

Kingdom Living Today

Demonstrating the WAY of God's Kingdom to the Hopeless and Helpless

43. Being Our Lord's Point of Contact (Part 1)

"YOU WILL HAVE THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES."

Bob and Abby's living room overflowed with the lively chatter of old friends and fellow companions in Christ. Gathered at their request were the various home fellowship shepherds and their wives: Jack & Dee, Bill & Mary, Ted & Lauren, José & Sharee, Tom & Megan, and Ken & Olivia. After a time of animated catching up and prayer, Jack shared his delight in seeing them all together again.

"What a joy to see how obvious the love of Jesus is in each of you! It's definitely *His* kind of love that's compelling you to do nothing less than what He'd be doing if He were you. Dee and I are just so thankful to Him that we really are His extended family with you all!" (Psalms 119:63,74,79; Matthew 12:50)

"The love Christ gives really is at the heart of it," Olivia grinned. "When each of us determined that the goal of our marriage covenant would be to become as Christ-like as possible, an undeniable empowered love began to grow inside us. (Hebraic Article: Mutually Growing Christ-like Relationships) This *love* is what's stirring us to reach people who haven't yet experienced what only Jesus can do in their lives when He's their Lord."

"You're absolutely right," Dee added heartily, "because in the end, *love* will be the only thing that will count." (Galatians 5:6) Turning to Bob she then asked why he'd called them all together.

Bob paused as his eyes gratefully took in these folks who really were family to him. (Matthew 12:48-50) For a number of years now they'd come alongside each other in prayer and action to serve their Lord together, always ready to cooperate with one another to extend His Kingdom. Finally he spoke, somberly and deliberately. "These past months I've been talking with a young guy at work named Treyvon. For several years he's been volunteering with a ministry that goes into the Holly Springs Detention Center for troubled youth."

Several were familiar with the center. Bob continued, "The past few months have been hard for him; he's gotten discouraged about the lack of fruit in light of all their effort. In fact, 80% of the teens end up right back in detention after their release."

Dee glanced at Jack and commented, "That detention center isn't far from us."

Nodding, Bob added with sorrow, "Treyvon's so frustrated that he doesn't feel he can go on with it the way things are. He asked me if there was any other way to help these kids that might be more effective than what's happening now."

A few moments of silence prevailed as the group glanced at each other. Then Jack offered soberly, "I truly believe our Lord wants us to discuss this tonight, Bob. I have to admit that this issue has exposed some pain I've had ever since I began to follow Jesus myself."

Sharee could feel the heaviness in Jack's heart and tears filled her eyes. "Jack, I sense you're really hurting inside."

Jack's head lowered, his own cheeks now damp. "Sorry, I'm dealing with a lot of sadness as well as a little anger." Pausing to collect himself he went on, "You may recall about four years ago we all discussed some Lifebytes from the Restoration

Ministries website that dealt with reaching the lost around us.”

Ken jumped in, “Weren’t those about the Mission Station approach versus the People Movement approach?” (Lifebyte 36. Are You Trapped In Mission-Station Thinking?; Lifebytes 37 & 38. The People Movement Approach)

“Yes, exactly,” Jack confirmed. “For far too long most Christian outreach has embraced the Mission Station approach, relying on *ministering to individuals* rather than whole families. But what we’ve focused on among us as fellowship families is the People Movement means of outreach; in other words, we see a person as *connected to a family* and to their other close relationships.”

As José looked at everyone seated in the circle, he felt he was speaking for all of them. “We all worked together to establish the foundation of our outreach for each family and home fellowship: *Each person* in our family or fellowship family is the *point of contact* on behalf of their entire family and faith community. And the person they’re reaching out to is the *point of contact* for themselves as well as for their family and close friends.”

Megan broke in eagerly. “In essence, the ones who are *points of contact* are bringing two groups of people together—the followers of Jesus and those who haven’t yet come to follow Him as their Lord.”

Jack sat back in quiet delight as each one offered their insights. They weren’t speaking from what they’d *studied*, but from what they’d made their *way of life*.

“It’s good that we’re going over this again,” Mary added. “Jack and Dee have instilled in us that we need to see each person not only as someone made in God’s image and for whom Jesus died, but also in the context of their close relationships. Because of that, through biblical hospitality we’re inviting them to be *part of our lives*.”

