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Weeding Your Family's Spiritual Garden

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Bob: If you're hoping that your family will grow spiritually strong, but you're not doing anything about it, you better be careful. There are plenty of forces at work in the culture today that would push your marriage and your family in a decidedly non-spiritual direction. Here is Dennis Rainey with one of those.

Dennis: I don't think you can talk about spiritual growth without discussing the whole subject of where your treasure is. And if you want to grow spiritually, I think a part of what helps you grow will be to turn away from the consumer-oriented lifestyle and turn towards the Scripture, which says "Send it on ahead. Invest in eternal things."

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Thursday, August 10th. Our host is the president of FamilyLife, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. Materialism is just one of the weeds that wants to choke the spiritual life out of your family.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today, thanks for joining us on the Thursday edition. I've always wondered what it would be like to have a garden – we have a garden in our backyard, but the kind of garden I'm thinking about is one that does not have any nutgrass in it. Do you know what nutgrass is?

Dennis: I do.

Bob: I hate nutgrass.

Dennis: I do, too.

Bob: You can pull up the nutgrass, and it doesn't go away.

Dennis: I have a nuclear herbicide where we nuke 'em.

Bob: Does it come back in like two weeks?

Dennis: The stuff is bionic, I'm telling you.

Bob: Completely indestructible, and I've often thought how nice it would be, if you were growing your garden, and you didn't have weeds to contend with. I mean, it would flourish, it would just be beautiful, and the tomatoes would be so big and so juicy, and it would be great, but the problem is we live in a fallen world, and so there are weeds in the garden, and when we try to grow a spiritually strong family, we find that there are weeds and tears and enemies at work in our spiritual garden as well.

Dennis: I once had a friend in Southern California who was trying to accomplish the

very thing you were talking about.

Bob: A weed-free garden?

Dennis: Actually, it was a weed-free, Tiff Bermuda lawn, okay? And what he did was, he completely uprooted everything that was living on the planet in his yard. And then he took some very strong chemicals and put it down on the soil ...

Bob: ... the bare soil ...

Dennis: ... it was in Southern California, so it was sand, okay? And then he took – as I recall, it was a black plastic tarp, and he put it down over the chemical on the soil, and he left it that way for a week.

Bob: Figuring at this point nothing can survive.

Dennis: The kids could not go near it. You had the feeling that it was a dangerous place to go, and what he was doing was he was sterilizing the soil, killing all the weeds, any seeds, any sprigs, anything and everything, so that when he stepped forward to put the Tiff Bermuda sod ...

Bob: ... going to lay it down, sod, no weeds, because everything is dead underneath it in the soil.

Dennis: That's right. You know what? The weeds won.

[laughter]

The weeds won. I'll never forget that, even though my buddy did have the most beautiful lawn on the block.

Bob: You know, the Bible says that we wrestle not against weeds and, I guess, it's flesh and blood that it talks about there, but in our families we do face a spiritual battle. If you want to grow a spiritually strong family, which is what we've been talking about now for the last week and a half, you have to recognize that it's not going to happen without opposition. There is an enemy who opposes that objective at its very core.

Dennis: There really is. In fact, my buddy with his lawn actually thought that some neighbor who didn't like him snuck into his yard ...

Bob: ... a saboteur ...

Dennis: ... late at night and planted all these weed seeds, who just didn't like him, right? And some marriages, I think, today may wonder, "You know, we tried this thing called marriage. We started out in a direction. What's wrong? Why are we at war with one another? We didn't get married to do battle with one another. We married to become one."

And yet if you look at the Bible, the Bible begins with a marriage, and it is a marriage between a man and a woman with God present – but there is another party present as well. It is the presence of evil. Personified in the snake, it was ultimately the devil who was trying to divide both the man and the woman from God and from one another.

Bob: That's right.

Dennis: And that act of sabotage has been occurring since the beginning of time. You

got married, I got married, we naturally didn't move to oneness. We naturally moved to isolation. We naturally experienced weeds. There is an enemy who wants to divide couples today, and there is a spiritual battle that swirls around your marriage.

