

*April – May – June 2019*

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## DIGGING UP THE ROOTS

**HEBREWS 12:15** SEE TO IT THAT NO ONE COMES SHORT OF THE GRACE OF GOD; THAT NO ROOT OF BITTERNESS SPRINGING UP CAUSES TROUBLE, AND BY IT MANY BE DEFILED;

We battled goat heads at the ranch for a few weeks this summer. If you're not familiar with the weed, they're a low, spreading plant with tiny yellow flowers and spiky seed pods about a half inch in diameter. They embed deep in your boots, so deep in fact that if the soles are a bit thin you can feel the spikes pricking your fragile soles with every step. Basically, they're awful and left unchecked they are prolific. Our round pen was entirely overcome a few weeks ago until we went at it with hula-hoes for several hours. Not days later, new seedlings began popping up. We hadn't been thorough enough – the spiky seed pods of doom shook loose when we hoed and raked and they replanted themselves. The roots that we hadn't damaged enough or pulled out entirely, popped right back up and showed their ugly little yellow heads.

So, one hot late June morning when I decided to take on the front pasture, I initially went at it with the same technique – hoeing away at the nasty plants. I realized quickly the volume of seed pods shaking off was frankly alarming and would no doubt lead to an exponentially larger harvest of goat heads within weeks. Pastor Bailey came out to help and began painstakingly sweeping up the seed pods and dumping them into plastic bags. I realized then I couldn't do this the quick and easy way – there was hours of work ahead of us and the thought of watching new weeds pop up within days was downright grueling. I got down on my hands and knees and began pulling up the weeds, one by



one. It's detailed work – the entire taproot has to be pulled out, and then the surrounding dirt combed through to ensure there are no pesky seed pods left to take root and undo all our hard toil. It was tedious and frankly annoying work to individually pull up by the roots each of these awful weeds and gather each prickly pod into my gloved hand. I even had to use my bare hand to pick up the seed pods. They begin as a clump when they're on the plant and then scatter into six separate tiny bits that resemble – you guessed it – a goat's head. Except, it's an evil goat that sharpens its horns so it can do ultimate damage if it were to attack! When pulling the weeds up by hand didn't work, I was given a screwdriver to dig down deep and parallel to the root to loosen things up and pull them out. Honestly, I started out grumbly that this was such laborious work, but then something that Pastor Bailey said brought my attention to the spiritual application of these pesky weeds. He mentioned that they had become so prolific this year because we hadn't planted pasture, and there was no competition. There was empty, well-watered ground and they took their chance!

I couldn't help but think, *how applicable!* Consider the sin that affects our natures and how quickly we can be overtaken, if left unchecked. One small sprout is all it takes to explode with seed pods and entirely overcome a huge amount of space. Sin, even just a "small one" quickly and easily takes root in our minds and hearts if we leave it unchecked. Our hearts – as the bible refers to our seat of our emotions and thoughts – are very much the soil in which our motivations, actions, habits, and lifestyle bloom. If we do not attend to the condition of our hearts and what is being planted, we will certainly reap a harvest that we don't want. The scriptures make it really clear that the things we allow into our hearts cause us some serious problems: ***"But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man, not eating with unwashed hands."* Matthew 15:18**

Anger, fear, bitterness, resentment, lust, all of these things are opportunistic "weeds" that take root quickly. They dig down and produce fruit at an alarming rate and I can tell you that digging up established roots is not a fun or



easy process. There's always unwanted collateral damage and little seeds that have to be painstakingly removed. Clearly, staying vigilant and preventing growth of unwanted habits is the best prevention. If it doesn't take root, it can't grow and blossom. There's something else that's important to maintaining a spiritually healthy heart; remember the earlier mention about how the weeds had no competition and so therefor flourished? We have to give the weeds some healthy competition to further prevent their growth. Philippians 4:8-9 tells us, ***"Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable – if there is any moral excellence and is there is anything praiseworthy – think on these things. Do what you have learned and received and heard from me [Paul], and the God of peace will be with you."***

In order to reap a harvest of fruit instead of weeds, we have to be proactive about planting good things in our hearts. Once we root out fear or bitterness or anger, it's prime ground for something else to take root. In order to maintain a lifestyle of peace, joy, and gratitude, we have to take care to plant those seeds in our hearts before something else comes and takes the opportunity.

