

Planting and Pulling

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[0:00] What did you expect by Paul David Tripp is our study and we're going to be covering the second daily commitment that we need to be making in our marriage.

There are six daily commitments that he refers to. The first last week was we will give ourselves to a regular lifestyle of confession and forgiveness.

And that was the first commitment that makes marriages flourish. They're good confessors and they're good forgivers. Now commitment number two is we will make growth and change our daily agenda.

What's an agenda? It's what you've got to do today. You may even write it down in your little book. And on that list should not only be confession and forgiveness, but change and growth today.

Okay, now we're going to see that in terms of the gardening imagery. Pulling weeds and planting seeds.

[1:15] Now marriage is a long-term exercise in gardening, as Tripp says. Suppose I visited Sharon Stuber's flower garden and I said, wow, I like that.

I would like my backyard to look just like that. And so she gives me some starts and I go out and buy other plants and I stick them in the ground and wait for them to grow.

And they do grow, but so do the weeds. And it seems as the summer months go on, the weeds grow faster and taller than the flowers.

So by the end of the summer, I have a mess and I call Sharon up and she comes in and looks at my garden and says, yes, you're right. It is a mess. And she wants to know how often I weed and water and fertilize my garden.

I said, what? And she said, well, you know, how often do you get out there and pull the weeds? And I said, I didn't know you had to do that. Now, I might say I'm too busy for that.

[2:24] I just want a flower garden like yours. But she would tell me there are no shortcuts. If you want flowers, if you want a garden like this, you've got to be willing to put in the time pulling weeds, fertilizing, doing whatever is necessary, but there's a lot that's necessary.

Now, if gardens don't grow by themselves, why should we consider that something that is even far more delicate than a flower garden, namely the most intimate relationship known on earth, that of a husband and wife, why would we expect that that would just grow automatically?

That there'd be no work, no rolling up of our sleeves and pulling out of weeds and planting of seeds. A very common sin in our marriages, says Tripp, is the sin of inattention, just neglect.

We just expect it to be fine without giving attention to it. So, this chapter is all about, these next two chapters, and we're going to cover them together, about pulling weeds and planting seeds in our garden.

Remembering that today we're harvesting from yesterday's plantings, and tomorrow we will harvest from today's plantings.

[3:45] Now, have you seen weedy gardens? Solomon had, hadn't he? And he speaks of going by a certain field and vineyard, and he tells us in Proverbs 24, thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, the stone wall was in ruins.

Now, what did that man have to do for his field to be in a weedy mess? That's just absolutely nothing.

Right. And what do you have to do to get a good crop of weeds growing in your marriage?

Absolutely nothing. They come right up automatically.

You see, there's something in us that wars against unity in our relationship. It's in us. The enemy's within, as we see in Romans 7 and other places.

There's something inside of every one of us that would destroy our marriages. So, if we do nothing, they will be destroyed.

[4:53] We have in our hearts the seeds of every sort of weed that has ever been produced in a marriage. We're weedy people, and our weeds have adverse effects upon our marriages, so pulling these weeds is one of the necessary commitments of any good marriage.

So, the next time you drive by Sharon's garden or one of these Amish gardens that's without a weed, know for certain that somebody's put the time in to pulling weeds. And the next time you see a happy marriage, you can know for certain that a husband and a wife are busy pulling weeds, dealing with the flesh in their marriage.

There are no weedless marriages. Either they're pulled or they take over. Now, Tripp highlights some of the most common weeds, but he also encourages us to think of others that may be draining the life out of our own particular marriage and to deal with those.

But he begins with selfishness. That's a common weed. You see that in every garden, don't you? And he challenges us with the way that we spend our evenings after a long day's work, whether we're considering the other or just doing what feels good to me, being too busy with our things that we don't volunteer to help with their things.

Selfishness is the DNA of sin, he reminds us, and that's why it's so natural. That's why it just comes automatic to us to think of what we want to do with this evening.

[6:39] And so it's like growing weeds. You don't do anything about it, and you will automatically do what comes natural for self. So we've got to be thinking, How can I say no to self and yes to service and yes to loving my spouse?

