



Cultivate: A Grace-Filled Guide to Growing an Intentional Life

Lara Casey

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A guide to embracing imperfect progress and making what matters happen, little by little.

Women often feel like they have to have it all together in order to live a meaningful life. Instead they feel inadequate, overwhelmed, paralyzed by fear and insecurity, and are exhausted simply trying to figure out where to begin. “The secret to living a flourishing life isn’t in engineering the perfect circumstances or having it all together. The secret is in the small,” says author and speaker Lara Casey. “It’s easier than you think to cultivate what matters. It all starts with a tiny seed.”

Welcome to the journey of getting messy in the rich soil of possibility—embracing imperfect, grace-filled progress to grow a life of joy.

Written as part encouragement anthem and part practical guide, *Cultivate* equips women to uncover and take action on goals that simplify life. Lara's signature “goal gardening” steps release them from the pressure to achieve and gives them freedom to move from planning to planting. Readers will walk through each season, finding balance as they interact in fresh ways with their current life scenarios, with God, and in the communities where they are planted. "You don't have to be perfect; you just have to plant! As you open this book, you are making a decision to leave the dry soil behind. You will lean in . . . and unrush your life. And in the process you will unearth your purpose."

Special features include

Goal Gardening Steps

an eight-week Fruitful Goal Gardening Guide with questions for small groups

Gardening 101 to start your own real-life flower or vegetable garden

Find the joy and the freedom that comes in cultivating. Cultivate your faith. Don’t fertilize the fear. And watch how your life flourishes in the days ahead!

Cultivate: A Grace-Filled Guide to Growing an Intentional Life Details

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From Reader Review Cultivate: A Grace-Filled Guide to Growing an Intentional Life for online ebook

Christy says

What a beautiful, life-giving book from the joyful Lara Casey. This book came into my life just when I needed it most; however, it is one of those books that will meet you where you are, in whatever season of life you are in. As a self-described "unlikely gardener," Lara uses gardening and other metaphors from nature to describe how we should view life's difficulties, set goals, and grow an intentional life. Lara gives practical, Biblically-sound tips to cultivate a life that glorifies God. Throughout the book, Lara will lovingly convict you to consider your priorities and goals using "Cultivate It" prompts, good for journaling or just for pausing to think. After each chapter, she summarizes by pulling out succinct phrases from the chapter called "Seeds of Grace and Truth," which are perfect to help you remember the main ideas. It is clear that Lara put her heart and soul into this book--her voice is distinct, encouraging, and effervescent. After reading, you will feel like you spent a warm afternoon chatting with her over tea.

While I received an advance copy as part of the book launch team, I will be purchasing my own copy when released at the end of June to re-read and annotate. I wanted to highlight and/or underline 90% of this book.

Juliette says

Just as with *Say it to God*, I found myself meditating on what another religious writer said. This time, it was Pierre Teilhard de Chardin:

"Above all, trust in the slow work of God . . . Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be. Give Our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete."

So much of what Casey wrote (in her cute way) could hearken to de Chardin. She seems like a nice person, and she has what sounds like a lovely garden, but I could not relate to her. When she was overwhelmed and having anxiety attacks, her husband's solution was to tell her to quit her job. Unfortunately, her circumstances are not quite the same as a single-income, single woman with a mortgage and bills to pay. It was difficult for me to take her seriously. Nevertheless, the chapter on cultivating friendships was interesting and encouraged me to reach out to a bruised relationship to heal it. (We'll see how that worked.) Her message -- that good things grow from bad situations -- is worthy of thought and consideration. But I prefer de Chardin's delivery.

Andrea Engfer says

I loved this book so much and was sad when I was finished. Lara Casey talks about cultivating a life that matters, and her gardening references are great analogies to the points she is making. I've since discovered her Write the Word devotional journals and am going through one right now. I'm a big fan of hers now!

Ellerie Saucer says

This was a great read! I really enjoyed the author's perspective. It did get a little repetitive toward the end.

Leah Good says

I really, really enjoyed this book. When I started listening to it, I was a little surprised to find the book centers around drawing life lessons from gardening. Once I adjusted to that, I thought it was going to be a lot of repetition of typical Christian living encouragements. That expectation wasn't entirely wrong. I didn't necessarily glean concepts that were brand new to me. However, the authors way of seeing the world through the eyes of a gardener--seeing the beauty and opportunities of everyday life--bought tears to my eyes many times throughout the book.

The one thing I think I feel is important to recognize in this book is that the author uses the term "imperfect" quite liberally in reference to people and their lives. At one point she said that we are beautiful and imperfectly made, and I was like, "Um, no. That's not what Psalm 139:14 says, either directly or through implication. God doesn't make mistakes when he makes us. I think what she means, though, is that we aren't made to fit a cultural image of perfection. By imperfect she seems to mean that we don't always look the way, act the way, or build our lives in the way the people around us think we should. Which is different than accepting or embracing a failure to measure up to God's standards--even though we are imperfect there, it's not something to be glorified. Just think that's worth clarifying going into the book.

