



Growing in a World of Weeds

Genesis 28:10-19a | Psalm 139:1-11,23-24 | Romans 8:12-25 | Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

"the Holy Spirit you received made you God's adopted child. By the Spirit's power we call God Abba. Abba means 'Father'. The Spirit himself joins with our spirits. Together they tell us that we are God's children." Romans 8:15b-16

Slide 1 Last week we more-or-less walked away in the middle of Jesus sermon on describing the Kingdom of God. So, we need to imagine Jesus still sitting by the lakeside, as a large crowd listened to him teach.

Like last week, Jesus is talking about the great harvest – but in today's story, he asks us to imagine a farmer who has sent his workers into a field to sow wheat seed. That evening, an enemy comes and sows weed-seed. As the crop began to grow, the workers quickly discerned the crop had been permeated by weeds. In horror, they urged the farmer to allow them to pull up all the weeds, removing them from the crop.

But the farmer startled them when he said, "No!" (13:30)

Now, unlike Jesus original listeners, it can be hard for us to understand Jesus rationale – surely it would always be better to remove the weeds, for otherwise they will steal all the nutrients from the soil from the wheat.

But Jesus' original hearers had a little more understanding of what went on in farming circles than we do.

In Jesus' day, sowing weeds in a neighbour's field was a common way people had of getting even with each other. Instead of parking on the neighbour's lawn or intentionally putting your rubbish in their bin instead of yours, they'd throw weed seeds into their neighbour's crop. Apparently, this got so out of hand that the Roman government actually passed a law against it.

Slide 2 | When Jesus spoke of seed thrown amongst wheat, his hearers immediately would have known that he was referring to rye grass, known as bearded darnel. In the picture you can see they are enormously similar. In fact, in the early stages of growth, while they're both green, it was near impossible to tell the difference. You can't really differentiate between the two until the heads of grain formed. However, by then, it was too late, because the roots would be interwoven with the wheat.

Now we understand why Jesus did not want the workers pulling out the weed, **"you'll uproot the wheat if you do."** (v29)

Now, darnel weed, if consumed, is poisonous. The symptoms were dizziness, slurred speech, convulsions, vomiting and diarrhoea. It was bad stuff. The seed was dangerous – kind of a bit like the seed of sin.

Thankfully, Jesus identifies what the weeds represent, **“the weeds are the people who belong to the evil one.”** (v38)

So, Jesus instructs the workers to **“let the wheat and the weeds both grow together until harvest.”** (v30)

So, what is Jesus trying to teach us?

I believe there is a two-fold lesson, depending upon where you are in your discipleship journey.

Slide 3 | Point 1 | Every disciple of Christ grows in a world surrounded by weeds.

As we all know, we are in the middle of a series about how the disciple of Christ grows to maturity.

In last week’s parable we focussed on the beginning of the discipleship journey: from spiritual death to new-birth, and we identified characteristics of the spiritual infant.

Today, however, we will recognise that as soon as spiritual children enter their discipleship journey, they are surrounded by a hostile environment, weedy people are all around them.

If you will remember, the reason Jesus did not want his workers to pull out the weeds was because, while the wheat was still in its infancy both the young wheat and the young weed looks extremely similar.

In the same way spiritual children have many characteristics of children of the world – or immature unbelievers.

Spiritual children operate in a very similar fashion to how the world operates: they are primarily self-centred, focussed on their own needs and wants being met, with little regard for others. As Paul described last week, they are driven by the ‘mind of the flesh’, their *modem operando* is - ‘I got to look out for number 1’.

I have provided more information on some of the characteristics of the spiritual child at the end of this message, however, suffice to say, young wheat and young darnel look very similar. Sometimes, it is difficult to see the difference.

Slide 4 | If you are a spiritual CHILD you’ll read this parable and understand it to be primarily focussed on how to keep growing in a world filled with weedy people. Your childlike maturity keeps you focussed on your own spiritual growth.

What the spiritual child needs is for a mature disciple, a spiritual parent, to walk alongside with them teaching them how to move their focus from being self-centred to becoming harvest focussed.

Remember, just a few chapters earlier, as Jesus looked out at the crowds, he remarked to his disciples, **“The harvest is huge. But there are only a few workers. So, ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers out into his harvest field.”** (Matthew 9:35-38)

Slide 5 | If you are ready to grow beyond spiritual childhood, towards YOUNG ADULTHOOD, you’ll begin to hear the call of the Lord of the Harvest, urging you to **“wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest ...”** (from John 4:34-38, and Luke 10:2). The Lord of the Harvest, Jesus, is seeking workers who will go into this weed infested field – to assist him in his work of scattering seed.

Slide 6 | Point 2 | The Lord of the Harvest is looking for workers. But, the workers must not attempt to judge between the wheat and the weeds themselves

One of the strongest assertions made in this parable is the warning of the farmer NOT to attempt to uproot the weeds.

