

Kingdom Living Today

*The Kingdom Way of Life: the Lordship-Committed
Mutually Serving Jesus Beyond the Religious Establishment*



*"I am the true vine, and My Father is the gardener.
I am the vine; you are the branches.
If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit;
apart from Me you can do nothing.
This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit,
showing yourselves to be My disciples" (John 15:1,5,8).*

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by Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz
Restoration Ministries International



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Preface

**"And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate
to make the people holy through His own blood.
Let us, then, go to Him outside the camp,
bearing the disgrace He bore" (Hebrews 13:12,13).**

Kingdom Living Today is a semi-fictional narrative of several families who are putting into practice the Hebraic foundations outside the religious establishment. Jesus often used parables to illustrate truths from the Word of God. So the characters and story lines of Kingdom Living Today help you mutually consider a variety of issues you'll face if you purpose to live committed to the Lordship of Jesus. In these chapters you'll discover followers of Jesus just like you who are living in loving and obedient trust. It's a way of life that enabled the first followers of our Lord Jesus to be so spiritually powerful and relationally intimate — a way of life that our Father is restoring today through the Hebraic foundations.

As you read the chapters and weigh the issues and concerns that each character and their family faces in being true to our Lord Jesus, focus on these four attributes that must be at the core of each person who claims to belong to our Lord Jesus — each individual, each marriage, each fellowship family:

- 1. Your life revolves personally around the Headship of Lord Jesus in bringing glory to your heavenly Father through doing His will.** (John 15:5-8; Ephesians 1:15-23)
- 2. You live repentantly by grace and help others live likewise in love-enacted communal righteousness within the relational connectedness of a home fellowship, ensuring that your Father hears and answers your prayers.** (Psalms 34:14,15; Ephesians 4:15,16)
- 3. You diligently seek the Holy Spirit's *rhema* so that by the Spirit you are able to specifically carry out your Father's will and glorify Jesus.** (John 16:13; Romans 8:14)
- 4. The aroma of Jesus is manifested in and through you, beginning with His love, forgiveness and compassion even for those who persecute you.** (Ephesians 4:32; Matthew 5:44)

1. Divine Discontent

**“My Word is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword,
it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow;
it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”**

Once again the Sunday morning worship service had come and gone. Brett broke the uncomfortable silence on the way home with a sigh. “These past few months of going to services have gotten harder and harder for me. I keep coming away frustrated and sometimes resenting that we even went.”

Lacie reached over and lightly touched his arm. “I know you’ve been feeling more and more uneasy there for quite awhile. When you first started telling me you thought it was a “divine dissatisfaction” that the Holy Spirit was arousing in you, I got nervous. I thought, ‘He’s going to want to leave our congregation and go someplace else, and I’m going to lose all the friends I’ve made these past twelve years.’”

“Lacie,” Brett nodded, “I knew you were upset that we might leave. But I just can’t go on putting in time in a pew and all those committee meetings when I know our Father has so much more for us!”

“Well, dear, I want to ask your forgiveness for giving you the ‘cold shoulder’ whenever you talked about it. It took a few weeks for me to realize the turmoil you’d been going through. All I could think about was me and how much I dislike change!”

Brett turned to his wife of 15 years with a warm smile. “I was hurt when you started to withdraw from me during that time, and I do forgive you. In fact I don’t really blame you. Even I didn’t understand what was going on inside me except this growing discontent every time we attended another service.”

Before Brett could say another word Lacie broke in enthusiastically. “While I was getting dressed this morning, I prayed that the Holy Spirit would give me some insight about this growing frustration in both of us. I just couldn’t drive home another day from services with us complaining about it. Then, I heard a soft voice within me answering my prayer.”

Brett was all ears as Lacie continued, “The Spirit revealed to me that our frustration began when we decided to get up early each day and read the Bible together. The more we’ve read and prayed for God to help us put His Word into practice (Luke 6:47,48; 8:21), the more uncomfortable we’ve gotten with religious programs and ritual.”

Perking up, her husband responded, “I think you’re right! During these early mornings together the past few months, we’ve begun to experience our Lord in a wonderful new way! (Psalms 5:3). I know we’re both changed inside because we’re both so hungry to deepen our love for Jesus and to live like His Word tells us.”

Lacie grinned as she picked up his fervor. “I feel that way, too. And I’ve noticed that when we ask for His wisdom to put His Word into practice, it’s like Jesus is sitting there with us (Matthew 18:18-20). Thank you, hon, for leading the way in this.” (Ephesians 5:25-27)

Brett glowed in her gratitude, then added, “Well, I appreciate the hurdle you had to overcome in getting up early, my little nighthawk! But your willingness to go to bed earlier so we could meet with our Lord together long before I needed to go to work has actually spurred me on. So I want to thank you too.”

A peaceable calm settled in the car. “Brett, what do think is happening in us as we go through God’s Word together?”

He chuckled. “I think the Bible is becoming for us the double-edged sword that God says it is. (Hebrews 4:12) As we discuss His Word, His Spirit is exposing attitudes and behaviors in us that don’t line up with Jesus.”

“I’m so glad,” smiled Lacie, “that we can encourage each other and help each other in the changes He wants to make in us. I love our Lord so much, and I want for both our lives to please Him!” (Hebrews 13:21)

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Several days later the sun was streaming through the living room onto the young couple seated closely on the cushioned loveseat. “Lacie, do you remember that older couple we met in the park several months ago?”

Lacie tilted her head in thought. “Yes, it was shortly before we began to get up early and go through the Bible together. If I remember right, their names were Jack and Dee.”

Nodding in agreement, Brett said, “Just as we were leaving them that afternoon, Jack handed me a slip of paper with a website address on it. I stuck it in my pocket and pretty much forgot about it until two days ago when I wore that jacket again.”

“And...?” Lacie wondered.

“Well,” smiled Brett, “the web address was restorationministries.org. I recalled that Jack recommended I download an article entitled ***The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation***. The little I’ve read so far has opened my eyes to how our Father in heaven sees our marriage.”

That got Lacie’s attention. “What do you mean?”

Brett turned to face his wife, taking her hand between his. “For one thing, I found out that our Father intended for our marriage covenant to be the physical representation of the spiritual covenant He offers us through Jesus.” (Ephesians 5:29-33) He continued, “That’s why God refers to Himself as a husband to His people Israel in the Older Testament, and Jesus as the Bridegroom to the Church!” (Isaiah 54:5,6; John 3:28-30)

Lacie's eyes widened. "I've never heard that connection before! If that's true, then we can't claim anything about our relationship with our Father that we aren't living out in our marriage."

"That's how I understand it, too, Lacie. And some other things at the website gave me totally new insight about our own marriage covenant."

Leaning eagerly toward him, she asked, "Like what?"

Brett was on a roll. "Well, the article said, 'If you want to know about my love for Jesus, watch it in how I love my wife.' (Ephesians 5:25-28) And this one you'll like: 'A wife is the highest gift God could give a man.' (based on Genesis 2:21,22; Proverbs 18:22)

He couldn't miss her pleased smile as she responded, "Wow! That makes me feel really special from God's perspective!"

Brett's eyes filled with love for his bride. "That's not all! A man's agape love for God (Matthew 22:37) is the same agape love God calls for in a husband toward his wife!" (Colossians 3:19)

Lacie beamed back at him. "So what you're saying is that a husband's love for God is also witnessed in the love he shows in his marriage." She paused for a moment, looking down thoughtfully. Then lifting her eyes she asked, "Do you know what that one truth would do for so many couples in our congregation who seem to have lost their love for each other?"

Brett agreed. "I do! And I'm really looking forward to going through The Gospel of the Covenant with you. I think that as we discuss it, it'll help us cooperate with the changes our Lord wants to make in us. And Lacie, I saw they had a video series on the website entitled Jesus In Your Home. That sounds like something really good for our home."

Picking up on her husband's keen determination she replied, "Let's watch that! But, hon, what are we going to do about our frustration with those weekly church services and all those programs and meetings they expect us to attend?"

Brett was quiet for a moment, then continued, "I've been praying a lot about that. Why don't we leave 'religion' behind for a while and concentrate on the changes our Lord wants to make in us as a couple." He added, "I think we need to rely on the promise of Jesus that where two or three come together in His name, He's with them. (Matthew 18:20) We can worship in our own home like the first followers of Jesus did, (Philemon 1:2; 1 Corinthians 16:19) and He may even bring some others our way who are equally hungry to draw closer to Him! What do you think?"

A warm smile accompanied her answer. "I think the Holy Spirit gave that guidance to you. Let's do it and see how our Lord leads us." Lacie paused. "I know we'll miss some of our friends from the congregation, and we'll certainly be misunderstood. But I believe with all my heart that this is what God wants from us now."

There was no doubt in Brett. Putting his arm around his wife, he said, "A few days ago we were reading Hebrews, chapter 13 together. Some of those verses apply to what we've been discussing here."

Lacie reached over to the coffee table and picked up her well-worn Bible. "Let me look... Here it is: 'And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through His own blood. Let us, then, go to Him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace He bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise — the fruit of lips that confess His Name' (Hebrews 13:12-15). 'Brett, I have the feeling our Father is setting us on a new course in our journey with Jesus!'"

2. Confidence In The Spirit Of Christ

**I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths.
Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door,
I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me."**

The ride home from meeting with their congregation's pastor found them reflective. As they pulled into the driveway, Lacie commented, "Brett, I'm glad we explained to the pastor and to our friends in the congregation what we're doing here at home. I don't want them to think we're just trying to get away from them."

"I'm glad we did, too, Lacie." A slight frown creased his brow. "It just seems so hard for people who aren't searching God's Word themselves to understand how earnestly we want to pursue His Kingdom purpose each and every day. (1 Thessalonians 2:4) And if we're constantly feeling like we have to take part in all kinds of programs and activities, we don't have much left for either drawing close to our Lord or for each other." (Matthew 6:33)

She nodded in agreement. "It's hard being misunderstood by others, but I have no doubt we're in God's will in prioritizing Him and how He wants to work in our marriage. I just wish Jeremy and Kristen could have joined us in this journey. She's my best friend!"

No sooner had Lacie spoken when Brett eagerly jumped in. "I don't know if I told you, but I mentioned the Restoration Ministries website to Jeremy and he told me he's going to check it out. He wants to download The Gospel of the Covenant so he and Kristen can go through it together. Who knows where this may all lead?"

That perked her up! "It'd be really nice to have other people who want to please God with their lives the way we want to. (Colossians 1:10) I'm going to keep praying for them!"

He smiled lovingly at his wife. "Well, our Lord has been so gracious to us to reveal through His Spirit how pleased He is that we're actually applying the Bible to our lives and not just reading it! (James 1:22-25) He knows our hearts, and I'm sure there are others he'll bring our way in His timing."

"You're right, Brett," she smiled back. As they got out of the car she added, "While you were at work yesterday I began to look at The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation article from the website. It really got me thinking about how little we ever hear about obeying God, and how our obedience is evidence of our love for Him!" (Nehemiah 1:5)

"You're right, Lacie. All we ever hear about is God's grace, which I'm so thankful for. But we never hear about His holiness and righteousness and justice. Maybe because we've been taught so little about the Older Testament, we've forgotten how often we're commanded to fear Him." (Psalms 128:1; 2 Corinthians 5:11)

Brett unlocked the door. Lacie paused for a moment then commented, "Since the Older Testament is the Hebrew Scriptures (Acts 17:2,3), that was the only Bible the Jews had when Jesus was on earth. (2 Timothy 3:15-17) There was no Newer Testament! Everything He taught He drew directly from the Hebrew text!" (Luke 24:27)

"It's as if the Church has laid aside the very Bible Jesus used, as though that's irrelevant to Christians!" Brett's voice was tinged with frustration. "Yet throughout His ministry He repeatedly called His own to trust in Him with the same kind of obedience and love that the Older Testament calls for." (Deuteronomy 6:3-6; John 14:21)

Lacie fully agreed. "As we go through this article together, let's make sure we do trust Him the way His earliest followers did — with a heart that's ready to obey."

As they hung up their coats Lacie revealed something that had been on her mind for awhile. "Brett, sometimes I think that my 'going forward' during an altar call so long ago has really been meaningless to me. I mean, the pastor just asked if I agreed with some verses he read, and when I said I did, he declared me 'saved' in front of the entire congregation that morning. They all stood up and applauded! But I still had the feeling that something wasn't right."

He nodded slowly. "It's the same with me, Lacie. I went forward at a youth rally to 'give my life to Christ' like a lot of my friends did. There was a lot of hype, and I went along with the crowd. But now that we've been reading the Bible together, I realize that no one ever told me I needed to repent of my sins — to turn away from them so I could turn to my Father for forgiveness in Jesus. (Acts 26:20) The rally speakers just emphasized how loving God is and that He'd accept me just as I am, even if I had no intention of turning away from my sinful actions and attitudes. (But see 1 John 3:7,8) It sure seemed like it didn't matter what my heart was like!"

She shook her head at the folly of it. "I know that can't be biblical! Now that we've both intentionally been spending time in God's Word to see our lives from His perspective, I realize that neither of us has understood the true Gospel before. But I'm puzzled by something, Brett. Why at this specific time do you think we both have this yearning to follow through with whatever God wants us to do?"

He pondered her question a bit as they walked into the living room. "That very thought crossed my mind yesterday as I was driving home from work and praying. It was almost as if God wanted me to know that we weren't alone in our spiritual journey."

"What do you mean, Brett?"

"Well, all of a sudden I was reminded of that older couple we met in the park about two or three months ago. I had the strongest sense that they've been praying for us all this time." (2 Thessalonians. 1:11)

Her face lit at the memory as they sat down together. “We talked with them for hours, and I realized they were the first people we ever met who said they ‘followed Jesus.’” (John 10:27;12:26)

“Right!” he laughed. “They never talked about religious things, but described a way of life that serves the Lord (1 Peter 1:13-16). Had you ever heard so many testimonies of answered prayers and divine encounters? Those are the first people I think I’ve ever met who truly live to bring glory to God!” (John 15:7,8)

That brought a warm smile. “And remember after we left them, we both commented how much their love for each other had the aroma of Christ in it! (Proverbs 5:18,19; 2 Corinthians 2:15) And I agree with you that I too sense that they’re praying for us! Especially since they were the ones who encouraged us to get up early to pray together and purpose to apply the Bible to our lives.” (Mark 1:35)

“Well, we sure saw the fruit of that in their lives!” he laughed. “And I think the Holy Spirit has answered their prayers as we’ve been searching His Word together each morning these past few months.” A tender hug sealed their decision to keep pressing on.

Brett suddenly chuckled over a thought that had just crossed his mind. “Ever since our time with Jack and Dee, I’ve been spending a lot more time reading my Bible whenever I have a few extra minutes.”

Lacie looked over at him quizzically. “I’ve noticed a Bible in the bathroom but I never got around to asking you why.”

Brett’s sheepish grin turned into laughter. “When you and Dee took a walk around the park by yourselves, Jack told me that he uses bathroom time to read the Bible. When he first started following Jesus he wondered how he could spend more time in the Word of God. So he recommended to me what he came up with: to read the Bible whenever he was answering the call of nature. That’s why I keep a Bible there.”

They both chortled. “Actually, you’re right, Brett. I can think of lots of times when I’m doing nothing while I’m waiting for someone or I’m stuck in traffic. I could be memorizing a verse or reviewing a passage we’d discussed that morning.” (Psalms 119:15)

It was dawning on them how important it was to be opportunistic about searching out God’s Word whenever they could. (2 Timothy 2:15) Brett reached over and grabbed his Bible from the table next to the sofa. Opening to 2 Timothy 3:16,17, he read it aloud slowly so both of them could relish what the Holy Spirit was telling them: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Lacie replied softly, “That’s what I want for us, dear — to be completely prepared through God’s Word for any and every encounter we have!” (1 Peter 3:15)

3. The Kingdom Is Within The Followers Of Jesus

**“My followers speak of the glory of My kingdom so that all men may know of My mighty acts.
My kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, enduring through all generations.
I am faithful to all My promises and loving toward all who follow Me.”**

Jack and Dee sat on their back deck contentedly enjoying their coffee. Between sips Dee asked, “I wonder how that young couple we met in the park a few months ago are doing?”

Jack replied, “You mean Brett and Lacie, don’t you? Nice folks. I’m glad we’ve both felt led to pray for them each day. It sure would be nice to hear that our Lord has answered our prayers!”

Dee smiled in agreement. “I’d like to think that when and if we do encounter them again, there’ll be a real hunger for everything our Lord desires for their lives.”

Jack added, “I think that note I gave Brett with the Restorationministries.org website pointed them toward the truths they’ll need if they’re sincere in following Jesus wholeheartedly with loving, obedient trust.”

“Think back, dear,” Dee responded a few moments later. “We were at the same point of questioning what was frustrating our spiritual lives as they are! Do you realize that it’s been 16 years since we took part in that Hebraic Restoration seminar? I’m so glad we followed the Holy Spirit’s prompting to go.”

Jack took his wife’s hand. “Back then I was an elder, coordinating three home fellowships and leading one myself. I remember that our elders’ board studied all the major writers on home churches before dividing the entire congregation into smaller groups.”

“You certainly tried to do your best to help our church body,” Dee replied. “You put a lot of time and effort into the whole transition to fellowship in homes.”

Jack nodded somewhat sadly. “As I look back now, I realize how wrong our goal was: to make people feel accepted and comfortable by getting together every week in each other’s houses. But we were just following what all those noted writers on home fellowships had recommended.

“Don’t be too hard on yourself, dear,” Dee murmured. “We all thought that just getting together to chat and do a Bible study in an informal setting was what biblical fellowship was supposed to be.”

“The trouble was,” added Jack wryly, “we never saw anyone growing in Christ’s likeness! People talked about God’s Word, but we didn’t see much fruit from all that discussion! I’m not sure that we even saw one new person come to Christ during that whole time. I guess that’s because what we were doing seemed right from our human perspective but had nothing to do with God’s purposes for getting together!”

Dee sighed. “Our Father purposed that we meet in homes to help each other remain repentant so that He could answer our prayers. (1 Peter 3:12) And those who are more mature in His ways are to come alongside to help the others apply His Word to their lives. (Acts 2: 42,46,47) That way we all become equipped to expand His Kingdom through our daily contacts with unbelievers.” (1 Peter 2:12)

She paused for a moment then added, “When we meet in homes, we’re also able to share our resources and spiritual giftings with our fellowship family. (1 Corinthians 12:6,7,26) And we’re never at a loss for testimonies of how He’s been at work around us!”

Jack sat up, folding his hands on his lap. “We sure missed His plan back then, didn’t we? The home groups in that old congregation ended up repeating what they’d always done in the church fellowship hall, like just another meeting. But we overlooked our Father’s whole intent that He’d made clear in the Scriptures: that we be extended spiritual family—a twenty-four hour a day, seven-day a week commitment to each other as brothers and sisters.” (Matthew 12:49,50)

His voice intensified as he got into the topic. “And don’t forget all those “one-anothers” in the Newer Testament! It’s in the course of our daily lives as extended spiritual family that we live those out.”

“Oh,” Dee replied, “you mean showing how we belong to Jesus as a body by loving one another, serving one another, admonishing one another...”(i.e.,Romans 12:9-16)

“You’ve got it, gal!” he laughed. “And there are 54 “one-another” ways in the Newer Testament that flesh out what agape love looks like in action! That’s how the earliest followers of Jesus were identified by outsiders — by their love for each other!” (John 13:35)

Dee chuckled. “Well, as you said, it’s been 16 years since we encountered the truths God is restoring to His people. What I remember most about our introduction to the Hebraic foundations was that they enabled the first followers of Christ to be so spiritually powerful and relationally intimate through His Spirit. (2 Peter 1:3) What an amazing 180° turn He’s made in our lives since then, Jack!”

“Look at it this way, Dee,” her husband said. “Can you think of any similarities between how we’re wholeheartedly living by His Spirit now day by day (John 3:8), and how we used to spend so much time orchestrating and planning out all those services and activities back at the church building?”

She shook her head at the very thought. “I can’t think of even one similarity. All I know is how mindful of serving the King of the Kingdom we’ve become. Back then, the Sunday service and weekly meetings pretty much comprised our spiritual life.

But now, each day we're praying and looking for opportunities to expand His Kingdom because we love Him so much!" (1 Peter 3:15)

"Just like that day at the park before we met Brett and Lacie, how we prayed for an opportunity to represent Jesus to someone!" Jack laughed. "It sure seems like that's how Father God wants us to live — ready and available for His purposes with everyone we meet. (Colossians 4:5,6) When we were busy keeping the religious system going, it never occurred to us to look for ways to do our part in the Kingdom. I use to feel that I was giving my all in directing the affairs of our congregation and the home fellowships I was responsible for."

Dee couldn't have agreed more. "Who would have ever thought that loving the Lord our God and loving our neighbor as ourselves would find so many chances to be lived out for His glory through us!" (Luke 10:27)

Jack paused thoughtfully for a moment then declared earnestly, "Dee, over these 16 years we've changed from being "churched" people to becoming followers of Christ bent on seeing His Kingdom expanded on earth. We haven't had to depend on institutions and creeds because we're standing on God's Word as truth. (John 17:17)

"And," added Dee joyfully, "we're relying on the indwelling Holy Spirit to guide and empower us to do His will." (John 14:15-17)

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It was early evening at Brett and Lacie's house. Supper was finished, the dishes had been washed and put away, and they could finally sit back and talk.

"Lacie, what would Jack and Dee think if they saw us now?"

His wife pondered for a moment as she leaned back into the sofa cushion. "I think they'd be pleased with how determined we've become in living for Jesus and wanting our marriage to reflect Him."

Brett followed with another question. "How far have you gotten in reading The Gospel of the Covenant?"

"I've only read through the first part that discusses covenants, Brett. But my eyes have been opened to see my heavenly Father in an entirely different way!"

He smiled in agreement. "When I read that the word covenant can mean "to come into union with," I realized that the covenant our Father offers us through Jesus invites us to live in union with Him. (Ephesians 2:21,22) I'd never heard that before!

"And since union implies oneness," replied Lacie thoughtfully, "that means our Father's goal is for us to live in union with Him so that His love and power will work in and through us. (Ephesians 2:10; 6:10) That's spiritual intimacy, isn't it?" Then she smiled. "Wasn't it gracious of God that Jack pointed you toward The Gospel of the Covenant?"

He grinned back at her. "We'll make that part of our morning time together until we've both embraced the Covenant our Father offers us. Maybe that way we'll learn what Jesus meant when He promised that streams of living water would flow from within us by His Spirit." (John 7: 38,39)

Lacie was pleased by his willingness to lead them spiritually. "I was also amazed to learn from that article how our covenant union with our Father plays into our marriage covenant with each other!"

Putting his arm around her Brett added, "I can see why so many Christian couples who have no idea about the relationship between these two covenants are getting divorced today. Instead of seeing God's intent for their marriage covenant to be as permanent and loving as their covenant with Him, (Daniel 9:4; Nehemiah 1:5) they're following the world's way of putting themselves and their personal happiness first."

"But giving up on your marriage and hoping for a newer, better spouse has nothing to do with loving God and walking according to His Word!" (Malachi 2:14-16) Lacie's voice wavered with sadness.

Brett, sensing the depth of her dismay, responded, "It sure doesn't!" They were both quiet as they realized how many of their friends had left their spouse for someone else.

After a bit Brett broke the silence with a new thought. "I'd never realized that our living in union with Jesus is actually an ongoing journey with Him here on earth until the time when our names are read aloud before the host of heaven." (2 Peter 1:10,11)

Sighing with longing, Lacie remarked, "I used to think that heaven was way off in the future. But Brett, I find myself more and more eager to want to please our Lord and be greeted with "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25: 21)

"I feel the same way, Lacie. If I think about our lives as a lifelong pilgrimage of growing more and more like Jesus through His indwelling Spirit, I'm more focused on HIS purpose for us rather than looking for what will make our life here on earth more gratifying and easier." (1 Peter 1:1,2)

Lacie leaned against her husband's shoulder. "There really is an intensity of determination when we realize what it means for Jesus to be Lord of our lives. That's why we need to depend so much on the indwelling Spirit for power to press on in God's will and purpose to the end." (2 Timothy 4:7,8)

"When I saw the pilgrimage aspect of life that's set forth in both the Older and Newer Testaments," Brett responded, "I realized something. My eternal salvation takes place when my name is read from the Lamb's Book of Life in heaven — and that's at the end of my life journey!" (Revelation 3:5)

Lacie's eyes widened. "So that's why we find all those verses in both testaments about enduring to the end, and not falling away!" (Hosea 7:13; Matthew 24:10-13)

The young man's voice turned serious. "As I've been going through the Bible, I've noticed how God is constantly calling us to be on guard and stand firm in our faith! (1 Timothy 4:1) If there were no chance of us straying or falling away, He wouldn't keep warning us!" (1 Corinthians 16:13; Hebrews 3:12)

"And that's why our eternal salvation comes after we've persevered to the end." (James 1:12)

Brett paused as he looked with love at his wife. "I'm so thankful we're on this journey together, hon. I wish we had the chance to meet up with Jack and Dee again so could thank them for nudging us along in Jesus!"

"Brett," she beamed, "I'm going to ask our Lord to have us run into Jack and Dee again. I want them to rejoice with us over what He's been doing in our lives."

Reaching over to hug her he answered, "I'll join you in that prayer."

4. The Spirit Of Truth Guides You Into All Truth

**“Those who put their trust in Me talk with each other, and I the LORD listen and hear.
They renew their covenant in ME In their homes and eat together with glad and sincere hearts.”**

Brett was awakened from a pleasant nap by the phone ringing next to him. When he answered, an excited voice greeted him. “Hi Brett, this is Harry. How are you?”

The young man responded eagerly, “Hey, Harry, I’ve missed you! Lacie and I have kept you and Jan in our prayers every day. What’s it been, about three weeks since we’ve seen you both?”

“Yeah, about that.” Harry paused, then went on, “Jan and I have something important to talk over with you and Lacie. Is there a chance we can get together soon?”

Delighted, Brett responded warmly, “Sure! I’ll talk with Lacie and then she and Jan can set up a convenient time for us to meet.”

“That’ll be great, Brett. We’re looking forward to seeing you both!”

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The two couples hugged like long lost friends, then made their way into the dining room of Brett and Lacie’s modest home. They’d hardly sat down when Lacie blurted out, “I’m so glad you’re here but I really want to know why you’re both so excited!”

Harry and Jan started to speak at once then laughed. “You go first, Harry,” said his wife with a grin. Harry leaned forward. “It has to do with what’s happened since Brett encouraged me to download *The Gospel of the Covenant Is the Pilgrimage To Salvation* around the time you two left our congregation. Jan and I started to get up early like you said you’d been doing together. (Psalms 5:3) The more we read that article and the more we looked into the Bible, we became convinced that the ‘gospel’ we’d believed was far from the truth!”

Brett and Lacie’s eyes met as they nodded in agreement. Then, looking directly at the other couple, Brett answered, “We know what you mean. That’s exactly what we concluded about what we used to think was the gospel as well. Now we see how man-centered and self-serving it had been. A false gospel has nothing to do with the reconciling work of Jesus so we can love God and live in ongoing, obedient trust by His Spirit.”

Lacie added, “I can’t begin to tell you how great it is to now know we have a Kingdom purpose in our lives rather than just meeting our own interests through activities and programs at the church building!”

Jan had felt the weight of the decision they’d made even more than Harry had. “Then we’ve probably followed in your footsteps...” She paused a moment then announced as her face brightened, “Harry and I have embraced the Gospel of the Covenant together! We aren’t the same two people you knew three weeks ago!”

Lacie jumped up from her seat and reached out to Jan. “This calls for hugs all around!” After they’d all enjoyed warm hugs of affirmation Harry continued, “The toughest part for us was going to the leadership and telling them we needed to leave so we could pursue everything our Lord desires of us.” He sighed and glanced away briefly. “I wish I could tell you the meeting went well.”

Jan picked up that thought. “As they listened to us, we could feel their attitude harden. One of the men actually said, ‘I suppose you’re going to join Brett and Lacie because we’re not good enough for you.’ That crack really hurt me!”

Brett sensed they were still smarting from that encounter and gave them some perspective that he and Lacie had received from the Holy Spirit in prayer. “It’s not so much that you were looking to leave as you were pressing forward for more of God in your life! (Philippians 3:12-14) You aren’t rejecting people. You’re just responding to your hunger to experience a relationship with God that the Bible promises.”

Encouraged by Brett’s insight, Harry nodded. “I agree. And our Lord has certainly been feeding that hunger with wonderful spiritual truth. (John 6:35) We’re definitely not the same!”

Jan joined in eagerly. “I’ll say! There’s such intensity of purpose in my heart that I’d never known before we entered our Father’s Covenant. (2 Timothy 1:9) The closest experience I’ve ever had to this is when my Dad was walking me down the aisle and I saw Harry standing there waiting for me. With my whole heart I wanted to be his.”

Lacie chimed in, “Wow, Jan, you pictured what resonates in our hearts, too!”

As the ladies headed for the kitchen to bring out the meal, Harry’s face grew somewhat somber. “Brett, I need to tell you that as Jan and I were going through the Gospel of the Covenant together, I had to fight off anger.”

Startled, Brett asked, “Anger? In what way?”

“I was angry that I’d been duped into believing that I was a Christian by just agreeing with some verses spoken by a pastor! The motto of the congregation seemed to be “Once saved, always saved,” like it was a bumper sticker slogan. But I sure didn’t see very many people living as though loving and obeying God was their highest priority!” He shook his head sadly. “I guess I thought that since I was “saved”, then that’s all there was to it. The idea of growing into Christ’s likeness never even occurred to me since no one ever addressed it.”

Brett nodded appreciatively. "I know what you mean, Harry. I used to be self-satisfied with just attending services and taking part in activities. But I'd never heard how critical sanctification was and how God was calling me to work out my salvation during my earthly pilgrimage." (Philippians 2:12)

"Well," admitted Harry, somewhat calmer, "before I embraced the stipulations of our Father's Covenant I had to confess my anger before Him. Now I can tell you with all my heart that I really want to become more and more like Jesus!" (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Hearing Harry's heart, Brett smiled softly. "I used to have twinges of resentment that I'd been fed a lie. But then I realized that the folks who proclaimed me 'saved' were prisoners of deceit themselves. I began to pity them rather than blame them."

Returning with steaming plates, Lacie piped up, "I bet each of us could look back and be tempted by regret or hard feelings. But instead," she added, "let's keep encouraging each other daily. (1 Thessalonians 5:8-11) As Jesus said, 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.'" (Luke 9:62)

Jan set her fork down and asked with a shy smile, "Does this mean that we're going to fellowship together?"

Harry turned toward his wife with a grin. "I was thinking the same thing. Brett, what do you think about that idea?"

"I'd like that very much," he responded. Then, hesitating a moment, Brett went on, "But before we decide, we need to think about what God intends for fellowship to be. When I was at the Restoration Ministries website I noticed their **Discussing How to Restore the Early Church** button. There are 50 lessons there, but Lesson 45 caught my eye, especially two subjects: 'Living Righteously Through Repentance and Confession', and 'Upholding Communal Righteousness'."

Harry glanced at him thoughtfully. "I've never even heard anything about those topics. What did you discover?"

"I downloaded the entire lesson and Lacie and I read it and discussed it. It was news to us that the primary reason the first followers of Jesus fellowshiped in homes was to uphold communal righteousness among each other." (Proverbs 3:33; 1 Thessalonians 5:8-11)

Lacie added, "They wanted to live righteously before their Father so their prayers would be answered! (Psalms 17:1; 34:14) The earliest followers of Jesus were Jewish, and they knew from their history, such as with Achan's theft (Joshua 22:20) and Korah's rebellion (Numbers 26:10), that God holds the whole community accountable for one person's unconfessed sin (Numbers 16:22)."

"Because of Achan's sin," Brett noted grimly, "36 Hebrew warriors were killed by the people of Ai. And because of Korah and his rebellious cohorts, not only their households but 250 other men were consumed by the Lord's fire. There was a real sense of communal responsibility and accountability from God's perspective."

"Being righteous in God's sight entails not only the righteousness we're given in Christ," responded Lacie. "There's also the way we live in Him by obedient trust, whether we continue to stay repentant or not. (1 John 3:7) Father God doesn't answer the prayers of the unrepentant, those who live unrighteously. (Psalms 66:18,19; Proverbs 15:29) So the early followers of Jesus met in homes together to help each other remain repentant." (James 5:19,20)

"I get it," said Harry. "If they confessed their sins one to another and turned away from them, their prayers would be answered just like with the prophet Elijah!" (James 5:16-18)

Brett joined in, pointing to the Bible on the counter. "By the second chapter of Acts we find out they're meeting in homes. In fact, that was the pattern throughout the New Testament (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Philemon 1:2), and look how our Father answered their prayers!"

Jan had just read the Book of Acts and chimed in, "Like how God got Peter out of prison when the believers gathered in the home of John Mark's mother to pray!" (Acts 12:5)

Brett smiled. "After reading that lesson on home fellowships, I've spent some time praying about how Lacie and I would commit ourselves to others in fellowship. If we're to fellowship together as extended spiritual family, Harry, I promise, with God's grace, that Lacie and I won't hold onto any unconfessed sin that would hinder our Father answering your prayers or ours." (Psalms 26:4,5; Proverbs 15:8,9)

Harry beamed with gratitude. "I understand the importance of what you just vowed. Answered prayer is what Jan and I are longing for too." He paused for a moment. "Answered prayer sure got the first followers of Christ noticed. And answered prayer brings testimony to our Father's glory!"

Jan added with joy, "And when our Father answers our prayer according to His will, we know we're in fellowship with Him as family!" (Matthew 12:50)

Brett affirmed his friends. "You've summed that up well."

Harry put his hand over his wife's and proclaimed so the hosts of heaven could hear, "Then on behalf of us both, I promise with God's grace that we won't hold onto any unconfessed sin that would hinder our Father from answering your prayers."

Gleaming with joy, Lacie spoke up. "I take it that we're now a fellowship of two homes that promise to maintain communal righteousness by His Spirit?"

Brett was first to respond, "That sure meets my heart and spirit!"

Harry and Jan laughed. "Ours too!!!"

Lacie turned to everyone. "If it seems good to you all, I think we should have communion together like the first followers of Jesus did in their homes." Everyone agreed.

As Lacie went into the kitchen for some bread and wine, Harry said, "The Gospel of the Covenant article calls communion the renewal of our Covenant with our Father. If that's so, then we should reaffirm the stipulations of our Father's Covenant. Brett, would you lead us in this?"

Brett nodded as his wife returned with the bread and cup. "Father, we want to renew our Covenant with you which the shed blood of Jesus made possible. First, please search our souls for any unconfessed sin. Let's each take a moment and ask the Holy Spirit to show us anything we haven't confessed." (1 John 1:9; Daniel 9:4,5) After a pause, he went on. "Father, we want to affirm our love for You, and please, help each of us love You more." (Joshua 22:5)

At that, the others responded, "Amen!" Brett went on, "We affirm our heart's desire to obediently trust you in all things. (Deuteronomy 13:4) And this too we ask You to increase in us." The others nodded in agreement as Brett continued, "We also affirm our forceful conviction and steadfast determination to live in Covenant union with You, and to finish our pilgrimage on earth having completed the purposes You've prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10)

"And finally," Brett concluded, "we affirm our forgiveness of everyone who has ever hurt us. (Matthew 6:14) More than that, we pray blessings on them!" (Luke 6:28) Everyone murmured, "Amen."

Brett went on, "Father, we thank You that we can renew our Covenant with You through the body and blood of Jesus. Thank You for accepting His sacrifice that reconciles us with You." He then passed around the bread, declaring, "This is the body of Christ given for us" (Luke 22:19), then the cup to each person, affirming, "This is the new covenant in the blood of Christ." With grateful hearts, each thanked their Lord as the room resounded with joyful voices singing praise long into the evening.

5. The Godly Will Be Persecuted

**“I will refine you, though not as silver; I will test you in the furnace of affliction.
And your faith—of greater worth than gold—
may be proved genuine and result in praise, glory and honor to Me.”**

A few days after having dinner with Brett and Lacie, Harry was having coffee during a break with a co-worker at the engineering company where he was employed.

“You know, Harry,” said Frank looking into his coffee mug, “you’re not any fun anymore. Ever since you and your wife started getting into the Bible you’ve changed.”

Harry was somewhat startled by the abruptness of Frank’s comment and quickly asked, “What do you mean?” Leaning forward, Frank sounded somewhat embarrassed. “You know. You don’t go out with us guys after work anymore and have a few drinks before we go home. We can’t even tell a dirty joke with you around because we feel uncomfortable.” (1 Peter 4:3,4)

Harry, however, was so grateful to his Lord for the wonderful changes that had been happening, especially at home. He paused for a second then replied with a smile, “I can’t tell you that I’m sorry, Frank, because I’m not. Ever since Jan and I began getting up early in the morning to pray and seek God through His Word, our marriage has been filled with a love and joy we never could have imagined.” Looking puzzled, Frank just shrugged. Both men knew it was time to get back to work.

Later that day Gene, the owner of the engineering company, called Harry into his office. “I just had lunch with Frank. I have to tell you, we talked about you and how things have changed.” Gene looked away a moment shaking his head. Then he spoke scornfully to the man who’d been a reliable employee for many years. “Listen, Harry, we don’t want to hear about your newfound convictions. And we don’t care what the Bible says. (Proverbs 29:27) Do you understand me?”

Harry hesitated for a moment trying to think of a reply, but none came. So he just nodded his head that he understood.

Gene cleared his throat, then put a pile of engineering specifications in front of Harry. “Two weeks ago I told you to alter the specs on this construction contract. We can get a big kickback from the construction company if we let them use inferior materials. I’ll even cut you in on some of the money if you do it.” (Ezekiel 22:13)

There was no hesitation as Harry replied, “I can’t do that. Not only would I be sinning against God, (Leviticus 19:11) but I’d be guilty of putting people in danger by using inferior material. I refuse to change any of those specs!” (Proverbs 11:3)

Gene didn’t hesitate either. With a face hard as stone he yelled, “Then you’re fired! You can clean out your desk and leave today. We don’t need any Bible thumpers around here!” (1 Peter 4:14)

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Sitting close to her husband on the sofa Jan gently took her husband’s hand. He glanced gratefully at her as he spoke. “I guess I should say I’m sorry for losing my job, Jan, but I couldn’t follow Jesus with integrity and do what they were asking.” (Psalms 26:1)

Jan turned Harry’s face between her hands and looked at him with eyes of love and admiration. “Honey, I’m so proud of you! I don’t know what the future has in store, and honestly, it doesn’t matter. (Psalms 18:30) You did what Jesus would have done, and that’s all that matters to me. I’m happier now to have you as my husband than at any other time in our marriage!”

Tears of gratitude flooded his eyes as Harry wrapped both arms around his beloved wife. “I so appreciate hearing you say those words! But in light of our current financial situation, we’re going to have to cancel that three-week trip to Sweden to visit your parents.”

Still beaming with joy that Harry had stood up for Jesus, Jan shook her head. “That doesn’t matter. I remember the saying, ‘God doesn’t close one door without opening another.’ We’ll just prayerfully wait on Him to see what He does.” (Psalms 27:14)

A blanket of peace seemed to settle around them both. “Jan, would you mind if I didn’t look for another job for a few weeks? As I was coming home from the company today I had the strongest sense that God wanted me to take some time to get to know Him on a deeper level.” (Psalms 119:57-60)

Jan’s loving smile said it all. “I think that’s great as long as you include me in this!” Harry’s serenity matched his wife’s. “That would be my pleasure!” He paused for a second then asked, “What do you think about calling Brett and Lacie and talking this over with them?”

Jan reached over to the phone with a grin. “I’ll call right now and see what they’re doing.”

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Saturday at lunch time found the four of them seated around a picnic table at the park. Brett reached out his hands to the other couple. “Harry, Lacie and I both believe with all our hearts that you did the right thing at work. And, we want you to know that if you need anything from us, please don’t hesitate to ask.”

Harry fought back tears as he responded from his heart, “We both really appreciate hearing that. Right now we have enough savings to hold us for a while. What we want to do is spend some time getting to know our Lord better. You don’t think that’s wrong in light of the command that a man ought to work to support his family, do you?” (2 Thessalonians 3:10)

Jan jumped in before Brett could answer. “Well, I don’t think it’s wrong at all! Our Lord has provided us with what we need for such a time as this. And I think he’s giving us this gift of time to be able to press on together.” (Luke 10: 40-42)

Lacie clutched Jan’s hand and chimed in, “Brett and I will be right alongside you both through this. I have to tell you, I can’t wait to see how Jesus is going to lead you!”

Brett asked, “Harry, do you have any leading in what our Lord wants you to focus on?”

“Actually, we do,” Harry answered. “We’re going to go through the **Going to the High Places** series on the Restoration Ministries website. That twenty-part series has a lot to say to us about our ongoing pilgrimage with our Lord Jesus!”

Jan’s fervor matched her husband’s. “Like you two, our hearts are yearning to walk more closely with the Shepherd of our souls. (John 10:4,14) We want to leap on the “high places” of Christ-likeness so our character will be conformed to that of Jesus!” (2 Samuel 22:33-35)

Brett commented, “We’d noticed the Going to the High Places series at the website but didn’t know what it was about.”

Jan filled him and Lacie in. “The series is a study guide for each chapter in the Christian classic, Hinds Feet on High Places. The book is a prophetic allegory to help people pinpoint their old fleshly ways that have hindered their identity in Jesus and then overcome them.”

“I’m interested already!” Lacie piped up. Turning to Brett she proposed, “Maybe you and I can go through that series too.” Brett agreed. “I just got a CD with all of the writings from the Restoration Ministries website. I’ll print out the **Going to the High Places** series tonight.”

Harry looked around at each of them, breathing in the joy that beamed from each face. “Let’s hold hands and thank our Father for His wonderful presence in our midst, and for the hope He’s holding out to each of us!” (Romans 15:13)

Just as they lifted their heads Lacie blurted, “Look over there by the parking lot. It’s Jack and Dee!” She shouted and waved. “Hey there! Over here!”

As Jack and Dee approached their table the younger couple sprang up. Brett immediately wrapped his arms around Jack as Lacie did with Dee. Grinning from ear to ear Brett laughed, “We can’t thank you two enough for what’s happened in our lives since we met you what seems like eons ago!”

Lacie was still holding Dee’s hands when a thought came to her. “You and Jack have been praying for us ever since we’ve met, haven’t you!”

Dee broke into a howling laugh. “That’s true. And, each and every day it was a delight for Jack and me to lift you both before our Lord for whatever work He wanted to do in you.” (2 Thessalonians 1:11)

Brett turned to Harry and Jan as they looked on with amusement. “Jack and Dee,” said the younger man, “I’d like to introduce you to Harry and Jan.” As greetings were exchanged, Harry wanted to let Jack and Dee know how divine the timing was for their meeting. “I praise our Father for you two arriving here in the park at the precise time we were here. This is where this journey of change began, isn’t it, when you met Brett and Lacie? What was it, about three months ago now?”

Jack couldn’t help but return the smile lighting Harry’s face. “It was about that long ago. In fact, this is our first time back to the park since then. Dee had a strong sense from the Holy Spirit that we were supposed to come here. (Acts 11:12) In fact, one of our kids called and wanted to come over and we had to schedule them for another time.”

Brett gestured to the picnic table and asked, “Do you two have time to hear what our Father has been doing with the four of us?” Jack and Dee answered simultaneously: “You bet! We ALWAYS want to hear how our prayers are being answered!”

Six animated people shared laughter and praise and empathy as they delved into each other’s lives. It wasn’t hard to do; no awkwardness disrupted their sweet time together since they all earnestly desired to become all that their Lord Jesus wanted them to be.

They marveled at the beauty of the Father’s fabric in weaving together people’s lives for His purposes. At times their joy broke into such loud chortling that others in the park turned to see what was going on. (Psalms 5:11) In fact, as one young couple was leaving the park with their baby, they paused by their table for a moment. “We just had to thank you,” the husband smiled, “for all the joy you couples seem to share. That’s the kind of relationship we’d like to have with others sometime in our life!”

Jack asked them to wait a moment as he scribbled his phone number and “Restorationministries.org” on a business card. He handed it to the young man, encouraging him to go the website. And, with equal enthusiasm, he encouraged him to call them.

The older couple excused themselves for a bit and walked the couple and their baby to their car. When Jack and Dee arrived back at the table they were both beaming. As they were sitting down Lacie said excitedly, “Before you got here, I bet you two prayed for a chance to reach out to someone as Lord Jesus would!” Jack and Dee nodded with grins that seemed to touch their ears.

“Wow,” exclaimed Brett, “that’s making the most of every opportunity, isn’t it! We need to be doing that too.” (Ephesians 5:16; Colossians 4:5)

The wind was picking up and they all felt the encroaching chill. Dee invited both couples to their home that evening for supper. “It won’t be fancy,” she chuckled, “but we’d sure enjoy having you join us!”

Together they all made it happen. As the two younger couples finished getting directions before a quick stop at the market, Jack was reminded of a verse he’d memorized just this past week:

“All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.” (2 Corinthians 4:15)

6. God Doesn't Close One Door Without Opening Another

**“I fulfill the desires of those who fear Me; I hear their cry and deliver them.
Those who seek Me find Me when they seek Me with all their heart.”**

Harry opened the door as the two couples arrived at the same time. Hugging each one in turn, he smiled broadly. “Greetings, everyone! I’m so glad we could get together at our house this time!”

Brett spoke first. “Us too! I remember that we first gathered at Jack and Dee’s after we met them at the park, and then at our house last week. Now here we are at your home, Harry.” He turned to the older man as they gave their jackets to Harry. “Jack, is this an intentional part of a larger plan?”

Jack grinned. “Later on I’ll fill you in.”

As they all got comfortably seated in the living room, Jan came in beaming. “I just can’t wait for you all to hear our amazing news! Harry has something wonderful to share — something only our heavenly Father could have accomplished!”

Harry had a difficult time getting the words out. Everyone could see that his eyes were beginning to tear. “Before I tell you, I want to thank our heavenly Father for His faithfulness to me. (Romans 15:6) He sure doesn’t close one door without opening another!”

By this time everyone was leaning forward eagerly. Harry went on, “I got a call yesterday from a company that does the same work as the one I left. They asked me to come in for an interview this afternoon and offered me a better position than I had in my old company. I let them know that I’d been fired, and that’s when Chad, the head of engineering said, ‘We know why you were fired. That’s exactly why we called you. We want a man with your integrity.’” (1 Chronicles 29:17)

Brett couldn’t contain himself. “Praise God! What a wonderful testimony! So tell us, did you take the job?”

Harry laughed, “You bet I did!” As joyful praise filled the room Harry continued, “But that’s not all...” Lacie urged him on, “Please tell us. I’ve got goose bumps!”

“Right after I said I’d accept the job,” Harry grinned, “they told me they wanted me to check out their European headquarters in Huddinge, Sweden.” Jan burst in excitedly, “Huddinge is where my folks live. That’s where we were going on vacation before Harry got fired!” Amazed “Wow!”s filled the room.

At this point Harry choked up. Finally he blurted, “I told them how we’d been planning to go to Huddinge to visit Jan’s parents before I got fired. That’s when our Father gave us His BIG gift!” Everyone’s heart began to beat faster. “When they heard how our plans had been axed, they told me that before I visit their headquarters, they want to give me three weeks paid vacation to visit Jan’s family!” (Psalms 37:4)

Now everyone’s jaw was hanging open. Their “Hallelujahs” could be heard next door!

As they began to calm down Jack felt compelled that they all thank God again. “Father, we want to thank you in the name of Jesus for your loving kindness to Harry and Jan. Thank you for being so concerned with our well-being. And, we in turn are going to make sure everyone we knows hears about what you did for our dear friends! Amen.” (2 Corinthians 1:11)

Everyone joined together in a hearty “Amen!!!”

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A short time later they’d gathered around the dinner table. Harry felt indebted to Jack and Dee for coming alongside to set all of them on the path to Kingdom living. “Ever since we began pursuing the truths on the Restoration Ministries website and using our Bibles to confirm and apply them, something has been happening inside Jan and me that we can’t put a finger on.”

Almost before Harry had stopped speaking, Brett jumped in with a word picture. “Lacie and I feel the same way! If I were a computer, it’s like someone took out the old processor and put in a whole new one — a completely different operating system.”

Dee warmly responded, “We both know exactly what you mean. It took Jack and I awhile to understand the change that was happening with us too back then.”

Jack smiled at his wife, then picked up that thought. “Our understanding of what God was doing inside us came after we shared communion together one day, especially as we reaffirmed the stipulations of our Father’s Covenant.”

The two younger couples leaned forward intently as Jack went on. “Think about what you’re committing to each time you renew your Covenant in Jesus through communion! (1 Corinthians 10:16) There’s no doubt that your commitment to love and serve Him as Lord of your life is going to change you over time.” (Hebrews 9:14,15)

Dee added, “Do you remember the truths from that ***Gospel of the Covenant*** article? It so agrees with what God’s Word intends for our lives as His beloved servants. (2 Chronicles 6:14) Our salvation pilgrimage both begins and continues as we stay repentant before our Father... as we love Him through our obedient response to His Spirit and His Word... as we trust in the shed blood of Jesus and His resurrection on our behalf... as we press on with determination to follow Jesus as our Lord... and as we forgive those who hurt us. As we renew our covenant in Jesus, we’re going to be strengthened to keep being transformed by His Spirit in us!” (2 Corinthians 3:18)

As the other couples nodded thoughtfully Jack proclaimed, “Over time, all of these elements of our walk in Christ grow in intensity! This is the ongoing sanctification part of our pilgrimage to our salvation. The Spirit is growing us to become more

like Jesus because we've stopped listening to our sin nature-controlled soul. (Romans 8:7-9) Instead, we're looking to the Spirit of Christ to speak through our spirit so we can be wholly available to serve Him." (Romans 12:2)

Dee added, "Those 'stipulations' of living in Jesus are like arrows pointing the way to Christ's likeness as His Spirit works in and through us." (Romans 8: 13,14,29) As the others took into their spirit what she was saying, their faces lit up in agreement.

Confirming what Jack and Dee had just shared, Brett spoke up. "That's exactly what's going on! I noticed the change that the Spirit was working in me because before I had to make any decision, I used to have to weigh all the pros and cons — especially what was in it **for me**. Now, all I want to know is what the Lord's will is and do it." (1 John 2:15-17)

Lacie added, "I've experienced such a sense of protection to know that Brett's heart is set on hearing God and following through! That's encouraged me to keep growing in trust, too, as I yield to His Spirit day by day!"

Harry nodded at the eager young couple. "The old Harry would've been plagued by bitterness and depression if he'd gotten fired. I chuckle to think that just a few days before I got fired, Jan and I had gone through the **Demolishing Strongholds** workbook we downloaded from the Restoration Ministries website. We identified and demolished every demonic stronghold that had been hindering our love for God, for each other, and for everyone else. I was even able to love my boss when he fired me, and pray for him!" (Luke 6:27)

Brett vowed, "Lacie and I won't let the sun go down tomorrow without us going through that workbook ourselves." She smiled in affirmation.

Harry paused for a moment as he remembered something. "There's an old poem at the end of **Demolishing Strongholds** which the author was given by his pastor during a difficult time in his own life. I memorized a part that's helped me see my Father's hand in everything that's been taking place. It may sound a little dated, but its truth is sure timeless:

'One step thou seest — then go forward boldly, One step is far enough for faith to see;
Take that, and thy next duty shall be told thee, For step by step thy Lord is leading thee.
Stand not in fear, thine adversaries counting, Dare every peril, save to disobey;
Thou shalt march on, all obstacles surmounting, For I, the Strong, will open up the way.'

Jack put his hand on the younger man's shoulder. "That's right, Harry! The Spirit of Christ will only give any of us 'one step of faith' to take. It's a step that can't be analyzed, only obeyed before the next step can be given."

Dee put a question to the two wives. "Have you noticed any changes in your marriage, in how you respond to each other?"

The two women grinned at her. "For sure!" Seeing the joy in his wife, Harry gleamed. "Now it's as if Jesus were inside me loving Jan! The old Harry who evaluated Jan by what she did for me has gone. The love I now have for her has power in it because I'm loving her through the Spirit the way Jesus would have me do." (Ephesians 5:25) Everyone smiled.

"That's the transformation that's taking place in me too," noted Brett. "Jesus is helping each of us to love the way He does... to trust our Father as He does... to live determined about doing the Father's will as He is... and to forgive everyone as He did."

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Sometime later they were all back in the living room having dessert. Brett said, "Jack, you said at the door that you'd explain something to us later."

Jack paused to look at each face. "Since we left the religious system sixteen years ago, Dee and I have come to realize that extending the Kingdom relies primarily on using the spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit gives to each follower of Jesus."

Jan broke in, "I've seen the gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians and Romans but figured they weren't important since no one in our Christian experience made much of them. Are they important? Should we know what ours are?"

Jack was delighted with her questions, for he could see she was eager for everything our Lord wanted for her. "As much as you need oxygen to live, the gifts of the Spirit are that essential if we're to fulfill our part in our Lord's Kingdom. For example, the Spirit has empowered me as an evangelist. He has worked within me a burning desire to see others embrace the Covenant our Father offers. (1 Corinthians 9:16) As people embrace the stipulations of His Covenant and receive the Holy Spirit through the new birth, I come alongside them to help them grow in their trust. (1 Corinthians 3:5) And I remain alongside them until I can pass on the responsibility to a man who will shepherd them."

Dee spoke up with a smile, "My gifts are faith and exhortation. With the empowerment of faith I look forward to impossible circumstances because they bring testimonies to our Father's faithfulness! There's an old saying I like very much: 'A condition for a miracle is difficulty; the condition for a great miracle is impossibility.' I believe that my Father enjoys showing us His awesome power!" (Luke 1: 37)

Jack hadn't lost sight of Brett's question. "In the past sixteen years since we began to apply the Hebraic foundations, I've been used by God to start eleven home fellowships throughout this county. Each of them has multiplied, and now there are over forty all actively serving our Lord Jesus in extending His Kingdom."

Excitement filled Harry's heart. "Just like you're doing with us! You used the **Gospel of the Covenant** so that we might become our Father's children and receive the Holy Spirit. And it's His Spirit Who's been changing us. But now we need His gifting so we can build up and edify each other in Him." (1 Corinthians 12:7)

“Exactly,” Jack responded. “And we’ll help you with that. But to answer Brett’s question: Dee and I like to meet in everyone’s home to get insight into the spiritual condition of their marriage and family. We have those we’re discipling into our home to role model the Christlike relationship He’s formed in us.”

Dee nodded in agreement as Jack went on. “For a time I’m like a shepherd with a flock. And, since each person and family is different than the others, I need to know them personally (Proverbs 27:23). What better place than in their home? If you haven’t seen it yet on the Restoration Ministries website, the **home** is the basic building block for spiritual development.” (Genesis 18:19; Ephesians 6:1-4)

Jan was beaming. “Jack, I’m thrilled to know how God has used you and Dee together. I can see how your gifts cooperate! To know there are others who are like-minded in serving Jesus makes me feel like I’m wrapped in a warm blanket on a cold day.”

“If it works out with you two guys,” said Jack, “I’d like to meet with you each week so we can talk about how you can grow in spiritual leadership in your homes.” Both men nodded approval. “How about meeting me at the Coffee Shop this Friday at 5AM. I’d like to spend two hours with you, and this will give you enough time to get to work. Besides, by meeting on Friday, you can catch up on your sleep over the weekend and you won’t be robbing your wives of time with you.”

Realizing that the evening was drawing to a close, Dee added one last joyful note. “Do you remember that young couple with the baby we met in the park three weeks ago? They’re Nate and Jessica. They called us and we met with them yesterday. Neither one is a follower of Jesus, so Jack and I are going to meet with them privately until they are. Then we’ll bring them into our fellowship family as a brother and sister in Jesus” (Mark 3:33-35)

Lacie asked, “I have one last question. Is there any way we can get to know our spiritual gifts sooner than later?”

Jack smiled. “At the Restoration Ministries website is a booklet entitled ***God’s Instruments for War***. I recommend you all put it at the top of your reading list. I’d truly love to see us all relying on the Spirit’s power as soon as possible. And I’d like nothing more than to know each of you in the Spirit as He sees you.” (1 Corinthians 12:11-27)

7. Our God Is Not Ashamed To Be Called Their God

**“Gray hair is a crown of splendor and is attained by a righteous life.
My servants will continue to bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green.
They actively serve Me in My kingdom, knowing that their true home is still to come.”**

“Would any of you like a refill?” the waitress asked as she served the three men at her table. Each one nudged their cup forward so she could easily pour the coffee. As she moved on to serve others, Jack continued his thought. “I really enjoy hearing your life history, guys. It delights me to find out the different ways our Lord has been at work in His redeemed people.”

Brett understood the joy of the older man. “Me too! Even though I’ve known Harry for years, I realize now that I’ve never really KNOWN him. Especially the divine intervention that’s been taking place in both of us and brought him and me to meet with you this morning.”

Harry joined in, “I can’t remember when I’ve had breakfast at five-thirty before! But this has been really worth it. I sensed when I got up this morning and got in that cold car to drive over here that the discomfort was really an investment in our relationship with each other. I look forward to keeping this going.”

Jack was delighted with their response. “I’m glad you both feel the way you do. Getting to know each other, warts and all, and getting out of our comfort zone for each other is the best way we can support one another as heads of our homes.” He paused a moment then added, “As time goes on you’ll realize even more how your wives and families are being blessed by our time together. There’s a certain kind of pressure that’s removed from a wife when she knows her husband has relational accountability with other men in the home fellowship whom she respects. (Romans 15:14) Especially when she sees that the wisdom he gains by his time with these men is helping their home be what our Lord wants.”

“I appreciate that you asked us to meet before work. That interferes the least with our family time,” Brett interjected. He smiled sheepishly. “At first I thought that when we got together, you’d be ‘teaching at’ us here in the restaurant. But you haven’t done that at all!”

Jack chuckled, “Brett, that’s the way clergy do things, thinking they have to lecture the Bible at people all the time. I recognize that the Holy Spirit has gifted me as a shepherd, a biblical elder. (Ephesians 4: 11-13) That’s what motivates me to serve you guys and your families by getting to know you and how I can help you learn to serve them. The best way I can do that is through open discussion.” He added, “And I hope you’ll openly discuss with your own family the things we talk about that concern them.”

Harry offered this thought. “That reminds me of a verse I just read in Proverbs yesterday: ‘Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds.’” (Proverbs 27:23) Our family is our flock, and they need to be our priority!”

“That’s it exactly!” Jack nodded. “As I shepherd you guys I expect you to shepherd your families, especially getting into God’s Word for yourselves with the desire to put it into practice. (Matthew 7:24) If you have any questions or things you don’t understand, I’m there for you. But it’s also essential in my serving you as a shepherd to come alongside you to get to know each member of your families personally too.”

Brett had a question. “If I understand you correctly, it’s important for you to know each one in our household. But you’re also committed to Harry and me on a more personal level to help us shepherd our own families.”

“That’s true, Brett. I believe that God’s plan is this: that at some point you both will be equipped to replace me and shepherd others our Lord brings to you. The best way I can do this is to help you meet the needs of your own personal flock, your family. In order to accomplish this, I want to find out from your family members what’s spiritually important to them, and then help you meet those needs.”

“I think that’s terrific!” Harry announced delightedly. “That’s what Paul says is one of the criteria for being a biblical shepherd — that a man must have managed his own family well. (1 Timothy 3:4, 5) But how will you be able to help us this way if our fellowship family grows larger?”

Jack smiled knowingly. “It’s my hope that our family in Jesus will expand as new people come into the Kingdom through us as His ambassadors. But keep this in mind,” he added seriously. “The size of our fellowship family is limited by the number of people that I as an elder can render account to our Lord for. I take very seriously what the writer to the Hebrews commands: ‘Fully hear those who lead you, and submit to them, for they keep watch on behalf of your souls as men rendering account. Listen to them with the intent of following through in order that they may do this with joy and not groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.’ (13:17, literal) In the Kingdom of God a man can’t serve as a shepherd more people than he knows individually.”

Brett looked puzzled. “So what happens when you realize there are too many for you to be accountable to God for?”

“By His grace we begin another fellowship family,” Jack responded. “From past experience I know I can’t serve more than five or six households. If I’m to interact with them meaningfully throughout the week, that’s about all I can handle. And the same goes for Dee as she comes alongside to help your wives mature in Christ” (Titus 2:3-5)

“Wow! All I can say is, Wow! This Kingdom living is sure different than all my past experience in organized religion,” remarked Harry with amazement. “That means that size sure isn’t a sign of success. Multiplication of Christ-followers is what the Bible calls for, isn’t it?” (2 Timothy 2:2)

Jack was pleased with that insight. “Home fellowships are like small platoons of spiritual warriors extending the Kingdom of God. That’s our Lord’s way of bringing light into a dark world.” (Ephesians 5:8-10) He went on, “And an elder/shepherd must have the courage to discern when he can no longer render account to God for each one. If a fellowship family grows too large, he’ll begin to manage a group rather than come alongside them personally.”

Brett voiced his thoughts slowly. “I’m beginning to feel a weight of responsibility on my shoulders. I can see how crucial these breakfast times will be if I’m going to mature in Jesus and become equipped as a shepherd myself when the time comes for our fellowship family to multiply.” (1 Timothy 3:1)

Harry joined in, “Me too. And that responsibility galvanizes me like nothing has in the past. I have an intensity in my heart to serve my Lord Jesus like never before!”

