

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.



Our Lord's Spirit Bestows Fellowship & Timely Words Of Wisdom



Indicates our recognition of a divine stitch.

Besides the miraculous things the Holy Spirit was doing around us at the center, He was also stitching together deeply committed relationships of the **Intimate Friendship & Fellowship** variety. (Please read our 1-page handout, *Discerning Levels of Friendship*.) We initially had no idea that the plans our Lord Jesus had for us would extend well beyond the retreat center to all of New England and into New York and New Jersey. But from the start we were aware of the immense value of developing deep relational commitment among people — the kind Mike experienced with his crew during his deployments in Vietnam. So he took extra time and caring effort to develop personal relationships like that between David and Jonathan (see 1Samuel 18:1-4).

Deeply committed relationships in Christ are purposely developed. They don't happen by chance. Two separate surveys of clergy in the US revealed that the vast majority were **task-driven** rather than **relationally devoted**. Many seminaries train clergy to avoid deep friendships in their congregation because they may be perceived as showing favoritism. Our goal at the retreat center was to help faith communities develop Intimate Friendship and Fellowship, and then continue those relationships at home. We saw in God's Word the depth of love-based relationship our Lord Jesus wanted His followers to experience, and sought to help others instill that within their own friendships: "As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34).



In those first few months at the center the number of men who came to the pastors breakfasts kept increasing. This was serving a relational need they all appreciated! After Mike began to facilitate the group he became aware of another clergyman who wanted to attend but had unresolved issues with someone who was already taking part. (We refuse to be part of relationships where smiling faces camouflage bad feelings or resentment.) Mike proposed to the group that he'd be glad to meet with both of the estranged men and serve as a peacemaker. Mike's method was to involve himself as long as each man remained earnest in seeking reconciliation. The Holy Spirit honored Mike's approach to reconciliation within the pastors group, and they grew both in size and in relational depth.



In a way which only the Holy Spirit could accomplish, Mike established Intimate Friendship & Fellowship with Neal, an older pastor of a congregation which supported a Christian school (K-8). The families of many of the children were from other congregations, and among the parents there was a great lack of cohesion and frequent bickering. Neal asked Mike to be the President of the parent-teacher group even though our son wasn't yet a student there. Through Mike's contacts with so many parents, the Holy Spirit was also expanding our arena of ministry.





This particular congregation, along with three others, was in the process of establishing a Christian high school. The new principal for the high school, Don, had already been hired and had moved to the area from another state. He and his wife often came out to the retreat center to

spend time with us. It didn't take long for us to develop Intimate Friendship & Fellowship with them. Mike asked the pastors if Don could attend the breakfasts since he had come up to serve this region's need. It's important to note that initially most of the pastors didn't believe in Christian school education. But their attitude changed dramatically after they learned Don's biblical framework.


Don and Mike were the only two non-clergy types in the pastors group. Both men had served in the Navy in time of war, with Don in UDT, the predecessor of the Navy SEALs. The Holy Spirit had given both men a vision of what the congregations could accomplish if they would cooperate together. And having Christian secondary education available in that region was one such cooperative endeavor.

Of the pastors, Norm and Bert were burdened with our Lord's larger view of what He could accomplish through the cooperation of different faith communities. However, most of the other pastors limited themselves to the needs of their own congregations. And there were also one or two who were absorbed in their own self-importance. (These were men Mike would speak with privately.)

 Mike first met Bert at a meeting of the parent/teachers board. His wife was on the board, and her father and cousin had been killed that very day. They were on Korean Air Lines Flight 007 from New York City to Seoul, South Korea on 1 September 1983 when Soviet fighter jets shot it down. During their conversation that night the Holy Spirit knit Mike's and Bert's spirits together. It was just a few days later while Mike was fixing a fence in the pasture that the Holy Spirit told him to go put a pot of coffee on because Bert was on his way to see him. No sooner had the coffee finished brewing when Bert drove up the driveway. Because each of them was attuned to listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit, their relationship deepened into intimate fellowship.

 Sue is a wonderful nurturer, and the farm was our Lord's gift to her. Gene had kept three beehives at the retreat center, and before his departure with ISI he trained Sue to be a beekeeper. She thoroughly enjoyed the bees. No less than a few retreaters found their lives changed when they put on a bee suit and joined Sue with the bees, sometimes assisting her in capturing a swarm from a tree (see picture).

As retreaters learned about the selfless cooperation of the bees toward a common endeavor, they were inspired about the depth of relational cooperation our Lord was seeking among His followers. As they shared their bee experience with others on the retreat, the discussion would expand to their commitment to each other. Several of the people who put on a bee suit found themselves overcoming their own fears as the bees buzzed around them. These experiences were testimonies by which others became transparent about their own fears. We realized that many experiences at the retreat center opened people up and made it that much easier for the Holy Spirit to do His transforming work.

 From feeding critters to helping during lamb deliveries, Sue was there. Our sheep at times had problems in giving birth. Our first lambing season found Mike reading Sue the instructions on how to deliver a breach lamb while he was gripping the ewe's neck with his other hand. Sue was elbow deep inside the ewe trying to turn the lamb around. This was a steep learning curve for us both! Sadly, over the years we did lose lambs, both before and after birth.



Each death always left us anguishing that maybe we could have done more. There was a deeper lesson for us too. If there's great joy in heaven when a sinner repents (Luke 15:7), perhaps there's also sorrow in heaven when someone this side of eternity dies and is on their way to hell because Christians didn't tell them about Jesus. When we lose even the slightest regard for the eternal destiny of those we know, we pray, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit" (Psalms 51:12). We always want to be available.