Most of my favorite Christian "self-help" books stick with me because they challenge me. This one was as uplifting as it was challenging. I finished it with a reminder to embrace seasons of life instead of enduring them, to look for the beauty in what I'm tempted to be annoyed by, and to make decisions that allow me to be fully present in each thing I say yes to.

If you enjoyed *The Best Yes*, you'll likely enjoy *Cultivate* as well.

Annie says

I don't know what it was about this book, but I just could not get into it. Maybe it was all the gardening references that I just can't relate to in any way, or maybe it was the cheesy, lackluster writing style-- either way, I just couldn't wait for this book to be over.

That being said, I would recommend this book to anyone who is feeling a little bogged down with life, a little overwhelmed, a little lost on their path. I think this book could really be helpful to someone else, as there are journaling prompts throughout the book that make it easy to reflect. This one just wasn't for me.

Heather Carrillo says

I can't say enough good things about this book. I can't say I'm a big self help person, but I think I just read this at a perfect time.

Katie says

I took a chance on this book as an audiobook because Audible included it in their Black Friday sale. And then I actually tracked down the Audible return process to give it back. The main problem was that I was listening to it while concurrently reading Hannah Anderson's Humble Roots. Both books come from a supposedly Christian perspective on dealing with overwhelm. Both books rely heavily on gardening metaphors. Only Humble Roots accurately diagnoses the, excuse the repetition, root of the problem. According to Cultivate the reason that I'm overwhelmed is that, oh poor me, I'm just too much of a perfectionist, taking on too much and trying too hard. What a well-intentioned way to be, if one that leads to burn-out. According to Humble Roots I'm a perfectionist who takes on too much and tries too hard because I'm proud. I'm trying to be God when only God can be God. I'm not acknowledging my limits, which are good things. And so because Humble Roots hits on my sin, it can point me to the Gospel and to the cure. Cultivate, or as far as I got into it, could only give me generalized promises that God would work in my life. As true as that is, it's not going to get to the true problem. And since I'm trying to be intentional about my life here, I decided to stick with the book that would illuminate problem and solution, not the cutesy one that would try and make me feel better. I recommend you do the same.

Natalie Herr says

Enjoyed this reminder that life takes cultivating! Growth takes time. Small steps get us where we want to go. The Lord goes before us and gives the growth! A good read heading into a new year.

Amory Skaggs says

Cultivate is such a beautiful book! Lara is incredibly real and hopeful in her story that she weaves throughout her gardening metaphors. This timely book is about going against the culture that is normal and taking the time to really tend to things that matter. Gardens don't happen over night and she reminds us that a life worth living doesn't either. It takes time, energy, persistence, water, sun, and just a little bit of trust that something is happening under the surface to grow a garden, and our lives are the same. It's hard to remember that things are happening under the surface, but this book is such a beautiful reminder.

I especially loved the stories from the "Grace from the Garden" sections!

I received an advanced copy of the book as a part of the book launch team.

I received this book in exchange for my review from the publisher. The opinions I have expressed are my own.

Disclaimer: This book was provided by the publisher. The reviewer was under no obligation to offer a positive review.

Elena says

I have been using Lara Casey's goal-setting guide since 2014 and I am not overstating when I say that it revolutionized the way I look at both short and long-term goals. I love her Instagram feed, where she shares

about juggling marriage, motherhood, her career, and her ever-growing garden. Whether in her books, blog, or IG, she is vulnerable, humble, and honest about her past struggles with perfectionism, a need for control, and her faith journey, pointing to Jesus and His grace. In *Cultivate*, she uses a plethora of garden analogies to uncover what grace-filled intentional living looks like. She encourages embracing our imperfections; letting go of burdensome pressures; and choosing to plan and plant and harvest what is meaningful in our relationships with God, those around us, and our own selves. The book is divided into two parts: Prepare Your Garden and Dig In. Every chapter has actionable prompts for discussion as well as a ten-week discussion guide at the back of the book, so the reader has practical application of all the principles and wisdom shared by Casey. Each chapter subtitle includes a lie and a truth that will be the focus of that chapter. For example, chapter eight is on harvesting contentment. The lie is that "I will be content when I have it all". The truth is that "I will be content when I live grateful". Instead of rushing through it, I savored the words by journaling what stuck out to me as well as my answers to the discussion guide questions. I also am participating in the Cultivate Book Club on Facebook, where we read and discuss a chapter every week. I will most definitely look back at the book and my journaled notes as I continue my journey in living intentionally and cultivating goals that aren't just a checklist of to-do but rather steps towards living on purpose a life that is rooted in the grace of Jesus.

