

# Sample Devotional

## WORST GARDENING YEAR EVER

As the 2021 gardening season drew to a close for the year, I felt a powerful sense of relief. Most growing seasons in my home state of Alabama are filled with sunny days and lush growth. But not the spring and summer of 2021, which was roughly 120 days of toil and frustration for me. I'll tell you more about it in the days to come, but let me offer a quick preview. First, we received unprecedented and excessive levels of rainfall, which facilitated the development of a scaly blight and the invasion of armyworms in my garden. To make matters worse, a large family of rabbits shacked up in my yard, which was kind of cute until they started eating every plant that the blight and armyworms didn't kill. The only thing that kept me from giving up was the fact that my yard would have looked like a horror scene if I hadn't taken action to mediate the damage. So, I continued to toil.

Whereas gardening usually brings me joy and refreshing, I felt frustrated and at times even repulsed. So, as I often do, I asked myself, "What can I learn?" I firmly believe that frustrations and failures can be redeemed by listening for God's wisdom and guidance.

As I listened for God's voice, He reminded me of another season of my life during which I had experienced feelings of frustration, failure, and devastation. For various reasons, I had resigned from a ministry position. I felt like God had abandoned me, and I wondered if I would ever return to ministry. But rather than abandoning me, God was simply taking me in a new direction and into a new season of life. Just because I went through one hard season didn't mean that I was going to quit forever. In fact, the shift propelled me into a PhD program, which led to massive personal, professional, and spiritual growth.

In Scripture, God never promises that our lives will be easy or free from pain. In fact, Jesus explicitly tells us that "In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33). But we also have hope, through Jesus, that our God won't allow us to suffer forever. In fact, Peter says that Jesus will personally restore us. "In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So, after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation," (1 Peter 5:10).

As Peter comforts us with the promise of restoration, he also reminds us of the scope and magnitude of God's power. You may feel like your affliction is more than you can handle, but Jesus will provide the strength you need. He hasn't abandoned us or forgotten us, but rather, walks with us through our trials and empowers us to emerge stronger than before.

By the fall of 2021, I had learned a lot of gardening lessons. The learning process wasn't very fun, but I'm better equipped now to deal with future obstacles and dilemmas. I don't always take joy in the challenges, but I do love an opportunity to learn!

***Lord, thank you for strengthening, supporting and restoring me in your perfect timing. Help me to trust in your power and sovereignty. Help me to focus upon your love and grace rather than fixate on my problems. Show me what I can learn from every trial or difficulty I face, whether big or small. In Jesus' name, Amen.***