Now, I have an exercise for you. I want to challenge you to spend one evening this week with tunnel vision in which you only consider doing, saying what your spouse likes and enjoys.

Now, don't tell her which night it is. She shouldn't be able to tell the difference, right? That's the way it's every night at your house. Or you might need to pull her off the floor from shock, whatever it is. Don't tell her which night it is, but that night your thoughts are focused, all right? I'm coming home from work and tonight is my exercise. I'm going to pull out anything of suggestion of what I want, and I'm just going to serve my spouse tonight.

Set her likes and wants and desires before you and set yours on the shelf and see if you can go from suppertime to bedtime living that way.

[8:01] Now, the very exercise will show us just how self-centered we are by nature, how many times in that evening we're going to need to say no to ourselves if we're going to serve the other in love.

It shows us just how deeply ingrained this weed is and how natural it is to our fallen DNA that we would so readily return to our concerns, just like the needle of a compass returns to the North Star. It's grace that enables us to get out of the center and it's Calvary grace that pulls us in another direction. So, the grace of God has appeared to all men and it teaches us to say no to ungodliness and self-centeredness.

And so, there on Calvary, Christ served our great good at great cost to himself. That's the kind of thing that will overcome Calvary love, overcome our selfishness.

So, selfishness is a weed with a huge root system that has the vitality to suck the life out of marriage. So, give yourself to pulling this weed of selfishness.

[9:28] Secondly is busyness, another weed often found in our marriages. For most, this is a weed that will fill our marriages unless we tend it very carefully.

Just like a vacuum. It doesn't remain a vacuum very long before something is sucked into its presence and fills that vacuum. So, is your schedule.

And so, is your day. And so, if busyness just happens for you, then you need to remember, it happens one moment at a time.

One decision at a time. And here's where you need to say no and pull this weed of busyness if it's interrupting your marriage. Too many of us have little time left in our schedules for meaningful conversation with our spouse.

For tender connection and focused problem solving. Little time to stop and think, how is my marriage doing? Too many of us, Tripp says, are doing marriage on the fly.

[10:36] We give it the leftovers of our time, the in-between times of everything else that rules our life and schedule. And he reminds us that marriages don't thrive on the fly with leftover time.

Even football teams find time for regular huddles where they all get their heads together to be sure that everybody's on the same page. And if even more time is needed, they even have timeouts. Husbands and wives, we need regular daily huddles. And we need regular timeouts. Time given just for this.

To draw near to each other. To speak with each other. To work toward intimacy together. Oneness, which is what God has intended for marriage.

You know there are marriage enrichment weekends. We announced one a while back. That's another extended timeout, isn't it? Where we can just take a weekend and say, this is timeout from all the other stuff.

[11:44] And we're just going to go away for the weekend, the two of us. And we're going to concentrate on this area of marriage. I put that before you. See Dave and Karen, and they've got the connection for one of those marriage enrichment weekends and conferences.

We're conferences. We're speakers. We'll speak on the topics of marriage and guide your thoughts together. Read a book on marriage together.

Read Tripp's book and discuss it together. There are busyness. Busyness is a weed in marriage.

Now what's so important that we're neglecting our marriages for it? Why is it that we're so busy?

Tripp asks. Well that's an answer that every marriage has to answer itself.

But Tripp says materialism is often not far away from our busyness. The pursuit of more and more things, bigger and better things, sucks out our time and energy and relational vitality.

[12:49] We have to work to get them and then we've got to give time to maintain them. Tripp says, I can't tell you how many times I've had husbands or wives say to me, well I would love to do these things.

These things that make marriage healthy. But I simply did not have the time. Well we might be working too much because we want too much.

And that's all the while the weeds continue to grow. So are you too busy to address the struggles in your marriage?

To sit down and talk about them? To pray over them together? To do the good things that make your marriage grow? Well Tripp says we need to make a daily commitment to make growth and change in our daily agenda.

Another weed. Selfishness, busyness, inattention. And we've considered what happens to a garden if you don't pay attention to it. I'm going to go on to the next.

[14:04] Self-righteousness. What do you do when your spouse points out some of your weeds? That's the area we're under. Do you welcome those moments when she approaches you with concerns about something you said or did?