Joy flooded Olivia’s face. “I’m so glad we’ve learned that biblical hospitality entails inviting people *into our home* where we can truly affirm them as our Lord would. And, biblical hospitality means that we’re willing to be inconvenienced in order to be the heart and hands of Jesus to someone else.” (Romans 12:13; 1Timothy 5:10; 1Peter 4:9)

In full agreement with his wife, Ken added, “That’s the *real* servanthood of Jesus when we invite others into our home.”

A pause ensued as the others stopped to consider how much they’d been changed through past discussion of those Lifebytes. Then Bob spoke fondly to the man he valued as his mentor. “Jack, I can see your joy as everyone has been sharing, yet I sense your heart is still heavy. Is that about reaching those boys in the detention center?”

Jack smiled appreciatively. “First, I really do savor hearing the loving conviction each of you has. But there’s something from my past I’d like to present that’s grieved me for many years.”

Knowing the depth of sorrow her husband had carried for so long, Dee put her hand on his shoulder and said, “Please let me start.” Turning toward the group she continued, “It’s been decades since God first made us aware of the fruitlessness of the methods used by most Christian ministries. Our concern began when we attended a Hebraic restoration seminar years ago. The speakers talked about the impersonal style of the Billy Graham Crusade they’d attended back in 1984. During that Crusade the largest percentage of people up to that time went forward. But even though the area congregations were supposedly prepared to follow up those who’d gone forward, *not*

one person ever joined any of those churches.”

Megan exclaimed, “So that’s why you two have been so insistent that when any of us are a *point of contact* in reaching an unbeliever, we immediately involve our family and home fellowship family both in prayer and willingness to do their part as needed.”

“That’s so true, Megan,” Jack affirmed. “People’s lives are intertwined in relationships, especially with family members. That stream runs clear through Adam and Eve as the first family down to the collective body of Christ as His family.” He sighed. “But history records that through the influence of the Reformers centuries ago, reaching the *individual* rather than the family became the focus. They were the first to foster evangelism to the individual *apart from* his other relationships. Now as our Father restores the Hebraic foundations, especially relational priorities under His Lordship, we can be like our spiritual father Abraham and establish relationships family to family and generation to generation.”(Genesis 18:19; Romans 4:16,17)

Bob’s heart was stirred. “I’m beginning to appreciate your sorrow as you’ve seen how fruitless and ineffectual ministries are that send out individuals to try to reach individuals. And given the singular nature of men in this country in particular, they’re probably the ones who keep this solitary ministry method going.”

“You’re right,” Jack replied with a grimace. “Throughout the centuries, Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians and clergy were predominantly white men from the educated upper classes of society. These men emphasized their knowledge of the Bible and their traditions instead of the life-transforming truth of an intimate relationship with the *God* of the Bible through the indwelling Spirit of Christ. And that pattern continues throughout much of Christendom today.”

All eyes were trained on Jack as he pressed on. “Presenting the Bible as information *about* God underlays their belief that if people can recite some of God’s Word or at least agree with it in their heads, that’s all that’s needed.” He shook his head sadly. “The goal of much of modern evangelism is to achieve a “conversion” and get people to attend services. But how much more biblical it is to establish a relationship with a person and his family and friends so that *collectively* they can thoroughly grasp the love and Lordship of Christ.(11:25,26) This *difference in approach* is why the crusade method of evangelism and other similar ministries is so fruitless.”

“I remember that the evangelists Paul, Timothy and Titus stayed on in an area as long as they were needed and established relationships with the people,”(Acts 11:25,26) José added. “They only moved on after a faith community was firmly established and an elder shepherd anointed to lead.”(Titus 1:5)

Bob was nettled. “What you’ve described, Jack, is what Treyvon’s been experiencing with the detention center kids. He told me that even though he’s part of a ministry, he operates individually with the kids and has little or no chance to interact with their family.” His voice sank. “Treyvon also mentioned that none of the married guys include their wives and families in establishing any relationship with the boys. It’s like the boys are kept separate from any contact with a stable family.”

Jack’s face stiffened at that thought. “One of the reasons these ministries don’t include families or intergenerational grandparent support is the unresolved bitterness so many clergy and parachurch leaders have with their own fathers. They strongly influence other men in ministry to avoid any intergenerational involvement.”

Lauren asked pointedly, “Since their work seems so ineffective, how come these ministries don’t change? Are we dealing with that old axiom, ‘A fool is the lumber man who doesn’t stop to sharpen his axe?’”