“I’m so glad you both feel the way you do,” Jack smile broadly. “That makes my labor a joy and not a burden. See, you two are already helping me fulfill God’s role for me as an elder!” (1 Thessalonians 5:12,13)

Brett probed Jack for more insight. “Tell us your recommendations so we can help you to help us mature like we should.”

Jack had already thought that through. “Both you and Harry are already on the right path by getting into the material on the Restoration Ministries website. I suggest you concentrate on going through the *Jesus in Your Home* series or the *Discussing How to Restore the Early Church* series. And be sure to explore either of these with your wives. That way you can discuss these truths together and discern from the Spirit how He wants you to apply them in your own home.”

Harry was curious. “What’s the difference between these two series? And why do you recommend them in particular?”

“Jesus in Your Home is the video version of Discussing How to Restore the Early Church, which is in a print format,” Jack answered. “So use whichever one suits your learning style. But realize that it’s as you put into practice what the Spirit reveals, you’ll begin to see changes, especially in your relationships within your home.”

“I’m so glad you’re emphasizing how much we need to make sure our own homes are in in order before we dash out to try to expand our fellowship family,” grinned Brett. “I know my wife will appreciate that, for sure!”

“No kidding,” laughed Harry. “I can’t tell you how often Jan used to cringe when I headed out the door for yet another obligation at the church building! We never seemed to have enough time for each other.”

Jack looked at both men intently. “Both these series make very clear the primary relational priorities of the earliest followers of Jesus. These priorities seem to have fallen by the wayside over the centuries, but they were so important to Jesus’ followers as an understood way of life.”

“Well, you’ve got my attention.” Brett leaned forward. “What are these priorities?”

Jack grabbed a clean paper napkin and unfolded it. “It’ll be easier if I draw it for you. The most important relationship for anyone who loves and serves God is with our Father and Jesus through the indwelling Holy Spirit.” (1 John 5:1)

Both men nodded. “What’s next?”

Jack continued as he drew another square around the first one. “Next comes your home. God calls for each of our homes to be a place of refuge, a peaceful sanctuary for each person who lives there. (Luke 10:5,6) If someone is married, as each of us is, our primary relational focus needs to be on our wives and children. (Ephesians 5:25; 6: 1-4) At least as far back as Abraham’s time, the home has been the primary place for spiritual development and growth for each person there.” (Genesis 18:19)

“I can see how mixed up my own priorities have been,” confessed Harry. “If there’s no peace and serving in love under our own roof, then I don’t have any real testimony of the Spirit of Jesus at work in me anywhere else!” (1 Timothy 3:4,5)

Brett agreed. “I can see how Lacie really needs me to lead us at home, and for her to know in her heart that she comes right after my love for God in importance to me.” (Ephesians 5:28,29)

“You’re absolutely right, guys,” smiled Jack. He added, “The third relational priority after God and your home is that of your home fellowship. They’re your extended spiritual family, the people you bear life’s joys and burdens with,” he noted as he drew the third square around the other two. “It’s what I refer to as “load-bearing” relationships, (Galatians 6:2) those we interact with through the “one-another” commands in the Newer Testament.” (such as 1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Brett’s face lit up as he spoke. “I like the feeling of cooperation that I’m sensing, that we’re going to be helping each other grow in Christ’s likeness and in His plans for our walk in Him.” (1 Peter 3:8)

Harry grinned at his two brothers in Christ. “That’s something I never experienced before in any of my activities when I served in my last congregation. There’s a certain sense of nobility in these priorities, like a dignity I haven’t had before — as if we’re directly serving our King Himself. In my heart I now realize that I REALLY want to please Him!” (2 Timothy 2:15)

The three men stood up so they could get to work on time. As Harry picked up the tab they all walked toward the door. Brett looked earnestly at Jack. “I know Lacie and I are willing to spend whatever time we need to so that we’ll be prepared when our Lord multiplies our fellowship.” (Ephesians 5:15-17)

Harry glanced over at him with a nod. “In that case, let’s all be a blessing to someone today. You never know who Father might put in our path!” (1 Peter 3:15)

8. When The Righteous Gather As Extended Family

**“My followers seek first My kingdom and My righteousness.
They’re family who break bread in their homes and eat together with glad and sincere hearts,
praising My Father and enjoying the favor of all the people.”**

“Those guys are sure having a wonderful time playing horseshoes in the backyard,” Lacie laughed as she looked out the kitchen window. She, along with Dee and Jan, were getting the food ready for supper. The other wives peeked out at their husbands and at Harry and Jan’s son, Josh, having fun together.

Jan was delighted to see her son joking with the other men, thoroughly enjoying himself. “I think Josh is getting a kick out of being Jack’s partner! He’d always enjoyed time with his late grandfather especially, and Jack’s so much like him.”

“I’m sure Jack is enjoying Josh just as much,” Dee responded. “Jack likes to look into the spirit of a young man and try to discover how God intends to use him later on. (Proverbs 22:6) We’ve found that it’s important for a young person to understand his bent and spiritual gifting. Then he can better cooperate with his parents as they help prepare him for a life that will bring glory to our Lord.” (Ephesians 6:4; Luke 1:17)

Jan’s face was aglow. “After having listened to Harry recount his breakfast with Jack and Brett the other day, I can see that’s right in the character of Jack’s role as a shepherd. You both must have learned a lot from raising your own sons!”

Lacie joined in. “Dee, since you’re now a grandmother, Brett and I could sure use some help with our kids. My Dad passed away years ago, and my Mom lives 10 hours away so we don’t see her very often. I’d sure love for Kirk and Kelsey to spend time with some older folks to help ‘grandparent’ them!”

The women smiled warmly as they watched eleven-year-old Kirk and nine-year-old Kelsey take turns tossing a ball for Jack and Dee’s dog to retrieve. “We’d love to spend time with your children, Lacie,” said Dee gently. “Just observing how they interact with each other and with other people helps us figure out their strengths and weaknesses. That way we can help you and Brett work on their character.”

“Dee,” Jan blurted out, “you and Jack seem to know each other so well, especially in spiritual matters. I mean, I’d love for Harry and me to work together as well as you two do. Do you have any suggestions?”

Dee smiled as she answered. “Well, our Lord has grown me over the years to become the helper Jack needs me to be. We both want so much for our Lord to be lifted up in people’s lives! And in order for each person to live out their part in His Kingdom, they have to know each other in the spirit, not according to the flesh.” (2 Corinthians 5:16)

Jan tilted her head at that. “I’m not sure I know what you mean, Dee.”

“Jan, I see you as a woman with a gift of mercy. (Romans 12:8) You appear to me as someone our Lord would use to reach out to the down-hearted and others who’ve lost hope.”

“That’s me,” Jan responded with a chuckle. “Harry tells me that I’m always looking out for ‘strays’! But I do really feel fulfilled when the Spirit uses me to help restore hope to someone.”

Dee turned to Lacie. “And you, young lady, have gifts of administration and exhortation. (Romans 12: 8) I’ve observed how you’re able to organize everything that needs to be done and cheerfully delegate each task. I also believe that the Holy Spirit has given you a wisdom that’s motivated by seeing people put it into practice what He speaks through you. That’s the core of the gift of exhortation — a combination of encourager and admonisher depending on what’s needed.”

Lacie beamed, “Brett and I used the book from Restoration Ministries that Jack suggested, God’s Instruments For War, and those two gifts came up very high for me!”

Jan’s face lit up. “That’s right! When Harry and I went through the questionnaire in the book, I was high in mercy, followed by the gift of service. And that’s exactly how I see myself doing my part in the Kingdom —through mercy and service.”

All three ladies stood there enjoying the new revelation about each other “in the Spirit.” Then Dee proposed, “How about us three getting together each week like the men are doing? (Titus 2:4,5) I don’t mean early in the morning, but sometime during the day.”

Jan spoke first. “I’d really like that! I work part-time at my sister’s boutique, but I’m off Tuesdays and Thursdays.”

“I homeschool Kirk and Kelsey,” noted Lacie. “But each week I alternate with two other home schooling moms to take each other’s children for a few hours. I’m sure one of the other mothers would agree to either Tuesday or Thursday.”

Dee reached out and hugged both women. “Great! Why don’t you call me on Monday and we’ll set up a time and place.”

Just then the men walked in from the backyard howling as Josh jokingly rubbed in how he and Jack had won at horseshoes. Jack gave the teen all the credit. “You really helped an old blind man!” The men laughed all the harder. Brett put his hand on Jack’s shoulder and remarked fondly, “You were no slouch!”

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“Josh, would you like to thank our Lord for the meal we’re about to share?” They all bowed their heads as Josh prayed hesitantly at first, but ended with a fervor of thankfulness that everyone responded to with a hearty “Amen!”

As they were passing the food, Jan piped up, “Would you mind if I asked a question?” Jack looked at her and nodded. “You asked us here on a Saturday afternoon for our Sabbath gathering. How did you pick this time?”

Jack was glad she'd asked. "First, let me say that neither the time we gather nor the day we treat as our Sabbath is locked in concrete. It's open to change and is something we can all discuss as we look into God's Word together. Over the years we've seen that the Sabbath is a gift from our Father — a twenty-four hour period of refraining from tasks that would rob us of the refreshment our Lord desires for us on this day of rest (Mark 2:27). It's also a special time set aside to honor and worship Him without the distractions we have the rest of the week." (Exodus 20:11)

Dee added with a smile, "In our home we apply the Bible's command for our Sabbath this way: we owe it to God that at the end of the twenty-four hours Jack and I are spiritually, emotionally and physically refreshed, prepared for the next six days of work."

Brett looked amazed. "I never thought of it that way. We've usually ended the day feeling worn out and ragged."

"We're intent on applying the Bible," interjected Jack, "based on the Spirit of the law, not on keeping the letter of it. (2 Corinthians 3:6) It's the Holy Spirit Who gives life and freedom to applying God's Word."

Jan pursued her original question. "So how did you come up with Saturday?"

Jack smiled at her persistence. "Most people don't work on Sunday, so we wanted to leave that day as their special family time together to be refreshed in their own relationships. By meeting late on Saturday afternoon and extending it into evening with fellowship and worship, it not only puts our Lord first but leaves Sunday free."

"I like that application!" announced Harry. "That rings true to me as the Spirit's way of caring for the well-being of our Father's children."

Jack assured them, "All of this is open for each household to review and come up with an application that suits their families and schedules. But let's make sure we set aside a twenty-four hour Sabbath rest as a gift from His hand." Nods of agreement confirmed his admonition.

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As Harry, Brett and Josh cleaned up after the meal, the ladies sat on the sofa looking through Dee's photo album. Jack was on the floor laughing with Kirk and Kelsey as they played tug of war with Sonny the dog using an old towel. Jack found a way to help Sonny win by tickling the giggling kids.

In between rounds of tugging Jack asked the kids, "How do you two like being home schooled?" They looked at each other with grins. Kirk answered first. "I really like it. It's not just academics like kids in public schools have. Mom, and later Dad when he gets home from work, spend a lot of time helping us see life from God's point of view."

"Yeah," chimed in Kelsey. "Ever since our parents met you and your wife, helping us develop the character of Jesus has really become their priority. But what I like the most is that they don't tell us as much as show us through their own lives. I've seen both Dad and Mom ask forgiveness from us when they've blown it. They never did anything like that before!"

"Maybe sometime this week I can stop by and spend some time with you both," suggested Jack. "We'll ask your folks if Dee and I can take you on some kind of 'field trip.' Would you like that?" Delighted to hear that these two neat, older adults wanted to spend time with them, the kids reached out toward Jack and hugged him.

At that moment Dee caught Jack's eye and gestured toward her watch. Jack realized that the time was later than he thought. He often got lost in the time he spent with people, and Dee would gently get him back on track.

"Let's all gather together," he called out. The sofa and chairs were arranged in a circular fashion around the living room to facilitate discussion and participation. "You kids can either sit with us adults or you can play on the rug in the middle here as long as you don't make too much noise."

The kids decided to stay on the floor and began to pull out the Legos that Jack and Dee had in a toy box they reserved for such occasions. Josh, just about to sit next his parents, changed his mind and joined the two younger kids with the Legos.

Jack was the first to speak. "I called each of your families a couple days ago to prepare you for our gathering. Anybody remember the verse I cited?"

Jan responded quickly, "I looked it up and memorized it! 1 Corinthians 14:26: 'When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.' And I also recall that you told me that the original word for 'church' means the called-out ones — the people our Lord Jesus has called out of the world's way of doing things!"

"That's good, Jan! I want each of us 'called-out' ones, whenever we come together, to be prepared by the Holy Spirit to participate — kids included. This will help keep us ready to 'one-another', and also ensure we aren't locking the Spirit of our Lord out of our gathering by just spectating." (2 Thessalonians 1:3)

"I remember in the Jesus in Your Home video series," Brett commented, "that they stress two points about gatherings. The first is, if Jesus doesn't show up, why should we? (Matthew 18:20) In other words, are we just getting together for a social time, or to bring praise and joy to our Lord? And, the second point is to never treat children like 'second-class citizens' in the Kingdom. (Matthew 18:10) They have something to offer God too!"

Lacie added, "Having both of these as our goals has caused our family to spend intentional time getting ready for our gathering together with you all."

Kirk looked up to see if there was an opening for him to share a thought. "Even on our way over here, Dad asked us to look inside ourselves to see if there might be any sin we hadn't confessed. He told us that every time we gather we should always be prepared to have communion together."

Jack and Dee grinned with delight at each other and looked with approval at the boy. Dee exclaimed, "Your conviction as you spoke gave me goose bumps, Kirk. They weren't just words from your mouth but from your spirit! (3 John 1:4) I just wish I was your age when I first learned these truths." The other adults nodded in agreement.

The evening was filled with praise as each one suggested or led out in a song. Several shared testimonies of answered prayers and situations where God's intervention was recognized. Two or three discussed insights they'd gotten from the Bible during the week. Then Jack led them in communion, reaffirming the stipulations of the Father's Covenant before passing the elements representing the body and blood of Jesus. (1 Corinthians 11: 24,25) He left it up to each father to decide if his children should partake.

As their time together drew to a close Jack placed his hands on Dee's head and prayed a blessing over her, and through her for his children and grandchildren. He then encouraged Brett and Harry to do likewise with their wives and children.

Jack and Dee hugged each one as they exited the front door that evening. Josh, somewhat out of character for him, held onto Jack as tears filled his eyes. "Two of my grandparents are dead and the other two live far away," he sniffed. "Would it be okay if I call you 'Grandpa' and 'Grandma'?"

They hugged him with delight as they searched Harry and Jan's face for approval. Both nodded 'yes', so the older couple told Josh how much they'd like that, especially since their own grandchildren lived out of state.

Kirk and Kelsey quickly looked at their own parents, who nodded approval. "We'd like you to be our 'Grandma' and 'Grandma' too!" (Proverbs 17:6) And with that, a group hug ended their evening together.

9. Women Of God Share Authentic Fellowship Together

“Older women in Christ teach younger women what is good, being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”

“Sorry I’m late!” smiled Lacie apologetically as she jogged up to the two waiting women. “Kirk forgot his backpack so we had to go back and get it before I dropped the kids off at their friends’ house.”

The afternoon breeze blew gently as it rustled the autumn leaves. Jan and Dee had been chatting for a few minutes and didn’t mind waiting at all. “We’re so glad you could come! We’ve been recalling how wonderful it’s been for our Lord to bring us together as extended family in Jesus. It seems as though we’ve known each other for years instead of just weeks!”

Lacie couldn’t have agreed more. How greatly she needed an older woman in her life to help her mature in her walk in the Spirit as well as help her fill her home with more peace and joy. “Thanks, Dee, for suggesting we get out and walk! I really value your input, and yours too, Jan. Sometimes I find that I’m feeling sorry for myself and kind of lonely. I guess it’s because Brett and I were so used to all those meetings and activities at our former congregation. I didn’t feel a need then to personally seek out how our Father wanted me to use each day to fulfill His purposes.” (2 Timothy 2:20,21)

“I understand what you mean, Lacie,” nodded the older woman as they walked along the park pathway. “Sixteen years ago Jack and I grew frustrated enough in our spirits to realize our Lord wanted to do a new work in us apart from depending on organized religion as our spiritual format. And while we found that drawing close to Him both individually and as a couple quickly deepened our seeing Him at work in and around us, we still experienced a sense of loss. (Psalms 37:3-7) All those people we’d spent years doing “church activities” with took offense at our absence. I couldn’t believe how much slander and gossip about us took place among people we thought had been our friends!” (Psalms 41:6)

Jan sighed. She too had found people turning the other way when she encountered them at the market or in other public places. “I hadn’t realized when Harry and I chose to get off the “religious program treadmill” that people would take it as a personal insult against them! (1 Peter 3:16,17) We only wanted to reorganize our relational priorities so we could focus once again on Jesus, crucified and resurrected, and how our marriage might reflect Him more!” (Philippians 3:10)

Dee grabbed the hands of the two women on either side of her. “Sometimes the very ones we considered friends are the people who turn against us. (1 Peter 3:15,16) But Father God is sovereign, and when you’re responding to the direction and prompting of His Spirit, you have to follow His command!” (1 John 1:3-6)

At that, Jan interjected, “Speaking of following His command, Harry and I are so excited about the door our Father has opened up for us in Sweden! (Luke 11:10) I called my sister, and she and her family and all my aunts and uncles there can’t wait for us to come! They’re organizing a family reunion during our 3 weeks in Huddinge, and I know Josh is looking forward to seeing his cousins again. It’s been 6 years since we were last there, so they’ll have a lot to talk about — even if they have to work through broken English together!”

“Are any of your relatives followers of Jesus?” asked Lacie.

“Well, not that I know of,” responded Jan. “In fact, I googled Sweden/religions to find out the spiritual condition there. The State Church of Sweden is Lutheran, and while 8 out of 10 Swedes are members, only 1 out of 10 regard “religion” to be important in their daily life. And I saw that Islam is starting to make inroads — it’s second only to the State religion in followers!”

“That sounds pretty much like the statistics I’ve read about most of Europe,” said Dee softly. “But it’s also a great opportunity for you and Harry and Josh to show them the difference — the authentic Jesus!” (Colossians 4: 5,6)

“I know you’re right,” answered Jan. “I read that among the young people there, Christianity is no longer taught in the public schools, nor are they learning about Jesus in their homes. So most of them are biblically illiterate. But, like young men and women here in America, they’re finding that materialism and education and all their personal technology are unable to fill the spiritual void in them. It’s an emptiness I know that God is allowing them to experience because He wants them to seek Him!” (Isaiah 55:1-3)

“That sure is the heart of our Father, isn’t it?” added Lacie. “Yet so many people want to believe in a warm, fuzzy god of love and forgiveness who doesn’t have any righteous standards — someone who fits their image! They expect their god to do their bidding because they have no idea what the mighty and awesome God of the Bible is really like.” (1 John 4:1,2)

“You can bet we’ll be coming before our Lord specifically on behalf of your family, Jan. He is the only One Who can prepare the soil of their hearts for the Seed of truth in Jesus. (Luke 8: 11,15) And you can bet that Satan is going to try to interfere to disrupt your relationships so that their ears won’t hear and respond!” (Mark 4:15) Dee was speaking from experience, and well understood the sorrow of missed opportunities and misunderstanding among her own relatives.

Jan looked fondly at both of her sisters in Jesus. “You know, so many times people have said ‘I’ll pray for you’ but I knew they’d forget as soon as the conversation was finished. But I know in my heart that you two are bearing this burden with me, and that you’ll keep Harry and Josh and me before His throne every day.” (Galatians 6:2)

Dee slowed down her pace and said, “Let’s begin right now with this particular opportunity to see our Lord work in a mighty way and be glorified in it!” The trio stopped and held each other’s hands right there on the path. “Father God, we come to you in the name of our Lord Jesus, knowing that you don’t desire for anyone to be lost but that all respond to Your call to repent. (2 Peter 3: 9) Thank You for your long-suffering patience. Please prepare the way for Jan and Harry and Josh to be Your instruments and ambassadors to their relatives in Sweden. Open the door of faith for them, Father. (Acts 14:27)

And open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to You, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place in Your family.” (Acts 26:18)

“And Father,” interjected Lacie, “we’re well aware that the enemy of our souls wants to keep these precious people in the darkness of lies. (1 John 5:19) We ask in the mighty Name of Jesus that the unclean, lying spirits be bound and gagged in their lives so that their ears will hear and their hearts see their sin and detest it. (Romans 7:18-20) Your Spirit brings conviction of sin, (John 16:8) Lord, and we ask that even before Jan and Harry and Josh arrive in Sweden, you’ll be at work to prepare their relatives to repent. (Acts 26:20) May they encounter the true gospel of Jesus and run to Him in love and trust, Father!” (Hebrews 2:9)

Jan was overwhelmed by the love her sisters in Christ were ministering to her as His vessels. “Father God, thank You that where two are three are gathered in the Name of Jesus, He is in our midst! We do love You and trust that You will go ahead of us and work mightily for Your Name’s sake. (1 John 3:21,22) Amen.”

The three hugged one another with joyful tears. Dee looked at them both as a mother would her beloved daughters. “Someone once shared with me this word picture that I think will be helpful to you. Imagine that in each of our lives are a certain number of “God sightings” — encounters with the true Gospel and with the Spirit’s power at work that ultimately have led us to respond to His call to repent and come to our Father through Jesus. For some it may take 85 “encounters” and for others only 5. You don’t know where your particular testimony or service in His Name will fall along someone’s particular life journey. You may be right on the cusp of being able to harvest them as Kingdom fruit. Or, you may meet them early on in their spiritual search; they need to hear what you share with them, but you’re more of a sower than a reaper.” (1 Corinthians 3:6-8)

The other two were listening intently. Dee continued, “Sometimes I’ve felt burdened by guilt that I didn’t see any signs of spiritual responsiveness in the one with whom I was sharing. But their response isn’t under my control! Only my obedience to the Spirit is.”

She went on as Jan and Lacie nodded their agreement. “Other times I’ve come under the conviction of the Spirit, realizing that He’d been prompting me to speak up or call or e-mail someone, but I’d resisted Him. Maybe I felt I’d be rebuffed or insulted by the person I spoke to, but at any rate, I knew in my heart that I’d grieved Him and missed an opportunity. But that produced the godly sorrow that compels me to not want to refuse any prompting He gives now!” (2 Corinthians 7:10)

Jan nodded with understanding. “If I assume that just because I’ve told someone the truth, that person should immediately respond positively, that’s presumptuous! I’m just a vessel through whom the Spirit works, (2 Corinthians 4:6,7) and it’s up to Father God and that person whether they respond. Father extends the grace for them to hear, but the person can choose to accept it or reject it at that particular time. They may still be clinging to the god of this age, unable to see the light of the Gospel.” (2 Corinthians 4:3,4)

“How grateful I am that He is so faithful!” exclaimed Lacie. “As I look back, I know someone must have been praying for me, because God finally got my attention to want Jesus as my Lord far more than I wanted to keep on sinning! When I saw my utter depravity in my own heart, then I received His gift of grace and forgiveness. (Psalms 51:17) So how can I ever look down on someone who’s as lost as I was back then? His love for me has grown compassion in me for those who have yet to encounter Jesus. (Colossians 3:12) At the same time, it keeps me alert to opportunities to be available for Him to use me in someone’s life!” (Galatians 6:9)

Dee beamed with joy at the wise insights of these two younger women. “That love and alertness helps each of us to make the most of every opportunity we have, especially since it seems that the days are more evil than ever! (Ephesians 5:16) In fact, just yesterday I was at Walmart, and it seemed like a really slow day there. I was the only one in line for my cashier, and I couldn’t help but notice great sadness in her face. I inquired, and she teared up. She told me she’d just found out her mother has cancer and didn’t know which way to turn. I told her that I have found great comfort in my Lord Jesus, and asked if she’d like me to pray with her about her Mom.” (2 Corinthians 1:3,4)

Lacie was startled. “You mean that you prayed with someone right there in Walmart?”

Dee smiled. “What a blessing to be able to lift her and her mother before our Father so that He might show Himself both loving and mighty in their lives! (Psalms 62:11,12) And how gracious of our Father to keep other customers away so we could have this brief, intimate moment with Him. In fact, right after we prayed, the next customer came up. I’ll never forget the hope I saw in that gal’s eyes as I left. Glory to Him alone!”

“I never thought of praying with people I don’t know,” commented Jan. “But being alert to when the Spirit prompts me to come alongside someone just to affirm that they’re important to God sure sounds like something Jesus would do! (Galatians 6:10) Thanks for recommending that to us!”

“Well, dear,” smiled Dee, “if I just talk about prayer but don’t put it into practice, I’m being hypocritical. After all, He’s been so faithful to me that I want that gratefulness to flow out to others for His glory! (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18) It’s His love at work in me that empowers me to serve Him in this way. And I know how pleased He is when I bear witness to what I’ve seen and heard when He works through me.” (Acts 4:20)

By this time the ladies had returned to their cars. “I’d better get going,” said Jan. “I have to pick up Josh from soccer practice. But I’m so glad we had this chance to talk!”

“Me, too!” smiled Lacie. “I’m so encouraged that we can get together to learn from each other and lift up Jesus in our midst. Are both of you available next week to walk and talk?”

Dee was encouraged by their eagerness. “I’d love to. And let’s be sure we keep in touch when other ‘God-sightings’ or needs come up during the week. (2 Thessalonians 2: 16,17) My spirit soars to share this kind of fellowship with you!”

Each went her way, rejoicing that they'd loved one another in Jesus and spurred one another on to serve Him as they serve others. (Hebrews 10:24)

10. The Righteous Shine In The Kingdom Of Their Father

“My kingdom grows imperceptibly like a mustard seed. Over time its many and ever-increasing branches bear fruit that blesses more and more people.”

The door to the hospital room opened quietly as a smiling face peeked in.

“Harry! You’re the last person I ever thought I’d see at a time like this,” blurted Frank, stretched out on his bed with tubes and wires sprouting from his arms and chest. A monitor next to the bed flickered as it kept track of his vital signs.

Harry reached out toward his old friend with a grin, wrapping both hands around Frank’s hand. “I’m here because you’re my friend, and always will be!”

Tears welled up in Frank’s eyes. “Harry, I betrayed you just like a Judas! (Matthew 26:25) When you refused to falsify those specifications and Gene fired you, I was on his side. [See Kingdom Living Today story #5.] I even made fun of you after your “religious experience”, and chewed you out for not drinking with us guys any more.” Suddenly he choked up. “How can you come to me as a friend after what I’ve done to you?”

Harry pulled a chair up next to the bed and spoke softly as he looked into Frank’s eyes. “I have to confess that I was pretty hurt by how I was fired. It took me a couple days until my God opened my eyes that it was His will that I be let go.”

“God wanted you fired?” declared the amazed man. “This I’ve got to hear!”

“Well, that’s why I wanted to come to see you, Frank. Right after I got fired, I was almost in shock. But as I was driving away from the company, I sensed that God didn’t want me to get angry or hold a grudge or panic over not having a job. He wanted me to use some time to get to know Him more.” He shook his head at the memory as Frank stared at him wide-eyed.

Harry continued, “What helped too was Jan’s response. She wasn’t upset or worried — in fact, she just about dragged me to our friends Brett and Lacie so they could pray with us. So getting to know God in a deeper way is what I did for several weeks.”

“Well, that’s pretty interesting in a strange sort of way, I guess,” remarked Frank slowly. “But why did you come here to see me?”

Harry chuckled softly. “Someone Brett had met, an older man named Jack, encouraged Jan and me to go to a website called restorationministries.org to help us grow in our spiritual development. Since we’d prayed earlier with Brett and Lacie about discerning God’s will, I figured this was part of His answer so I checked it out.”

Frank had spent a lot of time surfing the web before his heart attack, so his ears perked up that his friend would have found something besides entertainment in cyberspace. “So, what did you find there?”

“Something that changed my life, Frank. One day I was browsing through a book on the website, Restoring the Early Church. One sentence in particular almost jumped off the page. The author had been told by a friend, “You can never walk in the fullness of Jesus until you can wash the feet of Judas.” (See Restoring the Early Church, [Father & Lord Jesus: Your Primary Relationship](#)) Those words dug into my heart — I mean, I just kept reading them over and over! Then I heard a voice inside me say, “Harry, you can never walk in the fullness of Jesus until you can wash the feet of Judas.” (John 13:5)

Frank’s jaw dropped. Finally he said, “That’s powerful stuff! I can’t say I really understand it though. Please, keep going!” He pushed the button to prop the back of his bed up higher.

“Well, the more I read, the more I was convicted in my heart that I needed to forgive you, and Gene too. Let me see if I can describe it the way it was presented in that chapter as they depicted the Last Supper. This was a Passover meal, and Jesus was the Host. (Matthew 26:17-30) Even though He knew Judas was about to betray Him, He put the guy at the place of honor at the table, right next to Him. (John 13:26) That’s what I call forgiveness!”

Frank nodded. “I recall some of that from Sunday School when I was a kid, but it didn’t mean much to me back then.”

Harry smiled. “I know what you mean. But then I remembered the words of Jesus that I’d been reading that same morning: ‘If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.’ (Matthew 6:15) That sealed it for me. I knew what I had to do.”

“So because of this, you came here to see me?” asked Frank, puzzled.

“Not quite,” laughed Harry. “Actually, I didn’t even know you’d had a heart attack. I went to the office to see you and Gene. In fact, I’d just left his office after asking him forgiveness for any wrong attitude I’d held. One of the guys told me you were in the hospital. So I want to ask you the same thing I asked Gene. Would you forgive me for any wrong attitude I had against you?”

“YOU’RE asking me for forgiveness....” stammered the surprised man. Tears again emerged. “I need to be asking you to forgive me.”

“I’m glad to forgive you, Frank. Will you forgive me?”

Frank sniffled a reply as Harry gently reached across the wires to hug his friend. When a couple minutes passed, Frank cleared his throat and said, “Now let me tell you how I ended up in the hospital. You may notice that my wife isn’t here. She left me two weeks ago to think things through.”

“Think things through?” asked Harry. “What do you mean?”

“So Gene didn’t tell you what’s been going on?” Frank looked surprised.

Harry shook his head. “No. It was all he could do to say he forgave me for my attitude!”

Frank nodded grimly. “About three weeks ago the FBI showed up at our office. Some of the contracts we falsified data on were government contracts. Gene is waiting to be indicted. I’m not sure what’ll happen to me.” He sighed. “When Becky found out I was involved in illegal stuff she went through the roof. I guess that was the last straw. She was fed up with all the time I spent on the Internet too. Anyway, she packed her bags and told me she needed time to think about everything. She’s at her mother’s.”

Harry could tell how painful this was for his old friend and waited for him to go on.

“I managed to hang on for a few days, but I could just feel the pressure building inside me. Then yesterday I woke up with chest pains and was admitted here. They told me it was a good thing I came when I did, as my blood pressure is sky high and I really haven’t taken care of myself these past few years.”

“Frank, I’m really sorry all this has happened. I never even thought about the legal ramifications of what the company was doing. I only focused on what, in good conscience, I couldn’t be part of.”

“Well,” added Frank wryly, “if no one’s told you, you did the right thing and you left at the right time! I guess the FBI will find out why you were fired and will want to talk to you.”

Harry responded soberly, “I can only tell them the truth.” (Psalms 15:2)

His friend grimaced as he shifted his position. “Do you know, until you showed up here today I was afraid that your testimony might fry me. But now, I really want you to tell them everything you know. This dark cloud will never leave me until everything comes out in the open.”

“I’m glad you said that,” Harry responded with a slight smile. “I think God wants me to tell you what I’ve learned these past few weeks to give you hope.”

Frank was so grateful Harry had come. “I’d like that, buddy.”

“It’s no small thing that I’m here today of all days,” Harry noted with a grin.

“You mean today wasn’t an accident that you came in?” Frank wondered.

“Nope,” chortled Harry. “Tomorrow Jan and I leave for three weeks vacation in Huddinge, Sweden where we were going on vacation before I got fired.” He beamed with thanks again in His heart to the One Who’d made it happen. (Romans 8:28)

Frank cackled with disbelief. “So how’d you land a job that starts you out with a vacation?”

Harry was delighted to relate the amazing details. “The company I’m working for called me after they’d heard over the grapevine why I’d been fired. They wanted me because, as they said, they were ‘looking for a person of integrity.’ When I accepted the position, they told me they wanted me to visit their European headquarters first. When they mentioned it was in Huddinge, I began to cry — boy, were they startled!”

Both men chuckled over that.

“Anyway,” Harry went on, shaking his head at the memory, “I told them how Jan and I had been planning to visit her family in Huddinge before I’d been fired. On the spot they gave me three weeks vacation there before I report to their headquarters!”

Frank was silent as he took in what his friend had just shared. “I’m so happy for you, Harry. And so glad you’re still my friend. Though I’m not sure you want a potential felon with a broken marriage as your buddy.”

Harry gently jabbed his friend on the shoulder. “Hey,” he laughed, “even more so now.” He paused as his voice turned earnest. “I know the power of my Father in heaven to take the worst circumstances and make something beautiful out of them. Wait til you see what He’s done in my marriage and family! And, I know He can make yours even better if you’ll turn to Him the way He wants for you.” (Romans 8:31,32)

Hope began to flicker in Frank’s heart as Harry added, “If you give me Becky’s number, Jan will call her tonight. I’ve brought some things for you to read — since you’re just laying around here doing nothing,” he grinned. “The most important book to me is the Bible. That’s how our Father makes Himself known and how we can be right with Him through Jesus.” (Hebrews 4:12-16)

Frank nodded thoughtfully, knowing how much he needed to find out more about this God Who had so changed his long-time friend. Harry went on, “I also have a workbook, *Demolishing Strongholds*, for you to go through. Jan will recommend it to Becky when she talks to her. And I’ve brought an article, *[The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation](#)*.’ You need to see what my Lord Jesus can do on behalf of a repentant heart!”

“I want to get into the Bible like you and Jan have, Harry. I really hope Becky will want to come back and do this with me too,” he said, his eyes wet once again.

Harry grasped Frank’s hands and looked straight into his eyes. “Remember this, Frank, when everything looks bad: God doesn’t close one door without opening another. What my Lord has done for me, He can for you.” With that Harry prayed for both Frank and for his wife, committing everything into His hands.

Then Frank prayed, his heart aching to leave behind his old ways. (Isaiah 57:15) He confessed to God the wrongs he knew he’d done and the darkness and selfishness of his own heart. He cried out to God, humbly wanting to turn away from that self-serving way of life and to know and trust Jesus as the Way to be right with God. (Acts 26:18)

Harry gently embraced his old friend, assuring him of the forgiveness found at the Cross, and the new life in the Spirit that is given to the one who repents and trusts Jesus in grateful love, determined to walk as God wants him to.

As he turned to leave, Harry smiled at Frank. "Our flight for Sweden doesn't leave until 5PM tomorrow. I'll stop by as soon as Jan and I have everything ready." A BIG grin lit Frank's face. "Thanks, buddy, for everything! You'll be seeing a new man!"

+ + + + +

Just after noon the next day Harry and Jan turned the corner to enter Frank's room — and stopped in their tracks. There was Becky, arms wrapped around her husband. Through tears both of them were affirming how much they loved each other. As soon as Becky saw Jan she broke loose and ran to hug the woman who'd so recently opened her eyes to the darkness that had held her in bondage all her life.

"Jan, how can I thank you? I downloaded that workbook last night and didn't sleep until I went through pages 36 through 53 as you told me to. By 2 AM I could feel a host of angels all around me, and Lord Jesus was real to me for the first time in my life. I'M FREE AND I'M HIS!!!"

"Becky, I'm absolutely ecstatic!" cried Jan. "You don't know how much this means to me right now. I love my family and relatives, but I was really concerned about how Harry and I were going to share our newfound faith with them. They're really "religious" but they'll have no idea what's been happening in us through the Holy Spirit. Now with you and Frank, I've seen how quickly God can move, and I praise Him with all my heart!"

"I'm so happy for you, Jan. Frank told me how Jesus has blessed you with this vacation, and we'll be praying for you. But we have another blessing to share with you. Tell them, Frank!"

Harry and Jan were waiting eagerly.

"Well, an FBI agent came by to speak with me today. He offered me immunity from prosecution if I'd be a witness against Gene."

"Wow! Did you accept his offer?"

"No, I didn't." It was Harry's turn to look surprised. "But it's because I want to pay for what I did wrong. They're going to propose 2,000 hours of community service in exchange for my testimony. That's the deal."

Four grateful people joined hands in that hospital room praising God. What they didn't see was the host of angels joining them in worship. (Hebrews 12:22) But someday they'll join the great cloud of witnesses who root for the saints of God. (Hebrews 12:1)

Just before Harry and Jan left the room, they gave their new brother and sister in Lord Jesus the phone numbers of Jack and Dee as well as Brett and Lacie. These two couples would delight in getting together with these new family members in Christ.

The Kingdom is like a mustard seed...

11. What Will YOU DO When News Of Disaster Comes From Afar?

**“Trust in Me with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways acknowledge Me, and I will make your paths straight.”**

Lacie looked up cheerfully from the stove as her husband and son walked in from the garage. “So how’d you two do at the auto repair place?”

“Well,” smiled Brett as he hugged his wife, “it took a little longer than we’d planned, but that’s exactly the time we needed to be representatives of Jesus. Right, Kirk?” He hungrily snagged two of the cookies Lacie and Kelsey were baking, handing one to his son.

Kelsey gave her Dad a big hug and then asked, “What do you mean about it being just the amount of time you needed to represent Jesus?”

Kirk jumped in with his mouth full. “Dad and I prayed on the way to the repair shop that we’d have the opportunity to reflect the love of Jesus to someone while we were there. (Ephesians 5:15,16) We hardly got into the waiting room before it all began.” Kirk grabbed another warm cookie as the two women of the house stood there waiting for the rest of the story.

Brett continued, reaching into the refrigerator for some milk. “We sat down next to a woman who had two small children with her. The kids were running all over the waiting room, and she was really distraught. I thought it was because her kids were so active, so I tried to encourage her.”

“Dad told her the kids reminded him of me when I was that age,” Kirk piped up with a big grin.

“You were lively, Kirk, very lively!” Lacie laughed as she smoothed her son’s unruly hair.

Brett went on, “But the kids weren’t the problem — it was far bigger than that. Her name’s Lita, and her husband, Juan, is in Afghanistan with a unit of Army Engineers. He’s a driver on one of those vehicles that finds and removes IEDs, the bombs the Taliban hide under the roads.”

He paused as his family sat around the kitchen table listening intently. “Lita heard on this morning’s news that Juan’s unit had run into some trouble. But she was so busy getting her children ready to come here she wasn’t sure what it was all about. All she knew is that one of the vehicles had been in an explosion.” He shook his head slightly as he recalled the young woman’s tearful face. “She was beside herself with not knowing, so I took her hand and she let me pray for her. (James 5:16) I think she was really grateful that I did!”

Lacie trembled, identifying with what that young mom was going through. She stood up, then bent over Brett and wrapped her arms around him as she started crying. The two children looked on puzzled. Then Brett led his whole family into the living room and gestured for them to sit on the sofa together.

Kelsey snuggled up to her mother with tears on her own cheeks. “Mom, what’s wrong?” she asked anxiously.

Brett was going to answer for his wife, but she gently placed a finger over his mouth. “I want to tell you kids something I’ve never shared with you before.” After a few moments to gain her composure she went on, “When we were newly married, your Dad was a Navy helicopter pilot during the first Gulf War back in the 90’s. He’d been deployed about 3 months at that point. One morning I’d just arrived at the Commissary when one of the wives from the squadron came up to me. She’d just been at the squadron hangar and happened to overhear the duty officer reading a message that your Dad’s helicopter had blown up and was presumed missing.”

Kirk butted in, “This really happened, Dad? How come you never told us about it?”

“I haven’t shared much about this with anyone, Kirk. But let’s listen to your Mom now.”

Lacie cleared her throat. “When I heard that news I just stood there stunned. At that moment Carol, the XO’s wife, walked up to us in the doorway and the woman repeated to her what she’d overheard. Carol could tell I was so upset I could hardly stand. She put her hand on my shoulder and asked, ‘Would you mind if I prayed with you?’” (Ephesians 6:18)

Lacie stopped for a moment to blow her nose. “I’d never had anyone pray for me like that, like she really trusted that God would hear her and answer!” (John 14:13) When she finished, she committed everything into God’s hands. I remember what an interesting thought that was, to entrust everything to God.” (Philippians 4:6)

“So what did you do, Mom?” asked Kelsey, her voice quivering.

Lacie smiled at her little girl, then answered, “Carol drove me to the squadron hangar. As soon as her husband, the Executive Officer, found out what we’d heard, he looked at his wife. The first words out of his mouth were, ‘You two have prayed already..’ Carol nodded as he dialed the duty office.”

“Wow, Mom, you must have felt terrible not knowing if Dad was alive or not!” Kirk reached across his sister to grab his Mom’s hand.

“Well, yes and no.” She smiled tenderly at her children’s loving concern for her. “I was definitely distressed, but all around me I felt this Divine Presence undergirding me. The trust that Carol had in Jesus and seeing how confidently her husband verified that she’d prayed with me filled me with courage.” (Philemon 1:6)

She paused as she recalled that time so long ago, then told them, “The duty officer had found out more since the initial report the woman had overheard earlier. The new report confirmed that an engine on your Dad’s helicopter had blown up but

that your Dad was able to fly back to the ship on only one engine. The XO placed a satellite phone call to the ship, and in just a few minutes I was speaking with your father.”

The couple looked at each other with love, grateful that their Lord had brought about such a deliverance. Then they reached across both children and enveloped them in a long group hug — much to the joy of them all.

Smiling at her family, Lacie probed her husband. “So, let’s hear what else happened at the auto repair shop!”

Brett could tell that Kirk wanted to tell the story so he encouraged him, “You tell the rest, son.”

That was all the prompting the boy needed. “As soon as Dad finished praying with the lady, the man behind the counter who’d overheard everything jumped in. ‘I was an equipment operator in that same Army Engineer unit before I got out last year. Give me a minute and let me call someone for you.’ Dad and I didn’t know much about the way the Army works, so we both grabbed the lady’s hands together and this time I led out in prayer.”

“I’m so proud of you Kirk,” his Mom broke in. “I’m proud of both of you!”

Kelsey gave a startled look at her brother and asked with surprise, “You prayed out loud with her?!”

“Yup,” grinned Kirk. “It’s time for me to get in on this ‘committing everything to God’ deal. Right when I finished, the man behind the counter was standing in front of us shouting, ‘Your husband’s OK! He was wounded by some shrapnel and is in a field hospital right now. You got your cell phone with you?’”

Brett added, “By this time her kids were both grabbing her arm wanting attention, so Kirk and I distracted them with a little game while she retrieved her cell from her purse. Just then it rang, and we all jumped! We could tell something neat was going on by her amazed look as she listened to the other end.”

Lacie was so excited. “Tell us the rest!”

“It was her husband on the line! When Lita finished the call, she was so excited that she told not only the two of us but the other six people in the waiting room what he’d said! Juan’s was driving as his unit had been going along a road clearing mines when he heard a voice inside him command him, “STOP! NOW!” Three seconds later an explosion occurred right where the truck would have been if he hadn’t stopped. He and two others were injured, but nobody was killed.”

Kirk couldn’t contain himself. “A news reporter was at the field hospital when he was brought in. He interviewed her husband and the others in the truck and found out no one had given the order for the truck to stop. But he’d heard that voice telling him to!”

Brett laughed at his son’s enthusiasm. “Juan gave all the credit to Jesus and pulled out a pocket Bible someone had just given him a few days before. The person who’d given it to him recommended he read the Gospel of John. When he pulled the Bible out of his jacket, there was some shrapnel imbedded in the cover. The whole thing may make national news!”

“What a story!” Lacie laughed. “So did anything else happen at the shop?”

“You bet!” Brett replied, making a sweeping movement with his arm. “The whole waiting room was sitting there astonished. Then one older woman asked me, ‘You seem to have such trust in Jesus. That’s what I’d like in my life!’ Everyone else was listening in as I started sharing testimonies about Him.” (1 Peter 3:15)

Kirk jumped in, eager to be part of the joy of sharing. “Mom, no one else came to the repair place for over an hour! Dad talked about how he’d met Jesus and how our lives have changed because of Him, and how they needed Him as Lord of their lives too! (Colossians 4:3,4) At the end he asked everyone to hold hands, and he led them in prayer that they’d each seek the Lord until they found Him. Just as he finished praying, the repairman came in to tell us our car was ready.”

Brett returned the grin on his son’s face. “I was able to give a copy of *The Gospel of the Covenant* article to each person there and one of those Bibles we keep in the trunk to those who didn’t have one. I told them to begin with the Gospel of John if they’d never read God’s Word before.”

“How blessed we are to be able to serve Lord Jesus as His hands and heart wherever we go!” exclaimed Lacie.

The whole family chuckled in agreement. Brett noted, “Wasn’t it neat that the Spirit had us print out a whole bunch of The Gospel of the Covenant articles along with other things from the Restorationministries.org website and keep them in the car! I’m glad we put our own phone number on them. I think we may be hearing from some of those folks one of these days.”

“And Mom,” blurted Kirk, “Dad invited Lita and her kids to dinner tonight!” (Romans 12:13)

Lacie’s face filled joy. “I look forward to meeting her and her children. It’s wonderful how Jack and Dee have influenced us to be opportunistic about representing Jesus wherever we go. Just think, this all began at the park months ago when they themselves prayed to reflect our Lord to someone that day…”

12. Let God Guide Your Differences

"You are My Body made up of its various parts. And these parts do not all have the same function. You each have different gifts according to the grace I have given you. So, be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourself."

The three families smiled joyfully at one another as they munched dessert in Jack and Dee's living room.

"I'm really glad to hear how great your time in Sweden was, Harry," beamed Jack at his newly returned friends. "Though Dee and I sure missed you three — six weeks is a long time!" Brett and Lacie and their two children nodded agreement.

Harry relished the warmth of being back with their family in Jesus. "Even though we had a great time with Jan's folks and enjoyed meeting the people in my company at their European headquarters, Jan and I had to admit pretty often how much we missed you all."

Jan chimed in with a laugh, "We especially missed having you to share our lives with. But thanks so much to each of you for your encouraging emails and phone calls. It was so great to just be able to pray together when things came up!"

"We felt like we were with you in spirit," Dee joined in, "every time the Spirit reminded us to lift you before our Father's throne."

The love that comes in authentic fellowship filled the cozy room. After a comfortable pause Jack asked if he could share something that God had put on his heart. The others turned their attention to him.

He began, "I don't know if any of you have had a chance to go through the book *Growing Relationships Through Confrontation* from the Restoration Ministries website. It's especially helpful now that you've begun putting these truths we've been learning into practice in your own lives."

Jan responded quickly, "Harry had downloaded a copy for us to go through on our flight over to Sweden. We even had the chance to put it to use in some of our family conversations!" Brett and Lacie remarked that they hadn't gotten to it yet, but urged Jack, "Please tell us more!"

Jack went on, "I want to discuss with you a few points from the book so we can forestall a pitfall many fellowship gatherings fall into because they don't understand how to deal with interpersonal differences." He paused as the others waited intently. "The root of what I want to share with you is found in the words of Jesus, 'So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.'" (Matthew 7:12)

"I remember the section that's based on that verse," Jan interjected. "It cites four possible areas people differ over."

Jack looked her way with a surprised smile and asked her to tell the others what she recalled from her reading. He was always delighted when others took ownership of truths and "brought something to the table" for everyone else to partake of. He served their little faith family by equipping and guiding them in their journey together in Lord Jesus. Key to his discipling them was encouraging each to share with the others what the Spirit was showing them.

Jan responded eagerly. "Those four areas of potential differences in the way people see things have come up several times since Harry and I talked about them. By knowing where people may differ, we can avoid unnecessary tension."

Brett chuckled as he grabbed his wife's hand. "That's something I know Lacie and I would like to hear about!" Lacie laughed with him.

"The four areas, as I recall," noted Jan, "are goals, methods, values and facts."

Jack encouraged Harry and Jan to share everything they remembered from their discussions. "Harry," nudged Jan, "you're really good with details. You go first."

As an engineer, Harry's keen mind held onto facts readily. "First, people can differ over goals, the purpose of their relationship. When they figure out 'where' their relationship is going, they can help each other get there. (Amos 3:3) They also need to clarify which methods they're going to use to reach their goal; in other words, 'how' their relationship should work."

Lacie piped up, "I can see with just those two elements how easy it would be to argue when we have differences. So what are the other two areas?"

"The third potential area of differences is values," replied Harry. "Values indicate 'why' you think and act the way you do. (Proverbs 16:2) If you value something highly and the other person doesn't value it at all, you're going to have friction."

"That's for sure!" snorted Brett.

Harry concluded, "The last area where people may disagree is over facts, details you can prove through investigation. Facts tell you 'what' is facing your relationship. (2 Corinthians 13:1)

Dee commended Harry with a grin. "Wow! That was excellent!" Everyone playfully clapped as Harry ducked sheepishly.

Harry added, "More than memorizing these areas of possible differences, Jan and I have made ourselves very conscious of them so we can detect any tensions with other people early on." (Ephesians 4:3)

"That's great!" Jack exclaimed. "You may have noticed that goals and values have the greatest emotional connotation of the four areas you mentioned. And it's these two factors that people spend the least amount of time working through, whether in their marriage, family or fellowship family."

His wife broke in, “But disagreements about goals and values are the likeliest to bring about the most emotional pain if they’re not worked out early.”

The other two couples nodded thoughtfully and Jack continued. “I’ve waited for Harry and Jan to return so we could all be together to discuss this. Let me first ask you a few questions: ‘What is the goal of our fellowship family? And is our goal noble enough to serve our Lord’s purposes through us? (2 Timothy 2:21) Is it just our gathering together regularly? Or, that we make sure we feel good about our friendship? Or, that we help each other more effectively represent His Kingdom?’”

He looked attentively at each one. “If we all don’t have equal confidence in the same goals of our fellowship family, over time we’ll find ourselves getting emotionally strained with each other.”

Dee then thought of an illustration that could help clarify everyone’s understanding of goals. “In Malachi 2:15, God notes one of His goals for marriage: ‘Because He is seeking godly offspring.’ So a couple needs to work out how they’re going to meet His goal to raise godly children.”

“I understand that,” Lacie broke in. “That’s what Brett and I discussed before we decided to home school Kirk and Kelsey. We needed to establish a biblical basis for why and how we’d train our children.” (Deuteronomy 11:18,19)

Brett added, “I remember it was far more important for me to know WHY we’d be educating our children at home than what we were going to do to accomplish that.”

Before anyone else could say anything, Lacie responded, “And now that we’ve been home schooling our kids for several years, it gives me confidence that all of us, including the kids, are committed to the biblical basis to why we home school.”

Kirk and Kelsey, sitting contently at their parents’ feet playing cards, nodded in agreement. Kirk spoke up, “I’m glad that we’re learning about how to live the way that pleases our Father than just taking tests and getting good grades.” The adults chuckled and looked fondly at them.

Jack then commended Dee for using the Malachi example, and Brett and Lacie for how they built off it. All this participation made his serving them as an elder shepherd that much easier, since the “family flock” were all making God’s truth their way of life.

Smiling at Brett and his family, Jack went on, “Just as you and Lacie established a goal for raising your children to live a godly life, we as an extended family in Jesus need to establish and come to equal conviction about the goal or goals for our fellowship. We can discuss it more when we get together again, but I think it’s important that each of you as families talk this over first. Then next time you can share what you’ve concluded.”

Looking around the room, everyone agreed to follow through on Jack’s request.

Then in a soft voice Kelsey looked up and asked, “What about values? You said they were important too. What should we know about them?” (Luke 12:34)

The adults glowed with delight that the little girl had enough confidence to speak up. It also showed that she’d been listening even while engaged in the game with her brother.

“I’m so glad you reminded us, Kelsey,” Jack responded with a big smile. “Many people assume that their husband or wife or their friends hold the same things dear that they do. But when their assumption proves wrong, they feel hurt, and tension builds between them.”

“I’ll say,” Harry joined in, shaking his head at a memory. “Jan and I spent many hours disagreeing over how we were going to discipline Josh after he was born. Jan had read a book that taught you shouldn’t correct a child at all or you’ll damage his creativity and self-esteem. I’d been raised in the old way, ‘Spare the rod, spoil the child.’” He squeezed his wife’s hand gently. “We sure went through a lot of misery and hurt feelings, didn’t we?”

Without a word, Jan smiled and leaned toward Harry and kissed cheek.

Jack took up the conversation again. “You two, like most of us, have gone through emotional commotion in clarifying your values with each other. And I’m sure those disagreements were sometimes pretty painful.” Each couple nodded. He continued, “We can’t let it become tension for us in this fellowship as we work through our collective goals and values.”

He paused as he pulled out his Bible. “A passage I encourage you all to use in your interaction with other is Philippians 3:15 and 16: ‘All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.’”

Dee jumped in. “We live in a culture that doesn’t know how to work our way through differences. If you’ve read on the Restoration Ministries website about the influence of Hellenism, then you know that we tend to have conflict because we’ve been trained to persuade and manipulate people to agree with our goals and values. And if they don’t agree with us, we keep arguing or else we flee the relationship.”

Everyone knew Dee’s statement was true. Brett then asked, “Jack, how do you think God would have us work out our differences?”

“The Hebraic way of dealing with differences is that you’re expected to share your goals and values with the emotional intensity you hold about them. They’re not just intellectual concepts to you! You aren’t trying to persuade anyone, but you do want to make clear your own goals and values, and especially how you developed them.”

“I think I get it,” remarked Brett. “You’re forestalling wrong conclusions that everyone thinks the way you do when they may not.”

It seemed that the room was brightening. Something inside each person verified that Jack was addressing a topic that could lead to apprehension if overlooked.

“We’ll pursue this next time,” Jack added, “but I want to leave you with this. Whenever any group of people begins to operate together in a meaningful way, their relationship goes through stages: forming, storming, norming, and performing.”

Those were unfamiliar terms to the rest, so Jack went on. “Forming is what we’ve already accomplished. We’re a fellowship family of homes who want to live righteously. Storming is what I’m preparing us for — working through our mutual goals and values as a fellowship. After we’ve worked through this, you’ll find we’re Norming — we have an even greater commitment to our relationships with each other. But that’s not the end of it. Our Lord won’t be satisfied with us until we’re Performing in His purposes for His glory.”

“I can guess what that means, Grandpa,” Kelsey interrupted. “We start carrying out the goals of our Lord Jesus, just like you and Grandma Dee have shown us.”

Everyone laughed with approval at Kelsey’s insight. “Thank you, Kelsey,” affirmed Jack. “That’s right. And my heart will rejoice when we’re fully living and operating as a body whose sole goal is to please Jesus in every way.”

Resounding “Amen!” filled the room as the families began to worship and share communion together. Wonderful hours together passed without anyone noticing the time, and they left with sincere and glad hearts (Acts 2:46)

13. Are Your Goals And Values Noble Enough For Our Lord?

**“Always be conscious that you are representing Me in this world.
Serve Me with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind,
for I search every heart and understand every motive behind the thoughts”**

“The other guys are at your regular table,” Keisha the waitress told Jack as he came into the restaurant. “Y’all have been coming here regularly, and I hear little snippets of what you’re talking about. Are you some kind of clergyman?”

Jack gave her a big smile and replied, “No, I’m just an older man who loves Jesus more than life itself. I’m helping these men and their families to live likewise.”

“So, you’re a Christian,” the waitress shot back.

“Far more than that,” Jack responded, delighted that she had engaged him in conversation. He’d been praying for this woman who always served the guys when they met for breakfast each week. As she listened with interest he continued, “‘Christian’ is a word used freely by many who neither love our Lord nor keep His commands. We intentionally follow our Lord and King, Jesus, because we love Him so much. That’s why we purpose each day to trust and obey Him with all our hearts.” (John 15:10)

This was a new concept for Keisha, one that was resonating in her hungry heart. “I can see that in you three men! There’s something different about you and the way you all talk.” She paused as if she was considering something. Then she spoke up hopefully. “My husband and are doing some spiritual soul searching as to what God wants for us. Would it be possible for us to get together with you?”

The smile on Jack’s face was so big it covered his face. He reached in his pocket and pulled out one of the cards he kept for encounters like this with his name, address and phone number. “If your husband agrees, call me. My wife Dee and I would love to share more with both of you.

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As Jack made himself comfortable in the booth with Brett and Harry, they asked, “What was that all about with the waitress?”

Jack’s grin was anything but casual. “She wanted to know who we were.” Then, pausing for effect so he could drop the BIG bomb, “She asked if she and her husband could meet with me and Dee. They’re doing some soul searching....”

“Hallelujah!!!” an excited Brett let out, followed by a grateful “Amen!!!” from Harry.

Harry erupted with joyful emotion. “This Kingdom living is so exciting and purposeful! The conversations Jan and I have had since we talked about establishing biblical goals and values for our family have changed dramatically. Just yesterday she called me before going into the mall, asking me to pray with her that she’d have an opportunity to represent Jesus to someone. (Colossians 4:5) And it happened! But I’ll let her share it with you.” (Acts 4:20)

“Lacie and I are finding that same eagerness to be prepared for any encounters Father brings our way,” (1 Peter 3:15) Brett added with a grin. “Ever since we worked out our family’s goals and values according to God’s Word, and those of our home fellowship, we have such intense heart commitment to reflect Jesus to people in ways we’d never considered before... Like putting the garbage out for Mrs. Cohen next door. She’s developed serious arthritis in her knees and doesn’t get around much any more. Our kids are learning the joy of serving others without expecting to be paid!”

Harry added, “Jack, you helped Jan and me to really make a priority of discerning goals and values for our home, especially those that are noble enough for our Lord. Even Josh has been taking part in our discussions!” He chuckled, then went on, “Searching Scripture and praying together as a family each morning before I go to work has been one of those key values that keeps us looking for moments to reach out to others.”

Jack was thrilled in his spirit over the events of the morning. “Kingdom talk” and testimonies from his brothers of how they’re being guided to serve their King always fired him up. “Let’s go over the goals and values for our fellowship family that we established together.” He wanted to confirm that they were all in agreement so he recounted the four goals for them. “So do we all agree in our hearts that our fellowship family must spur each of us on to glorify our Father and Jesus through praise, worship and living testimony?” (1 Corinthians 10:31) The other two men nodded in determined affirmation.

“We also decided that our fellowship with each other must stimulate each of us to grow in Christ-likeness. (Philippians 2:12) Also, our fellowship and our mutual desire for communal righteousness need to keep us living in repentance and pressing on toward the narrow gate. (Matthew 7:13) And finally, our fellowship as extended spiritual family must encourage each of us to reveal Jesus to the lost in our daily lives. (2 Corinthians 5:18,19)

The three men joined hands in agreement, so grateful that they and their families were equally committed with wholehearted determination to love and serve their Lord. As Keisha the waitress observed the men holding hands in prayer, she longed for the day her husband would be among those men.

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The late spring evening was filled with bird songs and crickets chirping by the lake. The four women chatted easily, taking in the refreshing warm breeze from the comfort of their lawn chairs.

“Lita, I’m so glad you were able to join us for our picnic,” Lacie said as she, Lita, Dee and Jan watched the men fishing along the shore. The young woman glowed with joy at being included with her little girls.

"I can't begin to tell you how much your kindness has meant to me," she said with glistening eyes. "It's been hard trying to be both Mom and Dad while Juan's been in Afghanistan, but your friendship has been such a comfort." (2 Corinthians 1:5)

Lacie turned to Dee and Jan. "Lita has been such a delight to us! She's begun teaching Spanish to Kirk and Kelsey twice a week. Kelsey's become like a little mother to Lili and Ada, and Lita and I have had fun discussing God's perspective on raising children."

"This has been a wonderful opportunity for me, too," smiled Lita softly. "I love being with your family, and I know the girls love playing with Kelsey." She paused as she looked over to where Kelsey was playing games with the 3-year-old and 2 year old. "I'm seeing improvement in their behavior, too. Your daughter is so good at gently guiding them and helping them learn self-control, and you've been such a help, Lacie."

Dee smiled as she took the young woman's hand. "We're so thankful to our Lord that He has brought you to us, Lita. We've been praying on Juan's behalf for Father to bring complete healing, (Luke 9:11) and that your heart will be at rest as you wait for his return." (Isaiah 26:3)

"Lita," said Lacie with a smile, "there's a story hour and craft time at the library for little ones on Tuesdays. Kelsey and I would love to bring Lili and Ada if you'd like a couple hours to relax."

Jan added, "I know of a great little thrift shop not far from here that's having a big sale. If you like, I can pick you up while the girls are at the library and we can get some summer clothes for your family!"

Lita smiled gratefully at these ladies who cared so much for both her practical needs as well as her spirit. What loving kindness God was showing her! (Psalms 116:7) She couldn't wait to have Juan meet her new friends.

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"Grandpa, where did you learn so much about fishing?" Kirk asked as Jack hooked his third bass and handed the pole to the young boy to help him learn how to bring the fish in without losing it.

"Oh, my Dad was an excellent fisherman," smiled Jack, "and fishing was one of those things we really enjoyed doing together. As you're finding out, Kirk, there's a lot more to fishing than just tossing bait into the water."