Bob: We've talked during this series about how naïve we are as newly married couples, and I think back to when Mary Ann and I were first married. We didn't sit down and think, "You know what? We better be on our toes because the devil opposes our oneness in marriage. He's out to divide us. He wants to split the two of us, and he's going to throw everything he can against us." We weren't conscious of that. We were kind of drifting off into this idyllic marriage existence. And so when the problems began to develop as they inevitably do in a marriage relationship, we started looking at one another rather than looking at the enemy of our souls. We don't wrestle against flesh and blood but against powers and principalities and dark forces in evil places.

Dennis: There are really three sources of conflict between a man and a woman. First of all, they're flesh, there is selfishness. Secondly, the world contributes its fair share of lures to lesser loyalty. But, thirdly, there is a struggle, as you've just mentioned, with the spiritual forces of darkness that the Scriptures speak of as being a personal devil.

Now, at this point, some of our listeners are going, "You and Bob actually believe in the reality of a person called the devil?" And I want to assure you, we do. Why? Because Jesus Christ spoke repeatedly of him in the New Testament. Now, most of us look around us, and we see a chair, we see a table, we see windows, we see things that are visible, and we think that is all there is to reality. Well, Jesus is saying that there is a reality that is very real that we don't see, and it's in the spiritual realm, and that reality that we don't see – the devil – one of his chief aims, one of his chief objectives, is to get a husband and a wife divided, because when you are one, when you are together, when you're in agreement, when you, as a couple, are both in prayer before God yielding to Him, you're a threat to what the devil is trying to accomplish on Planet Earth. But when he's got you divided, when he has you turning against one another, and he has you setting up battle against your spouse, then he's got you. You're not going to be used mightily by God at that point.

Bob: And I think we've got to realize that if we want to grow a spiritually strong family, we better have a battle plan in place to recognize not only the attacks that are going to come our way that are designed to defeat that goal of spiritual strength, but also a plan in place to resist those attacks and to know how to stand against them.

And you mentioned three things – the world and the flesh and the devil. As you look at families today, what are the strategies that are at work, or the world's systems that are pressing us away from a spiritual foundation?

Dennis: Well, one of them is just the body of ideas that the world is promoting today. The world is promoting immorality or no morality; the world is promoting a materialistic lifestyle – live for what you can get, and the man who dies with the most toys is the man who dies the most satisfied life. Additionally, the world is undermining commitment, vows. It doesn't want couples to remain committed. Fidelity at points is mocked. Even the definition of marriage – the world is promoting at every turn an opposite view to what the Scriptures teach.

Bob: We have to be shrewd to recognize that the things you're talking about, whether it's materialism or immorality or the idea that our covenant is temporary and not permanent – all of these things are worldly weeds that grow up in our spiritual garden, and if we leave them untended, if we ignore them, they don't go away, they grow stronger, the root system goes down deeper, and they produce, they germinate, they produce other weeds that can eventually choke out what we're trying to do in growing a

spiritually strong family. We've got to systematically be about taking those weeds and pulling them out by the root and saying, "You know what? This is not a healthy plant for the garden."

Dennis: I think one of the things that's happening today even within the Christian community, is we're watching the dumbing down of Christian ideals and Christian standards that are from the Scripture by Christians who are conforming their lives to the world rather than God's Word. I think increasingly you've got to go to this Book, and I'm not speaking of the book I wrote. I'm talking about the book God wrote. You have to go to the Scriptures and make sure you're not being conformed to the world's standards. If you get your queues from the Christian community, I'm just telling you, many times our Christian peers are making choices that are not worthy of being imitated. In other words, they're making choices with their children, with their values, with their time, that is really not a lot different than those who are not followers of Jesus Christ.

Bob: It seems like Christian families sometimes have more in common with a situation comedy on television than they do with what the Scriptures call us to as Christians.

Dennis: I wonder, Bob, if we mindlessly turn on the television and leave it on when we should be turning it off. You want to grow spiritually? You want to grow spiritually strong as a couple, as a family, you have to feed on the right things, and that means not allowing your flesh to just sit there and soak in a show that is really honoring immorality, adultery, that is dishonoring the marriage covenant, the family, those things, which we know in our hearts are right.

Bob: Now, as you were talking, I was thinking back to what I've seen on TV in the last week, because I've had occasion to watch it, and the question I've been wondering is what I've watched something that has caused me to grow in righteousness and in holiness and in a God-ward direction. Now, you know that stories can inspire – a great play, a great book, a great movie can actually inspire you to righteousness and holiness, and yet most of what I've seen over the last week has not inspired me to righteousness and holiness and godliness, but, in fact, it has planted weed seeds in my mind that are the kinds of seeds that, again, I have to come back along and yank out if I want the garden to grow.

