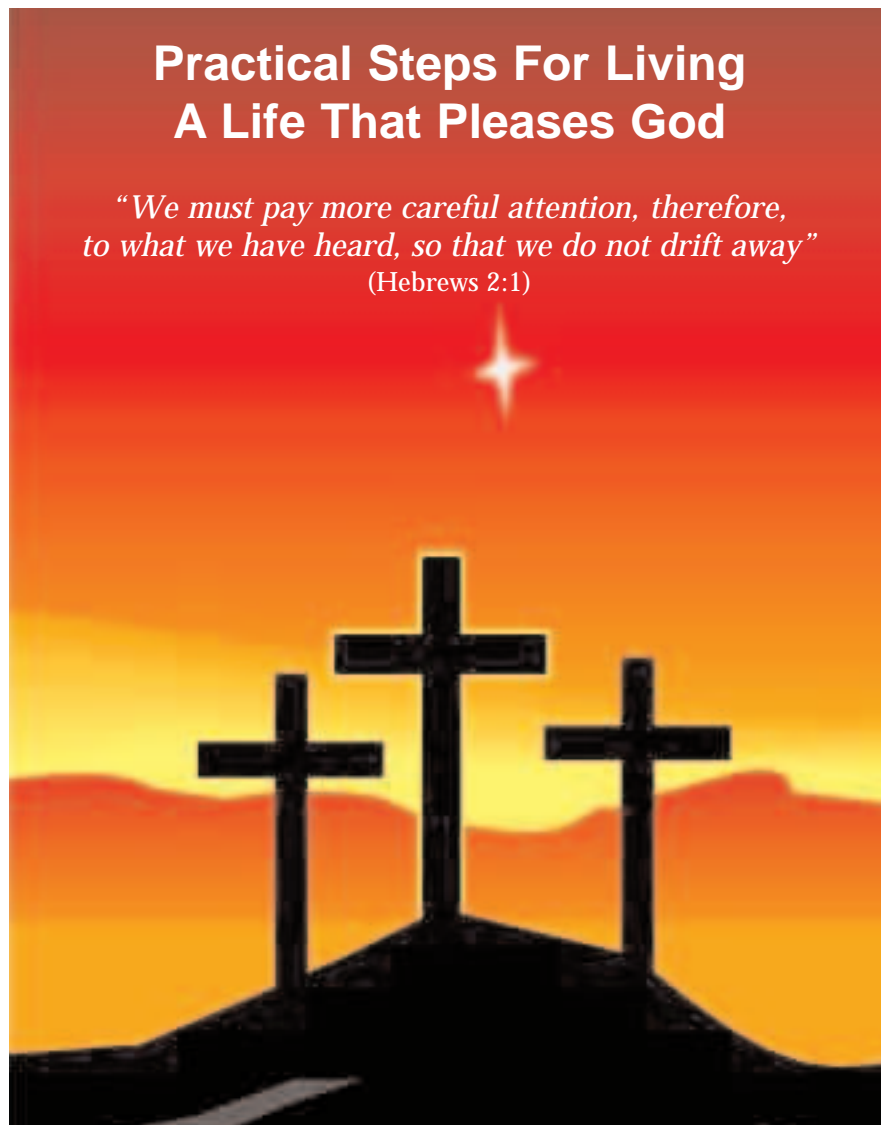


Lifebytes:

28. Bearing Fruit For The Father: Life Flows From the SPIRIT (John 3:8)



Restoration Ministries International

Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz

email: MikeDowg@aol.com

Web: www.Restorationministries.org

Dear Friends,

If you've read **Lifebyte 27**, then you're aware of the importance of your absolute trust in God. Your love-grounded obedient trust and the Holy Spirit's presence in you are the combo that enable you to bear lasting fruit for our Father.

A Trust-based Life in the Spirit
"Produce fruit befitting your repentance"
(Matthew 3:8)

"I don't want to end up like you and Sue, having to *trust God* the way you do." That statement was spoken to us a few years ago by someone who had observed our walk for many years. But we want to affirm that we find it far easier—and far more joyful—to trust God than to live *without* trusting Him!

With trust come power and guidance from the Holy Spirit, and testimonies to our Father's love and faithfulness.

Without trust come worry and anxiety, and a life filled with dead ends and failed expectations.

