

1 Pet 3:8-12 – Are you watering flowers or weeds?

Greek Audio: 1:31 to 2:31

[Slide 1] Early in September I was down in Asheville, NC experiencing something called a Personal Spiritual Retreat at a place called The Cove. It was personal because it was between me and God and totally self-guided. My goal was to hear from God in a beautiful and peaceful place in nature as I neared returning from my Sabbatical. Each morning, before sunrise, I would take my place on a deck overlooking a spectacular view [Slide 2] and wait for the majestic revelation of God. It was a time of wonder, gratefulness, beauty and quiet... well, mostly. As I was in a deep moment with God, there was this group off to the side talking rather loudly (seemed so in a quiet setting anyway). I could not focus and I was contemplating leaving altogether. That is when I heard something that really penetrated my heart. It is actually the only thing I can remember that was said from this group and it has stuck with me ever since. These words hit my ears: Water the flowers and not the weeds. [Slide 3] I believe God wanted to prepare me for a change as I returned to Wintonbury so He allowed me to hear this. What are the odds of me being at that place at that time to hear these words? My initial reaction started with an 'Are you kidding me' attitude and wanting my peace and quiet. God was saying, Dave, this group is not your enemy! I didn't own that deck and I wasn't thinking of that group very favorably. God gave me a gift to change my attitude and think about the things I could do to spend time watering the flowers (it's about Him) instead of wasting my time watering weeds (focusing on my agenda).

Would you please stand with me as we read today's passage from 1 Pet 3:8-12 together? [Slide 4] V8 Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. V9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. V10 For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. V11 They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. V12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." **You may be seated.**

We are taking a look at a section from 1 Peter, a letter written by one of the apostles, Peter. We know this from the first verse of the letter which is a typical place to find the author. It says: Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. There are other indicators in the letter that support this authorship as well. However, there are some objections to his authorship, but not enough to attribute someone different than what the early church believed.

Peter begins with the word "finally" to close out the end of a section of thought and not the end of the letter because that doesn't happen until chapter 5.

This first verse seems really interesting to me because there are specific words in it that have only one occurrence in the New Testament and we know what that is called, right? Hapax legomena [Slide 5]. I remember hearing that for the first time years ago from Rich. Four of the five words I will be talking about fit this description. What does it mean to be **like-minded**? Maybe the best way to think of it is being harmonious like my twins, Isaac and Silas. When they were little, they had a baby gate protecting us from their free ranging and one of them could not get that thing open. However, two of them were united in purpose, they had the same mind to figure out that each could do something different, working together and achieve the same result which was to break out. As I watched them, they didn't even have to say anything to each other. They worked in harmony and unlocked that gate. To the Christian, unity is essential.

Peter also says we should be **sympathetic**. (hapax) This is a readiness to enter into and share the feelings of others... to unite alike in sorrow and joy. As a good many of you know by now, my dad died recently and the sympathy this verse speaks of is what you lived out. Sometimes I cried and you cried with me. I needed a hug and you gave it to me. My sorrow became your sorrow. Rom 12:15 says to rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn.

Another way we are to conduct ourselves is to **love one another**. (hapax) I really appreciated what Rich had to share at Grace Collies memorial service last Sunday on love. I **loved** it so much that I am unapologetically borrowing what he said. He shared about 4 types of love. One is Stirgo, which is not found in the NT and means that we belong together like a family or a cat with her kittens. Eros, which is the romantic, feeling, and erotic love. Agape is the unconditional and willful love... NOT because of, when you, or if you do. Philos, from our passage today is friendship love or brotherly love that says I like you. This is the kind of special love that unites us. There is also that city of brotherly love, Dallas Texas. I know.. Philadelphia.

In addition to these things, we need to be **compassionate**, and this is interesting. It is compassionate tenderness or tenderhearted, or kindhearted. Literally it is "having healthy bowels." Not that you would go up to someone today and say: I really appreciate your bowels in action. It's NOT that. The insides were considered that place, that heart of where these deepest emotions and intention comes from. You get a sense of what this means from Eph 4:32. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

Lastly, when you are **humble** (hapax), you consider other's needs before your own. Phil 2:3-4 "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." Humility continues through 1 Pet 5:5-6 "All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time."