Dennis: You're right, Bob, and I think if there is an occasional weed being pulled, I think we've got to pull back and evaluate, are we allowing our garden to be overtaken with weeds?

I was recently with a missionary from a foreign country, and I asked him, I said, "What's the per capita income of a family in that country?" And he said, "Oh, about \$200 a month." – very poor. I've been to the former Soviet Union where it's \$30 a month. I promise you, in those cultures you can be materialistic in those cultures, because it's not a matter of how much money you make, it's what you love.

But, in America, we live in a consumer-oriented, what I've purchased recently, what I'm going to purchase tomorrow, where I'm going shopping this weekend, and what I think we need to be modeling in our Christian lives that I believe will create spiritual growth, is where we're giving and how we're giving and whether or not we're living a consuming lifestyle of constantly getting and receiving or whether we are living a kingdom lifestyle that is constantly thinking about where am I investing? Am I investing in what God is doing, am I joining Him in His kingdom work? And in the process am I demonstrating faith by giving things that are valuable to me – my money, my time – to what God is up to. And, Bob, I don't think you can talk about spiritual growth without discussing the whole subject of where your treasure is, and if you want to grow spiritually, I think a

part of what helps you grow will be to turn away from the consumer-oriented lifestyle and turn towards the Scripture, which says "Send it on ahead. Invest in eternal things."

Bob: So the question is, how do you maintain this goal of trying to grow a spiritually strong family without moving to Montana?

Dennis: Well, I think, first of all, you need to realize that in order to grow spiritually, just like a muscle, the muscle is strengthened as it has tension and weight, and as it is stretched. And I think our faith needs to confront what we're facing and make hard choices. So I think it's going to take courage to turn away from the messages, the value system, and instead of embracing it, turn off the television, make a choice, push back against the value system of the culture and don't just rail against the culture, instead offer a solution. What is the solution? The Gospel. It's proclaiming that Jesus Christ is the hope of men's and women's souls, and that the hope for families is in a personal relationship with God by knowing Jesus Christ.

You know, one of the things we've taken for granted in this whole series, Bob, that we've done here about growing a spiritually strong family is that, first of all, you know Christ as a listener, and that you have embraced Him as your Savior, as your Maker, your Redeemer, and that by faith you have made a commitment, you've surrendered your life to Him. But that, secondly, we've made the assumption that having done that, that you will be telling others about your own faith in Christ and leading them to discover him as well. Nothing, I don't believe, causes growth quite like sharing your faith with a next-door neighbor, with an adult friend at work, teaching your children to do the same with their peers at school, and you can do that in Montana, but, I'm going to tell you, at some point you've got to confront people's needs and view them as Jesus did – they're like sheep without a shepherd. They desperately need to know the Savior.

Bob: You can understand how people get weary. You get weary of the influence of the culture. You get weary of the weeds that keep popping up in the garden, you get weary of having to put on armor every day and to face the fight. But God's called us to the battle. He's called us to pull the weeds on a regular basis, and the idea that we can just drop out and escape the influence of the world, it's really not what we've been called to in the Scriptures.

Dennis: There are two statements in the New Testament that are our real litmus test of growing spiritually. One is the Great Commandment, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself.

Bob: You've got to have a neighbor to do that.

Dennis: You have to have a neighbor, and you've got to begin with your God. You've got to love Him first. That's where growth begins. But, secondly, there is the Great Commission, and that is the greatest task that has ever been given to another human being, and that is to be a part of telling other people about the Redeemer.

The question was once asked, what's the greatest thing that has ever happened to you? Now think about that for a moment? What's the greatest thing that's ever happened to you? Well, I would hope you would answer coming to know Jesus Christ as my Savior, Master, and Lord. If that is the greatest thing that's happened to you, what's the greatest thing you could do for another person? Our problem is I don't believe we've grown enough spiritually, Bob, to begin to look at people with the eyes of Christ. He saw them as lost. He saw the human soul as desperate, in need of God, and I'm afraid, many times, we've not grown enough and matured enough spiritually to begin to look at people with His eyes and, as a result, we don't have a burden for people who will spend eternity in a place called hell. And that, frankly, ought to motivate us to share our faith,

and to ask another person about their own destiny, eternally speaking. Do they know Jesus Christ? Have they experienced forgiveness of sin?

