

**Series: Making Life Work in a Screwed Up World**

**September 25, 2011**

**WEEDY FIELDS ▪ CRUMBLING WALLS ▪ WASTED CHANCES**

**Proverbs 24:30-34**

Speaker: Ken Davis

1. There is a force at work right this very moment in me, in my home, in my children—in everything I own—that makes me sad. It's not immediately obvious—but over time, you see it all around you—and feel it in your bones. We **fight** it—**hide** it—and we're tempted to spend obscene amounts of money on it. Sometimes you can stop it—or at least slow it down; but it's sneaky! And in some cases, you just have to admit—***I can't win! I'm fighting a losing battle!*** And I know that it will, in fact, it will ultimately steal everything I own and take my life. Look at these pictures and see if you can guess what it is.

**\*Old broken-down house, car, barn, ship, vineyard, wall,  
\*It's at work here at The Olive Branch  
\*And it's at work in me.**

**Lori said,** "This is us in 30 years!"

**[video]**

-Depressing, isn't it? And it has affected the entire universe. It's called...**entropy**. Now, I've read enough to know that **entropy** is a complicated concept from the field of physics—which means it takes people **way** smarter than me to describe it. The **simplest** definition is this: ***Everything has a tendency to deteriorate; to move from ORDER to DIS-ORDER.*** The longer you let something go, neglect something--the more difficult and expensive it is to get it moving in the right direction again.

-In 900 B.C., when a lot of the Proverbs were written, they didn't **use** the word, **entropy**—but they knew about it. See, they were bright people—and the tendency things have to deteriorate if left to themselves—is the most **obvious** fact on the planet. And that's what the wisdom of Proverbs addresses when it says:

**I went past the field of a sluggard, past the vineyard of someone who has no sense; thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins. I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—and poverty will come on you like a thief and scarcity like an armed man. (Proverbs 24:30-34 NIV)**

-Now, I know that some of you are probably thinking, "Wait a minute, Ken—we talked about this a few weeks ago! What is this--re-runs?" And I did talk about our work—and how laziness is one of the many issues that. Today, however, I want to take that principle into some other areas—and I'll tell you why. In this part of Canada, people

give a **lot** of time and attention to their work. But their **souls**? Their relational world? **Serving?** Hmm. That's another issue.

-And that's really the point, isn't it? That it's possible to have one area of your life doing **very** well, thank you--when another is disintegrating. As Jesus said, it's possible to **gain the world and lose your soul**. It happens all the time.

2. In our world—we don't think about fields and vineyards all that much. But in **that** world, you would be **very** fortunate to own a field or a vineyard; food and wine sustained life. To just let it disintegrate, let the walls crumble—in essence give it over to the weeds and predators—was unthinkable. And the writer, here, is pretty blunt. He says, "Someone who would do this is a **sluggard**; he has **no sense!**"

-The question you could ask is, "Why the weeds and broken down walls? Was there a drought? A catastrophe? Some sort of disaster?" No. It was sheer negligence on the part of the owner. He didn't realize what he had—and he just let it slip through his fingers. He was throwing away the opportunity of a lifetime. **A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest.**

-Entropy happens out of neglect—and it happens in the areas of our lives where we feel **least** motivated to change.

- a. The theory we live by in these tough areas could be stated like this: **Someday, somehow, my life will improve. Some day I will drift into more satisfying circumstances. Someday I will become what I want.** And this can relate to a whole variety of arenas:

\*Someday I'll feel like doing something with my life..

\*Someday, friends will naturally come my way

\*Someday I'll stop wasting so much time watching TV, playing with my I-phone and partying

\*Someday the perfect spouse will walk into my life

\*Someday my marriage will get better

\*Someday my kids will stop getting into trouble

\*Someday I'll stop craving another drink..

\*Sometimes my bad habits will stop

\*Someday I'll start wanting to make a difference with my life and become what I was created to become

\*Someday I'll feel like getting serious about my faith in Jesus. **Someday!**  
(Making Life Work, Hybels)

- b. Question: **Has anyone here ever seen this happen?** You know—where people **drift** into doing the right thing, developing their gifts, honing their talents? Where whole areas of our lives just **drift** toward health and wholeness and integrity? I've **never** seen that happen! Entropy is what happens naturally.