"Would you show me more?" Kirk pressed. Brett, Harry and Josh were fishing alongside them and stopped to listen to what Jack would say. After all, Jack had already caught three beauties and the rest hadn't even gotten a bite!

Jack was delighted that everyone was so interested. (Job 32:7) "The first secret in getting the fish's attention is in the tip action. You don't want to just toss your bait out and then reel it in. I caught each of these fish by wiggling the pole tip to make the bait look like it's injured. Even a bass that isn't very hungry can't pass up an 'injured' bait."

"That's all there is to it?" Harry looked dubious.

"Well, not exactly," chuckled the older man. "If the fish aren't biting on what you use first, be willing to change your bait until something does bite it." He paused for moment as he recalled a previous fishing trip. "Years ago I was invited to raft fish on the Yellowstone River in Montana. A couple of men wanted to repay a kindness I'd done for their families. I was using a Rapala lure and catching 20-inch brown trout. They were using a Panther Martin lure and catching little white fish. I offered them one of my lures but they refused."

Brett chortled. "Who'd want to catch crummy fish if you could snag some browns!"

Jack thoroughly agreed. "These guys just refused to change. One told me, 'Montanans always use Panther Martins.' They didn't catch one trout the whole trip, and I got 14! I felt really bad that they were so resistant to try something new, especially after seeing all the trout I'd caught." (Proverbs 9:12)

"I can see how that would sadden you, Grandpa. You're always considering others first, and that's inspired me to change my focus from me to others." (Philippians 2:3,4) Josh flashed a grin of gratitude for this wise man who cared for him like he was his own grandson.

"Thank you, Josh, for such kind words," smiled Jack as he squeezed the young man's shoulder, "but I haven't always been this way. The Spirit of Jesus has changed me over the years to conform more and more to His love and motivation." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Just then the men heard the voice of a newcomer a few yards down the beach. It was a man with a boy about Kirk's age. "I'm sorry, son. We forgot the bait and we don't have anything else to put on our hooks."

Kirk jumped in quickly, "Dad, can I share some of our worms with them?" (Hebrews 13:16)

Brett was delighted with his son's generous suggestion. They walked over and introduced themselves, offering a handful of worms to the pair. The grateful father was thrilled, and the two men immediately found much in common as they talked and helped their sons fish. An hour passed.

Meanwhile, Harry put his hand on his son's shoulder and turned to face Jack. "Josh asked Jan and me if he could be home schooled his last two years of high school. He's been praying a lot about it and feels this is what God would want him to do before he leaves home." (Genesis 18:19; Ephesians 6:4)

One glance at Josh's face revealed his delight at this prospect. "Grandpa, I really want this. I know it means giving up the sports teams from school, but I want to be a man who lives for Jesus and His Kingdom. I want to be like you and the man I see my Dad becoming!" (1 Corinthians 11:1)

Jack was deeply moved by the determination in the young man's voice. Delight filled his heart that Josh looked to him as his "Grandpa." (Psalms 78:4-6)

Brett and Kirk returned just as Harry was querying Jack. "This home schooling stuff is new to us. Would you help us establish the biblical foundations for training our son at home?" (Deuteronomy 6:1-9)

Before Jack could respond, Brett broke in, "I must have missed something. What's going on?"

"Josh asked to be home schooled," Harry beamed.

"Wow, that's great! My family would like to be part of whatever discussion you have on determining your biblical foundations. I'm not sure our own reasons are as complete as our Lord would have. Can we join you?"

Jack was glad that both men were so eager to work together with him on behalf of their families. "I'd be honored to help you. And, we can discuss any ways that Dee and I can be part of the hands-on training of your children in our Lord's ways. We want to fulfill our role as spiritual grandparents for both your families."

The father and son fishing nearby looked over and saw three men and two boys holding hands on the beach praying. They felt a spark of yearning for what those families had. Brett had given the man his phone number after he and Kirk had shared their faith along with the worms. The young dad reached again for that scrap of paper, knowing he'd soon be making that call.

14. Mutual Understanding Is Vital To Loving Relationships

**“You are My body made up of various members who are not all the same.
So be devoted to one another in brotherly love and honor one another above yourselves”**

The warm afternoon found the four women strolling happily under a clear blue sky along a hiking path partially shaded by towering trees.

“Dee, you always seem to have such a joyful countenance,” commented Lacie. “Have you always been this way?”

Dee burst into laughter. “Oh my, NO!!! When I was young I had such an anger problem. I’d get so frustrated when things didn’t go my way.” She shook her head at the memory then added, “It was only through the work of the Holy Spirit and my husband that I was able to change.”

“I’d like to hear more about that,” Lita broke in. “We Latinas can also have quite a temper. I’ve often felt so bad after I’ve vented my anger on Juan. I could certainly use your insight, especially now that he’s back recovering from his wounds.”

Dee’s heart went out to Lita as well as to the two other women who focused on her like nestlings waiting to be fed. “First, let me say how glad I am that Juan is home on convalescent leave after that explosion in Afghanistan. I think he and Jack are enjoying their time together at the playground watching the kids.” The ladies all smiled softly at Lita, knowing how concerned she’d been that her husband would somehow be “different” after his near-death experience.

“Jack had three deployments to Vietnam himself,” the older woman continued. “He can identify with men who return from war and the issues they face. I think even by the time we get back from our walk, wonderful things will have taken place between him and Juan.”

Lacie nodded thoughtfully. “Jack’s had some meaningful talks with Brett about their common military experiences, and Brett’s told me how helpful it’s been to have someone who understands what it’s like to be in that kind of situation.”

Dee looked with love at these women who were becoming like daughters to her. “Jack suffered post traumatic stress for 13 years before we even knew what it was. But let me get back to Lita’s question about anger. Jack’s ability to help me was a result of his training as a Naval officer, though he didn’t realize this until years later.”

She smiled as she remembered what an influence their Lord had had on her husband so many years ago as a new believer. “As Jack began reading the Bible for the first time, he recognized how biblically based the character qualities of a good naval officer were. For example, Congress requires every Commanding Officer to maintain both the operational readiness and the morale of his unit.”

Jan hadn’t spoken much up to this time since Harry had never served in the armed forces. But she was curious how the military and becoming more like Jesus were connected. “Operational readiness? What’s that?”

Dee smiled. “Officers are leaders. They must ensure that their people are trained and equipped to do whatever task or mission is assigned them. And, making sure their morale is high goes hand-in-hand with their ability to perform their assignment.”

“How does this translate into Jack’s ability to help you as his wife?” Lita pressed.

“Somewhere early in his Navy career,” Dee went on, “Jack learned two important concepts: ‘A wife is either a public compliment or a public rebuke to her husband,’ and, ‘Judge the quality of every man by his wife’s eyes.’”

The ladies looked at her quizzically so she continued, “My anger was a public rebuke to Jack, and my eyes didn’t have anywhere near the joy they have today. So he saw my anger as our problem. He knew it was his responsibility to help me just like he’d help his men with any problems that were detrimental to his unit.” (Proverbs 15:31)

“Didn’t that make you feel like a project he needed to fix?” Jan wondered.

“Not at all,” Dee chuckled. “I was ashamed of my anger, and Jack loved me enough to want to help me overcome this. Every time I started to get angry he’d gently put his finger over my mouth to stop me. Then he’d wrap his arms around me and pray until my anger subsided. (Proverbs 27:5) Sometimes he’d threaten to carry me off to the bedroom,” she laughed, and the other gals joined in with her.

As their laughter abated, Lita spoke up again. “I guess I’m having a difficult time understanding Jack’s perspective on your anger.”

“Well, let’s parallel Jack’s motive with ours as mothers,” Dee said thoughtfully. “We see our roles as moms through the needs of our children. We’ll do whatever is demanded of us to meet those needs as best we can.”

The other three nodded as she went on. “That motivation is also the foundation to biblical leadership — seeing yourself through the needs of those in your care. (Matthew 20:25-28) For example, Jack’s very aware of my spiritual gifts and does what he can to enable me to be used by the Holy Spirit in the lives of others.”

The ladies were listening attentively. “He doesn’t regard his own spiritual gifts as more important than anyone else’s. In fact, helping others identify their gifting and then helping them serve in that capacity is a biblical responsibility for husbands and fathers, and for leaders of faith communities for that matter. (1 Corinthians 12:4-7) Yet from what we’ve observed over the years, only the military trains their leaders to see themselves through the needs of those they lead.”

“As I’ve watched the changes in Harry through those morning breakfasts with Jack,” Jan noted eagerly, “I’m seeing that kind of leadership in our home becoming a way of life in my husband. He’s growing so attentive to my needs and to Josh’s,

and I feel loved in ways I've never experienced before!" She giggled, somewhat embarrassed before adding, "You know, he's even had the courage to tell me 'No' when I needed to hear it because I was going in too many directions at once. And, I didn't feel any resentment because I could feel his genuine love for me."

"It's the same with Brett," Lacie added with the same enthusiasm. "It's like he's gotten to know me in a whole new way. I feel like he anticipates when I'm heading for something that will rob our home of peace, then steps in and stops me." (Luke 10:5,6) Dee, Lacie and Jan glowed with delight because each was experiencing the loving leadership of her husband.

Dee smiled gently at Lita. "That's the crux of a man's servant leadership in his home: the loving courage to say 'no' to his wife when it's needed. (Ephesians 5:23) We women can rob our homes of peace when we get overwhelmed with tasks."

Lacie took Lita's hand and observed kindly, "Everything I've read about wives over the years contains a similar theme: we deeply desire our husband's direction, but our desire to rule our home often keeps us from receiving it." (Genesis 3:16)

Dee then wrapped her arm around the young wife who wanted so desperately the peace these other women enjoyed. "Lita, your day is coming, believe me. Because your husband is in the military, Jack will have an easier time showing Juan how some of the qualities that have been instilled in him can bless his home."

Hopeful tears and a quivering smile filled Lita's face, grateful to her Lord that these dear ladies were becoming such a vital part of her life.

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"I'm glad we can spend this time together getting to know each other, Juan," Jack remarked as they sat on the bench near the two little girls at the playground.

"Me, too," the young soldier responded. "You're the first person who's ever really grilled me about my faith in Jesus. I appreciate you doing that! I want it to be real." He paused and looked down at the ground for a minute before looking back at the older man. "You're also the first person I've met who can really understand not only the stress and pressures of war but the difficulty of returning home."

Jack smiled at his new friend. "I'm glad to help. After each of my three deployments to Vietnam I found I had the same problems you mentioned. Not only did I not want to tell Dee what had happened in Vietnam, but I also felt like I was a stranger in my own home."

"That's how I feel," Juan answered, relieved that Jack could understand the mixed emotions going on inside since his return from Afghanistan.

"Dee and I are glad to help you both," Jack noted kindly as he watched the girls taking turns on a slide. "In fact, I think she's doing that right now with Lita. We've found that men who spend a lot of time away from home on their jobs also experience the same 'outsider' feelings when they return home. When a man's away, home life seems to go on without him and he feels like a visitor in his own home. Men who marry a divorced woman who has children can also feel the same way."

"I didn't know that," Juan replied, reassured that he wasn't alone in his feelings.

Looking directly into Juan's face, Jack stated, "You and I need to talk about the emotional issues you experienced in Afghanistan. Then we can decide which ones are appropriate for you to share with Lita. You can't leave her out like I did with Dee for thirteen years. My silence only put a wedge between us." He stopped for a moment as an idea came to him. "Why don't you join us guys on Friday for breakfast? And maybe Dee and Lita can come up with a convenient time when we two couples can talk over how to undo the 'stranger' feelings you're going through."

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As they walked through Jack and Dee's front door Juan and Lita gave the older couple a big hug of gratitude. "Thank you for coming over the other night. Already there's a big change in our marriage and the atmosphere of our home. I'm no longer a visitor!" As Juan grinned, Jack couldn't help but see the peaceful joy in Lita's face as she looked at her husband.

Soon everyone from the fellowship was seated in the living room as Jack opened with a few points the Holy Spirit had impressed on him to discuss with the flock.

"Except for Juan and Lita," he began, "the rest of us have learned not only our own spiritual gifts but the giftings of each other. By knowing and cooperating with what the Holy Spirit has apportioned each of us, we're experiencing the building up He does in one another so we can reach out to others as His instruments." (1 Corinthians 14:12)

Dee added, "The other night we gave Juan and Lita a copy of [*God's Instruments for War*](#) from the Restoration Ministries website so they'll be able to identify their own giftings too!"

"I can't wait to know what they are," Lacie jumped in with excitement. She wanted them to experience the same thrill of being used by the Holy Spirit that the others had come to realize.

"Knowing and cooperating with each other with the anointings the Spirit of God has given this fellowship is key to our doing our part in the Kingdom," (1 Corinthians 12:18) Jack noted as the others listened eagerly. "But there's also the matter of our differing personality characteristics that I want to make you aware of."

He went on, "Because each of us sees things differently, we need to fully hear the other person's view to get a clear understanding of an issue. For instance, some people are task-oriented and like to provide helpful information. Anyone here like that?" Lacie and Jan both indicated this depicted them.

"Others are goal-directed. They see the vision, mission or goal as paramount and can see the bigger picture better than most people do. Does that describe anyone here?" Brett nodded while Dee piped up, "That's Jack as well."

“Some people are effective listeners and are deeply concerned with the feelings of others.” Before Jack could ask, Lita agreed that described her, and Dee and Kelsey indicated they were wired that way too.

“Finally, there are those who challenge us with thought-provoking questions. They may question the goals, methods, and values of others and encourage each of us to live courageously for the truth.” Juan was beaming, realizing that challenger described him, and Lita agreed. Harry added that he too was a challenger.

“See how diverse we are!” Dee exclaimed. “We have all the different qualities needed to effectively cooperate with each other. Josh and Kirk, how about you two?”

Josh responded first. “I think I’m part goal-directed and challenger. Is that okay?”

“Of course!” Jack replied.

“I need some time to talk about this with my Mom and Dad,” Kirk answered.

Before worshipping and renewing their Covenant together in communion, Jack brought up some situations to discuss so they could learn to appreciate their different characteristics. He assured each one that their input was important as the fellowship made various decisions, especially when establishing biblical applications.

15. Purpose To Stay Free Of Darkness

**“If you claim Me as your Head but continue to fellowship with the unrepentant, you do not belong to Me.
Walk in My light so that you can have authentic fellowship with one another.
Confess your sins so that My blood can cleanse you from all unrighteousness”**

The four families settled in the living room for their weekly gathering as the children sat comfortably on the floor with the toys and games Dee had set aside for such occasions. Brett opened with a question he'd been wanting to ask. “Jack and Dee, would you share with us some of the insights you've gained in the other home fellowships you've been part of?”

Dee encouraged her husband, “Why don't you tell them about our first fellowship, especially how that situation with Dan influenced you to be a stickler in checking out where each person stands in Christ BEFORE they become part of our extended spiritual family.”

“Dan was a tough man to deal with,” Jack grimaced as he shook his head at the memory. “Dee and I began our first home fellowship with Jim and Renee and a few other households. Jim was a retired doctor and had attended the same Hebraic Restoration conference we'd gone to. For three months we two couples got together regularly to discuss various aspects of the Hebraic foundations with them before anyone else became part of us as a fellowship family.”

“Wow,” interjected Harry. “You could really get to know each other's goals and values during those months!”

Jack smiled at the younger man. “You bet! We prayed and decided we'd fellowship together as an extended family in Christ, with Jim serving as a shepherd and me assisting him.”

Dee added, “We were going to limit ourselves to three or four other families for about six months until we'd all had the opportunity to apply the Hebraic foundations as our way of life. After that we purposed we'd only grow through reaching out to the lost.”

“That's a different approach than anything I've ever heard before,” broke in Brett. “Most congregations I've ever heard of grew by offering programs that attracted people from other churches or by offering entertainment that appealed to unbelievers to get them in the door.”

Jack nodded. “We knew what we were doing was contrary to the conventional “church growth” way of doing things. Jim and I agreed that we'd help other Christians start their own fellowship family, but we purposed to grow only through people coming to Jesus as their Savior and Lord of their life through our relationship with them. This proved to be vital in our service to our Lord by keeping us outwardly focused on reaching the lost rather than snared by self-absorbed “navel gazing.”

“I remember how delighted Renee and I were by that decision,” added Dee. “We realized how often home gatherings can become a chorus of complaints against former congregations and leaders, and we wanted to focus on equipping one another in His Spirit rather than rehearsing past problems.”

All the adults readily understood what that was like. Complaint and discontent seemed to characterize contemporary religious practice in America.

As Jack was reflecting for a moment about the joy of bringing into their fellowship fold those who'd newly become followers of Jesus, Lacie got him back on track. “What about this Dan you mentioned?”

“Yes, Dan...” Jack responded as a shadow of sorrow passed across his face. But he realized that Dan's situation was an important object lesson for all of them. “Jim insisted on having his friend Dan come to our fellowship gathering. I wanted to meet with him beforehand, but Jim insisted that Dan was OK.” He sighed, then went on. “When Dan came to our fellowship, we found out that his wife had kicked him out of the house about a month earlier. Jim didn't notice how frequently he brought up his wife and bad-mouthed her, but Dee and I sure did.”

Dee added, “Dan left before everyone else, and Jack asked everyone how they felt about this gathering time. All except Jim replied that they felt “dirty” by Dan and his slander against his wife. Jim, though, was totally oblivious to the whole thing.”

Jack picked up the topic. “I asked Jim to set up a breakfast time so he and I could meet with Dan. I questioned Dan about why his wife had thrown him out. He dodged my questions, and tried to get us to take sides against her.”

Everyone's eyes reflected his sorrow. “I then told him he wasn't welcome back in the fellowship until we had a letter from his wife that detailed her side of the story. You may remember that ‘the first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him.’ (Proverbs 18:17) I believe in that principle with all my heart. Basically, I'll listen to one person's side of a story ONLY if I can verify with the other person their side of it.”

“That is an important truth...,” Jan observed. “So what happened next?”

Jack could see they were all interested in his story and what they could learn from it. “For about a month Dan went all over town telling people we were a cult and that we'd thrown him out of the fellowship for no reason. Somehow his wife got wind of what we'd done and called Jim with the real reason for their marital problems.”

He glanced toward Dee, who said, “She told Jim she'd recently found out that Dan had had a lover for several years and refused to break off the relationship, so she told him to leave. Jim confronted Dan about this and he reluctantly admitted it was true, and that he had no intention of giving up the other woman.” He paused then went on softly, “This hit Jim hard because he'd known Dan for many years and had been oblivious of the whole affair.”

Brett jumped in, “So that’s why you’re so insistent about making sure about people’s motives before they enter our fellowship?” Jack nodded in agreement.

Dee added, “The importance of talking with people before they become part of our fellowship family was reinforced after Jack read an anecdote in the book, *Pastoring By Elders*, he found on the restorationministries.org website.”

“I’m not familiar with that one,” Harry noted. “Tell us about it.”

“As I recall,” Jack began, “the authors told about an incident with their sheep flock. A local 4-H’er had given them his ewe. She was a good-looking sheep but they failed to check her over. Not long after, they noticed she was limping because of foot rot, which destroys the hoof tissue and cripples the sheep so she can’t graze. It’s highly contagious and their entire flock became infected.”

He paused in thought, then went on, “The lesson I learned is that no matter how wonderful a person appears on the outside or how spiritual his talk is, if the infection of bitterness or pride is present, you can be sure others will be contaminated by it. Both proud, bitter people and infected sheep cause trouble and defile many! (Hebrews 12: 15)

Josh had been quiet until this point, but his youthful enthusiasm caused him to blurt, “I really appreciate you being the gatekeeper of our fellowship family, Grandpa! (Jeremiah 23:4) I think that’s why there’s such a great spirit of peace here.” The teen turned to look with love toward his father. “You’ve set a neat example for my Dad in safeguarding our own home against anything that would be unrighteous and dishonoring to our Lord.”

Jan grabbed her husband’s arm and added, “Jack, your method of talking through issues with us has really impacted Harry. We have more discussions with each other now rather than him doing the talking and Josh and I just listening.” Harry put his arm around his wife, not embarrassed one bit by her comment. He’d seen the fruit in the smiles of his wife and son as they mutually discussed things.

Juan was really enjoying the relational warmth of this gathering as extended family in Jesus. The camaraderie reminded him of the mutual trust he felt within his Army demolition unit. He had an important insight to offer, but was unsure whether they’d already discussed it before he and Lita and the kids had become part of the fellowship family. Sensitive to the Spirit and those around him, Jack turned to this new brother in Jesus. “You have something to share, don’t you?”

Juan smiled broadly. “During these weeks of convalescence I’ve been getting up early and spending time at the Restoration Ministries website.”

Lita piped up, “I’ll say! I wake up every morning to a briefing by my excited husband. But I’m glad! It leads us into a wonderful time of discussion and prayer with our morning coffee. We usually have about two hours before the girls wake up.”

Juan chuckled about “the morning briefing” part then continued, “Jack, you told me a few weeks ago that the Hebraic Restoration was our Lord’s way to return us to the faith-based obedience of Abraham, the father of all Jesus followers. I’ve been really looking into Abraham and his life.” (Romans 4:16)

Jack and the others encouraged him to share his insights. (1 Corinthians 14:26) Juan went on, “One of the things I’ve been reading on the website is their article, *Hebraic Home Fellowships Must Produce Godly Generations*. They wrote that God chose the patriarch Abraham because he would direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just. (Genesis 18:19) I think that means Abraham took personal responsibility for the outcome of the faith and future vocation of everyone in his family.”

“That’s correct, Juan,” Jack affirmed the young man.

“Then I looked up all the passages of Scripture using the concordance you encouraged me to buy,” Juan continued with growing excitement as he opened his Bible. “Isaiah 51, verses 1 and 2, really struck me about our own fellowship family here.” Juan paused as the others opened their Bibles, and then he read, “Listen to Me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was but one, and I blessed him and made him many.” Glancing eagerly around the room, Juan spoke with growing confidence. “First, in reading everything I could about my spiritual father Abraham, I can really see why my Lord wants me to see the Patriarch as a pattern for an obedient and trusting father. It’s changed my whole view of myself.”

Jack could see joyful conviction in Juan’s face. “How have you been changed?”

“Well,” smiled the young soldier, “I see that Abraham and his wife lived a trust-filled way of life.” Adding a little humor he laughed, “But I don’t know what Lita would have done if I came back from Mount Moriah telling her how I’d just tried to sacrifice our child because God told me to.” (Genesis 22:1-14) While everyone chuckled, at the same time they were fully aware of the depth of obedience which, from God’s perspective, was considered “righteous.”

Taking his wife’s hand, Juan eyed Jack and Dee seriously. “We’ve both committed ourselves before Christ to the level of obedience Abraham and Sarah had — to be willing to do whatever our Lord demands of us. You two make it that much easier for us because you model the same depth of obedience to Lord Jesus and the Kingdom of God that we see in Abraham and Sarah’s life.”

Everyone started to tear up at the guileless determination of this new couple in Jesus to follow Him wholeheartedly. Jack and Dee got up and embraced them warmly, as did everyone else with a group hug. That part the kids really enjoyed and showed it by their giggles as they wormed their way in!

As the hugs ended and each one returned to their seat, Juan wanted to add one more point. “I can see another connection between Abraham, the early followers of Jesus, and us in this room. Isaiah tells us that God blessed Abraham and made him many. (Isaiah 51:2) And in the Hebraic-style home fellowship at the end of Acts 2, the Lord added to their number

daily those who were being saved. Because Jack and Dee have been our “Abraham and Sarah”, God continues to add to us the way He did in the other home fellowships they started. Lita and I want this to be our way of life too!”

Everyone could sense that the Holy Spirit had given Juan this insight, and they each felt a deeper commitment in their spirit to fulfill God’s purposes for them both individually and collectively as a faith family. Lacie broke into a worship song and they all joined her, followed by more worship because their hearts were filled with gratitude. (Psalms 13:6) Children’s warbles mingled with strong male voices as each one poured out their hearts before their Lord in song and in prayer. After they had renewed their Covenant in communion, they moved to the kitchen to enjoy a meal together.

16. Followers of Jesus Are New Creations

“In your love for Me and in your desire to do your part in My Kingdom, guard yourself from looking back at your past with regret. I make all things new, and ongoing sorrow over your past says to Me I am not powerful enough to change you.”

“Josh, how did you, Kirk and Kelsey enjoy your time with Grandpa and Grandma?” Jan asked as her teenager walked into the kitchen and headed straight for the fridge.

“We had a great time, Mom! Grandma sure can cook, and Grandpa certainly knows how to sail!”

Keeping their promise to be involved with the children’s home schooling, Jack and Dee were taking all three kids every other Thursday for the whole day. This day began with Dee holding a cooking class in the morning, using the time with the children to share glimpses of her own life story. This morning she’d shared the loss of her firstborn son through crib death and how God had used her pain to help her develop deeper trust in Him. (Psalms 22:24) The hearts of all three children had been deeply stirred as she helped them see negative situations as one of God’s tools to get their attention and draw them to Himself in loving trust.

“How could you ever get through something like that, Grandma?” Kelsey had asked tearfully. “If we’re Christians, doesn’t that mean everything will work out the way we want it to?”

Dee had gently cupped the little girl’s chin with a floury hand. “My dear, just by virtue of our living in a fallen world we’re going to face suffering. Yet our Father promises us to be our strong refuge in the midst of our suffering, not to shield us from all of it.” (Psalms 46:1)

The children had been quiet as they thought about that. After a few minutes Kirk had piped up with another question about how God works through trials. That led to lots of opportunity for Dee to ask the children questions and discover where they stood in their own understanding of God. That give-and-take discussion provided fertile ground for future times together.

Later on, it had been a perfect afternoon for sailing — clear skies with a steady breeze. Jack had a friend with a 14-foot Lido sailboat on the lake where they fished and was delighted to let him use it to teach the kids to sail. Dee had sent them along with lunch and after a few hours of sailing, Jack had taken them to a small island on the lake. As they’d hungrily dug into the fruit and sandwiches, Jack had brought up several spiritual connections between the wind in the sails and the Holy Spirit in the life of someone who follows Jesus. (John 3:8)

Jan broke the boy’s reverie, pushing for more details as most mothers do. “So it was a worthwhile time for all of you?”

Knowing his Mom was sincerely interested, Josh went on, “Yeah, Mom, it really was neat, but somehow different too. I think that because Grandpa and Grandma are willing to spend time with me and tell me things they’ve learned themselves over the years, I feel better about myself — like I’m worthwhile talking with, not just a little kid. I feel like they trust me with the stuff they’re sharing.”

Jan smiled tenderly at her only child. “Your Dad and I are so blessed to know you’re able to spend time with Jack and Dee. We know how much they care for you and for Kirk and Kelsey, and how they want your relationship with each other to grow.”

“Mom,” continued the boy thoughtfully, “I see such an overlap in Grandpa and Grandma’s lives and what’s becoming a new way of life for you and Dad. I’m really glad about it!” Jan’s heart overflowed with gratefulness for the joy in her son’s face as she embraced him with a Mom-size hug.

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“You’re a little early this morning, Jack,” observed Keisha as the older man entered the restaurant. The cheerful server led him to his usual table near the back.

“I wanted to be sure I had a chance to thank you for the time Dee and I spent with you and Jerome on Wednesday,” Jack answered as he took off his jacket and laid it across the back of the booth.

“Thank me?” she responded in disbelief. “Do you know that my husband and I were so excited after talking with you and your wife that we didn’t get to sleep until after midnight!” She laughed out loud at the memory of it. “We’d both heard a lot of Bible teaching over the years, but never so many testimonies to the power of God and His faithfulness — NEVER! And the excitement and joy you and Dee have, we want that in our lives.”

“I’m really glad to hear that, Keisha!” Jack returned with a broad smile that seemed to light up the room. “When you and Jerome are ready, let us know and we’ll get together again.”

Keisha’s voice rang with enthusiasm. “We actually finished a good chunk of *The Gospel of the Covenant* already! Everything we’ve read so far we really agree with.” She paused to look back and saw the other three men walking toward them. They greeted Jack and slid into their seats as she went on, “Neither of us had ever heard much about covenants before. And having our marriage covenant reflect our Covenant with our Father and becoming more like Jesus is the kind of goal we want for ourselves.”

As the men nodded in agreement with her comment she added with a giggle, “Jerome even commented that he wished we’d known this years earlier because we wouldn’t have spent so much time pointing out each other’s faults. Instead, we could’ve helped each other grow in the character of Jesus.” (Philippians 2:12)

Since Keisha and Jerome had responded so eagerly to the things he and Dee had shared with them, Jack asked, “This coming Thursday evening we’re all going on another one of our fishing/picnic times at Holly Park on the lake. Maybe the two of you would like to join us there and meet our families?”

Keisha was delighted by the invitation. “I’ll ask Jerome and we’ll get back to you. I think he’d love to meet you all. Plus, he’s an avid fisherman!” she added, rolling her big dark eyes.

As she turned to get their coffee, the three new arrivals grinned at Jack. “Wow,” exclaimed Harry, “I never cease to be amazed at how easily you’re able to bring Jesus into conversations and follow up on them!”

Brett and Juan nodded at that. “I guess when He’s the most important Person in your life,” interjected the young soldier, “you just can’t keep quiet about Him!”

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No sooner had Keisha brought the men their coffee when Harry turned toward Jack with a gnawing question he couldn’t let go of. “Until we met you and Dee, I’d always been plagued by thoughts of the sinful things I’ve done in my past. Even if I confessed them, my past failings kept haunting me. But now they don’t even come up in my head. What’s happened?” Brett had wondered about that himself and was glad his friend had asked.

Delighted to address a subject weighing on their hearts Jack responded, “Men, it all has to do with understanding our Father’s ways of helping us become more Christ-like. What I mean is that when we sin, God requires that we confess our sins so He can forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, right?” (1 John 1:9) They all nodded.

“We also know that our Father recognizes if we’re sincere in our confession — if we’re grieved in our heart that we’ve violated His holy standards and disrupted our fellowship with Him. (1 John 1: 6,7) That sorrow for having sinned shows we really cherish our child-Father relationship and want nothing to interfere with it.” (2 Corinthians 7:1)

Harry interjected, “Then I bet the same principle applies when we offend or hurt other people. If they see we’re truly sorry for the wrong we’ve done, that gives them hope that we’ll purpose not to do it again.” (2 Corinthians 7:9)

“That’s absolutely right,” beamed the older man.

At this point Brett jumped in. “Jack, you and I talked a little bit about this a few months ago and I spent some time searching Scripture for how God deals with our sins so we don’t have to live in bondage to them.”

“Go ahead, Brett. Tell us what you remember.” Jack was always encouraged when the men had something to offer one another out of their own pursuit of their Lord.

The young man spoke earnestly as he glanced at his brothers in Christ. “First, I was thrilled to realize that authentic repentance results in our Father wiping away our sins. (Acts 3:19) He even refuses to remember them! (Jeremiah 31:34; Psalms 103:12) So then I realized that if He doesn’t remember them, why should I be tormented by them?”

“That’s the essential foundation for us to hold onto as we trust in our communion in Jesus as our Redeemer and King,” affirmed Jack. “We can press forward into all the grace He offers us, since our confession causes our loving Father to forget our sins.” Turning to the other two, he asked, “What do you think about this?”

Harry smiled as he recalled how God had been at work in his family’s life. “Paul describes repentance as turning away from sin and turning to God, and evidencing our repentance by our deeds. (Acts 26:20) So ever since Jan and I demolished our strongholds, we’re now helping each other take our thoughts captive and make them obedient to Jesus. (2 Corinthians 10:5) Instead of finger-pointing, we’re helping each other live a life more like Jesus so we can help others see Him at work through us.”

He paused as he considered a thought then went on, “That’s where His grace is found toward us as a couple, in changing our motivation as well as our attitudes and actions to be more like His!” (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

That insight brought nods of affirmation from Jack and Brett, but Juan wanted to be clear on this so he could share it with Lita when he got home. “Is that why Jesus tells us, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God?’” (Luke 9:62)

“That’s exactly it!” Jack grinned, appreciative that this new believer was so hungry to understand more about living to please his Lord. “We can only use testimonies of past sins and how our Lord has changed us to encourage and comfort others” (2 Corinthians 1:3,4). He went on, “As ambassadors of our Father, He wants us to bear witness with grateful hearts for not only what He’s forgiven us from, but especially in how we’ve been changed by His Spirit into more of Christ’s likeness in how we live.”

Harry was so glad he’d brought up this topic for their get-together. “That’s what has happened to Jan and me since we met you and Dee! You’ve taught us to never look back with regret about what we’ve repented of and what our Father has forgotten. He wants us to press on, helping each other become more like Jesus!” (Philippians 3:10-14) His voice carried so loudly that people four tables away turned to listen.

“That’s right, Harry,” Jack chuckled at the younger man’s fervor. “If someone tries to belabor their past sins in detail without the note of victory over how they’ve been changed by the Spirit, I redirect them to their need to confess and repent.”

He paused as he looked each man in the eye, then continued, "I never want to hear about anyone's sins if they haven't been forgiven and forgotten by my Father. Godly sorrow that leads to authentic repentance opens a whole wonderful world of forgiveness and gratitude. (2 Corinthians 7:10) Why would any of us want anything less?"

The transcendent joy and peace of the Holy Spirit filled them all as they closed their time together with prayer and mutual encouragement. Once again the onlooking Keisha longed for the morning Jerome would be with them.

17. A Life-giving Rebuke Is A Christ-like Expression Of Love

**“The earnest counsel of one who truly cares for your well-being
is more precious than all the riches of the world.
When you give a life-giving rebuke, you are displaying your love for that person.”**

Harry breathed a prayer as he got out of his car in front of his brother's house. They hadn't seen one another in quite awhile, and he knew that even when they did talk, Scott always had a tough time hearing anything from his younger brother — even if they were both in their 40's now.

“Harry, you drove a long way just to spend time with me! There's got to be something in this visit you didn't mention on the phone,” Scott probed with his usual direct style as they hugged at the front door.

Harry laughed as they walked inside the stylish home. “Actually, it's a trip of love. I really wanted to see you, Scott, and yes, there's an important reason I came.” He knew he had his brother's attention as he added, “It's something I hope we can both talk through to a positive conclusion.”

It was a warm day so Scott suggested they sit out in the backyard where they could talk alone undisturbed. As they settled into comfortable seats on the deck Harry asked Scott if he could lead them in prayer before they began to talk. Scott was a little startled but agreed as Harry committed their time together into the Lord's hands, asking Him for wisdom.

“Scott, you know that Jan and I left the organized religious system some months ago,” Harry began. His brother nodded and Harry continued, “We've been changed so much as we began to apply the Hebraic foundations that guided the first followers of Jesus.” He paused then added, “It hasn't been easy since so much of my old thinking had to be tossed out.”

Scott was surprised at that. “I don't know what you mean. I always thought you and Jan were good Christians.”

Harry smiled, realizing that his brother's perception pretty much voiced the view of most of their relatives who regularly attended Sunday services but had little regard for God the rest of the week. Wanting to make a point he pressed on, “I think the words of Jesus best capture what's happened to us these past months: “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins.” (Mark 2:21,22) Jan and I now see ourselves as new wineskins becoming filled with new wine.”

“I guess I don't understand,” his older brother responded. He was somewhat familiar with Scripture but hadn't ever seen it as God's way for His people to live.

“Let me explain,” Harry replied earnestly. “Jan and I have set our hearts on being totally committed to follow Jesus. To us He is the ‘Pearl of great price.’ (Matthew 13:45,46) That means we're willing to forfeit everything for our marriage to grow in Him and to do our part in His Kingdom no matter what it costs us.” (Ephesians 5:8-10)

“I thought you were both sold out to Jesus before.” Scott was genuinely confused by his brother's words. “I mean, you were a leader in your church and Jan was teaching Sunday school,” he retorted, feeling uncomfortable with the direction this was going. Yet he could see in Harry a conviction that had never been there before. Scott found himself actually envying his younger brother's certainty about Christ.

Harry shook his head, “We realized we didn't know anything about loving Jesus and living to please our Father! When Jan and I were in the religious system we were just doing our part to keep the system running despite the unresolved problems in our marriage.” That got Scott's attention, since he realized there was plenty between him and his own wife that needed healing. Harry went on, “Most people who knew us didn't notice how much tension there was between Jan and me, though our son sure knew. All we had to do was just put on a smiling “Christian” face and pretend everything was okay.”

“Isn't that what's expected of Christians? Aren't we supposed to gut it out and just keep plodding along?” Scott asked, his heart yearning for some sort of resolution to the emotional tension he and Kim struggled with daily.

Harry was elated that Scott, who over the years had seldom asked him questions about anything, was now inquiring. That meant he really wanted to know. “That's what Jan and I believed until we became acquainted with a ministry that showed us the basis to the spiritual power and relational intimacy the first followers of Jesus had.” Harry's voice lifted with the grateful joy in his heart as he went on, “Over these past months of being outside the religious establishment, we've diligently cooperated with the Holy Spirit in making our marriage reflect Jesus at work in and through us. (1 Peter 1:22) It's out of the loving motivation of Jesus that we minister to others from our marriage — something totally different than when we ministered despite the painful shape our marriage was in.”

Scott looked away for a moment then confessed, “To be honest with you, Kim and I talked about the changes we saw in you and Jan on our way home from Dad and Mom's anniversary. In fact, she commented about how much you two smile at each other, and how peaceful your faces are.” He paused, then chuckled. “She thought it was a little ridiculous that a couple your age could have so much affection between you. But I have to tell you, bro, I envied you two.”

Harry smiled affectionately at his brother. “To the earliest followers of Jesus, the highest gift a man could get from God was a wife. (Proverbs 18:22) And, whatever depth of relationship a husband claimed to have with our Lord Jesus had to be seen in the love he has for his wife. The same kind of love followers of Jesus are to have for Him is the same kind they are called to have for their wife!” (Ephesians 5:25)

“So you're saying that if I truly love Jesus, then I need to be showing that kind of love to Kim,” Scott ventured.

“Right on, brother,” replied Harry. “It’s through the humility of loving our wives, and even confronting them when it’s necessary, that we men grow in the kind of love for them that Jesus wants. And, if He’s Lord of our lives, He gives us His Spirit to do it!”

Scott was quiet for a moment. When he spoke, his voice was heavy. “I don’t think I’ve ever considered Kim the highest gift God could give me. In many ways our marriage is “convenient” for me. For the most part, she has her life and her friends, and I have mine.” Tears moistened eyes. “So often we don’t even know how to have a conversation with each other except when it comes to discussing the kids or chores.”

“Jan and I sensed this at Dad and Mom’s anniversary, and that’s why I wanted to come and see you.” Harry put his hand on Scott’s shoulder. (Proverbs 27:17) “We’ve both been praying for you two and believe your marriage needs the same foundations that ours is being built on. And that foundation is for a husband and wife to help each other become more like Jesus in their relationship with one another.” (1 Peter 3: 6,7)

“Is that possible for Kim and me?” Scott blurted doubtfully, beginning to realize how much he needed the relationship with Jesus his brother had.

“Absolutely! We’ve seen the fruit of it in our own lives — Jan and I feel like newlyweds!” Harry’s eyes twinkled as he pictured his beloved wife. “There is love in our hearts that we never could have imagined. It’s the kind of love only the indwelling Spirit of Jesus can give you for each other, no matter what’s happened in the past.”

Scott sighed as he pondered his own situation. “Well, you two are certainly living proof that people can change. I’ll say that.” Then he added ruefully, “But you know how Kim is. She’s a very controlling woman that nobody, including me, wants to get on the wrong side of.”

“I know that, Scott,” Harry replied encouragingly. “But ALL women are born with a desire to rule their homes; that goes all the way back to Eve. (Genesis 3:16) That’s where we husbands need to step up to the plate and not duck our responsibilities to our wives.” Wanting to anchor the nature of the marriage relationship from God’s perspective, he added, “After all, ‘a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He’s the Savior.’” (Ephesians 5: 23)

Scott countered softly, “I know that verse. It’s haunted me all our marriage.”

Harry could feel the regret his brother was experiencing at that moment. “It’s not too late to change, Scott, and to cry out to Jesus for His Spirit to bring this about. I’m not saying it’ll be easy, but it’s worth it.” Harry knew that what he was about to say would pain his brother, but he pressed on. “You need to realize that a wife is either a public compliment for her husband or a public rebuke.”

“How’s that?” Scott asked, never having heard that before.

“The unresolved tensions in your marriage have been affecting the rest of us for years,” answered Harry. “Think about all the family gatherings when your wife yelled at you, ‘Scott, do this!’, or, ‘Scott, get that!’ All the rest of us just cringed.”

Scott hung his head miserably, burdened by the years of cowering to his wife. “Oh, I’ve felt the embarrassment. Even my son has scolded me for not speaking up.”

“I can show you how to end these years of despair, Scott. You and Kim need the same truths that are changing Jan and me.” Harry reached down by his chair. “I’ve brought some material along,” he said as he opened the Demolishing Strongholds workbook he and Jan had filled in months earlier. “Let me show you the demonic forces that were killing our marriage. Since you’re my brother, I think you’ll find many of the same evil influences are in yours too.”

The two men spent the rest of the afternoon filling in the workbook Harry had brought along, encouraging his brother to ask Kim to review what Scott had identified in himself. Just seeing the nature of what had been agitating and influencing her husband might stir her to want to be free of those spirits herself.

For the first time since their teens a heartfelt emotional connection was restored in the two brothers.

[If you’d like to learn how to confront others redemptively as Harry did, we recommend reading [*Growing Relationships Through Confrontation*](#), a free download at our website.]

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“I hope my kids don’t act up!” Lita was nervous as she and Dee and the little girls walked from the parking lot toward the nursing home.

“Don’t give it a second thought,” Dee smiled as she held the hands of the giggling children on either side of her. “Kids warm the hearts of the older people here. Most hardly ever see little ones any more.”

“How long have you been coming to this nursing home?” Lita inquired as they neared the entry.

“I began about five years ago, right after my Uncle John came to live here. I noticed that some Jehovah Witnesses were proselytizing here, and no one who represented the deity of our Lord Jesus was coming. So I just started my own ministry.”

Lita’s face lit up, delighted that the older woman had asked her and the kids to join her here. “How’s Lili doing in learning ‘Jesus Loves Me’?” Dee asked. The bright-eyed three-year-old blurted, “I can sing it all by myself!”

“It must be the grace of God!” the young mom smiled as they approached the receptionist. “She sings it all the time around the house. Even Ada tries to join in with her big sister. Last night I noticed tears in Juan’s eyes as Lili sang it to him.”

The dining room had been set up with chairs in a circle for this gathering. Dee took Lita and the kids around to meet those already there, many confined to wheelchairs. The little girls had never been shy and squealed with delight as older

hands tickled them and asked them their names. In turn, the seniors smiled fondly as the children gently reached out to stroke wrinkled hands.

Dee shared a devotional thought from the Bible with the group then led them in some familiar worship songs. When Lili stood on a chair and sang “Jesus Loves Me” there wasn’t a dry eye in the whole place. Even the staff clapped!

Dee also let everyone know that Lita’s husband was serving in the Army and had been wounded in Afghanistan but was now recovering at home. When refreshments were served, a number of veterans from past wars eagerly talked with her while Dee took the little ones around to continue visiting.

Learning from Dee’s example, Lita ended each conversation by taking the person’s hand and asking, “May I pray with you?” A few of the old-timers laid hands on the children’s heads and blessed them. (Matthew 19:13)

On the way home the two women stopped at the playground so the girls could run around. Lita hugged Dee gratefully, adding, “When I grow up in Jesus, I want to be just like you!”

[You might want to read Proverbs 31:10-31 yourself to discover the role an older woman can have in the lives of younger women.]

18. God's Shepherds Help Undo Intergenerational Curses

**“The hearts of the fathers must turn to the children
and the hearts of the children to the fathers.”**

The leaves were rustling in the light breeze along the park trail as the two men walked side by side at noontime.

The 30-something African/American smiled at the older man keeping up nimbly next to him. “Jack, I’m really glad we could spend this time together!” Jerome exclaimed. “Keisha and I have changed a lot since we went through the Demolishing Strongholds workbook and embraced our Father’s Covenant in Jesus.”

“Dee and I have witnessed the Holy Spirit’s presence transforming both of you,” Jack responded with an affirming grin. “I think it’s time you two and your daughter Maya became part of our fellowship family!”

“That would be great! We’ve both looked forward to being with you all as family in Jesus,” Jerome responded warmly. Then, after hesitating briefly, he continued softly, “But Jack, I may have a hangup that could hinder me in growing in my relationship with my Lord as His Kingdom man and with you all as spiritual family.”

Jack looked at the younger man. “What do you think your hangup is?”

As Jerome looked into the kind eyes of the older man he murmured, “It’s going to take some explanation...”

“If you can walk and talk at the same time, I’m all ears,” Jack responded as they headed down the shady path.

Jerome inhaled deeply as he began for the first time in his life to unburden his soul. “First off, I don’t know who my father is. I grew up in the Watts area of Los Angeles and my mother had me when she was seventeen. She died when I was still a teen myself and never spoke a word about my father.”

Jack glanced compassionately at Jerome as he went on, “Maya isn’t Keisha’s and my birth child. My wife’s sister died of a drug overdose when Maya was two and we adopted her.”

Jack nodded encouragingly. Then Jerome’s face tightened with pain. “There’s something else, Jack. To be honest, I’m scared of being in a fellowship. I’ve never let people get real close to me.” He sighed deeply as he spoke. “A couple years ago Keisha and I were having serious marriage problems. She wanted to leave me so we went to a counselor. He told me I suffer from something called “Reactive Attachment Disorder.”

“Reactive what?” Jack asked with interest.

“Reactive Attachment Disorder. It’s when you’ve lost someone close to you and start protecting yourself emotionally. I think Maya suffers from the same thing and I haven’t been able to do anything to help her,” Jerome answered with deep regret.

Jack pressed for more information. “What are some of the symptoms of this disorder?”

“I don’t know them all,” the younger man responded, “but for me, I have a difficult time giving and receiving love. So I resist any form of physical closeness.” He paused in thought, then added, “I also have a hard time grasping cause and effect — I don’t always understand consequences of the things I do. It’s created a lot of tension in our marriage at times because of the stupid things I’ve gotten myself into.” Furrows filled his brow as he went on, “I was told I need to learn how to trust the input of others, but that’s been so hard for me to do. I wanted you to know this because maybe you could help me.” (1 Thesalonians 5:12)

“I know that Jesus can heal your inner emotions,” Jack answered gently, “and no one but our Lord has the power to do this.” He tapped Jerome on the arm and added, “And, I know that those in our fellowship family will do all they can to support you so you can learn how to love and be loved. (1 John 3:23) All of this can happen,” the older man challenged, “if you REALLY want it for our Lord’s purpose in your life.”

“I do... I REALLY do!” exclaimed Jerome, his eyes tearing up. “I’m tired of hurting others and letting them down. You know, I don’t even have one man I can call a ‘friend,’” he sobbed quietly.

Jack drew them both to a halt and put his hand on the taller man’s shoulder. Just then Jerome shouted with surprise, “Look, I’m crying! Not being able to cry was one of the other symptoms of this disorder.” His tears kept flowing. He didn’t want them to stop because he was so happy to feel them on his face.

Without even thinking Jerome wrapped both arms around Jack and hugged him like a son greeting his Dad after many years of being apart. The two clung to each other for some time.

Finally, Jack looked into Jerome’s face with sincere love. “I think Jesus is at work already, don’t you?” Jerome beamed as he nodded.

As they began walking again the younger man asked, “This can’t be all I need to do to overcome this disorder. Can you think of anything else?”

“I believe there is something else, Jerome,” he responded, “especially if you’re going to be the affectionate husband Keisha needs and the loving father Maya’s yearning for. Let me explain.”

Jerome interjected with hope, “Please do, Jack.”

“As I’m thinking about it, the symptoms of this disorder to one degree or another are common to all of us who’ve suffered deep emotional wounds in the past. They’re a normal response for those who are children of divorce, or who’ve been raised

in homes with alcoholic parents, or have been impacted by the premature death of someone close to them.” Jerome nodded as Jack continued, “We humans tend to guard ourselves emotionally whenever we’re hurt or let down.”

“I can see that,” Jerome affirmed, “but that guardedness doesn’t seem right for us who follow Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 1:8)

“Exactly!” Jack declared. “I want you to see this from our heavenly Father’s vantage point. He knows ALL the consequences to the sins of mankind beginning with those of Adam and Eve. Moses sure got it right when he wrote that “every inclination of the thoughts of our hearts is only evil all the time.” (Genesis 6:5)

“So,” asked Jerome tentatively, “does our Father just sit back and accept this rebellion and throw His hands up in dismay?”

Jack answered quickly, “Oh, He doesn’t accept it at all! He knew He needed to save mankind from ourselves. In essence, the whole Bible unfolds His plan of helping us live in eternity with Him, which Jesus made possible through His atoning sacrifice.”

“I understand that,” Jerome asserted. “But how does this apply to helping me with my Reactive Attachment Disorder?”

Jack regarded the desperate man with caring concern. “You’re seeing this disorder as something you want to be free of. But our Father sees this as something He can receive glory from! He wants to recruit you to help others with the comfort your healing will give you.” (2 Corinthians 1:3,4) Seeing the confusion in Jerome’s face he went on, “All the consequences of man’s sin are our Father’s means to bring us to His Son, Jesus. First, to be washed clean of our sins by His shed blood and reconciled to Father so that we’re in covenant union with Him through His Spirit.” (Colossians 1:22)

“Yeah, I get that,” noted the younger man as Jack went on earnestly, “Also, Father wants to heal us of the emotional scars of our sins and the hurt we received because of the sins of others.” (Matthew 8:17) He smiled kindly as he added, “Our Father uses our emotional suffering, whether it’s been caused by our own sins or by the sins of others, to bring us to what only Jesus can do for us. And after we receive the forgiveness of our sins and experience the power of Jesus to heal our emotions (1 Corinthians 2:4,5), our Father recruits us as His ambassadors to tell others about Him. (2 Corinthians 5:17-20)

“I think I understand what you’re saying, Jack. I’m only looking to get out of this emotional pit I’m in, while my Father is looking to recruit me for something bigger. I feel a little ashamed.” Jerome’s voice broke as he looked away.

“Don’t be, brother. That initial reaction is normal, but how do you feel about being His ambassador after your emotions are healed?” Jack asked with a big grin.

The younger man sniffed then laughed, “Great! It makes me want to turn to Jesus with all my heart trusting that He’ll heal me! But Jack,” he added as his chin drooped, “at the same time I feel so unworthy that my Father would use someone like me.”

Jack gave the big man a squeeze around his back. “Jerome, you’re exactly the kind of man our Father wants — a living testimony to the power of His Son, Jesus! The Gospels reveal the power of Jesus to heal and to deliver people from demonic oppression. And keep in mind that the Apostle Paul taught power, then wisdom” (1 Corinthians 1:24) The older man’s voice was etched with sorrow. “Christianity for too long has taught wisdom without power, or even worse, just presenting Bible facts without the power of the Spirit to obey in obedient trust.” (1 Corinthians 4: 20) He added, “That’s why so few testify to our Lord Jesus as living and active today among His Kingdom people.”

“That sure sounds like our prior church experience,” Jerome agreed. “But tell me, how I can be completely healed and be my Father’s agent to help others?”

Jack grinned at the younger man’s eagerness. “As Dee and I have shared the Hebraic foundations over the years, we’ve come to realize that they’re our Father’s means for us to enjoy the fullness of His love — a loving relationship that’s based on trusting Him in all things. We’ve observed that most Christians don’t really trust Him; they mouth the right words but when push comes to shove, they rely on their own analysis and rationale.” As the younger man nodded, Jack added, “One of the primary sources to their distrust is their own earthly fathers.”

“But I didn’t even know my father,” Jerome remarked, searching the older man’s face. “How could he be part of my problems?”

“You may not recognize it, but some of your emotional guardedness is a result of knowing that your father fled your mother. This leaves a deeper emotional scar than most people realize,” Jack answered. “Plus, you were raised for years without any positive male input. Unless you’re healed by Jesus, you aren’t going to trust our Father as He calls His children to. (Psalms 9:10) Think about it,” he added, “He’s sovereign over all the universe! He created it all, yet so few trust Him. Is this how you want to live?”

“NO! I don’t want to be like that!” Jerome cried out. “What do I need to do?”

“First, you need to forgive your father from your heart,” (Matthew 18:35) Jack stated firmly. “Now that you’re free of strongholds, you need to see him as a prisoner to the same demonic spirits you were once captive to. You need to see him as having done the best he could with what he had going for himself, even if it was flawed.”

“I can do that!” Jerome exclaimed, then prayed, “Father, I do forgive my father and I ask your forgiveness for what I’ve held against him. Lord Jesus, please heal me and help me love Keisha and Maya with Your love. Give me a trusting heart so I’ll never be afraid of being hurt again.” Weeping, he whispered, “Dad, I wish I’d known you.”

“I’ll be a father to you if you’ll have me,” Jack said warmly. (1 Corinthians 4: 15)

Jerome couldn't contain himself with the joy of finally being someone's son, even at age 38. The two men embraced as father and son in spirit.

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About a month later everyone had gathered at Brett and Lacie's for their weekly fellowship celebration. Everyone except Jerome and his family. Jack was getting concerned because they hadn't called. Not wanting the others to be anxious he lifted up a quiet prayer. Just then, there was a knock on the door — they arrived!

Jerome greeted the others as he quickly made his way toward Jack, choked up as he hugged him. "I'm a living testimony!" Everyone but Keisha and Maya were puzzled. Turning to the rest Jerome said, "You all remember a few weeks ago Jack asked me to share how Jesus healed me of some emotional scars caused by my absentee father, and I asked you to help me learn how to love and be loved." Everyone nodded, smiling as they observed the thrill in Jerome and his whole family.

"I just got off a two-hour conversation with my Dad!" he bellowed joyfully. Excitement filled the living room as Jerome went on, "He called me this morning! A year ago he'd been released from prison after serving time for armed robbery. While he was there a chaplain led him to Jesus. After his release the Holy Spirit told him to find the child he'd never known. It took him this long to locate me." Fighting off tears he continued, "He asked for my forgiveness. I told him I'd already forgiven him, and asked him to forgive me for the attitudes I'd held against him."

It was another of those great moments for a loving group hug. Then Jack asked them all to kneel with him as he led in a prayer of thanksgiving. The presence of Jesus fell on them all, and Lacie led out in song as the others joined in, "Majesty, we worship Your majesty..."

19. The Love-Based Anguish Of Belonging To Jesus

“Until you are with Me forever, My heart is filled with anguish like a woman eagerly awaiting the birth of her child. Only when you are with Me will My anguish be over.”

As Keisha poured a second round of coffee, her face shone with joyous pride as her husband sat among the men who regularly met with Jack at the restaurant.

“I bet Jerome doesn’t get his coffee poured like this at home,” Jack commented teasingly as she filled her husband’s cup.

“Only on his death bed,” was the server’s snappy response as everyone chuckled. For some “divine” reason there were few customers that morning so Keisha had a chance to sit in a booth near the men and overhear their conversation.

Harry spoke up first. “Jan and I have noticed that you bear a lot of emotional burden, Jack, as you render account to our Lord for each of us. (Hebrews 13:17) I think we all can feel your deep love as you serve us as a biblical shepherd.” (1 Peter 5:2)

“I know what you mean, Harry. Sometimes I’ve felt that kind of heart burden you’re talking about,” Brett added earnestly. “It’s a little hard to describe, but it’s a passion that’s fueled my own concern for my family.” The young man paused as he pictured his cherished wife and two children. “My love for them has grown so much deeper since I’ve yearned to live as Jesus would. I guess I’d say I’m willing to bear whatever pain or inconvenience I need to so I can love them as He would.”

Juan, whose battle wounds were almost healed, nodded. That was a new thought to him but something that sounded like what he needed for his own little family. Jerome and Harry agreed with Brett’s observation as well.

Jack was delighted, not only by their fervent response but also that he himself had role modeled a character quality they so avidly wanted to acquire. “Guys, what Brett’s describing is called ‘anguish,’ the kind of deep concern you have for people you genuinely love.”

The others riveted their attention on Jack as he continued, “Love-based anguish is a work in your character that only the Spirit of Christ in you can produce. It’s one of those qualities that makes us more like Him.” (1 John 4:17)

“I know I’ve used that word before. I guess I thought of anguish as something to avoid,” Jerome interjected. “But the way you’re explaining it has great meaning for us in following Jesus.”

“It sure does,” Jack responded. “Let me explain. There’s a negative kind of anguish that’s caused by fear of how something might turn out, such as going in for a biopsy or a boy awaiting his Dad’s discipline for disobedience.” The others nodded they understood as Jack spoke. “This is ‘fretting’ rather than the anguish which prompts you to act on someone else’s behalf. The Bible tells us that fretting, which is really fear and worry, only leads to evil.” (Psalms 37:8)

Juan’s face lit up. “I’m reminded of some of Jesus’ warnings to not fret about the future, or about what we wear or eat.” (Matthew 6:25-34)

Turning to the young believer, Jack replied, “That’s right, Juan. The fretting side of anguish is often a sign that we don’t trust our heavenly Father to keep His promises, or that we’ve forgotten just how sovereign He is over everything.” He smiled at the attentive faces as he proceeded. “On the other side of the spectrum is love-based, holy anguish — the emotional pain we bear for others because we care so much. That kind of anguish has many causes.”

“What do you mean?” Brett asked, ever willing to learn from the man he respected so much.

“For example,” Jack looked pointedly at each man, “I love each of you as a shepherd, so I anguish over each one of you making it through the narrow gate. (Luke 13:24) If any of you were to hold on to unconfessed sin and refuse to repent, you can be sure I’d follow our Lord’s instructions in Matthew chapter 18.” (18:15-18) Then he noted gently, “But like the prodigal son’s father longing for his return, my heart would be burdened for you to repent and return to fellowship in Christ.” (Luke 15:20)

Harry’s words reflected the heart of each man sitting there. “I think we all believe that would be your response, Jack. And you’d also make sure none of us held anything against him for having strayed.” (2 Corinthians 2:6-9) He looked with appreciation at the older man who loved them all so much. “I know that you’d encourage us to keep on praying and fasting, anguishing if you will, until that person was restored to our fellowship family.”

Jack couldn’t hold back his tears as the men nodded their agreement. No one noticed Keisha wiping her eyes in the booth nearby.

“I think the model of holy anguish for us all,” Jack stated quietly as he wiped his nose, “is when Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Matthew 26:38-42) I don’t think He was fearing His approaching death as much as experiencing the pain of leaving those He loved so He could fulfill His Father’s will to atone for all mankind.” He paused as he recollected, “I’ve felt a little of this kind of anguish when I had to leave Dee years ago and head off to war.”

Juan well understood what Jack was talking about. “I found out yesterday that I’m being returned to my unit in Afghanistan in three weeks. Not only leaving my family is going to be hard, but leaving you guys is making it all the harder.”

Several of the men put their hand on Juan’s shoulder in caring empathy.

“Love-based anguish is what separates a follower of Jesus from a nominal Christian who goes through religious motions but lives like an unbeliever,” (Proverbs 18:24) Jack observed. “We who follow Jesus as Lord of our lives anguish over our relationship with our Father. We’re emotionally sensitive to the hurt our sins cause Him as well as how we’ve pained others.” (Ephesians 4:30-32)

“So what you’re saying,” Harry broke in, “is that instead of just acknowledging we’ve done something wrong, we grieve that we violated a relationship with Someone we love so much.”

“That’s true, Harry.”

Jerome’s spirit was being deeply stirred. “Does that kind of love translate into anguish in our hearts for others to embrace our Father’s Covenant?” (Romans 9:2,3)

“I bet there’s something behind your question, Jerome,” Jack responded kindly.

“Would you mind if Keisha joins us for a second?” They all turned to invite her over. As she stood behind her husband’s chair making sure she wasn’t needed elsewhere Jerome continued, “Since my father contacted me this past weekend after all these years, I’ve developed this intense burden for all my black brothers to be free of demonic strongholds. That’s their real enslavement!” he exclaimed with passion. “It’s like my heart won’t ever be at rest until I do something about it!”

Keisha jumped in with equal ardor. “I’ve been on the phone a lot lately with both my sisters — they still live in the poverty section of Cleveland where we grew up. Until they went through the Demolishing Strongholds workbook I sent them,” she added with remembered pain, “they’d been filled with hatred! And not only for our own absentee father, but also toward their ex-husbands.”

“It seems like the Spirit of Jesus has stirred both of you to take on His anguish over the souls of others,” Jack affirmed helpfully.

“He really has,” Jerome rejoined with appreciation. “In fact, Keisha’s sisters have gotten permission from the authors to rewrite an inner-city version of *Demolishing Strongholds* so it’ll better speak to the hearts of their neighbors.”

Keisha broke in, “We found out the authors readily allow people to adapt the materials on their website to meet the needs of a particular audience. So we’re going to help write a version that people raised in poverty can better understand. My sister, Patrice, is taking the lead in this.”

“That’s not all,” Jerome grinned as his wife squeezed his shoulder and headed off to greet new customers. “In order to secure a base of operations, Patrice and her other sister are going around their neighborhood in the Name of Jesus giving the demons eviction notices!” (Mark 16:17)

“Let’s all keep them in our prayers,” Jack asserted soberly as he looked at each man. “You and Keisha keep us updated on how things are going and if there’s anything we can do to help.”

