

Who is Doing Your Gardening?

Galatians 5

Series: The Key to Be Free

Free from Destructive Drives - Free to Live by the Spirit

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There are many activities which bring us joy or help us relax. Running, reading, listening to music, and gardening. I hate gardening! It's tiring, too quiet, doesn't make me feel relaxed, and after all the time spent, the weeds keep coming back! I would rather destroy a thorn bush or attack a vine. I've already asked people to be in charge of the flowers or garden when I have a house because I won't keep up with it. Weeds are invasive and sneaky; disguising themselves as something beautiful to hide the damage they actually cause.

Weeds are not just in the soil. Weeds also show up in the soil. Throughout the last several weeks, we have been walking through Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia. One of Paul's main themes is freedom; how we are made free because of Jesus Christ's sacrifice for us. **Galatians 5:1** *"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."* As Joe preached about last week, once we are adopted into God's family, we are set free and are no longer slaves to sin. We can leave behind our old selves and live our new life in freedom. Jesus calls us out of sin and into freedom. But just like maintaining a garden, Paul tells us **sin, like weeds, continue to pop up.**

There are many different types of weeds: poison ivy, dandelions, and crabgrass to name a few. When you look at these different weeds you notice how some are recognized as "bad." I remember learning "leaves of 3, let it be" as a kid in regards to poison ivy. Then when I was a camp counselor, I taught that to my campers. However, some don't seem that harmful on the surface. Honeysuckle smells amazing and some might even say it's pretty; however, it strangles out everything near it. Its beauty disguises the harm it does. Just like weeds there are many types of sin. Paul states in Galatians 5:19-21 *"The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."* There are the obvious forms of sin which we recognize immediately such as sexual immorality, idolatry, drunkenness, and causing harm to another. Yet other sins are more subtle or socially acceptable such as envy, discord and selfish-ambition. But they are all weeds.

How do we try to get rid of weeds? We can ignore the weeds but they will continue to grow and take over. We can unintentionally spread the weeds, causing them to grow at an even faster rate. For example, when you pull a clover plant you think you're getting rid of it but the clover actually releases more seeds when pulled so you're causing a bigger problem than your original problem. Or we can rip the weeds off the surface so it looks good and makes you feel good; however, the roots still remain. We've just hidden it away for a while. As much as we don't want the weeds to come back, they do. Just like weeds, sin grows roots which anchor into our hearts and fester. It's in our nature, sin is inevitable.

So what do we do? How do we remove them?

The only way to successfully remove weeds, once and for all, is to dig out the root. This requires extra help and effort. In order to dig out the roots of sin in our lives, we need to **call in the Master Gardener, the Holy Spirit**. There is only one way the Gardener can come into your garden; He has to be invited. You unlock the gate to the garden in your heart so He can enter. After He has accepted our invitation, He has the master plan to keep our garden fresh and thriving. The first step to cultivating the soil is by communicating with the Holy Spirit. I like to picture the Gardener as showing us the tools and explaining each of their functions to us so the good fruit will grow.

He's ready to teach us how to do the hard work; but it's a collaboration with Him. He models it so we can copy Him. Even with the Holy Spirit in the garden, we might still try to do it ourselves. Or we may sit back and expect Him to do all the work. But the best way is to collaborate with The Gardener. By laboring together we will clear away the weeds that hold us captive and keep us from freedom.

We need the Holy Spirit to come in and show us how to take care of the garden by weeding. He comes in to make sure that we have good soil where weeds aren't taking root. Most of the time, His starting point isn't nice, rich soil; it's usually overgrown with weeds and not ready to produce fruit. We have to work with the Gardener to clear away the roots before we can plant the good fruit. He then tends to the garden, prompting us every so often, so it will thrive. This process is constant work and needs to happen. It can't be done just once. It's life long work, but when we allow the Spirit to come in and work with us, we begin to see the fruits of God's labor produce the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

And what does the Spirit produce? Paul says, *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."* Galatians 5:22-23

The fruit is the byproduct of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Did you know, plants never eat their own fruit?! The fruit does not serve the plant itself, it serves other creatures. **Fruit is Meant to be Shared**. The fruit the Holy Spirit produces in us is meant to be given away to others. We get to bless others through what we give away! The one thing weeds of sin all have in common is they are self-serving. They're things that we as humans, as sinful creatures, crave. They don't share, they take.

If we share this good fruit with others it's a blessing to them. It may even help them get rid of some of their own weeds! In order to understand how we can give away these fruits, let's look at them individually. As we go through the list, jot down examples of how you can use these fruits to bless others.

Love - a sacrifice; Am I helping someone in need without expecting anything in return?

