

Building Up Four Areas in the Present-Day Church Life

(Fellowship from Minoru Chen on November 8, 2020)

Prayer

Lord, we continue to look to You as our guide and our instant roadmap. Lord, as we're here moving with the Spirit, we just pray that Your hand will still be with us. We pray that all the brothers will really become the living stars in Your right hand, nothing of rank or position. We pray that in all the churches there will be many such brothers, who are not elders in name but messengers of Christ, shining, guiding, and leading Your people into a living condition, into a fruit-bearing condition, into a condition that befits Your testimony. Lord, we pray for ourselves. We humble ourselves. Oh Lord, give us a living word, a rhema word, the word that we need, and all the churches need. Also give us boldness and courage, to not fall back into an old way of doing things. Lord, we pray that we would serve You in newness of spirit, not in oldness of letter. Lord, gain something and do something new in the churches in the United States, especially in these ten churches.

Introductory Word

The Person, Not the Way

Brothers, I have a few things before I get into the fellowship for today. Firstly, we have to increasingly realize that, at the end of the day, as Watchman Nee famously said, we care for the person rather than the way. It is not the way per se, but it is the person who walks the way. This means that our care for the churches and for the saints does not really depend on just a way. We may have the best way, even the God-ordained way, but if we are the wrong person, any kind of way would not work. That way will be discounted. I am sorry to say that we have seen this. Some, because they were the wrong person, weaponized the way and used the way to carry out their own agenda, thought, or

viewpoint. This has happened to brothers in responsibility, and eventually caused problems. Brothers, I hope that we will hold fast to this understanding: the person, not some method or technique, is the way. We need the Lord to work upon us and in us, to adjust, correct, and perfect us, so that we can be the right brothers to bear certain responsibility and leading among the saints in the churches.

Brother Lee once mentioned to co-workers and elders that the younger ones have a certain kind of problem, the middle-aged brothers have another kind of problem, and the older ones have another kind of problem. With the young ones, the problem is always pride. Pride is always related to some ambition. With middle-aged brothers, the problem is their trying to be a hero. That was quite an interesting utterance from our brother. At a certain age, you would want to have made contributions and to be recognized as someone who did something for the Lord's recovery. You would have that desire for recognition to be a hero. With the older brothers, their problem is opinion. Over the years of their learning experience, they have adopted or formulated certain opinions about the church life, about the way to do things. They become insistent and cannot be convinced that what they know as the right way may be old or outmoded or may not work. In some cases, they become legal. Brothers, this happens. They become legal and even implacable and obstinate, refusing to change. We have seen these things plague the church life over the years.

Brothers, this is not my main burden today. But this kind of fellowship from Brother Lee on our dispositional problems is crucial. Our natural dispositions that are related to our age eventually undermine our service and usefulness and become a problem in the churches that we help to oversee or administrate. We all love the Lord. We all love the church. We all love the ministry. We all love the truth. All that is not much of a problem. But our dispositions have a way to raise their heads and become a problem. Brothers, it is good to be reminded or exhorted in this way.

Harmony and Oneness

I have one other thing that I would like to mention. The main thing with the brothers who bear responsibility in the churches that we need to take care of is the harmony and oneness. Never forget Psalm

133: *“how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell in unity”*. I would go a step further than unity – not just some kind of tacit oneness but harmony. In Matthew 18, the word is *symphonic harmony*: when two agree together in harmony, then they can bind and loose. That kind of harmonious spirit and atmosphere amongst the leadership, amongst the serving brothers, will be observed, learned, and followed by the saints. If the leading brothers are not harmonious – they are just putting on a show that they are one, but actually there are all kinds of problems – that church cannot be one. There must be genuine harmony. This does not mean that we agree on everything, that we see eye to eye on everything. No, but it does mean the cross is at work, the Spirit is at work, the blending is at work, and the balancing is at work. By means of all these things, we learn to be in a sweet, harmonious situation. When the brothers’ condition is like this, the Lord has a way to give the commanded blessing of life. You just feel it. You just taste it. Even the saints would feel it. Never underestimate the saints. Do not think that they are naive, that they do not know what is going on. Many saints’ spirits are very keen. They know when there are problems between the brothers and when there is infighting and discord. They know, and immediately their confidence and our credibility decrease.

