

Kingdom Living Today Addenda



Kingdom Living Today Addenda are the saga of two ordinary people who have loved, obeyed and served our Lord Jesus as children of our heavenly Father. Foremost, each

Addendum reveals our Lord's divine involvement in our lives – revealing His

life lessons for us and our character transformations,

as well as His Spirit's use of us to be His blessing to others.

May our saga encourage your confidence to live Lordship-committed.



If The Holy Spirit Hadn't Been With Us, We Would Have Bellyflopped



Indicates our recognition of a divine stitch.

The retreat center's locale wasn't haphazard! The Holy Spirit had led us to the same area where we'd been raised. We were both graduates of UConn about 4 miles across the valley, and the campus later became a key area of ministry. We also carried a deep burden for evangelism not only for our many relatives but for that whole region. In Mike's work with religious leaders and their congregations and ministries, Paul's anguish in 2Corinthians 11:28 described Mike's heart: "Besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches."



After a few months of counseling different clergy, Mike realized that with the gifts of apostleship and prophet there were aspects of shepherding people he couldn't fully appreciate. Since sheep and lambs show up often in the Bible regarding shepherding (Gk *poimen*) people, we began to pray to get a sheep flock. Initially we were given one ewe. We could tell she was distressed because sheep are a flock animal and often don't do well alone. We kept praying and were given other sheep. (We also learned a lot from Phillip Keller's book, *A Shepherd Looks At Psalm 23*.) Shepherding sheep was invaluable not only in counseling religious leaders but also in helping retreaters. FYI: Sheep are the most parasitically plagued domesticated animal. Unlike goats, they would die without a shepherd!



In the midst of His blessings the Holy Spirit also taught us a painful lesson about needing **discernment**. A local 4-H'er gave us a good-looking sheep and we gratefully added her to our flock. But not long afterward we saw she was limping with foot rot. Highly contagious, foot rot destroys the hoof tissue, crippling the sheep. The entire flock became infected. We spent countless hours dipping hooves into copper sulfate solution and cutting away rotted tissue!



(Lessons we learned through this painful experience may help you. Please read: The Gospel of the Covenant Is the Pilgrimage to Salvation, Lesson 20. *By the Indwelling Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Christ—God Reveals Himself*)



The 4600 sq.ft. retreat center lodge was heated by an oil burning furnace, and heating oil was very expensive at that time. Mike had been raised with a wood burning furnace as the only source of heat. Since we had over 50 acres of woodland on the property, we began to pray for a wood burning furnace to work alongside the oil burner. Norm's close friend, Ira, was Director of the Day Christian Foundation which focused on the evangelization of New England. The Foundation graciously donated a wood burning furnace to the center, but none of us knew the complexities of the plumbing and electrical that were needed to install it. We prayed for help.

A few days later there was a knock on our door. It was an older couple, Milt and Virginia from Pennsylvania, who'd come to Coventry to help build an addition onto their daughter's house. Days of rain had prevented the foundation from being poured. Her home was too small for them to stay in so they came to the retreat center and lodged with us.

The next morning during breakfast Milt asked if he could do anything for us. Mike answered, "Please, relax here." Virginia immediately responded, "He doesn't know how to relax!" Gene and Mike took Milt down to the furnace room and showed him the unattached wood furnace and gave him the manual for installing it. "Can you do this for us?" With a big grin Milt told the men he could, and ushered them out of the room with the words, "Don't come back unless I ask you."



About a year later a problem arose with the electrical connections between the oil and wood burning furnaces. We cried out to our Lord for help. About 11PM that night Milt and Virginia knocked on our door! They were visiting their daughter's renovated home and the Holy Spirit told them to get dressed and come to the retreat center. Milt fixed the problem in less than five minutes and we spent the next several hours sharing in joyous fellowship.



