

# GOOD DIRT

## Elements of A Healing Environment A Christian Perspective

In Week 2 we looked at how important it is to make sure the “roots” of your life are in good soil if you’re interested in producing strong, healthy “fruit.”

In a practical sense, what constitutes good soil for a person’s life? If you’ve ever done any gardening, you know that it doesn’t take much effort to produce weeds. But if you want vegetables, you’ve got to fight for them! And your first battle will be to optimize the soil. So, what are some elements that you want to be sure are part of the soil of your life?

### **Element #1: A Relationship With God**

This is foundational. Without a vital connection to “The Healer,” you are approaching your healing in only two dimensions: physically and mentally. Granted, those dynamics are an important part of the mix, and we’re not advocating that you disregard them. But to neglect the spiritual element is to hobble yourself in your journey toward strength and stability. It’s like trying to sit on a three-legged stool that only has two legs. It *can* be done, but not very easily, and you’ll never connect with the main mission of all stools: to provide a comfortable, relaxing mechanism for taking a load off and sitting your butt down in a restful configuration. Two-legged stools will always keep you on high-alert and barely-balanced at best.

A crucial point that will be developed later in the course is that God is your #1 ally, if you will only allow Him to be. He won’t force His will on you. He respects your personal decisions, and will only provide His aid to you in response to your request. This is an important part of a person’s “free will.” But if *you will* look to Him for help, *He will* bring all His resources to bear to bring about your healing. And no amount of pharmaceuticals, physical therapy, EAP directives, shrinks, self-help books or programs (including *this* one) can compare to what the God of the universe has in His healing arsenal for you.

From a Christian perspective, Jesus Christ is the gateway to this relationship. When He walked the earth two thousand years ago, He established that He was the physical manifestation of God Himself. He was born in a barn to humble parents, grew up, lived a perfect life, and became the central figure in human history – all in fulfillment of hundreds of years of prophecies.

He performed incredible miracles, demonstrating His divine origin. And He made some astounding claims, chief of which was that He was the Son of God, and that those who believed this fact and entered into a relationship with Him would be forgiven of their sins and given eternal life. At the age of 33 He was unjustly indicted and executed. But He had said ahead of time that this would happen, and that it was going to turn out alright. And it did, when three days later He came back to life, having paid the penalty of our sins by His sacrificial death, and showing with great finality that He truly was God come in the flesh. The familiar words of John 3:16 summarize this:

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*

In the centuries since then, His words in Revelation 3:20 have been the doorway to healing, life, and abundance for millions of people around the world:

*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him, and have fellowship with him and he with Me.*

Have you opened the door of your life to Him yet? If not, this might be a great time to consider doing so. It's a simple two-step act: (1) decide that you *want* Him in your life, and (2) by prayer, ask Him to come in. Your prayer doesn't have to be fancy – prayer is simply talking to God as you would to another person. It's not your words that are important, it's the attitude of your heart. Here is an example of a prayer you could pray:

*Father God, I believe in You, and I believe that you sent your Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross for my sins. I believe You love me. Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God, and that you rose from the dead. I want to have a relationship with You. I'm opening the door. Come into my life. Help me heal, increase my faith, and make me the kind of person You would like me to be.*

If you've taken that step – today, or at some time in the past – you can be sure that Jesus Christ has come into your life, and is even now at work to bring about your healing. The process probably won't be as quick as you'd like, but we are complex beings, and our woundings are also very complex. Have patience, listen for His instructions, and you *will* experience His healing.

Jesus once said:

*Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light.* – Matthew 11:28-30.

Sound good? It's what we all want: relief from our weariness and burdens, and rest for our souls. This is available to you if you will act on the first word: *"Come."*

## **Element #2 – The Bible**

There are a lot of unique claims made about the words of God and the teachings of Jesus Christ. For instance:

*Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.* – Jesus, Matthew 4:4

God's Word – the Bible – *feeds* you in ways that physical food never could. It nourishes your soul and spirit. Without it, you are spiritually malnourished. In addition...

*If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.* – Jesus, John 8:31,32

Are you in bondage to something? Do you need to be set free? Jesus said that His teachings will accomplish that.

In Hebrews 4:12 it says that the Word of God is "living and active." It isn't just ink on a page, or letters on a computer display. As we read it, it reads *us*, and the Spirit of God breathes life into it. He makes sure that it affects us exactly as we need to be affected at that moment.

In Romans 12:2 it says that our minds need to be "renewed." *All* of us need this. How much more is this true for those of us whose minds have been wounded by trauma? How do our minds get renewed, transformed, and made whole (sanctified)? Just before He was betrayed and executed, Jesus prayed to the Father for His followers: *"Sanctify them by Your truth: Your Word is truth."* Anything we can do to expose our minds to the truths of God's Word will help in the healing process.

Consider a daily Bible-reading plan. If you need a suggestion, start in the book of Matthew to get a strong history of Jesus' earthly life. Even if you only took a few minutes each morning reading one chapter, it would make a *huge* difference.

**Warning:** This practice is addictive. You may not be able to keep it to one chapter a day. Soon you'll be straying into two chapters. Then three. Instead of five minutes, you may find yourself taking ten minutes. Before you know it, you'll be at thirty minutes. This is a good thing.

