

Kingdom Living Today

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

47. Being Our Lord's Point of Contact (Part 5)

**"THOSE WHO WHO FEAR THE LORD AND HONOR HIS NAME
TALKED WITH EACH OTHER, AND THE LORD LISTENED AND HEARD."**

While the men had gathered in the living room, Dee, Yolanda, Treyvon's mother Ayanna, and Jasmine, Ramon's mother, gathered around the kitchen table. In the brief time they'd spent together, there was already a sense that they were sisters in their mutual love of Jesus.

"Did you all grow up nearby?" Dee asked, sensing familiar warmth among the three other ladies.

As the women nodded, Yolanda replied, "We all grew up within a few blocks of each other. I'm a lot older than my friends here, but you get to know each other when you live in the same neighborhood."

"Please, don't be offended," Dee smiled earnestly, "but I'd like to know what it was like growing up in the inner city and staying to raise your kids here."

Ayanna fielded this with a sad shake of her head. "Growing up in the inner city you see so many bad things. Gangs have been here as long as I can remember. In fact," she grimaced sadly, "I lost my cousin in a drive-by shooting. Guns are a way of life here, and the street talk is, you kill or get killed."(Psalms 12:8)

"Drug dealers on the corners making a sale in daylight is normal, Dee," added Ramon's mom, Jasmine. "And if we see it all the time, we wonder why the police can't see it too. I guess they're too busy with murders and break-ins to bother."

Ayanna quickly cut in, "We know it's happening, so we just try to stay away from those areas and warn our kids to avoid them too. But I can tell you this: most families around here either have someone doing drugs or selling them."

Dee's eyes filled with sympathy as she recalled her own childhood surrounded by peaceful homes and secure play areas for all the children. She turned as Yolanda, seated next to her, added another dimension of hardship in the inner city. "Decent housing is a real problem. When I was growing up, our family lived in a condemned building for several years. My father lost his job so he turned to the streets and started hustling to scrape up some money. Finally he just gave up and left us."

"Things got so bad for my father being out of work so much," interjected Ayanna, "that one night he got drunk and lined us all up to shoot us right there in the kitchen!"

"What happened?" Dee asked incredulously.

The younger woman went on, "I was the oldest and the first one he wanted to shoot. I just ran out the house screaming and he chased me. Praise God, he ran out of breath somewhere along the sidewalk." The whole memory saddened her as she continued, "I saw him crumple down on the cement and start to sob. The next day he left and we didn't hear from him for years."

Dee leaned over to gently touch her arm. "How did your family get by after that?"

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"Well," Ayanna sighed, "Mama struggled to keep food on the table for the six of us. We were on welfare and spent a lot of time in food lines at some of the area churches."

Dee said softly, "Ayanna, even with what you went through, I don't hear any bitterness as you're recounting it."

"That's because you need to hear what *Jesus* did!" she responded, excitement replacing somberness. "For years I was so bitter toward my father. I'd shake with anger whenever I thought about him. And I made sure I told everyone I met about what he'd done to us." Then she looked gratefully at Yolanda across from her. "When Ramon asked me to meet Garond and Yolanda, who'd moved in down the street several years back, things changed in my life. Wow, did they change!"

"How so?" Dee asked, rapt with interest.

"After we got together a few times, I was just about to tell Yolanda my horror story," Ayanna continued. "But she wouldn't let me talk! Instead, she said, 'From this day forward you're going to see what *Jesus* can do about your past.'" Her face brightened as she recalled, "She and Garond helped me and Isiah demolish our strongholds; these had kept us *both* in a prison of bad memories and responses for as far back as I can recall.^(2Corinthians 10:3-5) But when we renounced them in the name of Jesus, we were able to hear clearly from the Holy Spirit to turn from our sin and draw near to our heavenly Father through Jesus. For the first time I was able to truly forgive my Dad from my heart for what he did." She paused to gather her thoughts.

Jasmine turned to Dee with a grin. "She hasn't got to the best part yet..."

Ayanna smiled at her old friend. "About two years ago I ran into my father while I was going into Walmart. Our conversation was short, but I noticed I didn't have any bad feelings toward him. As he was walking away he told me where he was staying." She reached over the table for Yolanda's hand. "I came right over and told Yolanda. After we prayed together she told me in no uncertain words, 'I want you to go to your father and *ask forgiveness from him* for the years you were bitter toward him in your heart.^(Matthew 18:35) And then ask him to help you love him *the way Jesus would love him.*'"^(1Peter 1:22)

"Wow!" Dee responded, astonished at such a bold step of obedient love for their Lord. "So did you?"

"When it registered just how much sin my Lord had forgiven me of, I knew I had to do this. Besides," she added fervently, "how else could my dad see the love of Christ in me if I was choosing to be unforgiving toward him?"^(1John 4:20)

After they all marvelled at the greatness of their God and His transforming power, Ayanna added, "There's one more point I need to share. Not long after I asked Dad's forgiveness and asked him to help me love him like Jesus would, we got together again. While I was praying, I heard the Holy Spirit tell me, 'Ask your dad to tell his life story.' As soon as I asked him about his early years, he opened up."

Tears brimmed and she took a deep breath. "I didn't know the utter poverty he grew up in. His parents abandoned him when he was three and he was raised by his grandmother on sharecropper's land. He didn't have a pair of shoes to call his own til he was 13! And the more I heard, the more I was ashamed I'd ever held an ill feeling against him."