Just about every cent we received went into repairs. As a result we went many months without health insurance, having committed ourselves into our Lord's hands. One day our friend Karl, who also had a prophetic gift, called Mike. "God told me to tell you to get health insurance. Don't you have insurance?" Mike told him we didn't, but that he'd looked into how much it would cost. Karl then said he'd send premium payments for three months. The day after the health insurance went into effect Mike cut his knee open with a chain saw and needed stitches. The following week Sue broke her finger and had to get her wedding ring cut off at the emergency room. A month later our son, Sean, required kidney surgery. This divine assurance has been very real for us: "Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass" (Psalms 37:5). And yes, we confess there were also times we missed the commitment/trust connection, to our sorrow...



After several months at the center the Holy Spirit prompted Norm to ask Mike to replace him in facilitating the pastors' First Friday group. The first thing we changed was to serve the men breakfast.

(Backdrop: One of Mike's navy assignments required him to have a Masters Degree. The navy paid for him to receive an MBA in which he focused on organizational psychology and interpersonal behavior. Together with the relational emphasis that pours forth from God's Word, this background that had been set in place by our Lord years earlier helped hugely with counseling pastors and in conducting retreats.)

Having people as guests eating in your home is one of the most vital gestures you can do to enhance their dignity. Whether in a family, on retreat, or among religious leaders, there's more to sharing a meal together than just the food. **Facilitating** positive, relationship-building conversation allows so much of the character of Jesus to emerge and grow. And by nipping in the bud any negative or controversial topics, our time eating together became very personal and uplifting. Months after we began serving breakfast at the monthly meeting, a pastor told the other men that these get-togethers had become special times spent with special friends. They all agreed.



Gene continued to speak at several congregations in the Hartford area to find one that would follow up on his parking lot ministry to internationals. He couldn't find even one faith community that would help, which devastated our hearts. But then Gene heard about

International Students Inc. (ISI), a ministry which exists to share Christ's love with international college students. Since 1953, ISI has been training people to befriend international students in a loving and Christ-honoring way. The Holy Spirit guided us to have Gene represent the retreat center with ISI as part of their ministry to international students at UConn.

Through our relationship with congregations in the region Sue became the administrator/facilitator of about 61 Christian families who befriended at least one international student or visiting faculty member. She connected local families with internationals and passed along gouge from one family to another of what they did with their particular student or faculty member. We hosted a quarterly potluck at the retreat center. On Thanksgiving and Christmas when most American students went home for the holidays, we'd invite the internationals remaining on campus to join us at the retreat center for the days the campus was closed.

Those times together with internationals was the Holy Spirit's exceptional gift to us. These occasions were open doors for us especially among the Mainland Chinese to discuss Jesus since most had never heard the Gospel before. Some of the other students who stayed with us or shared meals were staunch practitioners of their own religion, whether Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim. We all experienced very quickly that people who are deeply sincere in their beliefs aren't fearful about talking about their faith. In fact they enjoyed hearing the commitment of people from other faiths since many came from countries where their religion was predominant. We and Gene were asked many questions about our trust in Jesus. Several months later Gene left us to work full time for ISI on a campus in Buffalo, NY.

(We wrote in Saga 1 that our desire after seminary was to serve our Lord as missionaries. A few days *before* we turned down the mission agency that would accept us *only if* we didn't share anything about the power of the Holy Spirit or spiritual gifts on the mission field, the Head of the Missions Department at the seminary, Dr. Christy Wilson, approached Mike. "Mike, the Holy Spirit has told me that our Lord isn't sending you and Sue to the mission field. But through you and Sue He is going to send hundreds of others." Now that we were at the retreat center, with many families from different congregations befriending international students or faculty, what the Holy Spirit told Dr. Wilson became very real to us. International students and faculty alike were carrying Christ back to their own people! In our next Saga we'll give you more anecdotes about our personal times with internationals.)



