

Kingdom Living Today

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

17. A Life-giving Rebuke is a Christ-like Expression of Love

“THE EARNEST COUNSEL OF ONE WHO TRULY CARES
FOR YOUR WELL-BEING IS MORE PRECIOUS THAN
ALL THE RICHES OF THE WORLD.
WHEN YOU GIVE A LIFE-GIVING REBUKE, YOU ARE
DISPLAYING YOUR LOVE FOR THAT PERSON. ”

Harry breathed a prayer as he got out of his car in front of his brother's house. They hadn't seen one another in quite awhile, and he knew that even when they did talk, Scott always had a tough time hearing anything from his younger brother — even if they were both in their 40's now.

“Harry, you drove a long way just to spend time with me! There's got to be something in this visit you didn't mention on the phone,” Scott probed with his usual direct style as they hugged at the front door.

Harry laughed as they walked inside the stylish home. “Actually, it's a trip of love. I really wanted to see you, Scott, and yes, there's an important reason I came.” He knew he had his brother's attention as he added, “It's something I hope we can both talk through to a positive conclusion.”

It was a warm day so Scott suggested they sit out in the backyard where they could talk alone undisturbed. As they settled into comfortable seats on the deck Harry asked Scott if he could lead them in prayer before they began to talk. Scott was a little startled but agreed as Harry committed their time together into the Lord's hands, asking Him for wisdom.

“Scott, you know that Jan and I left the organized religious system some months ago,” Harry began. His brother nodded and Harry continued, “We've been changed so much as we began to apply the Hebraic foundations that guided the first followers of Jesus.” He paused then added, “It hasn't been easy since so much of my old thinking had to be tossed out.”

Scott was surprised at that. “I don't know what you mean. I always thought you and Jan were good Christians.”

Harry smiled, realizing that his brother's perception pretty much voiced the view of most of their relatives who regularly attended Sunday services but had little regard for God the rest of the week. Wanting to make a point he pressed on, “I think the words of Jesus best capture what's happened to us these past months: *“No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins.”*(Mark 2:21,22) Jan and I now see ourselves as new wineskins becoming filled with new wine.”

“I guess I don't understand,” his older brother responded. He was somewhat familiar with Scripture but hadn't ever seen it as God's way for His people to live.

“Let me explain,” Harry replied earnestly. “Jan and I have set our hearts on being

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totally committed to follow Jesus. To us He is the ‘Pearl of great price.’ (Matthew 13:45,46) That means we’re willing to forfeit everything for our marriage to grow in Him and to do our part in His Kingdom no matter what it costs us.” (Ephesians 5:8-10)

“I thought you were both sold out to Jesus before.” Scott was genuinely confused by his brother’s words. “I mean, you were a leader in your church and Jan was teaching Sunday school,” he retorted, feeling uncomfortable with the direction this was going. Yet he could see in Harry a conviction that had never been there before. Scott found himself actually envying his younger brother’s certainty about Christ.

Harry shook his head, “We realized we didn’t know anything about loving Jesus and living to please our Father! When Jan and I were in the religious system we were just doing our part to keep the system running despite the unresolved problems in our marriage.” That got Scott’s attention, since he realized there was plenty between him and his own wife that needed healing. Harry went on, “Most people who knew us didn’t notice how much tension there was between Jan and me, though our son sure knew. All we had to do was just put on a smiling “Christian” face and pretend everything was okay.”

“Isn’t that what’s expected of Christians? Aren’t we supposed to gut it out and just keep plodding along?” Scott asked, his heart yearning for some sort of resolution to the emotional tension he and Kim struggled with daily.

Harry was elated that Scott, who over the years had seldom asked him questions about anything, was now inquiring. That meant he really wanted to know. “That’s what Jan and I believed until we became acquainted with a ministry that showed us the basis to the spiritual power and relational intimacy the first followers of Jesus had.” Harry’s voice lifted with the grateful joy in his heart as he went on, “Over these past months of being outside the religious establishment, we’ve diligently cooperated with the Holy Spirit in making our marriage reflect Jesus at work in and through us. (1 Peter 1:22) It’s out of the loving motivation of Jesus that we minister to others from our marriage—something totally different than when we ministered *despite* the painful shape our marriage was in.”

Scott looked away for a moment then confessed, “To be honest with you, Kim and I talked about the changes we saw in you and Jan on our way home from Dad and Mom’s anniversary. In fact, she commented about how much you two smile at each other, and how peaceful your faces are.” He paused, then chuckled. “She thought it was a little ridiculous that a couple your age could have so much affection between you. But I have to tell you, bro, I envied you two.”

Harry smiled affectionately at his brother. “To the earliest followers of Jesus, the highest gift a man could get from God was a wife. (Proverbs 18:22) And, whatever depth of relationship a husband claimed to have with our Lord Jesus had to be seen in the love he has for his wife. The same kind of love followers of Jesus are to have for Him is the same kind they are called to have for their wife!” (Ephesians 5:25)

“So you’re saying that if I truly love Jesus, then I need to be showing that kind of love to Kim,” Scott ventured.

“Right on, brother,” replied Harry. “It’s through the humility of loving our wives, and even confronting them when it’s necessary, that we men grow in the kind of love for them that Jesus wants. And, if He’s Lord of our lives, He gives us His Spirit to do it!”

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Scott was quiet for a moment. When he spoke, his voice was heavy. “I don’t think I’ve ever considered Kim the highest gift God could give me. In many ways our marriage is “convenient” for me. For the most part, she has her life and her friends, and I have mine.” Tears moistened eyes. “So often we don’t even know how to have a conversation with each other except when it comes to discussing the kids or chores.”

