

WoH 412

Taking the Long Term View / Planting to Please God

Sondy: I used to talk to strangers in the street just to hear a human voice that might have some joy in it... (music fade)

When I was younger, there were times in my life when things were very hard. There was very little money. My home life was full of abuse and hurt and pain. There were people at my work-place who very obviously didn't like me. I was far from my home and pregnant. I had *no-one* I could call a friend.

Carol: Hello, I'm Carol. I wonder if you feel like Sondy? Maybe you're feeling alone right now. But for now, we can be together for a while can't we! Welcome...and here's Tammy...

Tammy: Hello there. Thanks for joining us...and thanks for coming to share some time with us again too Sondy. You must have been very lonely back then...

Sondy: I *was*...very lonely. So I used to try to find some little thing I could enjoy from everything that was happening around me... The way a leaf fell to the ground...or a birdsong might lift my spirits enough for me to look forward to the next moment of happiness, because there were very few.

Carol: So things must have changed for you then?

Sondy: They certainly have. And I want to say to you as you listen today, don't get discouraged even when you don't see anything happening. It may not yet be the right time.

When I look back over my life now, I can see that a *lot* has changed. I'm financially much better off...my home-life is wonderful...I love my work and the people there. My two children have grown into respectable young adults.

Of course my life is not without its pains and sufferings - because, let's face it, life is like that! But now I don't need to cling to a lovely sound or a pretty sight to get me through each day.

Tammy: So Sony, as you look back, what have you learned about life through those difficult experiences in the past?

Sony: What have I learned? I have learned to take a long-term view. No matter what we go through in life, it will not stay the same forever. Just like a farmer planting seeds. He puts in his seed knowing he will not see any harvest for many months...sometime years! Then he must be patient....and he must take care of the seeds, and the little seedlings when they shoot up through the soil. Eventually, being patient and persistent in doing the right things will reap its reward.

Carol: That's interesting Sony. When things were very hard, it helped you to focus on some very *short-term* things. You mentioned noticing a leaf or the song of a bird, and taking pleasure in them for the moment. And that can be a real help, can't it?

Sony: Yes, at the time it seemed to be all I had to enjoy. Even when things are really difficult, there are always *some* good things to notice and enjoy.

Tammy: Yes - the weather, perhaps. We can enjoy the sun on our face on a cold day; or the cool breeze on a hot day. We can take a moment to wonder at the sunset colours or the rainbow. And then there are clouds. Have you taken the time to look up into the sky to see what's there today? I love to see all the different kinds of clouds – big grey ones that build up before a storm; little white fluffy ones in a blue sky. And of course at sunset they can turn bright golden and finally red.

Sondy: Sometimes I think, 'At least I have food today'...or...'Right now I can lie down and sleep...that's good!'

I might even notice the coolness of a drink of water when I'm tired and hot. I can get a moment of joy from watching a baby laugh, or a flower open, or the smell of food cooking. The world is full of beauty as well as trouble isn't it?

Carol: That's right. But when I'm in pain or worried, I often don't think to look for these things, so I miss out. Yet when I *do* notice, I feel grateful to God for the little moments of joy, and I'm encouraged to keep going.

Sondy: So the very short-term view can have some benefits. But so can the long-term view. It teaches you to be patient with the slow pace of change. Have you heard the story about the bamboo plant? It goes like this:

A Chinese philosopher took a young apprentice for a walk in his huge garden one afternoon. They were having a discussion about the apprentice's slow progress in his studies.

They walked deeper into the garden and soon sat down together.

After a while, the philosopher said, "Look around you." As the apprentice started to notice his surroundings, the philosopher asked "Do you see the ferns and the bamboo trees?"

"Yes", replied the apprentice.

"I planted the fern and bamboo seeds together...at the same time."

The philosopher went on to say, "I watered them, took care of them, and nurtured them from the very first day. The ferns sprouted up quickly from the ground and filled this entire place with their beautiful greenery.

