

Kingdom Living Today

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

45. Being Our Lord's Point of Contact (Part 3)

"I HAVE BECOME ALL THINGS TO ALL MEN SO THAT
BY ALL POSSIBLE MEANS I MIGHT SAVE SOME."

Warm sunshine filtered through the backyard trees as the four teenage boys—Josh, Nick, Dan and Adam—rounded up the younger children for a laughter-filled kickball game. With satisfied stomachs stretched by the delicious potluck barbeque lunch, the adults of the home fellowship family gathered in a circle in earshot of the kids. Everyone was listening intently to Treyvon as he related his experiences at the Holly Springs Detention Center. The young man was grateful for the sincere interest these brothers and sisters in Jesus had in him and his volunteer work.

"I have to say," Treyvon effused, "how encouraged my heart is as I see such love among you all! I really didn't expect to see such an *intergenerational* and *interracial* and *intercultural* mix in your fellowship family." He paused to look at each welcoming face. "You personify so much of what I believe Jesus wants in relationships." (Galatians 3:28)

Harry spoke for everyone. "The love you see among us is what Jack and Dee have role-modeled. They've made sure we all know how vital it is to live according to our Father's commands as a way of life out of love for our Lord and for one another." (John 15:10)

Juan's youthful face creased with a smile. "We've all tasted Jack's encouraging side. But, he can take us guys to task like a drill instructor if we're slack in leading our families in the way of our Lord!" (1Thessalonians 5:12,13) Everybody chuckled, especially Jack.

"Jack and Dee are like grandparents with intentional purpose, Treyvon," added Jan eagerly, "because they have an eternal view of us and our families. We know they're aimed for the narrow gate, and we're learning from their wisdom as we walk along with them." (Matthew 7:13,14) An atmosphere of joy permeated the air as different ones realized anew how much they'd been changed in their walk together in their Lord. In particular, the Spirit had generated in them a love that made them want to serve others. (Ephesians 4:15,16)

Jerome turned to Treyvon, his face serious. "I've known a number of young guys who've done time at the detention center, but you're the first man I've met who's actually going in to help. What's it really like to minister there?"

Treyvon's face brightened as it hit him how everyone was genuinely intrigued with his work with the kids at the center. All during the barbecue he'd been fielding individual questions. Now as he looked into these eager faces, he saw a faith family that didn't want to fail either him or their Lord.

"The first person who comes to mind is a teen who's Native American and Mexican," he recounted. "He grew up in a van parked in front of an apartment complex. His dad isn't in the picture now, but he remembers having to bring him home drunk more than once. When I talked with him last week he was really anxious

because he had nowhere to go when he was released. So he got into trouble again; that way he could stay in detention where he at least had a bed and meals.”

“Are there other boys like him who don’t have a place to go when they get out?” Jessica inquired, her voice quivering with sorrow as a young mother.

“Yes,” Treyvon answered gravely. “But there are also those who do have a place to go, and the conditions they go back to almost guarantee they’ll end up in the center again soon.”

“Like what?” Jessica pursued, her brow furrowing.

“Well, one seventeen-year-old I’ve been trying to help has a girlfriend and baby. They all moved in with his father and stepmother and grandmother after his release, but it’s really crowded and chaotic. The young couple has to sleep on a couch, and there’s no privacy.” He paused and slowly shook his head. “His dad’s been in jail a few times, and because of drugs he’ll probably go back there again.”(Proverbs 26:11)

Lacie’s eyes filled with anguish. “Is this pretty typical of the kids you encounter?”

“I’d say so,” Treyvon responded as his mind pictured the different boys. “In the years I’ve been at the detention center I think I met two from what you might call a stable home with a father and mother. The guys messed up, but it wasn’t a pattern of trouble in their family life.” His gaze lowered as he added, “For most of them, though, their lives outside detention are so bad that 80% end up back in.”(Proverbs 13:20)

Jerome was curious. “What’s the ethnic and racial makeup of the kids you’re working with?”

“The majority are Latinos and Blacks,” Treyvon answered, well aware that he was among them not many years back.

Lita had heard there were a lot of troubled Latino teens in their town and her heart reached out to Treyvon. “It must be very difficult to want to help these boys and know there’s so much going against your efforts.”

The young man sighed deeply. “It’s hard. If it weren’t for Jesus and my love for Him I would have stopped a long time ago.” A fresh wave of sorrow hit him. “Last night at detention was really painful. One of the boys I’d been working with for a while was going to be released. But his mother, who’d been clean for 6 months, failed a meth test and his hope of a place to go was shattered. He’s full of anger now because it was his mom who’d turned *him* in for being high on drugs and alcohol, and now she’s back into it.”