You can also *listen* to the word of God. There are numerous audible Bible apps you can download and listen to as you travel in your car, or whenever you have some unscheduled time.

### **Element #3 – Prayer**

Every first responder realizes how vital communication is. You know that if you encounter trouble, all you need to do is to get on the radio and ask for help, and the dispatchers will move heaven and earth to get you whatever backup you need.

Communication is vital for safety. It's also necessary for developing rapport, relationship, and gaining information.

Prayer is communication. Prayer is *also* vital for safety, rapport, relationship and information exchange. Since God is supremely concerned about not violating our free will, it would behoove us to *communicate* our thoughts, desires, hopes, dreams, challenges, and frustrations to Him. *God deeply wants it.*

Philippians 4:6,7 says:

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

This means that you can go to God in prayer any time you want to, about anything you want to, and in any way you want to.

Are you a little frustrated about how things are going in your life? You need to know that you can be honest with God in your prayers. Pull out all the stops. Don't hold back. You can shake your fist at Him, yell at Him, and beat on His chest, because God loves you unconditionally. He grieves with you in your loss. He wants to enter into your pain. None of this shocks Him. He is the God who suffered – in even *worse* ways than you have. Jesus was “the man of sorrows, acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). He's been where you are. He's not afraid of your pain, and He wants to hear about it from you – no holds barred.

Consider spending just five minute a day in prayer – maybe right after your Bible-reading time. Tell God how you're feeling, express your concerns, make requests for your family and friends, thank and praise Him for who He is and what He's doing in your life.

### **Element #4 – The Christian Community**

God will work on you directly by His Holy Spirit to bring about healing. But another mechanism He uses to great effect is other Christians. That's why The Church was invented by God. His Spirit has been given to other Christians around you with the idea that He would work *through them* to help *you*.

The love, wisdom, experiences, insights, compassion, resources, counsel, encouragement, accountability, grace, and mercy that He has put into other members of the “body of Christ” are there so that we can each contribute to each other's growth, protection, and healing. But this only works if we are intentional about hanging out with other Christians. The Bible makes it plain and simple:

*Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm*

*alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. – Ecclesiastes 4:9-12*

The mighty Redwoods of northern California are testaments of resilience and strength. Some of them are over three hundred feet tall and have lived for over 2,500 years. But have you ever seen a solitary Redwood tree standing alone in a field by itself?

No – because Redwoods have a problem: shallow root systems. Because of the minimal soil base in the Sierra Nevadas, God has ordained that these colossal giants must always grow in groves. They spread their roots under the surface laterally, intertwine them with each other's roots, and thereby create a stable underground platform that can stretch for miles. When the storms come howling down the mountains, they hold each other up. It's a very rare thing that a Redwood goes down in a storm.

This is an excellent picture of what the Christian community is supposed to be. We need to collect ourselves in these human Redwood stands, interlace our roots with each other under the surface, and hold each other up as we encounter the horrendous storms that our first responder careers may throw at us.

You are experiencing one of God's "Redwood stands" in your Firstline group. Get to know the others in your cohort, and let them know you. Intertwine your roots. Be ready to provide support and encouragement to them. Be ready to receive help from them. Get involved in a good church. Join a Bible study. Hang out with other Christian friends. This will benefit you *and them*.

## **Element #5 – Service**

Those who are struggling with the effects of line-of-duty stress and trauma are often (and understandably) focused on themselves and their pain – which compounds their anxiety. This is not a criticism, it's a simple statement of reality. One of the strongest disciplines that will help alleviate that anxiety is to shift our focus from ourselves to others around us who are in need.

When your mind is thinking about how you could help others, it spends less time thinking about your own problems. There's something about this humble, service-oriented, generous mindset that helps us heal. Rather than to demand our "rights" to be paid attention to and get fixed, we set them aside so that others can benefit.

This was a key component of Jesus' lifestyle. As the Son of God walking the earth, you might think He would demand worship, unquestioned obedience, and recognition as the Alpha Dog of the world. But His attitude was the opposite – He came to serve and to give. He made this clear when He said to His followers:

*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. – Mark 10:45*

This is one of the primary reasons God has allowed you to experience difficulty and affliction: so that you can be strengthened by it, and then help others who are in similar straits.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort: who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.  
– 2 Corinthians 1:3,4*

Who can you help? How can you serve others around you? What intentional actions can you take to lessen someone else's pain and anxiety? If you give it a little thought, something will occur to you. And as you act on it, it will help lead to healing in both them and you.

## **The More The Better**

God has provided certain elements that will contribute to a healing environment for a person who is struggling with the effects of stress and trauma. Good dirt does exist. If you want something to grow, you can't just walk out your front door and stick it in the ground. You must make sure the dirt is right. If it isn't, take action to *make* it right!

The more of these five elements that you can include in your own personal dirt, the sooner and better you will experience God's healing.

Firstline can't heal you. And you can't heal yourself. But as we are true to the principles God has outlined in His Word, we can create an environment in which God has optimal access to our bodies, minds and souls for the purpose of healing.

– Chris Adsit – January, 2018