The active attitudes of Christian conduct of being like-minded, sympathetic, love, compassion and humility, must be present in the community of the saints. This is watering the flowers! We represent the harmony of 1 Cor 12:26-27 which says “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” We are NOT the same and the beauty of that is when the different gifting comes together, it is extraordinary to see that oneness and harmony in action!

Let’s just pause here for a minute. Who do you know that lives this way? Thank God for that person out loud. God, thank you for _____

[Slide 6] My First Point: You water the flowers with godly conduct.

V9 says “Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.” We see a similar passage on how Christians should conduct themselves from 1 Thes 5:15. “See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.” What’s this really mean to us? Here are three different levels according to [Slide 7] Warren Wiersbe:

1. We can return evil for good – satanic level
2. We can return good for good and evil for evil – human level
3. We can return good for evil – divine level (spoiler alert, this is the right way to live)

[Slide 8] Evil is “Any act or event that is contrary to the good and holy purposes of God.” Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms. Insult or Slander is Abusive words falsely spoken that damage a person’s reputation.

Logos

Let’s be honest, when someone says something evil to you or insults you, what is your reaction? How dare you! You no good rotten bleep bleep. I’ll show you what an insult is. We can be on the receiving end, but let’s not stop there. Have you been on the other side where you have handed out a doozy? Chew on this one so-and-so. Sometimes you want to do the evil thing, don’t you? Like recently. Our dishwasher broke down and it isn’t even two years old. I registered a ticket and then another and then was on the phone with the service company, and then they didn’t like my proof of purchase, and then I had to get Costco involved, and then they didn’t like what Costco provided, and then one month went by, and then they came out and said the error message on the dishwasher was misleading, and then they didn’t have the right part, and then they ordered the part, and then when they ordered the part, it was broken. I felt like saying something not good or holy, but no evil thing was said.

You see, the Christ-follower lives differently. The Christ-follower has the supernatural activity of the Holy Spirit living in them in a transformational way.

Matt 5:11-12 says “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Earlier in 1 Peter 2:23 the response Jesus gave to evil was this: “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.” In the gospel of Matt 5:44-45a God’s word says: “But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” Sometimes the Spirit leads you to respond and sometimes the Spirit leads you to not respond. How are you supposed to know what to do? You must be sensitive to the Holy Spirit to hear, be obedient, do. Every situation is **not** the same and your response will **not** always be the same.

There is a blessing in the future that followers of Jesus will inherit. We don’t have to do anything for this inheritance as the blessing of eternal life is not earned. 1 Pet 1:4 says “and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you.” I’ve been thinking of things this way. Is there anything that I would want to withhold from someone after God has shown mercy to me and extended great kindness to me? For the sake of eternity, as a follower of Christ, I am transformed to be different. I am forgiven and I must forgive. Someone does something evil and insults me, I must bless. What I have received from God, I will give back to you. Think about what is at stake. Do you really want, wish, desire, for that person that has hurt you to go to hell? Eternally punishment? Really? For the sake of eternity, bless. The Father’s got you covered!

Peter shows us that Christians are called to live in a holy way. We are called out of darkness; called to suffer for doing good, called to inherit a blessing, and called to God’s eternal glory.

[Slide 9] My Second Point: You water the flowers when you return blessing for evil.

