

MISHPACHAH

A NEWSLETTER TO THE FAMILY OF JESUS FROM RESTORATION MINISTRIES

The Hebraic family is not simply an individual or private matter. Rather, it is an institution in which the whole community has a stake. Thus, the Hebrew word "mishpachah," meaning family, not only refers to parents and children, but to the whole extended family worldwide in the body of "Yeshua"—our Jesus.



Our Father's Purpose and Criteria for Fellowship in Him

Dear Friends,

Most of us are familiar with the primary expression of Christianity—attending church services. Services and so many other representations of Christianity revolve around some scheduled activity. The thought of living in serendipitous intimacy with our Lord and with others—eager and available to seize the opportune moment—is as foreign to many as Mary's response to Jesus is from her sister Martha's. Mary basked in relational intimacy in His presence, while Martha experienced Jesus in their home in terms of the myriad of activities that had to be done.

As Sue and I stroll around our neighborhood on the prairie, we often pass a home that has two dogs. One wags, open and friendly—bounds right up to us. The other dog barks, pacing a safe distance away. When we pet the first dog, we can tell that the second wants affection too, but fear keeps him from drawing near us. How many Christians live like this second dog—backing away from intimacy with our Lord because they fear the consequences?

Our Father's Goal for Fellowship

As I was reading and meditating on the Word one recent morning, the Holy Spirit explained to me three criteria and purposes why our Father desires us to be in fellowship with others.

1. Our fellowship with others must spur us on to glorify our Father through praise, worship, and living testimony.
2. Our fellowship with each other should result in growth in Christlikeness in each person.
3. Our fellowship must provide the corrective/confrontational means to assist each other toward entering the narrow gate.

The sign of our being in the fellowship our Father prescribes is love and trust-filled obedience that grow increasingly over time. The Bible commands Jesus-followers to "walk by trust, not by sight." Each person who would follow Jesus needs the support of others to undo the rule of our carnal reasoning so that we may develop reliance on the Holy Spirit. The age-old

battle will always be between *trust* and *analytical reason*:

Holy Spirit Soul (mind, will, emotions)
Trust <— — — — —> Reason

The three purposes of fellowship outline an ongoing pilgrimage in which, together with the guidance of the Holy Spirit within your family and/or extended family of loadbearers, you are working out your salvation. Our Father's three criteria and purposes answer the question "Why" the Lord desires you to be in fellowship. Knowing "why" enables you to align your motives with our Father's desire. This is pleasing to Him and a blessing to you.

Our Father's prescribed fellowship leads to ever-increasing growth in love and trust-filled obedience.

I know that some of you are saying that you can't find a loadbearing group that embraces the three criteria for fellowship. I want to propose a question: Are the three purposes found in your own home? As a husband, are you the "Abraham" leading your family into the ways of our Lord? If someone asked your children, "Who exercises spiritual leadership in your family, your Dad or Mom?" how would they respond? If you have relegated, delegated, or abdicated your spiritual responsibility to anyone else, get on your knees, ask forgiveness and take back the responsibility. It would be terrible to find your wife and children going through the narrow gate because of their obedient trust walk, and you splattered on the wall next to it through no connection with the Vine.

"I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (John 12:24).

The Lord used many agricultural illustrations in His parables. During our 11 years at a farm/retreat center in Connecticut tending animals and a large garden, these agricultural underpinnings took on

Preparing the Family of Jesus for the Dark Days to Come

greater clarity. Farming is an ongoing cycle of animals and plants dying in order to provide life for those who consume them. In essence, there is *no life without death*. As one author wrote, “The greatest victory was achieved with the death of the Victor.” Our faith would be fruitless if Jesus hadn’t died. As we shall see, we too are fruitless until we die to ourselves so that we can truly live fruitfully for our Father.

The Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13 is one of those striking accounts that offers insight into our Father’s criteria for fellowship:

“A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear.”

The message of the kingdom is going out throughout the world, and the seed is being cast. But which one of the four soils is acceptable to our Father? The soil of our hearts and of those with whom we fellowship strongly affects our ability to bear fruit that brings glory to our Father. Only good soil produces fruit. They hear, they understand, and they produce. Also, remember that it takes *cross-pollination* in order for a plant to be truly fruitful. *Selah*.

What people consider “fellowship” in most organized church systems has little or nothing to do with the purpose of those seeking intimate relationship with our Father and with each other. In order to *truly fellowship* with Jesus-followers, seek the discernment of the Holy Spirit.

