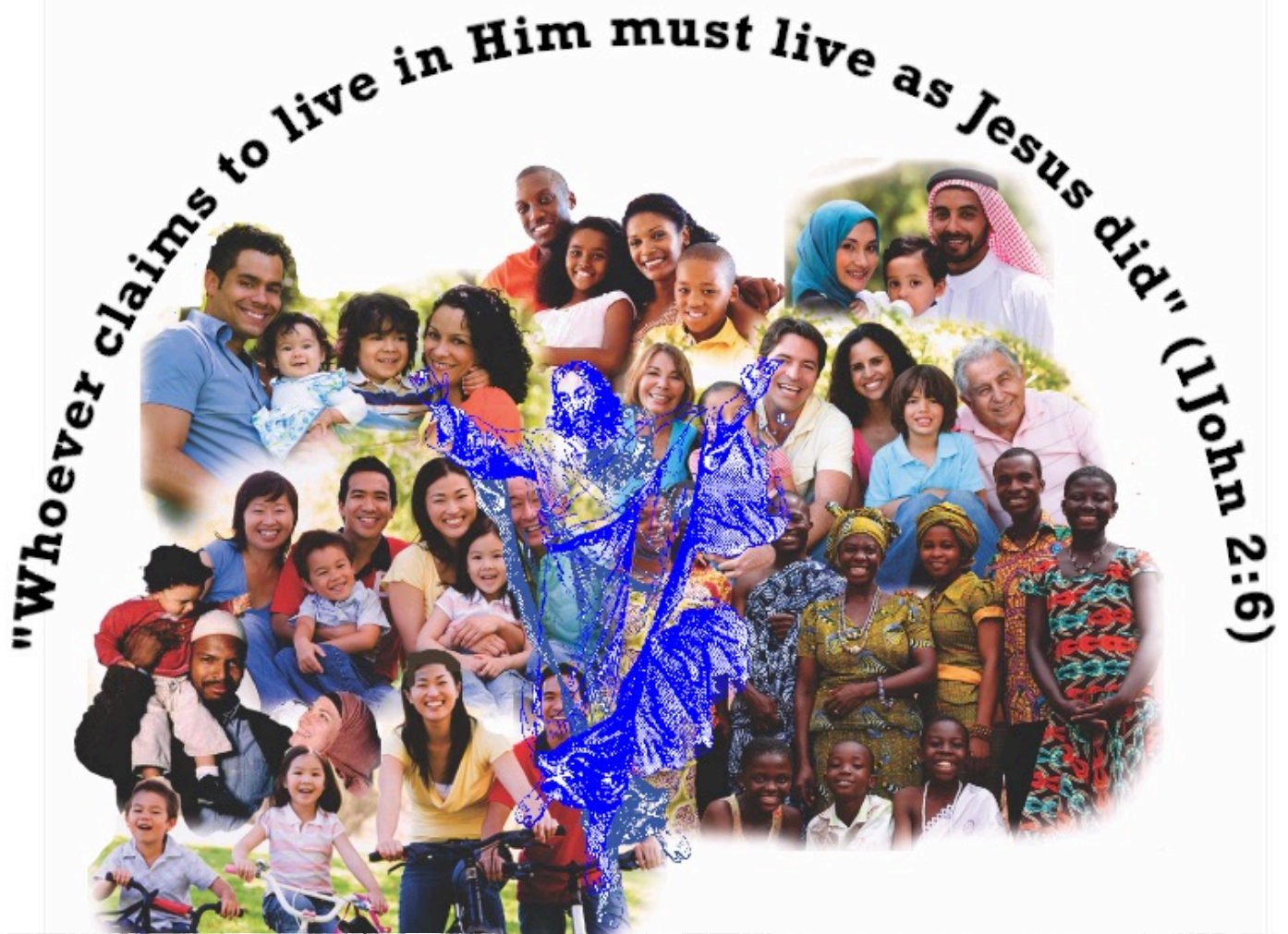


Being The Reality Of Jesus To A Wicked World

Reality 18. We Must Reflect Jesus Heart And Soul!