Jack chuckled, then answered her. “One difficulty in modern Christianity is *misplaced faith*. We who follow Christ need to wholeheartedly trust in the Spirit of Jesus within us. But many of these men put their faith in what they *know about the Bible* and in their *methods of ministry*. And besides that, their misplaced ‘faith’ makes it impossible for most of them to admit when they’re wrong!”

“Our Lord is the *living God*,” (2Corinthians 6:16) responded Lauren, her voice alive with fervency. “So the people we meet who don’t yet know Him need to realize we Jesus followers look to the *indwelling Holy Spirit* for guidance. He’s alive within us!”

“And since each person we meet is different,” José interjected, “the Spirit can give us insight and wisdom how we can be a *point of contact* for every unbeliever He puts in our path.” (Luke 12:11-12)

“I’m with you there, brother,” Ted agreed. “I think of King David each time he went to war; he always asked God beforehand how to fight each battle because none were the same.” (1 Chronicles 14:14,15)

That thought caused each person to reflect on how much they themselves looked to the indwelling Spirit for God’s guidance before they set out on anything. Then Ken brought up an important point. “Jack, you’ve taught us guys so often that any ministry we do needs to flow out of the love of Jesus we have for our wives.”

“How so?” Sharee asked, intrigued.

Ken replied, “It began with something Jack insisted on when we first began to meet with him for our weekly breakfasts. He told us, ‘Whatever ministry you do, make sure you’re drawing from the Jesus others can see in your marriage.’ He hammered home the fact that before we men could minister to others, we needed to first focus on having a marriage in which Christ has knit our hearts with our wives.”

“That’s one point Jack never backed off on,” Ted added with a grin. “We husbands need to put any form of ministry on the back burner until Jesus gives us *His* love for our wives. And that means humbling ourselves and crying out to Him to love her like *He* would love her.” He smiled gently at his beloved bride of many years and added, “Then we could minister *with her* to others.” (Philippians 2:3)

Bill recollected, “The married apostles took their wives with them wherever they ministered. (1Corinthians 9:5) That way people could see the love of Jesus in their marriage, because their marriage mirrored the spiritual intimacy Jesus has with His Bride!”

Mary turned to Jack and asked, “Is there anything else that keeps men who are involved in ministering to others from changing?”

“Well, why and how we minister to others on behalf of Jesus flows from whatever degree of gratefulness we have for our own redemption,” Jack explained. “It’s one thing to feel good about yourself because you’re biblically knowledgeable and can teach what you know to others. But it’s a far different story when you’ve understood your *own depravity and sinfulness*. You *hate* that part of you! And only then can you truly appreciate the cost of Jesus’s sacrifice for you.” His eyes watered with thankfulness as he marvelled, “Jesus did something you couldn’t do for yourself!”

Mary’s eyes glistened as well. “Jesus tells us, ‘*He who has been forgiven little loves little*.’” (Luke 7:47) So if someone can’t appreciate with their whole heart how Jesus suf-

fered on their behalf to reconcile them to His Father, then their ministry to others will also lack Christ's humility and love." (Philippians 2:5-8)

"That's exactly what I'm saying, Mary," Jack gleamed. "Men '*who love little*' offer others 'Bible knowledge' and establish their ministries around the goal of 'getting people saved' by agreeing with some verses. But Paul's ministry was so effective because he was so appalled by his own depravity—and so grateful for his redemption!" Opening his Bible Jack proclaimed ardently, "*I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display His unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on Him and receive eternal life.*" (1 Timothy 1:16)

Wide-eyed, Sharee declared, "That's why Paul's own ministry was so compelling and unstoppable. He wanted to *know* Jesus in His power and in His suffering! Listen to what motivated him: "*I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death.*" (Philippians 3:10)

"You've got it!" Jack echoed. "His appreciation produced loving purpose in Jesus!"

Ken broke in, "And now Bob is asking us to reach these boys in the detention center," bringing everyone back to the reason for their gathering.

"You're right," Jack replied, "though this discussion has brought joy to Dee and me to hear your hearts." He went on, "A lot of current ministries are fruitless because their approach to the kids is almost *clinical*; the volunteers spend a lot more time 'talking at' the guys than coming alongside them to hear their hopes and pain. And while some churches may partner with them initially, they don't really want these troubled kids in their youth groups nor do they want to invite them into their lives."

"Would you explain what you mean by 'clinical'?" Lauren asked.

Jack answered sadly, "It stems from a heart motive that says, 'I'm only going to go the *first mile*.' This is the type of ministry most middle class men involve themselves with. They never establish a close relationship with the kids themselves."