(Let me clarify here that we are commanded to come alongside as friends to those who have yet to follow Jesus. How else will they see Him as alive in us? But this does *not* constitute biblical fellowship, which is intimate relationship with those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Welcoming as a friend and joining as one in fellowship are two entirely different matters!)

I don’t give the “*right hand of fellowship*” too quickly because I like to know if the Spirit of our



Father and His Son rests in a person. The Gibeonite Ruse (see Joshua 9) is still part of Satan’s arsenal. Any time we fail to exercise discernment and to seek our Lord for wisdom, we’re susceptible to this trap. I also get nervous if Christians accept *me* too readily as a follower of Jesus without “*kicking my tires and checking my teeth*.”

Seed on the Path— The Devil Snatches

How does Satan snatch away the message of the Kingdom? Jesus tells His disciples, “*When he hears the message about the kingdom and*

does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.” How can this happen? *Discussion of truth* is absolutely essential in order for you to gain understanding. Lecture provides no feedback to see if you’ve even understood what is being taught. Discussion with others is the principle Hebraic methodology to gain understanding.

The Holy Spirit impressed on me a few days ago, “Outside of the symbol of the Cross, the next most important symbol is ‘?’—the question mark. A *question* goes further than a ‘.’ or ‘!’ to help people understand.” Studies show that a person retains only 20% of a lecture, but 70% of a discussion. If you consider yourself a teacher in a faith community, try *communicating with* rather than *talking at*. You just may keep Satan from snatching those our Lord has entrusted to your care!

Seed on the Rocks—Trouble or Persecution

This group experiences great joy in hearing the message of the Kingdom, but what happens next? “*Since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.*” Later, in our study of the seed that falls on good soil and bears fruit, we’ll show the importance of “*attachment to the Vine*.” Sadly, much of Christianity offers a lot of activity that calls for no attached relationship with Jesus.

How was the message of the Kingdom presented to this group? Did the message call for their *repentance*, turning away from sin to come to our Father through Jesus? Or, were they led to believe that everything would go great for them after they “came to Jesus”, as many false gospels today assert? Were they told *the truth* that trials and tribulation would come, and that their stand of faith had made Satan

their adversary? Were they encouraged that our Father designs that trials should lead us to trust Him more?

Seed Among the Thorns—

Worries, Deceitfulness of Wealth, Wrong Desires

Far too many who started their salvation pilgrimage bearing fruit have, over time, found themselves choked among the thorns. What was once a vibrant relationship ended as little more than religious form. Paul voiced his concern for the Galatians, who first began with the Spirit: “*You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?*” (5:7).

“*The worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful*” (Mark 4:19). Worries, fleshly longings, and the deception that you can rely on what you’ve acquired are cited when this category of soil is considered because worry and the deceitfulness of wealth attack the very nature of God Himself. People trapped in this miry clay are really saying, “God, you’re untrustworthy. I’d better have a backup in case you don’t come through!” This attack on our Lord’s very character lures people to a splattered end—they miss the gate. *Selah.*

Consider this thought: Are choked, unfruitful people members of the Kingdom? Do they belong to the circle of those who bear fruit, or to the previous two soils who have no trust? Sadly, many consider these people OK in the Kingdom. The Bible doesn’t support this. The Greek root word for the *choked* condition of the worriers and self-reliant means *strangled or drowned*—both lethal states. These folks are heading for the wall!

Mark’s account of the sower adds, “*and the desires for other things come in*” to choke off a person’s ability to bear fruit for the Kingdom. This “*desire for other things*” may seem a little matter to some, a minor sin — nothing to concern themselves with. When challenged by “fruit-bearers”, their slick response is something like, “Nobody’s perfect.” But does our Lord really tolerate purposes or goals *other than Himself*? We’re told, “*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*” (Matt. 6:33).

Have you ever heard the saying, “*If the Lord isn’t Lord of all, He isn’t Lord at all*”? What seems like a minor hindrance to bearing fruit is really *idolatry*. Doesn’t our Lord address this “*desire for other things*” when He commands, “*You shall not make [seek] for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord*”

How many choked people needlessly end their lives splattered on the wall next to the narrow gate?

your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me” (Exodus 20:4,5)?

How many *choked* parents are dooming their children to the consequences of their idolatry? As Christian pollsters have found, the children of “Christian” homes are just as bent on materialism and wealth as their unchurched peers! The consequence? Several generations of emotional loneliness and epidemic divorce.

