

Kingdom Living Today

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

23. In Everything You Do, Do It To The Glory Of The Father

“WHATEVER IS TRUE, WHATEVER IS NOBLE, WHATEVER IS RIGHT, WHATEVER IS PURE, WHATEVER IS LOVELY, WHATEVER IS ADMIRABLE—IF ANYTHING IS EXCELLENT OR PRAISEWORTHY—THINK ABOUT SUCH THINGS.”

The last of the sandwiches had been eaten and the younger children were putting their newly acquired boccie skills to work on the smooth grass nearby. The adults were seated comfortably in a semicircle under a shady tree. “I want to thank you for the influence you’ve had on me and my family,” Brett said gratefully, directing his gaze at Jack and Dee. “The joy we’re experiencing now is so far above anything we thought was possible in the past!”

Jack took Dee’s hand and responded with his usual broad smile, “Dee and I believe we’re experiencing the greater blessing. That’s because we’re able to pass along the wisdom our Lord Jesus has shown us to such eager people who want to please Him and glorify our Father.”(Proverbs 2:6)

“And what delights us even more,” Dee beamed, “is that you all are turning around to share these truths with others.”(Philippians 2:4) She paused to extend her hand to the couple next to her. “Scott and Kim, we’re so glad that Harry invited you to join us at this picnic. Your brother has spoken of you often to us.”

“We’re happy to be here, too,” Scott answered sincerely. “After talking with Harry and Jan last week, my wife and I both know that we want everything our Lord wants of us.” He wrapped his arm around Kim, who looked at her husband with the kind of admiration that makes a man’s heart sing. Kim then took Dee’s hand and added, “We really appreciate that you two are willing to meet with us to help us start a Hebraic fellowship family in our area.”

Both Jack and Dee nodded affirmation as Scott took up the conversation again. “As Jan may have mentioned, we’re about to adopt two Serbian children, a brother and sister, ages 8 and 5. We want to raise them in a manner befitting the Kingdom of God,(Ephesians 6:4) and we know we can’t be like we were for all those years — self-satisfied pew-sitters who just gave God lip-service the rest of the week.”

“I’m so happy for you!” Lacie exclaimed eagerly. “When do you expect to get them?”

“Hopefully in about three months,” Kim answered with twinkling eyes.

Josh jumped in, “I hope you find spiritual grandparents for them like Grandpa and Grandma are for us!” The teen looked over at the children laughing as they tossed balls and added, “Every week they take us kids for a day as part of our home schooling. That time is so neat because it’s not so much what we do with them as much as what we learn—and the good feeling we get because we know they like spending time with us.”

Dee and Jack were a little embarrassed by the praise, but delighted to hear it from their spiritual grandson. In front of their eyes he was becoming a young man of God.

Jack shifted his position, the prelude to what everyone had come to recognize was an important tidbit coming their way. In fact, they all looked forward to these

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moments when he'd impart some new nugget of wisdom.

"I want to affirm the path you've all taken in home schooling your children. You've each avoided the most common pitfall home schooling produces — spiritual pride. During the time we spend with the kids, Dee and I can both see the Christ-like attitudes you're instilling in them."

Scott jumped in, "This is something I want to know more about before our new children arrive." Everyone else was eager to hear Jack explain more as well.

"Spiritual pride," Jack went on, "comes when people begin to compare themselves to others based upon what they DON'T DO." (Luke 18:9)

Lita piped up, "I just saw that in my reading in Luke this morning! It's when that Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself thanking God he wasn't like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like the tax collector." (Luke 18:11)

"That's exactly it!" Jack looked warmly at the young mother, knowing how all of them were family to her especially now that Juan had rejoined his unit in Afghanistan. "The character qualities of most home schoolers today seem to follow that kind of pattern — congratulating themselves that they aren't doing what "sinners" are involved with and feeling good about themselves because of it." He paused and sadly shook his head. "What they really should be learning is to scrutinize their lives in light of what they ARE doing to fulfill their part in extending the Kingdom of God."

At this point Jerome broke in. "So you're saying that the majority of the Christ-like character qualities we're instilling in our children should be based on how they're living for our Lord?"

"You've got it," Jack rejoined. "Learning to obey God out of hearts that are growing in love for Him and for others is the goal for character development." (2 John 6) He smiled and added, "And I want to commend you all that you're doing precisely that!"

Jan was eager to know Jack and Dee's perspective on their collective children. "In what ways do you see them growing in character?"

Dee responded with a smile, "When the kids are with us, they often bring up the things they're doing on behalf of others. I don't think we ever hear them comparing themselves to anybody, certainly not speaking negatively about kids who haven't yet met Christ." She looked over at Jack, who added, "We hear how one gave toys to a needy friend, or how another one takes out the garbage for an elderly neighbor. Even your little ones, Lita," he grinned, "enjoy telling us about the people they meet at the nursing home. These are things Dee and I love to hear from them!"

"The things the kids are sharing with you," Brett proclaimed with a full heart, "is a testimony to what you two role model for all of us because you put into practice the Word of God." (Deuteronomy 31:14) Lacie smiled at her husband and added in agreement, "In your devotion to our Lord, you're the most opportunistic people we've ever met in seeing how you can do your part in His Kingdom! Sometimes I feel like I have to run just to keep up."

Everyone broke into laughter because they could feel just what Lacie meant. As the children wandered over from their play time, the adults each scooped one into their lap for a time of prayer. Jack was especially burdened to pray for Juan in Afghanistan.