Are you thankful that God has given you someone close to you to help you spot your weeds and to help you tend your garden? Or do you immediately jump to defending yourself?

Have you thought that all the weeds in your marriage needing to be pulled are masculine weeds or feminine weeds? Listen to Tripp's confession. I was there, self-righteous, but I did not know it.

I was angry. I was an angry man, but I simply did not see myself with anything approaching accuracy. In fact, I was quite hurt when Luella would characterize me as angry and I was quite convinced that she was a discontented wife.

Once, and this is humbling to admit, I actually said to her, 95% of the women in our church would love to be married to a man like me. Can you believe it?

[15:15] I was convinced of my own righteousness and therefore convinced of my innocence. And oh, by the way, Luella was very sweet, very sweetly informed me that she was in the 5%.

Self-righteousness, again, that good opinion of ourselves that sees our spouse as the problem, that's a weed we've got to get at the root of.

Then there's fear. Fear is a huge supply of weeds that keeps us from speaking the truth because we're afraid it might cause conflict.

Fear of failure can keep you from doing with courage the things that God has called you to do in your marriage. It's right to want your spouse's acceptance and respect, but when those things become ruling, desires in you that keep you from your responsibilities in marriage, they have taken a place that they must not have.

It's a weed. It must be pulled. Don't let fear cripple your marriage. And then the last weed that he mentions in particular is laziness, a bigger problem in our marriages than most of us may realize.

[16 : 38] We know we shouldn't carry anger over day after day, but we don't want to waste the whole evening talking slash arguing about the problem.

We know we're not on the same page about financial decisions, but working through it looks like a huge mountain and we're just too lazy to even take the first steps up that mountain. Laziness is rooted in self-love, doing what's comfortable for ourselves.

Remember that garden that we looked at at the beginning, that field that Solomon walked by and he found it overgrown with thorns? You know whose field that was? It was the sluggards, wasn't it? It was the lazy man. And hence, laziness is one of those thorns in our marriage that needs to be pulled. The sluggard says, oh, there's a lion outside.

I shall be killed in the streets. He's always got a reason to not do the hard right now. So, what about your marriage?

[17 : 41] What about those weeds? Maybe there's other weeds. When's the last time you and your spouse had an honest talk about weeds that need to be pulled in your marriage?

Now, we don't have to be afraid to examine our marriage, to talk about weeds because God specializes in weedy lives, in weedy gardens, weedy marriages.

It's at this very point of acknowledging that we have needs, that God meets us. It's at the very point of confessing, Lord, we're not enough for this.

We're overwhelmed. We are afraid. We are lazy. We are self-righteous. And these seeds are in my heart and will flourish if you don't come and help me.

Oh, help me. It's then that we find him making his strength known in our weakness. So, call on him and call on him together.

[18 : 46] Now, that's half of the business, pulling weeds, but then there's the planting of seeds and both of these need to be going on continually in our marriage as we're giving ourselves to the daily agenda of growth and change.

We're pulling and planting. One of the best ways to keep a garden full of the plants you like is to fill it up with good plants and it has a way of crowding out the weeds and not giving them room.

Whereas, if you just pull weeds and you've got this bare spot, it's nice and beautiful the day you weed it, but it won't be long, will it, before weeds will fill that spot.

But if you plant good plants in there, it will have a way of keeping the weeds out. And so, we need to be planting seeds as well as pulling weeds.

It's the principle that we find in Scripture of putting off, taking off the bad, the old, the fleshly life and putting on Christ and all of his virtues.

[19 : 55] Turn to Galatians 5 where we see this principle before us. There's not only the pulling out of weeds, but there's the planting of seeds.

There's not only the putting off of the flesh, but there's the putting on of the contrary fruit of the Spirit. And so, verse 16, Galatians 5.

He's just called on us to love our neighbor as ourselves. This is our great duty to man is to love our neighbors as ourselves and wives. Your nearest neighbor is your husband and husband, your nearest neighbor is your wife.

Now, having been told that, that if we don't do that, we'll bite and devour and destroy each other, he then says, so I say, verse 16, live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit desires what is contrary to the sinful nature or the flesh.

