

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 made no effort to deal with them. 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 all her neglect caused.**

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 is too late. **And our ceiling comes crashing in.**

NEGLECT. What a powerful word. It describes many family relationships. Neglect. Spouses were neglected. Children were neglected. Later, older parents neglected. Responsibilities neglected. Opportunities neglected. It is a specter that haunts all of life. Neglect. Ever seen a neighborhood that's neglected? How about a home? A garden?

Malcolm Gladwell in his book, The Tipping Point, tells about "*the Broken Window*" *theory of crime*. Many years ago, criminologists James Q. Wilson and George Kelling formulated this theory about how a neighborhood or community slowly gives in to increasing crime rates. They called it the Broken Window theory. Wilson and Kelling said that crimes are more likely to be committed in areas where it appears that the residents have lowered their standards and no longer care about their community. If a window is broken and left unrepaired, people start to assume that no one cares about maintaining that building. More windows will get broken. As the building becomes more dilapidated, there is a growing assumption of lawlessness by the residents. People assume that they can lower their standards of behavior, because no one will notice or care. The mayor of New York City used the Broken Window theory in the 1990s as a guide for reducing the crime rate. He had work crews cleaning up vandalism and repairing old buildings. He assigned officers to patrol neighborhoods and cite people for minor infractions. Littering, public drunkenness, vandalism and other small crimes were noted and swiftly dealt with. When the police attended to the "little things," they sent a message that the community cared about setting higher standards for itself. Major crimes like theft, assault, and drug dealing dropped dramatically once the minor crimes were under control.

Neglect. Broken Windows. Weeds growing in the garden.

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 heads, then the weeds also appeared. "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' "An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' "No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time, I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'" (NIV)

We're told that 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. The weed appears to be wheat--even an experienced farmer could not tell the difference--until the time comes for it to produce fruit. 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.

WEED & WHEAT. This is a scary parable, if you think about it. It's easy to talk about God's grace--God's loving acceptance of the unworthy. But we are left with these harsher teachings of our Master. *Some people are like wheat; some 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. I don't want to end up in the furnace with the weeds. **THERE ARE MANY THINGS WE CAN LEARN FROM THIS PARABLE. LIKE...HOW TO:**

#1. Fighting the Weeds in Our Own Life. I do know that I am continually fighting weeds in my own life. *Aren't you? If I neglect my car, sooner or later it catches up with me.* The battery cables corrode. And one cold

winter night, the car refuses to start. And, you know what I do? I pray, "Lord, why did you let this happen to me?" I need to get to that meeting, but my car won't start." But the Lord had nothing to do with it. It was my own neglect.

If I neglect my lawn, soon there are dandelions everywhere. If I neglect my health, sooner or later I pay a price. If I neglect my responsibilities here at the church, weeds sprout up all over the place. Battling weeds goes with being a responsible human being. Keeping a garden or keeping a life is not easy. Someone has said that when weeding, the best way to make sure you are removing weeds and not a valuable plant is to pull on it. If it comes out of the ground easily, it is a valuable plant.

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

Pastor Cecil Williams tells of growing up in Texas. 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 Williams 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."

We are mixing our metaphors, perhaps. 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. ***Have you ever noticed eaves troves on homes** where they are never cleaned out...weeds grow...eventually those weed not only stop the eaves from working but they cause them to rust if they are metal, and also those home end up with other problems, leaky basements, heaving basement wall, water leaking into the roof, etc. All because of weed being where they should NOT BE!!! **YES, THERE ARE THINGS IN LIFE THAT MUST BE LOOKED AFTER!!!**

#2. BUT THE TRUTH IS...We Are Fighting Weeds in Our Relationships.

Let me say a word to parents. Beware. Kids today are exposed to temptations that earlier generations never dreamed of. Most kids are great kids, but some of them will be damaged goods by the time they reach adulthood. Some of that damage could be avoided by vigilant parenting.

Author Carole Mayhall tells how her mother dealt with a common vice that captures many people when they are raising "Teen Smokers." Carole's mother looked dead serious as she announced that she knew she could not always be Carole's keeper as she grew up. So, she would not insist that Carole not smoke. After this pronouncement, though, she paused for effect and then delivered the killer line: **"But you must promise that you will smoke your first cigarette in front of me."** A few of Carole's friends had begun to experiment with smoking despite their parents' warnings. Carole was shocked by what her mother had said. Carole's parents had never broken a promise to her, and she was expected to honor her promises as well. Her mother was a wise woman. By extracting that promise from her daughter, she had effectively taken all the fun out of sneaking off to smoke. To this day, Carole has yet to smoke her first cigarette. Who in the world would light up her first smoke in front of the mother she loved and respected, breaking her heart in the process? **Smart Mom.**

In his 1996 book, Beyond the Classroom, Laurence Steinberg, Ph.D., 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.

There are some weeds growing in those gardens. 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.**

#3. However, We Are Also, Fighting the Weeds in Our Relationship with God. Some of us have weeds growing in our most important relationship of all—**OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.**

It's true, isn't it? We don't PRAY as often as we should. We don't READ or STUDY His WORD like we should. We don't rely on God's GUIDANCE IN OUR LIFE 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...and the WEEDS GROW... and the WEEDS GROW!**

Ed Young, pastor of the Second Baptist Church of Houston, Texas, tells of one event in his call to the ministry.

While I attended the University of Alabama, I got away from Bible study and away from the church. I had a friend name Walter Carroll, who was an atheist. He was a good guy, though. One Sunday afternoon he looked at me and said, *"Eddie, do you believe there's a God??" I said, "Sure, Walter, I believe there is a God." He said, "You don't live like it." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You live just like I do. I'm an atheist. I don't believe there's a God, and I live like there's no God. We're buddies. You do everything I do. You say there is a God, and yet you don't live like there's a God. Don't you know that, if there is a God, if you can get to know Him and live the way He wants you to live, that's the most important thing in life?"*

Ed Young goes on to say, *"That was the greatest sermon I have ever heard. God used the WORDS of an atheist. I'll never forget THEM. I couldn't answer. I went to my room, dropped on my knees and said, "Lord, I know you're there. I believe Jesus is Your Son. I've fallen away from you. Just lead me. I'm yours."*

Do you believe there's a God? The most natural response is "of course!" But so often, we fall away from God and THE WEEDS BEGIN TO GROW AND GROW AND GROW!!

And BECAUSE OF THIS LIFESTYLE, we miss out on the brightness of God's love in everything around us, BUT... His love is still there SHINING AS BRIGHT AS THE BRIGHTEN SUN!!!

I enjoyed reading a description pastor and author Brian Waite once gave of his family. He said 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 man in Brian Waite's 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. He served as an Army chaplain overseas, but he kept in close touch with his parents, who were atheists. Brian's 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. **TODAY, there are not as many weeds growing in Brian Waite's life--in his relationships with his parents, his wife or with God. YES, BRIAN 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—**NEED DAILY MAINTENANCE.**

Are there weeds growing in your garden? It's time to pull them out. IF WE DO, WE WILL HAVE MORE "PEACE" AND MORE "SPACE" FOR HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS IN OUR LIVES. "Let Anyone with ears Listen!!" AMEN.