Bob piped up, "That's what Treyvon admitted. The men in the ministry he's with never had any of the kids in their own home, and they kept their own families away from the kids too."

"I'm reminded of another topic we discussed together after reading the Hebraic article, *I Hate Nicolaitanism*," Tom noted. "The men in these ministries have only experienced *activity-based religious programs* role modeled for them through scheduled events and programs at their churches. And most church ministry is based on age segregated groups or on people grouped by common interests, like men's Bible study."

Megan agreed with her husband. "So these men at the detention center see their ministry in terms of an *activity*, like teaching the Bible to a group of kids who are put together only because they've committed some crime. Where's the *love*?"

Before Jack could answer, Dee jumped in. "Love is lived out by those who go the '*second mile*.' Jesus used the parable of the good Samaritan to show us what love for another person really looks like. It's someone who willingly goes the *second mile* (Matthew 5:41) enduring whatever inconvenience is necessary without complaining."

Jack added, "Dee's right! I've seen that wherever ministries are established or led by middle or upper class white men, they only go the first mile. They do just enough to make themselves feel good about what they're doing. But that's sure different than the Samaritan; he met the *full needs* of the man who'd been beaten and robbed." As the others nodded in agreement he pointed out, "This is the only way Jesus would

have us minister, and it often means being inconvenienced.”

“Treyvon made me aware of something else,” Bob observed with a frown. “Most of the men in these ministries have no spiritual power, and nothing about them reflects the work of God in their lives. So they have no testimonies to reveal the mighty acts of God which we in our home fellowship family are so accustomed to. (1 Corinthians 4:20; 2 Timothy 3:5) And to the boys, Jesus becomes just a story character.”

José could see that Bob hit a chord in everyone’s heart. As he looked at Jack, he said, “I can see your mind working. The Spirit’s prompting something in you, isn’t He?”

Jack grinned. “We need to offer the teens in the detention center *and* their families genuine Christ-like relationships. These kids and the people close to them need authentic extended family that reflects love and obedient trust in our Lord.”

“What you’re saying,” blurted Bob, “is that we need to extend to them what we offer anyone who enters our Father’s Covenant as the Spirit uses us: FAMILY UNION!”

“Exactly!” Jack answered. “I think Treyvon has shown us a new field of ministry and that our Lord Jesus would have us help these kids as His heart and hands. In fact, I think we need to be thinking about other areas where our fellowship families can reach out to the hopeless and helpless.” (Romans 12:16; Luke 14:12-14; Matthew 25:31-46)

Mary cut in, “It’s like Jesus said, *‘I tell you the truth, whatever you do for one of the least of these, you do for Me.’*” (Matthew 25:45)

“How should we get started, Jack?” several asked at the same time.

“Well, Holly Springs is basically in the backyard of our own home fellowship family. I’d like to meet with Treyvon first and get to know him more. Since he’s already ministering in the detention center, it’d be easier if he became our *point of contact*.”

Tom said, “Over the years you’ve used the phrase *‘point of contact’* many times. I just want to say how much it’s revolutionized our home and especially Megan’s life.”

Megan smiled warmly. “You and Dee told us several years ago how a wife, especially one with kids still at home like me, can be a *point of contact* with other families on behalf of her husband and family. I really took that seriously and especially focused on unbelieving families whom Tom and I could establish a relationship with. A good number of them are now followers of Jesus in our home fellowship!”

Ted added, “And when Jesus sent out His disciples, or Paul sent out his, each was a *point of contact* representing not only himself but also his faith family.”

Jack was delighted that Tom had turned them to this topic. “That’s exactly how we all need to see ourselves—each of us is the *point of contact* on behalf of our families and our fellowship families. *And*, we’re also the support team for each other!”

“After Jack meets with Treyvon to see if he wants to be our *point of contact*,” Dee said, “we’ll talk this over with our own home fellowship. They need to make sure their hearts are fully wrapped around not only the teens but reaching out to their families and including them too if possible. I’m pretty sure they’ll want to do this.”

Bob spoke on behalf of everyone. “Jack and Dee, again you’ve shown us a willingness to get involved. I believe each of us is going to look around our own home fellowship area and challenge our faith families to see what we can do to reach the hopeless and the helpless.”

They closed their time together in a wonderful time of praise and prayer, with deep sense of renewed determination to serve their Lord in His Spirit’s love and power.