Grievously, the “*choked in the thorns*” group represent a majority in most faith communities throughout the US. They fail to grasp how *really narrow* the narrow gate is and how strong our Lord’s command is to “*strive to enter by the narrow gate.*” How many countless people end their lives splattered on the wall next to the narrow gate, or wander off onto a counterfeit path that is wide and inclusive but destructive in the end? As with the previous two groups we discussed, these miss union with the Lord Jesus. They don’t become His because they are not attached to the VINE. If they were, they would produce fruit that would last!

Avoid a Prolapsed Uterus

In divine timing Sue and I called our Board member, Dr. Dillard “Griff” Griffith, and his wife, Reva, two days ago. There were circumstances in all our lives into which the conversation imparted blessing. Griff shared a vivid dream he’d had the night before, and immediately both Sue and I had a *rhema* of understanding its significance to this newsletter and to the “thorny group” in particular. We asked Griff’s permission to include his dream because of the blessing it was to us. As Griff related it,

“I had a dream, and in the dream I did an abdominal hysterectomy on a woman for some undefined reason. For some unknown reason I had failed to give the woman a full physical checkup before the operation. This is something I would never think of omitting.

The uterus had a five-month-old baby, which, of course, did not survive the procedure. At this point my medical school mentor, Dr. Hall, came into the picture and we performed a complete, though belated, physical. This exam revealed that this woman had a massive prolapse: the ligaments attaching the uterus were torn. Without criticism from Dr. Hall, and under his direction, I proceeded with the repair. At this point the dream ended. I knew I deserved criticism for the omitted physical, but instead, my mentor helped me to complete the necessary task at hand.

I asked the Holy Spirit for an interpretation and was impressed with the following: “The collective Church is referred to as ‘The Bride of Christ.’ This bride has suffered multiple unskilled and unfounded intrusions because of ignorance. We can only help this ailing patient when we understand the anatomy and that which has produced the

disfiguration. Only a few wise men have the ability to properly discern and correctly approach the problem. The incorrect treatment will only cause further disability and death. Ligaments are key structures in any body. When these become severed and torn, gross malformations and severe disability occurs.

How many infant Christians have been destroyed through premature actions by uncaring hands? Scripture states that Jesus the Messiah (The Bridegroom) is returning for a Bride (the Church) which has neither spot nor wrinkle. Now is the time that God is searching for caring, trained hands which will bring about order in His Bride.”

Note that the preborn baby in the uterus *never developed into maturity*, i.e., never became fruit-bearing. Left in a state of immature confinement, the baby perished. The ligaments which were designed to support and uphold the uterus for development to maturation were torn and dysfunctional, worthless to both themselves and to the one they were supposed to support. They were unable to “bear the load.”

Each of the soils we have discussed so far fails to achieve the Vine attachment our Lord desires and demands. Even in Griff’s dream, a uterus, as do many unbiblical movements in Christianity, may somewhat function without the necessary ligament attachment. But complications result! We want to cover some of these “complications” that are affecting people’s progress into maturity in Jesus, which is *fruit-bearing*.

“Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods.

But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable elemental spirits? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you”

(Gal. 4:8-11).

Elemental spirits attempt to keep us from experiencing our freedom in Jesus. They want us to remain immature and unfruitful—in other words, *choked*. Their ploy is to drag us back into forms of religious practice that keep us complacent in our religiosity. Elemental spirits rely on our old nature to keep us in bondage because something in our carnal nature yearns to *walk by sight*. That is, we find assurance when *someone else* tells us what to do to in our religious practice. Yet the Spirit fights to have us *live by trust*.

However, it is our *ongoing attachment* to Jesus and to others that enables us to meet the three God-given purposes of fellowship. When we are under the control of the elemental spirits, we look for religious rules and activities that persuade us to feel good

about ourselves, to be accepted by the majority, and to take pride in our religious practice.

In his insightful commentary, Jewish follower of Jesus, David H. Stern, refers to the above Galatians passage: “Judaism...is a religion based on sanctification of time. [They do this by recognizing special days]—Sabbath, Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, Yom Kippur, and others. When Gentiles observe these Jewish holidays neither out of joy...or spiritual identification, but *out of fear* induced by Judaizers who have convinced them that *unless they do these things*, God will not accept them, then they are not obeying the *Torah*, but *subjugating themselves to legalism*; and legalism is just another species of those elemental demonic spirits, no better than the idols they left behind” (emphasis added).