[21 : 05] So, we have these dueling desires, these weeds and seeds, the bad weeds, the good seeds. You have the flesh with all of its bad seeds and the Spirit with all of its good seeds.

His good seeds, I should say, not its. And, as we saw, within each one of us, we have those weeds and those weeds will move us into destructive ways.

But, if our marriage is to be what God designed it to be, we're going to need to be replacing the weeds with the positive plants of the fruits of the Spirit.

Now, we have that here before us. Notice verses 19 through 21. Here are the weeds and they're weeds in all relationships and they certainly are found in our own marriages at times.

So, these are some of the weeds. The acts of the sinful nature of the flesh are obvious. Sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy, drunkenness, orgies, unless we think this is all of

them, he says, and the like.

[22:48] And I warn you as I did before that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. That's the flesh. And if that's all you are, you will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But even in the Christian life, Paul is saying, the flesh keeps warring against the Spirit. The Holy Spirit has come into us and these kind of things are continually trying to worm their way into our lives and marriages and we need to put them off.

We need to pull these weeds and what needs to be planted in its place? Well, the fruit of the Spirit. And that's what follows verse 22.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control against such things.

There is no law. So do you see the principle? Put off, put on. Pull out these weeds, plant these seeds.

[23:56] And yet, it's not like gardening in this respect.

that you don't just roll up your sleeves and do these things, do you? What are these good seeds that I am to be seeing planted into my life and heart and marriage?

They're fruit of what? Of the Spirit. They're not the fruit of me. Me is the problem. Me is what leads to the weeds.

And so, God has given us His own Spirit to live inside of us. To be the one that empowers this kind of living.

What kind of living? Well, let's just look at it. Love. And so, we're to be seeing love in our marriage.

[24:57] Getting up in the morning and praying and looking for concrete ways to help your spouse. How to show love to them today. Is that ever on your agenda? It must be.

Joy. How do I plant joy in my marriage? Well, you focus on reasons to be thankful. You count your blessings that you do have rather than the blessings that you don't have and that you might complain about.

You spread joy around by communicating your appreciation and encouraging the good that you see in each other. As someone has written upon encouragement and praise and they said, water what you want to grow.

Isn't that one of the ways of gardening? You spot water and if you don't want things growing, you don't put water there, but you water what you want to grow. What do you see in your spouse?

You want to see grow? Well, water it. When you see it, thank them. Peace. Are we sowing peace?

[26:07] Making every effort to live in peace. Are we a peacemaker just by our very demeanor? That we give no place to the various disturbers of the peace, of anger and impatience and irritation and resentment.

We gladly overlook minor offenses and are thankful that they're no bigger. We work hard and quickly to restore relationships when something has come between us. We don't settle for icy detente.

We don't let coldness live on between us. It must be exterminated. We must know what God has made us to be. One. And so anytime something comes between us, we're striving for peace.

Patience, kindness, goodness. Now those are the things Tripp says we focused on when we were courting. We were very patient with each other, weren't we? We're very kind in the way we spoke to each other.

We were very good to them. Then we got them. And then we easily let slip patience. And now we are pretty quick to come down on them.

[27:18] And not with a kind word, but with a harsh word. And goodness. Those good things that we did for each other. I wonder if you would be embarrassed to have your pastor hear every word that you speak to your spouse and the manner in which you say it.

Would you be ashamed to have the Lord Jesus hear those words? Well, he does, doesn't he?

Patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness to your wedding vows.

You made promises, didn't you? Have you got them out lately? Asked, am I faithful to what I said I would do till death do us part?

Faithful to your God-given roles in marriage, what it is God calls you to be in that marriage? Men, the head of that home, leading your wife and children, the ways of God, the worship of God, the ways and paths of righteousness, teaching, praying, helping, wife, walking faithful to your role as helper, helping your man, submitting to him, faithfulness.

What about gentleness? What does gentleness mean? Well, when you handle something gently, you handle it in a way so as to not bring harm to it, don't you?

[28:51] And so is that marking our relationship? Gentleness. Yes, we have truth to speak that sometimes is hard to hear, but do we speak it gently?

A harsh word stirs up anger, wrath, but a gentle word, a gentle word turns away wrath.