As they all gathered up their things and headed for the parking lot, Lita scooted over to Jack to thank him for calling her husband. Tears filled the older man's eyes

because he remembered how painful it had been to be away from Dee in time of war. He was also mindful not to tell Lita that their call had been cut short because Juan came under mortar attack. This only increased Jack's burden for the young man, and he felt it prudent to ask the others to remember Juan in their prayers.(Ephesians 6:18)

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"Dee, what was the most difficult hurdle you had to overcome as a young wife?" Jan asked as the women began their weekly walk together in the park.

"The MOST difficult..." Dee pondered. "I think it was learning how to give Jack the deference due him as both my husband and as our kids' father. I think the absence of deference hurt our family more than anything else."

Some of the ladies glanced at each other, wondering if they even understood what deference was. They were also curious if lack of deference was one of the things hindering the harmony in their own marriages. Keisha broke the silence and asked, "Can we talk more about this? I know we're going to learn something each of us needs." As the others nodded, she added, "Would you define deference for us?"

"Oh, our Lord has made sure that after all these years I can tell you what deference is!" Dee shot back with a grin. "Father God has enabled me to make it a way of life that emanates out of my heart. And," she continued gratefully, "it's part of the reason for that big smile on Jack's face you all usually see."

Jan replied with longing, "I'd sure like to know how I can bring that sort of happiness to Harry." The other gals were in full agreement as they pictured their own men.

Dee was glad to share what she'd learned from experience to be a deep, inner character quality. "First, deference sees beyond your own self-interest to the wider arena of issues your husband is concerned with. You're showing deference when you avoid choices and decisions that would offend him or hurt his feelings."(Ephesians 5:24)

Lacie knew she'd often missed the boat there. "How can I do that?"

"You stop and look back at yourself from *his* vantage point and what he truly needs from you as his helpmate," Dee responded. "Deference inspires you to fulfill your responsibilities to your husband with a willing heart rather than as a burden of obligation.(Titus 2:4,5) We women can certainly pout and withhold affection from our husband when he intrudes into our bubble of rights." The other wives laughed ruefully, knowing they'd used that tactic on their own mates all too often.

Dee pressed on to her last point. "Deference is linked with the humility of being the helpmate to our husbands that our Father wants us to be. When we show deference, we're giving him the respect and esteem that pleases God."(Ephesians 5:33) She added wisely, "A smile of admiration goes a long way to let a man know he's important to you!"

"I think I asked for a drink of water and just got hit with a fire hydrant," Jan chuckled, fully grateful that she'd inquired. The others laughed as well.

"That's okay," Dee grinned, knowing they hadn't caught it all. "I've got this written down, and I'll give you a copy during our fellowship gathering this weekend."

"Before you learned deference," Lita asked quietly, "what were some of the things you were doing wrong in your relationship?"

"It didn't really surface until we had children," Dee replied. "Before the kids came

we had a wonderful time in our marriage. But raising children brought to a head something I hadn't seen before—my lack of deference." She paused as she recalled past pain. "When Jack saw bad behavior in the kids, he drew the line.^(1Timothy 3:4) But I thought he was too harsh in disciplining them. And today I know he'd agree that he was at times." She went on, "But rather than working through this, I saw myself as the go-between with him and them. That's where I made my mistake that hurt us deeply for several years. Jack felt unsupported, and recognized that I was hindering the character development of our children."

"Were you?" Lacie asked.

Dee's eyes were wet as she acknowledged, "Yes, I was. But even worse, I was hurting Jack's heart. He hid his emotional pain only to see it flare in anger at times." She added, "I thought *he* had the problem and that I was the good person in our marriage. But that wasn't the case at all!"

"I need to let you know that I'm scared," Lita blurted. "Growing up in a matriarchal Latino community, we aren't trained to show our men deference. And, the tension you and Jack had — Juan and I are suffering the same way now. Even while he was home recovering, we had tension over correcting the kids."

Keisha jumped in, "It's the same being raised in an inner-city black community!"

"And being raised by a single mother like I was," asserted Jan.

The ladies stopped for a group hug. Their hearts were heavy, yet no one wanted to stop until the Spirit of Christ gave them peace.

"Jack and I finally hit the bottom one day. He drove away in anger, and I felt like a trap door had opened and I'd fallen through it." Dee sighed then broke into a smile. "Jack did come back a few hours later after coming to this very park to pray for God's help. The Spirit prompted him to pick up his Uncle Hank and Aunt Mary and bring them home with him." She smiled gratefully. "They were a Godly couple, and we shared our hearts with them. That's when I began to learn about deference. They met with us every morning at 6:00 for over two weeks."

"What a faithful God we have!" Lacie declared. "Now tell us, how did they help you?"

"Well, they showed me that Jack was right in where he drew the line on the kids' behavior and attitudes. And Hank helped Jack develop more constructive methods of discipline that matched the needs of each child," she said. "It took both the help of Mary and the encouragement of Jack in order for deference to become a character quality in me."

Jan then asked, "How would you sum up the spiritual significance of deference?"

Dee responded quickly, "Deference embodies a woman's trust in the God Who gave her to her husband as a helpmate. God knew the man He was giving each of us to and what we'd endure to help him." The ladies chuckled softly as she went on, "Peter addresses us by using Sarah, who called Abraham 'lord,' as our example. He says we're her daughters if we do what's right and don't give way to fear.^(1 Peter 3:1-6) When I came between Jack and the kids, I lived in fear. Now that I give Jack deference, it's protected me from fear and has really increased my trust in God."

The women had much to think and pray about regarding their own husbands and the deference needed in their marriages. It had truly been a God-ordained day.