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Sin Is Like a Weed

Guest: Alex Kendrick
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Bob: When we face a temptation, there are stages we go through as that temptation turns to sin. All of those stages, according to Alex Kendrick, are leading the same direction—to death.

Alex: If we still stiffen our neck and say, “No, Lord, we want to continue doing this,” Stage Six is death. Over and over in Scripture, I see this—Old Testament / New Testament. It could be form of it, not just physical death. It could be relational death. It could be financial death. Your reputation could be taken away; but that’s what follows when we do not deal with sin. In other words, deal with sin early, uproot it before it grows. See, we can choose to sin; but guys, we cannot choose the consequence or when it comes.

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson, and I’m Bob Lepine. Someone has said, “We need to be killing sin, or it will be killing us.” We’ll hear more about that today from Alex Kendrick. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. Today is weed-whacker day. We’re going to call on all of our listeners to get out their weed whacker and go to work on those things—the Bible says, “Those things that can so easily entangle.”

Ann: Entangle; yes.

Dave: I tell you, Bob. You should see my wife with weed whacker.

Ann: I’m good at that. I like it, too.

Dave: I am not kidding. Our whole neighborhood watches her go out there. She, like, knocks down trees and mailbox posts.

Bob: What is it about the weed whacker that you like?

Dave: She loves it.

Ann: I like those tools. I like to see the before and after.

Bob: Mary Ann is the same way.

Ann: Is she?

Bob: Yes. She—we've got one of those rechargeable weed-whacker things, and she loves to get out and tear it up and loves to be able to look at it and go—

Ann: “Look at what I did.”

Bob: —“I've accomplished something here today.”

Ann: Me too.

Bob: Well, we're going to talk not about cleaning your garden today, but we are going to talk about how you cultivate your life and deal with the weeds that grow up because those weeds / those sins / those patterns / those habit patterns in our lives can so easily entangle us unless we are being proactive.

Dave: Just like a yard, if you don't deal with it quickly—

Ann: And maintain it.

Dave: —and take care of it, that weed can choke out life. I've seen it. Temptation—this is what this day is about—is something that we play with, and it's going to get you.

Bob: So, here is who we are going to hear from today. We're going to hear from a movie star. I mean he really is.

Ann: Yes.

Dave: Yes.

Ann: He is.

Bob: Alex Kendrick is part of the Kendrick brothers' movie team. In fact, they've got a new movie that is coming out in August called *Overcomer*. We saw a preview of it on the *Love Like You Mean It*[®] marriage cruise—

Ann: How does it look?

Bob: —back in February. Oh, it's great. I mean the audience loved the film. In fact, if you want to see the trailer, you can go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com. There is a link to the trailer there; but Alex was onboard the *Love Like You Mean It* marriage cruise with us this year back in February. This was a men's session that he did. It was all about cleaning up the weeds in the garden.

[Recorded Message]

Alex: At my house in Albany, Georgia, we have a large playground that my wife and I built for our kids some nine years ago. Right next to the playground, I built a six and half foot tall wooden fence. On the other side of my fence was my neighbor's regular-sized, chain-link fence. Between those two fences is about four inches. I got along with my neighbor; but about a year / year and a half ago, I noticed that something was growing between the two fences.

As the months went by, I noticed this weed was starting to look like a small tree; right? This is a gnarly looking bush, and it really irritated me. So, I would go out there, trim it back, trim it back. This past summer, when we went to shoot *Overcomer* in Columbus, Georgia, my family basically moved up to Columbus from Albany. When we get back home and I get to the back yard, my wife says, "Alex, what in the world?!" This thing has taken over the fence. When I go around the fence to look between the two fences, I see this thing is now a trunk. I was like—"That's it. I've got to something about this weed."

So, I get a yard guy to come over; right? This guy comes over. So, he starts working on it. He stays out there for hours and hours until he finally finishes. He comes to my door and knocks on the door. I come out to meet him. He says, "It's done." He says, "That's about the hardest thing I've ever done as far as yardwork." It cost me more than I wanted to pay—because I've got to pay him well for this hard work; right? Why did it cost so much? Why was it so hard to dig up? Why was it so ugly? I had allowed it to grow.

In my personal Bible study, I kept coming across a phrase in the Old Testament—it is also found in the New Testament—talking about when sin comes to full bloom or full measure. Then God comes in and does something drastic.

I began to see this pattern where God would say—something that began to spring up in regard to sin, and God would say, "Hey, deal with this. Deal with this, my people Israel"—or even other nations or cities, like the Amorites or Nineveh or Egypt, Edom, Moab. Occasionally, through the Old Testament, God says, "Hey, deal with this." He would give shots across the bow to say, "This needs to be uprooted. This needs to be dealt with." He would send prophet after prophet after prophet as He did with Israel and Judah.

Most of the time, what would they do? They'd let it keep growing; let it keep growing. Then I see this concept that he says several times where when it finally comes to blossom or full fruition / full measure, God brings in His backhoe; and He takes it out completely. It's usually devastating to the people.