Engrain into your heart a few key points before we explore the topic of fruitfulness:

- **You must trust** that your repentance and confession of your sins results in being cleansed of all unrighteousness by the shed blood of Jesus, our atoning sacrifice.
- **You must trust** that your righteous standing in Jesus provides the basis for your fellowship with our Father and His Son.
- **You must trust** that true fellowship is *first* found with God, and is the precursor for your fellowship with others.
- **You must trust** that His Spirit's activity in your life is designed to bear fruit to the Father's glory .

A person who remains righteous through repentance and stays in fellowship with the Father and Son will find trust to be like breathing. Life in the Spirit will flow.

A person who remains unrighteous through unrepentance and unconfessed sin will never learn to trust. Their sin will keep them spiritually gasping.

Your Attachment To The Vine

Let's continue our discussion from the previous Lifebyte, *Life Begins in the Spirit*. Certain facets of both the Hebraic Restoration and your ability to thrive on spiritual meat can best be illustrated by the parable of Jesus, the True Vine, and those who place their trust in Him as the "branches." [Please read John 15:1-17 before going further.]

"Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:4,5).

First, note that Jesus uses a *grapevine* to make His point. Unlike many other fruits that grow singularly, grapes grow in *clusters*. Keep this in mind because the truths we'll be sharing are aimed for your **collective consideration, discussion and application** with your family and those with whom you fellowship as extended spiritual family.

You may remember from our other writings that the word "**covenant**" can mean **to live in union with**. Living in *union* is a deep sense of belonging to Jesus. That intimacy



is captured vividly in the imagery of Him as the Vine and we as the branches securely attached to Him. But not only do we *belong* to our Lord, we NEED Him on our pilgrimage to salvation. If we're not connected to Jesus, we can do NOTHING for His Kingdom's sake and His Father's glory.

Ongoing **relational connectedness** is a requirement for the followers of Jesus. **Satan** is well aware of this, and that's where his attacks will come — through constant schemes to **sever connectedness**. Nothing is more vulnerable to wolves than a lone sheep.

Trying to live in union with an invisible God is tough enough for us who live in a visible world. But, besides the attacks of Satan, each of us has a force within us that is contrary to everything our Lord Jesus desires — our **sin nature**.

“[The Father] cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful” (John 15:2).

We discussed this in our previous Lifebyte, but it's worth repeating: Because we are born with a **sin nature**, a significant part of our life's goals, values and the ways we walk these out are developed under that dark influence. Our sin-based motives and behaviors are what our Father must prune. Those who refuse to be pruned by Him will be *cut off*.

Our Father doesn't need sin-controlled people representing Him in the world. Sadly, there are many who live in unrepentance with unconfessed sin and excuse themselves or are excused by others with the unbiblical term, “**Backslider!**”— as though there's a category for believers who live carnally and willfully according to their sin nature!

Not only must the influence of your own sin nature die through your *sanctification*, your journey with the Spirit trans-

forming you into continuing Christ-likeness. The sin-based, stronghold-influenced attitudes and behaviors you inherited from your parents must also come to an end. The degree to which YOUR PARENTS lived unrepentantly and were influenced by strongholds is the degree to which these motivations and attitudes have been instilled in YOU.

Your Father knows this. This is why He is the **PRUNER!**

The role of our Father in your spiritual development is often minimized throughout Christendom. Yet, you need to anchor His role firmly: He is going to remove everything in you that does not bear fruit!

This is where the cooperative help of those who fellowship with you according to His four purposes is so important. [See **Lifebyte 26, Will Jesus Find Faith Within You?**, for more on the essence of biblical fellowship.]

During times of pruning, the encouragement and the spiritual insight of others are invaluable so that you aren't overcome with discouragement and despair.

“This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples”
(John 15:8).

Read this verse again, and try to picture what it is being said from *our Father's* vantage point. Try to see *His* goal and purpose for pruning you into ever-increasing fruitfulness that brings Him glory:

“This is to My glory, that you bear much fruit for Me, revealing that you are My Son's disciples.”

As you undergo the painful changes the Holy Spirit will make in you on your pilgrimage, you need to pay attention to our Father's goal—***to bear fruit for His glory!*** If you don't keep His goal in mind as you go through the discomfort of being trans-

two ways: by utter dependence on Him, and through the actions our obedient trust produces.

