

It's time to Pull the Weeds
Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

In Saint Louis a few years ago a woman noticed a few bees buzzing around the attic of her home. Since there were only a few, she really didn't think much of it. Over the summer the bees continued to fly in and out the attic vent while the woman remained unconcerned, unaware of the growing city of bees that was taking up residence just above her ceiling.

The whole attic became a hive, and the ceiling of the second-floor bedroom finally caved in under the weight of hundreds of pounds of honey and thousands of angry bees. While the woman escaped serious injury, she was unable to repair the damage of her accumulated neglect.¹

That's a parable about many people's lives, is it not? We let things go. We put off dealing with them. We ignore that which is disturbing, yet inconvenient--until it's too late. And our ceiling comes crashing in on top of us.

Neglect is a powerful word. Neglect of family relationships, neglect of spouses, neglect of children, neglect of aging parents, neglect of responsibilities, neglect of opportunities. It's a specter that haunts all of life. Neglect. Ever seen a neighborhood that's neglected? How about a home? A garden?

Neglect a home, and the paint begins to chip. Neglect a garden, and weeds begin to take over. Jesus told a parable about a man who sowed good seed in his field. But, in the night while he was sleeping, someone with a grudge against him came and sowed weeds among the wheat. When the wheat sprouted and formed grain, the weeds also appeared.

In Syria and Palestine there is a weed known as the bearded darnel which grows plentifully. Here's the problem with this weed: it bears an uncanny resemblance to wheat--until the head appears on the plant. Only then is the difference easily discerned.

Only then is its true nature revealed. To have attempted to weed it out sooner would have been impossible, and attempting to do so would have destroyed valuable grains.²

When you think about it, this is kind of parable about people. Some people are like wheat; some people are like weeds. Wheat goes in the barn; weeds go in the furnace. I don't know about you, but I want to be wheat.

We need to fight the weeds that grow in our own lives. If you neglect your car, sooner or later it catches up with you. The battery cables corrode. And one cold winter night, the car refuses to start.

If you neglect your lawn, soon there are dandelions everywhere. If you neglect your health, sooner or later you pay a price. If you neglect your responsibilities here at the church, weeds sprout up all over the place.

¹ <http://www.trinitycrc.org/sermons/ps38v04.html>

² Bring 'Em Back Alive--A Healing Plan for Those Wounded by the Church, Dave Burchett, (WaterBrook Press, Colorado Springs, CO, 2004).

Battling weeds goes with being a responsible human being. Keeping a garden or keeping a life is not easy. I have found that the best way to make sure you are removing a weed and not a valuable plant is to pull on it. If it comes out of the ground easily, it is a valuable plant.

Pulling weeds is not easy, and it's never fun, but it's invariably a mark of character as well as successful living.

Cecil Williams grew up in Texas during a time when they didn't have electric lights in their house. They had two oil lamps with wicks that had to be lit daily. Once they were lit, a glass shade fit over the flame and they glowed.

Cecil's mother kept telling her children, "Ya'll clean the shade before you put it over the lamp. If you don't, you won't get as much light." Young Cecil didn't like cleaning the lamp shades. It took a long time and lots of elbow grease to scour off the sticky, gray soot. But when the shade was clean, one lamp would be bright enough to light up the whole living room.

Back then, cleaning the lamp shades was Cecil's job. He couldn't ask his brother or his sister to do his job for him. If he took a day off, everybody could tell. The light would be dim. Cecil says he has discovered that what was true back then about lamp cleaning is also true about life cleaning.

"Neither you nor I can ask anybody else to clean up our lives. My life belongs to me, and your life belongs to you. I have to clean my life daily or my light won't shine; so do you."³

Perhaps I'm mixing my metaphors: cleaning lamp shades and pulling weeds and fixing broken windows and cleaning out a bee hive growing in our attic. But you get the idea. There are things in life which must be looked after. If we let them go, we start to notice. And generally we notice after the damage has been done.

We need to fight the weeds that grow in our relationships.

In his 1996 book, *Beyond the Classroom*, Laurence Steinberg, a professor of psychology at Temple University in Philadelphia, cited his survey of 20,000 teenagers, in which one-third claimed their parents had "no idea" who their friends were, where they went after school and how they spent their money.⁴

There are some weeds growing in the gardens of our kids lives. Weeds that need to be pulled. You and I have no use for people who abuse children. Most of us would bury them under the jail house if we had the opportunity. But we need to understand that neglect is a form of abuse. Take time to pull the weeds. It's so important in the area of relationships.

Lastly, we need to fight the weeds that grow in our relationship with God.

We don't pray as often as we should. We don't rely on God's guidance like we should. We live as practical atheists most of the time with no real thought to God's claim on our lives. And the weeds grow.

³ No Hiding Place, with Rebecca Laird, HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.

⁴ "Pointing the Finger at Mom," by Michael J. Weiss, Ladies Home Journal, Oct. 2004, p. 62.

I read a description author Brian Waite once gave of his family saying that generations of men in his family have gained a reputation for foolish choices. There is a statue in New Hampshire erected to the memory of a General Waite, a leader in the Revolutionary War.

General Waite abandoned his troops in the midst of a battle and ran away from the front lines. But he became lost in the dark night; he and his horse froze to death. The statue makes note of his cowardice and foolishness.

Pearl Waite, another member of the Waite family line, invented "crystallized gelatin," or Jell-O. Unfortunately, Pearl Waite sold the patent to his invention for just \$25.00. The man who bought the patent turned Jell-O into a product worth many millions of dollars. Pearl Waite died broke.

But in 1981, Brian Waite made the wisest and best decision any Waite man has ever made: he gave his life to Christ. Now his life had a new purpose and peace. He became determined to break the chain of foolish choices and defeated living that defined the Waite men.

Brian married a godly woman and entered the ministry, serving as an Army chaplain overseas. He kept in close touch with his parents, both atheists, and over time his new attitude convinced his parents that his faith was real, and that they could have a relationship with God, too. In 1996, both of Brian Waite's parents gave their lives to Christ.⁵

There are less weeds growing in Brian Waite's life--in his relationships with his parents, his wife or with God. He has his priorities in order.

How about you? It's a simple idea, but so very vital. Relationships take maintenance, just like our car, just like our house, just like our lawn or our community. Our relationships with our children, our spouse, our parents, and, most important of all, our relationship with God.

If there are weeds growing in your garden, it's time to pull them out.

⁵ Brian Waite, *The Day I Met God*, compiled and edited by Jim & Karen Covell and Victorya Michaels Rogers (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2001), pp. 115-120.