

...by the Way

Living Covenant Ministries International

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WELCOME

We have sent ...by the Way in response to requests for an occasional "paper copy" version of what is happening with LCMI. Included are an introduction to different facets of LCMI, *Living Reflections* articles, our travel itinerary, and some available resources. We hope to answer your questions and keep you informed, as well as provide encouragement on your walk with God. Let us know how we are doing as this aspect of LCMI continues to develop. Our mission is to listen to God's voice, follow Him where He leads us, and to tell what we have seen and heard on our journey with Him, always leaving the fruit of the work in His hands. We are glad you are sharing this journey with us.

Shalom!

Mike, Becky, Joseph & Rachael



Benefits

By Mike Rule

In my pre-vocational ministry days I was employed in the auto industry. Occasionally, another company would call and ask if I would consider working for them. One of the primary considerations for me in accepting a position with a company was the salary and benefit package. There were several times when a very attractive salary package was offered, but when I looked into the benefits it became startlingly clear that I was better off staying with my current employer even when the salary offered was considerably higher. Benefits often play a huge role in employment.

I was recently reading Psalm 103, which says, "*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits...*"

Have you ever considered the benefit package you received when you accepted Christ? Check it out. The position you currently hold is well worth keeping! In fact, I would say it is the best position on the planet! But don't take my word for it; see what God promises.

Passages for reflection:

Blessed be the Lord, Who daily loads us with benefits, the God of our salvation!

Psalm 68:19

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities; Who heals all your diseases; Who redeems your life from destruction; Who crowns you with loving-kindness and tender mercies; Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Psalm 103:2-5

What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation,

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and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people.

Psalms 116:12-14

Your benefit package:

Ezekiel 36:26, 27;

Romans 5:8; 5:10; 6:4; 6:23; 8:1,2; 11:16;

1 Corinthians 2:16; 6:11; 6:19;

2 Corinthians 2:14, 15; 5:17 & 21;

Galatians 2:20;

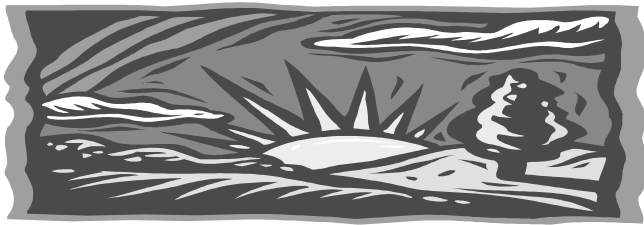
Ephesians. 2:5, 6 & 8;

Colossians 2:10; 3:3, 4;

2 Peter 1:4;

1 John 4:1;

And SO much more! Π



Whatever Blesses You, Lord

By Mike Rule

"Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name!" Psalm 103:1

One thing that the Lord has been teaching me is to be more yielded to Him in all areas of life. For example, we recently took a family vacation to the Rocky Mountains of western New Mexico to hunt elk with Becky's parents. During our vacation I found myself in several situations where my anxiety level would begin to rise within me. Here is what I mean:

As most of you are aware, this past year has been difficult for us, and we have made several futile attempts to have a family vacation. This time away was a gift from God as we were all emotionally and physically tired. It was almost too good to be true that we were going to have a break. We were only a few miles from home when we began to notice that our vehicle was intermittently making a very strange sound. The further we went, the more pronounced the sound became. While

discussing what to do about the problem I found myself becoming annoyed that our vacation was only beginning and we were already facing the possibility of delays due to car trouble. The decision about what to do was not easy, and as we weighed all the possibilities I heard a still small Voice whisper, "Trust Me." I envisioned spending hours in a repair shop waiting room only to have them tell us they could not isolate our trouble. On the other hand, we were going to be traveling late into the night and through some desolate parts of the country. A breakdown late at night in one of those regions could be even more frustrating. Again the still small Voice whispered, "Trust Me."

As we worked through our options, we decided to keep driving with an ear tuned into the noise to see if it got any worse, but I had an unsettling feeling inside. The negative emotions from our previous vacation attempts kept nagging at me, and I realized that I didn't feel that I could trust God in this issue. I wanted this vacation to go the way I wanted it to, and I was unwilling to accept whatever God's agenda might be. As I wrestled with God over my self-centeredness He brought to mind Psalm 103:1 and asked the question, "Are you willing to accept whatever blesses Me the most, Mike?" I felt something die within me as I realized that He knows what is best. My answer to His question leapt up with joy from within me: "Whatever blesses You, Lord; whatever blesses You!"

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus struggled with this same question: what I want, or what God wants? Jesus' response also brought Him peace and joy, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours be done." Luke 22:42

As you face the issues of your day you may also hear the Lord asking you this question, "Will you insist on your way, or will you accept whatever blesses Me the most?"