-Max DuPree—former CEO of a Fortune 500 company and author on leadership was once interviewed and asked, "Mr. DuPree. What's **the** most difficult thing that you personally have to work on?" He answered, "The **interception of entropy.**"

-Does everyone understand what it means to **intercept** something? If a pass gets intercepted in football—it means that someone from the opposing team goes to a **lot** of trouble to watch where the football is going—jump in front of the person it's directed toward—catch it—and take it in the opposite direction. Intercepting something in your life that is going in the wrong direction will **not** happen while you sit in the bleachers, eat cheese nachos, and drink beer. Intercepting is tough work!

- c. And you have to intercept it—because, remember **everything**—if just left to itself—begins to deteriorate. A number of years ago, our family had a metallic red Mercury Sable—which was so beautiful when we bought it, I felt guilty owning it. Ten years later we called it **Shortcake**—and entropy had taken its toll; it had rust holes, made strange noises. One day I was in a parking lot when a Rolls Royce pulled in next to me. Guess what I saw! **Rust! A rusted Rolls Royce!** I thought, **Yes!** Entropy is the great equalizer of cars.

-And entropy is the great equalizer of bodies. You see some guy with 6 pack abs. Don't worry--just wait! Some day it will be a keg!

- d. Here's what I find interesting; we're pretty diligent in noticing entropy when it comes to our cars and our stuff. We may not **do** anything—but we at least notice it. And most of us are pretty diligent on our appearance. We **notice** hair growing where it shouldn't—and wrinkles and lines and dimples—and we grieve! Spackle! Patch! Entropy is a **lot** more subtle in other places. Max DuPree made a list of the signs that entropy is advancing. Let me read a few:
- \*A tendency towards superficiality
  - \*Unresolved tensions in key relationships
  - \*We no longer have time for celebration and ritual
  - \*People begin to confuse heroes and celebrities
  - \*There is a loss of gratitude
  - \*There's this vague, chronic sense of guilt.
- e. A deteriorating car still gets you home. A little moving from order to disorder in homes is natural. When furniture experiences entropy—they call it **patina**—label it an antique—and charge more. But entropy can permanently damage friendships and destroy marriages. Inattentiveness in loving your family can alienate them— and sloppiness can bankrupt you if it gets into your finances— or kill you if it's your health.

3. Why don't we deal with this stuff? Well, sometimes we don't want to take the time and energy to see what's going on. Sometimes, as the book of Proverbs points out, we make excuses. Remember some of the sayings? "There's a **lion** out there! I could get killed!" Or the lazy person who turns back and forth on his bed like a door on a rusty hinge—or takes a handful of nacho chips from the bowl—but is too lazy to bring them to his mouth? **Really** funny stuff!

-But when laziness and neglect destroys your means of making a living...just lets a field get choked with weeds or a vineyard fall apart...that's just crazy! When

inattentiveness and stubbornness destroys marriages...when people just let their kids or their finances drift into chaos—that’s just stupid. But when people let neglect affect the eternal side to their lives—let their souls rot from disuse and miss their opportunities to make a difference and live for what matters—that’s **tragic!**

- a. Sometimes people do this because they don’t **like** the **life**—the “vineyard” they’ve been given to tend and care for. It’s easy, isn’t it, to be jealous of others—and just fantasize about having the perfect job, the perfect marriage, a perfect circle of friends. The truth is—we need to start with reality. My reality is—well, what’s been entrusted to me. See, at some point we have to say, “This is **my** life! It’s the only one I’m ever going to have!” The “vineyard fairy” is not going to drop some magic dust on it and change it. If anything is going to ever be different, it’s going to be because I pray—**you** pray, “God please **help** me! What is the next step you want me to take?”
- b. I think neglect is usually related more to procrastination than defiance. People don’t usually say, “Take care of my health? Look after my finances? Love my kids! Serve others? Give back? **Absolutely not!**” We **want** things to be different...tomorrow! Notice the increments of time that have led to the deterioration here in this parable about the messed up field and broken down vineyard. Just a **little**. A **little** slumber; a **little** folding of the hands to rest. And that fits neglect precisely, doesn’t it? “How much longer are you going to neglect your health, your relationships, your marriage...your soul?” Oh, not **long**--just a **little**. Maybe tomorrow! Or next Monday. Soon.