Building off the conversation Harry broke in, “I can see how after someone is truly free of strongholds, their hearts are changed. Now, instead of anger or vengeance I have deep compassion toward people who’ve hurt me or let me down.” He smiled in gratefulness to His Lord at work in him. “Those critical feelings have been replaced by anguish of wanting them to experience the same freedom and love of Jesus I’ve come to know.” (John 8:36)

“That’s it exactly!” Jerome answered, recognizing the truth of Harry’s words. “I grieve in my heart for other black men now, whereas I used to think, ‘They have their problems and I have mine.’ Now I feel like I can’t stop until they’re free too!”

Brett was disturbed by how little anguish he’d had in his own religious life. “Jack, why don’t we see more Christians anguishing with the intensity we’re feeling?”

“There are several reasons,” Jack responded. “The first is the shallowness of the false gospels that are so pervasive today. NONE point the way to the Covenant union our heavenly Father offers us in Jesus.” He went on earnestly, “By embracing His Covenant, we enter an intimate relationship that calls for intense love and trust. We’re also commanded to forgive everyone. (Matthew 6:15) This last point is the major hindrance that keeps many from being sealed by our Father with the Holy Spirit.”

Harry added wryly, “Most counterfeit gospels aim at ‘getting people saved’ or what many call ‘fire insurance’. If that’s the case, why would anyone anguish over anything when they’re guaranteed heaven by agreeing with a couple Bible verses?”

Jack had more to share. “During our pilgrimage to our salvation, another type of anguish occurs. Sanctification — our growth into Christ’s likeness — causes holy anguish as we deliberately choose to resist our old sin nature and take on the character of Jesus in some area. (1 Peter 1:14-16) We want to be like Him so much that we anguish — not over what we give up but over our hunger to please Him.” (Romans 12:1,2)

“That captures how Keisha and I feel!” Jerome declared. “We love Jesus so much we feel His pain over the lost. (Luke 13:34) That holy anguish helps us understand the hurt He felt, and we want to bear that on behalf of others as well.” (1 Peter 2:21)

“That’s wonderful that you’re embracing the anguish the Spirit of our Lord has given you,” (Romans 8:16,17) Jack smiled from his shepherd’s heart. “The anguish of love is a compelling force that impels you as Jesus burdens you concerning the well-being of others, especially for their eternal destiny. (2 Corinthians 5:18-21) In fact,” he added, “Christlike love and the emotional pain of anguish should be the hallmark of our motives as we serve Him.” (2 Corinthians 5:14,15)

Their time together ended in praise and prayer. Something had solidified in their hearts. “Seek first His Kingdom” had a whole new depth of meaning to each man.

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“Maya, I’m so glad your parents let you spend the night with me,” Kelsey laughed as Jerome and Keisha’s daughter set her overnight bag down in the bedroom.

"I am too!" responded the ten-year-old, a year senior to Kelsey. "Ever since my parents decided to follow Jesus wholeheartedly, I found I don't have many friends anymore."

"I know what you mean," Kelsey quipped. "It's not like you want to reject them. But the movies and other things we use to think were all right aren't anymore."

"Yeah," Maya retorted. "I'm still having a tough time obeying my parents in this," the young girl shared as she walked around the bedroom noticing what Kelsey had. "I don't think I've gotten hold yet of the faith they have. So far it seems like a bunch of new rules being dropped on me."

Kelsey chuckled at her new friend. "I was like that until I decided to get on my knees and ask Jesus to reveal Himself to me. I didn't want to be fighting my parents over the new things they were expecting of me."

"So what happened?" Maya eyed Kelsey curiously.

"It's a little hard to explain. One night as I was praying, I felt this Presence around me. I didn't hear a word but I knew I wanted to belong to Jesus. From that day I began to ask my Dad how to make this real. He took me through an article called the Gospel of the Covenant."

"Kelsey, would you pray with me the way you prayed?" Maya asked sincerely. "I don't want to be left out. I know there's something different about you and I want it."

The two girls prayed, unaware of the applauding heavenly hosts (Hebrews 12:1) who were watching the humility of the moment when someone wants Jesus more than anything. (Matthew 13:44-46) A holy anguish filled their young hearts as this one desire began to consume them.

20. The American Dream — Affluent Deception

**“Many of you who think you belong to Me are like the seed that fell among thorns.
Your life is choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures so you do not mature
and produce fruit for My Kingdom.”**

A gentle breeze wafted in through the open windows as the fellowship family sat around emptied dishes in Jack and Dee’s dining room.

“I’m sure going to miss these Wednesday night gatherings together!” Juan exclaimed as he looked with damp eyes at these people who had become family for him and his own little family. “Besides these great potluck meals, the Holy Spirit always seems to have something special for us all.” As the others nodded with smiles, the young soldier continued, “I’ve got seven more days until I ship out for Afghanistan again, and you can bet I’ll be thinking of you all and missing you.”

“I know that each of us feels the same, Juan,” Dee responded with grandmotherly warmth reflecting unabashed love for this “son” in the Spirit.

The young man beamed. “I really appreciate that! I’ve never experienced this kind of genuine care from others before.” (1 John 4:7) Looking around at the men, he added, “I’m looking forward to my last breakfast with you guys this Friday to make sure I’m ready to reach others for Jesus while I’m away.” (Proverbs 27:17)

“I’m glad you mentioned Friday,” Jerome jumped in. “I have an announcement to make: Keisha will no longer be there to serve us coffee!”

Everyone’s eyes darted from Keisha back to Jerome as the couple grinned with delight. “We want you all to share in our joy because we have a testimony to our Father’s faithfulness!” (Psalms 40:10) Keisha blurted gleefully.

Jerome took up the story. “As you all know, Keisha’s been working because we’ve been financially strapped. A week or so ago we talked with Jack about this, and he asked us if we tithed. When we said ‘No,’ he showed us Malachi 3:10 where God says something like, “Bring in the whole tithe and test Me in this, and see if I’ll throw open the floodgates of heaven to bless you!”

At this point Keisha laughed out loud with joy. “Jack encouraged us to pray about this, and if God convicted us that we need to be tithing, then start doing it.” She took her husband’s hand and went on, “Jack also urged us to ask Jesus where He wants His resources sent. So after we prayed, we did sense our Lord wanted us to send part of our tithe to Voice of the Martyrs for our persecuted family in Christ and the rest to a family we know who have some heavy personal needs.”

Everyone praised God joyfully because of the obedient step of trust the couple had taken — the same step Jack had presented to all of them to pray about.

“Now here’s the neat part we’re praising God for,” grinned Jerome. “Three days after we began to tithe, I was called into our manager’s office and given a promotion with a lot more pay. (Luke 6:38) Now Keisha doesn’t have to work any more!”

As delight erupted around the table, Keisha wrapped her arm around her daughter Maya and announced, “We’re going to look into home schooling this precious girl! We hope you’ll all give us guidance.”

Harry burst in, “Jack and Dee recently finished helping Jan and me develop the biblical basis for our home schooling Josh. We’ll be glad to share these principles with you.” Brett and Lacie responded the same. Then turning to Jack, Jerome asked, “You’re really committed to parents taking full responsibility for training their own children, aren’t you?”

Jack was still cherishing in his heart the good news he’d just heard. Then he said soberly, “Yes, I am. Too many families in this nation have been seduced by what’s often called ‘The American Dream.’” As the others focused their attention on him, he continued, “The difficulty for us as we wholeheartedly follow Jesus is that the American Dream opposes everything our Lord calls for if we’re to fulfill our part in His Kingdom.”

The gathered families digested this for a moment before Brett spoke up. “I think we’ve all in some way aspired toward a vague quest of the American Dream. Could you explain what you mean?”

Because she and Jack had helped each other deprogram from this pursuit, Dee took up the question. “The American Dream is basically an irrepressible pursuit of personal prosperity. You know, a better, richer, happier life for yourself and your kids.” Heads nodded in understanding as she went on, “The idea of the American Dream is rooted in the Declaration of Independence, which proclaims that everyone has certain inalienable rights, including ‘life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.’”

Jack added, “Home ownership, for example, is a mark of the perceived right to prosperity. Ownership is a status symbol which separates the rich from the middle class, and the middle class from the poor.”

The older man knew from the confused looks that further explanation was needed. “The more you understand the goals of our Lord’s Kingdom, the more you see the demonic hindrance of the American Dream. It’s the force behind the wealth/power structure which perpetuates the racial and class inequalities in our nation.” He paused briefly then added, “That blatant disparity and the personal hunger for more of the prosperity pie destroys the cohesion of even Christian families and faith communities.”

“Do you remember that study on this you read awhile back?” Dee interjected.

“Yes, I do,” Jack responded, “mainly because it opened my eyes to things going on in this country that I’d never considered before.”

“Please, tell us!” Harry blurted, eager to know if anything his mentor was saying had infected his own life and family. Jack’s voice was serious. “That study described the hidden agendas behind the different classes in the US. For the middle class, work and achievement are the forces that drive them. The wealthy, on the other hand, are motivated by political, social and financial prestige. And those raised in generations of poverty are driven by survival, entertainment and relationships.”

“Wow!” Brett burst out. “No wonder each group can misunderstand the others and experience tension with them — no one understands where the others are coming from! But how does the Kingdom fit into all of this, Jack?”

“Well, keep in mind,” the older man replied, “that because of the Spirit of Jesus in us, the Kingdom of God is there too. (Luke 17:21) If each of us is to do our part in the Kingdom, we need the humility and willingness to suffer the loss of everything we have in order to carry out our Lord’s will.” (Mark 8:34,35) Dee broke in softly, “And Jesus tells us that the poor have an advantage in not being tempted by so much to cling to: ‘Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.’” (Luke 6:20)

At this point Lacie glanced at her husband and said, “I can see how Brett and I in the Middle Class feel like our strong work ethic is the only way to go. But until recently,” she added with a grimace, “we’ve put most of our effort into the American Dream rather than into the Kingdom of God.” (Colossians 3:23,24)

Harry added, “I’ve been realizing that the richer you are, the harder it is to even enter the Kingdom — it’s very tempting to trust in what you have and in what you can preserve for yourself.” He sighed deeply as he admitted to his fellowship family, “I’ve anguished over this, especially our Lord’s warning that ‘it’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God.’” (Mark 10:25)

“Lita and I sure don’t have much money,” interjected Juan, “but we know that if we make it our main focus, that’s just as bad as striving to keep it!”

His young wife added, “I keep thinking about that dear widow who gave all that she had to live on, as little as it was, because she trusted her Lord so much. (Mark 12:41-44) That’s the kind of faith I want! I don’t ever want to be stingy and miss meeting the needs of others.” (1 John 3:17)

As the others glanced at the young mother appreciatively Jan observed, “We also need to remember that our Lord didn’t say it was impossible for the rich to enter His Kingdom, because everything is possible with God.” (Mark 10:27) Then she went on, “I can see that it isn’t just whether we’re poor, middle class, or rich, but how we view what our Lord has entrusted to us that’s key. I know that since Jack and Dee have helped us develop our halakhah on giving, our family doesn’t see the money Harry earns as ours any longer.”

“I’ll say,” their son Josh jumped in. “My parents see all their resources as belonging to God, and that they have no more right to it than anyone else!” (Acts 2:44-46) He smiled at his parents and added, “I think Dad calls it ‘stewardship’ rather than ‘ownership’. We sure seek our Lord’s will a lot more now over what to do with our money — and I’m glad!”

Jack was delighted that Josh had offered that insight. Reaching over to pick up his Bible he asked the others to open theirs to Luke chapter 4, verses 18 and 19. Introducing the passage, he noted, “Jesus describes for us the objectives of His own ministry. If we’re to authentically follow Him, we need to follow in His steps in one or more of these ways He listed: “to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Jerome broke in quickly with a chuckle, “You can almost hear the various portions of that passage as a job description!”

“That’s a good observation,” responded Jack. “Let me make this pointed for each of us personally to consider. Since we’re in Christ through His Spirit, He’s anointed each of us and sent each of us as His ambassadors to do His work: to preach good news to the poor; to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to release the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Matthew 25:31-46)

“I can see something here!” Keisha exclaimed. “Jesus has burdened Jerome to reach out to other black men so they can be free from their spiritual prison. And the Spirit has put into my sister Patrice’s heart, along with the rest of our family, to do likewise.”

Jerome joined in, “In that Jesus in Your Home video series you gave us, the presenters commented how the Spirit gave them a vision and commanded them ‘to free the captives.’” (See [*Going to the High Places*](#), Chapter 1, Part 1, p.8)

“Who do you think the blind are?” Josh asked as he turned to Grandpa Jack.

“You could probably apply it to someone who’s visually impaired,” Jack smiled at the teen. “But I like to think that Jesus is talking about the same blindness the religious leaders of His day experienced. In Matthew chapter 23 Jesus repeatedly calls them ‘blind guides,’ ‘blind fools,’ and ‘blind Pharisees.’ Maybe this is a ministry for someone to confront the blind religious establishment today.” (Jeremiah 1:17-19)

Lita then commented, “I know it’s not just finances that our Lord is interested in as His servants. He’s also looking at how we use our time and resources for His Kingdom.” She smiled at Dee as she added, “The kids and I really enjoyed our time with you at the nursing home, and I’ve committed to joining you there each week.”

Kelsey jumped in with eager 9-year-old enthusiasm. “I’d like to help Lita by caring for little Lili and Ada whenever I can!”

“And I’d like to help Kelsey babysit for the kids,” Maya proclaimed happily.

Jack smiled at his beloved wife, whose eyes were flowing with joy, then said to their gathered faith family, “I know we’ll have many more conversations about the Kingdom of God and how each of us can do our part in it. I just want to encourage

you about how important it is to continue to seek God's commands and apply them to your lives. Dee and I are always here to help."

"We've all experienced God's blessing because of your counsel," Brett replied, voicing what was in the hearts of all around the table.

"I appreciate hearing that," Jack returned. "Let's conclude our discussion by looking at something that ties in to what we've been saying. Let's turn to Matthew 16:19. Jesus tells us, 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' What do you think the 'keys of the kingdom of heaven' are?"

Brett had spent time pondering this question himself and spoke up. "I think the keys are halakhahs, the way we put into practice the Bible's commands. The 1,050 commands in the Newer Testament really flesh out the 613 commands in the Older Testament — and God designed them all for our well-being because He loves us!"

"I agree," Jack nodded as the others signalled the same. "Since we've been given the keys to His kingdom, we need to begin in our homes to fulfill how He wants each of us to live. For centuries religious systems have kept the keys of the kingdom under their control, but that's sure not what our Father intends!" (Luke 11:52; 10:21)

A sense of determination about their Kingdom purpose filled each heart. Jack asked Josh to close them in prayer. The young man's voice was filled with holy boldness, and on behalf of the group he gratefully praised his Lord and asked, sought, and knocked according to his Father's will. (Proverbs 28:1; Luke 11:9,10)

21. As Iron Sharpens Iron, So One Man Sharpens Another

**“Fully hear wise counsel and accept instruction. In the end you will be wise.
Pay attention and heed the sayings of the wise; apply your heart to what they teach.”**

Jack’s lined face glowed with love for these younger men who had grown very dear to him. (1 Thessalonians 2:11). Seated around him at the restaurant that early morning were Jerome, Harry, Brett, Juan and Josh. The teen had been invited to join the men for Juan’s last time with them.

“I’m glad we’re all able to have this last breakfast together with Juan before he ships out,” Jack smiled. He was fully aware that each of them had a heart to see the Kingdom of God expanded no matter what it cost them. (Mark 8:35) And, with joy in his heart, he realized that each of these men could replace him someday in the lives of others. (2 Timothy 2:2) That thought brought to mind something he’d read at the Restoration Ministries website: “Success without successors is failure.” He gratefully praised his Lord that this wouldn’t be his epitaph!

Jack’s devotion to these men was reflected in Harry, who with 40-something years behind him wasn’t ashamed to speak from his heart. “Jack, you’ve become our father in Christ and we’ve all become brothers.” (Romans 8: 29) Then turning to Juan and resting his hand on the young soldier’s shoulder, he reassured him, “Don’t worry about Lita and the kids. We’ll be there for them like family.”

Jerome, Brett, and even Josh shared that same conviction and said as much. Juan wiped his eyes, receiving this outpouring of assurance from these men who’d become dear to him in a way that was so different from past relationships. He’d worn his uniform that morning so the men could see he was wholehearted in fulfilling his duty as a man of his word. A soldier in uniform with tears in his eyes, surrounded by his friends sending him off to serve, is a noble sight.

As they settled into their breakfast Brett turned to Jack for advice. “Yesterday as Kirk came in from playing with his friends, Lacie smelled cigarette smoke all over him. Even his breath smelled like cigarettes! She was going to jump him with accusation, but then she stopped — she sensed that the Holy Spirit didn’t want her to confront him yet. She told me about it when I got home later and asked me to bring it up here this morning.”

The thought passed through Jerome’s and Harry’s minds that if Kirk were their kid, they’d probably have reacted sharply if they’d smelled smoke on him.

Jack chuckled, recognizing what they were thinking by the way they looked at each other. “It seems that some of you think Kirk committed the unpardonable sin, huh?”

“Well, what he did was pretty serious, wasn’t it?” Harry asked.

“Is it?” Jack responded pointedly. “All Kirk did was possibly give in to temptation. Anybody here not give in to temptation at one time or another?” (John 8:1-11)

“Well, Jack, since you put it that way...” Brett answered somewhat sheepishly.

Jack knew this incident was a good moment to impart some wisdom for each man to consider. “Think about what our Lord wants from each of us. He wants us to live in fellowship with Him and our Father through His Spirit.” (1 John 1:3) As the men nodded in agreement he went on, “It’s no surprise to Him that we have a sin nature that may at times get the best of us. But He’s made a way for us to restore fellowship — it’s through repentance.” (1 John 1:9)

Jack paused to glance at each man. “When we respond to the Spirit and turn away from a sin and confess it because we recognize the harm that sin has done, does God punish us because we messed up?” (Psalms 103:10-13)

“No,” Brett replied quickly, “but there may be consequences to our sin.”

Jack responded, “That’s true. However, there also may not be consequences, depending on the depth of sorrow the person experiences for the wrong they’ve done.” (2 Corinthians 7:9,10)

“Well, Lacie didn’t notice that Kirk felt bad at all!” exclaimed the young dad.

“So what does that tell you?” Jack inquired, his smile growing bigger. “Did you or Lacie ever talk to Kirk about the damage smoking does to the body?”

Brett’s brow furrowed for a moment. “No, we haven’t. We thought he was too young to discuss smoking with him.”

“Well, why don’t you talk to him tonight in a non-confrontational manner? Even ask him if he thought he did anything wrong,” Jack suggested as his smile turned into a grin. Everyone sensed the wisdom of the moment and were glad they’d been there to hear it.

“Where’d you learn this, Jack?” Jerome asked.

Breaking into a laugh the older man began, “When my son Mickey was about four, he came into the house one day repeating an expletive. I stopped him and said, ‘Mickey, that’s not right.’ He went upstairs into his bedroom and a few minutes later I heard him repeating the word. As I headed up the stairs to correct him more sternly, I heard him trying different pronunciations for it.” He laughed at the memory. “I finally realized that Mickey thought that when I said, ‘That’s not right’ meant ‘You’re not pronouncing the word correctly.’ By the time I got to his room I was cackling. So Mickey and I sat down and had a little talk about profanity.” (Ephesians 6:4)

Everybody at the table got a kick out of Jack’s anecdote. But Jerome didn’t feel that everything had been covered. He asked, “So when should I correct my child?”

“Well, you always correct any direct defiance toward your authority,” Jack responded more seriously. “God gave you that authority, your daughter didn’t. (Colossians 3:20) Remember, our Lord requires you as a father to include and commend those things that contribute to the peace of your home, and to exclude or correct those things that rob your home of peace.” (Proverbs 10:17; 29:17)

“Okay, I see that,” Jerome interjected. “But what if her behavior isn’t directly attacking my authority?”

Jack answered incisively, “You need to discern if your child knew that she’d done wrong. If she realizes she disobeyed, then whatever form of correction you use should be with the aim of helping her resist the temptation the next time because the consequences of yielding to it will be painful. (Hebrews 12: 9,10) But, at no time should you use anger in correcting your child!” (Proverbs 25:28)

As Brett looked at each man, he could see they all appreciated Jack’s insight. “Thanks, Jack. This has been really helpful! I can’t wait to share it with Lacie.”

“If I can share one last point with you guys,” Jack added. “Most of the things we value in our lives came through trial-and-error learning. We had to take personal ownership to make it part of our lives.” As the men listened attentively he continued, “Within certain boundaries, you need to let your children make mistakes. Somehow, mothers in particular feel like the world is evaluating them according to how their children behave. This is especially true for home schooling moms who function like their child’s ‘Holy Spirit’ right up until the day the child leaves home.”

“I can see that tendency in my Mom,” Josh sighed. “I think there’s this internal pressure on her that I have to do everything right the first time, and there’s no room for error. I’m glad that since I’m 15 and she knows I really do want to live right, I can give her a hug and she usually backs off.”

Jack was delighted Josh could speak with such insight as well as concern for his Mom. God had given him a wonderful “adoptive” grandson who would be a leader in God’s Kingdom someday.

“Can I share something about my Dad?” Josh broke in. Everybody nodded.

“Your influence on my Dad to let me seek the Holy Spirit myself showed up the other night, Grandpa. He and Mom asked if I wanted to go out to my favorite restaurant for an early-bird special. Just as we getting into the car I remembered I’d told our neighbor I’d help him move some paving stones from his front yard to the back when he got home from work.”

“Sounds like a dilemma,” Juan teased.

“It could have been that in the past,” Josh went on. “But when I mentioned it to my Dad, he said, ‘Why don’t you go into your room and ask God what He wants you to do?’”

Brett bumped Josh lightly with his fist. “Of course, God wanted you to go to your favorite restaurant, right?”

Josh was about to answer when his Dad spoke up. “Do you mind if I continue, Josh?” The boy nodded.

“Well, a while back Josh might have answered like that, Brett,” Harry smiled. “But when he came back to the car after praying he told us, ‘God wants me to be a man of my word. I need to go help Mr. Cramer move the blocks.’ Jan and I were so proud of him!”

Later on in the parking lot everyone hugged Juan. Jack led them all in prayer committing the young man into the Lord’s hands and asking that He would open a ministry for Juan in Afghanistan. Since everyone else had to head for work, Jack offered to drive Josh home to spend some extra time with him.

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As they headed to Josh’s house the boy asked Jack a pointed question. “Grandpa, you have such a caring way when you correct people. I’d like to be like you. Were you always like this?” The boy’s question actually caught Jack by surprise.

He glanced for a moment at the eager teen. “No, I wasn’t always so patient. My children and others who knew me would tell you how easily annoyed and frustrated I could get. What you’re seeing is the work the Spirit of Christ has done in me over the years.”

“So there’s hope for me,” Josh stated expectantly.

“Oh yes!” Jack responded brightly. “In fact, Josh, you’re way ahead of where I was at your age.”

Josh took in his encouraging words because he had an earnest goal in mind. “Is there anything you could suggest that would help me change to be more like you?”

The older man was touched by the sincerity in Josh’s voice. “Yes, there is Josh. Always let yourself be guided by Jesus words: ‘So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.’ (Matthew 7:12) As they stopped at a light Jack turned to the boy with a smile. “Look back at yourself from the vantage point of the other person and ask yourself, ‘What do they need from me, or, how can I bless them?’ Then you’ll be fulfilling everything the Law and the Prophets call for.”

“So, Grandpa,” Josh pressed, “you’re telling me to get outside myself and see how I can meet the needs of others.”

“Yes, that’s the starting point for the kind of love that puts your faith into action — the love our Lord Jesus speaks about in Matthew chapter 25, and James refers to in chapter 2.”

Josh digested that for a moment then asked, “Is there anything else you can tell me about learning to love others the way Jesus would?”

Jack smiled, appreciating his persistence. “Remember ‘booger love.’”

“Huh?” the young man blurted with a start.

“If I had something hanging from my nose, would you tell me?” Grandpa asked.

Hesitating just for a moment Josh replied, “Yes, I would!”

“If you saw that my fly was open, would you tell me?” Jack again asked.

Josh broke into a laugh. “Yes, I would!”

Jack had one last question. “If you had something hanging from your nose or your fly was down, would you want someone to tell you?”

With the table turned, Josh paused briefly then replied, “Yes, I would!”

“I truly believe that you’d care enough to overcome your own sense of embarrassment of speaking up to realize that my embarrassment of walking around with a dirty nose or my fly open is worse than you pointing these things out,” Jack stated.

Josh answered thoughtfully, “As you asked those questions, Grandpa, I could see that I answered the way I did because I cared more for you than I was concerned about myself.”

“I see that in you,” the older man affirmed as he reached over and put his hand on Josh’s shoulder. “You have a love for others that overcomes your own embarrassment, and that’s your bedrock in doing your part to extend our Lord’s Kingdom.”

As they pulled into Josh’s driveway, Jack added, “By overcoming your fear of embarrassment, you’re able to be concerned with the greatest need others have — the eternal destination of their souls.” Josh nodded as he joyfully hugged this man who had so much wisdom to share with him.

22. Those Who Follow Jesus Must Boldly Carry On His Work

“I came to call sinners to repentance, For there is great rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents. If you follow Me, you too must seek out sinners and bring them to repentance.”

With hamburgers and milkshakes in hand, Harry and his brother Scott sat down on the park bench. Since he was the one who'd asked for this get together, Scott was the first to speak. “I wanted you to know that Kim and I have gone through the Demolishing Strongholds workbook you gave me, and we read that *Gospel of the Covenant* article.”

“You did?” Harry responded, delightedly surprised that his older brother had actually followed through with his recommendation.

“Yes!” came the exhilarated response. “We’re truly free in Jesus from those unclean spirits, (John 8:36) and together we’ve embraced our Father’s Covenant!”

“Wow!” Harry rejoiced.

Scott grinned gratefully at his brother, whose forceful prompting had convinced him to investigate these materials thoroughly. (Proverbs 27: 9) “That article certainly made it plain how living in Covenant union with our Father can have a deep effect on our marriage. This is something Kim and I both want — the changes we see that He’s made in you and Jan. We can already sense that the Holy Spirit’s working in both of us!” (2 Corinthians 3:18)

“I’m so glad to hear this,” Harry beamed, “and I know Jan will be excited too. Maybe our families can get together real soon.”

“Kim and I would like that,” Scott agreed, then hesitated before he went on. “Harry, I’ve told you about the Bible study I’ve been attending at work for several years, haven’t I?”

“Yes, you’ve mentioned it,” Harry replied. “What about it?”

Scott sighed deeply. “Ever since I’ve been free of strongholds and embraced the Covenant Gospel, I’ve been having problems with the other guys that I’ve never experienced before. I don’t even feel like sharing anything at our meetings any more.”

“Let me see if I have this right,” Harry said. “It’s like you’re saying things now that nobody else wants to hear. You feel like you’re out of sync with the rest of the guys.”

“Yeah, that’s exactly what it’s like. What’s going on?” Scott was desperate for some type of understanding.

With a smile Harry asked, “Let me ask you a question before I answer yours. Has your own Bible reading changed?”

“I’ll say!” Scott blurted. “Kim and I want to know how to put God’s Word into practice, rather than just know what it says.” (Luke 8:21) He paused then added, “And I keep getting these little internal nudges when I’m reading certain passages. Sometimes I get insights I’ve never had before and other times it’s a prompting to align my life with what the verses are saying.” (Ephesians 1:17)

“That’s the prompting of the Holy Spirit within you doing this.”

“What do you mean, Harry?”

Harry regarded his sibling earnestly. “Let me ask you another question, Scott. Did you and Kim really trust that you were the Father’s children before you embraced the Covenant Gospel?”

“It’s interesting that you’d ask that because we both talked about this very thing,” Scott answered. “We both concluded that we’d never belonged to Him before! I mean, we’d known about God, but didn’t know Him in the intimate sense of being united in His Spirit with Him. (Romans 8:15-17) Why is it so different now?”

Harry firmly took hold of his brother’s arm. “Because you’ve both received the indwelling Holy Spirit!” He grinned as he went on, “Remember, our Father consummates His Covenant by sealing us with the Holy Spirit guaranteeing His part of the Covenant in Jesus. (Ephesians 4:30) The Holy Spirit is now operating through your spirit. His goal is to replace the influence of your sin nature and rule your soul!” (Romans 8:13)

A light bulb went on in his head and Scott breathed a sigh of relief. “So that’s what’s been going on! There’s a change of command going on inside Kim and me! (Romans 8:14) But how does this factor in to the tension I’m having with some of the guys in the Bible study?”

Harry jumped in quickly, “Let’s see if I can simplify this for you. When we’re born, we receive a spirit, soul and body. (1Thessalonians 5:23) Our spirit is what separates us from the rest of creation. Until we’re born again by embracing the true Gospel, we’re controlled by our soul. (Romans 7:5) That’s our mind, will and emotions, along with our sin nature and any undemolished strongholds in us.”

“I think I see where you’re heading because something from the Covenant Gospel article just popped into my head,” Scott blurted.

Harry urged him on. “Go ahead. You connect the biblical dots.”

Scott was eager to unload his new discernment. “One of the purposes of the Spirit is to help sanctify me into becoming more like Jesus.” Harry’s grin brightened as his brother continued, “It’s like once I was listening to an AM radio — my soul —

and now I'm listening to FM — the Holy Spirit. I don't want to sound arrogant, but I can sense that some of the guys in that Bible study don't have the Holy Spirit and that's why I'm having this tension." (1 Corinthians 2:14)

"Absolutely!" echoed Harry. "So many in Christendom today make assumptions that someone's a 'Christian' because they claim to be, even though their lives are just like the world's. (Romans 8:9) And for those of us who've embraced the Covenant Gospel that's proclaimed throughout Scripture, that's one assumption we don't want to make."

Scott appreciated his brother's insight and continued, "Those guys without the Holy Spirit seem to be always seeking more Bible knowledge but aren't putting it into practice. (Matthew 7:26,27) Their marriages are full of discord and their kids are out of control — by their own admission!" Sorrow and frustration filled his voice. "All they want to do is study the Bible and teach at each other, I guess so they can feel good about what they know. But I want to live the Word of God and see it become a way of life for Kim and me! (Matthew 7:24,25) My goals aren't like their goals any more."

"I recognize that, bro." Harry then looked directly into Scott's eyes with a challenge. "You're either going to have to help them understand the authentic Gospel and receive the Holy Spirit, or else they'll force you to leave. (2 Timothy 3:12) Like you said, you're now hearing FM while they're tuned in to AM. The two don't mix."

Scott nodded in understanding then added, "You know, you and I were raised by a non-confrontive father. He glossed over everything! That's probably why tension with others bothers us so much." He grinned ruefully. "I confess I've pretty much rolled along with the crowd until now."

That admission was no surprise to Harry. "If it hadn't been for Jack's influence in my life, I might still be trapped by the prison of apprehension. In fact, it was seeing his example that emboldened me a few weeks ago to come and see you about the strongholds you and Kim needed to demolish."

"I'll never cease to be grateful that you did," Scott smiled as he put his hand on Harry's arm. After a moment he asked, "Since I don't have a 'Jack' right now in my life, is there anything else you can share that would help me be more courageous, especially with the men in that Bible study?" (Proverbs 9:9)

"Sure! First, let me get my Bible out of the car." Coming back to the bench Harry recalled, "One Saturday Jack spent several hours with us guys showing us why we needed to be bold and confront others when necessary (Ephesians 4:14,15). It's foundational to exercising godly authority in our homes — the courage to be able to correct and/or exclude whatever hinders peace within our family."

Scott nodded in affirmation. "I can see by your expression that what he told you had quite an impact!"

Harry nodded. "It has. What Jack told us begins with the word 'deny.' He started off with Jesus' words recounted by Mark: 'If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me and for the gospel will save it.'" (Mark 8:34,35)

"That's pretty heavy when you realize that a cross in Jesus' day meant just one thing — a painful death!" exclaimed Scott.

"You're absolutely right," Harry responded. "He's telling us that if we're to follow Him, we need to willingly forsake anything that would hinder us from sharing His Gospel." Then he added, "Daily choosing to walk in His steps and deny ourselves is the whole ongoing process of sanctification into Christ's likeness. And the ground floor of doing our part in the Kingdom through His Spirit begins with denying our old sinful tendencies that try to snare our mind, will and emotions." (Galatians 5:16,17)

"I can see that!" Scott broke in. "It's not just a matter of turning off the AM 'transmitter' and turning on the FM. You have to be deprogrammed from all you learned under the AM and then learn the FM!" (Romans 12:2)

"'Deprogrammed'. That's a good way to describe sanctification in separating from the old and putting on the new," chuckled Harry. (Romans 13:12-14) "It'd be easy if all it took was learning Bible facts like in a classroom. But sanctification means that we have to deny our old goals and values, the values that made up our worldly identity. Then we're able to take on the Christ-like ones we find in the Bible." (1 John 3:2)

Scott smiled wryly. "I'm starting to see that acquiring and growing in our Lord's character qualities calls for a lot greater emotional determination than anything I experienced before in my spiritual life." He shook his head with a sigh. "In some of the areas the Holy Spirit has already changed in me, I felt like I was going through the 'valley of the shadow of death.'"

"I know what you mean," Harry agreed. "That's why Jesus gives us such dramatic comparisons so we can understand the cost of following Him and being identified as 'His family.'"

Scott was puzzled. "I'm not tracking that one."

"Well," responded Harry earnestly, "think about some of the hard things Jesus taught about following Him: 'I didn't come to bring peace, but a sword; I've come to turn a person against his relatives; his enemies will be the members of his own household; anyone who loves his father or mother or siblings more than Me is not worthy of Me; and anyone who doesn't take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me.' (See Matthew 10:34-38) In fact," he continued, "Jesus tells us that if we're to be His disciples, we have to hate our parents and family and even our own life!" (Luke 14:26)

"Wow!" Scott was amazed. He recognized that compared to loving Jesus, any other relationships would have to come second to obeying Him. "Following Jesus the way HE calls for is serious business, isn't it?"

"It's sure a far cry from sitting complacently in a pew and then living the way you want the rest of the week," Harry countered. "This is where role models like Jack and Dee can help us identify and fulfill our Kingdom purposes." (Ephesians 2:10)

“Since Kim and I don’t have a ‘Jack and Dee’ living near us, do you have any guidance that will help Kim and me stay on the right track in Jesus?” Scott entreated.

“I sure do,” his brother replied. “Stay repentant so that when you do sin, you readily confess and restore your fellowship with our Father and His Son.” (1 John 1:6,7)

“Why is staying repentant so important for us in serving as His Kingdom representatives?” (2 Corinthians 5:20)

Harry understood what he was asking. “When you confess your sins, God cleanses you from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9) And when you’re not tarnished by unrighteousness, you can be as bold as a lion in serving our Lord!” (Proverbs 28:1) He smiled affectionately at his brother. “And if I can add one more thing: Keep asking the Spirit of Christ in you for the love He has for others. After all, Jesus joyfully sacrificed His own life on their behalf.” (Hebrews 12:2)

“You’ve really helped me a lot,” Scott smiled gratefully. “I don’t want to leave that Bible study yet until I’ve tried harder to help. And if they ask me to leave because of that, so be it!”

“I’m proud of your willingness, Scott,” Harry declared. “One last suggestion. A good way to safeguard yourself from a judgmental spirit about the other men is something Jack taught us: People who stay emotionally wounded will always use the Bible intellectually. They know what He commands and are aware of the healing Jesus could give them, but they don’t do anything about it.”

He paused as he looked straight at his brother. “I’d encourage you to help these men, and their families if possible, become free of strongholds. Then, whatever it takes, urge them to fill in the old ruts of attitudes and emotions that have ruled their souls for so long and pained their relationships. If they do this, they’ll encounter the power of Jesus, and that makes all the difference just like it did in you and Kim.”

The two men finished their time in prayer. Scott drove off with a sense of peace and gratitude for being his Father’s child and having a brother like Harry. (Psalms 133:1)

23. In Everything You Do, Do It To The Glory Of The Father

“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things.”

The last of the sandwiches had been eaten and the younger children were putting their newly acquired bocce skills to work on the smooth grass nearby. The adults were seated comfortably in a semicircle under a shady tree. “I want to thank you for the influence you’ve had on me and my family,” Brett said gratefully, directing his gaze at Jack and Dee. “The joy we’re experiencing now is so far above anything we thought was possible in the past!”

Jack took Dee’s hand and responded with his usual broad smile, “Dee and I believe we’re experiencing the greater blessing. That’s because we’re able to pass along the wisdom our Lord Jesus has shown us to such eager people who want to please Him and glorify our Father.” (Proverbs 2:6)

“And what delights us even more,” Dee beamed, “is that you all are turning around to share these truths with others.” (Philippians 2:4) She paused to extend her hand to the couple next to her. “Scott and Kim, we’re so glad that Harry invited you to join us at this picnic. Your brother has spoken of you often to us.”

“We’re happy to be here, too,” Scott answered sincerely. “After talking with Harry and Jan last week, my wife and I both know that we want everything our Lord wants of us.” He wrapped his arm around Kim, who looked at her husband with the kind of admiration that makes a man’s heart sing. Kim then took Dee’s hand and added, “We really appreciate that you two are willing to meet with us to help us start a Hebraic fellowship family in our area.”

Both Jack and Dee nodded affirmation as Scott took up the conversation again. “As Jan may have mentioned, we’re about to adopt two Serbian children, a brother and sister, ages 8 and 5. We want to raise them in a manner befitting the Kingdom of God (Ephesians 6:4) and we know we can’t be like we were for all those years — self-satisfied pew-sitters who just gave God lip-service the rest of the week.”

“I’m so happy for you!” Lacie exclaimed eagerly. “When do you expect to get them?”

“Hopefully in about three months,” Kim answered with twinkling eyes.

Josh jumped in, “I hope you find spiritual grandparents for them like Grandpa and Grandma are for us!” The teen looked over at the younger children laughing as they tossed balls and added, “Every week they take us kids for a day as part of our home schooling. That time is so neat because it’s not so much what we do with them as much as what we learn — and the good feeling we get because we know they like spending time with us.”

Dee and Jack were a little embarrassed by the praise, but delighted to hear it from their spiritual grandson. In front of their eyes he was becoming a young man of God.

Jack shifted his position, the prelude to what everyone had come to recognize was an important tidbit coming their way. In fact, they all looked forward to these moments when he’d impart some new nugget of wisdom.

“I want to affirm the path you’ve all taken in home schooling your children. You’ve each avoided the most common pitfall home schooling produces — spiritual pride. During the time we spend with the kids, Dee and I can both see the Christ-like attitudes you’re instilling in them.”

Scott jumped in, “This is something I want to know more about before our new children arrive.” Everyone else was eager to hear Jack explain more as well.

“Spiritual pride,” Jack went on, “comes when people begin to compare themselves to others based upon what they DON’T do.” (Luke 18:9)

Lita piped up, “I just saw that in my reading in Luke this morning! It’s when that Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself thanking God he wasn’t like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like the tax collector.” (Luke 18:11)

“That’s exactly it!” Jack looked warmly at the young mother, knowing how all of them were family to her especially now that Juan had rejoined his unit in Afghanistan. “The character qualities of most home schoolers today seem to follow that kind of pattern — congratulating themselves that they aren’t doing what “sinners” are involved with and feeling good about themselves because of it.” He paused and sadly shook his head. “What they really should be learning is to scrutinize their lives in light of what they ARE doing to fulfill their part in extending the Kingdom of God.”

At this point Jerome broke in. “So you’re saying that the majority of the Christ-like character qualities we’re instilling in our children should be based on how they’re living for our Lord?”

“You’ve got it,” Jack rejoined. “Learning to obey God out of hearts that are growing in love for Him and for others is the goal for character development.” (2 John 6) He smiled and added, “And I want to commend you all that you’re doing precisely that!”

Jan was eager to know Jack and Dee’s perspective on their collective children. “In what ways do you see them growing in character?”

Dee responded with a smile, “When the kids are with us, they often bring up the things they’re doing on behalf of others. I don’t think we ever hear them comparing themselves to anybody, certainly not speaking negatively about kids who haven’t yet met Christ.” She looked over at Jack, who added, “We hear how one gave toys to a needy friend, or how another one takes out the garbage for an elderly neighbor. Even your little ones, Lita,” he grinned, “enjoy telling us about the people they meet at the nursing home. These are things Dee and I love to hear from them!”

“The things the kids are sharing with you,” Brett proclaimed with a full heart, “is a testimony to what you two role model for all of us because you put into practice the Word of God.” (Deuteronomy 31:14) Lacie smiled at her husband and added in agreement, “In your devotion to our Lord, you’re the most opportunistic people we’ve ever met in seeing how you can do your part in His Kingdom! Sometimes I feel like I have to run just to keep up.”

Everyone broke into laughter because they could feel just what Lacie meant. As the children wandered over from their play time, the adults each scooped one into their lap for a time of prayer. Jack was especially burdened to pray for Juan in Afghanistan.

As they all gathered up their things and headed for the parking lot, Lita scooted over to Jack to thank him for calling her husband. Tears filled the older man’s eyes because he remembered how painful it had been to be away from Dee in time of war. He was also mindful not to tell Lita that their call had been cut short because Juan came under mortar attack. This only increased Jack’s burden for the young man, and he felt it prudent to ask the others to remember Juan in their prayers. (Ephesians 6: 18)

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“Dee, what was the most difficult hurdle you had to overcome as a young wife?” Jan asked as the women began their weekly walk together in the park.

“The MOST difficult...” Dee pondered. “I think it was learning how to give Jack the deference due him as both my husband and as our kids’ father. I think the absence of deference hurt our family more than anything else.”

Some of the ladies glanced at each other, wondering if they even understood what deference was. They were also curious if lack of deference was one of the things hindering the harmony in their own marriages. Keisha broke the silence and asked, “Can we talk more about this? I know we’re going to learn something each of us needs.” As the others nodded, she added, “Would you define deference for us?”

“Oh, our Lord has made sure that after all these years I can tell you what deference is!” Dee shot back with a grin. “Father God has enabled me to make it a way of life that emanates out of my heart. And,” she continued gratefully, “it’s part of the reason for that big smile on Jack’s face you all usually see.”

Jan replied with longing, “I’d sure like to know how I can bring that sort of happiness to Harry.” The other gals were in full agreement as they pictured their own men.

Dee was glad to share what she’d learned from experience to be a deep, inner character quality. “First, deference sees beyond your own self-interest to the wider arena of issues your husband is concerned with. You’re showing deference when you avoid choices and decisions that would offend him or hurt his feelings.” (Ephesians 5:24)

Lacie knew she’d often missed the boat there. “How can I do that?”

“You stop and look back at yourself from his vantage point and what he truly needs from you as his helpmate,” Dee responded. “Deference inspires you to fulfill your responsibilities to your husband with a willing heart rather than as a burden of obligation. (Titus 2:4,5) We women can certainly pout and withhold affection from our husband when he intrudes into our bubble of rights.” The other wives laughed ruefully, knowing they’d used that tactic on their own mates all too often.

Dee pressed on to her last point. “Deference is linked with the humility of being the helpmate to our husbands that our Father wants us to be. When we show deference, we’re giving him the respect and esteem that pleases God.” (Ephesians 5:33) She added wisely, “A smile of admiration goes a long way to let a man know he’s important to you!”

“I think I asked for a drink of water and just got hit with a fire hydrant,” Jan chuckled, fully grateful that she’d inquired. The others laughed as well.

“That’s okay,” Dee grinned, knowing they hadn’t caught it all. “I’ve got this written down, and I’ll give you a copy during our fellowship gathering this weekend.”

“Before you learned deference,” Lita asked quietly, “what were some of the things you were doing wrong in your relationship?”

“It didn’t really surface until we had children,” Dee replied. “Before the kids came we had a wonderful time in our marriage. But raising children brought to a head something I hadn’t seen before — my lack of deference.” She paused as she recalled past pain. “When Jack saw bad behavior in the kids, he drew the line. (1 Timothy 3: 4) But I thought he was too harsh in disciplining them. And today I know he’d agree that he was at times.” She went on, “But rather than working through this, I saw myself as the go-between with him and them. That’s where I made my mistake that hurt us deeply for several years. Jack felt unsupported, and recognized that I was hindering the character development of our children.”

“Were you?” Lacie asked.

Dee’s eyes were wet as she acknowledged, “Yes, I was. But even worse, I was hurting Jack’s heart. He hid his emotional pain only to see it flare in anger at times.” She added, “I thought he had the problem and that I was the good person in our marriage. But that wasn’t the case at all!”

“I need to let you know that I’m scared,” Lita blurted. “Growing up in a matriarchal Latino community, we aren’t trained to show our men deference. And the tension you and Jack had — Juan and I are suffering the same way now. Even while he was home recovering, we had tension over correcting the kids.”

Keisha jumped in, “It’s the same being raised in an inner-city black community!”

“And being raised by a single mother like I was,” asserted Jan.

The ladies stopped for a group hug. Their hearts were heavy, yet no one wanted to stop until the Spirit of Christ gave them peace.

“Jack and I finally hit the bottom one day. He drove away in anger, and I felt like a trap door had opened and I’d fallen through it.” Dee sighed then broke into a smile. “Jack did come back a few hours later after coming to this very park to pray for God’s help. The Spirit prompted him to pick up his Uncle Hank and Aunt Beth and bring them home with him.” She smiled gratefully. “They were a godly couple, and we shared our hearts with them. That’s when I began to learn about deference. They met with us every morning at 6:00 for over two weeks.”

“What a faithful God we have!” Lacie declared. “Now tell us, how did they help you?”

“Well, they showed me that Jack was right in where he drew the line on the kids’ behavior and attitudes. And Hank helped Jack develop more constructive methods of discipline that matched the needs of each child,” she said. “It took both the help of Aunt Beth and the encouragement of Jack in order for deference to become a character quality in me.”

Jan then asked, “How would you sum up the spiritual significance of deference?”

Dee responded quickly, “Deference embodies a woman’s trust in the God Who gave her to her husband as a helpmate. God knew the man He was giving each of us to and what we’d endure to help him.” The ladies chuckled softly as she went on, “Peter addresses us by using Sarah, who called Abraham ‘lord,’ as our example. He says we’re her daughters if we do what’s right and don’t give way to fear. (1 Peter 3:1-6) When I came between Jack and the kids, I lived in fear. Now that I give Jack deference, it’s protected me from fear and has really increased my trust in God.”

The women had much to think and pray about regarding their own husbands and the deference they needed in their marriages. It had truly been a God-ordained day.

24. Have Your Behaviors And Attitudes Become Christ-like?

“Set them free from the emotional prison the demons have put them in so that they may gladly praise MY Name and become like Me.”

The evening air resonated with deep voices as the seven men on Jack's back deck filled each other in on how they'd seen God at work in their fellowship families during the past couple weeks. After a brief time of prayer welcoming the Spirit of Christ to guide their discussion, an older member of their group spoke up. "I sure enjoy these bi-monthly gatherings!" Other heads bobbed in agreement.

"I do too, Bill," Jack agreed as he looked around at the six shepherds of the fellowship family groups he and Dee had started over the years. "I'm sure our wives feel the same as they're encouraging and exhorting each other inside the house."

The men and women met separately the first part of these gatherings so that information and direction specific to their gender could readily be shared. Then they'd all come together for a time of worship and prayer. Jack and Dee also met individually with these elder/shepherds and their wives as specific needs arose.

Ted, who was shepherding the most recent fellowship family Jack had established before the one he and Dee were raising up now, voiced earnestly, "I think these meetings and being able to call each other when we need to have helped Lauren and me not feel alone as we're learning to serve our extended spiritual family."

"I'm glad each of you is willing to take the time on behalf of each other. I think we all appreciate each other's insights." Jack paused a moment as his voice took a more serious tone. "Tonight I'd like to discuss the threat of complacency that's paralyzing some in our fellowship families. Tom called me a few days ago with what the Holy Spirit had prophetically given him about this." (1Corinthians 14:1) Turning to the lean, gray-haired man next to him he urged, "Tom, why don't you share the prophetic insight you received and let us test this in our spirits." (1Thessalonians 5:19-21)

Tom took a moment to look at each of his brother shepherds, then spoke with a tone of deep concern. "At our last get-together two weeks ago Jack mentioned his unrest about how complacent a number of people in our fellowship families were." The others nodded, encouraging him to continue. "I began to seek our Lord for His guidance, and recently one morning He awoke me early. The Spirit of Christ pointed out that while we've helped our flocks become free of strongholds, we haven't been diligent enough to help them fill in the old behaviors and attitudes the demons had fostered in their souls. Even though the demons are gone, the people are still living captive to their old demonically inspired motives." (2 Timothy 2:26)

A portly man across from Tom piped up, "My spirit bears witness to what you've said! As you spoke, the Spirit revealed to me that as long as these unChrist-like behaviors and attitudes remain in someone's soul, they can't have the mind of Christ. The character and the love of Jesus will elude them." (1Corinthians 2:16)

"Ken, that agrees with what the Lord gave me," Tom continued. "Until these demon-inspired behaviors and attitudes are filled in by Christ-like ones, our faith families are still living with unrighteousness." The others were fully attentive. "The Spirit of our Lord impressed on me that we need to make sure each member of our flock willingly makes known their old ruts and asks the others in their faith family to help fill them in with God's ways." (1Thessalonians 5:11)

Bob, one of the more senior elders, jumped in. "It sounds like the same deliberateness God wanted the Israelites to have before Passover in removing the yeast from their homes and putting blood on their doorposts." (Exodus 12:7,19)

"I believe that's exactly the purposeful intentionality our Lord wants us to have in dealing with unrighteousness among our families," Jack affirmed. "In fact, I believe that not confronting unrighteousness is why our brothers and sisters lack the holy boldness they need to be making disciples (Proverbs 28:1) or to be living as our Father's ambassadors. (2Corinthians 5:20)

José said quickly, "Tom, I'm affirming as well that your prophetic insight is of our Lord. These unrighteous ruts of old ways of acting are what keep the people in our extended spiritual family from even wanting to make contact with each other during the week. You know, to "one-another" as the Bible calls for." He sighed and shook his head sadly. "Some of the folks in our fellowship family are clamoring for a Bible study, but they aren't willing to fulfill our Lord's purposes for them in the Kingdom. It seems like they're the very ones who say they don't have time to get into His Word themselves and live it; they just want someone else to spoon feed them." (Hebrews 5:12-14)

As the others cited various signs of complacency in their own fellowship families, somberness fell on them. The weight of the seduction of unclean spirits still committing "spiritual adultery" in their midst brought home the seriousness of their role as shepherd/elders.

Bill broke the silence with a word from the Spirit. "Years ago I read a book entitled Perspectives on the World Christian Movement. The opening chapters explain the relationship between God and the Israelites, through whom He'd chosen to reveal Himself to the world." (Deuteronomy 4:6) He paused for a moment. "But instead of reaching the world for the One True God, the Israelites became smug. Now I can see why, since Jesus censured the Israelites of His day that their father was the devil! (John 8:44) That's why His ministry included freeing people from the influence of the very demonic spirits that kept them in bondage." (Matthew 10:1; Mark 1:39)

"You're on the right track," Jack noted, encouraging Bill to continue. Bill was eager to connect some historical dots. "God has grafted us Gentile followers of Jesus into Israel to tell the world about Him. (Romans 11:25) Yet Hellenism introduced doubt about the devil's reality and his influence in a person's soul. And modern science relies on things which must be seen to be proved — though I can't say I've actually seen gravity!"

Several chuckled as Bill went on. “Throughout history Christianity has failed to carry out our Lord’s mandate to ‘go and make disciples’. (Matthew 28:18-20) In Europe, many heathens became Christians not because of the efforts of the Father’s children but rather when the heathens captured and enslaved Christian nations.” (Nehemiah 9:30) He found no argument there. “The book concluded that whenever the followers of Christ fail to be His ambassadors, He subjugates them to oppression just as we see in the Old Testament with Israel and her enemies. Can it be that at both a personal and national level, this is what’s happening in the United States now?” (Isaiah 3:5,12)

“I couldn’t have asked for a better lead-in to the point I want to share with you men,” Jack grinned. “After Tom shared his prophecy with me about complacency, I found a new article Restoration Ministries put on their website entitled Demolishing Your Strongholds. It’s a shorter version of their workbook. As Dee and I read it, we saw that it totally agreed with Tom’s prophecy.”

One of the other men announced sheepishly, “I need to confess that Lea and I seem to have to fight our way through a fog of complacency at times.”

Jack nodded at him as he handed a copy of ***Demolishing Your Strongholds*** to each man, telling them he’d had 100 copies printed up as part of his new purpose. “For too long we’ve misunderstood the difficulties our extended spiritual families are encountering. For instance, when we see emotional hurt, we’ve often counseled them trying to help them feel better. But it never occurred to Dee and me until we heard Tom’s prophecy and read this article that our Father is letting them undergo these emotional problems specifically so they’ll earnestly seek to be free to serve Him!”

“I see what you’re saying, Jack,” interjected Bill. “Too often people just want to get out of their problems and feel better. So maybe our Lord is doing this on a national and global level with the recession, the pandemic, and droughts and floods all over. He’s trying to get people’s attention through the apprehension and discomfort they’re experiencing!” (Isaiah 42:23,24)

By the way the men looked at each other, Jack could tell they understood. After a moment Ted broke in quietly. “On a personal level, my wife and I have demolished our strongholds and we’re really glad we’re experiencing a certain amount of freedom from emotional oppression. But something still seems missing.”

“That’s my point, Ted,” Jack answered. “Please turn to the bottom of the last page with me and let me read what the authors cite as indicators that a person is really free. And listen to this in light of Tom’s prophecy:

“You’ll know you’re really free and have made it tough for the spirits to return when:

- all your strongholds are demolished
- your seven needs are being met God’s way
- your old ruts of behavior and attitudes are being filled in with Christ-like character
- you have compassion for your family and close friends still enslaved to demonic strongholds. You’re eager to help them become free — even the people who have hurt you.”

As the men looked back and forth at each other, Jack could tell that some of them had never become fully free themselves. José was the first to confess, “I want to let you know that after demolishing the strongholds, Sharee and I stopped there. We’re still suffering in the old ruts of how we think and what we do! And we’ve done absolutely NOTHING to reach out to our family members or others to help them get free.”

An ache pained the hearts of each of the men Jack had discipled to elder their family flocks. “I can see by the hurt in your faces you men want to change,” he assured them. “Dee and I are convinced that this article has helped us identify the cause of the complacency in the faith families who aren’t being our Father’s instruments of reconciling people to Him and helping them achieve the freedom Jesus promises.” (Luke 4:18) Eager eyes urged him to continue. “It’s because we shepherds need to be adamant in ensuring that not only our own families are free, but also that each person in our flock has their seven, God-given needs met. We also need to help them fill in their old ruts of behavior and attitude with Christ’s character, so they can be filled with compassion for those who are still imprisoned in darkness.”

Bill’s voice quavered. “I think that’s where we’ve each failed our flock. We need to be unwavering both within our homes and with our flocks that we’re all free — NO ONE’S FREE UNTIL WE’RE ALL FREE!” The others chuckled at his zeal, but agreed that they too needed to be determined about this.

“I suggest each of you download and print multiple copies of Demolishing Your Strongholds for two purposes,” Jack encouraged them. “First, give a copy to each person in your fellowship family. Have each one make sure their strongholds are gone. Then ask them to share with your fellowship the more dominant symptoms they had. Keep with this until you’ve all helped each other become free.”

The others sensed the wisdom in Jack’s words. He went on, “Let compassion for their family and close friends and the desire to see them set free be a sign that everyone in your flock is free. In other words, keep working with them until each person is lovingly reaching out to others so that they can be free too.” (Galatians 5:13)

“I think I’m speaking for all of us,” Ted added. “We’re determined to follow through because people’s freedom in Christ depends on it.”

Jack smiled. “I’m reminded of Juan, a soldier in our fellowship. He was wounded in Afghanistan a while back and sent home to recover. Yet the whole time he was recovering he knew the goal was to return to war. This is what we need to do,” he added pointedly, “to help our fellowship families experience freedom from demonically-inspired motives and attitudes and get them on the front lines to represent our Father’s concerns.”

José added eagerly, “I can see now that freedom produces the love Jesus calls for in His followers. And His purpose for love is to create something new, like the union in marriage produces children. (2 Corinthians 5:17) Out of the love that’s replaced our old attitudes and behaviors, we yearn to be our Father’s ambassadors!” He then turned to Jack. “You said there are two reasons for using *Demolishing Your Strongholds*.”

Jack leaned forward. “Begin using copies of *Demolishing Your Strongholds* as a tool for evangelism. Encourage your faith family to start listening up for symptoms of strongholds in people they have contact with each day. I want them to have the courage to hand out a copy to the oppressed people they encounter. And ask them to put their phone number on it so they can follow up if needed.”

Zeal filled every man. In their spirit they knew this was of the Lord. “For too long Christianity has tried to get people ‘saved,’” Jack concluded, “only to see them plagued by demonic strongholds in their soul — especially the stronghold of deceit that convinces them they’re okay with God no matter how they live. But we’re going to do what Jesus and the early disciples did — free people from demonic oppression and the ruts the devil caused them to live in. Then we’ll give them The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation so they can live in union with our Father. How does this sound to you guys?”

Eager hearts voiced commitment to not only helping their flocks be truly free, but also to use this tool to reach the lost.

Download a free copy of ***Demolishing Strongholds***.

25. She Speaks With Wisdom And Faithful Instruction

“The older women then must train the younger women to love their husbands and children so that no one will speak badly against the word of God.”

“Someone once said that women are like a hurricane when our feelings have been hurt, and men are more like a tornado.” Dee smiled at the shepherd/elder’s wives meeting in her living room while their husbands were gathered with Jack on the back deck.

“So men and women can react like two different kinds of storms if we’re not responding to the Spirit of Christ in us,” Sharee, José’s wife, laughed. “Am I going to like where this is going?”

“Yes, you will,” Dee answered as she glanced around the room at these sisters who had become so dear to her over the years. “How we deal with hurt is one of the key issues we women must come to terms with if we’re to be the helpers our husbands need.”

Most of the women had been married for quite awhile and were eager to hear how they could more faithfully follow the will of their heavenly Father. They listened intently as Dee went on, “We women tend to hold on to past hurts for a long time, remembering every detail surrounding each occasion of emotional pain. On the other hand, when most men go through a painful situation or discussion, they’re able to get past the emotions more quickly.”

Nods of agreement passed around their circle. Megan spoke from her 25-year history with Tom, “So we’re like a hurricane that lasts longer and brings more far-reaching havoc than a tornado which lasts just a short time but is pretty devastating.”

“That’s a good way of putting it, Megan,” Dee responded. “We’re far more likely to develop begrudging bitterness because of something that may have happened years ago, and that impacts all our relationships. (Hebrews 12:15) Sometimes we women never let go of emotional hurt, especially if our husbands are the source of our pain.”

“Until you helped me out of this, Dee, I lived in that prison of fear and apprehension,” Lauren broke in softly. “I was always guarding myself against the time when Ted might hurt my feelings again.” She continued with a gentle smile, “Now I can really appreciate why Peter insists that we women put aside fear and follow the pattern of Sarah, Abraham’s wife. She listened to him with wise submission, not allowing anxious ‘what ifs’ to seize her thoughts. And trusting that God was working in and through her husband, she called him ‘lord’ out of loving respect.” (1 Peter 3:5,6)

Mary jumped into the discussion. “I couldn’t see what was wrong with protecting myself from emotional hurt by Bill until Dee asked me to read Hinds Feet on High Places and go through the study guide, *Going to the High Places*, on the Restoration Ministries website. When I did that,” she smiled, “I could understand the powerful lesson Much Afraid had learned: that God permits our wounding to develop the sacrificial love of Jesus in each of us. (Romans 5:3-5) And our husbands are one of His key instruments in helping us do that.”

“It seems like holding onto past pain is a lot more symptomatic of us women than of men,” Olivia, one of the more recently married women, noted.

“I agree,” Dee responded. “Beginning with Eve wanting to be like God, (Genesis 3:5) we women have been plagued by false expectation and a desire to take control. And in recent decades,” she added, “many books penned by misguided divorced women have seduced thousands of wives to pursue divorce if they’re unhappy in their marriage.” (See *Discussing How To Restore the Early Church, Lesson 32, Removing Presumption and False Expectation*, for extensive discussion on the sin of false expectation.)

Genuinely wanting to recognize anything that might be hindering her relationship with Bob, Abby asked, “Dee, remind us again of how false expectation hurts our marriage.”

“False expectation, especially that our husbands should treat us better, leads to resentment and bitterness. We stew in unforgiveness, and this is where Satan gains victory over us — because he knows that our Father won’t forgive us as long as we refuse to forgive.” (Matthew 6:15) Dee went on, sadly shaking her head, “In fact, God makes it clear that we’ll suffer emotional torture until we do forgive. (Matthew 18:34,35) That kind of love sounds tough, but He knows how much He’s willing to forgive us through Jesus. We have no right to hold on to any unforgiveness!” (Matthew 18:33)

At that point Mary added thoughtfully, “The Bible is so honest about marriages that sure didn’t seem like they were made in heaven! Just look at Hosea, whom God ordered to marry a prostitute, (Hosea 1:2) or Abigail with her foul-tempered husband Nabal. (1Samuel 25:3) Yet each of these examples shows us how faithfully God can mature our trust even in trying circumstances.”