How easy is it for us to make judgements, based entirely on external appearances, about all the weeds that grow nearby? Remember, this parable is not talking about fellow disciples of Christ who are different from us. The weeds, Jesus identified, are people who belonged to the Kingdom of darkness – unbelievers (13:38).

But, we seem to find it very easy to put people into categories: especially about their openness to hear the good news about Jesus. We say 'Oh! that person is quite likely to receive Jesus message', OR 'that one might, with a little friendship, accept an invitation' OR 'never in a million years will that person respond to Jesus.'

But, that is the very opposite of what Jesus is saying. Jesus is calling us to live amongst our weedy neighbours, with their weedy lawns, loving them and constantly speaking the message of the Gospel alongside them.

Remember Jesus words just a few chapters earlier:

"Love your enemies. Pray for those who hurt you. Then you will be children of your Father who is in heaven. He causes his sun to shine on evil people and good people. He sends rain on those who do right and those who don't. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Even the tax collectors do that. If you greet only your own people, what more are you doing than others? Even people who are ungodly do that. So be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-45)

Yes, it is a tall ask of Jesus to 'be perfect.' But, there is certainly an inference for every disciple of Christ to grow to maturity – and the mark of maturity is loving our enemies with the Father's love.

That's why, Jesus explains, we are called to **"shine like the sun in their Father's kingdom."** (13:43)

Why did Jesus call the Kingdom of God, 'my Father's kingdom' (13:43, 26:29).

To understand why Jesus described the kingdom in this way, we need to step back into Paul's letter to the believers at Rome.

Point 3 | In the heart of the child of God grows one central root: knowing the Father's love

Do you remember we read about Jacob's incredible dream, in which he saw a stairway to heaven? Jacob left the place with the resolve 'the Lord will be my God'. (Genesis 28:21)

Yet, God was a long way away – he was far above in heaven - unapproachable.

Even after the nation of Israel formed a covenant relationship with God it operated from a standpoint of separateness. God was so holy, so perfect, that only the High Priest could approach him and only once a year under the covering of the blood of innocent animals.

Then, this man Jesus comes on the scene and begins to call their holy, unapproachable God – Father.

No wonder the teachers of the Old Testament, balked at the intimate way in which Jesus addressed God (see John 5:16-23, 8:31-59).

As a Pharisee, Paul understood how remarkable it was that Jesus taught his disciples to call God, 'our Father'.

That's why he writes in verse 15, **"the Holy Spirit you received made you God's adopted child. By the Spirit's power we call God Abba. Abba means Father. ¹⁶ The Spirit himself joins with our spirits. Together they tell us that we are God's children."**

When we received the Holy Spirit at our birth, we are empowered to call God, 'Abba Father'.

Those who read these words in their original language immediately notice that this way of addressing God is the same as what Jesus uttered in his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. One theologian writes, “*Abba* was an everyday word, a homely family-word. No Jew would have dared address God in this manner. Jesus did it always, in all his prayers which are handed down to us.”¹

He also reminds us when Jesus encourages his disciples to address God as “our Father”, he empowers them to speak to their heavenly father literally as the small child speaks to his father, in the same confident and childlike manner.’

Just as it is with natural children, the most foundational truth that every child of God needs to know in order to thrive, is that their heavenly Father loves them, accepts them, and that His foremost desire is to form a deep and enduring love relationship with them.

Yet, this deep, enduring relationship, is only made possible, because our hearts have been empowered by the Spirit of God. That is why, Paul points out ‘**it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.**’

With this message, I have listed a number of discipleship courses, which are designed to walk with you through the process from spiritual infancy to childhood. (More courses will be listed in the coming weeks, which help you progress from childhood to young adulthood) Almost all of them include pondering on the truth that we are to be rooted and grounded in the Father’s love. (Read the opening portion of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians and you’ll discover the importance of this truth).

Application | ... So, let’s sum up.

We’ve learnt that if we are spiritual children our prime focus will be our own spiritual growth as we live in a world teeming with unbelieving weeds. As we grow in this environment, we follow Jesus’ advice to love our neighbourly weeds, resisting the temptation to categorise them, nor doubt God’s ability to do a work of transformation in their hearts.

If, however, if we are sensitive to the call of Jesus, we will power on towards spiritual teenagehood.

Spiritual YOUNG ADULTs have ears that respond to Jesus’ call to become a worker in his harvest field. As workers we assist the farmer in scattering of the message of the Kingdom in the world.

Lastly, we recognise the enormous privilege enjoyed by every disciple of Christ - calling God – ‘our Father’. Our spiritual growth from childhood to maturity depends on us allowing this important spiritual truth to grow deeply in our heart.