A Sweet Atmosphere in the Church

Brother Lee one time said that two things characterize a good eldership or leadership. He said that a certain atmosphere characterizes a good leadership. Number one is the spirit of prayer. When he would go and visit a church, the first thing he touched was the spirit of prayer among the brothers. The brothers would not just be talking, “fellowshipping”, or spending a lot of time doing things with little time to pray and to really minister by prayer. He said that that spirit of prayer is a sweet atmosphere because that is the incense. Where there is prayer, Christ is added as the incense for that prayer to ascend. There is a kind of sweetness and pleasant atmosphere when the brothers pray.

The second characteristic is the spirit of self-sacrifice. Self-sacrifice means to not preserve our soul life, to not preserve ourselves, our own dignity, and our seniority. It is to not preserve anything of ourselves, including our self-esteem, our self-respect, and other people's respect for us. With regard to offenses, mistreatment, or

wrong dealings, we just take the cross and die. He said that spirit is sweet if it is among the brothers. It will be a very sweet-smelling sacrifice. Brothers, in a church, it is not just a matter of things you do or the meetings you have, but there needs to be a certain atmosphere. When you come to my house, you may see my furniture and eat my food, but you also detect an atmosphere that is very unique to my family. You touch it in the kids. You touch in the parents. You touch it everywhere. It is a flavor. You can't quite put your finger on it, but there is an atmosphere. You have to realize, brothers, that the atmosphere of a church is very important. To build up a local church is not about doing the right things or having the right schedule. A lot of times we forget or miss the atmosphere. We may be doing everything right, but the atmosphere is wrong. The atmosphere is not sweet. The atmosphere is not clear and kind of cloudy. The atmosphere is not releasing and free; but some frustrating element is putting a lid on it. Brothers, we need to pay attention to this. We create that atmosphere by our exercise. I can never forget this speaking from Brother Lee in the '60s. He said that prayer and self-sacrifice are what will produce that atmosphere.

Building Up Four Areas in the Church Life

Today, brothers, I have a particular burden. Last week, we saw this image, picture, or pattern of the first church on the earth, the church in Jerusalem. That was not intended to be something that we legally copy and try to replicate, to become the "early church of the 21st century." In the church in Jerusalem, there was a glorious and Spirit-filled situation. Talk about atmosphere. You could touch something there. The Spirit was very much present in that first church. Those elements that make up the essence of that atmosphere – some of them even touching their practice – are what I wanted to convey. I hope that, today, more churches will be like that in essence, atmosphere, and spirit.

This morning, I was in a meeting with a couple thousand saints in Canada. Churches all across Canada, across five time zones, met together for the first time on Lord's Day morning on Zoom. Two of the churches used to be GTCA cities: one is called Abbotsford in British Columbia, and the other is called Guelph in Ontario. I had forgotten that those two places were GTCA cities some years ago. Today, there is a growing number of saints in those places. Both have been

functioning as a district of a bigger church. Abbotsford has been, for a number of years, a district of Surrey, a church in Lower Mainland. Guelph has been a district of the church in Kitchener in Western Ontario. With their growing number and the leading of the Lord, this morning they proclaimed the start, the official establishment, of these two churches in Canada. It was quite a celebration and a lot of joy. It was really good to see the core group of brothers – co-workers, leading brothers, and some learners – in the whole country, 30 to 40 brothers, fellowshiping for a couple of days. I joined them for part of the time. Through fellowship, they are really moving in that whole country of Canada as one man. You just feel the blessing. You just feel the peace. There is a lot to look forward to in Canada.

Today, I want to talk about four main areas in building up the present-day local church. Brother Lee spoke about these quite consistently. I am not talking about the God-ordained way. These are more basic and foundational. I am quite certain that, by my own experience and also based on the ministry, we cannot go wrong with these four things. In other words, to build up these four things in the church amongst the saints is equivalent or tantamount to building up the local church. The order of these four things are also according to Brother Lee.

1. The Preaching of the Gospel

Number one is the preaching of the gospel. You may not think that this is number one. Brother Lee had a book with the messages from 1985 called *Truth, Life, the Church, and the Gospel—The Four Pillars in the Lord's Recovery*. Typically, you would go in that order, but I am talking about now – the present time. This is based on Brother Lee's speaking to leading brothers. The first thing to build up is the preaching of the gospel by the saints. In other words, in building up a church, we need to build up a gospel-preaching church, a church that seeks to increase, a church that proclaims the gospel, an evangelical church.