Connection to the Vine reveals an abiding relationship of the *heart*, not just obligatory observance of correct religious behavior. The life-giving truths of the Vine and His branches have no correlation to “religious practice”. The profound spiritual interconnection between the Vine and His beloved branches is a matter of relational intimacy!

Each branch must choose to remain *attached directly* to the Vine, Jesus. No branch can attach itself to another *branch*, no matter how pleasant in appearance or bountiful it may be, and find life.

The necessity of *each person* being intimately attached to the Vine is why our Father is so against the **Nicolaitan spirit** in Christendom. Nicolaitanism places clergy and other spiritual leaders as **intermediaries** between God and His children. In other words, a human agent sets himself (or allows himself to be set) between the Vine and the branches, disrupting the direct life-giving flow.

This partition ultimately kills the branch. Even those who once trusted become dead believers through Nicolaitan interference. If you could survey those who complacently abide within this system to ask how their lives are bearing fruit for the Father’s glory, you’d be grieved at the most likely response: little or no fruitfulness.

Hebrews chapter 11 recounts the lives of faithful servants who **trusted** God; that is, they remained attached to the Vine. But the writer also warns how people become *detached*: “And **without trusting it is impossible to be well-pleasing to God...**” (Hebrews 11:6,CJB).

Just a note for you parents:

You’re responsible to help your children become personally attached to the Vine so that they don’t live vicariously through *your* trust. Yes, your children

DO need to see the fruit of a viable trust in your daily choices and actions.

Yet your kids also need to recognize and be appalled by their *own sin nature* so they can learn what it is to *turn* from darkness and choose Vine attachment as their own way of life. [For more on biblical parenting, see ***Discussing How To Restore The Early Church, Lessons 42-44.***]

When we first began to follow Jesus 30 years ago as a young couple, some wonderful role models showed us how to abide on the Vine. Our role models demonstrated the importance of attachment as well as the need for our Father’s pruning in order to produce much fruit.

As much as your sin nature may not want to accept this, it’s true:

The singular purpose for fruitfulness is to bring glory to our Father.

This biblical reality is easier to grasp if you see it lived out in others. Paul exhorts followers of Jesus to observe the lives of those who are more mature on the Vine:

Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live [who abide on the Vine as the Lord desires] according to the pattern we gave you;

Whatever you have learned [from my attachment on the Vine] or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you (Philippians 3:17;4:9).

[For more on the role of mature role models as guides to bring glory to the Father, see **Lesson 46** of ***Discussing How To Restore the Early Church: Flying the Flock to the Father.***]

Paul emphasizes how essential it is that our life and purpose bring glory to our Father in response to our connection to our beloved Vine:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ... so that we would bring Him praise commensurate with the glory of the grace He gave us through the Beloved One (Ephesians 1:3,6; see also vv. 12,14).

Again, in order to bring glory to our Father we must abide on the Vine, His Son. As fellow grapes in our collective family cluster, we're given orders to help ensure that the fruit is sweet, not poisonous:

Encourage each other daily, as long as it is called Today, so that you may not be hardened by sin's deceitfulness (Hebrews 3:13).

- **Consider this:** Trust in God isn't experienced until you have something that's *out of your control* that you need to trust Him for. What opportunities has He given you recently to trust? Are the testimonies you share of His faithfulness about *current* situations or those long past?

- Ask others close to you how *your* trust (or lack of trust) influences their lives. List their comments below.

Our Father Prunes! Boy, does He know how to prune!

Now that we've discussed the general nature of our life on the Vine, we want to explore more thoroughly the key points of pruning and fruit bearing.



Pruning is painfully necessary for fruitfulness. If anything about us is not going to bear fruit, our Father prunes it. Even areas of past fruitfulness may be pruned in order to bear greater fruit in the future.

This is why it is so crucial that we do not seek satisfaction in **what we do for God**. A person who is trapped by feeling he must perform in order to be acceptable to God develops a sense of pride about his past accomplishments, even those in the spiritual realm (see Luke 17:10).

Our Father is glorified by those who bear much fruit in Jesus (see John 15:8). But *motive* is an essential factor! The only fruit that lasts is that which is done through the Spirit by a branch who is determined to do *only* our Father's will!

People who identify themselves by what they *do* for God resist pruning by our Father. They may only have testimonies of *past* fruitfulness.