A year went by and even though I had watered the bamboo seeds too I could not yet see any signs of the bamboo growing from the earth. But I did not give up. Another year went by...and another year. ...Still no sign of anything sprouting up from the ground.

At the beginning of the fourth year, when I was walking through my garden I noticed some little green shoots. As I looked closely I could see that they were tiny bamboo shoots. Slowly, as the weeks went by they grew taller. However, thirty days later, the little bamboo plants still looked insignificant next to the lush, green ferns.

By the hundredth day of that year, the bamboo trees began to grow taller. Each day they seemed to grow a little more. And look at them now... *they* now provide shade and make this garden gloriously beautiful as you see here today!"

Carol: Let's listen to this music as we think about what this story means...

Carol: Welcome back to *Women of Hope*. Have you thought about it? What do you think the philosopher was trying to teach the young apprentice? I don't think he was giving a gardening lesson to his student, was he? What do you think he was really talking about?

Tammy: I think he was teaching him to work hard and have patience in his studies...to not be discouraged if he didn't see results right away. But he had to put in the right things, and be patient for a long time.

Sondy: The philosopher knew that some plants took very much longer than others to grow – so he was wise to not give up watering and caring for the bamboo seeds. In the end he had a garden that was twice as beautiful with both ferns and bamboo flourishing in the same place.

Tammy: I don't think his student would have ever forgotten *that* lesson do you?

Sondy: And I'm sure it helped him to keep on slowly but surely with his studies, until he began to do well.

Tammy: Thanks for being with us today Sondy and for sharing that story with us...and your own story. Is there anything else you'd like to share just before you go?

Sondy: Yes – I'd like to say that if you are struggling right now as I was...maybe with loneliness, or you feel that there is nothing good in your life...try to take the long-term view. Nothing stays the same forever. Keep going...don't give up. Look around you and find the small things in life that make you smile. This will be like planting little seeds into your life. Keep watering them and taking care of them until one day they grow into beautiful shady plants.

Carol: Thanks Sondy!

God's word, the Bible, talks about planting the right things into our lives: listen to these words: 'Don't fool yourself. A man (or a woman) reaps what he or she sows.' (Galatians 6:7-10 NIV)

We'll talk some more about this after we listen to this song...

Carol: Welcome back to *Women of Hope*. Let's hear again what God's word says about planting the right things into our lives.

'Don't fool yourself. A man (or a woman) reaps what he or she sows.'

The person who sows to please their sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.' (Gal 6:7&8)

Can you see what the writer is saying? We can plant things into our lives that please the selfish, sinful part of us. What sort of things might they be?

Tammy: They could be putting my own wants first - like putting the best piece of food on my plate, or spending our family's money on new clothes for me if I have enough but my husband really needs a shirt...or the children need shoes.

Carol: Or maybe telling a little lie to make myself look good. Or saying cruel things to hurt someone, when I'm angry.

Tammy: Or wanting something just for my own pleasure, even if it might hurt someone else. I think often people have affairs outside their marriage because they want pleasure for themselves, right now.

Carol: Yes, and don't we see the destruction that causes...destruction in marriages and families, and damage to the whole community. But you know, selfish decisions and little lies, and outbursts of temper - *they* cause destruction too! They weaken your character and over time they make you a person who can't be trusted. And they damage the people around you.

We need to take a long-term view of where our actions lead. These selfish habits grow like the ferns - fast, and they are hard to root out.

Did you notice what was the *right* kind of planting? Yes, the Bible called it 'sowing to please the Spirit.' Now you might wonder, 'What is this 'spirit'?'. This Spirit is not a nature spirit or demon spirit, or even your own spirit. It's the Holy Spirit of God. So how do we plant things in our lives that please God's Spirit?

Tammy: I know the thing that pleases God's spirit the most - when we put our trust in his son, Jesus Christ and become his follower.

Carol: That is so true...and remember what we read before from God's word? If we do that, we will 'reap the harvest of eternal life'.

Carol: You're still with us on *Women of Hope* where today we're talking about planting the right things into our lives that please God's spirit.