Pinpointing Key Facets Of The Hebraic Foundations

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We who are older women don't live in a societal vacuum! That's why this Reality series is designed for followers of Jesus at all ages and stages to share and discuss with others who are older or heading in that direction, male and female. As I've talked with other older Christian women, it's saddened me deeply that so many are handing down a heritage to their families and faith communities that isn't centered around the Lordship of Jesus. God's Word calls for excellence as unto Him *in reflecting Christ to others* and in *having glorious testimonies of answered prayer* for His glory and praise. Even within Christian circles, older women who are basking in their independence is a more widespread phenomenon than is the Lordship of Jesus and a life that's His blessing to others.

A very vocal group of godless women young and older in this nation are fighting for power and authority over men, and it breaks my heart to see this unbiblical pursuit among Christian women as well. This nation has experienced a curse as righteous men have refused to take a righteous lead. God's Word tells us that when men fail to lead in righteousness, *"women rule over them"* (Isaiah 3:12). This is His curse on us and our families. *But* we older women who love our Lord Jesus can change things! In this Reality I'll discuss the important role of older women among our Lord's earliest followers, and I'll cite several steps you can take now as an older woman to more fully reflect Jesus in your family and faith family.

Widows in early Christianity were cherished servants in faith communities.

Our Lord's concern for His mother even as He was being crucified is the hallmark of love on behalf of widows in their need: *"When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' 'Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home"* (John 19:26,27). Caring for a widow doesn't have to involve a biological relationship. Our Lord affirmed a specific parameter of who is part of His family, *"For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother"* (Matthew 12:50).

Women today and in the past who follow Jesus as their Lord and have been married have certain virtuous roles to play along the way which prepare them to be a godly role model as an older woman. Whether you're a widow or not, take these character qualities to heart:

"Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children [or maybe grand-children or foster kids]; has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints [graciously and humbly served others], has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work" (1Timothy 5:9,10).

Among our Lord's earliest followers, widows were to be cared for by their own families. But if a qualified widow was truly alone and prayerfully trusting God to meet her needs, she came under the care of her faith community (1Timothy 5:3,4). Widows had a vital role to fulfill in their faith community in intercession, in role modeling Christ-likeness, and in discipling the younger women. Their lives were prime evidence of the reality of our Lord Jesus to other women!

Caring for the needs of widows who have loved and served Jesus as their Lord and Savior is still the responsibility of deacons today. They step in to serve (literally, to "deacon") when a widow has no family to help her.

“Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily serving [literally “deaconing”]. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, ‘It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve [literally to “deacon”] tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.’” (Acts 6:1-3).

Being “full of the Spirit and of wisdom” meant that these server/deacons were led by *rhema*, the specific will of our Lord. In this way the widows could be confident that it was our Lord who was caring for their needs through those men — no less than her husband was commanded to do in seeking *rhema* for her and their family when he was still alive (see Ephesians 5:25,26). You could say that **deacons are our Lord’s first line of compassion for His followers’ needs**. We get a glimpse into the obedient trust and character of a Spirit-led deacon in the account of Philip, one of the seven who’d been chosen to serve (Acts 8:4-40).

😞 It's beyond the scope of this Reality to write about how male ecclesiastical leaders over the centuries, both Catholic and Protestant, have minimized the crucial responsibility to our Lord which He has given to us older women in serving others.

Older Christian widows now belong to the state instead of to faith communities.

Before the inauguration of Social Security in 1935, extended families and many faith communities took care of the needy widows in their midst as James 1:27 directs. But then retirement, a status unheard of in prior generations, became a societal obsession. Widows became “wards of the state”, dependent on whatever Social Security or social assistance help they could get. Family members were scattered across the country, and fewer wanted the responsibility to care for their widows and older relatives. Nursing homes became a holding tank for women and men who could no longer live alone but who could afford the cost. (“Poor houses” were the wretched alternative.) So how can we older women who love and serve our Lord Jesus return to our Father's intended plan for widows and older women?

Step 1. We older women can lead the way in testimonies of answered prayer.