Recall 1 Thessalonians that Paul stayed with the saints in Thessalonica for three weeks. He was not there for a long time. He was in Ephesus for three years, but he was in Thessalonica for only three weeks. In chapter one, Paul praised that church. He said, *"...you became a pattern to all those who believe in Macedonia and in Acadia. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded out; not only in Macedonia and*

in Acadia, but in every place, your faith toward God has gone out, so that we have no need of saying anything.” (1:7-8) That is quite a praise from the apostle for this church. Note that the first thing is that the word had gone out from them.

Let us go to the book of Philippians which speaks of the pursuit and enjoyment of Christ. In chapter one, Paul praised the church in Philippi. He said, *“...both in my bonds and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel you are all fellow partakers with me of grace.”* (1:7) Before that, he said, *“Always in my every petition on behalf of you all, making my petition with joy, for your fellowship unto the furtherance of the gospel from the first day until now.”* (1:4-5) This is right off the bat in the epistle. Paul’s praise to the Philippians was in their joining Paul, supporting and fellowshiping with Paul unto the furtherance of the gospel. That was a great thing because Paul was a minister of the gospel. He suffered for the gospel. He was in bonds for the gospel. And here was one church that supported that. Brother Lee said in the Life-Study that, while this book is on the enjoyment of Christ, we should not forget that this book is also on the gospel. You may think that enjoying Christ and the gospel are two different things. To Paul, it is the same thing.

In one of Brother Lee’s times of sharing with the leading ones and the saints on gospel preaching, he did not only say how important gospel preaching is; he said how important the *zealous* preaching of the gospel is. Brothers, today, to be in a normal, proper church, this must be the case. Gospel preaching, brothers, is not a campaign or a movement or some event. Gospel preaching is our commission according to the Gospels, and gospel preaching should be our living, our life, our church life. Brothers, we need to lead the church and help the saints. This is not an overnight matter, but we have to start building the church up in the matter of the gospel. It is for the bearing of fruit for the universal vine. It is for gaining materials for the building of the church. Brother Lee’s strong burden in going back to Taiwan was because of the lack of increase in the entire recovery. He was looking for a breakthrough and, step by step, he built up that God-ordained way. The driving burden within him back in those years was the increase and the preaching of the gospel. He said that a church that does not preach the gospel is not a church, does not have the character of a church.

Do not think that preaching the gospel is a low thing. Do not think that we are for the truth and life, but the gospel is optional. Brothers, you would be wrong to think that. We need to repent of that kind of a thought. The gospel is the highest and greatest commission from the Lord. In the book *The Vital Groups*, Brother Lee had a whole chapter on this matter of the great commission in Matthew 28, in Mark, and in Luke as well. We need a change, brothers. Do not look down on gospel preaching. Do not belittle that at all. It is a great thing. Today, the most desperate need in the Lord's recovery in this country – bar none – is the increase. We have the truth. We have the life. But our increase, percentage-wise, has been quite pitiful for a long time.

Also remember, brothers, that when we talk about the gospel, we are not only talking about the gospel of grace. The gospel also includes the gospel of life and the gospel of the kingdom. In Paul's words, the gospel of salvation is equivalent to the word of the truth. When we talk about preaching the gospel, we are talking about sounding out the word. In Acts 5, every day, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus Christ as the gospel. There you see both preaching and teaching. Brothers, when we say gospel, we are talking about preaching and we are also talking about teaching. We preach the gospel of salvation, the gospel of eternal life, the gospel of God's righteousness. We teach the word of the truth. Today, many Christians need the gospel, the full gospel. This should be our view.

The church in this sense should be outward-facing, not just looking at ourselves, not introverted. The church's commission is to preach the gospel. This means that the leading brothers have to take the lead themselves to be zealous for this and to be patterns for this. We are not talking about dropping our jobs and being on the streets every day. If the Lord leads you that way, that is wonderful. But we are talking about a maintainable, sustainable, week-to-week sanctified times to do this: to reach out to our friends, relatives, neighbors, or communities with BFA materials, by email, by text, or by visiting them. The sustainable way is the consistent, persistent, and regular way. And we do it personally and directly.

This will take some time to build, but, brothers, we have to be clear on how to build up the church. Gospel preaching is the first thing to build up. This is not just my speaking; this is Brother Lee's speaking. I

have studied Brother Lee's speaking during the five years of his time in Taiwan. The first of those books were all in Chinese – this was in the '80s – from the Taiwan Gospel Book Room, so I had the advantage to get into it. I was in Taipei myself for a year and a half with Brother Lee and in the FTTT. After Brother Lee came back to this country, he continued in the FTTA and in his Vital Group Training in Southern California. In all that he was burdened for and spoke about in those days, I was there to receive it. I also studied after Brother Lee passed away. I could not say I have read every single book or message, but I have read most of them. This is why I have compiled 16 outlines on a review of the God-ordained way. It is a full review, not a partial, selective review, but a full review of the development of the God-ordained way under Brother Lee's leadership. I can tell you with assurance that this matter of the gospel as the first way to build up the church will not be wrong.