Elemental spirits trap all kinds of “would be” followers of Jesus, especially those who are unattached to the Head. Rather than pursuing a life in the Spirit they stalk a pattern that appeals to their natural nature. Paul also warns the Colossians of the trap of the elemental spirit (see Col. 2:18-23). Again, the trap he speaks of is religious activity as an end in itself. These are things that people tell you that you must do in order to be accepted by God, parameters that require not trust, but activity.

Jesus is the LORD of Relationships

Satan is the god of religious systems

The elemental spirits that enslave faith communities employ a variety of now broadly accepted forms. Even the house church movement and home education cavalcade can become a means of enslavement if the purposes are detached from our Father’s purpose. Other prisons include liturgy or lively worship if used as an end in themselves. That is, they can produce soulish satisfaction for the individual but bring no glory to our Father.

Elemental spirits encourage blind conformity to denominational creed that stifles the right to question. Many people believe that the creed they were taught will get them through the narrow gate. But *creed without relationship* is nothing more than control by a few over the many. It creates a false sense of unity, and indulges people’s passivity rather than fanning the flame to fulfill our Lord’s purposes.

Confronting the Judaizing of the Church

We continue to hear from an increasing number of you who have Gentile friends who join Messianic synagogues and become choked in Jewish ritual. Sue and I find ourselves, like Paul in his letter to the Galatians, fighting against the Judaizing of those seeking to follow Jesus. If you are a Gentile considering Messianic Judaism, especially in which “*Torah*

Sue and I yearn to help others live free. As we have seen: **Freedom must be continuously fought for.**

Observance” is stressed above the trust-filled obedience of our spiritual father, Abraham, BE CAREFUL! Your trust in Jesus has already made you free. HOLD ON TO THAT!

When you hear statements such as, “Our righteousness is found in keeping the *Torah*,” you are heading for enslavement. Paul would voice the same warning to you that he did to those who sought enslavement in his day: *“So what are we to say? This: that Gentiles, even though they were not striving for righteousness, have obtained righteousness, but it is a righteousness grounded in trusting! However, Israel, even though they kept pursuing a Torah that offers righteousness, did not reach what the Torah offers. Why? Because they did not pursue righteousness as being grounded in trusting, but as it were grounded in doing legalistic works. They stumbled over the ‘stone that makes people stumble.’ As the Tanakh [Older Testament] puts it: ‘See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame’” (Rom. 9:30-33, JNT).*

When you read Romans 10:1-4 you see that the Judaizers understood righteousness in the keeping of *Torah*, not in trusting Jesus. In Romans 10:9,10, we Gentiles followers are declared righteous through our trust in Jesus, and *because of that trust*, righteous acts flow lovingly to the glory of our Father.

Holy Spirit

Jesus	<—source of righteousness—>	Torah
Trust	<—way of life—>	Legalistic Perversion
Freedom	<—life’s outcome—>	Enslavement
Intimate Relationship	<—rely on—>	Organization

Elemental Spirits

Fellowshipping with the “choked” will choke you!

The choked invite you into a system, not a relationship. System says, *“Come to my church service.”* Relationship responds, *“Come to my home and be my friend.”* Paul warned the Galatians of the motive of the Judaizers: *“Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may be zealous for them...Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to [join their church]. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ”* (4:17; 6:12).

As a family head evaluate the fruit of the group with whom you fellowship:

- Is your life glorifying the Father?
- Is there increasing Christlikeness in your life?
- Is there adequate correction/confrontation?

Bearing Fruit for the Kingdom

“Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:15,16).

The Hebraic Restoration offers a *relational attachment* to our Lord Jesus that displays itself in both *intimacy* and *spiritual power*. This is our Father’s means for you to bear fruit that will last—fruit for His glory. It is because of trust in His love that followers of Jesus are able *live free* and to *share His love freely*. Out of that love for our Father you are given the privilege to represent Him and His commands as a *way of life*, and not as religious form separated from your daily life. You don’t have to go some place to seek Him. *He is already in you*, desiring that you represent Him to the world. You know that you are His because of the aroma that the Lord’s presence produces. All of your actions flow from your *freedom to love*.

Seed On Good Soil

Hear,
Understand,
and Produce:
30, 60, 100 Fold

Sue and I, like some of you, are the first generation who are following Jesus in our families. My upbringing was as much a cultural expression as religious. I was raised in a tight-knit Polish-Catholic community. Attending services, obeying ecclesiastic traditions and agreeing with creedal positions were the foremost issues of our religious practice. Sue dallied in a few denominations, but shared little participation by her family.