Prayer: "Father, this day we are going to face things we don't want to face. We may be in situations we don't want to be in. Lord, we want to be willing to embrace the Spirit of your Son Jesus and yield to Him so we can say in ALL things, 'Whatever blesses You, Lord; whatever blesses You. Amen.'" Π

More Like God

By Becky Rule

I have been pondering the conversation between Eve and the serpent in the Garden of Eden. What would be an effective temptation to present to one whose desire is for God? She was not "fallen" like we are, and her motives were unmarred by sin. Satan suggested to Eve that God wanted more from Eve: 1) something more she had to do—be like God; and 2) something more she had to have—a knowledge of good and evil. God did not ordain being like Him beyond being made in His image, but the serpent implied Eve needed to be MORE like God. I think God wanted Adam and Eve to be content with humble humanness, but the serpent presented the idea that something more was necessary in order to please God. "More" in its various forms has been our downfall ever since.

God does not want something out of you; He wants YOU. He wants to BE with you in all your human frailty. We have been duped into believing that being "like God" is the goal. It isn't. I do not think God was intending or asking Adam and Eve to be like Him. God is more okay with our humanness than we are. We believe He wants more than humanness. Eve saw the tree was good for food (God stated that) and that the fruit was a delight to the eyes (God said that, too). The serpent told her that the fruit was desirable to make one wise. I can hear her reasoning: "Wisdom is a desirable thing; what could be wrong with wisdom?" A portion of this deception is an attitude of independence and a "coming-alongside God" mentality. We also can easily slip into placing a higher value on knowing good from evil than on knowing God Himself. Like Eve, our motives are to please Him; and we think living right will do that. Come to find out, He just wants us, period.

Eve took the serpent's word about God and what He wanted rather than going to God Himself. It is easy to slip into relying upon another person's view of God and life with God. An encouragement to seek God can subtly slide into specific direction on what seeking God looks like, how to get spiritual results, etc. When we allow others to define our spirituality, we often come up empty because *their* series of "10 steps" refers to *their* journey. Our individual journey is custom-made for us. What a

hidden gift! Like Eve in the garden, being overly reliant upon others harms us. True spirituality cannot be copied or imitated. It must be genuine, original, and lived out--not "spread on." Imitating Jesus is not what we are after. We are looking for the same Source who was His Source. We don't need to be LIKE God; we need God Himself! Judgment Day is not the only time when it is "just you and God alone." At its deepest level, each life is an intimate spiritual journey with only the individual and the Holy Spirit as true participants. The rest is simply outward observation. As Creator of this intimacy, God protects us by not always allowing what "worked" in another's life to work in our own. Personally, I find this terrifying because it requires faith in God and His ways rather than trusting in what produced results for someone else. God is in the process of creating the beautiful image of Jesus in YOU. You are an original in each component of your life—physically, mentally, and emotionally. As Jesus is magnified through that unique composition of you, you are portraying a spiritual original as well.

Take courage in walking your own path with God. Do not be content to walk a trail belonging to someone else. Bravely allow the Holy Spirit to take you on the path He has crafted just for you. Paths are not made FOR walking; paths are made BY walking. It is our walking that makes the path, and Jesus is the way. II



The Law of Liberty

By Mike Rule

God challenges us to live a life that is not natural for our flesh. Yet, it IS natural for the believer because Christ's nature dwells in him. To consistently live the Christian life in our strength is impossible. If I do not see how impossible it is, I am like a man who observes himself in a mirror. He faces the fact of his own inability, then walks away and forgets what kind of man he is by believing he can do it all in his own strength. *But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty, and continues in humble dependence, never forgets that it is Christ alone who enables to us to naturally do the things of God. (James 1:24, 25)*

God is the One to flow through and bless every detail of life with the presence of Jesus (See James 1:21-25). Because of Christ's indwelling life, I want to set aside all filthiness and my old nature's residue, and I am willing to receive God's prompting with meekness as He works within me. My thoughts, feelings, and actions are transformed as I submit to His urging. This relieves my mind, will, and emotions of the torment of trying to think, feel, and do the right things for God's acceptance. Every aspect of my life is affected as He aligns me with His written word and I see what my life is to look like as Christ flows through me. The next time you find yourself struggling with sin, remember that it is not a reflection of your sinful nature. The enemy would have us believe our goal is to avoid sin, but your actual struggle is in trying to involve yourself in sin. The battle is a reflection of Christ's holy nature that lies within you, showing you that you will never be happy living in sin because you simply are not suited for it. You were crucified with Christ and your sinful nature was put to death once and for all in Him. Π

Let Go!