“That’s a good point!” Dee exclaimed. “Our Lord gave us to our husbands because they were incomplete alone. They needed a suitable helper. (Genesis 2:18) We each need to help the women in our fellowship families mature into the best helping companion possible. (Titus 2:3-5) That’s what our Father wants for each of us, and His Spirit in us will work to bring that about as we yield to Him in obedient trust.”

“I’m so comforted,” blurted Lauren, “that even if the learning curve is sometimes painful, our Father sees what I’m going through and will never forsake me!” (Psalms 37:28)

As the others nodded their agreement, Sharee asked, “What do you think is the key reason we don’t easily get hold of God’s goal for us as wives?”

Dee paused for a moment, wanting to make sure she was speaking according to the Spirit. “To put it simply, our minds work so fast we succumb to manipulation rather than trusting that God will work sovereignly as we do our part. (Genesis 16:1-3, for example) As a result, we end up undermining our husbands in a whole variety of ways.”

As knowing nods encompassed the circle Dee went on, “We may fail to give them deference... or we may withhold affection... or we may bad-mouth them, especially to our mothers. And, the worst of all pits we women fall into is how easily seduced we can be into believing that we’re ‘more spiritual’ than our husbands. It’s so important that we take the log out of our own eyes (Luke 6:42) and face up to how much we fall short of being the helper our Lord calls us to be!”

Silence filled the room as each woman examined her heart to see if the sins Dee had verbalized for them were indeed soiling their own spirits. (Psalms 26:2) They for sure didn’t want to be hypocritical, exhorting the younger women in their various fellowship families toward Biblical standards while harboring sin themselves!

After a while Megan spoke up. “It seems to me that the sins of men are generally outward and more obvious than those of women. I mean, men may more likely give way to porn or get drunk or cheat or steal. But I think we gals are more likely to allow internal sin to fester inside us.” (1Timothy 5:24) She added with remorse, “We feel good about what we don’t do rather than committing overt sinful acts. That’s why it’s so hard for us to confront our own deficiencies.” (Luke 11:39)

“With Jack and Dee’s help, Ken and I have put a lot more effort into our marriage since we embraced the Hebraic foundations. That’s something we pretty much let slide during all that time we spent in the religious system,” Olivia explained. “I remember from the Restoration Ministries website that one of the reasons the early followers of Jesus gathered in each other’s homes was because they knew that couples needed that ‘one-anothering’ that connectedness with other believers brought.” (1Corinthians 16:19)

The others smiled at her, urging her to continue. “Young couples didn’t live far away from their families, especially their extended spiritual family in Jesus,” she went on. “They knew they needed the help of older couples while their problems were still bite-size. And Ken and I have certainly been helped by having you all feed into our lives!” she added, gratefully reaching over to Dee and some of the other sisters in Jesus who had modeled Christ’s presence in their own marriages.

“When José and I came to understand that interpersonal tensions are not signs of failure but instead opportunities to help each other become more Christ-like, our entire relationship changed,” Sharee interjected.

Turning toward her, Lauren asked, “In what way?”

Sharee responded, her eyes twinkling. “With my heart at rest in Jesus, I could trust that any tensions that rose between me and José were opportunities for change. (Colossians 3:12-14) With that kind of perspective instead of my natural tendency to criticize, my Latino husband realized that his honor wasn’t being attacked.” She added with warmth, “His love for Jesus and the desire to be more like Him overruled any potential resistance to things I might point out.”

“I can see how having the right attitude and motive makes all the difference in how we can help our husbands,” replied Mary. “That’s a lesson I sure want to impress on my daughters before they get married.”

Each of the women agreed, recognizing how important this window of time was to prepare their own nearly grown children for a marriage that would last. After a brief pause Abby began a new topic. “I’d like to share an important change Jesus has made in me in regard to Bob. It’s one of those habits that I finally figured out really hurt him and was hindering how I could help him.”

Dee smiled gently at her sister in Jesus. “Please, tell us.”

Abby continued, “I guess you could say that I was a motor-mouth. I’d just dump information on Bob without recognizing if he was even ready to hear — never mind that he couldn’t process all the nonessential details that just left him confused.” The other women knew what she was saying. How many times had they inundated their own husbands with details and problems as soon as he walked through the door or just before they were going to bed?

Abby pressed on, “I realized I was just trying to unload my own baggage and concerns in a way that was hurting him! God has put it within a man to want to solve problems, especially for his wife. But I need to be considerate of when I present these things and if I’m stating them in a way that’s clear to him, without all the added details that aren’t important.”

Dee followed up, “You’re so right, Abby. That’s key to giving our husbands deference and seeing things from his perspective rather than just ours.” (Philippians 2:4)

Abby added with a smile, “Since I’ve been making these changes, Bob’s been showing me so much more affection and appreciation. He knows that because I love him, I want to help him since he’s the one bearing responsibility for our home.” (Ephesians 5:23)

“I have a testimony, too,” Lauren interposed, “and I didn’t learn my lesson easily. For years I thought that Ted was too hard on the kids. I always felt like I had to be the go-between.” Some of the others could relate to that. “That’s when we went to Jack and Dee. They helped us see that we needed to work out how we were going to discipline the kids consistently, and that I needed to learn deference toward my husband and not be stuck in the middle between him and them.”

“You said that you didn’t learn that lesson easily, Lauren. What do you mean?” Sharee queried.

Lauren’s voice was tinged with sorrow. “When you think you’ve been the ‘good guy’ and your husband the ‘bad guy’, it can be awfully hard to come to grips with the damage your lack of deference to him has created in your home.” She looked gratefully at her mentor and friend. “With Dee’s help I began to see how manipulative my children had become. And to be honest, they really were very disrespectful — something I’d been totally blind to. Even my own parents were telling me this and I didn’t believe them!” She sighed then went on, “The toughest realization I came to was that Ted’s bouts of anger toward the kids were a result of how he saw them hurting and exploiting me.”

Olivia broke in, “I don’t get it.”

“Well, during one conversation with Jack and Dee,” Lauren continued, “I saw for the first time that Ted didn’t get upset so much with things directed at him. It’s when people hurt me that his real emotions got aroused. I’ll never forget the day Ted took my hands in his and said, ‘You’re the most loving person I have in life. When anyone, including the kids, hurts you or manipulates you, my strongest emotions are aroused.’ I’d never understood it this way, and here I was, thinking I was protecting the kids from him — and I was just hurting him more! I was standing in the way of the character development they needed, and inadvertently agitating my husband to anger!”

Dee then addressed them all. “Jack and I have served together over the years to help each of you cooperate in working things out in your marriage relationship. You’ve all come to realize that the areas of character and motive you haven’t lined up with those of Jesus only adds to the tensions you experience with each other and with others.”

She stopped for a second then added, “Let’s keep this goal in our hearts as we grow together with our husbands: that our relational union with each other increasingly reflects what we claim in our Covenant with our Father and Jesus. That’s the example we need to set for those our Father has entrusted to our husbands to shepherd others in Christ.” (Acts 20:28)

26. Stand Firm In Your Trust; Be Courageous And Strong

“Jesus is faithful as a son over God’s house. And we are His house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.”

“Grandpa!” Josh yelled with delight as Jack entered the young man’s hospital room. As he approached the bed of his spiritual grandson, Jack could see the broken arm in a sling and the grisly evidence of an awful beating.

“You look a lot better than your Mom reported,” Jack grinned teasingly, though inside his heart was breaking at the sight. “I take it you didn’t win the fight...”

“Oh, but I did!” Josh responded with a note of triumph that had the angels rejoicing with him. “I never struck a blow, but I won a soul for Jesus.” (Matthew 5:38,39)

Jack pulled up a chair alongside Josh’s bed. His heart was filled with expectancy knowing a testimony to his grandson’s faith was unfolding. “Josh, tell me all about it.”

The teen smiled crookedly through swollen lips. “I’d just finished trimming Mrs. Winslow’s hedge — she’s the widow who lives down at the end of our street.” Jack recognized the woman’s name and nodded for Josh to continue. “As I was walking home I noticed three older teens across the street talking with the Sizemore twins, who are 10. I stopped to watch for a moment because something didn’t seem right. That’s when I saw Zack Sizemore hand the older boys some money, and they handed him something back. I just knew it was drugs.”

Grandpa’s face wrinkled with concern as he asked, “So what’d you do?”

Josh continued with a twinkle despite his obvious physical discomfort. “I yelled at those guys to stop and started to walk across the street toward them. They just stood there glaring at me as I got closer. That’s when I sensed this might end up in a fight.”

“Didn’t you think it might be wiser to turn the other way?” Jack inquired.

“The thought crossed my mind, Grandpa. But instead, I lifted up a prayer asking Jesus to help me. (Jeremiah 1:19) That’s when I heard your voice quoting some things you shared with me a few weeks ago.”

That sparked Jack’s curiosity. “What was that?”

“Something written a long time ago: ‘All that’s necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.’” Josh stated it like a military order. “I didn’t want to be someone who did nothing when evil’s going on right in front of me. That’s when a Bible verse you’d discussed with me came into my mind: ‘Like a muddied spring or a polluted well is a righteous man who gives way to the wicked.’” (Proverbs 25:26)

“Wow, Josh!” Jack exclaimed as he leaned over Josh and gently hugged him. “I’m so proud of you! But I sure never thought my counsel to you would end up in you being hurt.”

“That’s okay, Grandpa,” Josh affirmed the older man. “I was still a little scared until I heard inside me the second passage you’d talked about with me. It was something like, ‘My righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I won’t be pleased with him.’ It went on that God doesn’t want us to be people who shrink back and are destroyed, but people who trust and are saved.” (Hebrews 10: 38,39)

Josh could see on his Grandpa’s face tears mingled with pride in this courageous 15-year-old. “I stepped up to the guys and told them that what they were doing was wrong. Then I told the twins to give the drugs back. That’s when the biggest of the three guys hit me from behind.” He shifted slightly on the bed to relieve some pain. “I landed on the ground and he jumped on me and kept beating me all over. I think it’s when I hit the ground that I broke my arm, but my insides were pretty banged up too. That’s why they’re keeping me here overnight for observation.”

Jack anguished for his grandson as he pictured the scene. “I’m so sorry this happened, Josh.”

“Please, don’t be!” Josh interjected joyfully. “Jesus got the victory!” Jack’s jaw dropped as the teen continued, “As I was being clobbered, I refused to hit him back. (Luke 6:29) Instead I shouted, ‘In the Name of the Lord Jesus, I order you to stop!’ (Psalms 118:10,11) And he did! He looked at me like a dog tilting its head when it hears a sound it can’t recognize.”

“So he stopped hitting you?” Jack blurted.

Pausing for just a moment to make a triumphant point, Josh gleefully exclaimed, “Oh yeah! He got off me and just stood there. Then tears started to fill his eyes.”

“Tears???” Jack asked incredulously.

“Yup! In a few moments he was actually crying! He told me how much his mother had been praying and fasting for him to change his ways.” Josh closed his eyes briefly to thank Jesus again then went on. “I told him that I forgave him. Then I put my hand on his shoulder and began to pray for him. Nick’s his name.”

Jack just needed to ask, “Weren’t you in pain, Josh?”

“I remember I really hurt, but I also know I was filled with more joy than anything I’ve ever experienced.” Josh grabbed Jack’s hand with his own. “When I get out of the hospital, I’m going to start meeting with Nick, Max and Adam and teach them the way you’ve taught me.” (2Timothy 2:2) He paused for a moment then added, “Grandpa, would you pray with me that the hearts of those boys might be open to what the Lord would have me share with them?”

“You bet I will, Josh. In fact, let’s do that right now.” As the gray head bowed next to the youthful one, prayers like incense rose steadily to heaven as a pleasing fragrance to God. (Revelation 5:8)

Past the bruises and the cast on his arm, Jack could see a young man of God laying in that bed. If it were only to experience this moment of loving triumph, then Jack’s life had been worth it all. But our Lord had a lot more for Jack to finish before he’d see Him face to face. (Acts 20:24)

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Two days had passed since Josh’s attack. His mom, Jan, looked gratefully around the room at the loving faces of these sisters in Jesus. The gals from her fellowship family had gathered at Dee’s to pray and encourage one another. After assurances that her son was mending well and now at home with Harry engaging his son in a concentrated chess match, Jan spoke with grateful tears. “Harry and I can’t thank you enough for all your care for us. Those meals were great, and we were so surprised to find that basket of fruit on the table when we brought Josh home. He especially loved the cards from all your children!” (1Peter 4:10) she grinned, basking in the support of these women who genuinely loved her as a sister in Jesus.

“It was our pleasure,” the rest agreed, reaching out to pat her arm. Jan added, “I couldn’t believe it when I saw that our lawn had been mowed and the garden weeds pulled! I know Josh really appreciated that, since that’s his usual chore and he’ll be out of commission for several weeks.”

“Speaking of caring for our homes,” Keisha remarked, “Jerome and I want to have you all over for our next fellowship gathering. I know our place isn’t big, but with a little rearranging of the furniture, we can all look each other in the face and “break bread” together!”

Dee smiled broadly at the younger woman. “Keisha, that’s a wonderful idea! And we can each bring something for the meal so it’ll be a joy for you, not a burden.”

“Well,” beamed Keisha happily, “since we’re training Maya up in Christ’s character right in our home each day, I have a great little hostess in the making!”

The others chuckled at the delight in their sister’s eyes in being able to stay home and educate her daughter in godliness and wisdom and character. (Ephesians 6:1-4)

Lacie cleared her throat to speak. “Dee, sometimes I feel a little inadequate about being a ‘hostess’. I mean, you always make people feel so comfortable, and I’m more like a ‘Martha’ type, feeling like everything has to be just so.”

Dee smiled gently at the young wife. “Lacie, I used to feel that way too! In fact,” she added with a shake of her head, “I think I put so much pressure on myself to perform as a hostess that I forgot what genuine hospitality really is! Looking back, I’m sure the people who came over felt almost like intruders rather than welcome friends!”

“I can’t believe you were ever like that,” declared Lita. “You’re always so calm and smiling whenever I come over, even with my little girls! My own mother gets upset that they might break something, but you’re so gentle and patient with them!”

A chortle burst forth from the older woman. “You have no idea the work the Holy Spirit has done in me in that regard, Lita! When He directed me to those verses in Scripture that talk about hospitality as a command, I realized that I’d been looking more to my own interest rather than to serving others and pleasing my Father in that way! And I have to admit, I used to grumble about having people over.”

“YOU?” chorused the rest in astonishment.

“Oh yes,” she replied with a nod. “But the Spirit of Christ in me convicted me that I was choosing to sin rather than obey my Lord in regard to hospitality. (1Peter 4:9) And showing hospitality,” she added, “is specifically mentioned as a role for a woman who loves and follows Jesus. It’s right up there with helping those in trouble, raising children well, and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.” (1Timothy 5:10)

“I didn’t even know the Bible talks about having people in your home,” commented Lacie with a start. “I guess I just thought that inviting people over was optional — or like returning a favor when someone invites me over.”

“Now that I think of it,” commented Keisha, “didn’t Jesus proclaim that the willingness to take people in and offer them authentic hospitality marked whether they were ‘sheep’ or ‘goats’ at His judgement throne? (Matthew 25:31-46) This is pretty serious stuff,” she remarked with emphasis.

Dee smiled kindly at the ladies around her. “The Scriptural command is to make hospitality your lifestyle practice, not just a one-time event. (Romans 12:13) Keep in mind that we’re not talking about putting on an event! It’s an expression of love for both God and for the ones He’s sovereignly put you in relationship with.” (Hebrews 13:1)

She paused a moment, then looked around with love at each eager face. “When Paul talks about the household of faith as ‘brothers and sisters’, he’s referring to the relational family connection Father calls for in the body of Christ.” (Galatians 6:9,10)

“I guess I never saw it that way before,” Lacie sighed. “My mother was almost a hermit, and we never had anyone over. But I can see what you’re saying as far as welcoming each other in Jesus as extended spiritual family. It changes my whole perspective on having people in our home!”

Jan added, “In Sweden my relatives all get together regularly because we enjoy each other so much! I have to admit,” she paused reflectively, “that when I married Harry and came to the US, I was taken aback by the lack of hospitality here! It seems like people need a specific reason to get together instead of gathering because you care.”

“Funny you should mention that, Jan,” responded Keisha. “My family are mostly in the South, and no matter how little any of us may have had, we always welcomed each other into our homes. I think that’s why it’s so easy for Jerome and me to understand our relationships with you all as family.”

“That’s how it is with our extended families, too,” cut in Lita. “Among Latinos, our homes are places of inclusion. And now that Juan and I understand more and more the love of Jesus, we see our home as a place where we can share that love with others whether they know Him as Lord of their lives or not!”

Dee was delighted to hear how these dear women were recognizing their homes as places of hospitality the way women who loved Jesus 2000 years earlier had. Their Hebraic forefathers had welcomed both strangers and friends into their homes as far back as even Abraham (Genesis 18:1-8) — a practice sorely absent, it seems, in the rush of modern American culture. “How sad,” she mused to herself.

Lacie again spoke, glancing down somewhat shyly. “I think my greatest fear is that I won’t measure up to others. I mean, what if my entree comes out awful, or if I forget to vacuum before everyone comes over?”

Jan reached over with a smile. “Lacie, you have such a loving, welcoming heart! Don’t allow those thoughts to agitate you. Satan would like nothing better than to implant unrest in you so that Biblical truth about opening your home to others might produce anxiety rather than joy.”

“Jan’s right,” Dee added. “Take those thoughts captive. Nip them in the bud and think instead of how Jesus would respond! (2Corinthians 10:5) When you see yourself as HIS hands and feet and heart, then you’ve captured the essence of hospitality.”

With that, the ladies grabbed each other’s hands and blessed and praised their Lord for His wonderful Presence in their midst.

27. Enter His Presence With Thanksgiving And Praise

“When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of each of you.”

Lacie deposited her fruit salad into Keisha's refrigerator and turned to smile at Dee. "What a great idea for each family to bring a different salad for our fellowship gathering!" she exclaimed. "That way we don't have to fuss in the kitchen over the food."

Dee chuckled as they walked down the steps into the grassy backyard where everyone else had gathered. "Jack thought it might be fun if we women joined the men and the kids for some fun rather than having to focus on food prep." They joined up with the others as she added, "He thought the kids would get a kick out of seeing us moms playing a variation of baseball that Jerome found on the Internet."

Conversations died down as Jerome held up a huge foam ball. "I trust that this will be fun for all of us to be able to join in. I realize some of us may be athletically challenged." He paused as knowing looks and giggles spread throughout the faith family. "That's why we're going to play with this really soft ball so no one needs a baseball glove."

Nine-year-old Kelsey interjected, "Wow! I think even I can catch that!" The other youngsters piped in with their own comments as Jerome continued, "The pitcher has to throw underhand, and there's only one strike per batter. After three strikes, we change sides. There are no forced outs, but get this: You can have as many players on a base as you need to, but they have to run in the order they arrived." Two hours of hilarity went on before the entire group entered the house to clean up.

Josh stood next to Jack as they waited for a turn at the bathroom sink. "Grandpa, I have this strong feeling that we should have communion before we do anything else. What do you think?"

The older man put his arm around the husky shoulders of the almost-16-year-old. "I think the Spirit of our Lord inspired that thought in you, Josh. In fact, would you mind leading us in communion?"

"Could I?" Josh blurted, totally surprised by Jack's invitation.

Jack's face beamed as he responded emphatically, "Yes, you can!" He paused as his love for this grandson in Jesus filled his eyes. "Make sure you let the Spirit of Christ guide you so this becomes an expression of your heart as you lead us in renewing our Covenant with our Father." (1Corinthians 2:13)

Josh motioned toward a private place in the back of Jerome's yard. "I'm going over there for a few minutes to pray." Jack nodded, understanding the heart of this young man to want to be clean and prepared before His Lord before he spoke. (Psalms 24:3-5)

A few moments later Jack approached the ladies in the kitchen who were just about to set the food on the tables. "Could we hold up on the meal for a while longer? I sense that our Lord has other plans than for us to eat right now."

The gals had gotten used to this expression on Jack's face, a look that reflected spiritual discernment the Lord had given him. They all gathered in the family room, some on the sofa and chairs, others snugly comfortable on the rug.

As Josh quietly led them to examine their hearts for anything of which they needed to repent, a stillness filled the room. (1Corinthians 11: 28) He then asked each person to affirm in their heart their love and obedient trust in their Lord and King with a steadfast determination to walk in His will. (1John 3:23,24) He also brought up the need to have the kind of forgiving heart that Father calls for in His Word. (Matthew 6:14) The bread was broken and passed around, and the cup shared by all who were in covenant union in Christ. (1Corinthians 11:23-27)

As the last person finished the cup, Keisha broke into a beautiful song. Her daughter Maya joined her, as it was a hymn they'd both been singing throughout the week. Other delighted voices were added, and other both new and familiar songs were lifted, interspersed with prayers of thanksgiving. (Ephesians 5:19) An hour passed when the last of the spontaneous worship came to an end. Joy, pure joy filled everyone's heart.

As he looked around at his extended family in Jesus, Jack could sense the Lord's pleasure in being enthroned in their praises. Laughter erupted as Lita's daughter Lily's little-girl voice squeaked, "Is it time to eat?"

Young Kirk quickly broke in, "Can our family share something first?" Everyone knew it must be important because Kirk was known for his love for food. For him to delay eating got everyone's attention.

"This morning we helped our neighbor, Mrs. Armstrong, move into a senior high rise. It was only our family and her son, and she had a lot to move." Encouraging smiles prompted him to go on. "Getting the stuff onto the truck wasn't hard, but we knew that getting it up the elevator to the apartment on the second floor would be. So Mom prayed that God would send us some help."

Kirk gestured for his sister Kelsey to continue. "When we got to the high rise, there was already another family helping their grandmother move to the same floor Mrs. Armstrong was going to be on. Dad introduced all of us to the father and uncle and three teenagers. They were just about finished when we got there and the father walked over to Dad and said, 'The Lord put it on our hearts to help you all. Could you use our assistance?' Wasn't that neat?!!"

Lacie wanted to get her two cents in. "We had a wonderful time while we worked together, sharing about our Lord with each other. All of us sensed the Divine timing of our encounter, and when they left we all hugged each other like we were family!"

Nate and Jessica, the young couple Jack and Dee had been discipling, sat in wide-eyed awe. As Jessica repositioned little Riley on her lap she couldn't contain her amazement. "I got goose bumps, ya'll... big goose bumps! My heart is praising God with every thump!" (2Corinthians 9:12,13)

Nate's joy was equally apparent. "I'm so glad to hear how our Lord blessed you all. You were so kind to Mrs. Armstrong, and our Father showered that on you in answer to Lacie's prayer."

Kirk couldn't hold back his enthusiasm. "That's not all! During our prayer time this morning Dad prayed that we might find someone in the high rise who loved Jesus and would follow up on our talks with Mrs. Armstrong." He paused a moment, allowing his flare for the dramatic to break through. "Somehow, as Mrs. Armstrong was handing her keys to Dad near the elevator, they slipped out of her hands and fell right down the shaft to the bottom."

"Boy, that's a problem I've never seen," Jerome proclaimed with a shake of his head.

Brett took up this part of the story since he'd been the one left to solve the situation. "I sent Mrs. Armstrong up to the apartment to show Lacie and the kids where she wanted things. The manager's wife 'just happened' to come by at that moment and I explained to her what happened. She got her husband, who turned the elevator off and got a step ladder to get to the bottom of the shaft."

"So did you get the keys back?" asked Maya, trying to anticipate where the testimony was going.

"Oh, we got the keys back alright," Brett answered. "And we got an answer to our morning prayer as well! As I talked with the managers, Phil and Cindy, I found out that they've been going through a lot of spiritual soul searching. They'd both become followers of Jesus just a few months before but never felt comfortable when they attended church services." He looked with love around the packed room. "I shared what we were doing in our fellowship family and gave them the address for the Restoration Ministries website and my phone number."

Several spontaneous prayers of thanksgiving followed. Then Josh asked to share his testimony. "I told you all how this cast ended up on my arm. It's been a little inconvenient but I'm grateful every time I look at it."

"Is this going to be about how we should find joy in suffering?" (1Peter 1:6,7) Maya asked, her girlish curiosity again trying to anticipate where Josh was going.

"It could be, Maya," grinned Josh. "Friday I met with those guys, Nick, Max and Adam, who'd been selling drugs to the Sizemore twins. I gave each one a Bible and handed them each a copy of Demolishing Your Strongholds which Grandpa gave me. When I had them open to the page that listed all the strongholds, they were blown away."

"They saw a lot of those demons in themselves, didn't they?" Jack asked knowingly.

"They sure did, Grandpa. And, they wanted to get rid of their strongholds bad!" Josh affirmed. "It took about 2 hours for them to renounce each demonic spirit in the Name of Jesus and by His authority. (Luke 10:19,20) But I can attest that each guy was free!"

"How were you sure?" Keisha inquired.

Josh responded quickly, "By the tears that flowed down their faces. (2Corinthians 7:10) And by how amazed they were by the power of Lord Jesus to free them so they could have ears to hear when I then told them about Him. (Mark 9:38-40) They cried even harder when I told them He was God and that He loved them enough to take the punishment they deserved for all their wrongdoing." (1Peter 3:18)

"Praise God!!!" Lacie interjected. "My body may be here, but my heart's rejoicing in heaven!"

Everyone rejoiced with her, filled with an awareness that glory was all around them. Josh continued, "I asked them to show their parents what they'd filled in. And you know, they were glad to! I could see that free people really want others they care about to be free too! (John 1:41) We're going to get together twice a week, and I'll be taking them through the Gospel of the Covenant next."

Keisha jumped in with an update on her sister. "Several weeks ago we told you about my sister, Patrice, in Cleveland. She and some of my other family members have cleaned up their home from all unrighteousness and God is really honoring them." (2Corinthians 6:14-18) Overcome with grateful joy, she paused to wipe away tears. "With Patrice leading the way, my family's focus is to see everyone in that city experience spiritual freedom, especially the black men. And I know they won't rest until everyone in that city is spiritually free!" (Hebrews 2: 14,15)

"That's wonderful news!" Lita declared with excitement. "I can see whole racial and ethnic communities becoming free and turning this nation upside down."

"Me too!" Keisha rejoined. "Patrice and the rest of our family have begun praying over their own neighborhood, and the people at Restoration Ministries are helping them prepare materials so they can do seminars with their neighbors in their homes."

Jack joyfully took in all the happy faces in the room and encouraged them all to keep praying for Patrice and for the boys Josh was reaching out to. Finally he announced, "I guess it's time to eat!" He didn't have to say it twice.

After the meal, Kirk, Kelsey and Maya got up to clear the tables. While they were in the kitchen Maya asked the other two, "How do the chores at these gatherings get assigned? Why are we clearing the tables and doing the dishes?"

Kirk and Kelsey laughed. "It's not that chores get assigned. It's more like recognizing what you didn't do, then pitching in to help."

"Huh?" questioned the young girl.

"If you didn't cook or set the tables, then you have to help clean up," Kelsey smiled as she put her hand on Maya's arm in a friendly gesture. "We're family, and each of us has a part to play so we can serve one another in love. (Galatians 5:13) As Grandpa taught us, 'There are no free-loaders in the Kingdom of God.'" (1Peter 4:10)

"I understand now," Maya acknowledged. "I remember Grandma Dee telling our Moms how important it is that all of us learn to willingly serve other people. (Proverbs 3:27) Let's get these dishes done and see how pleased they are!"

Back at the now-cleared dinner table Dee shared an encouraging observation. "Tonight the Spirit has made it even more evident to me why any fellowship family MUST have these mutual goals: that we help each other as brothers and sisters become more like Jesus and spur each other on in love to do our Father's will." (Matthew 12:50) Thoughtful nods followed her words. "To become more like Jesus is what enables us to embrace with joy the suffering that accompanies our sanctification (James 1:2-4). And our mutual dedication to fulfill our Father's desire to reconcile the world to Himself is what binds us together." (Colossians 1:19,20)

One soft voice followed by others began to sing: "Bind us together, Lord, bind us together, with cords that cannot be broken. Bind us together, Lord, bind us together, Lord, bind us together with love." (Proverbs 3:3)

28. I Know Your Deeds, That You Are Neither Cold Nor Hot

**“Many of you have pursued the pleasures and rewards of this world.
You’ve failed to love Me because you’ve been unwilling to keep all My commands.
Because you are lukewarm in your obedience to My Word, I am going to spit you out of my mouth.”**

“Brett, you look disturbed this morning,” Harry observed as the men sat down for their Friday early morning get-together at the restaurant.

“I am,” the younger man responded somewhat dejectedly. “Late last night my brother Dan’s son, Luke, who’s attending a junior college here and commuting from home, came over to talk with me. I didn’t know he’d been going through all the materials I’ve been sending his father from the [Restoration Ministries website](#).”

“Well, that couldn’t have been so bad,” Jerome piped in, thinking anyone going through those materials would be encouraged.

“Oh, Luke was filled with joy!” Brett countered quickly. “He’s been freed from strongholds and has embraced the Gospel of the Covenant. In fact, he’s been sharing these truths with his friends on campus.” He stopped long enough to collect his thoughts then added, “But there’s a problem. As he’s been growing spiritually, there’s been a growing tension with Dan, his dad. It’s gotten so bad that Luke is considering leaving home!”

Jack eyed his brother in Christ with empathy. “Go on, Brett. I think this is something we all need to discuss. I’ve encountered this kind of tension before when one family member seeks to be true to Jesus at all cost but the rest of the family rationalizes why obedience isn’t necessary.” (Luke 12:51-53)

Brett appreciated the chance to bring this before these men who so deeply cared for him and his family. He really wanted and needed their insights on this. “My brother is a regular churchgoer, and I thought good things were about to happen when he began to read the Bible for himself.” With a heavy sigh he went on, “While our conversations focused a lot more on spiritual topics, every time it came to something Dan was called to obey in God’s Word, he’d balk.”

“Balk?” Jerome asked. “Isn’t that what a pitcher does in baseball?”

“Yeah, and he gets penalized,” Harry interjected, and everyone chuckled.

Brett picked up where he’d left off. “Every time it came to a step of faith to obey God, I found I had to get very persuasive with my brother. I figured someday the Holy Spirit would get hold of him and give him the loving courage to obey God’s Word. (John 14:21-24) But after seeing the strain on Luke because of his Dad’s halfheartedness, I feel like I failed to be as forceful as our Lord would have me be.”

“Don’t let yourself be haunted by that last thought, Brett,” Jack cut in. “Can’t you see that God has given you through your nephew a second witness against your brother’s ongoing sin of disobedience? (Matthew 18:15,16) How did you leave it with your nephew last night?”

“He’s coming back this Saturday to spend several hours with me.”

“Good!” Jack exclaimed. “Then let’s go over some of the issues that any of us needs to face when a follower of Jesus has a lukewarm relative. Especially one that’s a churchgoer, since through that person’s disobedience he’s defaming the Name of Jesus.” (Revelation 3:14-16) At that all the men nodded agreement.

Jack began, “First we need to start with the prison of strongholds that may be influencing them. Two strongholds in particular are prevalent among people who take part in services but aren’t devoted to Jesus as Lord of their life. The first is Deceit, especially the symptoms of rationalization and wrong doctrine or misuse of Scripture.” (John 8:43-47; James 1:22-24) Each of the men could think of people in bondage to that. “The second is the stronghold of Religiosity and Spiritual Lethargy, and several symptoms stand out: religious busyness, Bible knowledge without love for God, no spiritual power, and spiritual blindness.” (1Corinthians 13:1,2; Matthew 23:27,28)

“So you’re saying that Brett’s brother is stuck in a demonic prison,” Jerome clarified.

Brett was perplexed. “But Dan told me he went through the Demolishing Your Strongholds article I gave him.”

“Even if that’s true and he’s free from the demonic prison of these two strongholds,” Jack broke in, “I believe you may find that he’s never filled in the ‘ruts’ of rationalization with trusting faith, nor has he called out to Jesus for the empowerment to love Him with such intensity that keeping His commands is no burden.” (1John 5:3)

“I’m not sure Dan really wants these old ruts filled in with God’s ways,” Brett noted.

Jack smiled assuringly at the younger man. “I know you love your brother, and he needs to be confronted by someone who cares about his spiritual progress. (Colossians 1:28) Even though these symptoms were induced by demonic spirits, for him to keep practicing rationalization and those other symptoms is a sin. And that’s where going to your brother to confront him comes in.” (Matthew 18:15) “And believe me,” he added with a shake of his head, “I realize how countercultural this is to our ‘tolerant, anything goes’ society.”

“I see now how God has raised up two witnesses against my brother’s disobedience,” (Matthew 18:16) Brett remarked, noting the wonder of God’s timing in having his nephew come over the previous night. “I have to admit that after my conversations with Dan when I’d try to exhort him to obey God’s Word, I’d feel incredibly drained. (2Timothy 4:2) Sometimes I’d even fight off resentment toward him because he was so passive and detached from biblical commands.”

Jerome spoke up with an intense realization. “Satan would like nothing better than to drive us away from the people our God wants us to help, even if it requires confronting them!” (Luke 17:3)

“You’re right on,” Jack enjoined. “That’s why we need to see our lukewarm relatives from God’s perspective. Let’s keep in mind that when we embraced our Father’s Covenant in Christ, we joined a much more important family than our biological one. (Luke 8:21) It’s the eternal family of Jesus (Matthew 12:50) and our ‘family’ responsibility in His Spirit is love-based obedience to do everything He commands us.” (1John 3:7-10)

Young Nate, whom Jack was discipling and was now part of their fellowship family, spoke up for the first time. “I’m new to reading and applying the Bible. Can you give me an example of the consequences when we rationalize disobedience rather than obey our Lord’s Word?”

“One comes to mind right away,” Harry said eagerly. “When the twelve men Moses sent to spy out the land returned (Numbers 13), all but Caleb and Joshua discouraged the Israelites because of the formidable people there. That fear-based rationale hindered the rest from trusting God — the same God Who sent ten plagues to free them from Egypt, Who parted the Red Sea, and Who miraculously provided food and water in the desert!” His voice dropped in sadness. “Because they relied on their fear-based rationalization, they wandered around the desert 40 years until that generation of doubters died. Only their children got to enter the Promised Land.”

“That’s a good example, Harry,” Jerome affirmed. “I have one from the Newer Testament. When the chief priests and elders asked Jesus by whose authority He was acting, He asked them a question about where John’s baptism came from. (Matthew 21:23-27) They rationalized that if they said it was from God, Jesus would ask why they didn’t believe John. And they didn’t want to say it was from man, because the people esteemed John as one of God’s prophets. So they didn’t answer at all. All throughout the Gospels Jesus calls men like these ‘Hypocrites!’”

“I get the picture,” Nate responded. “This is heavy. I gather that when I see a command in the Bible, God wants my first heart response to be obedience out of love for Him. I know you’ve taught me, Jack, that His Spirit in me gives me both the will and the power to obey Him,” (Philippians 2:13) the young man continued, “but rationalization would make me want to weigh pros and cons. And if I choose this as my initial step, I’ll talk myself out of doing it His way.”

“You put that well, Nate,” Jack affirmed with delight in the young man and the insight the Spirit had given him. “I committed to memory one particular stanza from the poem in the back of the Demolishing Strongholds workbook. It goes: One step thou seest—then go forward boldly, One step is far enough for faith to see; Take that, and thy next duty shall be told thee, For step by step thy Lord is leading thee.”

Harry smiled his agreement. “You’ve told us often, Jack, that you’ve never met anyone God gave two steps to take. I totally agree with that, and in my Bible reading I’ve found that principle to be true there as well.”

“Is that why God gives us so many examples in the Bible of first taking that one step of faith, then expecting that He’ll act?” Brett asked.

“Yes, it is,” Jack answered. “We need to see both the people who acted in faith and God’s response to their faith. They go hand-in-hand: one step of faith, and God responds.”

“Two examples in the Bible that spur me on to act immediately,” Harry echoed, “are when the Israelites were about to cross the Jordan River and attack Jericho. The river was at flood stage, and it didn’t stop flowing until the priests carrying the Ark stepped into it.” (Joshua 3:15,16)

Jerome cut in with a laugh. “I once envisioned myself as the first priest in line. I remember thinking, ‘I sure hope Joshua really heard from God!’” The immediate identification with Jerome’s point led everyone to chortle.

Harry continued, “The other example happened a little later when God told them to march around Jericho for seven days. That’s got to be the strangest battle strategy of all time.” He turned toward Jerome. “I bet those men who had trained for war had the same thought the priests might have had, ‘I sure hope Joshua really heard from God!’” Now everyone broke up in laughter.

Then the atmosphere returned to the soberness of the topic: how to interact with lukewarm relatives. Jack resumed with a question. “Brett, I need to ask this because it will guide you in how to deal with your brother: Will the lukewarm be welcomed into heaven?” (Hebrews 12:25-27)

“Golly!” Brett blurted. “I’ve thought about that each time I’ve finished one of those conversations with Dan when I’ve tried to persuade him to obey what’s in God’s Word. Deep inside I sense the answer to your question is ‘No, he won’t be welcomed because his walk doesn’t match his talk.’” (James 2:17-26)

Jack responded emphatically, “I agree! Remember, one of the stipulations we see time and again in God’s Word about our way to the Judgment Throne is that our pilgrimage to our salvation calls for forceful conviction and steadfast determination. (1Peter 1:13-17) Father doesn’t fling open heaven’s gate to those who give up along the way and return to the world’s values and goals,” (2Peter 2:22) he added. “That’s compromise, like mixing cold water with warm. And lukewarmness is, in fact, rebellion against His Lordship and His Word!”

“Are we dealing here with what the Bible calls a ‘carnal mind?’” Jerome asked.

“Yes, we are,” Jack responded. “‘Carnal’ is the Bible’s way of describing the corrupt nature of man which desires to sin. (Genesis 6:5) Carnality represents everything contrary to the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:17) He grimaced as he went on, “The idea of a ‘carnal Christian’ was developed by those who teach a false gospel which separates the spirit from the flesh as the ancient Greek Gnostics did. In other words, since your spirit is ‘forgiven’, you can disobey God’s commands with impunity.” (Jude 1:18,19)

Harry added, "So they're ignoring the fact that we're on a pilgrimage TO our salvation before our Lord's Throne. (Hebrews 12:1; 2Timothy 4:7) En route, we have responsibilities to our Father that by His grace He's prepared us to accomplish." (Ephesians 2:10)

As they were speaking, Nate opened his Bible to a passage he'd recently read. "Is this part of the issue we're talking about? 1 Corinthians 2: 13,14 says, 'This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.'" (Also see Romans 8:5,6)

As Jack nodded in approval, Brett spoke up. "I think the Spirit gave you that passage specifically for us, Nate. It captures the tension many of us who follow Jesus wholeheartedly have with relatives and friends who are lukewarm spiritually."

"The Scriptures bear witness that there's no such thing as a 'carnal Christian,'" Jack noted. "Nate, would you read Romans 8:9 for us? And please emphasize the word 'if'."

Nate read with meaning permeating his youthful voice. "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, IF the Spirit of God lives in you. And IF anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.' So those 'ifs' are important!"

"Indeed," Jack declared. "The testimony that the Spirit of Christ abides in us is seen in our earnest and loving desire to keep His commands." (1John 5:3; 2John 1: 6) He turned to Brett. "People like your brother who habitually choose to give way to their sin nature are revealing that the Spirit of Jesus isn't in them. (James 1:13-16) Their very resistance to living according to His commands is evidence of that. So, Brett, what would the Spirit have you do?"

Brett knew the answer. "I'm going to call my brother before I get to work. We need to talk! (Proverbs 27:5) I'll ask him to meet with Luke and me so he can hear us both."

29. If You Obey My Commands, You Will Remain In My Love

“I am the vine; you are the branches.

If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit to My Father’s glory.

If you don’t remain in Me, you’re a cut-off branch, thrown into the fire and burned.”

The intensity of emotions was as hot as the humid August heat shimmering in the backyard. “I don’t get it, Brett. Why are you and Luke jumping me about sin?” yelled a distraught Dan.

Brett could appreciate the defensive position his older brother was taking. No one in their family had ever confronted sin before, preferring to ignore whatever anyone was doing. “I’m here because Luke had the courage to come to me last week. He’s been going through those materials I’d been sending to you and is choosing to put them into practice.”

Dan’s acid response accompanied his glare at his son. “Yeah, yeah, he’s starting to turn into some kind of holier-than-thou pest. Life with him has become unbearable for both his mother and me.” (John 3:20)

“Dad,” Luke pleaded. “You make it impossible for any kind of meaningful spiritual discussion in our home.”

Dan jumped in with venom. “I get enough of that at church. We have a good home so why should I have to deal with spiritual stuff when I can be relaxing after work?”

Luke’s reply was pained. “We don’t have a ‘good home’. We have a home of darkness where you and Mom sin against God and you don’t care.” (John 3:19)

“What do you mean?” his Dad snapped back.

“Remember when I brought up those TV shows with the half-naked women dancing seductively?” The young man watched his father cringe in angry silence. “And I’ve caught you a number of times at those porn websites. (Ephesians 5:5) Don’t worry. I’ve been careful to keep it from Mom.”

His father retorted, “So, are you threatening me now?”

“Not one bit,” Luke rejoined. “I love you and Mom, and I want us to end the hypocrisy of going to church while we’re entertaining sin in the rest of our lives.” (Isaiah 1: 16)

Brett was patient, letting his nephew get everything out that he needed to say.

“So my sanctimonious son is calling me a ‘hypocrite.’ Listen, my conscience isn’t convicting me that I’ve done anything wrong,” (Titus 1:15) Dan replied angrily. Yet, Brett could see that the pain in Luke’s voice was getting through to the man.

Deciding to vent his ire elsewhere, Dan turned to Brett. “So why’d you join my son in this attack?”

“Attack?” Brett answered, fully realizing how difficult it had always been for his older brother to receive any input from him. “Because your son loves you so much, he’s had the courage to address specific sins in your life. And all you’ve done is mocked and ridiculed him. I’m here for the second step of confronting your sin.”

Dan snarled, “What do you mean, ‘second step?’”

Brett opened his Bible and quoted, “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.’ That’s why Luke’s come to you. It goes on, ‘But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church...’” (Matthew 18:15-17) He didn’t complete verse 17 because he didn’t know what Dan’s church would do if he and Luke went to them. He was hoping his brother wouldn’t force the issue that far by refusing to listen to them.

Dan hesitated, then replied somewhat less ruffled, “I’ve never seen anyone use that passage in our church. Everyone just puts on their ‘I’m fine, I hope you’re fine’ face so no one knows if anyone’s sinning or not the rest of the week.”

Brett was hoping his brother would ditch the rationalization he’d used for so long to defend his life of sin. (1John 1:5,6) He’d so earnestly been praying that Dan would want to know and love Jesus as Lord of his life far more than he wanted to cling to darkness. And Brett was also relying on an important scriptural principle. He turned to another passage, urging Dan to pay close attention. ‘For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.’ (Hebrews 4:12,13)

Brett closed his Bible, peering intently into his brother’s narrowed eyes. “There’s coming a day when every sin you’re doing will be laid bare before the eyes of God.”

Dan started to grumble, “I don’t want to hear that kind of...” But his words trailed off, followed by a long silence. Brett knew in his spirit that the intercession by the entire home fellowship was being answered. It was the first time he’d ever seen authentic conviction on his brother’s face.

Dan got up from his chair sobbing and wrapped his arms around his son. “Luke, I’m so sorry... so sorry. I’ve been a hypocrite for a long time. And now you love me enough to tell me the truth.” Dan let go of Luke and turned to Brett. After holding him tightly in a bear hug, he spoke sincerely. “I do want to listen to you, brother. Tell me what I need to do.” (Mark 10:17)

They went over to a table together and opened the Bible to a passage Jack had suggested they use if Dan showed a repentant heart — John 15. “Dan, it all has to do with you living a life clinging to Jesus with such intensity that not only is it hard for you to sin, your love for Him compels you to bear fruit to our Father’s glory.”

“I’ve never even thought about that before,” Dan disclosed with humility. (Isaiah 57:15) He asked Brett to go over that chapter with him, not wanting to miss a point.

Brett put his finger on the first verse: “Jesus is the Vine we must all remain attached to. And our Father is the Gardener: HE cuts off every branch that bears no fruit. These are so-called Christians who hold onto sin and live fruitlessly for themselves.” (Matthew 7:21)

“So am I being cut off?” Dan inquired anxiously.

“Not at all, Dad!” Luke interjected. “When our Father sees a repentant heart, He prunes you of those areas of your life that aren’t fruitful now, and of those that are holding you back from doing His will.” (1Peter 4:1,2)

Wanting to understand, Dan asked, “Is pruning less painful than being cut off?”

“By far!” Brett affirmed. Pointing further down the page, he noted, “Look at verse 16 and what happens to the branches that are cut off: ‘If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.’”

“We’re talking hell here, aren’t we?” Dan queried. (2Thessalonians 1:8,9)

“Yup, that everlasting place of suffering where those who don’t abide in Jesus end up,” his brother agreed sadly. “That’s why we need to be purposeful about our relationship with Jesus. The Bible repeats many times that our love for Him is displayed by knowing and applying His commands to our lives.” Gesturing further down the page, Brett pointed to verse 10: “If you obey My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in His love.” (John 15:10)

“I sure haven’t done any of that,” Dan responded sheepishly. “To be truthful, most Sunday mornings I daydream through the sermon and can’t wait until the service is over.” Pausing a moment, he added, “Tell me then, how does God see me now?”

“It’s right here, Dad, like we just said,” Luke jumped in eagerly, wanting to encourage his father. “‘Every branch that does bear fruit, our Father trims clean’ — He makes sure all that hinders us from producing fruit to His glory is pruned away.”

“I want to be that kind of person,” Dan responded with hope, regarding his son with growing pride.

Brett stepped in. “If you’d like to take the first step in pruning, you need to confess your sins and repent of them, purposing in your heart to turn away from what you know from God’s Word displeases Him.” He looked at his brother with assurance. “Luke and I will stay out here praying for you. Why don’t you go inside and let the Holy Spirit show you the sins God has against you.” (John 16:8)

About forty minutes passed before Dan returned. His red eyes bore witness that he’d been crying a lot. (2Corinthians 7:10,11) Brett and Luke rose up to embrace him. As they sat down again, Dan was the first to speak. “Son, I’d like that Demolishing Your Strongholds article and the Gospel of the Covenant Brett sent me that I’ve never read. I will now!”

“I’ll be glad to help you and your family, Dan,” Brett affirmed. (Isaiah 52:7) Pointing again to John 15, he continued, “As you can see in verses 4 through 10, Jesus repeatedly urges us, ‘REMAIN IN ME’, and then He’ll remain in us. That means it takes intentional steadfast determination on our part to remain in Him, or else He wouldn’t have repeated it so often! This is also where we need to encourage each other.” (Hebrews 3:13)

“I want that kind of relationship with Jesus, Brett. And I know my wife does too. It’s me who’s been the spiritual hindrance here. I’ve kept rationalizing away so many proposals she’s given me over the years for our spiritual development.”

“Many fall into the rationale trap and find their faith shriveling,” Brett responded. “They don’t mean to tear down the faith of others, but their doubt and unbelief does that.” (Hebrews 3:12)

After a pause Dan observed, “I notice in your Bible that you’ve written three references — 1 John 1:9, 1 Peter 3:12, and James 5:16-18— alongside John 15:7, ‘If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.’ And down here you put 4/7/08 next to ‘Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.’ (John 15:13) Why do you do that?”

Grateful love lifted Brett’s heart. “As I’ve continued to read through the Bible over the years, the Holy Spirit has shown me how interconnected different truths are. For example, in verse 7 Jesus says, ‘Ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.’ Standing alone, it seems like He’s saying you can get whatever you want just by asking.” He shook his head then went on, “But then I found that our Father has a condition for answering prayers. He calls us to be righteous in how we live! God listens to the godly person who does His will. (John 9:31)

Dan interjected, “That’s why you had me spend time having the Holy Spirit convict me of my sins — so I could be righteous in God’s sight by confessing them, receive His forgiveness in Christ and be purified from my unrighteousness.” (1John 1:9)

“Yes!” Brett agreed. “And 1 Peter 3:12 affirms a truth cited often in the Bible: ‘For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.’” (See Proverbs 15: 8, 28:9; Psalms 34:15-17; 66:18,19)

“Dad, answered prayer is what got the first followers of Jesus noticed,” Luke proclaimed with excitement.

"I don't think I've ever even seen an answer to prayer before," Dan replied meekly.

"You're seeing one now!" Brett exclaimed. "My whole fellowship family is praying for you while I'm here. God has worked in your heart in answer to their prayers!"

Tears again filled Dan's eyes. "Please...please thank them for me." (2Corinthians 1:11)

"I will, gladly," Brett answered. He then turned to James 5:16-18 and read it aloud to these two who were so dear to him.

"Wow!" was first word out of Dan's mouth. "I can see now what confessing our sins to our Father produces. That guy Elijah was someone just like me: righteous in God's sight because I've confessed my sins. And now my prayers can be heard just like his were, since I'm agreeing in the Spirit with what God wants."

"That's how God gets all the glory!" Luke beamed. "Our Father hears us when we have no unconfessed sin. And that's what I've wanted for our home, Dad."

"I promise you I won't rest until that's happened," Dan pledged as they hugged each other again. "One last question. I was pretty cruel to you two when we first got started today. But neither of you fought back. (1Peter 3:8) How come?"

Luke responded with a gleam, "It's love, Dad, the love God has given me for you and for everyone else! Once the demonic strongholds were gone and my friends in Jesus helped fill in my old ruts of behavior and attitude, love began to motivate me like never before. (1Peter 1:22) I began to realize what one of the authors of **Demolishing Strongholds** understood about the depth of God's love after the strongholds were gone in him."

Dan looked puzzled so Brett opened up to Ephesians 3:16-19: "I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." Did you get that? Christ is dwelling in you and me through faith! "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

"I want that kind of love I see in you two!" Dan proclaimed with heartfelt joy.

As Brett closed in prayer, they agreed to meet as often as necessary until the way of the Lord was the way of Dan's home.

30. Today's Decisions Cause Tomorrow's Consequences

**“When I come in My Father's glory with My angels,
I will reward each person according to what they have done.
On that day Each of you will have to give an account of yourself.”**

The cozy living room in Nate and Jessica's little home was brightly lit by both the glowing lamps and the warm, welcoming smiles of the young couple.

“We're really glad you could come over,” Nate said as Jack and Dee made themselves comfortable on the sofa. “Jess and I have two important matters we need guidance on.”

“We're glad to help any way we can,” (Psalms 37:30) Jack replied, fondness in his eyes.

Jessica blurted anxiously, “One of the situations has haunted us from our past. The other has to do with Nate's job.”

“Why don't you lead us in prayer, Nate,” Dee asked. “There are two or more of us here in the Name of Jesus, so let's ask the Spirit of our Lord for revelation.” (Matthew 18:20)

After Nate finished praying he continued holding Jess's hand and turned to Jack and Dee. “We hadn't mentioned this before, but we wanted you to know that we lived together for over a year before we got married.” Jess added, “At the time I felt it was a good idea. I thought we could find out if we were right for each other before making a final commitment. Even my church-going mother thought it was sensible. My Dad didn't agree with it, but he didn't put up any stop signs either.”

Jack understood how damaging fornication was to a marriage even years afterward, and asked a probing question. “So what's changed with both of you?”

Nate looked down before answering with a regretful sigh. “We'd seen in the Bible that there's no place in the Kingdom of God for those who have sex outside of marriage. (1Corinthians 6:9) We've both confessed our sin,” he added as he looked at Jessica and squeezed her hand, “but we feel convicted that there's more we need to be doing. I guess that inside we both sense that the deep kind of love our Lord would have us develop in our marriage is being hindered by our premarital sex.”

“Well, what the Spirit is convicting you of is true,” Jack replied as he looked deeply into the faces of the young couple. “The Word of God tells us to flee fornication because every other sin a man does is outside his body. But when a man fornicates, he's sinning against his own body.” (1Corinthians 6:18-20)

“I don't think I understand,” Jessica responded, puzzled.

“I may not understand all there is to it myself,” Jack answered honestly. “But what our Lord has shown Dee and me over the years we'll be glad to share with you both.” (Job 12: 12)

“Please do!” the young couple implored. “We really want to hear.”

Jack glanced at Dee, who nodded. Then he turned toward Nate and Jessica. “First, we want to describe some of the possible symptoms you've probably both been experiencing with each other.”

Their eyes were wide and startled. “You know what we've been going through?”

“Let's see,” Dee interjected. “Jess, you've probably often felt Nate was insensitive to your needs.”

Jessica blurted a resounding “YES!” before she could catch herself.

“And in response to him not meeting your needs,” went on Dee knowingly, “you decided to treat him with coolness. You've probably even talked about him unfavorably with your Mom or friends. Maybe you've bad-mouthed him to others even when he was with you.”

Jessica's face dropped with shame. “Guilty on all counts.”

Now Jack jumped in. “Nate, you most likely reacted to her coolness by becoming more demanding.”

Before Jack could go on, Jess burst in, “Yeah, like a tyrant!”

Turning to Jessica, Dee asked, “Did you start having doubts and begin to question whether Nate even loved you?”

“Yes, many times! How did you know?” Jess reacted almost as if Dee had been watching her through a security camera.

“It doesn't matter how Jack and I know,” Dee smiled gently. “What's important is that you recognize the consequences of premarital intercourse.”

“I can see that we really blew it more than we realized,” Nate admitted.

“Nothing is beyond what Jesus can heal as you cooperate with His Spirit to develop His character in your marriage,” Jack affirmed. “Dee and I have both been witnesses to what He can do if we'll wholeheartedly seek Him.” (Psalms 119:2)

Jessica leaned forward earnestly. “Are there any other symptoms that are hurting our marriage because we chose to do things the world's way?” (1John 2:15-17)

Dee responded, “Jess, let me ask you this. After you'd give Nate the cold shoulder, would he start buying you things?”

With a gulp, Nate jumped in, “Yes, I did! This is getting to be really weird.”

“Oh, it's not weird at all,” Jack stepped in. “It's the normal path our sin nature takes when we violate God's Word. We try to purchase favor from others in order to be accepted by them.” (Ecclesiastes 7:7)

Jessica's sudden anguish poured out in tears. "I just felt so awful when I accepted those gifts. I felt... I felt like a prostitute with Nate paying me." It was a while before anyone spoke because they were sensitive to the severity of Jess's pain.

Nate held her hand tightly and said with sorrow, "My buying things to make Jess happy became so bad that it drove us into some heavy debt — even this apartment she wanted that we can barely afford. I became so discouraged I began hanging around work not wanting to go home. This left Jess feeling even more alone and angry."

Then Jessica confessed, "I responded to him being away so much by making myself busy so he wouldn't think I needed him... We'd hardly been married two years and I was ready to leave him."

"Why didn't you, dear?" Dee asked, wanting to know what had held the young woman back.

"My high school friend Emma called me right in the middle of this and asked me to lunch," Jess replied, tilting her head at the memory. "I didn't know she'd become a follower of Jesus and had been praying for me every day. God had shown her that my marriage was hurting and that she needed to encourage me to hang in there. She said help was coming!" (Proverbs 27:9)

"And how did that help arrive?" Dee inquired curiously.

Nate looked at Jess with a chuckle and answered for the both of them, "It was when we ran into you two in the park that day."

Jessica added joyfully, "You two were the help God had promised through my friend Emma!" Words of praise to God rose up among them in response, and Jack finishing with a prayer of thanksgiving.

Nate then turned to Jack and Dee, his youthful face serious once more. "Now that we've exposed the symptoms of what our messing around has caused in our marriage, what would Jesus have us do?"

"Let's tackle that," Jack replied resolutely. "First, when you two fornicated, Jessica was still under the authority of her father in God's sight. You undermined the authority of her father, Nate, even if neither he nor the two of you recognized it."

As Nate had been getting to know the nature of biblical headship in his own home, (Ephesians 5:23) he could sense the truth in Jack's words. "So what should I do to correct this?"

"I'd encourage you to go to Jess's father and ask forgiveness for having intercourse with his daughter before you were married," (James 4:10) the older man responded.

Nate took a moment to search his own spirit for confirmation, then answered, "That'll be hard, but I know it's the step God wants me take."

"What about me?" Jess implored. "I'm just as guilty. What should I do?"

Dee answered with a tender smile at the earnest young woman. "It'd be helpful if you went to your Dad as well and asked forgiveness from him. I bet there's a place of pain in his heart that needs what only forgiveness can heal."

"But I hurt too!" Jess shot back suddenly with tears filling her eyes. "Doesn't my father need to ask me for forgiveness for not being the Dad I needed?"

Dee took Jessica's hand and asked, "You weren't very close to your father growing up, were you?"

Choking back sobs as she recalled her childhood, Jess murmured, "No, his career took him away from home a lot. And even when he was home, he played golf with his buddies whenever he got the opportunity." She paused then added with a sigh, "Almost all the discipline of me and my brother was left in my Mom's hands. She'd get annoyed at us and scream. We never knew what was going to set her off. I think she was just overwhelmed by all the responsibility."

Dee reached over and hugged Jess. She'd seen this scenario repeated so often in her years of working alongside Jack to help families. "The 'god' of corporate America has cost many families the blessings God would have given them if men hadn't sought their rewards in this world." (Psalms 17:14)

"This actually leads into our second situation," Nate interjected. "The company I work for wants to promote me to a position which will have me traveling at least two weeks a month. As I've looked at the biblical mandates for a man as a husband and father, (Deuteronomy 6:5-7; Ephesians 6:4) I'm really having doubts about this promotion."

Jack laughed as he shook his head. "I'm sorry. A decision I had to make years ago like yours flashed in front of my mind."

"I know what it is, too," Dee replied with a chuckle.

"We'd like to hear!" Nate and Jess entreated at the same time.

"Many years ago in a life far different than the one I have now, one of my assignments in the Navy was Personnel Officer. As part of this job I was required to put together retirement ceremonies."

"I'm just getting started," Nate blurted. "I haven't even thought of retirement."

Jack smiled. "It's what God showed me during that assignment that I want to share with you. I'd intended to make a career of the Navy. In fact, I'd just received a promotion myself and had been selected for command."

"So what happened?" Jessica asked, feeling a kind of suspense growing.

"In all but one of the retirements I conducted," Jack replied sadly, "the men retiring weren't married to their first wife."

"Wow! All but one?" Nate exclaimed in disbelief.

“Yup,” Jack continued. “The one who still had his first wife followed Jesus as Lord of his life, and he’d made career choices to forego advancements that would have jeopardized his responsibilities as husband and father. I can still picture his retirement ceremony, surrounded by his family. That was by far the happiest one I handled.”

“So is that what caused you to leave the Navy?” Jessica inquired.

Jack shook his head. “No, that came a year later. After I became a follower of Jesus, the Holy Spirit told me to resign.” (Proverbs 3: 5,6) Dee chimed in, “Because of Jack’s experience in Personnel, we could look back years later and appreciate what God had saved us from in raising our own family.”

“I don’t understand,” Jessica interposed.

“Our Lord was merciful to us. Jack was quickly advancing in the Navy, which meant he’d have to spend more time away from home.” Dee’s face furrowed. “He’d already been on four deployments, three of them in combat. I’m not sure whether I or the kids could have survived the next 10 years with him being away from us even more.”

Nate cut in, “I’m really glad you shared that with us. God gave me Jess as my wife. And then he’s blessed us with Riley, the first of what we hope will be several more children. They’re gonna need me! It’s Jess and the kids first, and everything else second.”

“That’s a wise decision,” Jack exclaimed as he reached over and hugged Nate. A time of prayer followed, the young couple reassured in the steps they were going to take.

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“Jack, this is Nate. Jess is on the other phone too. Could you and Dee come over for dinner on Friday?” Jack gestured for Dee to get on the phone.

“Are you and Jess having problems?” Jack asked with concern.

“Not one bit!” Nate exclaimed. “We went to Jess’s father the day after we met with you and Dee. When I asked for his forgiveness, he wept! The words out of his mouth after forgiving me were, ‘I wish someone had done this for me.’”

Dee voiced, “I don’t understand.”

Jess jumped in. “It seems that my parents fornicated too before they were married. When I asked Dad forgiveness, he held me as we both cried. It was like our Lord was releasing us all from a prison. Even my Mom got in on the repentance.”

“That’s why we want you to come over for dinner,” Nate added. “They want to meet you and find out how they can become followers of Jesus too!” Joyful “Hallelujahs!” filled the phones.

31. Don't Be Afraid Of Them, For I Am With You

“Say to them whatever My Spirit Gives you. Do not be intimidated by them. They may contend against you but will not prevail, for I am with you.”

Jack paused in the parking lot for a moment to pray before he entered the building. Several weeks earlier he'd received a call inviting him to meet with the local ecumenical clergy council who wanted to understand what his ministry was all about. Since he didn't want to discuss the Hebraic foundations in a vacuum, he printed out copies of the *Prodigal Church* booklet which the Moderator for the council then mailed out to each member.

After the introductions, Jack was asked to speak. “May I first ask how many of you have read the Prodigal Church?” About 20 of the 25 clergy present had. “How many of you were favorably disposed to what you read and wanted to investigate the topic further?” About five raised their hand.

Before he could continue, one of the five began to speak. “I went to the Restoration Ministries website and began to peruse their book *Pastoring By Elders*. Frankly, I was blown away when I found that there were no clergy in the earliest Church.”

