

“SPIRITUAL OFFSPRING”
Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24, Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43, Romans 8:12-25
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Steve Nickles tells this tremendous story of when his daughter, Sarah, was two years old. “We went together to the pet store to buy an aquarium for Sarah, and we picked out four fish to put in the tank. One of the fish died soon afterwards when Sara was at her grandparents' house. My wife flushed it down the toilet and didn't tell my daughter about it.

“Two weeks later Sarah found one of the other fish dead. She found it caught up in one of the fake plastic bushes. My wife called me at the office and said that Sarah had something to tell me. In her two-year-old way, she explained to me the fish had died, she found it in the bushes, and she and Mommy were going to have a funeral for it in the backyard.

“I realized that this was the first of many losses she would experience in life. I broke into tears, however, when the last thing she said to me before she hung up the phone was, ‘Daddy, **keep me from getting caught in the bushes.**’”¹

When we are born to these bodies here on the earth, we have no control over which families we are born into. We have no control over what nationality we will belong to. We have no power to choose the language we speak or the culture we live in or the religious traditions we are surrounded by. We do not even have the power to choose the skin color we have, or the eye color, or the hair color, or even the shape of our noses. When we are born here in this world, the bodies we have are a gift from God, determined by the parents who conceive us.

But there is one thing that is important that we often miss – we are God’s children, blessed with life. **Life is a blessing.** And God knows every bit about us, to the minutest detail. Psalm 139 explains it well for us, “*Lord, you have examined me and You know me. You know everything I do; from far away You understand all my thoughts. You see me, whether I am working or resting; You know all my actions. Even before I speak, You already know what I will say. You are all around me on every side;*

¹ (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL/ Tyndale House Publishers, 2003] pg. 222)

You protect me with Your power. Your knowledge of me is too deep; it is beyond my understanding” (1-6). God knows each one of us so well that there is no place on earth that we can go that He does not know where we are. Simple as that: God knows us!

And since God knows us so well, He desires to protect us and keep us from getting caught in the bushes. He is ready to lead us in the ways that lead us to life so that we might live as His children. However, we live in a broken world where we can easily become entrapped in the ways that lead to death. Knowing this, God calls out to us day after day, inviting us to seek Him and follow Him so that He might provide us with real life, not the fake stuff that this world presents.

So, though we have no control of where or when or how or to whom we are born to, **we do have the choice of which family we marry into.** As we grow up, we can make our own choice as to whom we align ourselves with. And we see the options in Matthew’s Gospel lesson for today in the Parable of the Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). Jesus has come to bring the Word of God to the world today so that those who believe in Him and follow His ways may receive the blessings of life from God. **We can choose to be God’s precious wheat** as we receive the teachings of Jesus, follow His commands, and live in ways that bring honor to His Name. The wheat are the ones who belong to the Kingdom of God through their faith in Jesus Christ. Accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior brings us into the family of God. And God takes great care of His family.

But **rejecting God and His ways leads us into a different category – weeds.** The weeds are the ones who are influenced by and choose to follow the ways of the world dominated by the Evil One, Satan. While the good seeds of wheat bring honor and glory to God by following His ways, the weeds are the ones that reject God’s ways and live diametrically opposed to anything that has to do with God. The weeds are the ones that find themselves living their lives based upon their own wisdom, their own strength, and their own rules. The weeds have a complete absence of God’s influence in their lives.

The thing is, however, we choose which path we will follow. **The environment we choose to live in determines our path in life,** and the outcome of our life. You see, weeds produce more weeds.

Have you ever noticed the progression of weeds within a garden? All it takes is one weed in the middle of that garden, and soon, within weeks, the whole garden is overwhelmed with weeds. The lawn becomes overgrown with black mattock, the gardens are filled with dandelions and oxalis, and in no time, any field is covered with rag weed and thistle. Their objective is to completely take over wherever they are growing and choke out anything else. They are relentless and constantly taking the opportunity to sprout up and establish themselves in any spot of good soil.

Well, the weeds in humanity bring about similar results. They promote anger, they actively endorse rebellion, they encourage chaos, and they uphold disobedience in the midst of this world. The weeds in our world do all they can to disassemble any rule or order or system that has its base upon God's principles. They outright distance themselves from glorifying God since their attempt is to only glorify themselves, making their ways and their agendas prevalent. And they are active in indoctrinating others into the ways that they believe, turning them from anything reasonable, or accountable, or good.

But the good seeds also produce more good seeds. The desired plants in the garden or lawn or field establish their roots in the good soil, but for some reason, they are slower to produce than the weeds are. Their intent is to show beauty and grow tall and delight in the glory that God gave to them. And we delight in their presence, since they fill the air with sweet aromas and fill the surroundings with their beauty.