Joy - a feeling stronger than happiness; Am I showing others how to live joyfully without it being determined by outside influences or experiences?

Peace - harmony in relationships; Am I working to bring peace to people and between people?

Forbearance - self-restraint and tolerance in trials or in discomfort; Am I holding back my instant thoughts or reactions in tough situations and instead offering patience?

Kindness - thinking of others first; Am I doing helpful things for people?

Goodness - being generous; Am I being generous with my time, words, interactions, actions, and resources?

Faithfulness - putting consistent trust into something, despite hard circumstances; Am I being faithful in trusting God in every situation or am I taking matters into my own hands?

Gentleness - accepting and submitting without resistance; Am I being humble?

Self-Control - not giving into sinful desires; Am I showing others how I don't choose sinful desires when tempted?

These are the 9 fruits that the Gardener plants in us. As we share them with others, we actually produce more. Looking at this list, what fruits do you already put into practice in your daily life? What fruits are a struggle or maybe haven't completely taken full root yet in your life? What fruits do you want to see more of in your life? This is the perfect time for you to ask our Gardener what fruits He'd like to grow in you. The fruit we produce is the evidence of living in freedom.

Planting the good seed is our next step. Seeds, though small in size, can grow into mighty things! For example; a whole forest can come from a few apples if the seeds are properly planted and multiplied. The fruits produced with the collaboration of the Gardener all have seeds. Seeds can be scattered and grow elsewhere. We never know where the seeds will land and take root!

An example of the scattering of seeds can be seen through our Growth Groups at Woodside. Our desire is to see our Growth Groups and Micro Churches reproduce and multiply. The best way to do this is by extending invitations to family, friends, and anyone the Holy Spirit is prompting you to invite. The fruits of the Spirit are meant to be shared outside of our Woodside family.

Right now is the perfect time to start taking care of your soul. Starting on July 25th, we will begin our new sermon series called "Soul Care." When the demands and difficulties of life overwhelm us, too often we respond by self-medicating. Overeating, overworking, and overspending are some examples. Soul Care is so much healthier than self-medicating. This summer, listen to your soul and learn how to start healthy practices such as time with God, family, exercise, sleep, proper diet, and recreation. Don't numb your soul. Nurture it with the Holy Spirit's help! What better way to put this into practice than asking someone to join your Growth Group as we dive together into Soul Care?

An example of sharing fruit with others, literally, happened a few weeks ago. 10 members from Woodside gathered together with many other volunteers to participate in a food distribution for families in the Trenton area.

TASK (Trenton Area Soup Kitchen) described the event as, “On Sunday, June 27th, TASK partnered with NJ Rise to host our third Rise to the TASK mass grocery distribution at Modway in East Windsor. Over the course of 5 hours, more than 100 volunteers distributed over 100,000 pounds of food to 1,300 households. Those who attended received chicken, seafood, eggs, pasta, cereal, milk, snacks, a variety of fresh produce, paper products, and other household goods. In the past year, TASK and Rise have worked together to distribute more than 275,000 pounds of groceries to more than 4,000 households!” Jim Stevens from Woodside said, “Everyone was so appreciative! Almost every car said thank you at each stop. It made me and my grandson feel good. It felt good to be working together and helping people.”

Galatians 5:24-25 states *“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”* This charge Paul gives us is not limited to just acts of service. Because of Jesus we live each day bearing the good fruit in every thought, word, conversation, and action.

Next time you are in a conversation with someone who is stirring up negative thoughts, respond with forbearance and gentleness. All around us we see evidence of despair and destruction. We have the ability to bring joy into these situations.

In my own life I have witnessed the amazing transformation that happens when you let the Holy Spirit be the Master Gardener of your life. In 2016 I realized God was leading me to go on an 11-month mission trip to 11 countries called the World Race. Not only would this be a big time commitment, but also a financial commitment. This was a huge test in faithfulness for me. Would God provide the financial support I needed in order to do this trip? I was advised by my incredibly wise father to perhaps take out a loan to help pay for it. As I continued to pray and talk to God, something in me didn’t feel right when it came to getting a loan. I was to trust God and wait patiently for His provision I knew in my heart I would get. Over the next few months money trickled in and on the weekend of my birthday, 1 month before Training Camp, and 4 months before my trip I received a check that put me over my goal. What a beautiful birthday gift the Holy Spirit orchestrated! He was growing the fruit of faithfulness in me and growing the fruit of generosity in all of those who donated to me. The total reliance on God was one of the most peaceful years I’ve ever experienced, all because of my collaboration with the Holy Spirit.

The Master Gardener, the Holy Spirit, longs to work with you to grow the fruit this world needs. Ready to dig in?