

Kingdom Living Today

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

46. Being Our Lord's Point of Contact (Part 4)

"THEY LOVED EACH OTHER AS THEY LOVED THEMSELVES."

After the supper remnants had been put away Dee was eager to know more about the three women sitting at the kitchen table. Garond, Jack, Treyvon, and Ramon and his father, Isiah, had already been sharing some of their history in the living room. Garond's face crinkled with a smile as he turned to Jack. "From the time Treyvon had lunch with you he hasn't stopped talking about you and your desire to get involved at the detention center."

"It's going to take a lot of prayer and fasting before we're in a position to effectively help," Jack responded, warmly returning the older man's smile. "This is a whole new arena of outreach for our faith family, and I know it's going to stretch us all in ways we can't imagine." He paused briefly, looking directly at Garond as he added, "We don't want to start something without everyone understanding and embracing what it will cost them." (Luke 14:31)

Garond appreciated that foresight. "You're wise to take the time to prepare before you act. Poor preparation is what got me into this wheelchair."

"How so?" asked Jack, surprised and intrigued.

All eyes were riveted on Garond, whose expression tightened as he recounted that pivotal event. "I was a crewman aboard choppers in 'Nam back in the early 70s. After a long day of flying we returned late, and the pilot decided not to top off the fuel tank. We had about a quarter tank left as I recall." His voice shook slightly as he continued, "In the middle of the night we got an emergency call for a medevac. The pilot told us we had enough fuel to make it there and back. We didn't. The chopper went down and I broke my back in the crash. That's when I lost use of my legs."

Jack, always alert for any signs of bitterness, detected none in the man seated across from him. "Is it because you've gotten use to it over the years that I don't hear any bitterness in your voice?" he inquired.

Garond brightened visibly as he replied, "On no! It's far more than that! I was bitter, *real* bitter, after the accident. I spent months in recovery angry with everyone. But there was another patient worse off than I was, and he had a sister." He raised his eyebrows for effect. "Yolanda came to visit him several times a week."

Knowing grins broke out among the men as they knew the happy ending. "She had a face like an angel," he glowed. "And even though my attitude turned everyone else off, not her! She always came over to talk with me. You might say I was the leper nobody wanted to be around." That was hard to believe from this man whose heart was reflected in his glistening eyes. "But Yolanda, she never hid her trust in Jesus. She just kept telling me about His love for me."

Garond's audience was spellbound and Jack teased him. "If your smile gets any bigger, you're going to find it hard to talk!" Affectionate laughter greeted that remark.

When he finally stopped laughing Garond continued, "Yolanda kept coming to

see me even after her brother was released. One day she stuck a Bible in my chest and ordered me to start reading it.” He chuckled at the memory of how such a sweet-natured person could be so forceful with him. Then he repeated to these brothers in Christ the very words she’d declared to him those many years ago: “You want to see me again, you’re going to read this from front to back! I’ll be here tomorrow and we’ll talk about the Book of Genesis. And all my friends who love Jesus have been praying and fasting for you, so you don’t have a choice!”

Ramon piped up loudly, “What’d you do?”

“Oh, I started reading,” Garond retorted as he turned to the young man. “But it wasn’t her tone that got me going; it was the love of Jesus I saw in her. I wanted to know the kind of love she had.”(Ephesians 3:14-19)

“So everyday she came and talked about the Bible with you?” Treyvon asked, gaining fuller admiration of the steadfast loyalty of this kindly woman of God.

“The very next day when she came back we discussed the Book of Genesis. But... I read the entire Bible in under two weeks for myself,” Garond gleamed. “When I read about the adversities other men faced like Joseph, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, I saw how God used these for a greater purpose. That’s when I *knew* God had used the helicopter crash to bring me not only to Yolanda but to HIMSELF!”

An expectant hush filled the room. “One night after lights out, Jesus’s love for me flooded my heart. I didn’t *want* to live in control of me anymore, and I sure didn’t want to be controlled by sin anymore either. I finally saw how out of love Jesus had taken my sins on Himself, so like a little child I asked the Father to forgive me and let me be His child. It may sound strange,” Garond’s eyes widened as he recalled that night, “but I sensed the room was filled to capacity with angels singing all around me!”

Every face was awash in tears of joy, something they couldn’t hold back when they’d seen the Spirit of Christ at work creating hope where there’d been hopelessness.

Wrapping up his testimony on a victorious note Garond marvelled, “A year later we were married, and now we have three wonderful children and six grandchildren.”

“I can hear your gratefulness to our Lord for His blessings to you,” Jack rejoined. “Do you mind if I ask how you moved to the neighborhood you now live in?”

“After I began to follow Jesus, Yolanda and I prayed about what Jesus meant for us when He said, *‘For where two or three come together in My name, there am I with them.’*(Matthew 18:20) We realized our Lord wanted the two of us to look inside ourselves and trust His Spirit for guidance.”

“So you weren’t nervous about just trusting Jesus and following through in whatever He made clear to you?” Isiah pursued.

“Nervous? Not one bit,” Garond chuckled confidently. “Trusting Jesus as Lord of all my life has been the easiest thing I’ve ever done!”

The other men were heartened by such affirmation of the older man’s intimacy with his Lord. “It’s like how Jesus described a born again person, the way He gives us certainty we can trust His Spirit’s guidance. He said, *‘The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.’*(John 3:8) Remember,” Garond said, “I’d been a military man under orders, sometimes not knowing if I’d come back alive. So taking orders from the Spirit was no big deal.(Matthew 8:5-10) It was ten years ago He told us

to move here and reach out to the neighborhood we're in now."

Jack knew he and Garond were almost the same age, and he'd truly met a brother who was a shepherd after his own heart. "What has Treyvon told you about us?"