Throughout the forest of the retreat center were many narrow horse cart roads that went back to the start of the farm in 1755. We knew that if they were restored they'd make great side-by-side places to walk, talk and pray together. These cart roads would also make it far more convenient for us to harvest wood. But they'd all grown over to such an extent that only a backhoe could clear them. Mike had driven backhoes and bulldozers for a small construction company while attending college, and we began to pray for a backhoe. A short while later a friend of a board member told Mike he had a backhoe he wouldn't need for the next two years and we could use it for free. During those next two years, not only were the walking paths renewed but also two ponds were dug on the property — one of which became a great place for baptismal immersions. Based on the current rental cost, we had used over \$50,000 of equipment if we'd had to pay for it!



After Mike had been counseling religious leaders for some time, they gave him an affectionate nickname: "the enema." The Spirit of our Lord used Mike's prophetic gift to expose any hidden sins that were clogging the work of Jesus in the person, and/or in their congregation. Because of our past history in the area we knew many individuals and families who were attending the congregations of the men coming to the pastors' breakfast. Several

older men in these congregations knew that Mike was helping a number of their religious leaders. They told him, "Our pastor takes himself too seriously — he doesn't have a sense of humor about himself." Here was one creative solution to this problem:

For several decades Mike had played "social golf" with his father and two older brothers. Dad enjoyed catching up with his sons as they walked along the golf course. One day Dad made a comment on the course that went something like this, "If somebody gets upset and angry over where they hit a golf ball, what are they like in dealing with other people?" Mike never forgot that insight. He then invited the pastors, most who'd never played golf before, to join him in the game. The owner of a nearby golf course heard about what Mike was doing and invited the men to play for half price at his course.

Slowly, ever so slowly on the golf course, the men began to develop a sense of humor about themselves and each other. Older men in their congregations began to comment to both the pastors and Mike concerning the positive differences they were observing. Mike did face one complication though. On his way to the golf course he'd regularly ask our Lord about the men he'd be playing with and if Father held anything against any of them. The Spirit would specifically tell Mike what to confront with particular men and to address it that day. So Mike would be playing golf, prayerfully looking for an opportunity to speak alone with a man the Spirit had earmarked. For example, on one tee Mike and the pastor he needed to confront would hit their golf balls within a few feet of each other. The walk to their balls provided a perfect opportunity to talk. And the Holy Spirit was never wrong about the sin the man was concealing, or about sins in his congregation which the pastor knew about but was ignoring.



About a year after the pastors began having breakfast together, the Holy Spirit prompted them to ask Mike if he would offer them overall insight about themselves. He cited two points: **1.** Their preaching wasn't bringing people to repentance. Rather, the goal of their preaching was to preach in a pleasant manner that ensured their own longevity. When he asked the men about this, they all acknowledged it was true. Some even began to preach about forsaking sins and living God's way the next Sunday! **2.** Many were telling their wives about their difficulties with various people in the congregation. Mike told them, "Your wife isn't the assistant pastor. She's your wife and your children's mother." Again all acknowledged they were bad-mouthing individuals in their congregation whom they had problems with.

A month before the breakfast noted above, a number of the wives of pastors in our area held an overnight retreat at the center. About 10PM Mike was heading for our bedroom having just finished filling the wood burning furnace for the night. Some of the wives stopped him and asked if they could talk with him. As they all sat together on the floor, the ladies told him the powerful influence he was having on their husbands. They then mentioned that many of them were receiving professional counseling because they had a hard time dealing with their husband's bad mouthing of "troublesome" people in the congregation. As a result, these women were developing bitterness toward the people who were giving their husband such problems—only to find out later that he had straightened out the problem but here she was, mad at that individual! The women were stuck in a quandary: "Do I go to the person to tell them how bitter I've become toward them?" The dilemma in which their husbands had put them was too much for them because our Lord never gave them the grace to deal with bad mouthing.

After discussion that night, the women went to sleep knowing they'd talked with someone who understood their pain. By working with their husbands, Mike would be used by our Lord as an instrument to help these women be the loving wife and mother that they and God wanted them to be. More in our next Saga...