There is nothing current to glorify our Father. Nor, unless they repent, will there be any future fruit.

On the other hand, a trusting, obedience-based follower of Jesus remains connected to the Vine. That branch seeks *only* God's will.

**He cherishes the pruning
of anything that will not bear fruit
to the Father's glory.**

Our Father intends to lop off the root causes and behaviors that have ripened through years of submitting to your sin nature. These underlying motives are more extensive and deeply entrenched than most followers of Jesus would like to believe! That's because we all tend to think we're better than our Lord knows we are in our heart.

His pruning is like a dentist making sure that all of the decay has been drilled out before he fills the cavity.

Be assured that our Father knows how far things need to be pruned much better than we do. Again, this is where trust is indispensable.

My friend Chuck, an agronomist, visited our retreat center a few days after I'd planted several fruit trees. After examining the saplings he asked, "Didn't you prune these as the planting instructions called for?" I thought I'd done a great pruning job. He asked me for the pruning shears. Slicing away, he cut those trees back so far that I thought they'd die!

"You have to drive the roots deep," he explained. "You don't need the tree to grow right now. It needs to create a healthy root system during the first few years. Then, when it begins to bear fruit, it'll be well-supplied with nourishment from its roots."

Chuck was right, of course! You should have seen the fruit we got in the years to follow. Likewise, a *passion for your relationship with our Father and His Son, Jesus—and a passion for His Word*—drives you deep into His will and character to enable you to cooperate with Him for His glory.

Ponder this apt pruning passage:

*And you have forgotten that **exhortation** that addresses you as [branches]: 'My son, **do not make light of the Lord's [pruning]**, and **do not lose heart** when He reproves you, because the Lord [prunes] those He loves, and He **scourges everyone He accepts [on His Vine]**'...*

*No [pruning] seems pleasant at the time, but painful. **Later on, however, it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness** for those who have been **trained by it** (Hebrews 12:5,6,11).*

Do you understand what happens in your life when our Father accepts you as a true branch? You're going to *be changed* by Him! And He warns that this transformation process isn't going to be pleasant. Why not? Because your identity is wrapped around years of having submitted to your sin nature. Your sin-based identity has been your "I am". And that nature will resist being changed.

Some counterfeit gospels even preach that God accepts you "just as you are" as though you didn't have to repent and turn away from your sin-bent inclination. But repentance has ALWAYS been foundational to the Gospel of Jesus so that your sins could be forgiven and His Spirit dwell within you!

There is only one **I AM**, our Lord Jesus, the Perfect Vine Whose nature is that of His Father. As His branches, we need to be disciplined, *pruned* if you will, of all that is un-Christlike. This is our Father's will so that we can bear much Christ-like fruit to His glory.

Keep in mind that vineyards are pruned during winter, a time when the vines are dormant. A false premise of Hellenist-influenced Nicolaitanism is

that your life in Christ will always be onward and upward, filled with religious activity. On the contrary, you need winter rests so that our Father can do His work in you for your future fruitfulness.

To *embrace* the winter rest of pruning takes a lot of trust! Just as the winter quiet follows fall's energetic harvest, so too you need to experience a season of rest in your busy fruitbearing.

This respite can be frightening for those who fear they're failing God if they aren't always on the go for Him! But spiritual winter is a time of retuning your relationship with your main priority: intimacy with our Father and Jesus.

A season of refreshing your loving trust calls for your heart and mind to appropriate perfect peace in His Sovereign love for you: "**Be still, and know that I am God**" (Psalms 46:10).

As your trust is strengthened and renewed during seasons of rest, you fortify your resolve to walk in loving obedience according to our Father's purpose for your life.

Just as some of the Asia Minor congregations that John reports drifted away from intimacy with God, so too followers of Jesus today can get distracted by their activities and make THESE the center of their life. Seasons of rest are one of our Father's means of setting us apart to fan the flame of passion for HIM.

Let's learn from the warning issued to our forefathers in the faith who allowed the gospel message to become mere words rather than life-giving purpose.

*For **Good News** has also been proclaimed to us, just as it was to them. But the message they heard didn't do them any good, because those who heard it **did not combine it with trust.** For it is we **who have trusted** who enter the*

*rest. It is just as He said, "And in My anger, I swore that they **would not enter My rest.**"... Therefore, it still remains for **some to enter it, and those who received the Good News earlier did not enter because of disobedience...** For the one who has entered God's rest has also **rested from his own works, as God did from His** (Hebrews 4:2-10).*

- Can you recount times when our Father wanted to do some pruning in you? Did you even know what was going on? If you can recount instances of pruning, what did He do and how did you react?