"After Bob encouraged him to go the Restoration Ministries website, Treyvon asked Yolanda and me to do the same," Garond replied. "He wanted us to confirm what he was investigating, and it didn't take more than reading their Home page to realize we shared the same kindred spirit about the Kingdom of God. So every day Yolanda and I revisit the website and read more." The man glowed with joy. "Our hearts are set on fulfilling our Father's purposes. That's why I was really looking forward to meeting you, Jack!"

Jack slid out of his chair and knelt alongside Garond's wheelchair. They hugged and cried, rejoicing in having met each other. The younger men looked on appreciatively.

As Jack returned to his seat and wiped his eyes, Ramon asked him pointedly, "What do you see are the main hurdles in helping the boys in the detention center?"

"I'd like to hear about that too," Isiah chimed in as the others agreed.

Jack took a moment since he fully understood the seriousness of Ramon's question. These men all shared a great concern for Treyvon and wanted confirmation themselves that he wasn't wasting his time working with Jack's fellowship. "In our faith family, two couples, one Black and one Hispanic, plus four teens want to be on the front lines, and others will intercede and help in other ways." He spoke decisively. "We know it will take the personal involvement of truly committed people to help the boys AFTER they're out of the detention center. I've always been encouraged by Isaiah 32:8, '*The noble man makes noble plans, and by noble deeds he stands.*' We want the Lord to be as much in the planning and preparation as we need His power and grace when we begin to minister." The men all nodded approvingly at that piece of wisdom.

"The issue for these boys, as it is for all who've lived at the bottom of society," Jack continued soberly, "is one of *freedom*. The Civil Rights Movement tried to gain freedom through non-violent means by relying on large numbers of people to stand their ground."

Garond interjected energetically, "I was at the Washington Mall when Martin Luther King gave his speech. In fact, I shook his hand!"

Jack leaned toward his new brother, sadness in his voice. "Now, over 40 years later, tell me what fruit of that movement you see."

"Well, while some blacks and minorities have gained a measure of economic success," Garond reported with a frown, "racism and inequality are sure still with us. And to be honest, it hurts me to see how little we really have gained."

Jack felt Garond's sorrow. "Then please be my judge in what I'm going to say. *True freedom*, whether it's spiritual, emotional or societal, starts with seeking the authentic kind of freedom Jesus promises. (John 8:36) Someone who's really free can take a stand *with* Him and *for* Him. And," he went on firmly, "as the Bible shows us with people like Joseph, David, and Daniel and his friends, when you stand for our Lord, He'll stand with you."

"Can you clarify that a little more for me?" Treyvon asked intently.

Jack's voice was sure in spirit. "Our Lord looks for a person to take *one step of obedience* on His behalf. Think about it. The shepherd boy David stood up to the giant

Goliath because of the Name and reputation of the One True God.(1 Samuel 17:45) Daniel and the young Hebrews stood up for their faith in their Lord and He stood with them in Nebuchadnezzar's furnace fire."(Daniel 3:19-25)

Garond's face dawned with new understanding. "I see what you're saying, Jack. In the Civil Rights Movement we were protesting for our own rights. We were counting on large crowds to get our point across rather than the power of Jesus on those who stand for Him. Genuine freedom *does* begin with Jesus and flows out of the freedom only He can give." He stopped for a moment, a wry grin on his wrinkled features. "I don't mean to sound offensive, but if we minorities wait for the white man to give us freedom, we'll just keep getting the crumbs we've gotten these past 40 years."

"I couldn't have said it better, Garond," Jack concurred. "And I've realized something about those boys in the detention center, too. The men who minister to them keep quoting Bible verses to them, but what they really need is the *reality of Jesus* in their lives. To most of these kids," he went on, "Jesus is more like a story character, or someone old people lean on. The Bible means nothing to them!"

"So what you're saying," Ramon noted eagerly, "is that the boys will discover Jesus as their own Way and Truth and Life when they encounter free people who share testimony of how our Lord stood by them and intervened in their lives!(John 14:12-14) This is the true freedom of turning away from the darkness of sin's control and turning to the Light of forgiveness and His Spirit's power."(John 8:12; 12:46)

"The Restoration Ministries website calls these living testimonies 'God sightings'," Treyvon inserted animatedly. "God sightings are a normal way of life for those who collectively live repentantly and obediently in the Christ they love and serve."(Acts 26:20)

Garond rejoined, "That's what so encouraged Yolanda and me when we spent time at the site! The Spirit had already shown us about communal righteousness. And as Treyvon and Ramon can attest, we insisted on all of us remaining repentant."

"As we've stayed repentant," Ramon added jubilantly, "we've sure had our share of God sightings!"

"When you think about repentance," Garond mused, "we're asking our Father for forgiveness and affirming to Him that we want to do things according to His Word. Our repentance shows God we really want to change."

"That's the bull's eye of true repentance," smiled Jack. "*Forgiveness*, given and received, both with our Father in heaven and with all people, is the way to true freedom.(Ephesians 4:32-5:2) And with freedom in Christ, there truly is hope!"

Garond summed it up. "So our focus must be on Jesus Who enables us to forgive and be free. It's the same for everyone, whether you're a boy in a detention center or an individual seeking racial equality." He sighed. "We in the Civil Rights Movement were never truly free. As long as any of us held unforgiveness toward the white man, we were still slaves—spiritually and emotionally."(John 8:31-34)

"Only someone who's been forgiven and has forgiven others is truly free," exulted Treyvon. "And only a free person can help others be free!"

It was as if the Spirit had given all of them His eyes of understanding. His heart overflowing with delight, Garond asked the men to hold hands as he prayed. A renewed determination to love and serve their Lord filled them all—and they hadn't even yet heard about what the ladies had discussed! We'll present that next.