

Kingdom Living Today

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

21. As Iron Sharpens Iron, So One Man Sharpens Another

“FULLY HEAR WISE COUNSEL AND ACCEPT
INSTRUCTION. IN THE END YOU WILL BE WISE.
PAY ATTENTION AND HEED THE SAYINGS OF THE WISE;
APPLY YOUR HEART TO WHAT THEY TEACH.”

Jack's lined face glowed with love for these younger men who had grown very dear to him.^(1 Thessalonians 2:11) Seated around him at the restaurant that early morning were Jerome, Harry, Brett, Juan and Josh. The teen had been invited to join the men for Juan's last time with them.

“I'm glad we're all able to have this last breakfast together with Juan before he ships out,” Jack smiled. He was fully aware that each of them had a heart to see the Kingdom of God expanded no matter what it cost them.^(Mark 8:35) And, with joy in his heart, he realized that each of these men could replace him someday in the lives of others.^(2 Timothy 2:2) That thought brought to mind something he'd read at the Restoration Ministries website: *“Success without successors is failure.”* He gratefully praised his Lord that that wouldn't be *his* epitaph!

Jack's devotion to these men was reflected in Harry, who with 40-something years behind him wasn't ashamed to speak from his heart. “Jack, you've become our father in Christ and we've all become brothers.”^(Romans 8:29) Then turning to Juan and resting his hand on the young soldier's shoulder, he reassured him, “Don't worry about Lita and the kids. We'll be there for them like family.”

Jerome, Brett, and even Josh shared that same conviction and said as much. Juan wiped his eyes, receiving this outpouring of assurance from these men who'd become dear to him in a way that was so different from past relationships. He'd worn his uniform that morning so the men could see he was wholehearted in fulfilling his duty as a man of his word. A soldier in uniform with tears in his eyes, surrounded by his friends sending him off to serve, is a noble sight.

As they settled into their breakfast Brett turned to Jack for advice. “Yesterday as Kirk came in from playing with his friends, Lacie smelled cigarette smoke all over him. Even his breath smelled like cigarettes! She was going to jump him with accusation, but then she stopped—she sensed that the Holy Spirit didn't want her to confront him yet. She told me about it when I got home later and asked me to bring it up here this morning.”

The thought passed through Jerome's and Harry's minds that if Kirk were their kid, they'd probably have reacted sharply if they'd smelled smoke on him.

Jack chuckled, recognizing what they were thinking by the way they looked at each other. “It seems that some of you think Kirk committed the unpardonable sin, huh?”

“Well, what he did was pretty serious, wasn't it?” Harry asked.

“Is it?” Jack responded pointedly. “All Kirk did was possibly give in to temptation. Anybody here *not* give in to temptation at one time or another?”^(John 8:1-11)

“Well, Jack, since you put it that way...” Brett answered somewhat sheepishly.

Jack knew this incident was a good moment to impart some wisdom for each man to consider. “Think about what our Lord wants from each of us. He wants us to live in fellowship with Him and our Father through His Spirit.”(1 John 1:3) As the men nodded in agreement he went on, “It’s no surprise to Him that we have a sin nature that may at times get the best of us. But He’s made a way for us to restore fellowship—it’s through *repentance*.”(1 John 1:9)

Jack paused to glance at each man. “When we respond to the Spirit and turn away from a sin and confess it because we recognize the harm that sin has done, does God punish us because we messed up?”(Psalms 103:10-13)

“No,” Brett replied quickly, “but there may be consequences to our sin.”

Jack responded, “That’s true. However, there also may *not* be consequences, depending on the depth of sorrow the person experiences for the wrong they’ve done.”(2 Corinthians 7:9,10)

“Well, Lacie didn’t notice that Kirk felt bad at all!” exclaimed the young dad.

“So what does that tell you?” Jack inquired, his smile growing bigger. “Did you or Lacie ever talk to Kirk about the damage smoking does to the body?”

Brett’s brow furrowed for a moment. “No, we haven’t. We thought he was too young to discuss smoking with him.”

“Well, why don’t you talk to him tonight in a non-confrontational manner? Even ask him if *he* thought he did anything wrong,” Jack suggested as his smile turned into a grin. Everyone sensed the wisdom of the moment and were glad they’d been there to hear it.

“Where’d you learn this, Jack?” Jerome asked.

Breaking into a laugh the older man began, “When my son Mickey was about four, he came into the house one day repeating an expletive. I stopped him and said, ‘Mickey, that’s not right.’ He went upstairs into his bedroom and a few minutes later I heard him repeating the word. As I headed up the stairs to correct him more sternly, I heard him trying different pronunciations for it.” He laughed at the memory. “I finally realized that Mickey thought that when I said, ‘That’s not right’ meant ‘You’re not pronouncing the word correctly.’ By the time I got to his room I was cackling. So Mickey and I sat down and had a little talk about profanity.”(Ephesians 6:4)

Everybody at the table got a kick out of Jack’s anecdote. But Jerome didn’t feel that everything had been covered. He asked, “So when *should* I correct my child?”

“Well, you always correct any direct defiance toward your authority,” Jack responded more seriously. “*God* gave you that authority, your daughter didn’t. (Colossians 3:20) Remember, our Lord requires you as a father to include and commend those things that contribute to the peace of your home, and to exclude or correct those things that rob your home of peace.”(Proverbs 10:17; 29:17)

“Okay, I see that,” Jerome interjected. “But what if her behavior isn’t directly attacking my authority?”