“What do you mean there were no clergy?” Belligerent response erupted from several in attendance.

Jack jumped in. “The earliest followers of Jesus were an extended spiritual family who met in homes. They were led by older men of wisdom who shepherded them as family leaders, (Acts 20:28) similar to the pattern of their Hebrew ancestors. (Genesis 18:19) That's why the apostles could address followers of Jesus as brothers and sisters over 250 times — in a very real relational sense, they were family!”

He could see looks around the room varying from puzzled to surprised to angry as he went on. “As you've read in Prodigal Church, Christianity didn't become a religious system until the fourth century under Emperor Constantine. Following the traditions of the pagan religions at that time, he constructed temples for the Christians to meet in and adapted the pagan priestly system.” He looked around the room. “You know your religious history. Incorporating pagan ways into organized Christianity became the norm because the familiar customs kept the populace from rebelling over change.”

“So we meet in public buildings. Isn't that the most efficient way to minister to more people?” blurted a clergyman with the largest congregation in the area.

Jack responded calmly, “It's not the public building that's erroneously referred to as ‘the church’ that's the most important issue. Rather, it's the elimination of why our Father purposed for individuals and families to fellowship in homes.”

“Are you talking about that communal righteousness stuff discussed in the booklet?” another cleric called out.

“Yes, I am,” Jack answered firmly. “The Older Testament clearly established that God could not be approached in just any sinful, haphazard manner without severe consequences. (Jeremiah 7:21-29) His commands made that clear! The Hebrew text also reveals through examples like Korah's rebellion, King David numbering his troops, and Achan's taking the devoted items in Jericho that God punished other people for the sins of one man, including family members.” (Numbers 16:3-35; 1Chronicles 21; Joshua 7)

Those passages were familiar to the clergy present, and some began to nod in agreement as Jack continued. “That's why the Hebraic stream of Jews who sought to live by the faith of their ancestor Abraham maintained what's known as ‘communal righteousness.’ They realized they needed frequent access to each other in their homes in order to help each other stay repentant and therefore righteous before God. (1John 1:9) Plus as family in Jesus having ongoing contact, they were able to live out what it means to love one another.” (John 13: 35)

One of the others who'd taken the time to look over the website spoke up. “I can see that the Temple system was too large for individuals to help each other live uprightly. It makes sense that relational intimacy begins in the home and is supported by the home fellowship family. That's where the give-and-take of regular interaction allows them to deal purposefully with sin. They know each other!”

Before anyone else could speak, the leader of a congregation modeled after the Church Growth Movement interjected, “We're doing what the early Church did. The congregation's divided into small groups that meet once a month for a meal in homes. We even accommodate individual tastes by designating groups into singles, married with children, older people and so forth. That way everyone's happy.”

Jack cringed inwardly but maintained a smile. “The family fellowship gatherings our Father inspired were intergenerational, like an authentic family! They relied on the wisdom of older men and women whose life experience was used by the Spirit to illustrate truth in action.” (Job 12:12,13)

A light dawned on a few more as they perceived how God in the first century had been building on previous Hebraic relational practices. Jack added, “This relationship as brothers and sisters in the household of God was a 24-hour, 7-day a week commitment to be the first line of helping each other. Isn't that what ‘loving your neighbor as yourself’ is? (Mark 12:31, as perceived from Leviticus 19:18) Besides upholding communal righteousness, within this fellowship family context younger couples could turn to the older ones for help in their marriage and bringing up their children.”

Another man spoke for the first time. “I think that's an important point since churchgoers in this nation have higher divorce rates than unbelievers do.” A rumble of agreement stirred the room.

Then a voice cut in defensively, “I believe that citing sin turns people away. No one wants to hear they’re bad! So in our services we avoid any mention of it.”

“Then may I ask,” Jack inquired, “how do you uphold the mandates of Matthew 18:15-17 to remove the unrepentant?” Pausing a moment he went on, “I’d like to ask all of you: When was the last time someone was removed from your congregation due to unconfessed sin? How many attend your services with unconfessed sin in their hearts, refusing to repent? Even more important, is this acceptable to our Holy God?”

Embarrassment flushed many faces. Jack was thinking about how to introduce another topic when someone asked, “How is it that we missed these truths during our seminary training?”

Jack replied, “The people at Restoration Ministries contend that the spirits of Hellenistic thought and Roman organization came upon Christendom because of the anti-Semitic stance of those Greek philosophers who converted to Christianity in the second and third centuries. You know, the men known as ‘Church Fathers.’”

“That sounds like a curse. Why would God allow that?” someone called out.

“Because He’s a God Who keeps promises,” Jack answered. “He promised Abraham that He’d curse anyone who cursed his descendants. (Genesis 12:3) So for centuries we’ve been living under a curse of Hellenistic thought and Roman organization.”

As startled glances swirled around the room Jack went on, “It may seem like our God is unjust, but we know He’s not. Consider that Romans 11 confirms that God has hardened the heart of the Jews until the full number of Gentiles enter the faith. (Romans 11:25) How would you like to be a Jew thinking that what He’s done seems unjust?”

“So when will this curse be lifted from Christendom?” a younger man next to Jack asked in earnest.

“It’s in the process of being lifted now!” Jack exclaimed. “When the Jewish people got Jerusalem back during the 1967 war, the prophecy of Jesus was fulfilled: ‘Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are accomplished.’ (Luke 21:24) As God is showing mercy to the Jewish people, He is revealing to us Gentiles the Hebraic understanding of His Word to undo the spirit of Hellenism.” (Zechariah 9:13)

One of those who were favorable to what they read in Prodigal Church piped up, “I read an article on the website entitled God’s Clergy-less Kingdom, and I’m convinced that when God declares He hates and fights against the teachings of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6,15,16), He’s addressing the clergy/laity distinction we’ve become so accustomed to.” That woke up any who’d been daydreaming! “I became convicted something has to change. I’d like to talk with you more, Jack, after this meeting.” Several others voiced agreement.

“I’d like to get back to the concept of dealing with sinners,” another broke in sternly. “In order to confront sin, that means we have to resurrect the Law. But as I understand it, we’re now under grace. The Law is meaningless to the Church today.”

“I’ve heard that distinction made before,” Jack retorted, “but it’s unbiblical. Grace isn’t just a New Testament concept! God showered grace on the Israelites in the Older Testament. How else can you account for the fact that He was willing for the death penalty for their sins to be paid by a substitute, an unblemished lamb or goat?” (Leviticus 4:27-35) He looked intently at each one then added, “The opposite of the Law isn’t grace, but lawlessness. GRACE is the power and desire to do His will. GRACE is the power of the Spirit of Jesus in us that helps us become more like Him in loving obedience.” (Philippians 2:12,13)

Several agreed with Jack’s definition as he went on, “Permit me to review for you what our Hebraic forefathers who first put their trust in Jesus understood. Through His sacrifice on the cross Jesus completely paid the penalty for our sins.” (Hebrews 9:27,28) Hearty “amens” accompanied that as Jack continued, “But we wouldn’t appreciate what Jesus did for us if we didn’t know how grievously we’ve sinned against a Holy God. (Jeremiah 3:25; Romans 1:18-32) That’s what His laws in both Testaments show us, as when Paul cites in Galatians chapter 6 a list of sins that abound today: sexual immorality, hatred, discord, jealousy, selfish ambition, envy, and drunkenness — and insists that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Galatians 5: 19-21)

“Certainly God makes clear throughout the Bible the things we do that violate His holy law,” an older cleric agreed.

Jack nodded and responded, “Keeping the law doesn’t make us righteous. Our righteousness is found only through trust in Jesus. (Romans 3:22) But as you said, God’s Law shows us how we sin against Him. We’re all aware that ‘no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.’ (Romans 3:20) ‘The law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.’” (Galatians 3: 24)

One of the younger men spoke up with a tone of arrogance. “I don’t think we should be even looking at the Old Testament. The Church began at Pentecost!”

“Is that so?” Jack rejoined. “The church actually means ‘the called-out ones.’ The first called-out one was the Hebrew, Abraham, who left Ur of the Chaldees in obedience to God. The eternal Covenant God promised to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) is the foundation for all of us whom Jesus has called out of the world to serve Him.” (John 15:18,19; 17:6)

Jack pressed home his point. “Paul tells us that Abraham becomes the father of all who trust Jesus. (Romans 4:16; Galatians 3:7) Also, God told Abraham the gospel in advance. (Galatians 3:8) Don’t you think that this patriarch who’s mentioned so often in both Testaments has special significance for us who are called out today?”

Sheepishly, the New Testament-only pastor responded, “I guess so...”

Jack wasn’t done. “There’s one other point I hope you’ll investigate. Jesus wasn’t the first to cite being born again when He brought it up with Nicodemus. (John 3) Experiencing spiritual rebirth was preached by rabbis of the Hebraic stream of

Judaism 200 years before the coming of Jesus.” Surprise arched several eyebrows. “Being born again answered the inner appeal of God to the spirit of His people to live in covenant union with Him. In essence, rebirth represented a determination to wholly relate to God as did Abraham, whose trusting obedience to go anywhere, do anything, and believe the impossible prompted God to establish a covenant with him.” (Hebrews 11:8-12)

“I agree with you that Abraham’s faith was demonstrated in his obedient actions,” another man said. With sorrow he added, “But we’ve trained our people to be passive spectators who serve no one but themselves.”

At this point the moderator let everyone know it was approaching time to end the meeting. He asked Jack if he had one last thought to share.

“In our Father’s sight the home is the basic building block for spiritual development. It’s not your public building. Everything in the earliest Church was aimed at helping fathers fulfill God’s commands to raise a godly generation (Malachi 2:15; Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Ephesians 6:4) Our home fellowships help fathers do their job. We don’t establish programs like youth groups to compensate for irresponsible fathers, nor can men outsource their families for others to train. We help them do it in their own homes.”

The meeting ended with 10 men staying behind with Jack for several hours of meaningful questions and answers. He agreed to meet with them in three weeks after they’d each read *Pastoring By Elders*, *I Hate Nicolaitanism*, and *God’s Clergy-less Kingdom* so they’d all be prepared for discussion. Jack left with a grateful heart — God had indeed answered his prayer!

32. To Our Lord Belong Wisdom And Counsel

**“You always have My Spirit of wisdom and revelation within you.
It gives Me great joy when you look to Me first so that you may give an apt reply”**

Brett had just gotten home from work. As he entered the bedroom, Lacie put the phone on mute and turned to him in distress. “I’m talking with my friend, Linsey. Her husband, Garth, is packing right now to leave her. He told her he’s had enough. What do I tell her?”

Brett quickly bowed his head, calling upon the Spirit of Christ within. “Lord Jesus, what should I do?” That quiet inner voice Brett knew so well responded (Isaiah 11:2), “Ask Garth if he and his wife would like to go out to dinner with you.” Opening his eyes, he told Lacie, “Have Linsey ask him if he’d like to go out for dinner with us.”

Stupefied, Lacie kept the phone on mute. “He’s leaving her and you’re asking him out to dinner???”

“That’s what I believe Jesus gave me,” her husband replied calmly. Then more firmly he urged, “ASK him...” To Lacie’s (and Linsey’s!) astonishment, Garth replied, “Yes.” With wide eyes Lacie added, “They agreed to meet us at Lowery’s at seven.”

Brett and Lacie immediately called others in the fellowship family to be interceding for them. (2Corinthians 1:11) And Keisha immediately offered to take care of Kirk and Kelsey. Brett barely knew Garth. Both women had maintained a friendship from the time they’d marched together at a Pro-Life rally. The men had infrequently encountered each other at various social gatherings, and about all Brett knew was that Garth was a pilot for Fedex — and that they lived in one of the biggest houses in town.

Just after seven, the two couples settled in at their table with polite chitchat. But no sooner had their meals been ordered when Garth began his harangue about what he saw as irreconcilable issues in his marriage. “We moved into our house because she wanted something magnificent with six bathrooms. Even when I’m home, I hardly see her because she’s either outside working on the yard or busy with something else she feels she needs to do to keep the place looking impressive.” (1John 2:16) He shook his head angrily. “The two of us don’t have anything in common but living in this monstrosity.”

Just as Linsey was about to counterattack, Brett cut in, “May I ask what is it you want, Garth?”

Bristling with vexation he retorted, “I’ve been trying for over a year to get her to move to a smaller home in a smaller town where we’d have more time for each other. But she refuses to leave her ‘dream home.’”

Somewhat shamefaced, Linsey shot back, “I grew up in poverty! I swore I’d never live like that when I got married. You gave me what I wanted, so why are you complaining now?”

Lacie was befuddled by her friend’s materialistic response. “Linsey, I thought I knew you. But now I’m not so sure...”

“I never wanted you to know my true reason for living in such an extravagant house,” Linsey blurted. “I knew you would’ve said something I didn’t want to hear. There was no other way but to deceive you.”

“Now you see what I’m up against!” Garth was almost shouting. “I don’t think she even cares about me, but only about what I can give her. I almost feel like she’s used me all of our marriage. At this point I don’t think she can love anybody but herself.”

Linsey’s eyes flooded as she bolted from the table and ran toward the rest room. Brett gestured for Lacie to go with her. Then, asking the Spirit for wisdom (James 1:5,6), he turned to Garth. “Is there anyone who can tell you what to do?”

Taken aback, the man growled, “No!”

“So, do you really want to lose your marriage?” Brett asked.

“NO! Despite everything, I still love my wife. I’d do anything to save our marriage, but I just can’t live like this any longer.”

Again Brett bowed and asked the Lord for wisdom. Then he looked Garth in the eyes. “I want to give you an initial step if you earnestly want to turn this impasse around. Are you willing to accept what I’m going to ask of you?” (Proverbs 27:9)

Garth was startled. He’d never had anyone challenge him this way. But there was a burning in his heart to do whatever it took to end the months of emotional pain so he answered somewhat meekly, “Yes. What do you want me to do?”

Brett handed him a piece of paper with the Voice of the Martyrs address on it. “EVERY time you bring up something negative about your wife, I want you to mail a check for \$500 to this ministry. Will you agree to do that?”

Brett was bowled over by how fast Garth answered. “YES... yes, I will. I give you my word.” The two reached over shook hands.

The ladies still hadn’t returned from the rest room. Brett then remembered an important area to probe which Jack had taught him. “Garth, how was your relationship with your father?”

“Not that good,” the man answered quietly. “He always seemed to be working. And when he was home, he didn’t interact much with us kids. Now, we talk maybe once or twice a year.”

Brett decided to dig a little deeper. “If someone were to ask him what it was like to raise you, what do you think he’d say?”

A gruff snort accompanied the answer. “He’d tell you I was lazy and didn’t do anything around the house. And that I always seemed to have a chip on my shoulder.”

“How do you feel about what you just told me?” Brett asked somberly.

“I’d agree with that appraisal,” the older man replied. “In fact, I don’t think I really changed until I became a Marine helicopter pilot. Their training and standards for conduct changed me a lot.”

Then Brett asked a question that pierced Garth. “Have you ever asked your father forgiveness for the years you hurt his heart? Would you want how you treated him to be done to you?”

Tears began to fill the big man’s eyes. “No... No, I’ve never asked him. And, no, I wouldn’t want to be treated with such disregard.” (Psalms 119:59)

“The Bible says that in everything, do to others what you’d have them do to you,” (Matthew 7:12) Brett cited. “Has it ever occurred to you that Linsey’s disregard for your feelings is God’s way of letting you experience what you’ve done to your Dad?”

By this time Garth was all choked up. He felt like he’d been standing on a trap door that had just opened and he was freefalling. But curiously, there was also a sense of assurance deep inside that gave him a glimmer of hope.

Meanwhile, Lacie was holding a sobbing Linsey’s hand as the ladies sat on the sofa in the rest room anteroom. “Linsey, I can appreciate you keeping your motives from me about the house. But you’re destroying your marriage! Is this what you want: a huge house without a husband?”

“No! Of course not,” came the agitated response. “I thought I could keep both Garth and the house.”

“From what I can see, that’s not going to happen. You need to make a decision tonight — right now! Will it be your husband or the house?” Lacie issued as bold a challenge as she’d ever given anyone. (Proverbs 25:12) “You’re not going to get a second opportunity. Your husband needs to know whether he’s first or second on your priority list.”

Linsey wailed, “I don’t want to have to make that decision!”

Lacie prayed quickly for the indwelling Spirit to give her wisdom. The response she received was, “She has lived with the curse of Eve. Her husband has always given in to it.” (See: Discussing How to Restore the Early Church: Lesson 35; or our video, Jesus In Your Home, The Home: Segment 8)

“Linsey,” she said softly but firmly, “all of us women are born with the curse of Eve. It’s the desire to be independent and to control our husbands. (Genesis 3:6,16) In order to be the suitable helper God wants us to be as wives (Genesis 2:18), we need to rid ourselves of our desire to dominate.” She made sure Linsey was looking at her as she asked, “Are you willing to do that and become the wife God wants you to be for Garth?”

Linsey’s face crumpled as she resolved to follow her Lord’s ways rather than live a moment longer under the bondage of idolatry and independence. (Romans 6:16) “I do want that, Lacie. I’m so tired of the tension I’ve caused in our home. And I hate myself for all the hurt I’ve caused my husband. I know he loves me...”

Without any concern for where they were or who might walk in, Lacie grabbed Linsey by the hand and they both knelt by the sofa. Her trusting plea filled the small room as she prayed. “Father, you know Linsey’s heart and the desire to change which she’s voiced before you. (Romans 8:27,28) You also know the pain that’s rocked this marriage for so long. We call on you for the help she’ll need to do this. And for her sake, Father, we ask You to give her a sign of hope before she leaves this restaurant. We give you thanks in Jesus’s name. Amen.”

After the women embraced and Linsey pulled herself together, they returned to the table. Approaching with trepidation, Linsey expected her husband to give her the cold shoulder. But to her amazement he got up and hugged her! As he pulled the chair back for her to be seated, she was nearly in shock.

Garth sat down and reached for his wife’s hand. “We’ve got a long way to go, honey, but I want you to know that Brett has helped me make some changes.”

“Changes?” she let out, not knowing what she’d hear next.

“There are a couple things I need to do. One is with my father, which I’ll explain later.” His wife was amazed by the calm assurance in his voice, a determined tone that indicated he wasn’t going to stop until everything that needed to be done was accomplished. (Ruth 3:18)

Speaking as if he were making a pledge Garth went on, “I’ve agreed that each and every time I bring up a negative comment about you, I’ll make out a check for \$500 to the Voice of the Martyrs ministry. Each and every time...”

Linsey’s face radiated with stunned joy as she blurted out, “In the rest room Lacie prayed that God would give me a sign of hope before we left the restaurant tonight. Boy! Has He done that!”

“Did I miss something?” Brett asked.

Linsey’s glance at Garth said it all. He knew precisely what his wife was thinking, and they both burst into laughter. “My husband is the biggest penny pincher in the world!” They both laughed even harder. “For him to give that promise means that he really means business and NOTHING will hold him back. I have hope. I have REAL HOPE!”

Brett and Lacie voiced praise to God as Garth and Linsey stood to embrace with joyful tears streaming. After the hugs and sniffles subsided, Linsey confessed, “I have something to share too, dear. I want to sell the house!”

Garth couldn’t believe what he’d heard. “You want to do what???”

“I want to sell that place that I’ve made an idol. And I want to become the wife you need and who God wants me to be!” (1Peter 3:5) she proclaimed with a dazzling grin.

The rejoicing continued out into the parking lot where Brett and Lacie gave Garth and Linsey a copy of Demolishing Your Strongholds and The Gospel of the Covenant, and offered to meet with them again. Two households that night were filled with joyful awe in the Lord Who had heard their cries and knew their hearts were gladly willing to follow His will. When the home fellowship family gathered a few days later, Brett and Lacie related the events of the restaurant meeting. Shouts and songs of enthusiastic praise overflowed at the wonder of what the Spirit of Jesus had done in response to the prayers of many!

Brett and Lacie did get together again several times with Garth and Linsey, encouraging them as they discussed the materials they'd shared. And what joyous anticipation filled that couple as they sold their home in record time and headed off to another state with a revitalized marriage and a keen hope for their future together! (Jeremiah 29:11)

33. Blessed Are The Meek, For They Will Inherit The Earth

**“I oppose every proud person, but I bestow grace on the humble.
Be like Me and learn from My Word, for I am gentle and humble in heart.”**

The afternoon sun was streaming into Jack’s living room as youthful chatter filled the air. “Can I ask you something?” inquired Nick, who was sitting on floor in front of Jack with eight other young teens around him. “What would you like us to call you?”

As Jack began to answer, Josh broke in. “Grandpa, do you mind if we all call you that — just ‘Grandpa’? I think these guys are going to feel the way I do toward you, and that’s the best name of all for you.”

Jack’s face brightened with a broad grin that always seemed to bless everyone who saw it. “I think ‘Grandpa’ would be fine. In fact, that’s exactly how I feel toward you boys — like a grandfather who wants each of you to grow up to be like Jesus.” (1Corinthians 4:15)

One of the newer boys to join the group was puzzled. “Grandpa, whaddya mean be like Jesus? Are all of us going to hang on a cross too?”

Jack chuckled inside but kept a straight face. He didn’t want to embarrass anyone for asking questions. In fact, he was proud to be asked by Josh to disciple this group of boys. It had all begun with Josh meeting with Nick, Max and Adam, the three boys who’d beaten him up and broken his arm when Josh caught them selling drugs to children in the neighborhood. The aftermath of Josh’s forgiving heart and loving courage had been these boys wanting to encounter the God Josh loved and served. (Romans 2:4) In a matter of three weeks other boys wanted to join them and learn the Bible. A little overwhelmed, that’s when Josh asked Jack to teach them all how to live by God’s Word.

“When I say ‘to be like Jesus,’” Jack responded kindly, “I mean that there are many character qualities Jesus has, such as love, compassion, kindness, and meekness. These are all qualities we each need in our own lives. They not only enable us to serve our Lord, but also to be respected by others.”

“So do each of us need an older man like you to teach us these things?” Adam asked.

Jack answered, “This responsibility first falls on your parents, especially your fathers.” (Deuteronomy 6:5-9; Ephesians 6:4)

Max shifted uncomfortably as he looked around at his friends sitting next to him. “Grandpa, only four of the guys here have a Mom and Dad at home. Including me, the rest of us are being raised by our mothers.”

For a moment an arrow of sadness stabbed Jack in the heart. Then the Spirit helped him realize how much he was really needed by these young men. “Well, in that case it’s all the more important that I become a GRANDfather for each of you.” The boys laughed as Jack emphasized “GRAND.” In his heart Jack had dedicated himself to be everything these boys needed from him and through him. He wasn’t going to fail them or his heavenly Father. Leaning forward, he set on the coffee table some items he had next to him.

“Whatcha doing?” someone asked.

“I want to show you something today that I hope you’ll remember the rest of your lives,” Jack answered as he set a board about a foot long on the table with the word ‘meekness’ written on it.

“What’s meekness?” Nick wondered.

“Meekness is a core character quality of Jesus — and one we must keep in balance throughout our lives.” Jack then placed on the board’s ends two weights on which he’d written ‘God’ and ‘me’.

Josh’s face lit up. “I remember reading in my Bible that ‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.’” (Matthew 5:5)

“Hey, if I can get the whole world,” piped another boy, “I want all the meekness I can get!”

Now Jack chuckled out loud. “Meekness is the balance of knowing how sovereign God is in ALL things. Nothing happens to you that He doesn’t know about in advance and permit it to happen. That’s why He’s always deserving of ALL our trust.” Jack stopped to make sure the boys understood.

Nick was the first to speak up. “So it’s not like God causes everything that’s bad in our life. But He lets it happen.”

“That’s a good answer, Nick,” Jack affirmed. “Always remember: Whatever happens, God our Father wants to use it to help you become more like His Son, Jesus. And having meekness is the key to this.”

“I’m almost getting it,” one of the younger boys interjected.

As Jack continued to talk, he placed the balls at different distances from the center, showing how the ends of the board went up and down accordingly. Then one of the older boys spoke up. “I’m starting to see what you mean by balance. When I used to seesaw with my kid brother, Denny, I always put him up in the air because I’m bigger. I have to move toward him before we can finally balance the board.” All the boys now understood balance from his illustration.

Grabbing the bigger weight, Jack went on, “On one side is our Father Who wants you to always trust Him. On the other side is your attitude about yourself and about the things that happen to you in life. It’s really important that you don’t think too much of yourself, like you’re the most important person around.” (Romans 12:3)

“That’s how I use to think,” Nick commented guiltily, “until I became Josh’s friend and wanted to become like him.” Josh slapped Nick on the back in gratitude.

The youngest boy, Jeremy, declared with a frown, “Grandpa, you’re talking about my older sister. She’s always talking about herself, and bossing me around.” The other boys howled.

Jack was delighted in the way the boys were participating, and how they were connecting what he was sharing with real-life situations. “Not only do you not want to think too much of yourself, you also don’t want to think that you deserve better in life either. If you think things should be easier for you, you’ll always get upset when things don’t go the way you want.” (Psalms 37:8)

“That happens to me a lot,” Adam confessed sheepishly.

“We all get tempted by this attitude from time to time,” Jack agreed, nodding at the teen. Having placed the weights so the board was perfectly in balance, Jack summed up his point. “Trusting your heavenly Father in all matters must be balanced by not thinking too much of yourself or by foolishly believing you deserve better. This balance is what describes meekness.”

“I see this in Jesus,” Josh observed, “but I also see Him as the most loving and courageous person Who ever lived. So much so that He died for us!”

“Praise God!” Jack exclaimed. “Only our Father could have shown you that!” (Matthew 16:17) That’s what meekness is. It doesn’t mean you’re some kind of pansy everyone steps on — not by any means. Rather, meekness gives you the courage to love no matter what your circumstances. It’s a character quality that makes you sacrifice your pride and live to bless others.”

“That sounds a lot like Frodo and Sam in Lord of the Rings!” a boy named Jason called out.

“Yes, it is,” Jack agreed. “They showed humility by giving up their own peaceful lives in the Shire to save Middle Earth, even if it meant dying. They persevered through each situation together, which made them even stronger friends.”

Max’s shoulder-length hair swirled around his shoulders as he looked at everyone, and even before he spoke the other boys sensed what was coming. “Grandpa, I think we’d all like to have friendships like that.” He stopped for a moment to look at the other boys again, then turned to Jack. “Would you help us be those kind of friends, and to be more like Jesus?” All the other boys joined with Max to pledge themselves to this goal. Tears filled Jack’s eyes...

He then pressed home the issue. “Meekness is being assured within yourself because you know that your heavenly Father is in control of everything around you. It’s also a humble attitude about yourself, with no false expectation about the circumstances in your life. You learn to view everything that goes on in your life in light of how it helps you develop the character of Jesus.” (Hebrews 2:18; 5:8)

“I’m glad you described meekness, Grandpa,” Josh remarked. “I always thought meek people were shy and timid, the mousy types everyone stepped on.” The other boys nodded.

“That’s far from the truth as far as God is concerned,” Jack noted strongly. “Knowing what meek is helps us respond in an appropriately assertive way. In other words, we willingly and courageously take our stand on the commands of God we find in the Bible.” (Ephesians 6:11)

“What’s assertive mean, Grandpa?” Jason asked.

Jack responded with determination in his voice. “To be assertive is a confident attitude because you know where you stand with your Father and His Word, (2Corinthians 1:21,22) and you treat others as you’d want to be treated.” (Matthew 7:12)

“I don’t know if I have the guts to take a stand on anything,” one boy revealed a bit shyly. “I always take off if I feel nervous.”

“Jesus will help you change,” Jack replied confidently. “If you’re willing, the Spirit of Jesus in you can transform an under-assertive follower who refuses to speak up because of fear of embarrassment or fear that others will get mad. (Romans 8:15) The problem with under-assertive people is that they speak up afterward with begrudging bitterness about the person they should have spoken to! (Proverbs 29:25) From the moment they failed to speak when they should have, the under-assertive person has stifled the love of Jesus.” (1John 4:18)

“I’ve been more of a bully than under-assertive,” Nick said with shame. “How about me?”

Jack replied, “Again, Jesus can change you to be more like Him. The over-assertive person goes through life leaving a trail of emotionally wounded people who are apprehensive they may have to go through another encounter with that individual. (Proverbs 29: 22) But with the help of Jesus, the over-assertive person begins to feel the emotional pain they cause others, and they want to change.”

“That’s what’s happened to me!” Nick exclaimed. “I ain’t the same person Josh met a month ago.”

“I can see that in you,” Josh grinned. “You, Max and Adam have become some of my best friends.” All four smiled at each other.

Jack broke in with a sincere, firm tone. “The assertive follower of Jesus has appropriated His meekness and takes seriously this command: ‘Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.’” (Philippians 2:30)

Adam spoke up enthusiastically, “That goes along with what Josh had us all memorize: ‘I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me.’” (Galatians 2:20)

Capitalizing on what Adam shared, Jack added, “An assertive follower of Jesus is never against anyone. Instead, the biblically assertive person puts into action the command of their Lord, ‘No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light.’ (Luke 8:16) Living for Jesus IS assertive!”

Josh stepped in. “In the months you’ve been my Grandpa, I can see how you’ve instilled assertiveness in me.”

“Describe it for the other boys,” Jack encouraged.

“Well, biblical assertiveness is a sign that we’re truly aware of the Spirit of Jesus indwelling us. It’s kind of a holy boldness. If we’re willing to become like Him and do His will, He gives us courage no matter what the circumstances. The choice is ours: to live in fear and be under-assertive; to live in arrogance as over-assertive; or to live in love, which is assertive. I’ve chosen love!!!”

Nick spoke on behalf of Max and Adam. “You sure proved this when we were beating on you....” Josh laughed with pleasure as he looked around the room and saw what his meekness that day had produced. His eyes then locked with his spiritual grandfather’s, love and joy beaming from each.

(For a real-life testimony of an older man investing in young boys, we encourage you to see the movie, *The Secrets of Jonathan Sperry*).

34. Our Lord Calls Each Of Us To An Earnest Heart

“My Father has hidden the ways of the Kingdom from the wise and learned, and revealed them to those with the trusting heart of a little child.”

“I’m not sure God can ever use me for anything,” blurted Nate as the fellowship family sat gathered in Harry and Jan’s living room. “I sure don’t want to let Him down, but don’t I need seminary training or Bible college in order to serve Him?”

Jack gave a warm smile to the young man who was sitting near him with his wife, Jessica, and baby Riley. “Let’s discuss together what you’ve just asked, Nate. First, though, I’d like to pray for wisdom so that the Holy Spirit would reveal to all of us our Lord’s mind on this matter.” (Ephesians 1:17)

When Jack finished praying, Jerome was the first to speak. “It seems to me that our Lord didn’t choose any of the wise and learned of His day to be His ambassadors. (Luke 10:21) I think He chose people just like each of us sitting in this room.” (1Samuel 16:7)

His wife Keisha jumped in with a note of resolve, “Look at what Jesus did with people the world considered common-place! (1Corinthians 1:27) In just three and a half years average men and women were transformed in fearless disciples, filled with His Spirit.” Her voice intensified as she pictured her predecessors in the faith. “They didn’t retreat at suffering; they didn’t flee from sacrifice — they turned the world upside down by standing firm in Jesus.” (Acts 17:6)

Jan joined in eagerly. “You’re so right, Keisha! These ordinary people were equipped with spiritual authority over demons and exercised His power over sickness and disease. (Mark 6:13) They were living proof that Christ transforms people!”

Lacie added quickly, “Three and a half years of undiluted Jesus will produce in us what it did in them: intense love for Him and a deep hunger for the Kingdom of God! (Matthew 6:33) Those were everyday people just as human as we are. And just like them, it’s our trust in the Spirit of our Lord Jesus at work in and through us that makes all the difference.” (Romans 8:9)

Lita had just found the verse she was looking for. “Hebrews 4:2 affirms what you just said, Lacie, about how important it is that we keep on living in obedient trust through the Spirit: ‘For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with trust.’”

Dee was excited to hear the passion in these younger gals. “I think in any generation what our Lord yearns for in each of us is undiluted, uninhibited trust in the Spirit of Christ within us! So what we need are hearts that will not be satisfied with anything or anyone less than Him.” (Romans 5:1-5)

“Over the years since Dee and I first embraced the Hebraic foundations,” Jack interjected kindly, “we’ve come to recognize that God is not in the business of raising up ministries. He’s recruiting bondslaves (Mark 10: 44) — men and women He has bought with the blood of Jesus who have no will of their own except to do His will. (1Corinthians 9: 19) Whether we’ve been conscious of this or not, we’ve realized that slavery to His will is what each of us here has been called to embrace in our sanctification into the character of our Lord Jesus.” (Romans 6:16-22)

Jerome grinned broadly at Jack and said, “That description of us as slaves might bother some folks, but I can tell you I know I have only one Master, and for sure that’s Jesus Christ my Lord!”

The others all nodded vigorously with their brother as Brett rejoined, “I think that mutual hunger to serve Jesus and do His will is why we’ve all experienced the power of Christ and seen wonderful answers to our prayers.” Brett then turned gratefully to Jack. “Through your leadership you’ve helped each of us by role modeling a burning passion to conform to the nature of our Lord Jesus. (Mark 10:45) Both you and Dee are examples of what it is to earnestly want to be like Him.” (Philippians 2:1-5)

Lita’s lilting voice softly filtered in. “Sometimes when we’re gathered together I feel like I’m one of the 120 people in the upper room on Pentecost who were earnestly seeking God and waiting on Him.” Encouraging smiles urged her to continue. “Far more than any kind of formal religious education, I see that our Lord will use us when we first seek Him out of hearts that truly love Him and wholly desire to be like Him.” (1John 4:17)

By this time Nate was elated that he’d spoken up about his own personal misgivings. He could sense that the Spirit of Jesus was inspiring everyone as they built one another up in their Kingdom purpose and determination. (Matthew 18:20) He turned again to the older man. “Jack, what other guidance could you give me to help me use each day according to our Father’s will?”

Jack replied with such deep conviction that everyone in the room knew they needed to pay attention. “When you seek wholeheartedly to love and obey our Lord in His will for you, you’ll most likely find that the Spirit will grace you first with emptiness. The things that are important to this world and its values and goals will recede dramatically, and your heart will become desperate to know Him more.” (Philippians 3:10)

His eyes took in every earnest face in the room as he pressed on, “Know that the fullness of your desire to serve our Lord Jesus is always preceded by emptying yourself of your own desires. You need to be a person whose heart’s passion is to seek God until Christ Himself is formed within you. (Galatians 4:19)

Nate’s eyes brimmed with tears of joy and deep conviction, mirroring everyone else in the room. Harry put his hand on his son Josh’s shoulder as he heard the teen sobbing softly. After a pause Jan observed quietly, “The kind of emptying ourselves you’re talking about reminds me of what Much Afraid experienced in Hinds’ Feet on High Places as she went to the high places and was transformed into ‘Grace and Glory.’”

“That’s a wonderful connection, Jan,” noted Jack, pleased with her insight. “And that’s exactly my point. That’s the depth of determination about wanting HIM to be transforming us that He’s calling us to.”

Several reached out to take one another’s hands as family in Jesus as he went on, “Just like us, the first-century saints had the words of Jesus and were filled with the indwelling Spirit of Jesus. In that simplicity of obedient trust they enjoyed unsurpassed greatness and power. That’s why our Lord could say to them and to us, ‘I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.’ (John 14:12) When we’re steadfast bondslaves who are fully committed to do our beloved God’s will, we’ll indeed have Father’s endorsement and His Son’s authority.” (Philippians 2:5-8)

No one spoke for a bit. Each looked inward to the Spirit of their Lord as a burning resolve filled each one. (Luke 24:32) Brett broke the silence as he pulled a sheet of paper out of his Bible. “Someone gave me this several years ago. It may seem a little humorous after all we’ve been talking about, but I think it captures the nature of the kind of people our Lord Jesus recruits — and how different His choices are from the world’s.” Sensing in his spirit that what Brett wanted to share was appropriate, Jack urged him to read it aloud.

“Memorandum:

TO: Jesus, Son of Joseph, Woodcrafter Carpenter Shop, Nazareth.

FROM: Jordan Management Consultants, Jerusalem

Dear Sir:

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have picked for management positions in your new organization. All of them have now taken our battery of tests; we have not only run the results through our computer, but also arranged personal interviews for each of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant.

It is the staff opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not have the team concept. We would recommend that you continue your search for persons of experience in managerial ability and proven capability.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale.

We feel that it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau. James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus definitely have radical leanings, and they both registered a high score on the manic-depressive scale.

One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, meets people well, has a keen business mind and has contacts in high places. He is highly motivated, ambitious and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man. All of the other profiles are self-explanatory.

We wish you every success in your new venture.

Sincerely yours, Jordan Management Consultants.”

Amused chuckles accompanied Brett’s recitation. Yet everyone understood the point of what the whole evening’s discussion and the reading had reiterated: God’s ways are not our ways, and His criteria for recruitment are not ours either. (Isaiah 55:9)

Jerome leaned forward to ask, “Jack, earlier you quoted from John 14:12 that our Lord Jesus promises that we’d do greater things than He did. What do you think these greater things might be?”

“I believe the ‘greater things’ are intertwined with our responsibility to complete the work our Lord began,” Jack responded. “Let’s all open our Bibles and turn to Isaiah chapter 61, verse 1.” Turning to young Kirk, he asked, “Would you please read this for us, young man?”

Kirk was delighted to be called on. His youthful voice read firmly and steadily, “‘The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.’”

Jack nodded his thanks to Kirk, then addressed the whole gathering. “So let’s see from this verse the ministry which Jesus fulfilled: to preach to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness. These are all Spirit-empowered actions His followers are called to do.” (James 2:14-17)

“I see that,” Jerome agreed. “You’ve encouraged us to be on the lookout for people in need. (Proverbs 3:27) And Dee and Lita and the little girls have been going to the Nursing Home to bind up the brokenhearted.” He stopped for a moment as everyone made the connections, then continued, “In the same vein you’ve encouraged all of us to write letters through Voice of the Martyrs (www.prisoneralert.com) to our persecuted brothers and sisters held in captivity around the world.”

Josh, thinking of his weekly get-togethers with Jack and the teenage boys, piped up, “You’ve also had all of us demolish our strongholds and fill in the old ruts of attitude and behavior to free us from captivity and darkness. (2Corinthians 10:3-5) And after we’ve become free ourselves, we’ve been able to help our relatives and friends get free too!”

“Not only that,” Keisha added, beaming. “You’ve insisted that each of us get to know not only our own anointings but each others’, so we’d use our spiritual gifts to bless others.” (1Corinthians 12:4-7; also see our book, ***God’s Instruments For War***)

“I’m sure our Father is pleased with our mutual desire to carry on the ministry given to our Lord Jesus,” (1John 3:16) Jack concluded as he looked at each joy-filled face. He then turned to Nate. “If I could give you a suggestion, I’d recommend that you and Jessica together focus on going through the various materials on the Restoration Ministries website. Discuss them with each other with the intent of making them a way of life. Dee and I sure wish we’d known these truths earlier in our marriage — we still regret all those years we squandered spinning our wheels in the religious establishment.”

Nate turned to his young wife and took her hand. “We’ve been using some of the materials on the website, but now we’re going to dig into them with greater determination so we can be prepared to serve our Lord the way He wants us to!”

The joy that filled the hearts of everyone that evening stirred exuberant songs of praise to overflow the room. What they couldn’t see were delighted angels all around them enjoying the moment along with those they serve. (Hebrews 1:14)

35. Does Your Lack of Courage Grieve God?

**“My children are righteous and blameless among the people of their time.
Others readily recognize their love and courage because they live in union with Me.”**

The morning outside the small frame house may have been blissfully quiet, but inside the home chaos and bickering loudly reigned. “Maria, you’ve got to start disciplining your kids,” Lita exclaimed as she sat in her sister’s living room sipping coffee. “You tell me you’re angry with Dad and Mom for not wanting to babysit for you, but you and your husband have brought this on yourselves.”

“What do you mean?” her sister snapped back. “I think I’m a very caring mother. In fact, I think Roberto and I are better parents than ours ever were for us.”

“Not one bit!” Lita retorted unflinchingly. “Our folks loved us enough to correct us when we needed it. They did what God commands parents in raising children.” (Proverbs 19:18)

Maria lifted her chin defiantly at her younger sister. “I don’t think God commands parents to spank their kids. The books my husband and I have been reading say that spanking only causes children to become violent themselves.” (2Thessalonians 2:11)

“Maria, you and Roberto are believing lies,” Lita countered. Maria was surprised at this newfound confidence she hadn’t seen in her kid sister before. (Proverbs 28:1) Deep inside it began to dawn on her that her own position on not disciplining her children might be flawed. (Proverbs 29:17) At that moment Lita asked, “Are you and Roberto equally committed to the way you’re raising your children?”

Somewhat embarrassed Maria answered, “I wouldn’t say ‘equally’... I’m the one who’s pushed him into backing off from disciplining the kids. He’s told me a number of times that he thinks we need to correct our children like his parents corrected him.” (Proverbs 3:11,12)

“Can I ask, then, why you refuse to discipline them?” Lita pursued. “Don’t you find yourself getting emotionally worn out and angry over their bad behavior?”

“Yeah, I do, Lita. But isn’t fatigue and giving in to them what being a mother is all about?” her sister responded with a heavy sigh.

Lita gently put her hand on Maria’s arm. “Yes, we moms do get tired from the demands of caring for our children. But that shouldn’t come from tolerating defiant and disrespectful behavior. The God Who created us knows that we’re born with a desire to sin that goes all the way back to Adam and Eve.” (Genesis 8:21)

“What do you mean?” Maria inquired with a note of surprise, having never read the Bible.

“All of us are conceived with a soul, which is our mind, will and emotions,” Lita continued, “and in our soul is an innate desire to sin and do things our way rather than God’s way. Let me ask you: Did anyone have to train your children to fight each other over toys or to pick on each other?”

Maria exhaled with a head shake. “No, I saw them doing things I knew were wrong almost from the moment they could crawl.”

Lita pulled out her Bible. “Let me read to you God’s perspective on training our children. And remember, He’s the One Who brought them into existence in the first place! “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.” (Proverbs 13:24) “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.” (Proverbs 22:15) “Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die.” (Proverbs 23:13) “Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death.” (Proverbs 23:14)

Deep within Maria her conscience was stirring to overcome her revulsion to spank her children when they were defying her and acting rebelliously. “That last one you read says I can somehow save my kids’ soul from death. (Romans 8:13) What does that mean?” At this point she was listening intently as she began to realize that how she raised her children when they were little could have such a great impact on them when they were older. (Proverbs 22:6)

“It means that you’re purposefully taking the appropriate biblical steps to keep them out of hell!” (James 1:13-15) Lita answered resolutely.

“I do believe there’s a hell,” Maria murmured with a nod, recalling bits and pieces of her childhood religion classes. “But I never thought that my failure to correct my children might contribute to them ending up there.”

Lita looked directly into her sister’s eyes. “The Bible tells us that our heavenly Father disciplines every person He accepts as one of His own children.” (Hebrews 12: 5-11) If He does that to His kids, whom He loved enough to have His own Son take the death penalty our sins deserve, what do you think He requires of us parents?”

“I believe that He wants us to do nothing less,” Maria answered with growing conviction and repentance. “But Lita, I know that Roberto and I are going to need help with this.” She paused and looked down for a moment before going on. “And I need to ask Dad and Mom for forgiveness for making them so uncomfortable about being around their own grandchildren.”

Lita smiled with love at her sister. “I know an older couple named Jack and Dee who’d be glad to share some wise counsel with you both. And you and Roberto might want to read some of the books on raising children God’s way* that have helped Juan and me.”

With that, she grabbed Maria's hand and led in prayer, filled with hope that Father God would intervene and begin a new season of parenting for this couple.

[*suggested reading: Sacred Parenting: How Raising Children Shapes Our Souls by Gary L. Thomas; Parenting By The Book by John Rosemond; Bringing Up Boys and Bringing Up Girls by Dr. James Dobson; Revolutionary Parenting by George Barna]

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That evening an older, gray-haired man was walking through the shady park with a younger guy whose face was filled with anxious concern. "Nate, the first thing you've got to do is quit being upset about your friend's illegal activities," Jack noted, calmly glancing at his agitated son in Christ. "Way back in the Book of Genesis God accurately described our human condition as inherently sinful. From His perspective, 'every inclination of the thoughts of [man's] heart is only evil all the time.'" (Genesis 6:5)

Nate relaxed somewhat at Jack's counsel. "I know you're right, Jack. But Damon and I go way back to technical college together." He paused for a moment then went on, "Now he's head of data services for the big phone marketing company where I just started this morning. He hired me because of our friendship."

"Are you sure it was because of your friendship alone that you were hired?" Jack asked with a penetrating look. He then pressed his point. "Consider that on your very first day on the job, he tells you he's taking kickbacks from the different vendors he purchases from. (Proverbs 4:19) Next, you tell me he offers to cut you in on the proceeds. Was it only because of friendship he hired you — or because he thought you could be bought?"

The startled look on Nate's face showed that this idea was new to him. "I never thought of it that way, Jack." After some reflection he disclosed, "I do have to confess, though, that the Nate who Damon once knew did a few things in the past that weren't exactly aboveboard. But that was BEFORE I became a follower of Jesus." He smiled somewhat grimly. "Yes, he'd have good reason to think I could be bought." (Proverbs 13:5)

"That's okay, Nate," Jack reassured him. "It's what you need to do now that's important."

"Please, advise me on what I should do!" (Proverbs 13:14) Nate pleaded earnestly.

Jack smiled at his son in the Spirit. "Let's first ask for a Spirit of wisdom and revelation so we may have the Lord's understanding of this. (Ephesians 1:17) Nate, why don't you pray for us?"

The young man had barely finished praying when Jack had a prompting from the Holy Spirit. "Two verses come to mind that may help guide your motives, Nate. The first is, 'Like a muddied spring or a polluted well is a righteous person who gives way before the wicked.'" (Proverbs 25:26)

Nate broke in with a chuckle. "'Muddied spring' and 'polluted well' sure don't sound good. So I think God's saying He won't be pleased with me if I don't do something about this situation. What's the second verse, Jack?"

The older man lifted his forefinger and pointed directly at the young man's chest. "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men." (Matthew 5:13)

"Boy, both those verses are incriminating," Nate observed solemnly, feeling the weight of what his new job had gotten him into.

Another revelation from the Spirit stirred Jack's spirit as he took the young man's arm firmly. "If you fail to act promptly and Damon's criminal activity is discovered sometime later, you'll be guilty AFTER the fact because he told you about the kickbacks." He added grimly, "And you'll be guilty BEFORE the fact because every time he takes a kickback in the future, you already know it's illegal."

"I don't want to be part of this!" Nate bellowed with wide-eyed distress.

Jack stated definitively, "Then I'd suggest tomorrow that you first go to Damon and ask him to stop taking kickbacks. If he refuses to listen to you, go to his boss and tell him what's going on." (Proverbs 13:6) His lips tightened. "I have a hunch they already have their suspicions about him." The two men prayed again before leaving the park, committing the next day's confrontation into their Lord's faithful hands.

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The next evening the phone rang at Jack and Dee's home. "Jack, this is Nate. You won't believe what happened today at work! I'm the new head of our department!"

"You're what???" Jack responded with both surprise and delight.

Nate related his story of the day's events. "I went to see Damon as soon as I got to work this morning. When I asked him to stop taking kickbacks, he laughed at me and told me I was naive. He also said that if I didn't go along with him, he'd fire me and give me a poor recommendation."

"I'm sorry he responded that way," Jack sympathized, knowing they'd been friends.

"I was hurt at first," Nate continued. "But then I remembered what you told me to do if Damon refused to listen. I went to Mr. Hadley, his boss. As soon as I said, 'I need to talk to you about something Damon is doing,' Mr. Hadley responded, 'Do you mean the kickbacks he's been taking?'"

Jack butted in, "So they already suspected?"

“Yes, they did!” was Nate’s excited reply. “Mr. Hadley went on to tell me that they were about to take action against Damon but had held it up for a day or two to see what kind of person I was. Man, I’m so glad you and I talked yesterday!”

“I am too, Nate.” Jack’s heart was rejoicing as he stopped to pray with thanksgiving, “Lord Jesus, we thank you that You never fail to provide wisdom when two or three seek You together. (Matthew 18:20) We promise to share this testimony with others to Your glory.”

“Amen!” Nate declared at the top of his voice.

Jack posed another question. “You’re the new head of the department?”

“Yes, I am!!!” Nate exploded joyfully. “When Mr. Hadley was convinced I wasn’t part of Damon’s illegal activity, he called the Head of Human Resources and the Head of Security. They went to Damon and escorted him immediately out of the building to the police who were waiting at the front door.”

“I bet you were glad you weren’t walking beside him,” Jack laughed.

Chuckling at the thought of it, Nate howled, “You betcha! When the dust settled, Mr. Hadley and the Head of Human Resources interviewed me right then and there and offered me Damon’s position. They wanted not only someone who technically understood the job but also a man of integrity who could resist the temptation of kickbacks.”

“I want to commend you, Nate, for seeing this through. I’m glad for your promotion, but I’m far more delighted in your courage to face down unrighteousness,” (Psalms 5:12) Jack declared like a proud father.

“Hearing that from you, Jack, means more to me than the promotion I got. I sure see the benefit of seeking counsel from the wise. (Proverbs 22:17) And I appreciate having a testimony that glorifies our Lord!” (Psalms 34:3)

36. Do You Cooperate Together In Your Sanctification?

“Do not be inconsiderate of the wife of your marriage covenant. She is My suitable helper for you through whom you must learn to love like My Son Jesus loves. As companions together, you must seek to be like Him and to do My will.”

The air was filled with joy as the fellowship family sat around Jack and Dee’s living room. “Juan, I’m really glad you’re back from Afghanistan!” Jack exclaimed, expressing the grateful hearts of all the fellowship family couples present. Juan blushed with happiness, while his wife Lita snuggled tightly under his arm.

“It’s great to be home, and especially to see all of you again,” he grinned. “And I thank my Lord for enabling me to come back early and be assigned to head up the bomb demolition unit on base here.” As he spoke, Lita pressed in even more closely.

Jack smiled as he glanced around the room at everyone and then reached for his wife’s hand. “Dee and I wanted to spend this time with all of you so we could review together some of the biblical framework in which our Lord views our marriages.”

“As we’ve mentioned many times before,” Dee added, “most of the commands in the Newer Testament are in the plural rather than the singular sense, as in our rather than my. Jack and I want to be supportive of each of you couples as your relationship grows together in Christ’s likeness.”

Jerome nodded as he added, “I remember from the [Restoration Ministries website](#) that one of the purposes God ordained for home fellowships was for older, wiser couples to help younger husbands and wives while their problems are still small. (See Titus 2:3-8) The way extended families live so far apart from each other these days, that’s all the more needed!”

“That’s true,” Jack affirmed. “And that’s why Dee and I thought some open discussion on some of the foundational considerations for marriage may help us be preventative — so we can put into practice the biblical principle to forestall problems you all might encounter before they arise. (Colossians 1:28) How does that sound to you all?”

“Let’s go for it!” Lacie interjected with her usual enthusiasm.

Jack began, “One of the first goals God has for marriage is companionship. He gave Eve to Adam to fulfill this need when He said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’” (Genesis 2:18)

“Genuine companionship grows out of oneness of spirit in which both of you want your marriage to be filled more and more with the love and motives of Jesus,” Dee said, squeezing Jack’s hand. “God intended that marriage reflect the divine relationship between Christ and His body of all who love and trust in Him. That’s why He declares that ‘a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ Then Paul refers to this covenant union as ‘a profound mystery’, connecting the intimate spiritual union of Christ and His called-out ones.” (Ephesians 5:31-32)

Harry spoke up, “I remember that point from [The Gospel of the Covenant Is The Pilgrimage to Salvation](#) article. Our Father intends for our marriage covenant to be the physical representation of the spiritual Covenant He offers us through Jesus!” (Ephesians 5:25)

“That’s true, Harry,” Jack said as he introduced another element into the discussion. “A key part of a married couple pressing on together in their sanctification into Christ’s likeness is the completeness a wife brings her husband.” (Genesis 2:23-25) He smiled warmly at Dee. “A good definition for companionship is two people who complement each other — they fill in the weak areas each of them alone has, and find that their relationship together is far more than just a sum of their individual traits and strengths.”

Dee added, “In our sanctification into Christ’s likeness, our Father intends for a married couple to reveal the fruit of the Spirit of Jesus within them through the changes only He can make — especially sacrificial love and respect.” (1Peter 4:8)

“What does respect look like in a marriage?” Nate asked, eager to know since he and Jessica had only been married a couple years.

“That’s a good question,” Jack responded. “I believe the basis to respect begins with Jesus’s command in Matthew 7:12: ‘So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.’ When someone takes the time and patience to be considerate of you the way they want you to be toward them, respect begins. Respect then deepens as each person sacrifices more of themselves on behalf of the other. And from respect, the love of Christ is nurtured.”

“Could you share some examples?” Jessica asked.

“Well, one that comes to mind,” Dee noted, “is taking the time to understand the differences between the genders. While Jack was in the Navy, several studies were conducted concerning the differences between males and females. They found that we’re 97% different!” Chuckles followed that statement. “Getting to know these differences and understanding why God made us so un-alike can really be a blessing in your marriage. It’s almost like mining for gold.”

Jack added with a serious tone, “But failure to appreciate the differences between you and your partner can result in years of painful fighting, and that leads to a lack of both respect and peace in your marriage.” Everyone nodded, having tasted the sorrow of that pathway.

“We’ve all recognized over these months that you’ve encouraged us to get to know each other’s spiritual giftings,” (1Corinthians 12:1,4-7) Jan smiled warmly at the older couple. She turned to her husband, Harry, as she added, “Misunderstanding each other’s gifts of the Holy Spirit can also bring a lot of frustration into a marriage.”

Jack appreciated her observation. “This is especially true with the gifts of prophecy, exhortation, and discerning spirits. (Romans 12:6-8) With the first two gifts, people think you’re being pushy or judgmental. And if you’re able to discern spirits, you have a sense when things aren’t of God; but because you can’t explain it rationally, others doubt you.”

“I remember when Dee had us women read one of the Restoration Ministries newsletters entitled, *‘You Belong to Me’*,” Keisha observed. “I committed to memory four points they brought up about a godly wife so I could make them a way of life for Jerome’s sake: • She seeks to be the best Christ-like helper of her husband; • She seeks to be a public compliment to both Jesus and her husband; • She enjoys the protection of her husband’s Godly authority; and • Her husband finds it easy to praise her Godly qualities.” (1Peter 3:1-6; Proverbs 31:10-31)

The other women listened intently as Keisha spoke, earnest themselves in their desire to please God and their husbands. During the brief pause that followed, Juan spoke up, somewhat embarrassed. “What about sex in our marriage? I mean, how does that fit in with wanting to be Christ-like together?”

Jack smiled at the young soldier, realizing it took a lot of courage to ask the question. “Remember, God gave intercourse to Adam before he and Eve sinned. He meant it as a holy expression of the loving appreciation they have for each other.” (Song of Songs 2: 10-17)

“That point was also in the Gospel of the Covenant,” Jerome broke in. “When a man has intercourse with his wife, they’re renewing their marriage covenant. That’s why the writer of Hebrews could admonish, ‘Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure [undefiled], for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.’” (Hebrews 13: 4)

“That’s a good point, Jerome,” Jack said. “Your love for each other needs to be expressed in ways of enjoying each other. This goes not only for intercourse but also to laughing together and doing things together that add joy to your marriage.” (Song of Songs 8:6,7)

Holding her baby Riley, Jessica asked, “Would you go over where children fit into God’s design for marriage?”

“I’d like to respond to that,” Dee replied. “Beginning with Adam and Eve, God wanted mankind to be fruitful and fill the earth. (Genesis 1:28) At the end of the Old Testament He gives us another specific reason for marriage: to raise up children who will love and serve Him. In the words of the prophet, ‘Has not [the LORD] made them one? In flesh and spirit they are His. And why one? Because He was seeking godly offspring.’” (Malachi 2: 15)

Jack added, “Dee and I believe that this command is a bridge going back to why God chose the patriarch Abraham. He’s a role model ‘father’ to us who follow Jesus. Listen to what God says: ‘For I have chosen [Abraham], so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what He has promised him.’” (Genesis 18:19)

“This is the area you and Dee have been emphasizing,” Harry blurted, “the extended spiritual family support of our entire fellowship in raising our children!”

“Exactly!” Jack exclaimed. “And I want to commend all of you in how you’ve become spiritual aunts and uncles to all the children in our fellowship family.”

After a pause Lita broke in softly, “Now that Juan is home, I’d like some insight about being under my husband’s protection.”

“A husband’s protection of his wife involves an intertwined set of biblical principles,” Jack began. “It flows from the command, ‘Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.’ (Ephesians 5:25) The first protection a husband provides is to guard his home against those things that would rob it of peace.”

Dee added, “This is where our trust in God enables us to trust our husbands when they correct us or exclude things that would rob our homes of peace. Remember, God wants our husbands to help us be free from the curse of Eve, of wanting to rule our homes.” (Genesis 3:16; see also December 2003 newsletter, *Develop Christ-likeness—Destroy the Curse of Eve*)

Lita looked puzzled. “I don’t understand...”

“Do you remember when we women got together a few weeks ago and talked about how we have a larger corpus callosum connecting the two sides of our brain?” Dee asked. “Because of our fast thinking processes, without our husband’s input we can get into situations that rob our homes of peace. A woman who trusts the God Who gave her to her husband as a suitable helper has no trouble trusting her husband when he has to say ‘no’ for the good of their peace.”

“And the same is true for us husbands,” Jack added. “When we trust God that the helper He’s given us is suitable for us, (Genesis 2:18) then we can trust our wives to give us the counsel we need. That’s why we’re told, ‘Her husband trusts her from his heart, and she will prove a great asset to him.’” (Proverbs 31:11,CJB)

Dee looked around the room. “In light of this trust, I’d like to ask each couple which one of you detects problems in your marriage first?” A show of hands indicated it was about even, with as many men as women being the first to recognize a problem between them.

She went on, “Jack is the first to detect when we have problems, so I’ve needed to develop a trusting willingness to fully hear him out, and especially be considerate of his feelings when he does speak up. It took us several years before I recog-

nized how I was hurting Jack because he was citing problems I just couldn't see." Those in the room who were the first to detect tensions in their marriage nodded agreement about the emotional pain of being shut out when they voiced problems.

"Again, you can see where 'doing for others what you'd want done for you' comes in," Jack asserted. "Connected to this whole topic of hurt feelings, I have one more question. How many of you were raised in homes where it was difficult to share your emotional wounds?" Hands flew up around the room.

Dee jumped in, "How are you all doing now in expressing your feelings?" Everyone admitted that it was an area of struggle for them to share their feelings.

Jack went on, "I gather from what you're indicating that your parents didn't have healthy ways to resolve differences. And that's affecting you today with your spouse and probably with your siblings." Everyone acknowledged the truth of those words.

Harry spoke up. "I can see that if we're ever going to change so that our marriages reflect the increasing character of Jesus, each of us needs to be purposefully sensitive to the emotional pain we cause others, especially our spouse."

"That's right, Harry!" Jack proclaimed. "And the problem is that this culture is weak in expressing feelings, and sterile when it comes to resolving hurt feelings."

Brett asked, "Could you explain that a little more?"

Jack replied, "From the Hebraic viewpoint, personal feelings are part of our dignity. Our feelings represent the strong emotions we attach to particular people and the things we value. But the stoic influence of Hellenism now dominates how people relate to others. So when your spouse, for instance, brings up their hurt feelings, you respond defensively like they're blaming or manipulating you." Everyone acknowledged how they'd each fallen into that insidious trap.

As Dee went to bring out snacks, Jack concluded, "If you'll guide yourself in your marriage and with other people by applying Matthew 7:12, 'In everything, do to others what you'd have them do to you,' you're summing up everything the Law and the Prophets call for. That's the essence of Biblical love. We'll keep reviewing these foundations until they've become a way of life for all of us."

37. Are You Emotionally Supportive Of Others?

“Love each other deeply from your heart, and, whatever you do, be at peace with each other. For our God opposes the proud, He hates divorce, and He will not forgive the unforgiving.”

“Jan and I can’t thank you enough, Jack, for being preemptive last Wednesday night in discussing issues facing our marriages,” Harry declared with heartfelt gratefulness. The other men from their fellowship family who’d gathered at the restaurant for their Friday early morning breakfast voiced their appreciation as well. Each man clearly recognized how much they needed the Biblical wisdom Jack had shared with them that night from a heart that cared deeply for each of them. (Proverbs 22:17)

Nate added with a chuckle, “I need to tell you that I was really tired the next day at work.”

“From talking about marriage?” Jerome asked dubiously.

“Not from our discussion at Jack and Dee’s, but the talk Jess and I had until 2 AM that night,” Nate laughed. “But I’m happy we kept at it. It wasn’t until after 1:00 that we had some real breakthroughs.”

Brett felt he needed to own up as well. “You weren’t alone in the wee hours, brother. Lacie and I finally fell asleep about that time ourselves. And like you and Jessica,” he added with a grin, “it wasn’t until we really got down to a heart level of talking that something wonderful happened. It was like the presence of our Lord fell on us both!”