Besides the death of lambs, our Lord used the death of a calf to humble Mike and bring him to his knees. Pop Hill, whom we mentioned in Saga 2, sold us a very young calf. Pop had told us to give the calf only pure water from the lodge for the first month. Several days later Mike was in the barn and failed to heed Pop's warning — he gave the calf well water from the barn. A few hours later the calf was listless and the next day it was dead. There was no emotional hole deep enough for Mike to hide his hurt in. The death of the calf devastated him and it took a long time for healing to take place.

Mike: As I grieved the loss of the calf, the word "specificity" kept being repeated in my spirit. As I prayed about it the Holy Spirit counseled me that the wording of prophecies whether given through me or someone else was more specific than I had paid attention to. For example, people would relate prophecies they'd received for me to test (1Corinthians 14:29; 1Thessalonians 5:20,21). Sometimes the person telling me the prophecy would use an "a" in their sentence, and immediately the Holy Spirit would tell me that the word He spoke was "the", a much more specific point. I became much more attuned myself to each word when He spoke a prophecy to me.



During one lambing season a teen came to stay with us for a week during spring vacation. A few weeks earlier Ian had lost both his Dad and his Dad's brother within a few days of each other. Not only was his Mom devastated, but also his grandparents. While he was with us Ian helped around the farm and was present when one of our ewes was having difficulty delivering her twin lambs. Sue had to reach in and deliver both of them. The day before Ian was to return home the ewe accidentally laid on both lambs, smothering them. We wondered what effect this would have on the young man. But without us saying anything he told us, "I can go home now and help my Mom and grandparents. You can never explain death or why someone dies. I can help them stop trying." The Holy Spirit knitted Ian and us together in a special way that week.



During a retreat of teenagers we had a sick lamb who needed round-the-clock care. One of the quieter girls asked if she could help Sue. Whenever free time occurred during the retreat Sharon had the lamb with her. During a group activity on the confidence course Sharon was up on the log to do a trust fall into her friends' arms. She stood on the log shaking in tears for many minutes. Finally, instead of falling backwards into everyone's arms, she leaped straight up and came down hitting both knees on the log.



We took her to the emergency room while everyone else went on with the retreat. While sitting in the waiting room Sharon opened up to us. "I hope my friends don't think I didn't trust them. I do! But while I was holding that needy lamb and later standing there on the log, I realized I had to tell someone. My stepfather has been raping me for months. I told my Mom but she says I'm lying." Fortunately she had no major leg injuries, and when we returned to the center we told the couple leading the group what Sharon had told us. They were at a loss and asked us for advice. Out of Mike's mouth the Holy Spirit spoke, "Believe the girl!" Investigation proved that she was telling the truth, and it became a criminal case against her stepfather.



During a single women's retreat from New Jersey, Sue was caring for two lambs whose mother died while giving birth. Most of the women worked in New York City in high executive positions. After spending time around them Mike was amazed at how power-driven they were! On

Friday night Sue stayed up late caring for the lambs in the heated hallway. In the morning the women awoke to find Sue in tears. One of the lambs had died. As Saturday night approached the women asked Sue if they could care for the lamb. About 5AM the next morning Mike walked downstairs to put on coffee for the ladies before they got up. As he turned the corner into the downstairs lounge all the women were sitting there in tears. The lamb had died during the night and they were deeply concerned about having to tell Sue. Mike asked the Spirit for wisdom.

He then sat with them like a caring father and they began to share their misgivings about themselves. Some had become emotionally hardened by their jobs and had developed cold love — a situation they wanted out of. Mike helped all of them become clean before our Lord Jesus. After breakfast the ladies asked him to lead them in a communion celebration. In the years to follow, the ladies as well as men from their congregation came on a number of retreats. In fact, they outgrew our 30-bed capacity but refused to go anywhere else. Tents popped up on our lawn!



On another occasion a ewe bore a lamb and then refused to nurse it. The lamb would cringe in pain every time we tried to give it a bottle, so we began to pray for wisdom. The Holy Spirit told Mike, "If you want to know what love is, shoot the lamb!" We stood together crying as Mike shot the lamb. Afterwards we took the remains to our local university for an autopsy. We found that the lamb had a paralyzing disease and would have died of starvation because it couldn't swallow.



Some time later a clergy retreat from a particular denomination was held at the center. The wife of the speaker had come with him from Missouri. While sitting on the deck having coffee she asked Mike about the retreat center. Prompted by the Spirit he began to tell her about the deaths of the animals and how lives had been changed through this. He then told her, "I'm convinced that nothing dies without God using that death." A short while later she told us it was exactly one year to the day that her daughter committed suicide. This mom had been lost in trying to make sense of it until Mike spoke to her. She told us she was ready to go back to Missouri and help other families.



During the weekdays Mike worked extensively making repairs around the lodge or working out on the farm and in the forests when he wasn't conducting retreats or counseling religious leaders. We didn't know at that time that Agent Orange exposure from his service in Vietnam was likely compounding his physical pain. One day he stopped by a hot tub dealer in our area to see if he might acquire some old parts to build his own hot tub. The Holy Spirit prompted Mike to tell the dealer about the various animal deaths on the farm. All of a sudden the dealer broke down sobbing. It had been exactly one year before that his 21-year-old daughter had committed suicide. Mike prayed silently and was then able to give the man words of encouragement. To our amazement, the next day a brand new hot tub with all the bells and whistles was delivered to the retreat center as a special gift for Mike. The owner couldn't thank Mike enough for having shared those testimonies with him so that his heart could finally begin to heal.

In ways no human can imagine, nothing dies without God using that death. And in words that no one could come up with on their own, the Holy Spirit provides timely words of wisdom to bring peace and comfort.