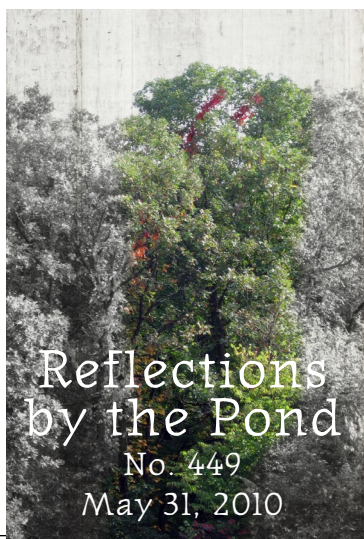


Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

1 John 2:15-17

Choking Out the *Life*

LOOKING OUT THE WINDOWS OF OUR SUN ROOM, out over the pond toward the dense timber now clothed in its full summer greenery, we watch with fascination the lethargic progress of the tallest tree.



Reflections
by the Pond

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Straight out, just beyond the decrepit and decaying old back gate, the stand of trees measures about fifty feet in height, but the tallest tree, situated behind the others, stands about ten to twenty feet taller than its brethren. Yet while the rest hastened into their rich green apparel after winter—it seems to happen almost overnight—this one tree took twice as long to put on its summer clothes. As the deep, dark greens of new leaves ripened all around, this tree appeared stunted in its growth of foliage. Even now, while by its superior height and age it should be the crowning glory of the woods, it stands out, instead, with its smaller and paler leaves, as an obtrusive disappointment.

To the experienced eye, the reason for this is obvious.

Before even the earliest tree leaves had begun to emerge, one could see the darker, luxuriant foliage of several heavy vines trailing up to the very top branches of this tallest tree. Like thick, hungry caterpillars creeping up from the soil around the base of the tree, the determined poison oak dominated its host—its very appearance shouting, “Me first!”

This parasite is beautiful: it is the first to turn green in the spring, and the first to turn a brilliant red in the autumn. But we call it poison oak for good reason. The slightest contact with it will cause an itchy rash on exposed human skin. Even the smoke from

burning it can produce the same result. And, over time and repeated contact, one does not become *de*-sensitized to its venom, but *super*-sensitized—until it seems as if just *looking* at the thing can cause a painful outbreak on one’s skin.

And all the while, year after year, it just keeps sucking away the nutrients and life from its unwitting host.

“The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road, and it was trampled under foot and the birds of the air ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky soil, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. Other seed fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up with it and choked it out. Other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great.”

Luke 8:5-8a



Do you live among the thorns? Do you live with something that is choking the life out of you?

The disciples of Jesus didn’t understand His parable, so they requested clarification. He explained that the “seed” represented the word of God, and that the third example was a picture of someone from whom the power of the inner life was being choked away by

the force of something from without.

“The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity.”

Luke 8:14

“These are the ones who...bring no fruit to maturity.”

Because even believers must still live with and do battle with the flesh every day, it is easy to let the things of the flesh—the things of this temporal, fallen world—dominate us and drain away our joy, drain away our hope, drain away the rich promise of life in Christ.

And when that happens, it also chokes out our potential—everything God means to accomplish in and through us. Too many Christians see their redemption in Christ as little more than a “Get out of Jail Free” card. But that is the myopic perception of flesh. That is the vision of someone caught in the choke-hold of the thorns. By *heaven* vision (the only vision that counts), the believer’s redemption is, instead, a gateway into opportunity—a portal leading to a full and bountiful life of service in Christ’s name.

Jesus told His disciples that the seed in His parable represented the word of God, and whether the illustration applied to true believers or those who had only superficially

“heard” the word, the lesson is the same: God intends for His word to take root and grow in every one of His children. His word is not just pleasant reading material, but the stuff of life itself.

Do you live among the thorns? Is there something choking the life out of your relationship with Christ, your communion with Him, with the power of His word in your life? Centuries before the birth of Christ the psalmist wrote a beautiful word-picture of how God’s word is to take root in us and change us for His purpose.

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.

Psalms 1:1-3