- Did you *miss* the lessons He wanted you to learn from His pruning? Are there areas of your spiritual life that were once fruitful but are now dead? Yes or No? If yes, what are they?

**Life In The Spirit
Experiences the Spirit
Spirit Life Isn't the Way of the World**

"To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me" (2 Corinthians 12:7).

We'll be writing more about "spiritual meat" in future Lifebytes. However, we wanted to leave you some thoughts and testimonies from both our personal experience and from others who are following Jesus and responding to His Spirit's guidance.

Mike: I've walked in a prophetic gifting for 30 years. Those who know me well realize what it's "cost" in both emotional and physical suffering to share God's messages. (Both Testaments bear witness that the prophetic life is never easy!) In fact, my mother told me she named me "Michael" because she sensed I'd be one of His messengers! Although I know that this is His call for my life, it still takes a toll at times!

I feel our Father's mercies in the prophecies He gives me for people, even the tough messages. Sometimes the prophecies are corrective; other times they give guidance and direction. In either case my heart's motivation is to accurately share what God impressed on me, and to help keep people out of trouble with Him. Any suffering I undergo is part of His mercy to me. I certainly don't think much of myself, for I'm just an "unworthy servant".

We've encountered some believers over the years who have been deceived by the counterfeit "health and wealth" gospel: that God intends for His children to not suffer physically or materially. You can imagine the accusations tossed at me that my "faith is weak" because I suffer so often!

We mention this because you or someone you know who trusts our Lord wholeheartedly may be suffering as our Father uses them for His purposes. If they're part of your family or fellowship family, remember that Body Life in the

Spirit calls for spiritual discernment and encouragement of one another.

***"To this you were called,
because Christ suffered for you,
leaving you an example,
that you should follow in His steps"***

(1 Peter 2:21).

Right now God may be using you as His instrument in situations or circumstances that are calling for steep sacrifice. You may find yourself misunderstood by many. We hope your family and those in your extended spiritual family are coming alongside to pray and bear the load with you.



Sometimes you may be swamped in difficult circumstances because your Father has put you there to *intercede*. Or, you may be His messenger to those who don't want to hear. Perhaps He's called you to take unpopular steps of trusting obedience. Those who are without the Spirit of Christ will most likely criticize you or desert you in your time of need. But don't give way to despair just because He's found you faithful to serve Him and His purposes!

We'd like to encourage you with a few testimonies that represent life in the Spirit:

- Prior to moving to the retreat center in Connecticut in 1983 we were living in Massachusetts. One of the congregations in our area was powerful for the Lord, and we wondered why.

One day I (Mike) had lunch with an older man who was a deacon in that faith community. Twenty five years earlier he'd served as a deacon when the congregation had voted to hire a liberal pastor. Many of the biblical conservatives left. But the Holy Spirit told this gentlemen to *stay* and *pray*.

For *twenty years* he anguished there praying for God to intervene and restore Truth. Then, in a most wonderful and unexpected way, the parishioners voted in a new pastor who led them back to follow Jesus!



- Our Lord intended for this man’s testimony to be an anchor for us a few years later. When we arrived at the retreat center the Board of Directors were part of denomination that called themselves “**The Frozen Chosen**”. If it hadn’t been for God sending us prophetic messengers to confirm that we were to serve and teach there, we wouldn’t have accepted their invitation.

After we’d settled in, the Holy Spirit directed us to attend the congregation of that denomination (about three miles away). What an emotionally and spiritually challenging experience, one that we didn’t always graciously embrace!

One Sunday morning on the way to the worship service, I was so distraught over having to go participate in such a lifeless gathering that I blurted out, “Lord, if You want us to attend this morning, have three red cars come in the opposite direction!” Hardly had the words left my mouth when three red cars came over the hill. On another occasion Sue cried out about this, only to find God affirm that we were to stay.