The group shared his discouragement for a moment; then Keisha asked softly, “Have there been any success stories?”

Treyvon looked up, a small smile reflecting his hope. “Yeah, there’s a nineteen-year-old who’s been raised by his grandmother. He joined a gang when he was 14 and ended up in Holly Springs. After he surrendered his life to Jesus as his Lord, a family with five kids took him in. He’s been part of their family for the past year and a half.” His smile grew larger as he went on, “He has a dream to be a chef. He’s now going to culinary school and working at a restaurant. But his biggest realization has been that he has to stay away from his old homies and his former way of life.”(Psalm 1:1,6)

“Is this kid’s experience what got you thinking there must be a better way to min-

ister to these guys than what you've been doing?" Nate asked.

"For sure," Treyvon nodded. "I can see that it isn't what we do *in* the detention center that matters as much as what needs to be done *after* the boy is released."

"Explain that more for us," Jack asked kindly.

Treyvon's deep voice intensified. "Our ministry to the kids doesn't have any follow-up after they get out. All we do is minister while they're in the center. I think that's the main reason so many return to their old ways and friends and end up in detention again."^(2Peter 2:22)

"You told me earlier while we were eating," Brett interjected, "that the ministry you're with works with the kids only while they're confined. Therefore they have no incentive to keep in contact with the volunteer after they're out."

"That's true," Treyvon agreed. "And the law forbids volunteers from pursuing the kids once they're released. If the guys want to be in contact with us, they have to initiate it."

Jack could sense that the fellowship family had a good feel for the young man as well as the fruitless nature of the ministry he was in. "We could ask more questions, Treyvon, but I suspect some of you are already being spurred by the Holy Spirit to do something about it."

Juan looked at his wife for a nod of confirmation. "Lita and I would like to get involved in wherever this is going to lead. It's time we help our Latino people, and Lita and I speak Spanish fluently." He added beaming, "Now that I'm out of the Army and staying in this area, we have the time and opportunity to do something to help others."

Jerome jumped on board after he heard Keisha whisper to him, "Let's do it!" "We'd like to get involved too."

"Could you use some teens?" Josh, Nick, Dan and Adam had sat down nearby, supervising the younger kids from a short distance. "The boys will need some friends who aren't like their old ones."

Jack looked at Treyvon warmly. "I guess you can see we want to help!"

Treyvon's face expressed the joy in his heart. And when he heard even the boys volunteer, tears trailed down his cheeks.

Dee made her way over to him and wrapped comforting arms around his broad shoulders. His tears were a release from having borne years of sadness that needed to be poured out.

A single voice began singing, "We praise your name, Lord Jesus..." and others joined in gratefully for having witnessed the Spirit of Jesus bring together hearts aligned to do His will.^(Hebrews 13:15)

After a time of praise and thanksgiving, Lacie jumped in, "What's next?"

Jack looked around with love, knowing that the faith family trusted the Spirit to give him discernment when their Lord was casting a new vision in their midst. "We need to start praying and fasting, seeking our Lord to put together how He wants us to participate individually and collectively,"^(Romans 12:4-7,27) he noted earnestly.

"I can see we need to research the laws and regulations that pertain to ministering in Holly Springs," Harry offered. "I'll be glad to look into it."

Jack nodded approvingly, then turned to Treyvon. “Do you want to be part of what we’re proposing?”

“Yes, sir!” came the resounding reply.

“Then the first thing we need is for Dee and me to meet your Mom, Garond and Yolanda, and anyone else in your life you think we should get to know,” Jack urged. “We’re a movement of family and extended spiritual family, and we rely on *points of contact* with families and extended family^(Philippians 2:19-25). Before you become our *point of contact* at the detention center, we want to get to know your family, both spiritual and biological.”

“I’ll do that,” Treyvon grinned broadly. “You guys are the first people who ever even asked about my family!”^(2Timothy 1:5)

“You’ll find that relationships among Jesus followers are the backbone of the Kingdom rather than singular individuals,” Dee stated encouragingly. “Taking the time to develop meaningful relationships in the Kingdom is what helps each of us stand when demonic assaults come. All those spiritual warfare commands in Ephesians 6:10-18 are in the *plural*—we do it together!”

“And it’s those relationships as family in Jesus,” her husband added, “that help the work we do *together* to far exceed any individual effort or expectation.”^(Ecclesiastes 4:12)

By now all the children had come to the circle and were seated on any available lap. As this loving gathering ended their time together in praise and prayer, Treyvon understood more deeply Jesus’s definition of *His* family: “*Whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.*”^(Matthew 12:50)