

## "PULLING WEEDS"

(Acts 10:1-48)

(Chuck Swindoll)

Just as every garden has weeds, so every heart harbors prejudice of one kind or another. So, it's not a matter of whether you struggle with prejudice, but how you choose to deal with it. Like a gardener must diligently pull weeds to stay ahead of infestation, we must seek out and eliminate every form of bigotry and chauvinism.

To eliminate prejudice, we must first know what we're looking for. I define "prejudice" as any preconceived judgment or irrational attitude of hostility directed against any individual or group. Prejudice is simply making judgments about someone in advance, forming opinions strictly on the basis of preconceived ideas and assumptions. So, as I observe Peter's struggle with prejudice and periodically search my own heart, I observe three principles at work.

**Principle 1: The root of prejudice is pride.** Pride can't be satisfied with an honest assessment of oneself; pride thrives on comparisons. It's deeply ingrained in human nature to find a scapegoat rather than accept responsibility for our own failures. We also delight to find someone more pathetic than ourselves when we become uncomfortable with our own shortcomings. When those two strategies fail, we can feed our pride by associating with one group—literally or through the power of imagination—while disparaging another as inferior.

Pride is called a "deadly sin" because it spawns so many others. Prejudice grows out of pride.

**Principle 2: The rationalization for prejudice is tradition.** Prejudice thrives on tradition. In fact, most people inherit their bigoted attitudes from generations of institutionalized pride. People behave certain ways and harbor certain attitudes because "it has always been that way."

When I was a young boy growing up in rural Texas in the 1930s, I remember that my maternal grandfather, Judge Lundy, didn't much care for "the way it's always been." At a time when unemployment for white men topped 25 percent, my granddad hired a black man named Mr. Coats and kept him employed for many years. When it came time for the man's wife to deliver a child, my granddad used his influence to make sure that it was in the hospital—probably the first black patients in that maternity ward and undoubtedly the last for quite some time. I learned from his example to honor authority but to question tradition. As it turned out, most of the hospital staff didn't have a problem with black people; they had just never thought to change what had always been.

Even when people want to set aside prejudice, they often have to battle their own culture and the



inertia of tradition. It's a tough battle. Nothing will make it easier. So, we simply have to do what's difficult in order to accomplish what's right.

**Principle 3: The rehabilitation from prejudice is painful.** Honest self-examination is an uncomfortable process. There's no way to get around it. Acknowledging sin is painful because there's no one to blame but ourselves. Facing the sin of prejudice, therefore, can feel downright agonizing. By the time you discover prejudice in your own life, you realize it's been a part of your thinking for as long as you can remember. The feelings of shame can be overwhelming as you trace your own history of chauvinism and find its tentacles wrapped around many decisions and actions.

The truth hurts, but Jesus promised that truth leads to freedom. Every change I've had to face in my life has been painful. No exaggeration—every single one. And the older I get, the more difficult change becomes. Still, I wouldn't trade anything for the freedom I enjoy when I choose to fight through the pain and do what is right.