

Kingdom Living Today

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

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 ANOTH-
ER 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

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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 chuckled, 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 Cor. 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.