

Kingdom Living Today Addenda



Kingdom Living Today Addendums 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.



Our Lord's Ways Are Perfect In All He Does



Indicates our recognition of a divine stitch.

We're continuing our series of personal sagas to encourage you to reflect on your own life journey and the good hand of our Lord in guiding your steps even before you were aware of it. In this Saga and several to follow, we'll present anecdotes of the Holy Spirit's involvement in our lives during our 10+ years at Coventry House Christian Training and Retreat Center. Believe us that in no way were our lives "onward and upward" even with the Holy Spirit's presence in us. Not only did our own failures and shortcomings keep us humble, they also kept us from looking down on other people's screwups when they came asking us for help!

We realize that our accounts of various events in our lives may seem like a hodgepodge. But we know that there was a perfectly divine fabric being woven by our Father even if we didn't recognize it at the time. Just as others who are led by the Spirit of our Lord have experienced, when you're living through especially hard situations, all you can see is the tangled backside of the tapestry He is weaving. Later, when you reflect back with the Holy Spirit's insight, you glimpse the tapestry's beautiful front pattern. Your understanding then is much like that in the poem, *Footprints In The Sand*:

Those first weeks of chilly living at the barren retreat center took a lot of adjustment, not only in being without beds and furniture but also in learning how to care for farm animals. Before that, we'd only had a dog! But as donations increased slightly and weather permitted, we were able to begin repairing the property – if it wasn't leaking, it was falling down.

With us was our friend Gene who was invaluable in teaching us about caring for the cattle, ducks, rabbits, goats, sheep, geese and chickens. Gene had been raising these as well as getting livestock from other farmers to sell cheaply to immigrant families in a parking lot in Hartford each Saturday. It was an open door for him to share the Gospel and hand out Bible tracts in their different languages.



To keep food on the table and feed the animals, the Holy Spirit prompted Gene

Footprints In The Sand

One night I dreamed a dream.
As I was walking along the beach with my Lord.
Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life.
For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,
One belonging to me and one to my Lord.

After the last scene of my life flashed before me,
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.
I noticed that at many times along the path of my life,
especially at the very lowest and saddest times,
there was only one set of footprints.

This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it.
"Lord, You said once I decided to follow You,
You'd walk with me all the way.
But I noticed that during the saddest
and most troublesome times of my life,
there was only one set of footprints.
I don't understand why, when I needed
You the most, You would leave me."

He whispered, "My precious child,
I love you and will never leave you
never, ever, during your trials and testings.
When you saw only one set of footprints,
It was then that I carried you."

and Mike to regularly dive into the dumpster behind our local grocery store. Food that was packaged we could eat, while wilted produce and old bread products fed hungry farm critters. (When our relatives would stop by and we offered them a meal, some would ask, "Is this from inside the store or behind it?") As local farmers heard about what we wanted to do to restore the retreat center, they began sharing their hay with us. Some even let us use their farm equipment to improve our pasture land.

(People in our small rural town didn't warm up to us very fast even though we'd both grown up one town away. The locals were rural New Englanders whose families had first settled the farms in the 1700s. When the center was a halfway house the clientele were outsiders, people with "city problems" that alarmed the country folk. One client had committed suicide in the lodge a year before our arrival.)

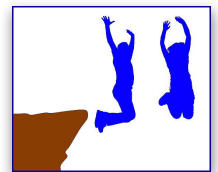


One early relationship truly uplifted our hearts. "Pop Hill" was a farmer in his 90s whose son was now running the family farm. One day Pop was driving by while Mike was repairing the rock wall near the road. He stopped, wanting to get to know Mike personally. In 1755 Pop's ancestors had settled the farm he lived on. When he learned that Mike was intent on preserving the heritage of the farm on which the retreat center was situated, he adopted Mike into his heart. Often Pop would stop by to give Mike advice. Pop also told the townsfolk about us. Mike knew he was accepted in the town when he stopped by the local general store and the owner poured him a cup of coffee from the pot on the wood stove.



"You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in You" (Isaiah 26:3). When Sue put her trust in our Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit apportioned her the **gift of faith**. All who know Sue soon recognize that the more impossible things are to humanly resolve, the happier she is. Her most joyful moments occur when a situation is so dire that only Jesus could provide the answer. Her gift of faith helped encourage us through many hard times.

(Those of us who trust our Lord Jesus but don't have the gift of faith are often dumbfounded by Sue's confidence when only the supernatural work of our God can fulfill the need. It does take some time to adjust to the responses of someone with the gift of faith. Mike and others might wrongly think she was blind to the desperate circumstance. But then they'd realize that the Holy Spirit had given us Sue as His benchmark of what rock-solid trust is. It's the trust that is commanded in the Bible and defined by the Hebrew word, *emunah*, whose root means "to jump off a cliff.")



We had been on a retreat or two prior to coming to Coventry House, but the Holy Spirit prompted us to establish a biblical basis for why we were there. He quickened in us that the biblical basis for retreats emanates from this pattern: "Three times a year you are to celebrate a festival to Me" (Exodus 23:14). Other biblical guidance we received indicated that these times away from routine life were to be opportunities for relationship strengthening, especially as people ate together. We served food "family style", and Mike or one of the staff role modeled and facilitated affirmative dialogue among those gathered at each meal. Controversial topics were politely terminated.

(During our time in the navy we developed a friendship with Karl, who had a gift of prophecy. After a month of being at the center the Holy Spirit spoke to us to ask Karl to come and spend some days with us to give us a spiritual review. As he was leaving, Karl warned us, **"Don't let others vicariously live through your faith."** We soon realized that as the Spirit of our Lord was doing miraculous and

marvelous things on our behalf, people who heard about these things would pass the reports along. But instead of personally experiencing their own testimonies of our Lord Who was behind these blessings, they were content to just repeat what He had faithfully done for us.)