I'm going to remind you. In the case of Israel, God led them out of Egypt. When they finally get to the Promised Land—Joshua's bringing them into the Promised Land—and

God says—what? He says, “This is now your land. Go in and annihilate everybody, and you take over.”

There were godless nations there with detestable sins—“I’m giving this land to you.” So, they go, and they start wiping one city out after another. He establishes them, and He says, “I am your God, and you are My people. Do not engage with the godless nations around you and their immorality or idol worship.” He made it very clear numerous times.

Now, eventually, after obeying the Lord / walking with Him for a while, what do the Israelite men do? Start looking over the borders, and they start checking out what their neighbors are doing: “Hey, guys, you—come here. You see what these women are doing over here with their little idol worship and these dances. Hey, come check this out.” At first, they are not engaging; but they are observing. Then these nations start asking them to come participate. At first, they are like—“No, we don’t do that.”

But little by little, the godless nations and their practices start creeping in on Israel and Judah until eventually they are fully engaged with same detestable sins. What does God do? He sees it springing up, and He sends prophet after prophet: “Come back to Me. Uproot this. Come back to Me. I am your God. You are my people. I am the One that blesses you. I am the one that protects you. I am God. There is no other.”

But what do they do? They stiffen their neck, and they allow sin to grow and grow and grow. When it comes to full blossom, what does God do? He sends in His backhoe, and it is devastating.

In Ezekiel 7:5-10, listen to what God says through the prophet Ezekiel: “This is what the sovereign Lord says: Disaster—unheard of disaster! See, it comes. The end has come; it has roused itself against you. Doom has come upon you, upon you who dwell in this land. The time has come; the day is here. There will be panic, not joy in the land. I am about to pour out my wrath on you, and spend my anger against you. I will judge you according to your conduct, and I will repay you for all your detestable practices. I will not look on you with pity. I will not spare you.”

He’s not just trimming back anymore. He’s uprooting from the ground up: “I will not spare you. I will repay you for your conduct...for your detestable practices. Then you will know that I am the Lord. The day is here. Doom has burst forth.” Now, listen to this: “The rod has budded. Arrogance has now blossomed.” So, there it is again. God says, “I’m seeing your sin. Your arrogance has now blossomed.” Something sprouts. God says, “Take care of it.”

If they don’t take care of it, He starts sending warning shots. He starts sending His prophets: “Deal with it now. Deal with it early. Uproot it now.” When they didn’t and it came to full blossom / full fruition, God comes in because He is a just God, and He deals with it.

It's interesting that He says this about the Amorites. Before Joshua took the people of Canaan-end of Amorites, God was giving them time to come back to Him. He actually says this in Genesis 15 / 16: "I'm not dealing with them yet because the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full fruition." Another verse says, "Full measure." I'm like—"What?" In His mercy, He was still giving them time: "Repent." He says, "The sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure"; but when it did, He told the Israelites, "Wipe them all out." Again, when God brings in His backhoe, nothing is left.

Blossoming sin leads to death.

So, I noticed this in Scripture—this pattern over and over—and I'm going to give you the six stages of sin.

The first stage is thought and temptation. Now, this is not sin. Yet, it's the thought comes into your mind or the temptation presents itself. Jesus was tempted but did not sin. So, the first stage is thought and temptation; but if we don't reject it, it leads to the second stage where you allow it to conceive. Now, in this stage, usually, sin stays hidden.

Stage Three: You allow it to grow. Now, this is where I would use the term, toehold. It's when the door is cracked, and sin just gets a little bit of a toehold in there. At this stage, which is Stage Three, God usually starts to send conviction: "Hey, stop this. Come back to me." In other words, the weed is starting to grow, God sees it, you know it, and He starts to send conviction—if you are a child of God, by the way.

Stage Four: If you still do not do anything about it, Stage Four is when you begin to nurture it. This is when it goes from a toehold to a foothold. The door opens a little bit more, and that toe slides right in there. It's starting to try to squeeze in the door. Sin is looking to take over. God's warnings become more prominent, and it's out of His mercy that He sends these warning shots across our bow.

If we still do not do anything about it and allow it to grow, number five is when we embrace it. We embrace sin. This is a dangerous phase. This is when sin becomes a stronghold. It's nearing full bloom. God usually begins discipline of His children at this stage.

So, Stage One: thought and temptation—not necessarily sin yet—thought and temptation; Stage Two: We allow it to conceive, but it usually stays hidden. Stage Three: We allow it to grow. It becomes a toehold. God starts to convict. Stage Four: We nurture it. It becomes a foothold, and God's warnings start coming more heavily. Stage Five: We embrace it. It becomes a stronghold. It's nearing full bloom. God begins to discipline us.

Stage Six: If we *still* stiffen our neck and say, "No, Lord, we want to continue doing this." Stage Six is death. Over and over in Scripture, I see this—Old Testament / New

Testament. It could be any form of death, not just physical death. It could be relational death. It could be financial death. Your reputation could be taken away; but that's what follows when we do not deal with sin.