I think that verse 8 serves as a roadmap to live out v9. However, we put up roadblocks between the two verses. What is preventing us from getting where God wants us to be? I picked up this hiking map (show the congregation) at The Cove. If you are a good map reader, this stuff is priceless? It’s fascinating that, with my GPS it takes too long to tell me which direction I am actually facing. Anyway, with my map of all the trails, I entered a trail with a warning about black bears [SLIDE 10]. I was thinking to myself that I didn’t particularly want to meet a black bear... uh ever. This warning sign made it seem like there were bears everywhere and I would certainly be attacked and lose a couple of limbs or something. So, it became a focus of my attention and I am making a lot of noise like that scene from a movie called the Parent Trap. It’s the one where the twins are “having fun” with their father’s fiancé. They tell her that when you bang two sticks together, you’ll be safe from the bears. So, I admit, I was starting to completely miss the purpose of why I am out on the trails: talk to God and hear from Him. My fear was preventing me from fulfilling that purpose until I came across this

[SLIDE 11]. Let's read it together. "Do not fear for I am with you. Do not be dismayed for I am thy God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." After I saw that, I laughed and said "Isn't that like You, Lord." The fear dissipated and for the entire time I was there, I didn't see a bear.

What is your fear? What prevents you from returning evil with a blessing? Is it what you anticipate the response to be? Are you afraid the offending party won't give you what you are demanding, like an apology? Are you afraid that your retribution and rightness won't ever be delivered and so you have lost? Are you afraid that God won't make things right?

[Slide 12] My Third Point: You water the flowers when God becomes greater than your fears.

The table has been set in these first two verses for Peter to reference a Psalm for support, the next three verses, and particularly using Psalm 34:12-16. It's not the first time Peter references the Psalm in this letter. Earlier in the letter, chapter 2:3, he references Ps 34:8 "now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."

V10 says that For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech." That tongue! James 3:6 says "The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell." We must ask the Spirit to help us control the tongue. How many times have you wished you could take back something you said? 1 Pet 2:1 "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind." Get rid of this in your life. You must ask God for help. You may be experiencing very difficult life circumstances and you feel you can't help it. God wants us to be content and have joy in our life regardless of the circumstances. One way would be to follow 1 Thes 5:16-18 which says "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." What awaits you is eternal life and it is worthy to endure now because what is ahead is far greater. You can live a life that has a taste of the Kingdom!

V11 "They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it." This again is an action. The follower of Jesus actively does good work and not evil, does not entertain evil, does not welcome evil in any way. Pursue peace in purposeful action.

I received a text recently. It wasn't something I wanted to receive. There were things that were said to me.. you know, those things. It was like a punch to the gut. Dave, you're a fake. You're a fraud. You say something, but you don't mean it. When you are hurt, there is a kind of natural defense you want to put up. Have you ever wanted to fight back when you've been hurt? Have you wanted to explain your side? That's not what I meant! I didn't say that! You know the first thought that actually came to my mind? How can I seek peace in this? God, what is my part in this to cause such an offense? God moved me to turn from evil and do good. I asked forgiveness and prayed for a miracle. I was sorry for the offense I did not see and hurt I

caused because it mattered to the other person and I needed to enter into their pain. It mattered to them. I thought I was watering flowers, but I was actually watering weeds and I couldn't see that.

[Slide 13] My Fourth Point: You water the flowers when you pursue peace with great fervor.

Our last verse, 12, says "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." What are the righteous? The Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms says it to be "God's right and just character, actions, and judgments... believers are to imitate God and thereby become righteous in life just as God is righteous." God **cares** for His own and **hears** our prayers. It is a good thing to be on this side of God. Rom 8:31 says "If God is for us, who can be against us?" For those who do evil, stop doing evil, run away from evil, and immediately run to God. He loves you and wants you in a right relationship with Him. The good news is that it is not too late. He will forgive you when you ask Him too. God is not your enemy.

Just a little over a month ago, I believe that God revealed to me that there were times that while I thought I was watering the flowers, I was actually watering the weeds. He did this to prepare me for my return and to already begin to put into practice what I have shared with you today.

[Slide 14] My Final Point: You water the flowers in the way you bless
and when you water the weeds you make a mess.

If you would like someone to pray with you, come up front and we would love to do that together.

The Lord bless you, and keep you; The Lord make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.' – Num 6:24-26

Have the best day ever!

[Slide 15]