Proverbs 15, 1. Jesus would not break a bruised reed. So, there's your spouse, and they're a bruised reed this morning.

They've just said something, done something, they've sinned, they're a bruised reed. Are you going to break them? Or are you going to help them? Jesus wouldn't snuff out a smoldering wick.

He might be a smoldering wick tonight. But don't snuff him out. Jesus wouldn't snuff it out. He encouraged and helped weak faith, and so gentleness will do.

[29:56] Gentle with each other, and lastly, self-control. And here, Tripp just reminds us that good marriages are always found where partners are good at saying no.

Not to the other, but to themselves. no to self. That takes control. If you want to damage your marriage, just do whatever comes naturally to your desires and your emotions, whatever they suggest.

In heated moments of hurt and disagreement, you'll be tempted to do and say things that must be rejected as sinful and inflammatory, lashing back with digs of personal attack instead of drawing alongside and helping each other, we must constantly be saying no to the flesh.

That means constantly editing. You know what editing work is. Before you send it to the publisher, you edit it and you go over it and so you're editing your thoughts.

Are these thoughts worthy of speaking? Your words, your actions. Is this in line with scripture? Is this in line with what God wants for me?

[31:09] And so we're editing, editing, evaluating what we say and think and do before we let it out to the press, before we speak, before we act and continue thinking in those ways.

So, self-control. Well, there's seven seeds to plant. Did you notice that? Seven. That's one a day vitamins.

You just take one of those every day and say, today, God, teach me to love her today. Teach me new ways to love her. Help me to renew old ways of loving her.

Oh, it's Tuesday. Joy. Teach me to spread joy in this relationship. God. And so, through the week. You see, the way to pull weeds and plant seeds is not just to have your devotions and say, oh, Holy Spirit, I need you to come and teach me to love, to have joy and peace and all these fruits of your power in my life, and then to just sit back and watch for it.

[32:25] No. It doesn't happen that way. We pray like desperate sinners that we are, that all I've got is weeds to contribute and if you don't come and save me from myself and empower good seeds in my life, and then we go out and we plant good seeds.

We pray and we go out and we work hard. We sweat at pulling weeds out of our lives. We pray and we go and we get busy.

It's not one or the other. The way the Spirit sanctifies us and fills our gardens with beautiful plants is by prayer and hard work.

Because He works in us to will and to do the things that are pleasing to Him. So, may the Lord help us to be pulling weeds and planting seeds every day this week and to make that a daily pattern of our lives.

That's the second commitment that makes marriages flourish. Thank you, our Father, for being committed to saving your people from our sins.

[33:48] Thank you for the Word of God that is one of your key instruments. You prayed, sanctify them by your Word.

Your Word is truth. So, Lord Jesus, take up this Word in our hearts and teach it to us and show us weeds in our lives that need pulled and blessed virtues of the Spirit that need to take the place of those weeds.

We thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit. You've poured out your Spirit upon your church because you knew that just instructing us in your Word was not enough, that the weeds are too deep and our hearts are too full of these seeds to ever do this ourselves and so you've given us the Holy Spirit to give us a new heart with new desires, with desires for righteous plants.

With hatred for those weeds of the flesh. Well, where would we be without a new heart? And where would we be without the Spirit working in us to be careful to keep your commands and careful to walk according to your laws?

Thank you for your commitment to us, Holy Spirit, not waiting until we were perfected, but coming into our dark hearts and living there now, living right in the midst of our anger and bitterness and laziness and selfishness and yet living there with the commitment to changing us.

[35 : 27] So we ask you, go on changing us. Bring us to that willingness of being changed. Don't let us be satisfied with the status quo.

Surely there's more of this blessed unity for which you created marriage to be a reflection of that unity between the Father and the Son.

And so come and create that in our hearts and in our marriages. Do it for your glory and for our good. We thank you for marriage and the gift that it is to us.

Come and deliver us from ourselves and come and make us to taste those joys that you have intended for us and to return all the praise to you, the only Redeemer from sin.

So lead us into worship in the next hour. I'm thankful that we have such a great Savior, mighty to save. We praise you in his name. Amen.