

Enriching the Soil / The Sower

Tammy: Did you know that if you want to grow healthy plants, your soil needs to be 'alive'?

Carol: I never thought of soil being alive. I've only thought of people, animals and plants being alive!

Tammy: Well that's what we're going to talk about today.

Carol: Hello, I'm Carol...welcome to *Women of Hope*. I know you have a garden, Tammy!

Tammy: We do have a garden and we are just getting ready to till and prepare the soil so that we can have vegetables and fresh fruits this summer.

Carol: That's right – some time ago you told us that you love your garden!

Tammy: I do...and today we want to talk about the soil that you use to make a garden. You can't just plant things in any soil anywhere can you?

Carol: If *you* do a lot of work in *your* garden, you may already know about what to put in the soil to make things grow. But you still might learn something new today.

Tammy: We talked to our gardener friend and he told us about this soil that's alive. If your soil is just sand or clay, you won't grow much, if anything, in your garden. Sandy soil won't hold the moisture, and clay holds too much.

Carol: Hey...let's say that again – it's important – sandy soil won't hold moisture...or water...and clay holds too much water.

Tammy: That's right...so...the soil needs to have lots of little creatures, such as bacteria, fungi, worms and little tiny bugs. Most of these you can't see, but they do a lot of work.

Carol: Oh – *that's* what you mean by soil that's alive!

Tammy: That's right. All these little creatures eat up the big things like scraps or leaves or pieces of wood and break them down into small grains that contain the food the plants can use.

And they help air and water to get down into the soil, and hold it there, so the roots can grow quickly and the little hairs on the roots can reach out into the tiny spaces between the grains of soil. The more they can get air and water and food that they like, the better the plants will grow.

If the conditions in the soil are not good, these creatures will die. Or at least the good ones will die and the ones that are bad for your plants will grow too fast – like the fungi.

Carol: Well, tell us Tammy...how am I going to keep these good little creatures healthy?

Tammy: What keeps your body healthy?

Carol: Well...the right amount of air... and water... and sunshine... and food.

Tammy: That's right. And that's what keeps the creatures in the soil healthy. Of course, they don't all need or want to actually be out in the sunshine, but they need the other things...remember what they are? That's right – air...and water...and food.

Carol: Now that we know this, how are we going to help the soil to be full of life and action so that the plants will grow?

Tammy: Plants and animals that have died provide the food for the little creatures. This includes leaves and stems and old pieces of wood, and dead insects and animals, and manure and urine from live animals.

Carol: Now most gardens have these leaves and stems and old pieces of wood and dead insects and maybe little animals that have died. What about the manure? Where will we get it?

Tammy: Well you, or someone nearby, may have a goat or a cow, or a buffalo or some other animal. And you can gather up the manure that they leave lying around.

The manure can be put straight onto the soil, or mixed in with it. Or you can start off by putting it in a bucket of water for a couple of days, until it's nice and smelly. Then water the plants with it... Mix it with other water first so that it doesn't burn the plants. And if you use urine, mix that with water too.

And don't put these things too close to your plants or they may burn the roots and stems. Put them at a little distance so that by the time the roots get to them, the worms and other creatures have changed them into a form that the roots can use for food.

Carol: Now let me see if I can remember what to do with the manure...

I could mix it straight into the soil – but not straight onto the plant or it might burn the plant.

Or I could mix it with water first until it becomes smelly...then it's ready to be put on. But I need to put it a little bit away from the plant so it won't burn the roots.

And the little creatures in the soil will turn it into good food for my plants.

Tammy is telling us what we can do to have soil that's 'alive' to grow our gardens. Our gardener friend told her about it.

Tammy: If you have a shady corner in your yard, one way of making good soil is to make a compost heap. This is where you make a pile of leaves... small twigs that you have chopped up... manure... grass cuttings... kitchen vegetable scraps...don't add any meat as it might attract rats or mice...or bread, as it will go moldy.

It's best if you can keep it from falling over by using a frame of wood, branches or cardboard. Mix it up every few days. If the conditions are right, the fungi and other creatures make the mixture hot, and then it cools off. After a few months this will turn into good, live soil that you can mix with the other soil in your garden.

Carol: What can you do if you don't have room for a compost heap?

Tammy: It doesn't matter if you can't make a compost heap. You can just put the leaves and other things on the surface of the garden, and the worms and little creatures will eventually eat them up and drag them under the soil. Or you can dig them in near the plants and the process will happen more quickly.

Carol: What about if your soil is very hard, because it's made of clay or has been walked on a lot, or vehicles have driven over it?

Tammy: it will need a lot of work. It will be hard work to dig it, so you may be able to pile leaves and manure on top of it for a while and let the creatures do some of the work for you.

If your soil is shallow, because it's on top of rocky ground, you may need to make raised garden beds. You may be able to do this by making a border of wood or rocks. Put in extra soil and straw and manure and the other things we've talked about, and you will at least be able to grow plants that have shallow roots, like herbs, green onions, radishes, spinach and other green leafy vegetables...like bok choy, cabbage or kai lan.

Carol: I find that weeds *love* to grow in my garden, do you?...

Tammy: I sure do! If you have lots of weeds in your garden, of course they will take away the light and water and food that your vegetables need. They must be taken out, as soon as they appear so that all that lovely 'live' soil is left for your plants.

Carol: Thanks Tammy – we've learned a lot from our friend the gardener, haven't we?

