

PULLING WEEDS & SWATTING BUGS

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One morning on my way to meet my friend Elizabeth, I was thinking how, as Christians, the big picture of our life looks good, as it's painted with destiny, hope, and a future. However, the reality of the day-to-day picture is that it is marred with problems, frustrations, and questions. We know that God will fulfill our destiny and work all things together for good, yet when it comes to tonight, or next week, how do we deal with the problems and stresses?

Elizabeth and I found a bench in a small park where we could sit and catch up on the latest news. On the horizon blue sky sat on green hills, giving us a beautiful panorama of God's creation. As she talked, I studied the grass at my feet. The top of each blade was ragged and brown from dull mower blades. Mixed in with the various types of grass were weeds, dead leaves, and bugs. A Wendy's cup lay near us.

Looking at creation that close wasn't pretty, not nearly as impressive as what I could see in the distance. I suddenly understood how the difference between creation-from-a-distance and creation-close-up was a picture of the difference in daily life versus the big picture of our destiny. When we look at the panorama of our lives, the Spirit-led walk, the promises and vision God has set before us, we see it in all its beauty. We don't see the imperfections, the days we missed it, lost our temper, or bought a pen that didn't write. Unfortunately, day-to-day life in a fallen world comes with weeds and trash.

A few years ago, my husband Terry was bemoaning how much the grass would have taken over by the time he got back from his trip to New York. We had recently moved out to the country, providing us with five acres of grass that never stopped growing.

Until that point I had never mowed a blade of grass, but in an effort to surprise Terry I donned my swimsuit and shorts, got Chris to start the push mower for me, and set off. While Chris used the riding mower, I worked around the small log cabin where the ground was fairly level, then, growing bolder, tackled some taller grass. It wasn't easy. I discovered that most of the yard was littered with sticks, rocks,

leaves, and dirt patches that had to be cleared from my path, yet I had to continually hold up a bar on the mower or it would stop. I learned that it is possible to mow tall grass if you take it slow, otherwise the mower would choke and quit. I wondered if it would damage the mower by repeatedly running out of gas, since my preferred method went like this: run out, put some in, run out, put more in. Mowing around the shed I was nervous and kept a close watch as we'd seen snakes there before. The hillside above the pond was hard work, and sometimes I felt like my arms were being ripped off. As I mowed the hill above the pond I thought how if I saw a snake I would let go of the mower and run, and the mower would coast right down into the pond. That might take away from Terry's pleasure in the surprise.

I discovered it was easier to mow the hillside horizontally except when it was steep, then to let the mower down and pull it up instead of trying to push it up above me. Anything was fair game. Piles of leaves, sticks, rocks, I'd try anything. Moreover, I discovered that mowing is instant gratification, you can see immediate improvement. I decided I liked this form of torture. It burned calories, built up muscle, got me a tan, and the yard looked wonderful. Chris and I mowed for three days straight, crawling into bed at night tired and sore.

As I mowed, I thought about how we were maintaining our small kingdom, our bit of the earth. We were beginning to see that it was going to take a lot of work, as there was quite a bit we wanted to change. Get rid of the rabbit hutch and the clothesline. Move some small trees out from under the power lines and cut down some dead ones. Put gravel on the drive, and then figure out how to keep it there instead of washing over into the neighbor's horse pasture. Weed the flowerbeds, figure out how to stop the leak in the pond, and wait on the Narcissus to die out so we could mow down the tall grass growing in with them. It was a never-ending job. However, because it belonged to us, we were motivated to work at it, slowly bringing it into the place where it required minimal care and was designed the way we wanted it.

In the same way, our life is our kingdom, our bit of creation that we're allowing God to work into His plan and destiny. However, it needs maintaining daily. It's often too easy to let life take over, bringing with it trash and weeds, but if we're diligent we can bring our daily lives into a beautiful picture of creation.

We must learn to identify the things that will bring ugliness into our life and then remove it. When we see weeds of waiting in long lines at Wal-Mart causing

frustration and impatience, we need to recognize them and pull them up. When the bugs of road-rage begin to crawl in, we need to squash them as quickly as they come. Sometimes the mower of life has dull blades, and whacks off our beautiful lawn, and we have to wait until the grass grows out again before we can see past the pain and ugliness in our life.

The more we allow the weeds and trash in, the harder it will be to see God moving and working in our life. They aren't a part of what God wants for us, it just comes with the territory of a fallen world, and as Christians we don't have to let it get to us. Through Holy Spirit we have been given supernatural resources to deal with these things. God's weed killer, bug spray, pruning shears, and trash compactor. Put them to use! When fear or heartache mow down your grass, stand in God's strength against it. When the ugly trash of frustration falls into your yard, pick it up and throw it away. When weeds of discontentment began putting down roots, pull them up. And when the bugs of stress start biting, swat them.

Like the big picture, our daily life can look beautiful, but it's a matter of choice. It's not so much the big choices that make or break us but the hundreds of daily choices that we make. Watch for the weeds, bugs, and trash of daily life that work their way into our kingdom. When life's mower comes by realize that, through God, your beautiful blades of grass will eventually grow out again. And as you weed, spray for bugs, pick up trash, and design your life to be beautiful, don't forget to keep your eyes on the big picture, seeing in God's creation the beauty of your life.