-Years ago there was a story in a California newspaper—probably an urban legend—but it’s about a guy who goes to the house where he grew up. He hadn’t been there in at least 20 years. So, out of nostalgia, he knocks on the door. When someone answers he says, “This is a sentimental trip for me. I used to live here—could I go through the house?” Well, he finds an old jacket of his in a corner of the attic. So, he puts it on—and in one of the pockets is a stub—a receipt from a shoe repair shop! Then he remembers; he took a pair of shoes there to be fixed—and in the confusion of the move 20 years earlier, never picked them up.

-So—on a whim—he goes to the repair shop—and as a prank, hands the receipt to the guy behind the counter and says, “Are my shoes ready yet?” They guy says, “Hang on a second” He goes into the workroom—comes back out and says, “Come back a week from Thursday!”

-And that’s how our minds sometimes work when it comes to things in our lives that **desperately** need our attention. It’s not like we say, “I’m just going to let everything disintegrate—even though it’s valuable and important!” We say, “Come back on Thursday.”

- c. Sometimes we put stuff off because we feel absolutely overwhelmed by life—and we’re **afraid** to dig too deeply. I remember, a number of years ago, when I was in a very busy, demanding season of ministry—and I felt like I wasn’t doing **anything** well. A couple of senior members of my staff sat down with me—and

gave me a reality check on some of the problems we were facing. As the list grew—from about 1 to 10 or more—I wanted to get up and run out of the room. Anyone ever felt like that? Tired. Overwhelmed. Scared. Like Jack Nicholson’s line from **A Few Good Men**, “**You can’t HANDLE the truth!**”

-As hard as it was, facing the truth that day was critical. We thought, talked, prayed, begged God for courage—and developed a plan—and God showed up!

4. My intent today is **not** to raise the bar, make **anyone** feel more scared and guilty than you already do, or give the impression that God sits in Heaven with a scorecard—and expects a perfect performance. What I **do** want to say is that you and I have to pay attention to what really counts so that we don’t lose a part of our lives that we can’t **afford** to lose—don’t **want** to lose. Friends, we have one shot at this life—and what we do with it matters for **eternity**. This is where Proverbs encapsulates wisdom in some strategic ways and helps us keep our eyes on the ball.

- a. Maybe the first thing that would help is to cultivate a receptivity to the wisdom and feedback of others. Anyone know what Proverbs calls someone who is always right, never wrong—and can’t hear or receive the feedback of people who love them? A **fool**. Sometimes there is form of arrogance that wallpapers over neglect and masks the truth we need to see—and totally alienates people who genuinely care. Proverbs says:

**A sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven people who answer discreetly. (Proverbs 26:16 NIV)**

-I’ve run into **Yeah...but...** people all my life—people who have inoculated themselves against wisdom that could transform their lives. Whenever they encounter truth that could keep them off a detour or help them see a critical area of life clearly, their first response is, **Yeah...but...** Then they go on to describe why wisdom applies to other people, but not them. “I’m too **smart** to screw up!”

-On this issue of neglect, the **Yeah...but** might sound like this:

**You know, you’re right—I do have problems. God has to deal with me on a lot of them—but laziness isn’t one of them. In fact, if anything my problem is that I’m TOO busy! I’m running too fast...I’m working too much... I mean, I’m not afraid of the lions—I’m shooting them! My fields and vineyards? Man, I’m making bread and picking grapes. I’m a Type A overachiever!**

-Truth is, I struggle with **selective** entropy—and I’ll bet you do too. In other words, there’s a vineyard in our lives that we don’t like to talk about...or even think about.

\*It could be a minister who is there for **everyone’s** needs, spread all over the community, and leading the church with great passion—but if you ask his **wife** what he’s like? Don’t ask—because the truth might really disillusion you.