In humanity, the good seeds bring about similar outcomes. They are quick to show love, they practice genuine forgiveness, and they demonstrate compassion on all those around them, even to those who may be opposed to them. The seeds are the ones that give of themselves to increase goodness and hope. They are the ones that address the hurts of the world in ways that bring about consideration and empathy, and they often sacrifice their own comforts in order to support and encourage and build up the lives of others. They also build into the lives of others, teaching them how to love God with all their hearts and to love those around them unconditionally. They gently guide and develop the tenderness and beauty that is a part of God's blessings for us.

Yet, God has a plan for us. His desire is that we choose to be seeds in the midst of this world. While the world is quick to criticize and point out the failures in others and demoralize those who seek to follow God's ways, God plants His seeds to multiply in order to overcome the things of this world. He is ready to empower and encourage those who follow His ways so that they might live boldly in this world. God desires that everyone follow Him and be accountable to His ways. There is no desire for weeds to grow chaos and confusion. God wants us to be obedient to His ways so that we might influence the world with His great love.

But while the weeds and the seeds live side by side in our world, God has planned a future for both sided. He is clear that those who rebel against Him and reject His ways will follow their own path to death and destruction. Following the influence of Satan, the weeds give up any real life that might be theirs. So they are left with constant emptiness, a God-sized hole in their lives that nothing can fill. Money can't fill that emptiness. Possessions can't fill it. Sex, drugs, alcohol, and power bring no satisfaction to the empty soul living without God in them. And they constantly grasp, and clutch and clench and hold onto whatever they seek to try to find fulfillment, but nothing satisfies.

Yet, God is also clear as to what the future will be for those who seek Him. Though the ugliness of the world surround them, God delights to fill these folks with His love, directing them to abundant opportunities to give of themselves to bring about His glory. The ones who follow God's ways, adamantly proclaim Jesus as their Savior and take Him up on His challenge to share love and joy and peace and happiness and faith with those around them. God is quick to protect them and provide for them, often in miraculous ways. He lifts up their spirits when they are discouraged, He fills them with abundant life, and He delights to call them His children. While the weeds seek their own lives, but only find emptiness and death, the good seed seek to follow God's ways, and live for the benefit of those around them so that they might find abundant life, too.

Yet, we are called to follow the ways of the Lord. He tenderly calls out for us to seek Him and follow Him. God constantly calls us to follow His Spirit and let His Spirit live in us so that we don't

live in the ways of this world, but according to the ways of the Lord God. **We have the choice** as to whom we will follow. God has given us free choice to live according to the ways of this world, or according to the ways laid out for us in the Bible. We have the choice of whom we will follow, of whom we will align ourselves with, and of whom we will give our allegiance to.

The Apostle Paul lays this out intricately, and often meticulously. Let me read to you how he lays this situation out for us. This is Romans 8:12-25. (READ Romans 8:12-25).

Here in chapter 8, Paul elaborates on Jesus' parable of the weeds. He states that we have the choice to live according to the ways of the world, or to live according to the ways of the Spirit of God. And he is bold enough to say, *"Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him. But if Christ lives in you, the Spirit is life for you because you have been put right with God..."* (Rom. 8:9-10).

You see, we are not locked into being weeds of the world. We have a choice to choose Jesus Christ as our Savior, and by doing that there is hope. Hear again the way Paul puts it. *"So then, my brothers (and sisters), we have an obligation, but it is not to live as our human nature wants us to. For if you live according to your human nature, you are going to die; but if by the Spirit you put to death your sinful actions, you will live. Those who are led by God's Spirit are God's [children]"* (8:12-14). It is our choice to live either in the ways of the world or in the ways of God's Spirit.

So there is hope for us. Though we may start our lives living in the ways of the weeds, we are not bolted into that way of life. God provides a way for us to make a change, but it demands that we make that choice of moving from one way to another. Paul says it clearly, *"For the Spirit that God has given you does not make you slaves and cause you to be afraid; instead the Spirit makes you God's children and by the Spirit's power we cry out to God, 'Father! my Father!' God's Spirit joins Himself to our spirits to declare that we are God's children"* (8:15-16). It means we choose to open up our lives to let God's Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, move into us. We decide that we are tired of living in the ways of the world and constantly be filled with the world's emptiness, and we make the choice to live

according to the ways of God. And then as the Holy Spirit moves into us, there is a spiritual transformation that takes place, closing the door of the ways of the weeds, and opening up the door for us to become good seeds. As we welcome God's Spirit into our lives, we become the children of God.

So with God's help we are free by the Holy Spirit to change from one family line to another. We are able to spiritually transform from being weeds to become God's good seeds. And as we make that transformation through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are then able to live as children of God. Let me explain it like this.