It's hard work to maintain healthy landscaping and a healthy mindset, but the effort is always worth it in the long run!

# NEWS AND UPDATES

## April

What a spectacular month! We have had an awesome season so far with the kids we're working with. We have truly been able to see the massive change a person can make just by taking a little bit of time to pour into someone else. For example, a young man we've been working with came to the ranch unenthusiastic and spiteful, even, but a few weeks ago he told his parents he needed some boots for what he's doing out here. He remembers our memory verses, gives feedback, voluntarily helps out, and smiles much more. Just those little things make our weeks so much brighter! That's just a small example of the progress God is showing us. Our teen girls mentoring group is growing (we're practically busting at the seams) and these girls are blossoming and turning into awesome assistants and future leaders. Christy officially went full time in the middle of April and Ariel began work on gaining sponsorships to serve full time as well!



## May



We finished our spring sessions in May – and it was tough to say a temporary goodbye to those kids since we saw God do so much with them in that small amount of time. In fact, since we couldn't bear a whole season without them, we made plans to meet up a few times over the summer to continue our progress. There's lots of pipe to weld into fences and we need all the help we can get! We are continuing sessions with our mentoring girls. They're split up into pairs over three days every other week so we can spend more one-on-one time developing their skills. We added another horse to the herd on a trial basis and she seems to be working out quite nicely! We're looking forward to getting her fit and ready over the summer so she can be good to go for sessions in the fall. Our senior mare, Serenade, is entering her late golden years and will likely be in partial or even full retirement soon, so it's good timing that we have a horse to fill the gap. We slow down over the summer so we can pour our attention into church activities and retrain and recondition the horses and ourselves so we're ready to go for the

seasons. We have a trainer volunteering her time every week or so to work with us so we can stay sharp and keep the horses sharp! We're looking forward to what the summer has to offer and preparing for sessions in the fall.

## June

June is summer in earnest! We poured a lot of time into Clovis Connect and began bringing our teen girls out a few times a week. It's refreshing spending more one-on-one time with them and digging a little deeper. It's better for bonding and working through the struggles and blessings of life together when there's a smaller, more intimate group. Our new horse Dakota began her training and she is fitting in spectacularly! Her laid-back temperament is a



winner for our program and we foresee a long future with her. The kids already love her! With fewer sessions, we doubled down on lessons with trainers to continually grow our skills and keep our horses sharp and fit. In other big news, Christy got engaged! She will be getting married in November and we are all excited to see the changes that God is bringing. She has been able to spend a lot of time dedicated to the ranch thanks to her sponsorships and new schedule and it has been a huge blessing. Ariel is still collecting sponsorships and praying for the timing and direction for full-time service! At the halfway point through the summer, we're looking forward to the fall season and will continue to prepare ourselves and our horses to be the absolute best we can be for the kids and families that we serve!

## WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

**Our entire team works other jobs to support themselves and makes time to serve our kids and community through the Ranch.** We believe in what this ranch does for our kids, their families, and our community. We also believe that God has been good to us in providing for our every need! Not once in our short history have we gone without or been concerned that we wouldn't have enough to provide for our horses and our kids. If it's on your heart to provide financially for a little R&R, here's how you can help:

- **\$35** gets a horse's hooves trimmed
  - **\$100** buys two weeks of hay
  - **\$200** feeds a horse for a month
  - **\$500** feeds two horses, and helps keep the lights on and the grounds groomed around here
- **Monthly Support:** As we grow, we have increasing financial needs. Keeping our facility beautiful takes effort, and it's our long-term dream to have paid full-time staff. Please prayerfully consider investing in your community and the mission of Rapha Ranch on a monthly basis!

**Want to give your time?** Send us an email or a Facebook message and we can send a volunteer application your way!