People today are desperate to encounter a heavenly Father Who is REAL and Who hears and answers their cries. And we older women have the opportunity through our prayers to share testimonies of ‘**God-size’ answers!** These are answers that everyone who hears about them will know that only God could have done it. And we need the depth of intimacy with the Spirit of our Lord by which we receive His promptings that result in answered prayer (see Romans 8:27).

Over the years I've communicated with older women who daily prayed for their families and for others—but most can't recall even one specific testimony of our Father having heard their petitions. My first inclination is to ask if they've scrutinized themselves to determine if they are holding onto any unconfessed sin. (Remember, sins can be attitudinal, as in holding a grudge, or something like fixation with immoral, ungodly TV shows.) Our Father does hear the prayers of the righteous (1Peter 3:12), and confessing our sins cleanses us from all unrighteousness (1John 1:9). The reality about prayer from His vantage point is that NOTHING is too difficult for Him:

“The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops” (James 5:16b-18).

Those were God-size answers! But having unconfessed sin can make your prayers an exercise in futility. If you hold onto some particular sin in your heart even if it's unspoken to anyone else, the Lord won't hear your prayer (Psalm 66:18). You don't want to be an older woman whose prayers for your family go unheard by our heavenly Father. It's to the righteous widow that the Holy Spirit speaks: "*She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day*" (1 Timothy 5:5). The Holy Spirit is directing older women to a life of divine hope and joy by having 'God-size' testimonies of answered prayer as well as His impromptu intervention. You may not have all your prayers answered right away, but He'll make sure you have some God-sized ones so you can testify.

Your grateful testimonies of our Father's faithfulness to you as an older woman in Christ also serve this virtuous goal: you role model for younger women a humble and loving relationship of repentant and obedient trust which they themselves need.

- Does your prayer life evidence testimony of a God Who has answered "powerfully and effectively" in some very specific ways?
- If God's Word promises He'll hear the prayers of the righteous and you aren't experiencing any of His answers, what could be the problem?

Step 2. To be spiritually protected, widows must be under the God-ordained authority of a man of peace.

"For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the Head of the called-out ones, His body, of which He is the Savior" (Ephesians 5:23). "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27).

Biblical authority in relationships serves a protective purpose. From Adam onward, God specifically gives authority to men *and* holds them responsible in their role. You can see throughout the Bible that a woman is under the protective authority of either her husband, her son, or an elder/shepherd. They serve as instruments of His loving care for her! Within a home, authority is a role of servant/leaders. It exists to develop and maintain peace (*shalom*) so that love may prosper. The Hebrew letters in *shalom* mean "**authority that keeps chaos in check.**" The chaos of everyone wanting their own way and giving in to their sin nature needs to be kept in check by someone! It takes a positive relational climate for love to prosper, and our Lord requires husbands and fathers to exercise servant authority by actively leading in maintaining peace in their home. You could say he is a "**stress eliminator**" for his wife, family and guests if he is serving the way our Father intends. And for widows, seeking the input of a godly male relative or elder helps avoid unilateral decisions which would be harmful or risky.

Peace means wholeness, harmony, and the well-being of each person in your home, whether it's your family or a guest. Where you find peace, you find love blossoming!

Jesus is known in the Bible as the Prince of Peace. He's the Source of our peace, and peace is a key fruit of the Spirit. So, what's our Lord telling His disciples about the importance of peace in a home? "*When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you" (Luke 10:5,6). In essence, Jesus is limiting His disciples to stay in a home where the husband (or son of a widow) is actively leading in maintaining peace. But if a man isn't keeping peace in his home, then his wife may be ruling perhaps through quarrelling or bickering! (See Proverbs 21:19.)*

God-given authority encompasses specific responsibilities:

- to **include** those people or things that contribute to peace and harmony in your home,
- and to **exclude** those people or things that rob your home of peace and harmony;
- to **commend** those actions and attitudes that contribute to the peace and harmony of your home,
- and to **correct** those actions and attitudes that rob the peace and harmony of your home.

