

Kingdom Living Today

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

12. Let God guide your differences.

“YOU ARE MY BODY MADE UP OF ITS
VARIOUS BODY PARTS, AND THESE PARTS
DO NOT ALL HAVE THE SAME FUNCTION.
YOU EACH HAVE DIFFERENT GIFTS,
ACCORDING TO THE GRACE I’VE GIVEN YOU.
SO, BE DEVOTED TO ONE ANOTHER
IN BROTHERLY LOVE.
HONOR ONE ANOTHER ABOVE YOURSELVES”

The three families smiled joyfully at one another as they 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 both -- 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.”

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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.”

“That’s right, Brett. And this is where the principle of establishing personal *halakhahs*, your specific applications from God’s Word, is so important for all of us.” (Matthew 16:19; 18:18) He went on, “We don’t all have to apply His Word the same way. But we do need to respect the legitimate applications of each family’s goals and values.”

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)