By Mike Rule

Someone recently commented to me that it is sad to see the bulk of my counseling is simply sharing the gospel with Christians. I understand that sentiment and would be very discouraged and frustrated if God had not shown me His perspective. So often we must try what does not work before we are ready and able to receive the one thing that does work. The good news of Jesus in its simplicity is offensive when we continue to believe we have something valuable to contribute. Therefore, I continually proclaim that He will let His children go in every way that is not the way to prepare us to receive the revelation of His way! Only Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, and no one can come to the Father except through Him. Jesus sets us free from the captivity, the sin and the death resulting from our efforts at self-improvement. What a blessing that when we are at the end our rope we simply have to let go and fall three inches into His arms. It is only in trying to hold on that we become so miserable. Let go! **Let go! Let go!** Π

Manna

by Mike Rule

As I speak, my tendency is to want to keep up with or recapture what happened "yesterday." The Lord may speak powerfully in the first of a series of meetings, but then I struggle with the underlying fear that He will not speak in the next session. The Lord is so faithful to encourage me in this. If I am counting on yesterday's manna for today, it will be wormy and spoiled. God has new manna that will satisfy for today. *He* is our manna, and He always satisfies. It is only when I set aside what Jesus did yesterday that He can be anything to me today. He is the same yesterday, today and forever, but I cannot live on yesterday's Jesus; it is not what I need today. I need a fresh Jesus. His mercies are new EVERY morning! I praise God for that. I can rest in the knowledge that His will is being done and that He gives the exact thing at the exact time to meet an exact need. It does not matter if we walk away feeling our meeting was a waste of time, so long as His will was accomplished. I must forget about the results; results are His worry, not mine. Π

“Living Reflections”

The email ministry that has developed into “Living Reflections” began nearly five years ago when Mike occasionally wrote his thoughts in an article format and mailed them to a few friends and family members. From there the Lord slowly began an outreach/discipleship ministry and grew a distribution list

To date, people are receiving these articles in approximately twenty countries, including Latvia, Hungary, Croatia, India, Australia, the Philippines, Canada, and several countries in Africa. This facet of LCMI continues to expand, and we are always intrigued to hear how God uses these short devotional thoughts. In the United States, Latvia, and Africa they are used regularly in Bible studies

The archive of “Living Reflections” on our website has approximately 175 articles posted with more being added regularly. To subscribe to “Living Reflections”, email addme@livingcovenant.com with “subscribe” in the subject line. II

Livingcovenant.com

I have often referred to the Internet as God’s fast forward button because what used to take many years to come about can now happen in a relatively short time. In the last two years we have had approximately 140,000 page views on our site. Our discussion forum sees an average of 3000 visitors per month. It has been an exciting experience to watch livingcovenant.com grow.

During this past year we acquired livingcovenant.net and livingcovenant.org in addition to livingcovenant.com. It is not uncommon for undesirable material to be posted on site names similar to a rapidly growing site. At the rate the site was growing, we have attempted to head off this possibility by having rights to all three names.

We hope we have increased our website’s visual appeal by including new homepage graphics and new menu buttons. We work hard to keep the site simple in both function and appearance. If you stop by the site, please feel free to share what you like, as well as what might be changed, added, or improved. II

Resources

Audio Series – \$20 each

Living: His Perspective

8 CDs or cassettes covering our basic message and showing how God is working in ALL things to draw us to Himself.

Marriage – 7 CDs or cassettes looking at marriage from God’s perspective. We really are better off than we feel we are.

Audio Tapes - \$3 each

New! First Love - A look at Revelation 2. What is the first love?

Whose Faith? – A look at Galatians 2:20. Whose faith is God looking for?

Complete in Christ! A look at Colossians 2:10. We are complete in Christ.

Faith! – A look at John 10. How do we walk by faith?

Offended! - A look at Romans 5 & 6. Why are we always being offended?

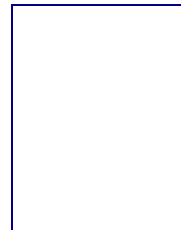
God’s Order – A look at Galatians. If we start in the wrong place, everything else will be out of order.

Jonah – A message of encouragement from Jonah.

Fruit or Life? – Mike’s testimony and a look at Matthew 7:15-20.

Call or write us to order any of these resources.

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

2 0 0 4 I T I N E R A R Y	January 21–23 DeWitt, Michigan	Matters for Prayer <ul style="list-style-type: none">• That people everywhere would have ears to hear, eyes to see, and hearts to receive God and His will• That we would increasingly recognize and follow His voice, living with our hearts wide open to Him That God’s will be done... <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In counseling situations at home and while traveling• In daily family life and Mike’s travels• In ministry and personal finances• In the structure of LCMI• In all 2004 ministry opportunities
	January 26-February 4 Calumet, Michigan	
	March 3-24 Mozambique & Malawi, Africa	
	June 20-27 Paradise, Michigan Youth Mission Trip	
	July 9-19 Fiji Youth Mission Trip	
	July 21-22 Australia TBD	
	July 23-29 Ocean Grove, Victoria, Australia	
	July 30-August 1 Ocean Grove, Victoria, Australia Men' s Retreat	
	August 2-9 Australia TBD	
	October 14-17 Paradise, Michigan Counselor’s Retreat	
October 17-24 Paradise, Michigan Biblical Studies Segment of Advanced Training	To Contact Us: Living Covenant Ministries International P.O. Box 188 Cass City, Michigan 48726 USA Telephone: 989-553-2252 Email: contact@livingcovenant.com Website: http://livingcovenant.com	