Shifting to the Hebraic

If you weren’t raised in a home that was conscious of seeing God’s activity around you or applying His Word to the situations you face in life, the Hebraic [*Abrahamic*] walk of obedient trust can be life-changing. I remember when Sue and I first began to look for God’s interventions. We called them *“God sightings”* — as simple as an answer to prayer, or one of those “divine appointments” such as a timely phone call or someone you just happen to run into. As we trained ourselves to look for our Lord at work, we began to marvel at just how busy He was around us!

Within a year of following Jesus, we attended a Basic Life Principles Seminar. The teacher, Bill Gothard, was the first person who showed us that the Bible had living and reliable answers that addressed so many life situations. Next on our application learning curve was an Old Testament Survey class at seminary where Dr. Doug Stuart taught us the value of *halakhahs*. A *halakhah* is more than

rhema. *Rhema* is the Holy Spirit's **particular and specific guidance** for you. For instance, the Holy Spirit may prompt you to phone someone at a particular time or to write a check for a specific amount to a person or ministry. *Rhema* usually provides a one-time insight or guidance.

Unlike *rhema*, a *halakhah* is the establishment of a life principle based upon the Scriptures. It is an **application of God's Word** for a situation you are confronting, or the establishment of a life-long principle. Among God's people, *halakhahs* would be passed along from generation to generation

Halakhah formation: See a problem, seek a biblical solution, take action based on the solution—problem, solution, action.

so that their offspring would have a *spiritual inheritance* of how the Holy Spirit had guided their ancestors.

Beginning with the teachings of Jesus and many of the Newer Testament writers, a transition occurs: a shift away from the scribal way of teaching *Torah* to showing the path of *how to apply it*. The process of *halakhah* formation entails seeing a problem, seeking a biblical solution, and taking action based upon the solution — **problem, solution, action** . Notice how often Newer Testament writers address a problem, cite a particular part of the Older Testament as their source, and provide a halakhic solution for others to take action. This approach enables us to compile testimonies that glorify our Father: problem, solution, action.

God sightings, *rhema*, and *halakhahs* are a *living way* to both experience our Lord and to appropriate His guidance so that your trust in Jesus bears living fruit. These three elements of your pilgrimage entail far more than knowledge of the Bible. They represent your *earnestness* to live a life that glorifies our Father. You who are first generation followers of Jesus or who have been raised in the Christian community without awareness of Father's way of living for Him have the privilege to begin a generation-to-generation process that will hopefully encourage those who follow to live a life which brings glory to our God.

Glorifying the Father — Online!

Coming soon to www.Restorationministries.org ! We've recruited several individuals and families to join us in a new feature coming to our website called **"Glorifying the Father."** Each person who shares will have their own family branch onto which they can add God-sightings, *rhema*, or *halakhahs*. We want those who come to the website to be encouraged to understand following Jesus as a *way of life*, not as a form of religious observance.

The whole pattern of these testimonies is *story-telling* on a *personally experienced level*. It is recounting

the sighting, *rhema*, or *halakhah* as it happened. We have encouraged those contributing to include the feelings, if appropriate, that they were experiencing as the story unfolded so that the reader can put himself into the situation. This is not an attempt to teach as much as *to share*. Godly sharing provides the opportunity for those hearing a story to identify with the teller as a fellow follower of Jesus.

To stimulate your thinking, here are examples of each category from our own lives:

1. God sighting

When our Lord told us to go to Israel to live with our friends, the Schlossbergs, we had no money to go. Yet, He impressed on us to make a plane reservation, so, in obedience, we did. On the last day and at the last hour in which we could secure the reservation by paying for the tickets, we received a check that covered the entire cost of our travel.

While in Israel, with the bare minimum of funds, Sue began spotting *shekels* (shiny, dime-like coins) on the ground in all sorts of unusual settings to encourage us to trust Him for provision. When we returned to the US, we continued to find coins on the ground, often after we were praying about a certain purchase or expenditure. With each coin we sensed our Father's affirmation that the funds would be there and that we were to press on.

2. Rhema

While we were in Israel we were earnestly praying as to whether our Lord would have us stay there or return to the US. During my morning Bible time a few days after we'd begun to pray, I was reading the story of the demoniac in the region of the Gerasenes. As I noticed Jesus's words to him, **"Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you"** (Mark 5:19), I had an intense quickening in my spirit that our Lord was speaking to me. I wrote next to the verse, "in Jerusalem, 1/13/94."