Jack chortled vigorously. Noticing everyone’s puzzled expression, he responded, “What you two men have experienced with your wives involves a process of interpersonal communication that seems to be new to you. I’m sorry we haven’t talked about this before. Please forgive me.”

“We’ll forgive you only AFTER you’ve taught us this communication process,” Juan answered tongue-in-cheek.

When everyone’s laughter had subsided, Jack could see that all the guys eagerly wanted to pursue the topic. “We all have different levels of conversation each day. Most of them are what I call ‘newspaper talk’ where we just exchange facts with others. There’s little emotion involved in it because it’s not anything that really affects our lives personally.”

“Is this kind of conversation wrong?” Juan inquired, puzzled.

“No, not at all!” Jack replied. “Conveying facts or information is necessary, but it does nothing to strengthen our relationships.” He looked around at them and went on, “In other words, when you exchange information, your devotion to the person you’re talking to isn’t increased by the conversation. That’s because ‘newspaper talk’ chitchat is the shallowest kind of communication you can have.”

Nate pressed the question, “So what do deeper communication levels look like?”

“In the Scriptures you see the deepest level of discussion,” Jack continued. “It’s Christ-like in that the discussion pursues wisdom while at the same time it emotionally supports the dignity of the person you’re talking with.” (Romans 12:9,10)

“Hmmm,” Jerome murmured, deep in thought. “I know the Bible not only offers us wisdom but also directs us to love others, which for sure means upholding their dignity. (Romans 13: 8,9) And that encourages their heart so they’ll keep communicating.”

“Both of these are necessary,” Jack agreed. “A while back we discussed that knowledge is man seeing things from his own vantage point. On the other hand, wisdom is taking the time to see things from God’s vantage point. And we can’t perceive God’s perspective,” he added, “unless we rely on the Spirit of Christ within us and apply His Word to the situation or decision at hand.” (John 14:26)

“You mentioned emotionally supporting the person you’re talking with,” Harry noted. “How do we do that?”

Jack replied, “The intensity with which you emotionally support someone reflects how much you value them in your heart. They measure their dignity and how much you value them by the degree of emotional undergirding you give them.” (Philippians 1: 7,8) He added seriously, “If you don’t convey a sense of emotional support, you can wreck intimate relationships such as marriage.” Several of the guys looked down contritely, recognizing how often they’d neglected this part of communicating especially with their wives.

“The amount of emotional support you give them especially in regard to their aspirations, values and goals is the measure by which they feel you uphold their dignity. And from their perspective,” Jack added forcefully, “that’s a measure of your devotion to them.” (1John 4:11) From the soberness of his tone, each man knew this was a piece of vital truth he needed to both hear and purpose to put into action.

Brett looked around at all the other guys before he spoke. “I think we’re all guilty here in that respect. I know for sure that many times I’ve fallen short of what you’re telling us. In fact,” he sighed, “inside I know that I’ve let Lacie down when she’s needed more concern for how she was feeling than I was giving her. And that wasn’t loving her the way Jesus wants me to love her.” (1Peter 3:7)

“Tell us what we need to do to love the way Jesus does. PLEASE!” Jerome implored.

Jack was stirred by the conviction of heart of these brothers in Christ and their desire to please their heavenly Father. “The deepest kind of conversation that causes your wife to experience your loving devotion calls for sustained, heart-to-heart give and take until ALL the concerns and issues, including the emotions that lay deep within, are brought out and respectfully addressed.” (2Corinthians 6:11-13) He smiled kindly. “I know this is new ground for you men. But I bet this is what

Nate and Brett experienced the other night. In the end it brings forth a peace that passes understanding (Philippians 4:7), indicating the work of the Spirit of Christ in a humble heart.”

Brett was the first to respond. “You’re right! What was going on inside us didn’t come out until much later in the conversation. It took awhile for me to drop my defensiveness — feeling like Lacie was blaming me.” Nate nodded that the same thing had happened between him and Jessica as well.

“Is that what most of us men have been doing?” Harry asked with sorrow. “Have we been cutting our wives off in order to avoid emotional issues?”

“What do you all think?” Jack shot back.

Again Brett took a moment to look at the others, then responded, “I think we’ve all been quick to shut down conversations with our wives. Whether it’s due to not wanting to be blamed or just avoiding the emotions of it all, I don’t know. But in either case, we’ve done our wives wrong.” (Colossians 3:19)

“Is there a Biblical example that describes the kind of wisdom and emotion you’re talking about?” Juan probed. “I don’t want hurt Lita any longer like that.”

“There’s a good example in John, chapter 11, where Jesus talks with Martha after her brother Lazarus had been dead a few days,” Jack replied as he and the men opened their Bibles to that passage. He continued his point. “Keep in mind that Jesus needed to share the wisdom of God with Martha, while at the same time supporting her emotions. That required some back and forth dialogue.” He went on, “In verses 21 and 22 Martha confirms her confidence in Him: ‘“Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give You whatever You ask.”’

Nate jumped in, “I can see that Jesus takes her to a higher wisdom when He says, ‘Your brother will rise again,’ and then moves her toward the Reality Who’s standing right in front of her: ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who trusts in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and trusts in Me will never die. Do you believe this?’

Jerome climbed on board. “We can also see that she affirmed her broader understanding of Jesus and her faith in Him when she replies, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, Who was to come into the world.’

“So the wisdom issue is pursued through dialogue until the ultimate wisdom our Lord wanted her to embrace was achieved,” Jack summed up. “And out of love He would have kept up this dialogue until she saw beyond her own brother’s loss. And that leads us to the emotional issue,” he added. “Here we’ve got a dead man in the burial cave, a man whom both Jesus and Martha loved. Let’s look at verses 33 through 36: ‘When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ‘Where have you laid him?’ He asked. ‘Come and see, Lord,’ they replied. Jesus wept.’ Because He’s fully human, Jesus feels deeply!”

“I never thought about the emotional sensitivity of our Lord before,” Juan commented, moved himself by that awareness.

“Few of us do in this culture,” Jack replied. “The stoic influence of Hellenism has robbed especially us men of paying attention to our emotions and those of others. If we look at the Bible just as facts to learn, we miss the emotion-grounded commands like love, mercy, and compassion.” (Colossians 3:12)

Jerome reiterated slowly, “Pursuit of wisdom and support for the emotional needs of others. (2Corinthians 6:11-13) This is going to take some patience and practice.”

“Let me give you a few more pointers that may help,” Jack voiced. “It normally takes no less than four or five give-and-takes in which each person interacts with what the other one said. Then you can begin a discussion to pursue wisdom.” He went on, “It takes that much probing before feelings can be addressed. Less than this is only knowledge-based chitchat — you’re just conveying facts.”

“So what you’re saying,” Harry interjected, “is that quick chitchat only deals with the problem as you see it. But it takes more back and forth dialogue to have God’s wisdom. That’s the only way you can get His view on your situation.”

“So how do you keep going deeper?” Nate interrupted, eager to learn.

“You ask questions. You simply ask questions,” Jack answered sincerely. “Make sure your wife is completely satisfied that everything is out on the table, including any emotional issues that may be connected to your conversation. And,” he added, “show patience and genuine concern for her.”

“Can you talk a little more about the emotional stuff?” Juan asked shyly.

Jack’s heart was delighted. He could see that these younger men didn’t want to go on hurting their wives. “As I said, it takes deeper levels of dialogue before you really begin to bring out the emotional issues relating to the points you’re discussing.” He said penetratingly, “You may find that the first emotion your wife reveals isn’t the only one or even the one that really matters to her most. So you may need to do some digging. You need to show loving concern and allow her adequate time until the entire scope of emotions has surfaced if your relationship is to be strengthened by your discussion.”

“We really need your help,” Harry pleaded. “I know we don’t want to just change our behavior. We want to truly reflect the love of Jesus through us for our wives.”

Pursuing Harry’s thought Jack responded, “I recommend you camp on Ephesians 5:25, ‘Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the called-out ones and gave Himself up for her.’ The only way you’re really going to have Christ-like motives is to ask the Spirit of Jesus within you to help you love your wife as He would.”

“We all want to do this, Jack,” Brett said, not needing to look at anyone before he spoke. He could sense the heart determination of each of them in wanting their wives to be loved with the love of Christ.

“Jack, are there also different levels of pursuing wisdom?” Nate asked, not sure if he was phrasing the question correctly.

“I think so,” Jack answered. “There’s the wisdom we seek when we deal with everyday problems and situations. But I think a higher wisdom flows from Martha’s affirmation we read earlier, ‘I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, Who was to come into the world.’ It has to do with how intense our focus is on spending eternity with our Lord, (2Corinthians 4:17,18) AND on our heart’s yearning to bring many with us.” (2Corinthians 5:18-20) He looked intently at them. “I think this is the highest pursuit of wisdom we can seek — eternal matters and our loving responsibility to our Lord.”

“That’s a vital life framework for you and Dee, isn’t it Jack?” Harry inquired. “Am I right that your determination to see others embrace our Father’s Covenant is intimately connected with how your marriage has developed Christ-likeness?”

“That’s a wonderful observation Harry,” Jack smiled warmly. “Dee and I found that it’s easier for the Spirit of Christ to change us when we make what truly matters for eternity the focal point of our marriage.” (Colossians 3:1,2)

Jerome commented, “When you think about it, everything we see now will someday come to an end. (1Peter1:24,25) But eternity with our Lord Jesus and bringing others with us is the ONLY thing that will matter forever!”

“That’s a good summary,” Jack affirmed. “With this eternal goal in mind, consider it all a joy as you and your wives face the challenges of having your marriage increasingly reflect the character of Jesus. Pursue all varieties of Godly wisdom together, and emotionally support each other in the same way our Lord would if He were you. You’ll enjoy the blessing of that both now and for eternity!” (1Thessalonians 4:17,18)

38. Those Who Feared The Lord Talked With Each Other

**“For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man,
but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.
For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”**

[Reader Note: In Kingdom Living Today, 31. Do Not Be Afraid Of Them For I Am With You, the town Ecumenical Clergy Council had ended with 10 of the men remaining behind with Jack for several hours of meaningful questions and answers. He agreed to meet with them again after each one had read *Pastoring By Elders*, *I Hate Nicolaitanism*, and *God's Clergy-less Kingdom* — materials from the Restoration Ministries website that had so strengthened his own walk in Jesus over the years. Not only had the men pored over these materials, but most, befitting their own integrity, had delved deeper into the various facets of the Hebraic Restoration.]

Soon to be ex-Father John Hagan spoke up first as the discussion began. “After reading through the materials you recommended, Jack, I began a quest of my own. I surveyed many of my longstanding parishioners and discovered that with few exceptions, attending Mass pretty much summed up the totality of their religious conviction.”

The other men nodded, recognizing a similar pattern among many in their own congregations. The priest's voice rose as he went on, “Through other research I became convicted over the hypocrisy of my denomination. As you probably know, Roman Catholicism claims both the Bible and Church tradition as the source of its authority and faith practices. In fact, I found EVERYTHING we did was based on the traditions which men from the past had established rather than being founded on the Bible.” A certain sadness permeated his tone. “I've come to realize that almost every major practice we have today contradicts God's Word. And I think what grieves me most is that among those I surveyed, I found only three people who read the Bible routinely, even though the 1963 Vatican II Council required all Catholics to read their Bible daily!” He paused for a deep breath then added, “I want you brothers of mine to know that I've started the process to leave the priesthood.”

Startled looks crossed the faces of many. Tim, one of the younger ministers, spoke up. “John, it's not just Catholics you're describing. I've encountered few in my own congregation who pursue God and His interests in their daily lives, even though I try to get that across from the pulpit. Attending Sunday service is all that matters to many.”

Simon, the oldest clergyman present, filled Jack in on what had transpired in the past several weeks: “Six of the younger guys here have submitted their resignations.” Encouraging looks passed around the table as Alex, who'd just turned 37, broke in. “We realized we're neither old enough nor mature enough in wisdom to shepherd our Father's children.”

“And we four older men,” Simon rejoined, “believe that we're qualified to be true elder/shepherds as our Father calls for in His Word. (1Timothy 3: 1-7) We're going to intentionally transition the flocks we're serving into biblical Hebraic foundations. If the people throw us out, that's up to them — but we believe we need to find who wants to come alongside us as extended spiritual family in our new NON-clergy status.”

“Wow!” Jack exclaimed. “I expected some heavy-duty discussion when we got together today, anticipating that most of you would be defending your clergy position. I'm gratified and humbled at the same time to be sitting here with you men.”

“What you're unaware of, Jack, is that many of us have been playing golf together each week for several years,” Dave, one of the other older men, noted. “And as we read those materials, they became our chief topic of discussion during and after our matches!” He went on earnestly, “We began to fast and pray for each other like never before. In fact, we all met together last week with our wives, and what you see here is what the Spirit of our Lord confirmed — there are no clergy in the Kingdom of God! Having that truth anchored, we each needed to discern what God wanted us to do next.”

Lance, a younger man, interjected, “I remember from one of George Barna's polls that over 20 million people have left the religious system to experience the relational intimacy and spiritual power of the earliest Church. I guess 10 more have now been added to that number.” Chortles filled the room.

“Jack, what do you see as the chief hindrance to so many clergy refusing to embrace the Hebraic foundations?” probed Mark, another senior pastor.

“I've shared these truths for over 16 years and believe that restoring the Hebraic foundations is a prophetic revelation of God. (2Peter 1:20,21) Most professional clergy have resisted it because they see the Hebraic Restoration as just another teaching rather than the will of our Father to restore what's been lost for centuries.” (Acts 3:21)

“Even a cursory glance at Church history reveals that clergy have all but silenced the prophetic,” John pointed out. “Rather than testing prophetic utterances as God's Word requires, (1Thessalonians 5:19-21) my denomination martyred His messengers.”

“I agree with John,” Tim chimed in. “We clergy are so easily threatened when anything rattles our orderly religious system — even more so when someone prophetically gifted comes along and tells us there weren't any clergy in the earliest Church.”

Simon chuckled. “Jack, it's interesting that you'd cite the prophetic backdrop of the Hebraic restoration as being the hindrance for clergy.” He pulled an article out of his briefcase. “During a recent golf match Alex gave us this article by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the pastor martyred by the Nazis.” He read aloud, “Priest against prophet . . . this is the eternal conflict in the church of Christ.”

He paused to let the words have their impact. Then he read a few more points he'd underlined: "The conflict and the struggle between prophet and priest is the conflict over the Word of God and the will of God; specifically, who speaks for God and thus reveals His will for His people. (Amos 3:7) Prophets are sent when matters are dire. And the conflict comes when the prophet of God addresses the situation but the priest does not test and confirm the prophecy. The priest does not recognize the prophet in his calling. The priest has a platform. The prophet does not. The priest has a congregation. The prophet does not. Clearly, the advantage lies with the priest."

Tears filled the older man's eyes. He handed the article to the man next to him to continue reading. "The priest is a hireling and does not feel that God's people need to repent. He thinks they are generally healthy sheep. He believes this because their condition is a reflection of his ministry, and he is certainly not going to admit that their condition is bad. That would mean **he** would have to repent. The prophet, in the eyes of the priest, is a threat to the peace that he, the priest, has worked so hard to establish. The reason the priest is threatened is because prophets live in the wind (John 3:8), priests tend to live on the earth. (Romans 12:2) (See Teaching E-mail 45. [*Do You Understand the Kingdom?*](#) for more on this topic)

Silence pervaded the room until Simon cleared his throat and declared, "This article tugged at me deeply, as well as the other materials we all read. I don't think God wants just prophets to 'live in the wind', but everyone who claims to be born of Him. (Galatians 5:25) And I want to be one of those people!"

"Amen!!" resounded. "What's your experience with prophets?" Tim asked Jack.

"We have several with the gift of prophecy among the house churches my wife and I have established," Jack answered. "The more that people personally seek God in His Word in order to apply it to their lives, the more comfortable they are with His prophets and our Lord's purpose for them." (Amos 3:7)

"So you're not threatened by them?" John inquired. "Not at all!" Jack responded sincerely. "As communities of followers of Jesus, we focus on becoming more like Him and on cooperating together in extending His Kingdom. We view the combined efforts of the apostle, evangelist, prophet, and shepherd/teacher as key to our being able to serve Him. And they help us attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ, Who's our only Head." (Ephesians 4:11-24)

"So you're really seeing this cooperation and spiritual growth taking place?" Simon asked, eager for this to occur among the people he'd served for so long.

"We are!" Jack exclaimed. "We have no ecclesiastical systems where a man's vested interests in maintaining his position need to be defended. (For more on the vested interest of clergy, see the Introduction to Restoring the Early Church: [*Christianity in the Atomistic Culture of the USA*](#); and, Discussing How to Restore the Early Church, [*Lesson 19: The Roman Conquest of the Church*](#)) Since we're a spiritual family rather than a religious system that needs professionals to keep it running smoothly, we trust the words of Jesus: "For where two or three come together in My name, there am I with them." (Matthew 18:20) He added with a smile, "We believe that He's given all His followers authority to apply His Word to their lives, and the power of His Spirit to see it through. (Matthew 16:19) And we hold resolutely that our biblical applications and any other revelations must be confirmed by two or three." (2Corinthians 13:1)

Dave cut in with determined conviction. "I read in the Gospel of the Covenant about Jesus becoming an everlasting Priest in the order of Melchizedek. That article cited a vital truth which we clergy have long overlooked: When the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus during His immersion in the Jordan River, the Levitical priesthood ended and an everlasting Priest in the order of Melchizedek came into being." (Hebrews 7) He looked around the table keenly. "Realizing that Jesus would give His people the power to carry out their Covenant responsibilities, John the Baptist announced, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." (Luke 3:16b)

"Alex gave us all the [*Gospel of the Covenant*](#) article as well as Dietrich Bonhoeffer's article," Tomas, a younger man, put in. "We all came to realize that our status as clergy was based so much on the old Levitical priesthood, with us men standing poised between God and His people. But now we don't want anyone, especially ourselves, to come between a person and the Spirit of Christ within them!" He paused a moment before he added, "When we met together last week, we each repented for having been deceived. And this past Sunday all of us asked our congregations for their forgiveness for having deceived them through our ignorance."

Joy as well as pride in these men welled in Jack so much that he had to stand and shout, "Hallelujah!!!" All the men stood up, many with arms lifted high. Some then fell to their knees sobbing as praises went up to Father God. None had ever experienced in their ministry such a victorious savoring of His love in their midst. Simon began to fervently sing an old worship song as others joined in: "I have decided to follow Jesus... Though none go with me, still I will follow... The cross before me, the world behind me... No turning back, NO TURNING BACK." All fear was gone as hearts were filled with such love for their Lord that they'd willingly lay their lives down for Him. (Revelation 12:11)

As they sat down again, one of the younger men asked, "Jack, exactly what is your purpose in the Kingdom?" Delighted with the question, Jack responded with a broad smile, "My gifting is an evangelist. I love to see people embrace our Father's Covenant which Jesus made possible. I stay alongside those who are born into Him until I can disciple shepherds who will take my place in eldering." (Titus 1:5)

"Did you have to quit your job to do this?" Alex inquired. "I recognized God's gift of evangelism at work in me shortly after my wife and I went to a Hebraic Restoration seminar 16 years ago," Jack rejoined. "Even though I've been retired for five years, I began my ministry while I was still working. Remember, as with the earliest Church, elders weren't hired — they were honored and provided for because they were serving in their later years." (1Timothy 5:17,18) Jack went on, "You may remember from Pastoring By Elders that pagan Hellenism introduced the paid professional clergy system."

"I agree with the point you're making," Dave nodded. "I'm grieved how detrimental the Hellenist influence on Christendom has been in raising up a professional clergy class — especially since that whole system has hindered us from developing mature ambassadors in our congregations on behalf of our Father. (2Corinthians 5:18-20) All we've produced for centuries are passive, self-serving spectators!"

Simon added, "I confess to God and to you all that I once took pride in having one of the largest congregations in town. But now I'm so ashamed of having produced such passivity among hundreds of Sunday morning pewsitters. I promise before God and each of you that things are going to change, or I'm gone!" The younger men noted the intensity of spirit in these two older men and wanted the same resolute determination.

Jack asked pointedly, "Have you all noticed how you've set aside your creedal differences in order to be true to our Lord Jesus?" Looking around at each other, they nodded. Jack went on, "You're each detaching from putting your faith in the man-made creeds which have divided Christianity for centuries, and are now experiencing what the first followers of Jesus meant by 'doctrine.' It's a way of life that flows out of your steadfast determination to trust the Spirit of Jesus within you to guide you. (Ephesians 5:8-10) And it's your love for Jesus and for one another which unites His followers to cooperate together in extending the Kingdom!"

A time of heartfelt prayer closed their gathering, with a plan for Jack to meet with them regularly to help them make the Hebraic foundations their way of life so they could in turn help others.

39. Peacemakers Sow And Reap A Harvest Of Righteousness

**“Blessed and filled with joy are those who promote peace. They are truly the Father’s children.
A person at peace with all has a heart full of praise to Me!”**

Jack greeted the two men at his front door that evening with welcoming delight. “Howie, it’s been a few months since you and Grace came over for dinner with Nate and Jessica. (See Kingdom Living Today, 30. *Today’s Decisions Cause Tomorrow’s Consequences*) And Nate, I’m glad you came along with your father-in-law.”

“I’m glad Nate’s here too,” Howie replied as Jack ushered both men into the living room. “I believe he can be a great help in what I think God wants me to do.” Jack could sense the disturbed tone in the older man’s voice. As they all sat down he turned to Howie, slightly younger than himself, and asked pointedly, “How are you doing?”

“I’m not doing all that well,” came the somber reply. Jack took in the rather gaunt face and asked with concern, “Tell me, what can I do?”

“A few days ago my doctor told me I have Stage 4 colon cancer,” Howie answered in almost a monotone. “I’ve got less than a 15% of chance of still being alive five years from now even with aggressive treatment.” He paused with a deep sigh then added, “The cancer isn’t the reason I called you, Jack, but it’s surfaced an issue that I don’t want to leave unsettled just in case...” His voice trailed off and he looked away. Then he went on, “It has to do with some of my five kids and their relationship with me.”

Jack leaned toward him with compassion. “Howie, I’ll do whatever I can for you.”

Howie pressed on, “Since Grace and I met with you and Dee awhile back, we’ve been seriously going through the materials you recommended from the Restoration Ministries website. That little book, *Growing Relationships Through Confrontation*, gave me some hope that I could clear up the ill feelings some of my kids have against me.”

Jack nodded encouragingly as the other man continued, “Then Nate mentioned that in your Friday morning gathering with the men in your home fellowship family you’ve been training them to function as a ‘nasi’ [NAH-see], someone who moderates a group discussion.” He asked earnestly, “Would you help me clean up the bad feelings in my family? I don’t want any of them feeling like that toward me any longer.”

“It’d be my privilege,” Jack replied kindly. He asked the two men to hold hands with him as he led them in prayer, seeking Jesus for wisdom and guidance. (Matthew 18:19,20) When he finished, he asked Howie to go on. “I messed up a lot of things as I was trying to get ahead in this world and raise a family at the same time. I look back now and can see how my ego and desire for a comfortable life caused me to fail both my wife and my kids. (1John 2:15,16) Three of my kids don’t respect me at all, especially my oldest son, Craig, who’s filled with a lot of bitterness. The sad part for me, besides his bitterness, is that he’s turned out just like me — successful in the eyes of the world but hurting his family.” (James 4:4)

At this point Nate broke in, wanting to soften his father-in-law’s sense of guilt. “I talked with Grace about this, Jack. It’s not like Howie pursued this path without her approval. She and the family enjoyed what Howie’s career afforded them, even if they complained about his lack of involvement with them as a Dad.” He reached over to touch Howie’s arm. “I think back then they all thought this is just the way life is.”

Jack looked at Nate. “How about Jessica? How does she feel about her father?”

“She was fourth out of the five,” the young man replied. “She told me she always felt like she was Daddy’s little girl, like there was nothing he could do wrong. It’s only since he and her Mom have started talking with us about the convictions they’re having after going through the Hebraic foundations that Jess and I are finding out how much of a mess my father-in-law’s goals have caused his kids.”

Howie responded purposefully, “I want to do whatever we can to see forgiveness and peace come into all my children’s lives. (Colossians 3:12-14) I think I grieve the most over Craig. Maybe it’s because as the oldest he had the most responsibility, but his bitterness and chasing after the things the world values has made him a prisoner — he’s cut off from the emotional needs of not only his own family but everyone around him.”

“If there’s a bull-in-a-china shop,” Nate interjected, “it’s Craig. But I sense from things he’s told Jess and me that he really wants out of that prison!” (Psalms 34:14)

Howie turned to Jack with hope. “What is this nasi character? Ever since Nate mentioned how that works, I sense deep inside that having a mediator of some sort is part of God’s answer to my can of worms.”

Jack smiled at the man’s eagerness to learn. “The role of a nasi in group discussions has been lost in both our society and Christian culture, although the ancient Jews readily recognized his place. And I believe that for us who follow Jesus, that role is much more than facilitating dialogue.” (Romans 15:5-7)

“What do you mean?” Howie inquired.

“Our God knows that love can’t grow wherever peace is lacking,” Jack responded quickly. “That’s why our Lord Jesus emphasizes, ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.’ (Matthew 5:9) He’s citing the importance of peacemakers in relationships.” The two men listened intently as he added, “The Hebrew word for peace is shalom, and the Hebrew letters of shalom mean ‘authority that keeps chaos in check.’”

“So you’re saying that a nasi serves as a peacemaker?” Howie asked.

“That’s right,” Jack answered. “A nasi serves with a certain degree of authority to ensure that a peaceful process is maintained until a decision or resolution is reached.”

“What do you mean by authority?” Howie interjected.

Nate jumped in, “I’d like to answer that if I may.” Jack nodded his approval. “Biblical authority is the privilege and responsibility to include those things that contribute to peace and harmony, or exclude those things that rob peace and harmony; and to commend those actions and attitudes that contribute to the peace and harmony, or correct those actions and attitudes that rob the peace and harmony.” (Psalms 37:30)

Howie was impressed with his son-in-law. “I can tell that those words aren’t just something you’ve memorized, Nate. You mean what you’re saying, and I can sense these truths in the peace Grace and I always find in your home.” The young man smiled appreciatively as Howie continued, “You definitely live out ‘authority that keeps chaos in check.’ I see it in my daughter’s peace and in the joy of little Riley.” (Luke 10:5,6) The two men hugged. Turning to Jack, Howie asked him to tell them more about a nasi’s role.

“First, a nasi needs a strong sense of righteousness and justice when it comes to guiding group discussion.” (Proverbs 8:20) Rather than lording himself over the others or trying to get his own way, a nasi sees to it that there’s an atmosphere of equality among those involved in the discussion. No one’s input is more important than anyone else’s.” The men could readily see how important those safeguards are. Jack went on, “It isn’t the decision itself that’s the goal, but guiding a peaceful and just process until EVERYONE, if possible, is at peace concerning the final resolution or decision.” (James possibly served as a nasi in Acts 15.)

“So I gather that character has a lot to do with someone being chosen to serve as a nasi,” Howie observed.

“Yes, it does,” Jack responded. “In a sense, a nasi serves as God’s representative in a group discussion to make sure a just and peaceful process takes place — hopefully one that leads to a just and peaceful resolution. (Ephesians 4:3) He’s responsible for facilitating the dialogue until the group collectively reaches an understanding in which the peace of God is experienced.” (Romans 14:17-19)

Nate noted again, “He does this by commending and including the things that he believes will contribute to peace, and correcting or excluding those that rob peace.” (James 3:18)

Jack affirmed the younger man with a grin as he went on, “Until people have some experience with the process of a nasi-guided discussion, a facilitator will find himself in some discomforting situations. He may have to confront some about old habits such as arguing for the sake of argument. Or admonish some about not fully listening to what others are saying because they only want to get their own point across.” Looking straight at Howie he said, “And when it comes to families, a nasi can’t permit the old baggage which family members bring with them to obstruct the process of peace.”

“What do you mean by old baggage?” Howie wondered.

“No one grows up in a home without their perception of each person in their family being shaped for a lifetime by the hurts they’ve experienced there. As adults, few if any siblings take the time to update themselves about the changes that have occurred in each other along the way — changes caused by being married, by parenting, by military service, by their jobs. But most people keep their parents and siblings trapped by what happened when they were growing up.”

“I see that,” Howie said, endorsing Jack’s insight.

Nate interjected, “Jack shared with us men one morning that many adult relationships are hampered because people carry with them unresolved bitterness toward their parents and siblings. That bitterness impacts all their other relationships.” (Hebrews 12:15)

“I can certainly see that in Craig’s case,” Howie threw in sadly. “I’ve met some of the people he’s worked with over the years and heard firsthand how hard-nosed and emotionally cold he is.”

Jack intervened before Howie could dwell too long on that thought. “Hopefully what you’re endeavoring to do now will give Craig a chance to rid himself of those begrudging feelings.” Howie nodded, trying to have hope. “What else can you tell us about a nasi?”

Jack smiled, sensing the older man’s determination to do everything he could to see healing in his family. “In order to reach a peaceful resolution, in today’s vernacular a nasi makes sure everybody puts their cards on the table. He doesn’t let anyone just sit there silently without voicing their thoughts and feelings. He insists that they give their input because in this process, silence does NOT mean consent.” He then added, “A person’s word judges him or her as our Lord says: ‘For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.’” (Matthew 12:37)

Howie cleared his throat nervously as he commented, “But I can guess there’s going to be a lot of emotion that may come out if we let our feelings surface. Then what do we do?”

“That’s a great question!” Jack replied. “A nasi must allow and even encourage appropriate emotions. A person wraps their emotions around the things they value. And as dark as it is, bitterness may be someone’s value and it must be allowed to be revealed. Craig needs to be encouraged to speak about what’s inside him, as do all the others.” He paused a moment. “I know that we’re not a culture that’s used to sharing our emotions. The negative ones often only surface after we’ve become so frustrated we can’t hold it in any longer.”

Howie spoke up. “Letting negative emotions surface can be pretty tricky for a nasi, right?”

“That’s true,” Jack agreed. Then his tone changed. “I encourage you, don’t defend yourself when these feelings come out! If there’s ever going to be healing, you MUST let them talk! Entrust yourself to the nasi to include or exclude.”

“Who should serve as the nasi?” Howie implored.

“I can tell you that Nate has the ability to be your nasi in this situation,” Jack affirmed. Gulping, Nate responded, “Me???”

“Isn’t he too young for this?” Howie asked somewhat skeptical. “We’ll probably only get one shot at this. Why do you think Nate will work?”

Jack declared, “He’s married into your family. Are either of you aware of any ill feelings toward him among your wife or kids?” Both men shook “No.”

“I’ve watched Nate closely as both a husband and father in his own home,” Jack noted, looking at the younger man. “He has a strong sense of both justice and righteousness. (Psalms 85:10) And, I KNOW the Spirit of Christ in him won’t let him fail as the nasi you need for this meeting!”

Tearfully Howie put his arm around Nate. “Would you be our nasi?” Matching tear for tear, Nate proclaimed, “I’d be honored to.”

“In light of my cancer,” Howie noted, “it sounds strange to say that I’d give my life to have my relationship with Craig and the others healed. Deep inside I feel like it’s not worth taking another breath until forgiveness fills my family. I feel like Jesus has taken over my whole being, flooding me with peace!” (2Thessalonians 3:16)

“It’s His Spirit, Howie,” Jack proclaimed. “He wants you to know He’s with you through this attempt at reconciliation. (2Corinthians 5:14-21) I’m going to ask our fellowship family to keep praying for you until the victory of forgiveness is achieved.”

40. Eagerly Find Out What Pleases Our Lord Jesus

**“My entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’
So never put your needs above those around you.
In humility and love, consider their needs as your own and take action to bless them.”**

The fellowship family relaxed in the snug coziness of Nate and Jessica’s small living room enjoying the peace of their home. The young couple was delighted that in spite of the folding chairs and floor cushions everyone could enjoy their hospitality. “I want to thank you all for your prayers for my Dad and his desire to reconcile with his kids,” Jessica began warmly. “I wish we had a video of what took place! My family experienced such joy as Dad so sincerely asked for forgiveness and it was genuinely given by each of my brothers and sisters. (Colossians 3:13) And, he found wonderful healing in his heart too.”

Nate turned to Jack with grateful appreciation in his eyes. “The wisdom of God that you shared with Howie and me made it possible for the Holy Spirit to convict everyone there, and I mean EVERYONE. Each person let go of all their ill feelings.” (Luke 6:37)

“Even the oldest brother, Craig?” Jack asked with a smile.

“He wasn’t the first and he wasn’t the last,” the young man grinned. “But when his heart melted, he held his Dad the longest. He used more tissue than anyone else!”

“Jack, you would have been proud of Nate,” Jess enthused, squeezing her husband’s arm. “He led the whole family through what at first seemed like ‘the valley of the shadow of death’ as he made sure everyone got their feelings on the table.”

“There were times I thought Craig would just get up and leave,” Nate added shaking his head. “But each time he was agitated and started fidgeting, I just softly said, ‘Craig,’ and got his attention.

“After Craig asked my Dad for forgiveness, he kept hugging Nate,” Jessica interjected with tearful joy. Spontaneous praise transformed into songs of worship that went on for some time.

As quiet penetrated the gathering Juan said, “This morning in prayer I heard the Holy Spirit tell me, ‘Ask Jack and Dee to describe what a Value-based relationship with Jesus is like.’” The young soldier looked around the room for their response. Everyone agreed that their spirit bore witness that what he’d related was from the Lord.

Jack and Dee looked at each other, then with loving affection at their family in Christ. Jack spoke first. “For the past several days God has been impressing on Dee and me something to share with you all. And we can see that this is the morning to do it.” Jack paused as his eyes began to brim with thanks to his Lord. “I want you each to realize that this fellowship family exists because each of you has a heart’s desire to please our Lord. (Romans 12:1,2) Dee and I have come alongside you to encourage and help you, but it’s been your own loving determination to grow more like Him in character and obedient trust that has made our fellowship what it is today — a family in Jesus that lives to glorify our Father.”

“As you all know,” Dee added wholeheartedly, “it’s never been our goal to get together just for social reasons. We’ve never purposed for warm bodies to show up just so they can focus on their own self-interests.”

Scanning the packed room, Harry affirmed, “We all bear witness to this.”

“Look at how you’ve embraced the sanctification only the Spirit of Christ can do in your lives,” Jack gestured to them all. (2Corinthians 3:16-18) “Being set apart for His purposes to be fulfilled in your lives and loving Jesus as your Lord has worked such wonderful changes in each of you!” He paused as his face sobered. “And we’ve recognized the heartache in each of you when you’ve broken fellowship with our Lord through sin. Without hesitation you’ve repented when you’re convicted of those wrongs.” (2Corinthians 7:10,11)

Dee broke in with warmth, “You’ve each given your whole heart and soul in loving our God and other people, (Luke 10:27) and have earnestly sought out His commands in His Word so you could apply them to your lives. (2John 1:6) And each of you readily uses the gifts the Spirit has given you to edify and bless others.” (1Corinthians 12:4-27) She had to stop, as her heart was overflowing with such delight to be part of such noble and unwavering purpose to walk together in the steps of Jesus. (1Peter 2:9,21)

Jack went on with one more thought. “Each of you is so given to Jesus, so in love with Him, so open to the reproof of His Spirit, so separated from the wickedness of this world, that you’re intent on knowing and living by the ways and workings of the Spirit of Jesus in you. (Hebrews 13:20,21) These are the foundations to authentic fellowship, both with God and one another.” As each person took in the faces of the others around the room he added, “Think of the times the Spirit of Jesus has been manifested in our gatherings... the times we’ve all been filled with joy and peace and awe!” (Psalms 65:5)

While everyone was pondering what Jack and Dee had shared, Juan asked, “Can you describe how all this that you’ve mentioned came into being among us? We want to help other people the way you and Dee helped us.” (Philippians 3:17)

“From the time you were freed from demonic strongholds and embraced our Father’s Covenant in Christ, you began your pilgrimage to your salvation,” (Acts 28:18) Jack replied earnestly. “And during the ongoing process of being molded into the character of Jesus by the Spirit, your relationship with our Lord has grown ever deeper — much the way it does in Value-based relationships.” (1Peter 1:22)

Dee joined in, “When you take the first steps toward a Value-based relationship, you can’t help but see each other through how the relationship makes you feel. Even as you talk with each other, you filter the information through your own

motives and values.” She looked around to make sure they were tracking. “Then, as a desire for a deeper relationship with someone grows, you begin to naturally find out what pleases the other person. You try not to unnecessarily hurt each other’s feelings, and you try to meet each other’s needs and desires.” (1Peter 4:8)

“I remember,” teenage Josh cut in, “that Value-based relationships are built on the choices we make on behalf of someone else.” He gestured to the three boys sitting next to him who’d once beaten him up and broken his arm. (KLT 26. Stand Firm In Your Trust; Be Courageous And Strong) “Putting each other before ourselves is what Nick, Max, Adam and I have done to become the best of friends.” The boys nudged each other with chuckles.

“Isn’t this the same process we’ve each gone through with our Lord Jesus?” Jack asked encouragingly. “We first took notice of Him for what He did for us. Then we made choices to grow in a deeper love relationship and please Him.” He concluded with a smile, “Our Value-based relationship with our Lord makes pleasing Him far more important than seeking to be blessed by Him.”

Brett added, “I can see that in Value-based relationships there’s an easy, mutual flow of information. That’s not only helpful to the other person, but as we trust the input from each other, our relationship is strengthened.”

“I’m glad you mentioned that, Brett,” Jack responded. “The easy flow of information between people is what the military often calls ‘gouge.’ Gouge is the wisdom which experienced, senior military personnel pass along to younger troops to help them do their job well and avoid deadly mistakes.” That made sense. He went on, “This interchange of wisdom as well as seeing it through the motives of the person giving it is necessary for the cooperative body life of a fellowship family whose sole Head is Jesus Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11-16)

“Isn’t this what you and Dee have been doing for us,” queried Jerome, “giving us spiritual gouge?” (Luke 6:40) Everyone laughed approvingly.

Jan spoke up, “You’ve also encouraged us to make it easy for people to share what’s on their hearts. Out of love we need to ensure that no one has any apprehension in speaking up, even things that may hurt our feelings. (Proverbs 15:31)

Brett asked pointedly, “Jack, none of this would have happened if you weren’t serving us as an elder shepherd. What’s your own heart’s motivation for doing this?”

“I’m glad you asked,” Jack replied heartily. “As I said earlier, the progression of our relationship with Jesus parallels what our Lord desires for us with each other. There comes a time in our character development in Christ when we men, out of love, look first to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:4) This is the foundation of a shepherd who’s intent in wanting the character of Jesus.” (Mark 10:45)

“As we’ve discussed before,” Dee added, “our Father’s shepherds are older men of wisdom and Christ-like character. They don’t just know about Jesus, they know Him and walk with Him. (2Timothy 1: 12) Actually, I’m convinced that no man can serve as a shepherd until after his frontal lobe shrinks around age 50.”

“I agree with you there!” Harry, who’d just turned 51, exclaimed. “In part 2 of the Hebraic article, *I Hate Nicolaitanism*, they cite that after a man’s frontal lobe shrinks, like I think mine has, he’s more attuned to his emotional as well as his cognitive abilities.” He smiled lovingly at Jan. “I can feel inside myself how better able I am now to represent my Father’s compassion, mercy, and love for people. And, another change is that I see ‘doctrine’ more as a way of life to help instill in others. (2Timothy 1:13,14) It’s out of love now that I want to help others grow in Christ.” (1Peter 1:22)

“Now that you mention it, Harry,” Nate observed, “you and Jack sort of respond the same.” He paused a moment. “We younger men may not understand the changes taking place in you because we didn’t see it all happening. But we sure can see the fruit! What can we do to make it easier for you to help us?”

Jack answered candidly, “What I’m about to say, you’ve all been doing, and I’m exceedingly grateful. An older shepherd is pregnant with wisdom to pass along — wisdom younger people need.” He glanced about the room. “There are two biblical commands for younger people to fully adhere to: ‘We ask you to respect those who are working hard among you, those who are guiding you in the Lord and confronting you in order to help you change.’ (1Thessalonians 5:12,CJB) And, ‘Let yourself be persuaded by the ones leading you and submit to them. They watch on behalf of your souls as those who will be rendering an account, in order that they may do this with joy, and not groaning, for this would be profitless to you.’ (Hebrews 13:17, literal translation)

“Speaking for all of us,” Jerome offered, “we want to make it easy for you to pass along wisdom and to confront us when we need it — and especially that you’d find joy in serving as our shepherd.” Everyone got up and hugged both Jack and Dee.

Dee then said. “I’ve watched the anguish Jack goes through as a shepherd — he willingly faces emotional hurt and personal inconvenience because he loves you all.”

“Please tell us more,” Keisha insisted. Dee continued, “Serving others as a shepherd is like a nursing mother. Her child dominates her life and personal plans. As an older man, Jack’s leadership flows from the love in his heart. When he helps others, he may have to revisit painful experiences from his past through which God has shown him wisdom.” She took his hand. “That pain gets compounded when he’s learned God’s wisdom through past mistakes. But the blessing is that he can use these experiences to help others not make the same error.” (John 10:11) Jack eyed her with love.

“I think I understand why many older men who have wisdom don’t want to be shepherds,” Juan commented. “They lack the love and compassion that’s needed to help those who are emotionally hurt.”

Lita turned to Dee. “How about you? What’s it like being a shepherd’s wife?”

“Two words come to mind,” Dee smiled, “love and deference. I can look back now and see how I was God’s primary instrument for Jack to learn how to love as Jesus would. I can also see why a shepherd must be the husband of only one wife. (1Timothy 3:2) It takes years for a man to develop Christ’s love.” (Ephesians 5:33)

Jack jumped in animatedly, “I really got hold of this after the Hebraic seminar we attended years ago when I heard, ‘If you want to know the extent of my relationship with Jesus, see it in the love He has given me for my wife.’ That’s when I started getting on my knees and crying out to Jesus to empower me to love Dee the way she needed, and the way He does.”

Grateful for how God had used her in Jack’s life, Dee continued, “You ladies know from our discussions of Proverbs 31 that it describes a elder/shepherd’s wife. In our own marriage, God needed to teach me the deference that Jack would need in me when he began to shepherd our Father’s children.” With a sigh she added, “I can say that having been raised with an independent spirit, I cried a lot as I became God’s helpmate fit for Jack. Over time I realized that my deference to Jack actually represented my trust in the sovereignty of my God. The day I came to understand that nobody’s will overrules God’s will, I had peace with Jack. And as a result of my deference, Jack has experienced the fullness of my respect for him.” (Ephesians 5: 33)

Jack then confronted the men. “If you’re ever going to become a shepherd, you need to realize it’s going to take you AND your wife cooperating together. A man’s sanctification, his growth in Christ’s likeness, begins to bear real fruit AFTER his frontal lobe shrinks. He sees God’s truths and people from the love in his heart.”

The fellowship gathering continued with joyful worship, personal testimony, and grateful hearts as they renewed their Covenant in Christ with their Father.

41. God Hates Divorce!

**“Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery,
and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.
If a wife divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”**

When the men had finished praying, Jack said, “I’m glad José asked for this meeting of us shepherds. He has a weighty matter that’s shown up in his home fellowship family that we all need to discuss.” Turning to José, Jack asked, “Why don’t you explain the situation you’ve encountered in your fellowship family?”

Glancing around the table, the older man began, “Chris and Tracy are a couple who’ve been part of our fellowship family for some time. They came to me because they’re all of a sudden talking about divorce after 20 years of marriage.”

Jack gently stopped José. “We don’t need to know any more details right now.” Turning to the other shepherds, he asked, “Have any of you had any personal dealing with divorce? I don’t mean that you know someone who got divorced, but that you were deeply involved in the situation.” Only one other man had.

Jack went on, “Our Father has used me to help save a few marriage covenants over the years. But first I’d like you to be aware that most ‘Christian counseling’ has no biblical basis the way it’s being practiced today.” (1Corinthians 2:11-16) Some inquisitive looks surfaced. “Because of their psychological rather than biblical basis, counselors often allow each party to re-view what their spouse did wrong — and spewing unforgiving accusations often polarizes the conflict even more.”

He paused for a moment then continued, “If you truly want to help a couple, they first need to understand that divorce is a sin — it’s breaking a covenant pledged before God. Review HIS purpose for their marriage from the Bible’s perspective. With this foundation you can help them recognize the sins against God and each other which the husband and/or wife has been committing which have resulted in them pursuing divorce.” He then said with emphasis, “Divorce is always the result of unconfessed sins for which they haven’t repented. In essence, one or both of them have divorced themselves from obeying God’s commands — especially by not turning to Him in Spirit together to develop the humility and loved-based character of Jesus.

Ted summed it up. “So the dissolution of their marriage reveals in the physical realm what’s been going on regarding their spiritual Covenant with our Father.”

Then Bill added, “The most overriding point is that our Father intends a marriage covenant to be the physical representation of the spiritual Covenant He offers us through Jesus. After all, these two covenants are inseparably linked in God’s sight! One reflects the other.” He went on, “God wants our marriages to personify to the world what living in covenant union and growing in increasing Christ-likeness looks like.” (John 17:20-23)

“Increasing Christ’s likeness in our own marriages has sure been a chief focus among us shepherds,” Bob noted. “That’s what we’ve been laboring to instill among our faith families from hearts that love God and want to please Him.” (Colossians 1:9,10) “To deceive others by claiming an intimate relationship with our Lord that people can’t see reflected in our marriage is hypocrisy,” he added resolutely.

José opened his Bible. “I know we need to pay particular attention to how intense our Father’s deep regard for the marriage covenant is, as well as why He established marriage in the first place.” He began to read slowly and purposefully: “The LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are His. And why one? Because He was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. ‘I hate divorce,’ says the LORD God of Israel ... So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.” (Malachi 2:14-16)

“Notice our Father’s further purpose for the marriage covenant: He was seeking godly offspring from people who are His,” Jack stressed.

José added another point. “I’ve also learned from research that the children of divorce have lifelong difficulty experiencing any kind of relational intimacy, and a hard time developing value-based relationships.” Tom broke in, “The majority of children of divorce are raised by single mothers, or by mothers who have remarried and their husbands are relatively uninvolved in raising her children. So the kids often suffer a sense of abandonment by their father.”

“I guess what I’ve seen,” observed Ted sadly, “is the kids who fall short on living uprightly because their guilt-plagued mothers have become their ‘friend’ or have given up on parental responsibilities. Parents who feel guilty may try to ‘purchase favor’ from their children by giving in to them. All this sounds like it could be God’s curse, the resulting consequence of broken marriage since He declares, ‘I hate divorce.’”

Ken introduced another alarming outcome of divorce. “Even more staggering is that children who are under the age of 4 when their parents divorce and have no healthy male influence have a 75% higher chance of becoming homosexual when they mature than do kids raised with their father or with a stable father-figure like a grandfather, a coach or a caring uncle. I guess that’s another curse for violating God’s ways!”

(For more on the effects of divorce on children, read *Discussing How To Restore the Early Church*, [**Lesson 33, Why We Need Fathers**](#))

“Ever since we all embraced the truths in [*The Gospel of the Covenant*](#),” Bill noted, “each of us has come to recognize that our God doesn’t provide many options for getting a divorce.” He read aloud, “I tell you that anyone who divorces his

wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.’ (Matthew 19:9) My heart tells me that we shouldn’t make it any easier for the people in our care to pursue divorce than our Father does. The resulting curse on the children is too painful.”

“I agree completely. Adultery is the only allowable reason Christ gives for divorce. That’s because it defiles the marriage-covenant parallel of our relationship with Him as a spiritual bride just as surely as it defiles the ‘two becoming one’ image of earthly marriage,” interjected José emphatically. “That’s why God’s prophets so often used words against Israel like ‘prostitute’ and ‘adulterous, unfaithful people’ — His people were bringing His name down by committing spiritual adultery with other gods!”

“And because divorce is so tolerated and unfronted within Christendom today,” Jack sighed, “it’s tougher for shepherds who represent our Father’s concern for His children to do our part — especially because the sin of divorce and the consequences of that sin don’t seem to be of much concern for those pursuing divorce.”

Bob’s heart was determined. “We shepherds are here to serve people on behalf of our Father, and He never intended for couples to divorce — even if that’s what was happening all around the pagan world back then and is so widespread today. It was Moses who permitted divorce because the Israelites’ hearts were hard. (Mark 10:5) Let’s hear God’s perspective: ‘In the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and live in union with his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.” (Mark 10:6-9)

“Let not man separate,” Jack reiterated. Surveying his brothers appreciatively he said, “While we could spend more time on God’s view of marriage and purposes for it, as well as other consequences of divorce, I think you guys collectively addressed the most crucial ones. Some other time we can discuss how our faith families can reach out to help the broken families around them as instruments of His grace and mercy.”

José turned to Jack and asked, “So how do we proceed next?”

“Let’s again look in God’s Word. I have several halakhic applications (See [*Christian Halakhahs—Loving Jesus Through The Way You Apply His Word*](#)) you may want to consider regarding divorce, and please feel free to add, question, or disagree with anything I say. As always, we’re looking for what’s right according to our God, not who’s right among us.” (1Corinthians 2: 12,13) Everyone agreed.

“When a spouse or a couple comes to you talking divorce,” Jack continued, “they’re pursuing sin, and their guilt for doing this must be established and repented of. The one who wants to break the marriage covenant is presumed guilty until further investigation reveals otherwise (Proverbs 18:17): that the circumstances are so dire your spirit bears witness that the other person’s unrepented sins make them guilty.”

“We shepherds need to keep something in mind,” Jack emphasized. “When someone violates God’s Word, no matter what the sin is, their guilt must be established. They need to see their sin as sinful! Mercy over extenuating circumstances can be given afterwards when they’ve repented and been forgiven and cleansed.” (1John 1:8,9)

“Isn’t the refusal to accept their own guilt burden what keeps many people from repenting?” asked Bill rhetorically. “We men who follow Jesus and are entrusted to lead are responsible for upholding communal righteousness. So our first goal is to help people repent of their sin, if they’re willing.” (1John 1:6,7)

Jack then asked the men to turn to Matthew, chapter 18. “Bill, would you read verses 15-18 aloud for us?” ‘If your brother sins, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the called-out ones; and if he refuses to listen even to the called-out ones, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 18:15-18)

Jack pressed on. “In light of this passage, your meeting with the couple must focus on determining if one or both of them has sinned against God, and each other. I encourage you to have your wife with you, José; she can greatly help expose the woman’s motives. First uncover any sins, with each one taking responsibility for their own sin and not accusing their spouse. (Matthew 7:3-5) Next, if you do discover sin in one or both of them, will they listen to you and repent? If one of them refuses to repent, you need to follow the rest of the steps in Matthew 18.”

“I bet that each one in this couple will want us to take their side,” José noted wryly.

“Yes, they’ll try!” Jack exclaimed. “But don’t let that happen. And don’t let yourselves get caught up with any resentment toward them. A study of Christian marriage counselors reveals that most of them first take the wife’s side. You need to act justly if you’re going to establish guilt and help them repent as the Spirit would have them do.”

“So we first need to establish whether there’s sin,” Ted said. “If guilt is established and they refuse to listen and repent, then they need to be removed from fellowship.”

“That’s correct,” Jack responded. “As Paul recommended, turn the unrepentant person over to Satan when you remove them from your fellowship family. (1Corinthians 5:5) The devil himself may expedite their repentance through pressure!” (1Timothy 1: 20)

“What if one or both of them does repent — then what do we do?” Tom asked.

“Now you can help them experience from the Spirit the healing of their emotional wounds through God’s mercy,” (Psalms 147:3) Jack replied. “They need to forgive each other from the heart because God commands it. (Matthew 6:15) And make sure they get the ongoing help they need as our Lord heals their emotions. (James 3:17,18) This often takes time. And don’t

be shaken by setbacks,” he cautioned. “Keep the couple focused on our Lord and on His goal and purposes for their marriage. Help them develop these as the framework of their covenant union to become more Christ-like!”

Ken added, “It seems like most interpersonal tension comes through recurring demonic strongholds, (Ephesians 6:12) or when ruts of old attitudes and behaviors haven’t been fully filled in according to God’s ways.” (Romans 8:12-14)

“That’s a good point to have a couple look into first,” Jack affirmed. “And be sensitive that there may be other contributing factors causing tension, like problems on the job, a man going through the Wounded Warrior stage, a pre-menopausal wife, rebellious kids, bitterness against anyone, or a whole host of other tension producers.”

“Jack, what about divorced people who want to enter our fellowship family?” Bill wondered.

“I encourage you to talk with the person and thoroughly investigate their divorce,” Jack replied. “If that person was the guilty party who left their marriage, you need to help them repent and help them restore the marriage, if possible.” He then warned, “If you let in the guilty who haven’t repented, you’ll stymie your communal righteousness and your prayers will go unheard by our Father.” (1 Peter 3:12) Remember, the Holy Spirit will help your investigation. (John 16:7,8) He wants sin exposed and repented of so that forgiveness and cleansing can take place.”

Bill then asked, “What about divorced people who’ve remarried? Can they join our fellowship family?” Jack’s face turned serious. “You again need to investigate and use a lot of spiritual discernment in your fellowship family. Our God longs to be merciful to the repentant. (2John 6) And divorce is not unpardonable sin!”

A grateful José shared, “I and my fellowship family now have a scriptural framework for this couple’s situation. I can see that God’s way of dealing with interpersonal tensions, including divorce, is very redemptive — it leads to repentance.”

With that, Jack concluded, “Keep in mind the authority God has given you and your fellowship family to apply His Word to all of life’s situations!” (Matthew 18:18-20)

42. Marriage Should Be Honored By All

**“At the beginning of creation I made them male and female.
For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,
and the two will become one flesh.
So they are no longer two, but one.
Therefore what I have joined together, let no one separate.”**

The two couples, one older and the other in their 40's, faced each other on comfortable loveseats in José and Sharee's brightly lit family room. After the four of them had prayed Chris blurted, “Tracy and I left a little miffed after we met with you both last week, José.” Glancing sideways at Tracy, who'd put some space between them, he added, “We thought you'd listen to our gripes about each other that we've harbored throughout our marriage.”

Tracy finished for him. “But instead you gave us homework, like we were kids.”

“And did you complete what we asked you to do?” José asked politely. When they both nodded he went on, “After 20 years of marriage, what you two see wrong in each other and what our Lord sees and desires for your marriage have nothing in common. So I ask you both, whom would you want me to pay more attention to?”

“To the Lord, of course,” they murmured without much conviction.

“Listen,” Sharee broke in firmly. “When your love for Jesus matters more to you than focusing on how you hurt each other, then your marriage will be on the right path.” (1Corinthians 13:1-7) She eyeballed them both. “I realize that neither of you have much hope this can ever happen. But are you both willing to continue following our direction for the next few weeks just as you vowed to do during our first meeting?”

After a brief hesitation both agreed. Tracy added, “It's not so much for Chris that I'm willing, but when you showed us the statistics about what happens to the children of divorce, I felt our marriage is worth fighting for! I don't want to handicap our kids with the curse of divorce.” Chris's look affirmed her.

José asked them to open the Demolishing Your Strongholds survey he'd asked them both to fill in last week. After he and Sharee had scrutinized the responses he asked, “Did you renounce these demonic strongholds together in the Name of Jesus as we asked you to?”

“It took us a few days before we had the courage to go through our strongholds together,” Chris confessed. “And even another day before we could renounce them together,” Tracy added.

“Then you're both free of these?” José pursued, making sure they both responded they were. He then began to discuss the symptoms of the strongholds the couple had in common, starting with the stronghold of Deceit. Chris had indicated a high number for “rationalization”, while Tracy scored high on “delusions.” José pointed out, “Each of the symptoms is a demonically-induced rut of attitude and behavior that you need to fill in by the Spirit of Christ in you and with the help of others. If your marriage is going to be saved, you two have to help each other.” Wavering just a little, they both agreed.

José focused on Chris. “Tell me about the rationalization in your life.”

The younger man responded quickly, eager to be free from this lifelong darkness. “I've always been able to talk myself out of taking responsibility and get people to agree with my reasoning .(1Corinthians 3:18,19) And I tend to shrug off problems and even treat serious ones superficially. I guess I'd call myself 'aloof.'”

Turning to Tracy, Sharee asked, “What do you think about what Chris just said?”

Sensing how earnest her husband was to come clean, she answered, “That describes him. And if I could add, he often makes excuses to justify his sinful behavior.” She was actually surprised that Chris didn't argue with her or try to defend himself. Instead, he acknowledged Tracy's insight almost gratefully. (Proverbs 27:9)

“And you, Tracy,” José inquired, “tell us how you see delusion in your life.”

Having previously reflected on this, she responded with certainty. “My Mom divorced my father when I was little. After she married my stepfather when I was 12, I began to watch a lot of 'chick flicks' and read romance novels. So when I got married, I'd already developed what I can see now were a lot of false expectations about what I thought marriage should be.” She shook her head sadly. “For the past 20 years I've lived deluded that things should be the way I'd envisioned them.” She broke into tears. Chris, moved by her confession, reached over to take her hand.

Sharee asked softly, “Chris, is there anything you can add?”

“Tracy's spent so many years comparing herself to other women and always ending up feeling like she falls short,” he replied with frustration. “As much as I try to affirm her, it seems like my words fall on deaf ears. And sometimes she plagues herself with the notion that the 'grass is greener' somewhere else — like God has shortchanged her so she isn't grateful to God for what we do have.”

“He's right!” Tracy sobbed. “I brought a lot of baggage into our marriage from things my mother would tell me: 'Tracy, you're putting on weight.' 'Tracy, I see a zit on your face.' If there was something wrong with me she'd always point it out. That's why I find it hard to accept when people say anything nice to me now.”

Sharee looked kindly at the couple. “How are you both feeling right now?”

Squeezing one another's hands they answered, “Hopeful that we can change...”

“Over the next week I want the two of you to go through the rest of your symptoms together and help ‘fill in the ruts’,” (2Corinthians 10:4,5) José smiled. “If you run into any problems, call us right away. Don’t hesitate! Is that okay with you both?”

Still holding hands, Chris and Tracy nodded appreciatively.

Their elder/shepherd wasn’t through. “I also want you to give to each of your parents a copy of the *Demolishing Your Strongholds* survey you filled in along with the Gospel of the Covenant article and the statistics on children of divorce I gave you last week. Next time, Sharee and I would like to meet with both you and your folks after they’ve gone through the materials.”

“Why get them involved?” they both asked incredulously.

José responded adamantly. “Your marriage didn’t get to the difficult condition it is today without the influence of your folks in your past. We need to get your parents on board if you really want help for you and your children.”

Sharee added to her husband’s counsel. “We need to introduce your parents to the reality of demonic strongholds, and make known the covenant goals you’re trying to incorporate into your marriage. Once they read the statistics on the children of divorce and see the strongholds they’ve passed along to you and their grandchildren, they’ll want us all to get together, I assure you!”

+ + + + +

Two weeks later guests once more sat in José and Sharee’s family room. After pouring coffee for everyone Sharee sat next to her husband. Across from each other sat two gray-haired couples: Chris’s parents, Ned and Claire, and John and Phyllis, Tracy’s parents. Chris and Tracy flanked their hosts.

Their nervousness was readily apparent, so José started by putting them all at ease. “I take it you all know that Chris and Tracy have been considering ending their marriage?” he asked. They all nodded. “We’re not here to find fault or to establish blame, but rather to help identify whatever may be hindering them from experiencing the fullness of the love of Jesus in their marriage.” The parents relaxed a little at that.

Sharee interjected, “As you can see by the materials Chris and Tracy gave you, divorce is an awful curse on children — possibly for several generations.”

Phyllis responded, “The material you asked us to read sure got our attention! Having been divorced and remarried myself, I know I’ve passed along a mess to Tracy.”

Sharee reassured her. “When a generation fails to demolish their demonic strongholds, it leaves problems for the next generation. José and I are still cleaning things up from our past ignorance, since we only learned these truths six years ago!”

“So you two have children?” Claire asked with interest.

“Four kids and eleven grandchildren,” José beamed. “As Sharee and I made the Hebraic foundations a way of life, we learned that the fruit of any generation is seen in the grandchildren it produces. (Proverbs 17:6) For their sake we vowed to do whatever was necessary so that they’d grow up loving our Lord Jesus and desiring to serve Him. Some good changes have happened, but it’s still a work in progress.”

“Do you mind if we ask what you did to change?” Ned broke in.

“Just what we’ve done for you!” Sharee smiled. “We gave our kids the same materials we gave you, including *Demolishing Your Strongholds*. José and I identified our strongholds so that our children could see what got past us to them and to our grandchildren. (Psalms 32:5) Besides giving our kids the materials, we asked the people in our fellowship family to pray and fast for them until our Lord broke through.”

John asked a bit dubiously, “Did everyone get onboard?”

“Not at first,” José replied with a grin. “It began with our youngest son, Ramon, and his wife Elesa. They were at the same place Chris and Tracy find themselves. Today they’re active in our fellowship family, and he and Elesa conduct *Demolishing Strongholds* seminars in Spanish throughout this area.”

Sharee could see hope filling everyone in the room. She then asked each of the older parents, “Why are you still married?” As each pondered the question for a moment, Claire confidently blurted, “Because I gave my word 45 years ago!”

“As noble as that sounds,” José replied, “does it meet the glorious intent and purpose our Lord has for your marriage after all these years?”