God commands us to respect and show deference toward those in authority (e.g. Ephesians 5:33; 1Timothy 3:4):

- Deference is shown when you avoid choices and decisions that would offend those in authority over you.
- Deference causes you to fulfill your responsibilities with a willing heart rather than as an obligation.
- Deference is linked with humility, imparting honor and esteem to those who have a right to them.

(For a more complete understanding of authority and deference in your home, read: [Discussing How To Restore The Early Church, Lesson 38](#))

Mike's home lacked biblical authority when he was growing up. His mother ruled, and tension abounded. But he learned about biblical authority from a Jewish man for whom he worked during high school. The man had two daughters and disciplined Mike as if he were his own son. Military service further entrenched the purpose of authority since much about the function of authority came straight from the Bible.

After we were married we lived with Mike's Mom on two occasions. The first was right after we returned from living in Israel (1994). One morning Mom was scurrying around the kitchen, all flustered because she was short of time and about to leave on a trip with other seniors. When Mike asked what she was doing she replied, "I have to make potato salad for the family picnic this afternoon." He said, "But you're not going to the picnic. You're going on a bus trip." "I know," she answered, "but your Aunt___ will bad-mouth me to the family if I don't make my salad and bring it over before my trip." At that point Mike stopped her with loving but firm words: "Mom, with Dad gone, I'm the head of this household. You're getting yourself all upset over something you DON'T NEED TO DO! Now get ready for your trip. The salad stays here!" Mom balked for just a wee moment, and then was clearly at peace.

FYI: Several studies decades ago revealed how much a wife wants **direction** from her husband. But this expressed need can create internal conflict for a woman because of her Eve-inherited desire to rule and control her home. Without **affectionate deference** toward her husband, she resists his direction. Older widowed mothers often face the same conflict. One told us she resisted her adult son's direction by telling him, "I nursed you and changed your diaper!"

Mike's Mom needed someone who loved her to exercise protective authority and guide her in such a way that she could find protective covering and peace. Just before we left her home to further our ministry, she asked Mike and me to come back and care for her when the time came that she couldn't take care of herself. She knew we'd uphold her peace and dignity, and we gave her our word that we'd take care of her. In 1998 that time arrived and we moved back to Connecticut to care for her until 2000 when she entered our Lord's presence. If you're a son reading this, you may appreciate some insights Mike's Mom gave to him regarding his protective authority. She told him, "You love me more than all my other kids because it takes that kind of love to stand up to me." True! And she added, "You are the head of your own household. When we go to your two older brothers' homes, we always say we're going to (the name of each wife's) home. But when we'd go to your home we'd say, 'We're going to Mike's home.' That's how I know you are the head of your household."

- If you're a widow and have a son, would you graciously yield to his protective authority?
- If you have no husband or son, is there a godly man in your faith community to whose wisdom and direction you'd willingly yield?

Finally, I've been discussing our Lord's way of maintaining peace and providing the blessed atmosphere for love to blossom in your home. Our Father intends for a husband or father to be responsible for these, and that his wife and children support him in their mutual pursuit of peace. (This is something you can help out with among your younger relatives and friends, giving wise input that may lead to greater unity and peace in their home!) Harmony in any home is an essential goal to mutually work toward. God planned for a home to be a refuge and sanctuary for all its members. Your home is also the crucible in which the human sin nature is confronted and where the fruit of the Spirit has opportunity to come forth. Harmony doesn't come naturally! Through love it must be nurtured, modeled, and reinforced daily.

God designed for children to be raised in a peaceful home under the loving direction and training of both a father and a mother. In fact, until the late 1800s "education" was defined as the relationship of a mother with her children. Is it any wonder the Bible repeats, "*Do not forsake your mother's teaching*" (Proverbs 1:8; 6:20; see also 1 Timothy 2:15)? And isn't a father required when God commands through His servant Paul, "*Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord*" (Ephesians 6:4; see also Genesis 18:19)? Fathers and mothers are sorely needed together to raise a godly generation. Your loving involvement with your own family or with another family in your faith community by providing instruction, correction and rebuke as a godly older woman has never been more needed!

Sue (with loving support and input from Mikel)