For *five years* we stayed in that congregation because our Lord assured us He had a purpose for us being there. Mike would attend annual retreats with the men at a cottage in New Hampshire. At *each retreat* they’d attack him about some facet of his trust in God. *Each Sunday*, the retreaters would attend one of the denomination’s services in that area. *Each time* the pastor would be preaching on the same topic the men had just attacked Mike over. And, each time his teaching sided with Mike’s position.

(God does have a sense of humor!)

Finally, after five years of this pattern, Mike and the guys were leaving the service. One of the elders exploded at Mike: “Why is it that every time we jump *you* on these retreats, our *own man* is taking your side?!” Mike replied, “*Listen* to him!” Just at that moment, the Holy Spirit told Mike he’d finished his work in that congregation and could leave. After meeting with the elders, we left.

We didn’t write ***Demolishing Strongholds*** in order to hunt demons. But we do recognize from God’s Word that our Lord Jesus gave to ALL who would be His disciples the authority to take on spirits when they interfere with His work (see Luke 10:17; Mark 16:17).

The ***Demolishing Strongholds*** material is our way of indirectly helping people we’ve never met. This workbook represents a “milk issue” in spiritual warfare. “*Lord, even the demons submit to us in Your name*” because they HAVE to! Choosing to walk free of their influence and exercising the authority of the Name of Jesus is the MEAT of your life.

- Mike: When we visit people or minister somewhere, I like to “sense the spirit” of the place. For instance, when we’d do a seminar in a congregation, I’d look for a private spot and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what demonic forces we’d be up against. The Spirit might respond in my spirit, “**Fear and Insecurity**” for one; “**Bitterness**” in another; “**Pride**” in still another. And, in one congregation in Texas: “**Murder!**”. (There isn’t room to tell you how *that one* unfolded.)

Once I was choked by a demon as I prayed for a young man who’d been heavily into *Dungeons and Dragons*. The demon told me I’d die if I kept praying but I gasped, “Then I’ll die *praying!*” The demon let go.

On another occasion I visited a man whose family wanted to be part of our home fellowship family. When I entered his house the man was on the phone. Sensing spiritual darkness in the home, I went into the bathroom to bind the influence of the demons in the house.

As I prayed, a demon began to choke me, saying, “You have no right to bind us; *the man* has invited us to be here.” I told the demon that while I was in that home I had authority in the Name of Jesus, and ordered the demon to not interfere. The demon released my throat.

Later, as I talked with the man, I recounted what had happened in the bathroom. He bowed his head in sadness and admitted how he’d let his family listen to raunchy music, watch indecent TV programs, and use other ungodly materials in the home even though he knew they were wrong. With a sincere heart he repented. And later, so did his whole family when he told them what happened. A lot of stuff went out the door that day!

When I came back to visit two weeks later, the home was filled with spiritual light. And, joy encompassed the family.

- It’s not just the big, “earthshaking” situations in which the Holy Spirit intervenes. One afternoon as I (Sue) was driving home, I found myself behind a truck overloaded with all sorts of junk and debris. I quietly heard in my spirit an insistent voice: “Move over, NOW!”

I immediately glanced in the rearview mirror, then swerved into the passing lane — just as the entire truckload of stuff spilled onto where I’d been! How faithful He was to warn me, and to reward my obedience with safety!

- A Christian publisher invited us to use an office at his company. One morning I (Mike) was up earlier than usual in prayer

and reading my Bible. The Spirit stopped me after I read this passage:

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised. For in just a very little while, ‘He who is coming will come and will not delay. But My righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him’ (Hebrews 10:35-38).

As I prayed for guidance, the Spirit spoke to my spirit that we should go to the office immediately. We got in the car and arrived at the parking lot at 5 AM. Standing there by his car was one of the graphic artists who worked for the publisher.

As we walked toward him he began to cry. “I came in early to kill myself here before you all came to work. I’ve had enough! It doesn’t seem like my life is worth anything!”

Then he paused and asked why *we* were there. We went inside and sat down in the conference room. I told him what had happened as I was reading Hebrews 10. I read to the man verses 35-38. A holy fear of God came over him as he heard the words, “*And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.*”

“God hasn’t failed me!” he blurted out. “I’ve listened to those lying voices and stopped trusting Him!” With a heart full of repentance he saw how close he’d come to “shrinking back” and terminating his own life. That very morning he began to take hope and see our Lord intervene in his circumstances.