During those first weeks with so much work needing to be done, Mike would get downhearted and walk out to the pasture to gripe to Lord Jesus. One day the Spirit of our Lord told him, "Be patient and keep repairing the premises." He then told Mike to be at peace because on April 24, 1983 He would make our ministry public. (Remember the date!)

Meanwhile, another option was presenting itself. Tim, the Building Inspector in Coventry, was a military aviator as Mike had been. When Tim came by to inspect some of the work we were doing, he and Mike would always end up talking about flying. So Tim put Mike in touch with the Connecticut Air National Guard, who needed a helicopter pilot with heavy lift experience for their Sikorsky Sky Cranes. Since Mike was heavy-lift qualified and thought the income from flying for the Guard would be helpful, he applied.



One morning while awaiting his acceptance into the Guard, Mike was shoveling out the chicken coop near the road. As he tossed out the last shovelful, a man wearing a fancy three-piece suit drove by in an expensive car. In a moment of mental temptation Mike felt sorry for himself, recalling that our Lord had led him out of the navy to serve Him full time on the very day he had been promoted and command selected. And here he was, shoveling chicken manure!



As a somewhat dejected Mike walked back from the coop to the lodge, the Spirit of our Lord began speak to him: "If you want to fly for the National Guard, you have My permission. But if you can be at peace and be patient, I have another plan for you." By the time he arrived at the lodge his mind was settled. He called the Guard recruiter to cancel his application. The recruiter, a man with whom Mike had talked with on several occasions, also followed Jesus. He told Mike, "I want to confirm that our Lord doesn't want you in the Guard. I've never lost anyone's paperwork as often as I have lost yours. You don't belong here!"



On the first Friday of March, 1983, the local pastors again gathered at the retreat center for their monthly meeting. They asked Mike to sit with them. A pastor of a large congregation asked the others for advice: "How can I get a man in my congregation who has offended me to ask me for forgiveness?" Mike silently listened to the interchange among the various men. Then Norm Swensen turned to Mike, stating that the Holy Spirit had prompted him that Mike had the answer the pastor needed. Mike got up to fetch his Bible.

Not knowing whether the pastor who had brought up the issue would be insulted or not, Mike introduced several Scriptures that related to the situation. In essence, the pastor had slandered someone who'd offended him since the man wasn't there to represent his side. The Scriptures also directed the pastor to first forgive the offender from his heart, and then ask the man for forgiveness for having taken offense. All of the other men agreed, including the pastor who had brought up the situation. They then asked Mike if he did any counseling.

Mike replied that he prayed for direction from the Spirit and used the Bible and its commands to direct someone's course of action as he had just done with the pastors' group. He added that if the person agrees that the passages apply to guiding the action they should take and they refuse to follow through, he cuts the person off and turns them over to Satan. (For examples of this, see 1Corinthians 5:5; 1Timothy 1:20. Turning a rebellious person over to Satan so they might ultimately repent and return to Christ is our Father's last merciful measure when the person refuses godly counsel. In our experience of prayerfully turning someone over to Satan to bring to desperation and humility, no one has lasted even one month before they repent!)

The pastors then asked Mike for his appraisal of their counseling efforts in their own congregations. He told them, "You men feel most needed when you're counseling people. But you frequently get in the way of Jesus and the commands in His Word. I bet some of you have been counseling the same people for over three years." They all nodded in agreement and asked what they should do. Mike told them, "Commit the people into Jesus' hands!" (During their next meeting several pastors reported they'd done as Mike had suggested. At first the counselees were a little disturbed, but in just a few weeks of leaning on Jesus they were changed.)



On the first Friday pastors' meeting in April a pastors counselor who worked for the Evangelistic Association of New England came to the gathering. He was the sole counselor to clergy throughout all of New England. As he shared with the pastors the discouraging nature of his ministry, he broke down in tears. When asked what was the major problem he was facing, he replied, "Somewhere pastors have been convinced that they need to be counselors instead of leading their flock." He told the pastors he could no longer handle the needs of all of New England. Since he lived in New Hampshire, he was hoping to find someone in southern New England to counsel there. They asked how he counseled pastors. He said, in effect, that he used the Bible and its commands to direct a person's course of action.

In unison the pastors blurted, "That's what Mike told us last month that he does!" They turned toward each other and then to Mike and asked if he'd serve as their counselor. He said he'd agree if it was unanimous with them, unanimous with the Board of the retreat center, and unanimous with the Board of the Evangelistic Association. When all were unanimous in the decision, Mike embraced the ministry which the Lord had told him to patiently wait for as he walked away from the chicken coop several weeks earlier.



A number of pastors in the region wanted to commission us and the retreat ministry. The date they chose was April 24, 1983 (see page 3!). Many people gathered at the retreat center as the pastors commissioned Gene and the two of us. As different pastors prayed for us, a jarring thunderclap was heard from a clear sky with no thunder clouds. One of the pastors then anointed Mike to be an apostle among them, someone sent to serve all of them.



Just as Norm Swenson had been burdened for the cooperation of the various congregations, Mike became a prophetic voice to these congregations. Our burden for the region stemmed from the fact that we both had grown up only miles from the retreat center and had graduated from UCONN just across the valley. Our Lord was going to do amazingly more than we could have imagined that day while we knelt before the pastors. More of the wondrous work of the Holy Spirit in our midst next time...