Jack answered incisively, “You need to discern if your child knew that she’d done wrong. If she realizes she disobeyed, then whatever form of correction you use should be with the aim of helping her resist the temptation the next time because the consequences of yielding to it will be painful.”(Hebrews 12:9,10) But, at no time should you

use anger in correcting your child!”(Proverbs 25:28)

As Brett looked at each man, he could see they all appreciated Jack’s insight. “Thanks, Jack. This has been really helpful! I can’t wait to share it with Lacie.”

“If I can share one last point with you guys,” Jack added. “Most of the things we value in our lives came through trial-and-error learning. We had to take personal ownership to make it part of our lives.” As the men listened attentively he continued, “Within certain boundaries, you need to let your children make mistakes. Somehow, mothers in particular feel like the world is evaluating them according to how their children behave. This is especially true for home schooling moms who function like their child’s “Holy Spirit” right up until the day the child leaves home. ”

“I can see that tendency in my Mom,” Josh sighed. “I think there’s this internal pressure on her that I have to do everything right the first time, and there’s no room for error. I’m glad that since I’m 15 and she knows I really do want to live right, I can give her a hug and she usually backs off.”

Jack was delighted Josh could speak with such insight as well as concern for his Mom. God had given him a wonderful “adoptive” grandson who would be a leader in God’s Kingdom someday.

“Can I share something about my Dad?” Josh broke in. Everybody nodded.

“Your influence on my Dad to let me seek the Holy Spirit myself showed up the other night, Grandpa. He and Mom asked if I wanted to go out to my favorite restaurant for an early-bird special. Just as we getting into the car I remembered I’d told our neighbor I’d help him move some paving stones from his front yard to the back when he got home from work.”

“Sound like a dilemma,” Juan teased.

“It could have been that in the past,” Josh went on. “But when I mentioned it to my Dad, he said, ‘Why don’t you go into your room and ask God what He wants you to do?’”

Brett bumped Josh lightly with his fist. “Of course, God wanted you to go to your favorite restaurant, right?”

Josh was about to answer when his Dad spoke up. “Do you mind if I continue, Josh?” The boy nodded.

“Well, a while back Josh might have answered like that, Brett,” Harry smiled. “But when he came back to the car after praying he told us, ‘God wants me to be a man of my word. I need to go help Mr. Cramer move the blocks.’ Jan and I were so proud of him!”

Later on in the parking lot everyone hugged Juan. Jack led them all in prayer committing the young man into the Lord’s hands and asking that He would open a ministry for Juan in Afghanistan. Since everyone else had to head for work, Jack offered to drive Josh home.

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As they headed to Josh’s house the boy asked Jack a pointed question. “Grandpa, you have such a caring way when you correct people. I’d like to be like you. Were you always like this?” The boy’s question actually caught Jack by surprise.

He glanced for moment at the eager teen. “No, I wasn’t always so patient. My

children and others who knew me would tell you how easily annoyed and frustrated I could get. What you're seeing is the work the Spirit of Christ has done in me over the years."

"So there's hope for me," Josh stated expectantly.

"Oh yes!" Jack responded brightly. "In fact, Josh, you're way ahead of where I was at your age."

Josh took in his encouraging words because he had an earnest goal in mind. "Is there anything you could suggest that would help me change to be more like you?"

The older man was touched by the sincerity in Josh's voice. "Yes, there is Josh. Always let yourself be guided by Jesus words: *'So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.'* (Matthew 7:12) As they stopped at a light Jack turned to the boy with a smile. "Look back at yourself from the vantage point of the other person and ask yourself, 'What do they need from me, or, how can I bless them?' Then you'll be fulfilling everything the Law and the Prophets call for."

"So, Grandpa," Josh pressed, "you're telling me to get outside myself and see how I can meet the needs of others."

"Yes, that's the starting point for the the kind of love that puts your faith into action—the love our Lord Jesus speaks about in Matthew chapter 25, and James refers to in chapter 2."

Josh digested that for a moment then asked, "Is there anything else you can tell me about learning to love others the way Jesus would?"

Jack smiled, appreciating his persistence. "Remember 'booger love.'"

"Huh?" the young man blurted with a start.

"If I had something hanging from my nose, would you tell me?" Grandpa asked.

Hesitating just for a moment Josh replied, "Yes, I would!"

"If you saw that my fly was open, would you tell me?" Jack again asked.

Josh broke into a laugh. "Yes, I would!"

Jack had one last question. "If *you* had something hanging from your nose or your fly was down, would you want someone to tell you?"

With the table turned, Josh paused briefly then replied, "Yes, I would!"

"I truly believe that you'd care enough to overcome your own sense of embarrassment of speaking up to realize that *my* embarrassment of walking around with a dirty nose or my fly open is worse than you pointing these things out," Jack stated.

Josh answered thoughtfully, "As you asked those questions, Grandpa, I could see that I answered the way I did because I cared more for you than I was concerned about myself."

"I see that in you," the older man affirmed as he reached over and put his hand on Josh's shoulder. "You have a love for others that overcomes your own embarrassment, and that's your bedrock in doing your part to extend our Lord's Kingdom."

As they pulled into Josh's driveway, Jack added, "By overcoming your fear of embarrassment, you're able to be concerned with the greatest need others have — the eternal destination of their souls." Josh nodded as he joyfully hugged this man who had so much wisdom to share with him.