- Jack, our next door neighbor many years ago, worked in the Quality Assurance department of a major corporation. Late one night as I (Mike) was preparing for bed, the

Holy Spirit prompted me to go to Jack's house. When Jack answered the door I could see that he was disturbed about something.

Jack shared that as he was leaving work that afternoon, his supervisor had approached him to pass some material the next day that didn't meet company specifications. Jack had never done this before and voiced his objection. The supervisor responded, "Do you want to keep your job?"

Jack had been awake praying that God would guide him, just as I knocked on the door! As we prayed and discussed the problem, we discerned that the appropriate place of appeal was with the personnel department. If the company backed the supervisor, Jack felt he couldn't continue working for a disreputable company.

As only our Father can orchestrate, Jack came home the following evening as the *new supervisor* of Quality Assurance. The company wanted men of integrity!

- When Mike knew from God that he was to leave the Navy and attend seminary in Massachusetts, I (Sue) had very mixed emotions. I particularly didn't want to leave our cozy California house! Mike had applied to an interdenominational seminary back east but for several months we hadn't received any reply or acknowledgement of his application.

The silence was really getting to me! One morning I knelt by the bed and confronted God. (I was a new follower of Jesus and didn't think He'd mind this approach!) "Lord, I'm tired of wondering where we're going to live. Please let me know today if we're heading back to New England or not!"

I actually had perfect peace as I drove away to the Commissary. I hadn't been gone from the house for 5 minutes when I heard in my spirit, "Go home." I recognized it was the Holy Spirit and argued with Him: "I have a lot to do!" Again, that quiet but firm voice: "Go home."

I turned the car around. As I pulled up to the driveway, I saw that the mail had just arrived. There was Mike's acceptance to seminary! I jumped back into the car with tearful thanks, grateful that He'd responded to my childish plea. I knew we'd be going where He wanted us to.

- Our friend Katie experienced a recent situation in which disobedience to the Spirit's prompting could have been fatal! She and her family had just returned from the beach when she heard thunder rolling. Wanting to wash off the sand, she was just about to shower when she heard in her spirit, "DON'T!" Realizing that the Spirit was warning her but hating to feel sticky, she rationalized that a *quick* rinse would be okay. She'd barely emerged from the shower stall when lightning struck, blowing apart the water pipe in the wall! Had she lingered, she'd have been struck as well!

As she told us later, she realized that our Lord had been trying to teach her the importance of *immediate obedience*. Her family is planning an extended trip to China to visit house churches, and as their future guide told her when she related the shower incident, "It's vital that you learn to hear the Spirit and *obey* Him right away *before* you head to China!" (Part of the shattered pipe is on their mantel as a reminder!)

There are so many other testimonies of life in the Spirit that we could share! These represent testimonies of trust, of followers of Jesus who have learned to walk in the Spirit's presence. We hope that the stories we've written will encourage you if you haven't yet grasped the intent of Jesus for His sheep to *daily* trust Him in loving obedience:

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).

A Word of Encouragement

“There is nothing new under the sun”
(Ecclesiastes 1:9).

Our future Lifebytes will deal more with the **way of life** we followers of Jesus can expect to encounter. So that these teachings and testimonies won't come as a surprise, we encourage you to read through the Gospels and the Book of Acts. Observe closely the events that our Lord and His disciples encountered.

Pay particular attention to the ways in which the Holy Spirit operated in and through them. Get a clear picture of how the demons work as well, so that you'll be able to discern the ways in which they will oppose *you*. And, they WILL oppose you!

Don't think of the Bible as just an historical document. EVERYTHING in God's Word—*both*  Testaments—can teach, correct, reprove and train you (2 Timothy 3:16). You and your fellowship family will be greatly blessed if you use the Scriptures as a living, double-edged sword.

The testimonies we share and will share shouldn't sound strange or unusual to you! They are the life pattern of the followers of Jesus who inhabit the Bible's pages—a *way of life* in the Spirit.

And finally, *judge yourself* by those with whom you fellowship. Are they **believers** or people who **trust God**? Consider which category *you* belong to:

We have **not** received the **spirit of the world** but the **Spirit who is from God**, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words **taught by the Spirit**, expressing **spiritual truths** in spiritual words. The man **without the Spirit** does **not accept** the things that come from the **Spirit of God**, for they are foolishness to him, and he **cannot understand them**, because they are **spiritually discerned** (1 Corinthians 2:12-14).