

“Weed ‘Em and Reap”

Galatians 6:1-10

Series: The Key to Be Free Week 6. Freedom from Destructive Decisions

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The Woodside Church

July 18, 2021

Last week Meg gave a great message on the need to weed the sin out of our souls so we can grow the Fruit of the Spirit. Of all the weeds she mentioned, the one I fear most is Poison Ivy. Years ago I did my parents a favor and cleared out the vines consuming their North Carolina house. Guess what was mixed in? I looked like the victim of a zombie attack. My arm turned into raw meat. This week I noticed it growing near the fence around Woodside. That poison ivy stalk is stalking me.

My wife tells me the burning, itching rash is really my body’s reaction to the poison ivy oil. Over the years I’ve tried countless remedies to combat the rash. I desperately vow not to touch it only to find myself unconsciously scratching it raw. I pour on gallons of calamine lotion until I am coated in a pink crust. The only remedy which works is a steroid which stops the reaction from the inside. In the same way, deadly sins are my soul’s reaction to temptation, stress, struggles in my life. When I brush up against one of these they might cause me to swell up with pride, break out in greed, get a rash of envy, burn with anger, itch for lust and excess.

In Galatians, Paul tells us the Key to Be Free is Grace – a free gift from God we don’t have to earn. Like the steroid, it also works on the inside. The Law cannot save us and set us free. Nor does freedom mean going wild and indulging desires. Grace sets us free from the restraints of the Law. Grace delivers us from burning itch of temptation. Grace removes the rash of sin and restores us to a healthy relationship with God. We receive God’s grace, His gift of freedom and salvation, by faith. We place our lives in Jesus’ hands and He fills us with the Holy Spirit. God lives in us. Like the steroid, the Spirit stops the power of sin from the inside. The Spirit helps us to stop feeding our sinful, selfish nature. The Spirit guides us to grow spiritual fruit. It sounds simple and easy. So why do we keep rubbing up against poison ivy?

One fatal mistake: we try to live the Christian life alone. In America we equate freedom with independence. We’ve been independent of Great Britain for 245 years. But are we really independent of each other? I do not produce my food, manufacture my car or pump my water. We are not independent but interdependent. In fact, the more interdependent we become, the freer we are to contribute our unique part.

We like being interdependent...until it comes to faith. Then suddenly the walls go up. For some reason, one’s relationship with God is supposed to be private – a solo act. Keep it to yourself, keep it a secret, keep quiet about it. People even go so far as to say, “I can be a follower of Jesus without any connection to a congregation. I’m spiritual not religious. It’s just me and God and I don’t need anyone else.” The Bible says just the opposite. How can you be a follower of Christ if you aren’t part of the Body of Christ? God built us with a need to network that’s why social media and the web are so popular. Jesus frees you from the prison of isolation and independence. He makes you a part of His community of faith. He plants you in His garden with other believers. The bottom line: if you want to get rid of sin’s weeds, other believers are what you need.

First, we need to **Gently Weed Out Sin**. Paul writes,

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. Galatians 6:1

The phrase, “caught in a sin” can mean either a Christians’ secret sins have just been revealed or a brother or sister in Christ is trapped by sin too powerful to stop. In both cases, the response is the same. Notice Paul does not say other believers should criticize, kick out, condemn or condone the sin. We “restore that person gently.” As Meg mentioned last week, when weeds are found in a garden, you can violently rip them out but they will come right back. You can spray weed killer on them but you’ll destroy the good plants. You can ignore them and let them take over. Or you can gently, patiently uproot them one by one and restore the garden to good health and order.

Helping fellow believers uproot the weeds of sin is difficult work. Paul gives some very specific directions on how to do this.

But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load. Galatians 6:1-5

You can’t help someone else out of the pit of sin if you are not on firm ground. On my last mission trip to the Dominican Republic, we dug many ditches for walls and columns. Because it was hot, difficult work, we kept trading places. Soon the ditch was so deep and the side walls so fragile it was tricky to get the person out without a collapse. The one above needed to be on firm ground while offering a helping hand to the one below.

As you attempt to gently restore someone caught in sin, Paul advises, “watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.” One temptation is to fall into the same trap of sin. If someone has a problem with money, alcohol, sex, anger or self-pity you might get so close to the edge the walls collapse and you wind up with them in the pit. Another mistake is to start off comforting them and wind up enabling them. A third temptation is pride – instead of offering a helping hand you fold your arms and look down in judgment.

