depicted purple, fuchsia, and burnt-orange flowers with a tiny butterfly fluttering from one petal to the next. Each time I picked up the seed packet and admired the beautiful illustration, I would set the package back down, afraid to bury these beauties beneath the earth.

How could such a delightful plant grow from such a small seed? I marveled. The following spring, with the help of my father-in-law's green thumb, I nervously planted the seeds in a small plastic starter tray. Each morning I'd check on them, waiting for a speck of green to appear in the dark soil.

Eventually something caught my eye. Was it really a sign of *new* life? Sure enough, a small green sprout was shooting up from the depths.

After that, more and more sprouts began to appear in the

tray. As the days progressed, these small sprouts grew and grew until . . . I killed them. I went out of town and was unable to water my seedlings, and by the time I returned home, these little beauties had bitten the dust. (You didn't think my black thumb turned green that quickly, did you?)

This illustration depicts the well-watered life: imperfect and always in progress. The Well-Watered Woman isn't a perfect woman, but she knows the one who is perfect—the Gardener who never fails. She isn't always “okay” and she isn't always “fine,” but she roots herself in the unrelenting hope of the gospel.

Sometimes she gets busy and distracted. Sometimes she neglects Bible study. Sometimes she sinks into the despair of this broken world. The difference is she doesn't stay in the “I'm not okay” moments forever. She always comes back to Christ, the cornerstone and foundation of her life. Here's the wisdom she's rooted in:

She knows God will not leave her side—ever (see Hebrews 13:5).

She knows she isn't enough apart from him, but in him, she has all she needs (see Ephesians 1:3).

She knows discouragement, failure, and doubt don't get the last word (see 2 Timothy 1:7; James 1:5-8).

She knows that it's okay to not be okay in this fallen world, because, in the end, all will be better than okay in Christ (see 2 Corinthians 4:8-12).

She knows feelings aren't something to be afraid of;
she listens to them, learns from them, and leans on her
Savior in the midst of them (see Psalm 42:1-3; 63:1-3).

The Well-Watered Woman is like a seed planted by God—
continually growing by his grace, sustained by his promises.

THINGS WERE NOT OKAY IN THE BEGINNING

In the very beginning, before all that is was not yet, the earth is described as being “without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep” (Genesis 1:2). The earth was not okay when it first began. The Hebrew word for “formlessness” is *tobu*.¹ There was no order, no life, and no light, but the Creator God brought life, light, beauty, and purpose from its vast, empty surface. From nothing, God created everything. From a wasteland, he made wonder.

God knew what he was doing when he created light, land, and water before creating vegetation and plants (see Genesis 1:3-5). The great Gardener created the perfect conditions for growth at the dawn of time. Today he shows his creativity, power, and provision as he cultivates the conditions for new life to grow within our souls. He is infinitely patient, and he takes the long view when it comes to our growth.

When I planted those tiny seeds in the starter trays, some were almost too small to see. Multiple seedlings fell into one hole to offer an opportunity for one or two to take root. After

planting, I showered them with some water, set them by a window, and began the hard part: waiting.

Did you know you can't make a plant grow faster by staring at it? It's true; I tried. What I was forgetting was that growth was happening beneath the soil long before the green sprouts were visible. Each day I watered and waited, and all the while, God worked.

YOU ARE NOT OKAY WITHOUT JESUS

The creation story beautifully reflects the salvation story. God, the Author of life and Creator of time, brings new life to struggling, chaotic, not-okay human souls. God isn't just the one who created our bodies; he also creates the conditions for our spiritual growth.

The apostle Paul used this analogy in his letter to the church at Corinth: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). Though we do our part to dig holes, drop seeds, cover them with soil, and water them, growth and life ultimately come from God. Just as God made the soil and designed the seeds to produce food and beauty for life, he created the spiritual conditions for us to know him and follow him. Just as he set the sun on fire and caused the earth to spin at perfect speed—not too fast, not too slow—he set our hearts to long for him and for eternity (see Ecclesiastes 3:11).

God placed the first human beings in a perfect, beautiful garden. But this idyllic scene didn't last long, and from the moment they ate the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve weren't okay (see Genesis 3). The earth wasn't okay either. It was cursed, broken, and ravaged by sin, and we still reap those effects today. After Adam and Eve's rebellion, God spoke directly to them, sharing the consequences for their disobedience. To Adam, he said, "Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field" (Genesis 3:17-18). The earth that was made to bear fruit would now also bear thorns and thistles, pain and disappointment, suffering and sorrow. In your struggle with jealousy, thorns grow. In your bitterness against the person who betrayed you, thorns grow. In your desire for something God hasn't given you, thorns grow.

