

THE FAMILY GARDEN

Weeds

Matthew 13:24-30; Galatians 5:19-23

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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/the-family-garden-weeds/>

The image of weeding a garden is very on target for family life, because raising children or cultivating a marriage requires constant weeding. Someone has said, “If you love flowers, you have to hate weeds.” Have you noticed that you don’t have to do anything for weeds to grow? So it is when we neglect our family. The problem is not the absence of growth; it’s that the wrong things grow.

And another thing about weeds. They can hide or disguise themselves (see our Matthew text). While weeding a berm in our yard, I was fooled by a weed that looked much like a flower. Have you noticed this in relationships? We can call it love, but it’s control; we can call it a good deed, but its manipulation; we can call it persistence, but it’s stubbornness; we can call it being a wise judge of character, but it’s really hyper-criticism.

Let’s take a look at the weeds mentioned by the Apostle Paul (Gal. 5:19-21). There are three broad categories: Distorted sexuality; distorted worship; and distorted relationships. Notice that they are inversions and perversions of the fruit (vv. 22-23). In other words, for every good bit of fruit there is a distortion of it. Love is replaced by lust; joy is replaced with artificial highs (intoxication); peace is replaced by destructive opinions, hatred and fits of rage.

Now please note something else. The list of internal sins is longer than the list of external (physical) sins. In other words, hatred or destructive opinions (NIV) are as much a work of the flesh as sexual immorality. These weeds are works of the flesh, meaning this is how we behave as if God is not a factor. So we can’t make excuses: “My bad temper is just the Johnson family gene. I can’t help it!” And we can’t blame it on the devil. Several years ago, a prominent female TV evangelist was living extravagantly with her TV evangelist husband, matching Rolls Royces, etc. She said she had a shopping demon! No. They just needed to weed their family garden! What are your weeds? What are your family’s weeds?

The solution to this weed problem is Jesus Christ, vv. 22-23. Some of you know this is my life text. I have a plaque on my office wall with these verses. I’ve preached this passage many times as your pastor. I note that it is singular. Not fruits; fruit. It is Christ’s personality and life on display in us, when we weed and clear space for him. We don’t have to do what comes naturally. We can do what comes supernaturally (love, joy, peace...)

Let me give you an example. Have you ever startled yourself? Something really ugly, selfish hurtful comes out of your mouth or behavior and you say, “Where did that come from?” Simple. It came from all those weeds. Nothing exposes our selfishness like marriage, or having children, or having siblings or being in a close relationship.

Or it might be the opposite. You're in a terrible argument with a family member. And just before you say something dreadful, out of the blue, you feel a surge of tenderness and with a word or a touch, you speak peace and the situation is defused. And you wonder, "Where did that come from?" It came from your garden.

Last fall, I was trying to clean out some flower beds before winter. Do you know what I discovered? A weed I had neglected to pull (here's a hint: they don't go away if you ignore them; they just get harder to uproot!). The weed was so deeply rooted, I had to get down on my knees! Our sins (our weeds) don't go away if we ignore them. They just become more entrenched. Some habits, attitudes and family weeds are deep. We can only pull them, down on our knees.

Leonard Sweet tells the story of a woman who dreamed of seeing Jesus behind a counter. "What are you selling?" she asked. "Your fondest dreams or desires," came the reply. "Oh," she exclaimed, "I'll take happiness and peace for the whole world!" Jesus replied, "You misunderstood. I'm not selling fruit; I'm selling seeds." "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."