Tammy: And he said: 'Happy gardening, and I hope you will soon have very productive soil! ...Soil that's alive and produces lots of lovely vegetables for you and your family.'

Carol: It's a really good idea to encourage our children to do some gardening with us...or have a garden of their own to take care of. It gives them a chance to learn so much, and to enjoy watching things grow. And there's nothing quite like eating what you grow yourself is there?

Tammy: In a moment, we're going to hear a story from God's word, the Bible about soil and growing. Jesus, God's son was with a large crowd of people by the lake – there were so many people crowded around him that he got into a boat and talked to them from there. He told them a special story. Stay with us to hear what he said...This story is called a 'parable' – a story with two meanings.

Carol: *Jesus got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many stories in the form of parables, such as this one: "A farmer went out to sow his seeds. As he was scattering the seeds, some fell along the footpath, and the birds came and ate them up. Some of the seeds fell on rocky places, where they did not have much soil. They sprang up quickly, because the soil was not very deep. But when the sun came up, the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn't have deep roots, they died. Other seeds fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!"*
(Matthew 13: 3-8 a variety of versions)

Tammy: That's like some of the soil we've been talking about, isn't it.

The path is so hard that nothing will grow there. The seeds won't go into it, and so the birds get all of it.

Carol: And those rocky places, where the soil is not very deep. The plants look good for a little while, in fact they grow quickly because the soil is warm. But if there's a hot day, they quickly die! That shows that the roots are not very deep doesn't it!

Tammy: Then those weeds. I have lots in one corner of my garden at present, and they're choking the vegetables. I don't get much food from that part of the garden. I'll have to do what our gardener told us to do and pull them out!

Carol: Ah, but that good soil sounds really inviting, doesn't it! For each seed that is planted, a crop of 30, 60 or even 100 times as much as had been planted. That's what we want, isn't it!

Tammy: But what did Jesus mean by this? Was he just talking about a garden? Remember we said that a parable is a story with two meanings?

Carol: Well, Jesus liked to use stories about gardens because most of the people listening to him had gardens and understood very well what he was saying. But that wasn't the real point of his story. Listen to what Jesus said later as he explained the story:

"Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds: The seeds that fell on the footpath represent those who hear the message about the Kingdom (of God) and don't understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts. The seeds on the rocky soil represent those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. But since they don't have deep roots, they don't last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God's word. The seeds that fell among the thorns represent those who hear God's word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the (attraction of money), so no fruit is produced. The seeds that fell on good soil represent those who truly hear and understand God's word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!"
(Matthew 13: 18 – 23 NLT)

Tammy: Wow, these are important things that Jesus is saying!

When we see a bird pecking up seeds on a path, we can remember that the evil one, Satan, is looking out for people who don't really understand what Jesus is saying, and he snatches it away quickly so that they won't keep thinking about it.

I don't want to be like that. I want to understand the message and follow Jesus. I'm excited about what he says. It's so true!

But I'm a bit worried about that next part, about the seed that fell on rocky places being like someone who is excited to receive the word of God. That's like me...I love to hear God's word. I hope I don't fall away like those people Jesus is talking about.

Carol: No, I hope I don't fall away either. But let's keep on going to hear about the others and see what we can learn.

The third type of soil is full of thorns. In this story the thorns are the worries of this life and the attraction of money.

Tammy: Well who doesn't have worries?! That really applies to me.

Carol: And me! We all have worries of some kind don't we?!

Tammy: And as for wanting to have lots of money...I do think about that. It looks like that could be a trap.

Carol: Yes, Jesus is saying that we won't bear fruit, we won't have a life that is pleasing to God, or satisfying to ourselves, or helpful to others if we spend our time concentrating on our worries or how to become rich.

Tammy: I like the last one best. I want to hear and understand the word of God. I want to bear fruit. I want to bless lots of people.

Carol: Tammy, I've learned a lot today about how to make sure the soil in my garden is alive. Remember what our gardener said: our soil needs, to be alive and healthy and make our plants grow?...

That's right, the right amount of air, water and food.

Tammy: But do you remember in the story Jesus told, he talked about the seed being like the message of the kingdom of God. What is that message? And how can we be like the soil that's deep and fertile and ready to make the seed grow?

Carol: The *message* that Jesus gave to the people was the *good news* that he came to give us new life. He told us that God, his father, loves us very much. In fact so much, that Jesus gave his

life for us. He died on the cross to take away the punishment that we deserve for the wrong things we do.

Tammy: Remember Ros saying last time that God gives us laws to live by? She also said that we can't keep these laws didn't she? We all make mistakes and do the wrong thing. So God made a way for us to come back to him. He wants to have a relationship with us. He loves us, and he wants us to love and serve him.

Carol: So if we hear that message and we ask God to forgive us, we become his children. Then he wants us to grow, just like the seed in the good soil. How do we make it grow? ...By thinking about what he says in his word, by agreeing with what he says, and by obeying it.

Let's ask God to help us understand this message...and pass it on to others. Then the message will multiply – just like when you plant a seed... It grows into a plant and the plant produces more seeds. And we plant those seeds and they grow...and so on...so that in the end you have 30, or 60 or 100 times more than you first planted.

Tammy: We've enjoyed our time with you today – but now it's time to go. If you would like to know more about this message that Jesus told, please contact us at this station or email us.

Carol: Good bye...God bless you. Our prayer for you is that you have a great week filled with God's blessings.