Claire grabbed her husband’s hand and looked deeply into his eyes. “Now that we’ve read the Gospel of the Covenant I’d have to answer an emphatic ‘NO!’” Ned took up her drift. “We do need help. After we read that God wanted our marriage to represent our relationship with Him, we both became convicted how we’d failed to prepare our kids for marriage.”

“I’ve been Tracy’s stepdad since she was 12,” John noted as he looked with love at her. “It hasn’t always been easy for her and me, but I was proud when she asked me to walk her down the aisle at her wedding. And I want to do whatever I can to help her and Chris stay together.” He paused to look at Phyllis. “And, I want our marriage to shine with the love of Jesus!” “Me too!” his wife declared with tears.

José and Sharee were overjoyed. “We’ll be glad to work with you in establishing the Hebraic foundations in your marriage and families. But first, you older couples need to get free of strongholds and begin to fill in your old ruts of behavior and attitudes with ways that please our Father.”

“How will we know when we’re truly free and the ruts have been filled in?” asked Phyllis pointedly.

Sharee responded, "When your heart is filled with the mercy of Jesus toward other people, especially those who've hurt you. (1Peter 4:8) When you're free, you find it easy to forgive because you have the deepest appreciation of what you've been forgiven of by our Father through the blood of Jesus."

"You'll KNOW you're free," José added, "because the love of Jesus will rule you and empower your attitude and actions toward others." (2Corinthians 3:16-18) Optimism filled the room as José assigned "homework" for each of the couples. As the evening began to wrap up, Ned asked, "José, could Claire and I could join your fellowship family?" "Us too!" chimed John and Phyllis earnestly.

José answered warmly, "Let's work toward that goal. We'll need several more meetings together, and each of you will need to embrace our Father's Covenant in Jesus before you become part of our fellowship family." José then led them in prayer. When everyone had left, the elder shepherd and his wife sat back delighted in how exceedingly abundantly our Lord had answered their prayers. (Ephesians 3:20)

FYI: Quick Resolutions That Are Key To Ending Marital Conflicts

(courtesy of authors Ron Blue and Jeremy White)

1. Stick to the problems at hand. Don't bring up past issues or accuse your spouse of "always" or "never" behaving a certain way.
2. Don't think about "my way" or "your way." Work toward a solution that represents "our way."
3. Identify the core issue. Get to the heart of the problem, not just the symptoms.
4. Don't be a mind reader. Don't try to interpret your spouse's thoughts or motives; instead, ask direct questions.
5. If you haven't reached a consensus by bedtime, agree to resume the discussion the next day. Bitterness can take root in your marriage if you leave things unresolved.
6. No matter how strongly you disagree, attacking your spouse's personality or character is never acceptable.
7. Remember, your relationship with your spouse is far more important than winning or being "right."
8. Remember that love keeps no record of wrongs. Be quick to forgive, quick to admit your own mistakes, and quick to move on from the conflict.

43. Being Our Lord's Point Of Contact (Part 1)

“You will have the power of the Holy Spirit, and you will be My witnesses.”

Bob and Abby's living room overflowed with the lively chatter of old friends and fellow companions in Christ. Gathered at their request were the various home fellowship shepherds and their wives: Jack & Dee, Bill & Mary, Ted & Lauren, José & Sharee, Tom & Megan, and Ken & Olivia. After a time of animated catching up and prayer, Jack shared his delight in seeing them all together again.

“What a joy to see how obvious the love of Jesus is in each of you! It's definitely His kind of love that's compelling you to do nothing less than what He'd be doing if He were you. Dee and I are just so thankful to Him that we really are His extended family with you all!” (Psalms 119:63,74,79; Matthew 12:50)

“The love Christ gives really is at the heart of it,” Olivia grinned. “When each of us determined that the goal of our marriage covenant would be to become as Christ-like as possible, an undeniable empowered love began to grow inside us. (Hebraic Article: Mutually Growing Christ-like Relationships) This love is what's stirring us to reach people who haven't yet experienced what only Jesus can do in their lives when He's their Lord.”

“You're absolutely right,” Dee added heartily, “because in the end, love will be the only thing that will count.” (Galatians 5:6) Turning to Bob she then asked why he'd called them all together.

Bob paused as his eyes gratefully took in these folks who really were family to him. (Matthew 12:48-50) For a number of years now they'd come alongside each other in prayer and action to serve their Lord together, always ready to cooperate with one another to extend His Kingdom. Finally he spoke, somberly and deliberately. “These past months I've been talking with a young guy at work named Treyvon. For several years he's been volunteering with a ministry that goes into the Holly Springs Detention Center for troubled youth.”

Several were familiar with the center. Bob continued, “The past few months have been hard for him; he's gotten discouraged about the lack of fruit in light of all their effort. In fact, 80% of the teens end up right back in detention after their release.”

Dee glanced at Jack and commented, “That detention center isn't far from us.”

Nodding, Bob added with sorrow, “Treyvon's so frustrated that he doesn't feel he can go on with it the way things are. He asked me if there was any other way to help these kids that might be more effective than what's happening now.”

A few moments of silence prevailed as the group glanced at each other. Then Jack offered soberly, “I truly believe our Lord wants us to discuss this tonight, Bob. I have to admit that this issue has exposed some pain I've had ever since I began to follow Jesus myself.”

Sharee could feel the heaviness in Jack's heart and tears filled her eyes. “Jack, I sense you're really hurting inside.”

Jack's head lowered, his own cheeks now damp. “Sorry, I'm dealing with a lot of sadness as well as a little anger.” Pausing to collect himself he went on, “You may recall about four years ago we all discussed some Lifebytes from the Restoration Ministries website that dealt with reaching the lost around us.”

Ken jumped in, “Weren't those about the Mission Station approach versus the People Movement approach?” ([*Lifebyte 36. Are You Trapped In Mission-Station Thinking?*](#); [*Lifebyte 37, The People Movement Approach \(Part 1\)*](#); [*38. The People Movement Approach \(PART 2\)*](#))

“Yes, exactly,” Jack confirmed. “For far too long most Christian outreach has embraced the Mission Station approach, relying on ministering to individuals rather than whole families. But what we've focused on among us as fellowship families is the People Movement means of outreach; in other words, we see a person as connected to a family and to their other close relationships.”

As José looked at everyone seated in the circle, he felt he was speaking for all of them. “We all worked together to establish the foundation of our outreach for each family and home fellowship: Each person in our family or fellowship family is the point of contact on behalf of their entire family and faith community. And the person they're reaching out to is the point of contact for themselves as well as for their family and close friends.”

Megan broke in eagerly. “In essence, the ones who are points of contact are bringing two groups of people together — the followers of Jesus and those who haven't yet come to follow Him as their Lord.”

Jack sat back in quiet delight as each one offered their insights. They weren't speaking from what they'd studied, but from what they'd made their way of life.

“It's good that we're going over this again,” Mary added. “Jack and Dee have instilled in us that we need to see each person not only as someone made in God's image and for whom Jesus died, but also in the context of their close relationships. Because of that, through biblical hospitality we're inviting them to be part of our lives.”

Joy flooded Olivia's face. “I'm so glad we've learned that biblical hospitality entails inviting people into our home where we can truly affirm them as our Lord would. And biblical hospitality means that we're willing to be inconvenienced in order to be the heart and hands of Jesus to someone else.” (Romans 12:13; 1Timothy 5:10; 1Peter 4:9)

In full agreement with his wife, Ken added, “That's the real servanthood of Jesus when we invite others into our home.”

A pause ensued as the others stopped to consider how much they'd been changed through past discussion of those Lifebytes. Then Bob spoke fondly to the man he valued as his mentor. "Jack, I can see your joy as everyone has been sharing, yet I sense your heart is still heavy. Is that about reaching those boys in the detention center?"

Jack smiled appreciatively. "First, I really do savor hearing the loving conviction each of you has. But there's something from my past I'd like to present that's grieved me for many years."

Knowing the depth of sorrow her husband had carried for so long, Dee put her hand on his shoulder and said, "Please let me start." Turning toward the group she continued, "It's been decades since God first made us aware of the fruitlessness of the methods used by most Christian ministries. Our concern began when we attended a Hebraic restoration seminar years ago. The speakers talked about the impersonal style of the Billy Graham Crusade they'd attended back in 1984. During that Crusade the largest percentage of people up to that time went forward. But even though the area congregations were supposedly prepared to follow up those who'd gone forward, not one person ever joined any of those churches."

Megan exclaimed, "So that's why you two have been so insistent that when any of us are a point of contact in reaching an unbeliever, we immediately involve our family and home fellowship family both in prayer and willingness to do their part as needed."

"That's so true, Megan," Jack affirmed. "People's lives are intertwined in relationships, especially with family members. That stream runs clear through Adam and Eve as the first family down to the collective body of Christ as His family." He sighed. "But history records that through the influence of the Reformers centuries ago, reaching the individual rather than the family became the focus. They were the first to foster evangelism to the individual apart from his other relationships. Now as our Father restores the Hebraic foundations, especially relational priorities under His Lordship, we can be like our spiritual father Abraham and establish relationships family to family and generation to generation." (Genesis 18:19; Romans 4:16,17)

Bob's heart was stirred. "I'm beginning to appreciate your sorrow as you've seen how fruitless and ineffectual ministries are that send out individuals to try to reach individuals. And given the singular nature of men in this country in particular, they're probably the ones who keep this solitary ministry method going."

"You're right," Jack replied with a grimace. "Throughout the centuries, Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians and clergy were predominantly white men from the educated upper classes of society. These men emphasized their knowledge of the Bible and their traditions instead of the life-transforming truth of an intimate relationship with the God of the Bible through the indwelling Spirit of Christ. And that pattern continues throughout much of Christendom today."

All eyes were trained on Jack as he went on. "Presenting the Bible as information about God underlays their belief that if people can recite some of God's Word or at least agree with it in their heads, that's all that's needed." He shook his head sadly. "The goal of much of modern evangelism is to achieve a 'conversion' and get people to attend services. But how much more biblical it is to establish a relationship with a person and his family and friends so that collectively they can thoroughly grasp the love and Lordship of Christ. (11:25,26) This difference in approach is why the crusade method of evangelism and other similar ministries is so fruitless."

"I remember that the evangelists Paul, Timothy and Titus stayed on in an area as long as they were needed and established relationships with the people," (Acts 11:25,26) José added. "They only moved on after a faith community was firmly established and an elder shepherd anointed to lead." (Titus 1:5)

Bob was nettled. "What you've described, Jack, is what Treyvon's been experiencing with the detention center kids. He told me that even though he's part of a ministry, he operates individually with the kids and has little or no chance to interact with their family." His voice sank. "Treyvon also mentioned that none of the married guys include their wives and families in establishing any relationship with the boys. It's like the boys are kept separate from any contact with a stable family."

Jack's face stiffened at that thought. "One of the reasons these ministries don't include families or intergenerational grandparent support is the unresolved bitterness so many clergy and parachurch leaders have with their own fathers. They strongly influence other men in ministry to avoid any intergenerational involvement."

Lauren asked pointedly, "Since their work seems so ineffective, how come these ministries don't change? Are we dealing with that old axiom, 'A fool is the lumber man who doesn't stop to sharpen his axe'?"

Jack chuckled, then answered her. "One difficulty in modern Christianity is misplaced faith. We who follow Christ need to wholeheartedly trust in the Spirit of Jesus within us. But many of these men put their faith in what they know about the Bible and in their methods of ministry. And besides that, their misplaced 'faith' makes it impossible for most of them to admit when they're wrong!"

"Our Lord is the living God," (2Corinthians 6:16) responded Lauren, her voice alive with fervency. "So the people we meet who don't yet know Him need to realize we Jesus followers look to the indwelling Holy Spirit for guidance. He's alive within us!"

"And since each person we meet is different," José interjected, "the Spirit can give us insight and wisdom how we can be a point of contact for every unbeliever He puts in our path." (Luke 12:11-12)

"I'm with you there, brother," Ted agreed. "I think of King David each time he went to war; he always asked God beforehand how to fight each battle because none were the same." (1 Chronicles 14:14,15)

That thought caused each person to reflect on how much they themselves looked to the indwelling Spirit for God's guidance before they set out on anything. Then Ken brought up an important point. "Jack, you've taught us guys so often that any ministry we do needs to flow out of the love of Jesus we have for our wives."

“How so?” Sharee asked, intrigued.

Ken replied, “It began with something Jack insisted on when we first began to meet with him for our weekly breakfasts. He told us, ‘Whatever ministry you do, make sure you’re drawing from the Jesus others can see in your marriage.’ He hammered home the fact that before we men could minister to others, we needed to first focus on having a marriage in which Christ has knit our hearts with our wives.”

“That’s one point Jack never backed off on,” Ted added with a grin. “We husbands need to put any form of ministry on the back burner until Jesus gives us His love for our wives. And that means humbling ourselves and crying out to Him to love her like He would love her.” He smiled gently at his beloved bride of many years and added, “Then we could minister with her to others.” (Philippians 2:3)

Bill recollected, “The married apostles took their wives with them wherever they ministered. (1Corinthians 9:5) That way people could see the love of Jesus in their marriage, because their marriage mirrored the spiritual intimacy Jesus has with His Bride!”

Mary turned to Jack and asked, “Is there anything else that keeps men who are involved in ministering to others from changing?”

“Well, why and how we minister to others on behalf of Jesus flows from whatever degree of gratefulness we have for our own redemption,” Jack explained. “It’s one thing to feel good about yourself because you’re biblically knowledgeable and can teach what you know to others. But it’s a far different story when you’ve understood your own depravity and sinfulness. You hate that part of you! And only then can you truly appreciate the cost of Jesus’s sacrifice for you.” His eyes watered with thankfulness as he marvelled, “Jesus did something you couldn’t do for yourself!”

Mary’s eyes glistened as well. “Jesus tells us, ‘He who has been forgiven little loves little.’ (Luke 7:47) So if someone can’t appreciate with their whole heart how Jesus suffered on their behalf to reconcile them to His Father, then their ministry to others will also lack Christ’s humility and love.” (Philippians 2:5-8)

“That’s exactly what I’m saying, Mary,” Jack gleamed. “Men ‘who love little’ offer others ‘Bible knowledge’ and establish their ministries around the goal of ‘getting people saved’ by agreeing with some verses. But Paul’s ministry was so effective because he was so appalled by his own depravity — and so grateful for his redemption!” Opening his Bible Jack proclaimed ardently, “I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display His unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on Him and receive eternal life.” (1Timothy 1:16)

Wide-eyed, Sharee declared, “That’s why Paul’s own ministry was so compelling and unstoppable. He wanted to know Jesus in His power and in His suffering! Listen to what motivated him: ‘I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death.’ (Philippians 3:10)

“You’ve got it!” Jack echoed. “Paul’s appreciation produced loving purpose in Jesus!”

Ken broke in, “And now Bob is asking us to reach these boys in the detention center,” bringing everyone back to the reason for their gathering.

“You’re right,” Jack replied, “though this discussion has brought joy to Dee and me to hear your hearts.” He went on, “A lot of current ministries are fruitless because their approach to the kids is almost clinical; the volunteers spend a lot more time ‘talking at’ the guys than coming alongside them to hear their hopes and pain. And while some churches may partner with them initially, they don’t really want these troubled kids in their youth groups nor do they want to invite them into their lives.”

“Would you explain what you mean by ‘clinical’?” Lauren asked.

Jack answered sadly, “It stems from a heart motive that says, ‘I’m only going to go the first mile.’ This is the type of ministry most middle class men involve themselves with. They never establish a close relationship with the kids themselves.”

Bob piped up, “That’s what Treyvon admitted. The men in the ministry he’s with never had any of the kids in their own home, and they kept their own families away from the kids too.”

“I’m reminded of another topic we discussed together after reading the Hebraic article, *I Hate Nicolaitanism*,” Tom noted. “The men in these ministries have only experienced activity-based religious programs which are role modeled for them through scheduled events and programs at their churches. And most church ministry is based on age-segregated groups or on people grouped by common interests, like men’s Bible study.”

Megan agreed with her husband. “So these men at the detention center see their ministry in terms of an activity, like teaching the Bible to a group of kids who are put together only because they’ve committed some crime. Where’s the love?”

Before Jack could answer, Dee jumped in. “Love is lived out by those who go the ‘second mile.’ Jesus used the parable of the good Samaritan to show us what love for another person really looks like. It’s someone who willingly goes the second mile (Matthew 5:41) enduring whatever inconvenience is necessary without complaining.”

Jack added, “Dee’s right! I’ve seen that wherever ministries are established or led by middle or upper class white men, they only go the first mile. They do just enough to make themselves feel good about what they’re doing. But that’s sure different than the Samaritan; he met the full needs of the man who’d been beaten and robbed.” As the others nodded in agreement he pointed out, “This is the only way Jesus would have us minister, and it often means being inconvenienced.”

“Treyvon made me aware of something else,” Bob observed with a frown. “Most of the men in these ministries have no spiritual power, and nothing about them reflects the work of God in their lives. So they have no testimonies to reveal the

mighty acts of God which we in our home fellowship family are so accustomed to. (1 Corinthians 4:20; 2 Timothy 3:5) And to the boys, Jesus becomes just a story character.”

José could see that Bob hit a chord in everyone’s heart. As he looked at Jack, he said, “I can see your mind working. The Spirit’s prompting something in you, isn’t He?”

Jack grinned. “We need to offer the teens in the detention center and their families genuine Christ-like relationships. These kids and the people close to them need authentic extended family that reflects love and obedient trust in our Lord.”

“What you’re saying,” blurted Bob, “is that we need to extend to them what we offer anyone who enters our Father’s Covenant as the Spirit uses us: FAMILY UNION!”

“Exactly!” Jack answered. “I think Treyvon has shown us a new field of ministry and that our Lord Jesus would have us help these kids as His heart and hands. In fact, I think we need to be thinking about other areas where our fellowship families can reach out to the hopeless and helpless.” (Romans 12:16; Luke 14:12-14; Matthew 25:31-46)

Mary cut in, “It’s like Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, whatever you do for one of the least of these, you do for Me.” (Matthew 25:45)

“How should we get started, Jack?” several asked at the same time.

“Well, Holly Springs is basically in the backyard of our own home fellowship family. I’d like to meet with Treyvon first and get to know him more. Since he’s already ministering in the detention center, it’d be easier if he became our point of contact.”

Tom observed, “Over the years you’ve used the phrase ‘point of contact’ many times. I just want to say how much it’s revolutionized our home and especially Megan’s life.”

Megan smiled warmly. “You and Dee told us several years ago how a wife, especially one with kids still at home or like me with our grandkids living so close, can be a point of contact with other families on behalf of her husband and family. I really took that seriously and especially focused on unbelieving families whom Tom and I could establish a relationship with. A good number of them are now followers of Jesus in our home fellowship!”

Ted added, “And when Jesus sent out His disciples, or Paul sent out his, each was a point of contact representing not only himself but also his faith family.”

Jack was delighted that Tom had turned them to this topic. “That’s exactly how we all need to see ourselves — each of us is the point of contact on behalf of our families and our fellowship families. And we’re also the support team for each other!”

“After Jack meets with Treyvon to see if he wants to be our point of contact,” Dee said, “we’ll talk this over with our own home fellowship. They need to make sure their hearts are fully wrapped around not only the teens but reaching out to their families and including them too if possible. I’m pretty sure they’ll want to do this.”

Bob spoke on behalf of everyone. “Jack and Dee, again you’ve shown us a willingness to get involved. I believe each of us is going to look around our own home fellowship area and challenge our faith families to see what we can do to reach the hopeless and the helpless.”

They closed their time together in a wonderful time of praise and prayer, with deep sense of renewed determination to serve their Lord in His Spirit’s love and power.

44. Being Our Lord's Point Of Contact (Part 2)

“Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.”

Jack, Bob and Treyvon had been getting acquainted for several minutes as they enjoyed lunch at a local restaurant. Treyvon, a husky young man with a smile as warm as Jack's, was eager to meet this man Bob admired so much. Jack was just as enthused, and looking pointedly at Treyvon he said, “Tell me about yourself. And tell me about you and Jesus.”

Treyvon took a moment to gather his thoughts, then matter-of-factly began to recount his life journey. “I was raised by a single mom. My dad was in and out of my life until around age 10, and then he just left. I joined a gang, and like the kids I'm ministering to now, I did time in a detention center.”

Jack appreciated the way Treyvon spoke of his past without any tinge of bitterness or shame. The older man probed, “So how did you get from there to where you are now?”

“Where I lived in the inner city, there was an older woman named Yolanda who lived down the block.” Treyvon smiled warmly as he thought about her. “Whenever she was outside in her yard and saw me walking by, she'd stop me and talk. Man, she was always coming down on me about the bad choices I was making. But I really knew she cared.” His face split with a grin as he added, “She'd tell me over and over again, ‘Treyvon, someday you're gonna to come to a point when you'll need to ask Jesus to help you!’”

“So what happened?” Jack asked, his interest piqued.

“One night my friend Ramon and I were walking home and a police cruiser with two white cops pulled up next to us. The one in the passenger seat jumped out of the car with his pistol drawn and put it to my chest. I could see he was young and edgy. And I had my hands in my pockets and that made him even more nervous.”

Bob was focused on Treyvon's story too. “How were you feeling at that moment?”

“I was shaking like a leaf. As I looked into his eyes I could see he was wondering how much a threat I was and whether he needed to pull the trigger.” He paused and shook his head. “It was right at that moment Yolanda's words came to me, and deep inside myself I called out to Jesus for help.”

“I take it the officer didn't shoot,” Jack commented softly.

Chuckling a bit, Treyvon continued, “No, he didn't. He just lowered his gun. And then his whole face changed as he told me he was sorry. Seems they were looking for two guys who held up a liquor store and shot the owner. Both cops got back in the cruiser and drove off.” He paused at the memory. “I turned to Ramon. He was so scared he looked like a white guy! I could hear him whispering, ‘Jesus... Jesus... My Lord Jesus!’”

“I sense this event happened because someone had really been praying up a storm for you and Ramon,” Bob interjected.

“You know, somehow we both sensed that very thing,” the young man continued. “In fact, even though it was late, we went to Yolanda's home. She and her husband Garond invited us in. He was confined to a wheelchair; that's why I hadn't spent time with him before.”

“I can tell by the warmth in your voice and the expression on your face that this was a really meaningful time for you,” Jack observed candidly as he put his hand on Treyvon's shoulder.

The young man was surprised; no white man had ever touched him with such genuine kindness before. He went on, “Yolanda called our parents and told them where we were, and then she sat us down. She and Garond talked with us for hours. That was the first time in my life an older couple ever took a real interest in me. And it was the first time an older man talked to me like I was a man and not some kid.”

“What do you mean, Treyvon?” Bob broke in, curious as well as in awe of what Lord Jesus can do to bring someone to Himself.

“Neither Garond nor Yolanda preached at us or talked down to us like so many Christians we knew had done over the years. They asked us questions about our lives and shared God's view about how we lived.” (1Timothy 1:13-16) His eyes glistened as he recalled with a grateful heart what happened next. “Both Ramon and I began to feel the hurt our sins had caused God. It must have been close to dawn when he and I knelt down together crying.” (Isaiah 55:6,7) Treyvon inhaled deeply, wrapped up in the emotion of that moment.

Jack waited as the man pulled out his handkerchief to wipe his eyes. “I can see that your life was changed forever from that moment.”

“So many Christians talk about being born again like it's no big deal,” Treyvon snorted. “But that morning Ramon and I really were reborn!” Enthusiasm sounded from his heart. “Garond and Yolanda gave us breakfast and then sent us home. They asked to meet my Mom and Ramon's parents. I didn't understand it then, but I do now after what Bob's been telling me about your way of ministering. They knew we needed the support of our family if we were to go on with Jesus.”

Jack loved hearing authentic, God-honoring testimonies. “And that's one of the things that's hit you about a different way of ministering to the kids in the detention center, isn't it? A family-to-family relationship makes all the difference!”

"I'll say," the young man responded jubilantly. "The Lord was already way ahead of Ramon and me. We found out that Garond and Yolanda had moved into our neighborhood several years earlier and began interceding for all of us. (Isaiah 55: 10,11) Ramon and I were the firstfruits of their prayers! And for months afterward they not only met with Ramon and me; they also became close friends with my Mom and his parents."

Knowing smiles filled the faces of the two older men as Treyvon enthused, "We all became family like I've never seen family! (Psalms 118:15) Because of Garond and Yolanda's love and faith, it didn't seem like it took very long until we were all family of Jesus together." His face grew serious as he added, "The one thing they insisted on is that we stay repentant so that God would continue to answer our prayers. And we knew that how we lived showed whether our trust in Jesus as our Lord was real or just words." (Proverbs 2: 7,8,20,21)

"I see that you understand how important it is to live in a way that pleases our Father and stay repentant the way He wants," (1Thessalonians 4:1) Jack affirmed. "He loves to answer the prayers of those who trust and obey Him!" (Proverbs 15:29)

Bob cut in, "In the weeks Treyvon and I have been discussing the detention center, I've recommended he go to the [**Restoration Ministries website**](#) and read some of the materials."

Jack turned toward the young man with great interest as Treyvon responded earnestly, "Bob had me work through Demolishing Strongholds and watch the Jesus In Your Home videos. Everything I read or watched rang true in my heart! And I could sense that my time with Garond and Yolanda had prepared me for these truths."

"Have you spent any time in the organized church system?" Jack asked.

"For the past year and a half that I've been part of the detention center ministry I've been attending the same church as one of the others guys who volunteers at the center," he answered. "But the congregation itself isn't involved. And to be honest," he sighed heavily, "something inside me has never been at peace or fulfilled there."

Jack could understand. "You're probably recognizing that organized religious systems and the Kingdom of God aren't the same."

The young man nodded avidly, then brought up what was burdening his heart. "Bob told me the insights you shared with the shepherds and their wives when you got together last week. You hit the nail on the head when you said none of us who ministers at the detention center ever had any of the kids into our homes after their release. And," he noted sadly, "middle class men do run the ministry. My heart breaks when I realize that 80% of the kids will return to detention."

"I'm sorry to hear about the frustration that method of ministry has caused you," Jack replied sincerely. For decades he'd carried the same hurt over ministry fruitlessness that he saw in the younger man's face. "But I'm also happy to see you riled enough to do want to do something about it!"

"Jack, it's not just how we minister that hurts," Treyvon added, "but how unwilling the men involved are to question their methods. That really burns me!"

Bob spoke up, "At our shepherd's meeting, someone mentioned an old saying, 'A fool is the lumberman who doesn't stop to sharpen his axe.'"

Treyvon leaned forward on the edge of his seat. "That sure describes what's going on with these guys!" He paused, then observed, "I really like what I'm seeing at that website, Jack. If you and your home fellowship families are serving our Lord Jesus the way I'm seeing there, I really want to learn more. Maybe God would have me come alongside you guys like a disciple."

Jack's spirit could sense the Spirit of Jesus in this eager soul. "Bob and I are just beginning to see how we can help you, Treyvon."

"Jack, you've been walking in Jesus a lot longer than I have," Treyvon humbly voiced. "Please tell me more about how today's idea of 'church' has strayed so far from serving the King of the Kingdom."

Jack summed it up this way: "Much of the American religious system relies on knowledge about God, often emphasizing the parts of the Bible that appeal to the leaders' special interests and ignoring the rest. They attract people through programs and activities that appeal to people's interests — kind of like the world's way." Treyvon nodded he understood and Jack went on, "But the Kingdom depends on spiritual power as the Holy Spirit works in and through authentic Jesus followers. Kingdom folks have absolute confidence in the Spirit of Jesus within us to guide us."

Bob jumped in with another point. "Congregations often minister to others based on a narrow focus on what the religious leaders think people need. But a Kingdom understanding pursues the need of a person to intimately know the only One Who can meet their heart and soul, and pours out to meet other areas of need as well."

"All our home fellowship families have embraced the biblical truth that anyone who encountered Jesus or His disciples encountered the power of God," Jack stated confidently. "As the apostle Paul made clear, The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power." (1 Corinthians 4: 20) Since we've been graced with the power to do our Father's will, everyone in our fellowship families has the same goal: Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

Treyvon's face brightened. "I know what you mean by spiritual power! In the months we got together with Garond and Yolanda, I saw our Father answer prayers all the time. Each time we met we built each other up with testimonies of healings, deliverances, and divine encounters with people." His handsome face grew sad. "But since I've been in this congregation and been part of this ministry, it's all gone. Something's dead around me." (2 Timothy 3: 5)

"I hear what you're saying," Jack empathized. "It's like you initially followed Jesus in His Kingdom, then you got trapped in a religious system. Now you want your first love for Jesus to shine in the opportunity to serve His Kingdom purposes."

"That's exactly what I mean," Treyvon exulted. "I want the Kingdom again!"

The fatherly hearts of Jack and Bob were reflected in their smiles; they weren't going to let Treyvon down. Turning to the two men, Treyvon offered, "I was reading one of the Teaching E-mails on the Restoration Ministries website where they talk about this guy at a retreat center simulating throwing a hand grenade into a group." (**42. Develop Loyalty—Giving Up Your Life For Someone**)

"You're talking about when none of the clergy, 10% of the men, and 50% of the women and teenagers jumped on the hand grenade, right?" Bob asked.

"Yeah, that's it," the young man answered. "Both Garond and Yolanda showed Ramon and me how important it is to be dead to ourselves. (Luke 9:23) They'd left their children and grandchildren back in the suburbs because God had called them as a couple to move into the inner city. I want to be around people again who live this way!"

"As I've talked with Treyvon," Bob smiled at Jack, "he reminds me of how the Psalmist describes a righteous man's life: 'When I called, You answered me; You made me bold and stouthearted.'" (Psalms 138:3)

Treyvon reddened at the praise, but he was thankful to his Lord for the boldness that repentance had produced in him. Jack looked at his watch and realized the men had to get back to work. "Treyvon, we're going to have a picnic with our home fellowship family to discuss participating with you at the detention center. Why don't you come over Sunday and see if this is a faith family you want to belong to?"

Grasping each other's hands, the men joyfully committed their way to the Lord.

45. Being Our Lord's Point Of Contact (Part 3)

"I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some."

Warm sunshine filtered through the backyard trees as the four teenage boys — Josh, Nick, Max and Adam — rounded up the younger children for a laughter-filled kickball game. With satisfied stomachs stretched by the delicious potluck barbecue lunch, the adults of the home fellowship family gathered in a circle in earshot of the kids. Everyone was listening intently to Treyvon as he related his experiences at the Holly Springs Detention Center. The young man was grateful for the sincere interest these brothers and sisters in Jesus had in him and his volunteer work.

"I have to say," Treyvon effused, "how encouraged my heart is as I see such love among you all! I really didn't expect to see such an intergenerational and interracial and intercultural mix in your fellowship family." He paused to look at each welcoming face. "You personify so much of what I believe Jesus wants in relationships." (Galatians 3:28)

Harry spoke for everyone. "The love you see among us is what Jack and Dee have role-modeled. They've made sure we all know how vital it is to live according to our Father's commands as a way of life out of love for our Lord and for one another." (John 15:10)

Juan's youthful face creased with a smile. "We've all tasted Jack's encouraging side. But, he can take us guys to task like a drill instructor if we're slack in leading our families in the way of our Lord!" (1Thessalonians 5:12,13) Everybody chuckled, especially Jack.

"Jack and Dee are like grandparents with intentional purpose, Treyvon," added Jan eagerly, "because they have an eternal view of us and our families. We know they're aimed for the narrow gate, and we're learning from their wisdom as we walk along with them." (Matthew 7:13,14) An atmosphere of joy permeated the air as different ones realized anew how much they'd been changed in their walk together in their Lord. In particular, the Spirit had generated in them a love that made them want to serve others. (Ephesians 4:15,16)

Jerome turned to Treyvon, his face serious. "I've known a number of young guys who've done time at the detention center, but you're the first man I've met who's actually going in to help. What's it really like to minister there?"

Treyvon's face brightened as it hit him how everyone was genuinely intrigued with his work with the kids at the center. All during the barbecue he'd been fielding individual questions. Now as he looked into these eager faces, he saw a faith family that didn't want to fail either him or their Lord.

"The first person who comes to mind is a teen who's Native American and Mexican," he recounted. "For years he lived in a van parked in front of an apartment complex. His dad isn't in the picture now, but he remembers having to bring him home drunk more than once. When I talked with him last week he was really anxious because he had nowhere to go when he was released. So he got into trouble again; that way he could stay in detention where he at least had a bed and meals."

"Are there other boys like him who don't have a place to go when they get out?" Jessica inquired, her voice quivering with sorrow as a young mother.

"Yes," Treyvon answered gravely. "But there are also those who do have a place to go, and the conditions they go back to almost guarantee they'll end up in the center again soon."

"Like what?" Jessica pursued, her brow furrowing.

"Well, one seventeen-year-old I've been trying to help has a girlfriend and baby. They all moved in with his father and stepmother and grandmother after his release, but it's really crowded and chaotic. The young couple has to sleep on a couch, and there's no privacy." He paused and slowly shook his head. "His dad's been in jail a few times, and because of drugs he'll probably go back there again." (Proverbs 26:11)

Lacie's eyes filled with anguish. "Is this pretty typical of the kids you encounter?"

"I'd say so," Treyvon responded as his mind pictured the different boys. "In the years I've been at the detention center I think I met two from what you might call a stable home with a father and mother. The guys messed up, but it wasn't a pattern of trouble in their family life." His gaze lowered as he added, "For most of them, though, their lives outside detention are so bad that 80% end up back in." (Proverbs 13:20)

Jerome was curious. "What's the ethnic and racial makeup of the kids you're working with?"

"The majority are Latinos and Blacks," Treyvon answered, well aware that he was among them not many years back.

Lita had heard there were a lot of troubled Latino teens in their town and her heart reached out to Treyvon. "It must be very difficult to want to help these boys and know there's so much going against your efforts."

The young man sighed deeply. "It's hard. If it weren't for Jesus and my love for Him I would have stopped a long time ago." A fresh wave of sorrow hit him. "Last night at detention was really painful. One of the boys I'd been working with for a while was going to be released. But his mother, who'd been clean for 6 months, failed a meth test and his hope of a place to go was shattered. He's full of anger now because it was his mom who'd turned him in for being high on drugs and alcohol, and now she's back into it."

The group shared his discouragement for a moment; then Keisha asked softly, "Have there been any success stories?"

Treyvon looked up, a small smile reflecting his hope. "Yeah, there's a nineteen-year-old who's been raised by his grandmother. He joined a gang when he was 14 and ended up in Holly Springs. After he surrendered his life to Jesus as his Lord, a family with five kids took him in. He's been part of their family for the past year and a half." His smile grew larger as he

went on, “He has a dream to be a chef. He’s now going to culinary school and working at a restaurant. But his biggest realization has been that he has to stay away from his old homies and his former way of life.” (Psalm 1:1,6)

“Is this kid’s experience what got you thinking there must be a better way to minister to these guys than what you’ve been doing?” Nate asked.

“For sure,” Treyvon nodded. “I can see that it isn’t what we do in the detention center that matters as much as what needs to be done after the boy is released.”

“Explain that more for us,” Jack asked kindly.

Treyvon’s deep voice intensified. “Our ministry to the kids doesn’t have any follow-up after they get out. All we do is minister while they’re in the center. I think that’s the main reason so many return to their old ways and friends and end up in detention again.” (2Peter 2: 22)

“You told me earlier while we were eating,” Brett interjected, “that the ministry you’re with works with the kids only while they’re confined. Therefore they have no incentive to keep in contact with the volunteer after they’re out.”

“That’s true,” Treyvon agreed. “And the law forbids volunteers from pursuing the kids once they’re released. If the guys want to be in contact with us, they have to initiate it.”

Jack could sense that the fellowship family had a good feel for the young man as well as the fruitless nature of the ministry he was in. “We could ask more questions, Treyvon, but I suspect some of you are already being spurred by the Holy Spirit to do something about it.”

Juan looked at his wife for a nod of confirmation. “Lita and I would like to get involved in wherever this is going to lead. It’s time we help our Latino people, and Lita and I speak Spanish fluently.” He added beaming, “Now that I’m out of the Army and staying in this area, we have the time and opportunity to do something to help others.”

Jerome jumped on board after he heard Keisha whisper to him, “Let’s do it!” “We’d like to get involved too.”

“Could you use some teens?” Josh, Nick, Max and Adam had sat down nearby, supervising the younger kids from a short distance. “The boys will need some friends who aren’t like their old ones.”

Jack looked at Treyvon warmly. “I guess you can see we want to help!”

Treyvon’s face expressed the joy in his heart. And when he heard even the boys volunteer, tears trailed down his cheeks.

Dee made her way over to him and wrapped comforting arms around his broad shoulders. His tears were a release from having borne years of sadness that needed to be poured out.

A single voice began singing, “We praise your name, Lord Jesus...,” and others joined in gratefully for having witnessed the Spirit of Jesus bring together hearts aligned to do His will. (Hebrews 13:15)

After a time of praise and thanksgiving, Lacie asked, “What’s next?”

Jack looked around with love, knowing that the faith family trusted the Spirit to give him discernment when their Lord was casting a new vision in their midst. “We need to start praying and fasting, seeking our Lord to put together how He wants us to participate individually and collectively,” (Romans 12: 4-7,27) he noted earnestly.

“I can see we need to research the laws and regulations that pertain to ministering in Holly Springs,” Harry offered. “I’ll be glad to look into it.”

Jack nodded approvingly, then turned to Treyvon. “Do you want to be part of what we’re proposing?”

“Yes, sir!” came the resounding reply.

“Then the first thing we need is for Dee and me to meet your Mom, Garond and Yolanda, and anyone else in your life you think we should get to know,” Jack urged. “We’re a movement of family and extended spiritual family, and we rely on points of contact with families and extended family (Philippians 2:19-25). Before you become our point of contact at the detention center, we want to get to know your family, both spiritual and biological.”

“I’ll do that,” Treyvon grinned broadly. “You guys are the first people who ever even asked about my family!” (2Timothy 1:5)

“You’ll find that relationships among Jesus followers are the backbone of the Kingdom rather than singular individuals,” Dee stated encouragingly. “Taking the time to develop meaningful relationships in the Kingdom is what helps each of us stand when demonic assaults come. All those spiritual warfare commands in Ephesians 6:10-18 are in the plural — we do it together!”

“And it’s those relationships as family in Jesus,” her husband added, “that help the work we do together to far exceed any individual effort or expectation.” (Ecclesiastes 4: 12)

By now all the children had come to the circle and were seated on any available lap. As this loving gathering ended their time together in praise and prayer, Treyvon understood more deeply Jesus’s definition of His family: “Whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.” (Matthew 12:50)

46. Being Our Lord's Point Of Contact (Part 4)

“They loved each other as they loved themselves.”

After the supper remnants had been put away Dee was eager to know more about the three women sitting at the kitchen table. Meanwhile, Garond, Jack, Treyvon, and Ramon and his father, Isiah, had already been sharing some of their history in the living room. Garond's face crinkled with a smile as he turned to Jack. “From the time Treyvon had lunch with you he hasn't stopped talking about you and your desire to get involved at the detention center.”

“It's going to take a lot of prayer and fasting before we're in a position to effectively help,” Jack responded, warmly returning the older man's smile. “This is a whole new arena of outreach for our faith family, and I know it's going to stretch us all in ways we can't imagine.” He paused briefly, looking directly at Garond as he added, “We don't want to start something without everyone understanding and embracing what it will cost them.” (Luke 14:31)

Garond appreciated that foresight. “You're wise to take the time to prepare before you act. Poor preparation is what got me into this wheelchair.”

“How so?” asked Jack, surprised and intrigued.

All eyes were riveted on Garond, whose expression tightened as he recounted that pivotal event. “I was a crewman aboard choppers in 'Nam back in the early 70s. After a long day of flying we returned late, and the pilot decided not to top off the fuel tank. We had about a quarter tank left as I recall.” His voice shook slightly as he continued, “In the middle of the night we got an emergency call for a medevac. The pilot told us we had enough fuel to make it there and back. We didn't. The chopper went down and I broke my back in the crash. That's when I lost use of my legs.”

Jack, always alert for any signs of bitterness, detected none in the man seated across from him. “Is it because you've gotten use to it over the years that I don't hear any bitterness in your voice?” he inquired.

Garond brightened visibly as he replied, “On no! It's far more than that! I was bitter, real bitter, after the accident. I spent months in recovery angry with everyone. But there was another patient worse off than I was, and he had a sister.” He raised his eyebrows for effect. “Yolanda came to visit him several times a week.”

Knowing grins broke out among the men as they knew the happy ending. “She had a face like an angel,” he glowed. “And even though my attitude turned everyone else off, not her! She always came over to talk with me. You might say I was the leper nobody wanted to be around.” That was hard to believe from this man whose heart was reflected in his glistening eyes. “But Yolanda, she never hid her trust in Jesus. She just kept telling me about His love for me.”

Garond's audience was spellbound and Jack teased him. “If your smile gets any bigger, you're going to find it hard to talk!” Affectionate laughter greeted that remark.

When he finally stopped laughing Garond continued, “Yolanda kept coming to see me even after her brother was released. One day she stuck a Bible in my chest and ordered me to start reading it.” He chuckled at the memory of how such a sweet-natured person could be so forceful with him. Then he repeated to these brothers in Christ the very words she'd declared to him those many years ago: “You want to see me again, you're going to read this from front to back! I'll be here tomorrow and we'll talk about the Book of Genesis. And all my friends who love Jesus have been praying and fasting for you, so you don't have a choice!”

Ramon piped up loudly, “What'd you do?”

“Oh, I started reading,” Garond retorted as he turned to the young man. “But it wasn't her tone that got me going; it was the love of Jesus I saw in her. I wanted to know the kind of love she had.” (Ephesians 3:14-19)

“So everyday she came and talked about the Bible with you?” Treyvon asked, gaining fuller admiration of the steadfast loyalty of this kindly woman of God.

“The very next day when she came back we discussed the Book of Genesis. But... I read the entire Bible in under two weeks for myself,” Garond gleamed. “When I read about the adversities other men faced like Joseph, Daniel, and Paul, I saw how God used these for a greater purpose. That's when I knew God had used the helicopter crash to bring me not only to Yolanda but to HIMSELF!”

An expectant hush filled the room. “One night after lights out, Jesus's love for me flooded my heart. I didn't want to live in control of me anymore, and I sure didn't want to be controlled by sin anymore either. I finally saw how out of love Jesus had taken my sins on Himself, so like a little child I asked the Father to forgive me and let me be His child. It may sound strange,” Garond's eyes widened as he recalled that night, “but I sensed the room was filled to capacity with angels singing all around me!”

Every face was awash in tears of joy, something they couldn't hold back when they'd seen the Spirit of Christ at work creating hope where there'd been hopelessness.

Wrapping up his testimony on a victorious note Garond marveled, “A year later we were married, and now we have three wonderful children and six grandchildren.”

“I can hear your gratefulness to our Lord for His blessings to you,” Jack remarked. “Do you mind if I ask how you moved to the neighborhood you now live in?”

“After I began to follow Jesus, Yolanda and I prayed about what Jesus meant for us when He said, ‘For where two or three come together in My name, there am I with them.’ (Matthew 18:20) We realized our Lord wanted the two of us to look inside ourselves and trust His Spirit for guidance.”

“So you weren’t nervous about just trusting Jesus and following through in whatever He made clear to you?” Isiah pursued.

“Nervous? Not one bit,” Garond chuckled confidently. “Trusting Jesus as Lord of all my life has been the easiest thing I’ve ever done!”

The other men were heartened by such affirmation of the older man’s intimacy with his Lord. “It’s like how Jesus described a born again person, the way He gives us certainty we can trust His Spirit’s guidance. He said, ‘The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.’ (John 3:8) Remember,” Garond said, “I’d been a military man under orders, sometimes not knowing if I’d come back alive. So taking orders from the Spirit was no big deal. (Matthew 8:5-10) It was ten years ago He told us to move here and reach out to the neighborhood we’re in now.”

Jack knew he and Garond were almost the same age, and he’d truly met a brother who was a shepherd after his own heart. “What has Treyvon told you about us?”

“After Bob encouraged him to go the Restoration Ministries website, Treyvon asked Yolanda and me to do the same,” Garond replied. “He wanted us to confirm what he was investigating, and it didn’t take more than reading their Home page to realize we shared the same kindred spirit about the Kingdom of God. So every day Yolanda and I revisit the website and read more.” The man glowed with joy. “Our hearts are set on fulfilling our Father’s purposes. That’s why I was really looking forward to meeting you, Jack!”

Jack slid out of his chair and knelt alongside Garond’s wheelchair. They hugged and cried, rejoicing in having met each other. The younger men looked on appreciatively.

As Jack returned to his seat and wiped his eyes, Ramon asked him pointedly, “What do you see are the main hurdles in helping the boys in the detention center?”

“I’d like to hear about that too,” Isiah chimed in as the others agreed.

Jack took a moment since he fully understood the seriousness of Ramon’s question. These men all shared a great concern for Treyvon and wanted confirmation themselves that he wasn’t wasting his time working with Jack’s fellowship. “In our faith family, two couples, one Black and one Latino, plus four teens want to be on the front lines, and others will intercede and help in other ways.” He spoke decisively. “We know it will take the personal involvement of truly committed people to help the boys AFTER they’re out of the detention center. I’ve always been encouraged by Isaiah 32:8, ‘The noble man makes noble plans, and by noble deeds he stands.’ We want the Lord to be as much in the planning and preparation as we need His power and grace when we begin to minister.” The men all nodded approvingly at that piece of wisdom.

“The issue for these boys, as it is for all who’ve lived at the bottom of society,” Jack continued soberly, “is one of freedom. The Civil Rights Movement tried to gain freedom through non-violent means by relying on large numbers of people to stand their ground.”

Garond interjected energetically, “I was at the Washington Mall when Martin Luther King gave his speech. In fact, I shook his hand!”

Jack leaned toward his new brother, sadness in his voice. “Now, over 40 years later, tell me what fruit of that movement you see.”

“Well, while some blacks and minorities have gained a measure of economic success,” Garond reported with a frown, “racism and inequality are sure still with us. And to be honest, it hurts me to see how little we really have gained.”

Jack felt Garond’s sorrow. “Then please be my judge in what I’m going to say. True freedom, whether it’s spiritual, emotional or societal, starts with seeking the authentic kind of freedom Jesus promises. (John 8:36) Someone who’s really free can take a stand with Him and for Him. And,” he went on firmly, “as the Bible shows us with people like Joseph, David, and Daniel and his friends, when you stand for our Lord, He’ll stand with you.”

“Can you clarify that a little more for me?” Treyvon asked intently.

Jack’s voice was sure in spirit. “Our Lord looks for a person to take one step of obedience on His behalf. Think about it. The shepherd boy David stood up to the giant Goliath because of the Name and reputation of the One True God. (1 Samuel 17:45) Daniel and the three young Hebrews stood up for their faith in their Lord and He stood with them in Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace fire.” (Daniel 3:19-25)

Garond’s face dawned with new understanding. “I see what you’re saying, Jack. In the Civil Rights Movement we were protesting for our own rights. We were counting on large crowds to get our point across rather than the power of Jesus on those who stand for Him. Genuine freedom does begin with Jesus and flows out of the freedom only He can give.” He stopped for a moment, a wry grin on his wrinkled features. “I don’t mean to sound offensive, but if we minorities wait for the white man to give us freedom, we’ll just keep getting the crumbs we’ve gotten these past 40 years.”

“I couldn’t have said it better, Garond,” Jack concurred. “And I’ve realized something about those boys in the detention center, too. The men who minister to them keep quoting Bible verses to them, but what they really need is the reality of Jesus in their lives. To most of these kids,” he went on, “Jesus is more like a story character, or someone old people lean on. The Bible means nothing to them!”

“So what you’re saying,” Ramon noted eagerly, “is that the boys will discover Jesus as their own Way and Truth and Life when they encounter free people who share testimony of how our Lord stood by them and intervened in their lives! (John 14:12-14) This is the true freedom of turning away from the darkness of sin’s control and turning to the Light of forgiveness and His Spirit’s power.” (John 8:12; 12:46)

“The [*Restoration Ministries website*](#) calls these living testimonies ‘God sightings’,” Treyvon inserted animatedly. “God sightings are a normal way of life for those who collectively live repentantly and obediently in the Christ they love and serve.” (Acts 26:20)

Garond rejoined, “That’s what so encouraged Yolanda and me when we spent time at the site! The Spirit had already shown us about communal righteousness. And as Treyvon and Ramon can attest, we insisted on all of us remaining repentant.”

“As we’ve stayed repentant,” Ramon added jubilantly, “we’ve sure had our share of God sightings!”

“When you think about repentance,” Garond mused, “we’re asking our Father for forgiveness and affirming to Him that we want to do things according to His Word. Our repentance shows God we really want to change.”

“That’s the bull’s eye of true repentance,” smiled Jack. “Forgiveness, given and received, both with our Father in heaven and with all people, is the way to true freedom. (Ephesians 4:32-5:2) And with freedom in Christ, there truly is hope!”

Garond summed it up. “So our focus must be on Jesus Who enables us to forgive and be free. It’s the same for everyone, whether you’re a boy in a detention center or an individual seeking racial equality.” He sighed. “We in the Civil Rights Movement were never truly free. As long as any of us held unforgiveness toward the white man, we were still slaves — spiritually and emotionally.” (John 8:31-34)

“Only someone who’s been forgiven and has forgiven others is truly free,” exulted Treyvon. “And only a free person can help others be free!”

It was as if the Spirit had given all of them His eyes of understanding. His heart overflowing with delight, Garond asked the men to hold hands as he prayed. A renewed determination to love and serve their Lord filled them all — and they hadn’t even yet heard about what the ladies had discussed!

47. Being Our Lord's Point Of Contact (Part 5)

“Those who who fear the LORD and honor His name talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard.”

While the men had gathered in the living room, Dee, Yolanda, Treyvon's mother Ayanna, and Jasmine, Ramon's mother, gathered around the kitchen table. In the brief time they'd spent together, there was already a sense that they were sisters in their mutual love of Jesus.

“Did you all grow up nearby?” Dee asked, sensing familiar warmth among the three other ladies.

As the women nodded, Yolanda replied, “We all grew up within a few blocks of each other. I'm a lot older than my friends here, but you get to know each other when you live in the same neighborhood.”

“Please, don't be offended,” Dee smiled earnestly, “but I'd like to know what it was like growing up in the inner city and staying to raise your kids here.”

Ayanna fielded this with a sad shake of her head. “Growing up in the inner city you see so many bad things. Gangs have been here as long as I can remember. In fact,” she grimaced sadly, “I lost my cousin in a drive-by shooting. Guns are a way of life here, and the street talk is, you kill or get killed.” (Psalms 12:8)

“Drug dealers on the corners making a sale in daylight is normal, Dee,” added Ramon's mom, Jasmine. “And if we see it all the time, we wonder why the police can't see it too. I guess they're too busy with murders and break-ins to bother.”

Ayanna quickly cut in, “We know it's happening, so we just try to stay away from those areas and warn our kids to avoid them too. But I can tell you this: most families around here either have someone doing drugs or selling them.”

Dee's eyes filled with sympathy as she recalled her own childhood surrounded by peaceful homes and secure play areas for all the children. She turned as Yolanda, seated next to her, added another dimension of hardship in the inner city. “Decent housing is a real problem. When I was growing up, our family lived in a condemned building for several years. My father lost his job so he turned to the streets and started hustling to scrape up some money. Finally he just gave up and left us.”

“Things got so bad for my father being out of work so much,” interjected Ayanna, “that one night he got drunk and lined us all up to shoot us right there in the kitchen!”

“What happened?” Dee asked incredulously.

The younger woman went on, “I was the oldest and the first one he wanted to shoot. I just ran out the house screaming and he chased me. Praise God, he ran out of breath somewhere along the sidewalk.” The whole memory saddened her as she continued, “I saw him crumple down on the cement and start to sob. The next day he left and we didn't hear from him for years.”

Dee leaned over to gently touch her arm. “How did your family get by after that?”

“Well,” Ayanna sighed, “Mama struggled to keep food on the table for the six of us. We were on welfare and spent a lot of time in food lines at some of the area churches.”

Dee said softly, “Ayanna, even with what you went through, I don't hear any bitterness as you're recounting it.”

“That's because you need to hear what Jesus did!” she responded, excitement replacing somberness. “For years I was so bitter toward my father. I'd shake with anger whenever I thought about him. And I made sure I told everyone I met about what he'd done to us.” Then she looked gratefully at Yolanda across from her. “When Ramon asked me to meet Garond and Yolanda, who'd moved in down the street several years back, things changed in my life. Wow, did they change!”

“How so?” Dee asked, rapt with interest.

“After we got together a few times, I was just about to tell Yolanda my horror story,” Ayanna continued. “But she wouldn't let me talk! Instead, she said, ‘From this day forward you're going to see what Jesus can do about your past.’” Her face brightened as she recalled, “She and Garond helped me and Isiah demolish our strongholds; these had kept us both in a prison of bad memories and responses for as far back as I can recall. (2Corinthians 10:3-5) But when we renounced them in the name of Jesus, we were able to hear clearly from the Holy Spirit to turn from our sin and draw near to our heavenly Father through Jesus. For the first time I was able to truly forgive my Dad from my heart for what he did.” She paused to gather her thoughts.

Jasmine turned to Dee with a grin. “She hasn't got to the best part yet...”

Ayanna smiled at her old friend. “About two years ago I ran into my father while I was going into Walmart. Our conversation was short, but I noticed I didn't have any bad feelings toward him. As he was walking away he told me where he was staying.” She reached over the table for Yolanda's hand. “I came right over and told Yolanda. After we prayed together she told me in no uncertain words, ‘I want you to go to your father and ask forgiveness from him for the years you were bitter toward him in your heart. (Matthew 18:35) And then ask him to help you love him the way Jesus would love him.’” (1Peter 1:22)

“Wow!” Dee responded, astonished at such a bold step of obedient love for their Lord. “So did you?”

“When it registered just how much sin my Lord had forgiven me of, I knew I had to do this. Besides,” she added fervently, “how else could my dad see the love of Christ in me if I was choosing to be unforgiving toward him?” (1John 4:20)

After they all marveled at the greatness of their God and His transforming power, Ayanna added, “There’s one more point I need to share. Not long after I asked Dad’s forgiveness and asked him to help me love him like Jesus would, we got together again. While I was praying, I heard the Holy Spirit tell me, ‘Ask your dad to tell his life story.’ As soon as I asked him about his early years, he opened up.”

Tears brimmed and she took a deep breath. “I didn’t know the utter poverty he grew up in. His parents abandoned him when he was three and he was raised by his grandmother on sharecropper’s land. He didn’t have a pair of shoes to call his own til he was 13! And the more I heard, the more I was ashamed I’d ever held an ill feeling against him.”

Dee had no idea that people from her own generation had lived through such difficult circumstances. But her heart lifted with joy knowing the deep healing that only an authentic trust relationship with Lord Jesus can bring about. “How is your relationship with your father now?” she asked.

“Dad and I see each other every day now!” beamed Ayanna. “Being able to talk about his past without anyone blaming him or accusing him gave him the respect he’d longed for all his life. I’ve now become his caregiver as his health has gotten worse,” she went on, love radiating from her face. “But every day new positive memories are being formed between us. And the best part is that Dad is now following Jesus too with his whole heart and soul, seeking each day to live in a way that honors his Lord!”

Dee mirrored the delight in the other caring faces. Then the Holy Spirit seemed to impress on her that this time set apart to get to know one another had a deeper purpose. “I feel like our Lord has brought me here for some special reason besides my joy in our time of sharing. Could you please describe for me what it’s been like, raising your children here?”

“Survival, just being able to survive, is the attitude of most of the people,” Jasmine blurted. “Living here isn’t much different than being in a prison. So many people are hopeless because they can’t see a way out for themselves or their kids.”

“What are the schools like here?” Dee pushed, knowing that many parents where she lived set their hope on their children getting a diploma and going to college or learning a trade.

Jasmine’s sunny face fell into despair. “I have an 11-year-old daughter, Malia, and I’m praying about what to do with her. She’s repeatedly being beaten up and bullied in school. (Psalms 10:2) I’ve gone to the administration with six others families, but the principal seemed helpless to do anything to stop it.”

“What you’ve just said, Jasmine, is going on in all the schools around here,” Yolanda added seriously. “Garond and I use our home in the afternoon to tutor latchkey kids, and they tell us the same horror stories. And when we talk to their parents, they’re scared about their kids being in the public school too. They know it’s chaos there, but what can we do?”

“What about home schooling the children?” Dee asked, knowing that that was the course of action chosen by their fellowship families.

Ayanna snorted. “Home schooling, isn’t that for the rich and the smart?”

“Not at all,” Dee answered with an assuring smile. She sensed she now knew why God had her meeting with these ladies. Turning to Yolanda she continued, “I have a lot of experience in home schooling. Maybe you and I can not only help Malia learn in security and tranquility, but the kids from the other six families and many more as well.”

“Are you asking me to volunteer for something?” Yolanda replied, her dark eyes gleaming as she was catching hold of what Dee’s proposal really meant.

“You may want to pray more about it, but I think an avenue may be opening from God for you and Garond to do far more than tutor after school,” Dee affirmed. “Home schooling isn’t just education from textbooks and repeating the facts on tests,” she added. “Our fellowship families understand that their children are given to them by our Father to train up to live His ways. (Genesis 18:19) That takes far more role modeling and loving interaction than before and after school allows.”

“I hear what you’re saying,” concurred Ayanna with some doubt in her voice, “but I only have a high school diploma. I didn’t go to college, and I sure don’t feel qualified to teach Malia, even though she’s only in sixth grade.”

“What you can offer your daughter,” smiled Dee gently, “is the security of your love and the opportunity to instill the character qualities of Jesus in her even while she’s meeting all the state requirements for learning.” (Deuteronomy 6:5-7) She leaned forward, glowing as she encouraged this mother with a whole new perspective on ‘education’. “Malia’s wondering if she’s going to become just another used-up, bullied girl like those all around her at school. And she’s not alone! Those other 6 families who showed up at the meeting want more for their kids too! And,” she smiled, “I’ve never met a home schooling family who wasn’t eager to share their own journey of how they began and why they’re still educating their kids at home. The families in our fellowship would be delighted, I know, to help you get started.”

Yolanda was beaming. “I’ve had so much practice with these after school kids that I’d love to help you with this, Jasmine! Just think of it: being able to undergird all aspects of your daughter’s learning with the character and truth of our God! You’ve got me thinking about my own grandbabies, Dee,” she added with a twinkle. “They’re all out in the suburbs, but I know their parents are really concerned about the humanist focus at their schools, and how hectic their lives are with outside activities when they’re not in classes. You’ve planted some seeds for prayer for me and Garond!”

Hope was starting to rise for both Jasmine and Ayanna, whose many friends were also deeply troubled by the chaos and safety issues at their children’s schools. “Could you help us check this out, Dee? I mean, it sounds too good to be true, that any of us could educate our kids ourselves. Like, for instance, what would Malia do about things like chemistry and algebra? I wouldn’t be much help there.”

Chuckles filled the kitchen as Dee replied, “You’d be amazed at how our Father can put together opportunities with others to handle areas you may not feel comfortable with. But I know that the curriculum some of our fellowship families are us-

ing,” she added confidently, “not only puts God at the center of all areas of learning, but also lays out the instruction in such a way that you’re learning together. And yes, there’s opportunity with the program I’m talking about for one set to be used with kids from grades 3 through 12. So you don’t have to be either rich or highly educated to help your children learn to live God’s way!”

Eyes of wonder reflected hearts burgeoning with hope for new purpose in living in the inner city. And Dee couldn’t wait to talk with Jack and with the fellowship family to come alongside these dear ones with wisdom they’d gleaned from experience as well as resource materials she knew they’d be glad to share.

Jasmine eyed Dee with appreciation. “You’ve given me something I could only have dreamed about, Dee — hope that my daughter wouldn’t have to repeat the same cycle of despair that Isiah and I experienced at that age. I look forward to discussing this more with you and your faith family. The sooner Malia is out of that situation, the better for us all!”

And the story goes on far beyond these chapters!

August 4, 2022



Many of the encounters and stories you've read in Kingdom Living Today come from our own personal experience. We are not exceptional people; just a couple who love our Lord Jesus and seek to glorify our heavenly Father by our lives. Once we left the religious establishment and by His grace instilled the Hebraic foundations which our Father is restoring, our lives became interactive with Him as His Spirit kept revealing His purposes in and through us. There's nothing you read in this article that can't be yours if Jesus is Lord of your life!

Our Father has drawn us to find our personal identity in our Lord Jesus and to live by the four attributes below that must be at the core of each person who claims to belong to our Lord Jesus – each individual, each marriage, each fellowship family:

- 1. Your life revolves personally around the Headship of Lord Jesus in bringing glory to your heavenly Father through doing His will.** (John 15:5-8; Ephesians 1:15-23)
- 2. You live repentantly by grace, and help others live likewise in love-enacted communal righteousness within the relational connectedness of a home fellowship, ensuring that your Father hears and answers your prayers.** (Psalms 34:14,15; Ephesians 4:15,16)
- 3. You diligently seek the Holy Spirit's *rhema* so that by the Spirit you are able to specifically carry out your Father's will and glorify Jesus.** (John 16:13; Romans 8:14)
- 4. The aroma of Jesus is manifested in and through you, beginning with His love, forgiveness and compassion even for those who persecute you.** (Ephesians 4:32; Matthew 5:44)