

# Kingdom Living Today

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

## 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 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.”

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"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 "dirtied" 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 queried 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 reflected *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.*"

"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.

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“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.