¹John Stott quotes Joachim Jeremias’ in *The Bible Speaks Today, The Message of Romans*, p233.) The only exception to Jesus habit of addressing God as Father was his cry from the cross recorded in Matthew 6:9, Luke 11:2.



Some Recommended (free) Discipleship Courses

Primarily designed to assist with growth from Spiritual Infancy to Spiritual childhood

First Steps: Beginning the Disciple's Journey

By Brandon Guindon and Jim Putman | Self-Paced Paper Workbook: Six weeks

Description: This is designed for new believers who are beginning their journey to learn what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. This is a six week self-paced workbook course. The course commences with understanding the Gospel message to what it means to be part of the mission of Christ in the world.

Course may be downloaded from: <http://jimputman.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/First-Steps-Final.pdf>

Deeper Walk International: Heart Focused Discipleship Course

By Video and Workbook Course: 8 Weeks

This is an online course in which you watch an episode (approximately 40 minutes long) and then answer questions in a workbook.

Description: Course One of the Deeper Walk Institute explains the foundations of heart-focused discipleship. This is core discipleship material that every Christian needs to understand. You will learn how heart-focused discipleship is different than traditional discipleship and four core issues that can help you get unstuck and get moving in your walk with God. You may watch the videos and download the workbook from here: <https://deeperwalkinternational.org/course-1-heart-focused-discipleship/>

Learning from Jesus: A Spiritual Formation Guide

By Lynda G Graybeal and Julia Roller | Book for Individuals and groups

This study guide has been created to help each of us enter into the story of the Bible so as to see our own story, our own journey in the great cosmic drama of divine-human relationship. May we choose to surrender freely to this river of life, receiving and helping others to receive this Life, this Zoë, as our own. (Forward by Richard J. Foster). This book is available as a PDF for you to read at your own pace. Please see the Southlakes Church office for this guide and it can be emailed to you.

The following resource assists the disciple to move from childhood to young adulthood:

Kingdom Disciples: 8 Keys to Life Transforming Discipleship

By Tony Braun | Book with reflection questions

The purpose of this book is to produce unreasonable, unorganized, uncompromising, focused spiritual people who will carry out the desire of the Christ to reach a lost and dying world. It is written for a variety of people: people who don't know how to be spiritual, people who are tired of religion, and people who are tired of trying to live a Christian life devoid of power. It is written for church leaders, lay or otherwise, who are tired of having zero converts, zero baptisms and zero impact on their communities, year after year! This book is a working textbook so you will have a clear plan on how to be a disciple and how to make Kingdom disciples that truly function as disciples of the great commission. Each person who works through these teachings will know how to walk with the Lord, see others come to Christ, and know how to equip the new disciples to reproduce their lives to do the same. The book teaches you how to live within the Kingdom of God. A PDF version of this book is available for you to read at your own pace. Please contact the Southlakes Church office and the book can be emailed to you.

STAGE 3: CHILD

Again, be careful not to mistake Bible knowledge alone, years of attendance, physical age, or appearance for spiritual maturity. Some spiritually immature people have been in church 60 years or more, and some spiritually mature disciples have been Christians for only a few years.

Spiritual infants typically see Christianity on the basis of "It's just me and Jesus"; while a spiritual child will have at least made a basic connection to the spiritual family. All spiritual children have these characteristics in common.

Self-Centeredness: Children tend to interpret everything from the perspective of "me". Spiritual children are often more concerned about their needs than the needs of others.

Idealism: Children tend to be black and white in their thinking, as well as naive. They might think disciples can only listen to Christian music, or read nothing except the Bible. When they apply their idealism to how other Christians should live, it can be disappointing and legalistic.

Over/Under Confidence: Spiritual children tend to move back and forth on a confidence continuum. Overconfidence manifests as pride. Underconfidence can become self-loathing and defeat. Without intentional guidance from a more mature disciple, spiritual children may swing back and forth.



When someone is a spiritual child, their words and their actions reveal it. Here are some of the typical things you might hear a spiritual child say:

- Don't branch my group into two groups! It is comfortable for me the way it is.
- This church is getting too big - who are all these new people coming in?
- I didn't like the worship music today, why can't they just play.....
- I am not being fed at my church; I'm going to go to a church that meets my needs.
- The Pastor walked right by me today without even saying hello.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12, Paul speaks of treating the readers as his own "children". In 1 Timothy 1:1-2 he refers to Timothy as his "son". And in Philemon 1:8-11 He makes an appeal for Philemon, calling him his "own son". These verses make it clear that Paul was a disciple-maker who intentionally invested in people who were less spiritually mature.

Here are some of the spiritual needs of a child:

- A relational connection to a church family
- Help to start feeding themselves spiritually
- Teaching about who they are in Christ and how to have a relationship with Him
- Modeling of how to be in relationship with other believers