

# Kingdom Living Today

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

## 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.<sup>(Psalms 22:24)</sup> 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.”<sup>(Psalms 46:1)</sup>

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.<sup>(John 3:8)</sup>

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

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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 strong-

holds, 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.