\*It could be a Dad whose career is off the charts. He's climbing the ladder, man, and his I-phone is jammed **full** of contacts. But he's totally out of touch with his kids and they're drifting away. That vineyard is a mess

\*It could be a Mom whose day is **jammed** with van time—she's the one with the schedule—she gets all the kids to soccer, dance, tutoring—and going pedal to the metal at work—multi-tasking at **everything**. Problem is—a soul can't be fed on a drive-through at Timmy's.

\*It could be a couple who seems to have **everything**—the house, great life, lots of friends—and plenty of activity—but it's been months since they've had a meaningful conversation—and they're drifting further and further apart.

\*It could be a person who, from outward appearances, has a life that's going up and to the right—but his life is totally about himself. And the gifts God has given him to make a difference, accomplish his **real** mission in life—are like old rusty farm implements in a field—disintegrating out of neglect.

-Don't fool yourself into thinking that because one or two visible areas of your life are all bulked up and buffed up—that makes up for neglect in another area that you keep carefully hidden!

- b. And there's a Proverb that I think speaks directly into this.

**Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds; for riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations. When the hay is removed and new growth appears and the grass from the hills is gathered in, the lambs will provide you with clothing, and the goats with the price of a field. You will have plenty of goats' milk to feed your family and to nourish your female servants. (Proverbs 27:23-27 NIV)**

-Now, this may seem a little blurry in a world like ours that is so far removed from agriculture. Let me explain it as simply and quickly as I can. Picture a farmer in that culture. In the foreground are the fields—the annual crops he grew. Out in the distance would be a flock of sheep and a flock of goats. Sometimes sheep and goats would be taken to distant pastures on the tablelands to graze. For a farmer to check on them—would take valuable time and effort.

-It would be **very** easy to say, "You know what—I've got some weeds growing—and some crows after the corn. The sheep and goats are probably okay. Like, they're up there grazing—hopping around in the fields. I'll check tomorrow." This parable is saying, "Better keep your eye on **everything!** The sheep and goats are the **long term** plan—and will take care of you long after the crops in your field have been harvested. **Know what's going on with the important things that are out of sight! Especially--make sure the long term things in your life are healthy!**

-It's possible to keep your car all clean and shiny, the bathrooms spotless, the clothes pressed and looking cool, the hair trimmed, the computer up-to-date, the paycheck coming—and imagine that the parts we **can't** see are okay. This wisdom here says, "There are things you alone are responsible for—things that

you alone can care for—things no one else can see—things that will take some effort to check on—and you’d better have a handle on them!  
 -In our vernacular—just because a car is shiny doesn’t mean everything’s okay under the hood!

5. There are a lot of other parables that would probably fit into this morning’s topic—but there’s one I want to focus on in closing—because I think it lies at the core of all we’ve said.

**Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.  
 (Proverbs 4:23 NIV)**

-When the Bible talks about the heart, it is talking about the *real* me and the *real* you—beyond the press photos, beyond the degrees and symbols of success, beyond this slowly deteriorating body and hairy face—beyond the pontificating. My heart is the core of my life. It’s more than my mind—but includes it. It’s more than my emotions—but includes them. My heart is the seat of my motives and desires—and it is the place where I make my key decisions. It’s my gyroscope. It’s what keeps me rightside up. If we neglect critical parts of life—know where that starts? In the *heart*—and then it affects other areas. This passage says, “Better guard your heart—because *everything you do* flows out of it.”

- a. The previous church I served in Pennsylvania got its water from a well. Because we were a public institution, we had to have our water regularly tested and certified. One day the water safety inspector tested a sample and said, “Your water’s polluted!” I asked, “How did *that* happen?” He said, “Oh, a rat probably fell into your well and drowned!” The thought of us drinking water from a well that had a dead rat floating in it—200 feet under ground—*thoroughly* grossed me out! So we had to shock the well with bleach—and install a purification system.

-Sometimes, when it comes to our hearts, friends, there’s a *dead rat in the well*. If we don’t guard it, all kinds of stuff can fall into it. Jesus said that *lust* can contaminate our hearts. He told the Pharisees that their hearts had been contaminated by *greed*. Jealousy, hatred, anger, selfishness, unforgiveness and bitterness—all these things can contaminate our hearts like a rat in the well. And when they do—they affect everything that comes out of them.