Author and president of Princeton Theological Seminary, Craig Barnes, shares this story of the transformation that takes place when we open our lives to the Holy Spirit. He says, "When I was a child, my minister father brought home a 12-year-old boy named Roger, whose parents had died from a drug overdose. There was no one to care for Roger, so my folks decided they'd just raise him as if he were one of their own sons.

"At first it was quite difficult for Roger to adjust to his new home--an environment free of heroin-addicted adults! Every day, several times a day, I heard my parents saying to Roger:

'No, no. That's not how we behave in this family.'

'No, no. You don't have to scream or fight or hurt other people to get what you want.'

'No, no, Roger, we expect you to show respect in this family.'

"And in time Roger began to change. Now, did Roger have to make all those changes in order to become a part of the family? No. He was made a part of the family simply by the grace of my father. But did he then have to do a lot of hard work because he was in the family? You bet he did. It was tough for him to change, and he had to work at it. But he was motivated by gratitude for the incredible love he had received.

"Do you have a lot of hard work to do now that the Spirit has adopted you into God's family? Certainly. But not in order to become a son or a daughter of the heavenly Father. No, you make those changes because you are a son or daughter. And every time you start to revert back to the old addictions

to sin, the Holy Spirit will say to you, ‘No, no. That's not how we act in this family.’”²

So the transformation from the ways of the weeds to the ways of good seeds is not an easy one. For one, the Devil does not want to lose his control over us so he sends as much garbage our way to make our life as difficult as possible so that we begin to think that making this spiritual transformation was not such a great idea. Satan will attack us at almost every possible avenue in order to prevent us from turning from the ways of this world and entering the ways of God. So the learning curve of moving from being a weed to becoming a seed is tremendously steep.

However when we decide to make that transition, God gives us the strength and the courage to continue on towards Him. It will mean that we have to lose all of our old “friends” and stop going to all of the old favorite hangouts, because Satan will use all of those to try to lure us back into the ways of the world again. But in time, surrounded by those who encourage us and help us to learn the new ways of God, our lives will become stronger and stronger living in the ways of the Holy Spirit. And then we will begin to see that **we have a future** that is bright and beautiful, rather than gloomy and disastrous.

Again, Paul gives us a look at what we can expect. He says, “*I consider that what we suffer at this present time cannot be compared at all with the glory that is going to be revealed to us*” (8:18). The stuff of this world doesn't compare to the glory that God has for us when we become His spiritual offspring. When we make the move from the world's ways to God's ways, there is absolutely no comparison between the two. It's the difference between night and day, between sour and sweet, between raging waters and still, quiet lakes.

The problem is that when we make the change from the ways of the world to the ways of God, we want it all to take place instantly. We often don't want to put in the time and energy it takes to receive all of the fullness of God's blessings. We do just enough to get into the door of God's house, but we stand there at the door, ready to make short trips back into the world, or looking out through the window to see if something better is available without us going deep with the Lord. So we wait eagerly

² (*More Perfect Illustrations*, pg. 251)

at God's front door for Him to reveal His glory to us, but we aren't willing to move further into His house. We who have the Spirit of the Lord Jesus must press on deeper to come to know the Lord in all of His ways so that we might enjoy the fullness of His abundance. As we grow deeper with the Lord, He provides even more of His Spirit to us so that we become strong in our faith, and we are then able to begin to live according to His ways, even being surrounded by the weeds of the world. Our life, then, becomes a testimony as to the glory of God that we can share with the world around us so that those still living in the weedy lifestyle can see the difference, and they, too might make the choice to make the change from the world to the things of God.

Then, as we live in such dramatic difference than those in the world, as we live our faith, they will begin to want what we have. They will begin to compare their lives with our lives and they will see the difference between living by the influence of the weeds and living by the influence of the Son of God. And they will begin to crave the things that we have. Then we will be able to start sharing God's freedom to those living like weeds, helping them to grow into seeds filled with the Holy Spirit. Then it will be possible for them to become spiritually transformed, themselves, into children of God.

Paul says it like this, "*...we who have the Spirit as the first of God's gifts also groan within ourselves as we wait for God to make us His sons (and daughters) and set our whole being free. For it was by hope that we were saved...*" (Rom. 8:23-24). As we grow deeper in the Lord and find His blessings for us, we can then, in turn, share with those around us so that they might come so see God's blessings for their own lives and crave the difference. And then it is hope that guides us through from our old human nature into the ways of God's Holy Spirit. And then we can endure whatever this world has to throw at us, because we know that there is much more with the Lord.

So come to know the ways of the Lord. Grow deep in His love and in His life and become fully immersed into His family. Become the spiritual offspring that God has called you to become since the day you were conceived so that you might bring hope to those around you, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.