Scout Collins says

This book should really be called *Cultivate: A God-Filled Guide to Growing a 'Prayerful' Life*

Like her other book, *Cultivate* is smack-full of 'God', 'prayer', and tons of Bible quotes. As a non-Christian this was completely unappealing and became irritating. Casey seems to view anyone who isn't a devoted Christian a charity case who needs to 'find God'. She seems to only surround herself with praying friends, her family is religious and she converted her husband too.

Apart from the religious aspects, the book was okay. Nothing new; "get off your phone, spend time with people, be grateful, be religious, and buy my product that will help you with all of this!"

She turned her metaphor of a garden representing life into a full book, with snippets from her life about her daughter mainly and her gardening. This part was not bad. The incessant God advice was so annoying that it made me doc 2-3 stars though.

Examples of things to cultivate

- A healthier lifestyle
- A stronger marriage
- Intentional connections with family
- Joy in your children
- Contentment in what you have
- Learning/education
- A new business venture
- Being more present
- Deeper friendships
- Confidence in your life path
- Creativity
- Work that allows you to use your gifts
- A life-giving home with open doors for hospitality
- Balance and rest

(Religious points removed)

Of course every book by this author features the conversion to Christianity of someone in her family - in *Make It Happen* and now in *Cultivate*.

"I kept thinking of the big picture: if I could encourage my dad and share God's love with him, maybe he would want to know God too. I can't take credit for any of this change (Oh really?!), but God used my weekly letter writing to open my dad's heart. He started asking Ari and me about our faith..." (Casey, 135).

Things I Didn't Like

Repetition of the modified word "season" - it got annoying fast

"There is no formula. There is no one "right" way to tend and grow an intentional life. You simply do what God tells you to do." (Casey, 146). a), why did I pick up this book to have that kind of an answer, and b), how does God tell you what to do? Do you hear voices in your head? Sounds kinda crazy.

"My tending list in the season after I experienced that heart pain was pretty simple:

- Pray

- Read the bible" (Casey, 147).

>> Wow, if only reading the Bible could solve all your problems. It can't though. And when reading the Bible, did you happen to read some of the bad parts? The parts that encourage murder, rape, abuse, etc.? Hmm.....

Everything wrong with this quote:

"Complaints can reveal self-reliance instead of God-reliance. We often complain to control, to fix, and to express our distrust and discontent. Complaints can sometimes be our way of saying to God, *I do not believe You are real*. That right there hits me hard. But there's hope, and there's grace. Grace upon grace." (Casey, 166-167).

Things I Liked

- Story about Walter the Mailman and Grace (author's daughter). Cute.

- Cover design. From a design standpoint, this book would get a 4.5 from me!

- Ideas about connection with others: Ask your neighbour their name (repeat it back to them if you can't remember), Tell a friend you want to grow in friendship with them, Leave an encouraging note for your friend, Send a postcard, Don't think and let go of nice thoughts - text or email them, Invite your friend over, Send a message after you meet and say you were glad you spent time together, Leave notes of encouragement for a friend, "Grab a box of popsicles, a watermelon, or a basket of peaches and spend intentional time telling your friend all the things you are proud of her for." (Casey, 192), Celebrate "friend-iversaries"

- This quote: "Ask someone to come over, even if your house is a mess. I don't know about you, but I feel so relieved when I go to someone's house that is perfectly imperfect like mine!" (Casey, 197).

I would recommend this to...

a) Pious Christians

b) People who like gardening

c) People who can get over the 50% religious content in this book

I would not recommend this to...

a) people who aren't Christian, who don't enjoy reading many Bible quotes and hearing about Jesus

Jess says

Such a moving and motivating book to read. I was reading this along with my best friend and many others for the Cultivate book club with Lara Casey and her team at Cultivate What Matters. It was a treat to savor each chapter and really dwell on the words. Many many beautiful quotes highlighted and nuggets of wisdom to soak into my heart. Truly inspiring.

Emily says

Reading this is like having a cup of coffee with Lara--really. It's so warm and encouraging. Lara has a gift for inspiring people to do what really matters in their lives, and Cultivate is an excellent follow-up to her first book, Make It Happen, in this regard. Make it Happen helped me define things I wanted to do, and goals I wanted to set--Cultivate will help me actually see those goals through, during times when I'm frustrated or want to give up on my whys.

Donna says

I liked the idea of this book. I also loved, loved all the gardening references...(I'm big on gardening and I could relate to those analogies.) In that way, this book spoke my language. But this felt more like a talk I'd hear in church, and less like a book.

This book is very positive and it brings in how important faith is in living a peaceful life. The author also uses scriptures. It was nice, but again, it felt more like a talk I'd hear in church. So 3 stars, mostly for the how successful the gardening theme worked with her ideas.
