

Kingdom Living Today

Illustrating the WAY of God's Kingdom for a Modern World

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 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.”

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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 is 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."

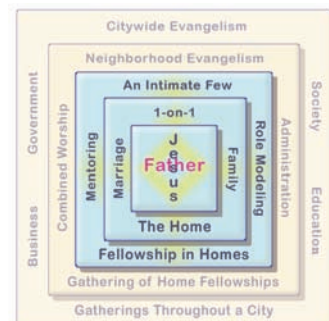
Jack looked at both men intently. "Both these series make very clear the primary relational priorities of the earliest followers of Jesus. These priorities seem to have fallen by the wayside over the centuries, but they were so important to Jesus' followers as an understood way of life."

"Well, you've got my attention." Brett leaned forward. "What are these priorities?"

Jack grabbed a clean 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



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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 "loadbearing" relationships,^(Galatians 6:2) those we interact with through the "one-another" commands in the Newer Testament."^(such as 1 Thessalonian 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)