In other words, deal with sin early; uproot it before it grows.

See, we can choose to sin; but guys, we cannot choose the consequence or when it comes. I can choose whether to get involved with pornography. I can choose whether to go outside of my marriage. I can choose whether to cheat in my business or to lie; but I *cannot* choose the consequence or when it comes. That is up to the Lord; but I can tell you this: The consequence is never what you would choose.

Again, when God says, "Come back to me," and we reject Him, "Come back to me," and we reject Him—we allow it to grow; we nurture the weed; we nurture the sin. At some point because He is a just God and because you are His child, you're inviting God's discipline on you; and He will bring in His backhoe. It is always more severe than we want it to be.

You do not follow your heart. You lead your heart to seek the Lord. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" Galatians 6:7: "Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. A man will reap what he sows." Hebrews 12:1-11—we get a picture of why God allows discipline and chastisement in our lives. It's because if we belong to the Lord, He loves us.

In Hebrews 12, it says: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline or lose heart when He rebukes you. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and He chastises everyone He receives as a son."

Are you God's child? If you are, God loves you; but at the same time, He wants you to grow. He wants you to run from sin; but because we all sin, we will encounter moments where He chastises us to one degree or another; but woe to the man who says, "I'm allowing to sin grow even after God convicts me, even after God sends warning shots across the bow. I'm still hiding it; or maybe, I'm just open with it. I'm still doing it." My brother in Christ, if you allow it to blossom and come to full measure, you will not like the result.

Endure suffering is discipline. God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? Then listen to this. If you do not experience discipline like everyone does, then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

If someone were to say to you, "Hey, I think this is okay, and I'm not convicted," but you know Scripture clearly says that it's wrong, and they reject your admonitions / they reject what Scripture says—"God's not convicting me"—that is a sign by their fruit you shall know them that they are not a true child of God which is an even scarier thing.

This message is about what's growing in the garden of your heart. Proverbs 3: "Do not be wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord and turn away from evil. This will bring healing to your body, refreshment to your bones." The older I get I need refreshment for my bones. Verse 11 in Proverbs 3: "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline. Do not loathe His reproof. For the Lord disciplines those He loves as a father of the son in whom He delights."

Do not test the Lord. You do not have to look them all up now; but Deuteronomy 6:16, Matthew 4:7, Luke 4:12, 1 Corinthians 10:9—all say the same thing: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

Again, if you are God's child, He loves you; but He will discipline you. He is a just judge. He has to bring consequences for sin. So, yes, He offers us mercy / offers us grace; but there is a time where He says, "No, you've come to full fruition. It's time to take drastic measure."

So, my brothers in Christ, there's not a woman on this boat that wouldn't want a husband who was striving to keep the garden of his heart right before the Lord so that he can love God more and, in turn, love her more.

What more could we do—and even offer our wives—than to say, "God, would you go through the garden of my heart? If there is some kudzu sin growing that's trying to take over my heart, Lord point it out. Help me uproot it early / uproot it now. Lord, don't let me let this thing grow. I do not want to invite your discipline on me." You and I already experience enough of that just growing in our faith; but to taunt God / to test Him and say, "No, I can't get rid of this."

You say, "Well, I've got something that's a toehold. I've got something that is a foothold." Maybe, you've got something that's a stronghold. That's got to be uprooted guys. We can choose to sin. We do not get to choose the consequence. So, as we sit here today, I'm going to ask you a question. First, what's growing in the garden of your heart?

Secondly—we're only guys in here. Our wives aren't in here. I'm not going to ask any details—no details. If you have something today that's growing in your heart and you know, "I need to uproot this," in a minute, I'm going to ask you to raise your hand; and I want the guys around you to pray for you. We're going to pray for one another as brothers in Christ that God would give us the strength and the wisdom and the desire to act now to uproot it in our hearts.

[Studio]

Bob: Well, again, we've been listening to Alex Kendrick from the *Love Like You Mean It* marriage cruise a session he did with men on dealing with sin in our lives. I'm listening to that again, and I'm reminded of something I heard Dr. Crawford Loritts say years ago.

He said, “Most of us want to manage the sin in our lives rather than wanting to mortify it.” We don’t want to pull the weeds up by the root. We just want to weed whack them.

Ann: Well, that’s what I was going to say. The weed whacker is not the tool to use. You need to get in there with a root digger and dig it out because it will come back—

Bob: That’s right.

Ann: —quickly.

Dave: I think I’ve done this. Every man I know—you play with temptation. I’ve said this. It will eventually lead to devastation. You can’t play with it, and that’s what Alex was getting at. I’m thinking—you know, I wasn’t in that room, but I love speaking to men alone—

Bob: Yes.

Dave: —because you can just do business. I’m guessing when he said, “If you are playing with some sin, raise your hand”—I’m thinking every hand in the room went up.

Bob: A lot of guys who said, “I need prayer for that,” and a lot of guys who were praying for one another in that moment; yes.

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