Instead of complicity, condoning or condemnation, Paul recommends collaboration – literally “working together.” His advice seems contradictory:

Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ...for each one should carry his own load. Galatians 6:2,5

Everyone has burdens: problems I can’t handle alone. My struggles and weaknesses are not the same as yours. I’m no better than you. You’re not superior to me. Each of us can use a helping hand. We need each other. This requires trust, honesty, openness and love. Some of my issues I can’t see. I need you to speak the truth in love with me. I can do the same for you. We can help each other work through it. That’s how we carry each other’s burdens. At the same time there are changes I need to make, weeds I need to pull, sins I need to stop and you can’t do that for me. Nor can I take responsibility or control of you. These are the loads

each of us carries. And this requires love – a genuine, gentle, non-judgmental concern for a fellow believer. This is why Paul adds,

The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”
Galatians 5:14

When you are caught in sin it is my responsibility to lovingly, patiently, gently restore you just as it’s your responsibility to lovingly restore me.

Second, we **Sow Seeds in the Spirit**. Paul continues,

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Galatians 6:9-10

In Galatians 4, Paul points out there are two natures inside a Christian, the selfish sinful nature and the Spirit. He brings up both natures again in this verse but notice you sow the same seed in both cases. Even something good, if sown in selfish ground, will produce a bitter awful harvest. The love of a parent, one of the purest forms of love, can become controlling and smothering if it is used selfishly. Your career, if pursued for selfish reasons, can become all consuming. Even the Bible, used by powerful people, can create crusades and inquisitions. But when family, marriage, career, finances and time are planted in the Spirit, when they are willingly offered up to God, they become the way Jesus cares for your soul and pours eternal life into this world. Selfishness will destroy a marriage, a family, a career, a life. The Spirit will fill all these with the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and goodness. We’ll discover how to do this in our new message series called Soul Care. 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.

Third, **Reap and Share**. Paul finishes this passage with,

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. Galatians 6:9-10

What is the point of all this seeding and weeding? To give love away. Why does Jesus gather us into the church – so we could hold worship services, study the Bible, make friendships, comfort each other? Those are all good things but they fall short of our true purpose, our real mission: to love God, love people and make disciples of Jesus. We need to “Share with Others:” share the saving Good News of Jesus Christ, share our resources with a hungry needy world, share our hope in a dark and discouraged world. As Meg said, no tree can eat its own fruit. It must give it away. We must give away the fruit of the Spirit to the family of believers and beyond.

I see your love for the family of believers – especially through our growth groups and microchurches. Last Thursday I visited Walter Cullerton, Sue Schmauder’s father in St. Mary Medical Center. He shared his medical situation with me. And then in the middle of our conversation he said, “The thing I love most about Woodside is my Growth Group. Those guys mean the world to me.” One of them was on his way to visit Walt. They’ve been with

him in the past and they will stand by him through all that's ahead. Want to receive the love of God and the fruit of the Spirit? – Put down roots in a Growth Group or a Microchurch and start to grow.

I also see your love which goes beyond the family of believers. We could have celebrated Woodside's 75th birthday with a big party for ourselves. Instead, our elders decided to spread seeds of God's love. They want to help Family Promise find a permanent center to house and help homeless families. Family Promise has a wonderful track record of helping families move from homelessness to self-sufficiency. Our elders challenged you by taking \$50,000 from reserves and asking you to raise it to \$75,000. This past week we informed you we were just \$400 away from reaching that goal. You didn't give \$400. You gave over \$4000 taking us well beyond our goal. In these challenging financial times you could have easily, understandably held back. Instead you reached out with love.

Make no mistake, Satan will keep trying to spread the poison ivy of sin into the soil of your life. That's why we need to trust one another, love one another, bear one another's burdens. You don't need to tell everyone your troubles. You just need to have one or two close Christian brothers or sisters who knows everything that's going on inside you.

John Ortberg is an author, teacher and Presbyterian minister in California. After years of struggling with hidden sins in his life, he took the risky step of telling a brother in Christ everything going on inside him.

I sat down with a longtime friend and said, "I don't want to have any secrets anymore."

I told him everything I was most ashamed of. I told him about my jealousies, my cowardice, how I hurt my wife with my anger. I told him about my history with money and my history with sex. I told him about deceit and regrets that keep me up at night. I felt vulnerable because I was afraid that I was going to lose connection with him.

Think for a moment what it would feel like for you to reveal all your secrets to a brother or sister in Christ. So often we can barely admit them to ourselves let alone tell another. Will they be disgusted or ashamed? Will they avoid us or sever the friendship?

Much to my surprise, he did not even look away. I will never forget his next words. "John, I have never loved you more than I love you right now." The very truth about me that I thought would drive him away became a bond that drew us closer together. He then went on to speak with me about secrets he had been carrying.

It was one of the most important moments of my spiritual life.¹

Let God weed, seed and feed your faith through a brother or sister in Christ. Then give the fruit of the Spirit you reap away.

¹ John Ortberg, *The Me I Want to Be* (Zondervan, 2009).