



From Creep to Crackle: Growing in the Darkness

by Lori Williams

Burgundy bicolor double blooms create a flower flurry,” promised the seed packet. “These zinnias are drought and mildew resistant.”

And so, even though it was already past the ideal window for planting, I bought three different seed varieties and got to work on weeding my flower patch. The crackles were unlike the old-fashioned zinnias my mother grew in our large garden beds in northern Ohio. I’m usually a sentimental fool, but I wanted something new this year. I crumbled the dirt through my





fingers, scattered seeds in a shallow furrow, and smiled as I pat-a-patted the dirt over the tiny white flecks of promise. “May 4,” I wrote in my journal. This is the day I planted seeds. But in my mind, I knew it was the day I planted hope.

Looking back, I realize that those seeds gave me a delicious sense of anticipation. When it didn’t rain in my Oklahoma suburb, I turned on the hose and showered the bed with moisture. Would this be the day, I wondered to myself as I stepped outside, that the zinnias creep upward and begin their journey sunward? Yes! On May 14, the leaves waved to me, their chartreuse pennants ruffled by the Oklahoma breeze. It wouldn’t be long now ...



But it was long. One of the varieties, the Burpeeana Giants, is a whopping twenty-four inches tall! They need lots of space and stem and underground strength.

“But God,” I said on a rainy, not-cheerful-kind-of-day, “isn’t it time to bloom? Isn’t it time to stop huddling, hidden away, and put all that energy into something beautiful?”

But the only sound I heard was that of the bees buzzing around the Rose of Sharon tree.

King David may have had such places of waiting in mind when he wrote Psalm 139, specifically verses 7-8 and 11-12 (NIV):





*Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make
my bed in the depths, you are there. ...*

*If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the
light become night around me,"
even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night
will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.*

David knew about dark places. While fleeing from his enemies, he hid in the wilderness (I Samuel 22-24). These were seasons of waiting. They were times of creeping into caves, hunkering down, of being unknown and unnoticed.

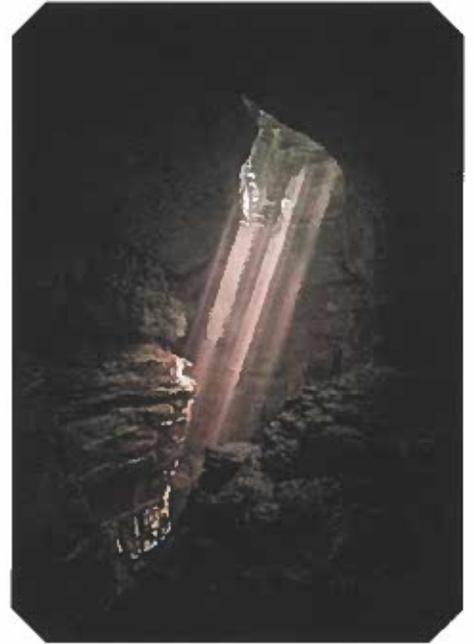
But they weren't wasted times.



Even if it's taking longer than expected, the waiting that feels like darkness need not be dormant. It can be a time of making sure your roots are being watered, keeping a journal, crying out to God for sustenance and comfort and guidance. It can be a time of trusting God for the results because He is faithful (Philippians 1:6).

It can be a time of growth.

It is still zinnia season in my tiny backyard. Some of the flowers have bloomed; others are taking their sweet time. The Burpeeana Giants with their six-inch-diameter blooms look like mop heads waving in the breeze. The color crackles look a





little confused in their two-toned robes. The garden variety zinnias, though, are the most glorious. Their flower heads are just the right size for their stems, and their hues are the most vibrant. After the blooms fade, I'll collect these seeds carefully, and store them away in a cool, dark place.



Then, before I know it, it will be time to plan next year's garden. I'll prepare the beds, crumble the dirt, and dig the furrow. I'll plant hope and scatter some seeds along the way.

Prayer:

Dear God, the author and finisher of my salvation, You do ALL things well. I give You my life's garden and trust You to make beauty out of it. Because You are the Master Gardener. Amen.



Questions:

1. What seasons of waiting are regular patterns in our lives?
2. What benefits of waiting have you experienced?
3. What was your longest season of waiting? Your shortest?
4. Which areas of the garden of your life have you seen God make beautiful?



Lori Williams likes to write stories (and they're even true!) about cantaloupe moons, big hosannas, and pink flamingo sunsets. She loves being a mom to Aurelia and a music teacher to the preschoolers at her church. Please write to her at lawordwright@gmail.com.