Soon afterward, we attended a prayer conference in Jerusalem. A pastor from Memphis who didn't know me walked up and put his hand on my shoulder and revealed the answers to two prayers about which Sue and I had told no one else. That got our attention! He then added, "Brother, do you know that the Lord brought you here so that you could go back to the United States with a prophetic message?" His knowledge of our secret needs gave credence that the message he shared had its source in our Lord. But we added this to our hearts and waited for further confirmation.

A week later we were attending worship in Jerusalem and the pastor was teaching from Genesis 33. As I was following him in my Bible, my eyes were

drawn from the right page to the far left page where I read, “*Then Jacob prayed, ‘O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O Lord, who said to me, “Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,” I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups’*” (Gen. 32:9,10). I felt another quickening as though the Holy Spirit was showing me something. I wrote next to the verse, “Jerusalem, 1/22/94, Mike & Sue?”

Sue and I were convinced that our Lord was directing us back to the US to live with my Mom. After we arrived back at the Schlossbergs’ from the service, Bert and Exie told us that they’d been praying, and the Holy Spirit had shown them that we were to return to our family in Connecticut.

3. Halakhah

When our son, Mike, was about 13, we established a *halakhah* by which we would bless his marriage when the time came. He needed to hear from Sue that she *respected* him. We derived this from Ephesians 5:33b, “*and the wife must respect her husband.*” We felt as Mike’s parents that we owed to both the bride and her parents that our training of Mike should make it easy for her to respect him. If his own mother couldn’t respect him, then we wouldn’t attend his wedding.

Mike needed to hear from me that I considered him *responsible* enough not only to render account to God for himself, but also for his wife. This was derived from several passages of Scripture in which men tried to give excuses to God and lost their position. The key passage was taken from Adam’s words that blamed his wife: “*The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it*” (Gen. 3:12). Rather than take full responsibility and ask forgiveness, he blamed his wife.

We hope the above are helpful, but don’t consider them limiting. Our Father wants to be glorified by what His people share. The ways in which He has intervened in your life will be totally different than how He’s revealed Himself in ours — and that’s the wonder of His creativity! We’re sure that *your* stories will be rich in encouraging others to find the path for themselves that brings Him glory.

Thoughts to Consider

All three purposes for your fellowship operate in conjunction with each other. We all need the corrective processes encompassed in intimate relationships. We each need the encouragement and role modeling of others bent on growing in

Christlikeness. And any purpose or goal that *fails to glorify our Father*, be it finding a job, buying a home, home schooling, or joining a home fellowship is a path to enslavement.

Most of you have found that in your pursuit of the three criteria, the Lord has left you fellowshiping only with your family or a few others for a season. It seems lonely at first. But shouldn’t this be where the intimacy that Mary cherished in Jesus’s presence be nurtured? Being set apart for a time to strengthen your family relationships in intimacy and power doesn’t mean unfruitfulness. Fruit-bearing in the Kingdom has a variety of forms.

Richard Wurmbrand (founder of Voice of the Martyrs): “I am president of a world-wide mission. I was brought to Christ by a Romanian carpenter, Wolfkes, who prayed for years — without result — that he might not die before bringing one Jew to Christ. God granted him two, my wife and myself. We brought to the Savior a few other Jews; and these, in turn won more. The result can be seen now in thriving Hebrew-Christian congregations in many towns in Israel.

Once when I told the story of my conversion in a Romanian village I noticed that a very old man in the audience was weeping. He told me at the end: ‘God used me to bring that carpenter to Jesus. I thought that I had toiled all my life uselessly. I heard from you now that I am a grandfather in faith of many Jews.’”

If we truly are the soil fit for the message of the Kingdom, then each of us can bear fruit that lasts. But we must focus outside ourselves and our desires. No fruit matures just for itself. When it is mature it has reproduced itself in the seeds that will die and bear more fruit. *Hallelujah!*

Francis of Assisi’s prayer needs to be the heart of our fellowship focus:

*Make me an instrument of Thy peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.*

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Please join us in our Father’s Vineyard! Ask Him to prune both the unfruitful branches and the choking thorns. May death to ourselves mean life for many. Pray to Jesus that the joy set before Him to die for us would be our joy as we die to our plans, desires, and ambitions in order to reproduce Him in others.

Our love,
Mike & Sue

Phil. 1:9-11