The thorns that came into the earth because of the Curse were just the beginning. Later, those thorns inflicted pain that has never been felt before and will never be felt again: at the crucifixion of Christ. The pain Jesus endured on the cross was more than physical torture. He also endured the wrath of God against sin and shouldered the weight of human depravity (see Isaiah 53:10). The very Curse Adam had reaped due to his disobedience was set on Jesus' head in the form of a crown of thorns (see Romans 5:12-21; Galatians 3:13).

Christ became "not okay" for us so we could be more than

okay forever in him (see Romans 5:8). Christ, the one who created the lush, green world and brought life and wonder from nothing, reaped the consequences of sin *for* us. It's almost too scandalous to be true. That's why the gospel both wrecks us and restores us. It's so wonderful, so indescribable, so layered with grace that it takes an entire lifetime and all of eternity for us to truly grasp it. Christ redeemed the thorns of this life by wearing them for us (see Matthew 27:29). Now we're no longer bound by crushing circumstances or stuck in unrelenting strongholds; we are free, and we are finally okay—more than okay—in him.

Even in the moments when life is not okay—when the sheriff shows up at the front door with tragic news, when the e-mail pops up with a shocking story, when your child rebels and leaves your home—remember the crown of thorns piercing the perfect brow of Christ, who is now risen and wearing an eternal crown of glory (see Revelation 19:12). The Well-Watered Woman is not the perfect woman, but she knows the perfect one who was pierced with thorns in her place. The thorns of suffering and sorrow may still grow, but they don't pierce us forever. Any pain we feel is meant to point us back to Christ, who wore the crown of thorns to break the curse caused by sin.

Charles Spurgeon, known as the “prince of preachers,” said, “Thorns and thistles shall the earth bring forth to thee, but if these bring thee nearer to thy God, they are the best crop the ground can grow!”²

YOU ARE MORE THAN OKAY IN CHRIST

If you were to ask me how I'm doing now that I've finished writing this chapter, I would respond differently. While I still have a long to-do list in front of me, a house in disarray around me, and a lot of emotions stirring inside me, the Word of truth is at work, refocusing me and reminding me that God is good, even now. My circumstances haven't changed, but the posture of my heart shifts as I look to Jesus (see Hebrews 12:1-3). Though I still have things that concern me, I'm reminded of God's care. This is what God's Word does to our feelings and our present struggles—it gives us what we need, right when we need it (see Philippians 4:19).

When your roots run deep in God's goodness and steadfast love, nothing can shake you or break you forever. His goodness and unfailing love hold us together when life is falling apart. They provide a healing balm when thorns strike our souls. When we're not okay, we remember that our attitudes of praise are dependent not on the ease of our circumstances but on the fact that God is good—period (see Psalm 136). This is why the apostle Paul prayed for believers who were walking through suffering—that they not lose heart but become “rooted and grounded in love” and that they “know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge” (Ephesians 3:13-19). You can never be empty when you're full of Jesus.

The very one who made and redeemed the world will also one day restore the world to be *better* than okay—it will be

glorious and even better than Eden.³ The thorns of suffering, sorrow, doubt, and discouragement will no longer grow or take root in our hearts (see Revelation 21:1-5). Instead, we will harvest life, joy, abundance, and peace as we dwell forever with God, whose very presence will give us light (see Revelation 22:5). Until that glorious day, we wait as God tends the soil of our hearts (see Romans 8:19-25).

In this in-between time, we embrace the realities of living in a fallen world while being deeply rooted in the infallible Word of God. These roots cannot be plucked up or pulled out of the soil. They are steadfast and immovable, and they grow deeper and deeper day by day. In the moments when things are not okay, those roots keep us grounded in the truth we already know.

Hold fast to the Word of God, and it will hold fast to you. Living a well-watered life doesn't mean always being okay. It does mean you're always growing more attached to Jesus and less attached to this world. Even in the daily, unseen moments, the Gardener is tending your soul and making you whole.

So wait with hope. One day, everything will be better than okay in him. Until then, let the thorns and thistles of life thrust you closer to him and pierce your heart with gospel truth.



THE WELL-WATERED WOMAN

SURRENDERS A LIFE

OF STRIVING

FOR A LIFE

OF SINKING HER ROOTS

INTO GOD'S WORD.