When we put our trust in Jesus it also means following his example and doing the things he told us to do...the things *he* would do. So, what might some of those things be?

Tammy: If I ask myself, 'What would Jesus do?' I usually know the answer. It's almost the opposite of the things that please our sinful nature! Jesus was pure, caring, loving...

Carol: ... self- controlled, kind, truthful, honest. He spoke kindly to people in trouble. He gave food to the hungry. He respected women. He encouraged those who were down.

Tammy: I remember that he washed the dirty feet of his friends at the end of a long day. He certainly obeyed God's laws. He prayed to his Father in heaven. One time he said, 'I always do the things that please God my Father'.

Carol: And we need to *keep on* trying to please God - because we don't become like Jesus overnight. All those old habits are hard to change, but with the help of God's Spirit, we *can* really change. Meanwhile, the 'harvest of goodness' is growing slowly, like the bamboo.

Tammy: That's true. I know I'm often not nearly as good as I should be, but I know I'm not the person I used to be before I gave my life to Jesus. God has really changed me over time.

Carol: I guess we are still being shaped by God, all our lives. I'm glad God is patient and doesn't give up on me. He takes all the time he needs to help us grow to be like Jesus.

Why don't we learn that part of God's word together, so we can keep it in our hearts, and maybe share it with someone else. It comes from Galatians chapter 6, verses 7&8.

'Don't fool yourself. A man (or a woman) reaps what he or she sows. (Tammy repeat)

The person who sows to please their sinful nature, (Tammy repeat)

...from that nature will reap destruction; (Tammy repeat)

...the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.'

(Tammy repeat)

Galatians chapter 6, verses 7&8. (Tammy repeat)

Carol: Good... Well, here's the rest of that part of God's word that we were reading earlier. It says: 'Let us not become tired of doing good, for if we do not give up the time will come when we will reap the harvest.' (Gal 6:9, GNB)

That's God's promise to us, and it encourages me to keep asking, 'What would Jesus do?' Let's take the long-term view; we will reap the harvest of a good character and better relationships if we sow the right things into our lives now.

(Song)

Tammy: Here on *Women of Hope* today we've been talking about taking the long-term view in our lives. Do you remember what Sony said near the beginning? She said: Don't get discouraged even when you don't see anything happening...it may not yet be the right time. I would like to read a very old poem to you from God's word the Bible. It was written by a wise king when he was an old man and had seen a lot of life. Here it is:

(Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 NIV)

'There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:
a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,

a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,
a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time
to refrain,
a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,
a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,
a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

So as you think about what you're planting into your life – remember that God knows where you're at in your life...and he has plans for you...for *your* good. He made you and he loves you and he wants to shape you into something beautiful for him...in his time!

Carol: We've invited (Guest) back again today to tell us some more about prayer. One of the things that God wants us to plant into our lives is a time for talking with him. Thank you Guest...

Guest: Prayer helps us to stop worrying (Philippians 4: 6-7)

Do you sometimes worry about things? I'm sure you do, and I do too. But God says to us in his word, the Bible, "Don't worry about anything, instead pray about everything."

Many things we worry about don't ever happen do they? Whatever we're worrying about, we need to think, 'Can I do something about it?' If you can, then do it, but if you can't then put what you're worrying about into God's hands, He loves you and understands. He cares about your worries. He may not take away the problem but he can take away the worry.

His word goes on to say, 'Tell God what you need, and thank him for all that he's done.' Do you know what God has done? He made us, he loves us and he sent

his son Jesus to take the punishment for the wrong things we've done. So we have a lot to thank him for don't we?

And do you know what will happen after we give our worries to God? He will give us peace in our hearts. That's his *promise*. His word says, 'If you do this, you will experience God's peace...' God tells us to swap *our* worries for *his* peace. That sounds like a good swap to me!

(Based on *Prayer; talking with God*. Stonecroft Ministries, 2006)

Carol: Thank you Guest. And it's time for us to go now. Remember that God loves you and he cares about what's happening in your life. We would love to hear from you...

Tammy: You can contact us at... Good bye and God bless you.

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