You read an e-mail with me just a couple of days ago from a couple who came to one of our Weekend to Remember Marriage Conferences, and it was a couple who don't go to church. In fact, the woman who wrote us sounded like she'd never been to church in her life. But it was at the conference where she heard about God, about the Gospel, and a practical solution to the daily challenges she is facing in her marriage and family. And you know what? You and I, as believers, have those solutions, and we need to be sharing them regularly.

Bob: You know, we've talked about the influence of the culture on our thinking, and I think one of the antidotes that we have to that cultural influence is spending time reading or listening to things that are going to press us back in the right direction. This is the month we've been inviting our listeners to turn off the TV and have a TV fast because typically television isn't going to point you in the right direction spiritually, but listening to this radio program or reading your book, "Growing a Spiritually Strong Family," those are the kinds of things – the hour you'll spend reading this book is an hour you won't spend watching TV, so it will be doubly effective in that regard.

We've got copies of the book in our FamilyLife Resource Center, and our listeners can go to our website, FamilyLife.com. In the center of the home page, there is a round, red button that says "Go," and if you click on that button, it will take you right to a page where you can get more information about this book that takes about an hour to read. This would also be a good date night book. You could read a chapter at a time when you go out on a date night together and just talk about how are we doing in this area? What are the challenges we're facing? Good calibration or a tune-up to see how your family is growing spiritually.

Again, our website, FamilyLife.com. If you click the "Go" button in the middle of the screen, it will take you right to the page from which you can order a copy of the book, "Growing a Spiritually Strong Family." There are other resources listed there to help you in your spiritual growth as a couple and as a family. We've listed your book, "Moments Together for Couples," a daily devotional for couples to use throughout the year to help orient them in the right direction spiritually. And, in fact, any of our listeners who would like to get a copy of both "Growing a Spiritually Strong Family" and "Moments Together for Couples," we would be happy to send along at no additional cost the CD audio of this two-week conversation on the subject of growing a spiritually strong family that you can either listening to again yourself or pass along to someone who might benefit from hearing it.

Again, our website is FamilyLife.com. All the information about these resources are available on our website, or you can call 1-800-358-6329. That's 1-800-F-as-in-family, L-as-in-life, and then the word TODAY, and someone on our team can let you know how you can get a copy of these resources sent out to you.

When you get in touch with us, can we ask you to consider something? FamilyLife Today is listener-supported. That means that folks like you not only tune in and listen to the program and may contact us from time to time to request resources, but there is a group of you who also contact us from time to time to make donations to our ministry, and we appreciate you folks. You help keep us on the air in this city and in other cities all across the country. Your financial support is essential to FamilyLife Today, and we want to ask you to consider during the month of August making a donation to FamilyLife, if there is any way you can do that.

In fact, we'd like to send you a thank you gift this month if there is any way you can

help with our financial needs this month. We have a CD that features about an hour-long conversation that you and I had, Dennis, with Beth Moore, who is the author of a number of Bible studies that women all across the country have gone through. We had a very engaging, a very candid conversation with her about some of the challenges she faced in her family growing up, some of the challenges she and her husband Keith experienced early in their marriage, and we found that conversation delightful, refreshing, encouraging, and we wanted to pass the CD along to anybody who, during the month of August, can help with a donation of any amount to the ministry of FamilyLife Today.

You simply go online at FamilyLife.com, make a donation, and as you're filling out the donation form, you'll see a keycode box. Just type the word "free" in there, and we'll know that you'd like the Beth Moore CD sent out to you. Or, if it's easier, call 1-800-FLTODAY. You can make a donation over the phone and just mention that you'd like the Beth Moore CD. We're happy to send it out to you. Again, it's our way of saying thanks for joining with us and helping to support the ministry of FamilyLife Today, and we really appreciate your partnership with us.

Well, tomorrow we want to talk about the spiritual protein, the biblical protein, that will help you become spiritually buff as a family. We'll talk about what that is tomorrow. I hope you can be back with us for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I'm Bob Lepine. We'll see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

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