-Jesus once told a parable about fruitfulness—something we *all* want. He compared it to seeds being planted—and how the quality of soil they fall in has a huge impact on whether they ever produce fruit. Of course, his point was that the seed is the Good News of the Kingdom—and the soil is our hearts. Some soil’s too hard. Some is too shallow. But some is just jammed with weeds. Jesus said:

**The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. (Matthew 13:22 NIV)**

- b. There's not a person I've ever met who would say, "Know what—I don't care if I grow mostly weeds with my life! I honestly don't care if I have dead rats in my well—contaminating everything that comes out of me! Yeah, I know—I've got one life—but who cares!"

-Maybe **some** people don't—but I'll bet **you** do—am I right? My guess is that you want your life to make a difference. You want to grow **good** things—not weeds. You want to bless the world, not contaminate it. You want to thrive financially, relationally, emotionally—and spiritually. When it's time to hand your life back in to the God who gave it to you—and you **must**—you want it to be invested well; for Him to hold you close and say, "Way to go! Good job! I'm **so** pleased with your life!"

-The good news is—that **can** happen—for anyone here. The tough news is—it won't **just** happen because you get emotional and say you want it to. You have to deal with weeds before good stuff can grow—or, as Jesus said—the good stuff will get choked out and all you'll have left is... **weeds!** You need to know where the neglect is—and own it. Where is it? Where is God calling you to ask for His help?

\*Maybe it's in your finances. You're always wanted to be generous—but, at least at this point, you're not. You've neglected this area.

\*Maybe it's your health. Simply put, you've neglected it—and you know it will kill you.

\*Or maybe it's your soul. To be honest—just like the soil in Jesus' story—you've got a stressed out, pre-occupied soul full of thorns and weeds, and that's it.

\*Maybe it's pure neglect of what God wants you to do—and how he wants you to use your life and your gifts. You know God is calling you to serve others—but you've got your hand in His face. "Tomorrow. In a little while. I'll take get around to that when I have more time."

\*It could be that there's an area of defiance or bitterness in your heart—and, truth is, you've got a rat in your well. And it's contaminating everything as it sits in there are rots.

I believe God's promise is that if we will take one step in faith toward Him—just **one**—well, He can do **wonders** with that!

## Q & A

6. On December 29, 1972, Eastern Airlines Flight 401 left JFK Airport in NYC for a routine flight to Miami. Most of the people were returning home from Christmas visits. Fortunately, this flight was as safe as it gets. The weather was clear, the captain was a veteran, and the plane was only 4 months old.

-After an uneventful flight, what none of the passengers knew as they made their final approach to Miami International Airport was that a faulty landing gear indicator light had the attention of the entire flight crew. What the **crew** didn't know was that they were **not** on auto-pilot—as they thought they were.

-The crew's only responsibility that night was getting 163 passengers and 13 crew safely home. Easy enough. But as all three of them messed with a 99 cent bulb that any ten year old could've replaced, they slammed the plane right into the Florida Everglades—killing 101 of the people they had been entrusted with. **[pics]**.

-One record of the disaster says: “[The plane]... *began a descent so gradual it **could not be perceived by the crew.***”

-Auto-pilot in a plane is a **wonderful** invention—but pilots still have to be careful with it. In life? Living on autopilot is **lethal** to whole areas of your life.

-On planes, there is a voice indicator that nags pilots about the danger they're in. I don't like to nag—because I know it doesn't work. Proverbs 21:9 says,

**Better to live alone in a tumbledown shack than share a mansion with a nagging spouse. (Proverbs 21:9 MSG)**

Someone compared nagging to ***being nibbled to death by a duck.***

-But I have been called by God to tell the truth—to urge people to not live on auto-pilot—but to use their lives to make a difference and provide opportunities to do that—then pray like crazy that they will. This morning I've told the truth as best I can—and in the lobby we've showcased some opportunities to engage, pull weeds, serve, and make a difference.

-And now—as I pray--the ball is in your court. It's your vineyard; your life! Don't neglect **any** of it!