Dee had no idea that people from her own generation had lived through such difficult circumstances. But her heart lifted with joy knowing the deep healing that only an authentic trust relationship with Lord Jesus can bring about. “How is your relationship with your father now?” she asked.

“Dad and I see each other every day now!” beamed Ayanna. “Being able to talk about his past without anyone blaming him or accusing him gave him the respect he’d longed for all his life. I’ve now become his caregiver as his health has gotten worse,” she went on, love radiating from her face. “But every day new positive memories are being formed between us. And the best part is that Dad is now following Jesus too with his whole heart and soul, seeking each day to live in a way that honors his Lord!”

Dee mirrored the delight in the other caring faces. Then the Holy Spirit seemed to impress on her that this time set apart to get to know one another had a deeper purpose. “I feel like our Lord has brought me here for some special reason besides my joy in our time of sharing. Could you please describe for me what it’s been like, raising your children here?”

“Survival, just being able to survive, is the attitude of most of the people,” Jasmine blurted. “Living here isn’t much different than being in a prison. So many people are *hopeless* because they can’t see a way out for themselves or their kids.”

“What are the schools like here?” Dee pushed, knowing that many parents where she lived set their hope on their children getting a diploma and going to college or learning a trade.

Jasmine’s sunny face fell into despair. “I have an 11-year-old daughter, Malia, and I’m praying about what to do with her. She’s repeatedly being beaten up and bullied in school. (Psalms 10:2) I’ve gone to the administration with six others families, but the principal seemed helpless to do anything to stop it.”

“What you’ve just said, Jasmine, is going on in all the schools around here,” Yolanda added seriously. “Garond and I use our home in the afternoon to tutor latchkey kids, and they tell us the same horror stories. And when we talk to their parents, they’re scared about their kids being in the public school too. They know it’s chaos there, but what can we do?”

“What about home schooling the children?” Dee asked, knowing that that was the course of action chosen by their fellowship families.

Ayanna snorted. “Home schooling, isn’t that for the rich and the smart?”

“Not at all,” Dee answered with an assuring smile. She sensed she now knew why God had her meeting with these ladies. Turning to Yolanda she continued, “I have a lot of experience in home schooling. Maybe you and I can not only help Malia learn in security and tranquility, but the kids from the other six families and many more as well.”

“Are you asking me to volunteer for something?” Yolanda replied, her dark eyes gleaming as she was catching hold of what Dee’s proposal really meant.

“You may want to pray more about it, but I think an avenue may be opening from God for you and Garond to do far more than tutor after school,” Dee affirmed. “Home schooling isn’t just education from textbooks and repeating the facts on tests,” she added. “Our fellowship families understand that their children are given

to them by our Father to train up to live His ways.(Genesis 18:19) That takes far more role modeling and loving interaction than before and after school allows.”

“I hear what you’re saying,” concurred Ayanna with some doubt in her voice, “but I only have a high school diploma. I didn’t go to college, and I sure don’t feel qualified to teach Malia, even though she’s only in sixth grade.”

“What you can offer your daughter,” smiled Dee gently, “is the security of your love and the opportunity to instill the character qualities of Jesus in her even while she’s meeting all the state requirements for learning.”(Deuteronomy 6:5-7) She leaned forward, glowing as she encouraged this mother with a whole new focus on ‘education’. “Malia’s wondering if she’s going to become just another used-up, bullied girl like those all around her at school. And she’s not alone! Those other 6 families who showed up at the meeting want more for their kids too! And,” she smiled, “I’ve never met a home schooling family who wasn’t eager to share their own journey of how they began and why they’re still educating their kids at home. The families in our fellowship would be delighted, I know, to help you get started.”

Yolanda was beaming. “I’ve had so much practice with these after school kids that I’d love to help you with this, Jasmine! Just think of it: being able to undergird all aspects of your daughter’s learning with the character and truth of our God! You’ve got me thinking about my own grandbabies, Dee,” she added with a twinkle. “They’re all out in the suburbs, but I know their parents are really concerned about the humanist focus at their schools, and how hectic their lives are with outside activities when they’re not in classes. You’ve planted some seeds for prayer for me and Garond!”

Hope was starting to rise for both Jasmine and Ayanna, whose many friends were also deeply troubled by the chaos and safety issues at their children’s schools. “Could you help us check this out, Dee? I mean, it sounds too good to be true, that any of us could educate our kids ourselves. Like, for instance, what would Malia do about things like chemistry and algebra? I wouldn’t be much help there.”

Chuckles filled the kitchen as Dee replied, “You’d be amazed at how our Father can put together opportunities with others to handle areas you may not feel comfortable with. But I know that the curriculum some of our fellowship families are using,” she added confidently, “not only puts God at the center of all areas of learning, but also lays out the instruction in such a way that you’re learning together. And yes, there’s opportunity with the program I’m talking about for one set to be used with kids from grades 3 through 12. So you don’t have to be either rich or highly educated to help your children learn to *live* God’s way!”

Eyes of wonder reflected hearts burgeoning with hope for new purpose in living in the inner city. And Dee couldn’t wait to talk with Jack and with the fellowship family to come alongside these dear ones with wisdom they’d gleaned from experience as well as resource materials she knew they’d be glad to share.

Jasmine eyed Dee with appreciation. “You’ve given me something I could only have dreamed about, Dee — hope that my daughter wouldn’t have to repeat the same cycle of despair that Isiah and I experienced at that age. I look forward to discussing this more with you and your faith family. The sooner Malia is out of that situation, the better for us all!”