“Jan and I sensed this at Dad and Mom’s anniversary, and that’s why I wanted to come and see you.” Harry put his hand on Scott’s shoulder. (Proverbs 27:17) “We’ve both been praying for you two and believe your marriage needs the same foundations that ours is being built on. And, that foundation is for a husband and wife to help each other become more like Jesus in their relationship with one another.” (1 Peter 3:6,7)

“Is that possible for Kim and me?” Scott blurted doubtfully, beginning to realize how much he needed the relationship with Jesus his brother had.

“Absolutely! We’ve seen the fruit of it in our own lives — Jan and I feel like newly weds!” Harry’s eyes twinkled as he pictured his beloved wife. “There is love in our hearts that we never could have imagined. It’s the kind of love only the indwelling Spirit of Jesus can give you for each other, no matter what’s happened in the past.”

Scott sighed as he pondered his own situation. “Well, you two are certainly living proof that people can change. I’ll say that.” Then he added ruefully, “But you know how Kim is. She’s a very controlling woman that *nobody*, including me, wants to get on the wrong side of.”

“I know that, Scott,” Harry replied encouragingly. “But ALL women are born with a desire to rule their homes; that goes all the way back to Eve. (Genesis 3:16) That’s where we husbands need to step up to the plate and not duck our responsibilities to our wives.” Wanting to anchor the nature of the marriage relationship from God’s perspective, he added, “After all, ‘*a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He’s the Savior.*’” (Ephesians 5:23)

Scott countered softly, “I know that verse. It’s haunted me all our marriage.”

Harry could feel the regret his brother was experiencing at that moment. “It’s not too late to change, Scott, and to cry out to Jesus for His Spirit to bring this about. I’m not saying it’ll be easy, but it’s worth it.” Harry knew that what he was about to say would pain his brother, but he pressed on. “You need to realize that a wife is either a public compliment for her husband or a public rebuke.”

“How’s that?” Scott asked, never having heard that before.

“The unresolved tensions in your marriage have been affecting the rest of us for years,” answered Harry. “Think about all the family gatherings when your wife yelled at you, ‘Scott, do this!’, or, ‘Scott, get that!’ All the rest of us just cringed.”

Scott hung his head miserably, burdened by the years of cowering to his wife. “Oh, I’ve felt the embarrassment. Even my son has scolded me for not speaking up.”

“I can show you how to end these years of despair, Scott. You and Kim need the same truths that are changing Jan and me.” Harry reached down by his chair. “I’ve brought some material along,” he said as he opened the *Demolishing Strongholds* workbook he and Jan had filled in months earlier. “Let me show you the demonic forces that were killing our marriage. Since you’re my brother, I think you’ll find many of the same evil influences are in yours too.”

The two men spent the rest of the afternoon filling in the workbook Harry had

brought along, encouraging his brother to ask Kim to review what Scott had identified in himself. Just seeing the nature of what had been agitating and influencing her husband might stir her to want to be free of those spirits herself.

For the first time since their teens a heartfelt emotional connection was restored in the two brothers.

[If you'd like to learn how to confront others redemptively as Harry did, we recommend reading *Growing Relationships Through Confrontation*, a free download at our website.]

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"I hope my kids don't act up!" Lita was nervous as she and Dee and the little girls walked from the parking lot toward the nursing home.

"Don't give it a second thought," Dee smiled as she held the hands of the giggling children on either side of her. "Kids warm the hearts of the older people here. Most hardly ever see little ones any more."

"How long have you been coming to this nursing home?" Lita inquired as they neared the entry.

"I began about five years ago, right after my Uncle Frank came to live here. I noticed that some Jehovah Witnesses were proselytizing here, and no one who represented the deity of our Lord Jesus was coming. So I just started my own ministry."

Lita's face lit up, delighted that the older woman had asked her and the kids to join her here. "How's Lili doing in learning 'Jesus Loves Me'?" Dee asked. The bright-eyed three-year-old blurted, "I can sing it all by myself!"

"It must be the grace of God!" the young mom smiled as they approached the receptionist. "She sings it all the time around the house. Even Ada tries to join in with her big sister. Last night I noticed tears in Juan's eyes as Lili sang it to him."

The dining room had been set up with chairs in a circle for this gathering. Dee took Lita and the kids around to meet those already there, many confined to wheelchairs. The little girls had never been shy and squealed with delight as older hands tickled them and asked them their names. In turn, the seniors smiled fondly as the children gently reached out to stroke wrinkled hands.

Dee shared a devotional thought from the Bible with the group then led them in some familiar worship songs. When Lili stood on a chair and sang "Jesus Loves Me" there wasn't a dry eye in the whole place. Even the staff clapped!

Dee also let everyone know that Lita's husband was serving in the Army and had been wounded in Afghanistan but was now recovering at home. When refreshments were served, a number of veterans from past wars eagerly talked with her while Dee took the little ones around to continue visiting.

Learning from Dee's example, Lita ended each conversation by taking the person's hand and asking, "May I pray with you?" A few of the old-timers laid hands on the children's heads and blessed them. (Matthew 19:13)

On the way home the two women stopped at the playground so the girls could run around. Lita hugged Dee gratefully, adding, "When I grow up in Jesus, I want to be just like you!"

[You might want to read Proverbs 31:10-31 yourself to discover the role an older woman can have in the lives of younger women.]