Please read the book *The Practice of the Church Life according to the God-Ordained Way*. He gave these messages to the elders and co-workers in Anaheim in 1992 during the Vital Group Training. That was the year after we went to Russia. We went to Russia in 1991. The year after, when he gave these messages, he said that if we did not preach the gospel, the Russians would come and preach the gospel for us. He was so burdened about the USA. He said that the first step is to go out and contact people with the gospel and with the word. I hope that, in these ten churches, brothers, you will think this way. Also, do not forget my first fellowship about the church needing to be people-centered.

2. The Universal Shepherding

The second thing to build up in the church life is the shepherding. Under this word *shepherding* is a lot of things. Shepherding means cherishing, feeding and nourishing. Shepherding includes teaching – recall the mention of teachers and shepherds in Ephesians 4. Shepherding includes perfecting – a big part of shepherding is perfecting others. Brothers, in a healthy church, shepherding is prevailing. Shepherding turned out to be the last main fellowship of Brother Lee on the God-ordained way and on the vital groups. The last book called *The Vital Groups* is almost entirely on the burden of shepherding. He called it *universal shepherding*.

Brothers, build up a shepherding church, a church where the brothers shepherd. Elders, you are the shepherds of the flock. The main work of an elder is to shepherd. All the saints should pick up this burden of shepherding. Everyone, from old to young, should be shepherding somebody. That somebody could be a junior higher, a high schooler, a college student, or a full-timer. Do not think that full-timers do not need shepherding. They greatly need shepherding. These are young saints who are just apprenticing on how to serve the Lord. They need so much care. We need to shepherd the weak ones, the backslidden ones, the ones who are in the periphery of the church life, the ones who have lost heart, and the ones who have been sidetracked or distracted.

Brothers, the list of people who need care and shepherding is endless. Brother Lee told the elders one time to take out the phone list, go down the list name by name, shepherd each one, and when they were done with the list, to go back to the top and do it again. To do this, you have to carve out time. You have to budget and schedule your time to do this on a constant and regular basis. We may think that shepherding is fighting fires. When there is no problem, there is no need to shepherd. When there is a problem, then you go to "shepherd." No, shepherding is not damage control. When you have a promising brother or a pursuing sister, they need a lot of shepherding for their growth, for their perfecting, for their improvement in functioning. Many of us have the experience – I surely do – that the lasting fruit and the useful saints are typically products of some intense one-on-one shepherding over the years. There is no way around that. People do not pop out from under a rock and become useful. No, they have been cared for, shepherded, for years and decades, then they flower and blossom and their function is manifested. Brother Lee also talked about the shepherding spirit of the Son and the receiving, loving heart of the Father in Luke 15.

Brothers, this is a huge subject. Build up the church that cares of people, a shepherding church. Oh, that atmosphere. Talk about the atmosphere. It is just caring. No one is left uncared for. You would remember that Brother Lee talked about Brother Eugene Gruhler, Sr. He also talked about Eugene Gruhler, Sr.'s father in Germany who was a baker. Every day this brother went to the bakery and, by three o'clock in the afternoon, he was done. He would go home and change,

and every afternoon he would go and visit the believers. Brother Lee loved to talk about that story.

This man's son – that was Eugene Gruhler, Sr. – was a terrible speaker with a heavy German accent. He could not give a prophecy by today's standard. He was very reluctant to speak in the meetings. This was in Elden. But Brother Lee considered two things about him that made him special to Brother Lee, who even called him his co-worker. Number one was Brother Gruhler's prayer for Brother Lee. He never traveled with Brother Lee. He never gave conferences. But he prayed for Brother Lee. Number two was that he shepherded the young people. I was a beneficiary of that. Every Lord's Day, he would invite a group of young people – college-age in my case – to his home. His wife, Caroline, would prepare this wonderful British meal. After that, he would sit us down. One time everyone had left and it was just me and him. He had bushy eyebrows, piercing eyes, a big nose, a German accent – all these were a bit scary. That day he spoke a word to me that I shall never forget. He spoke to me about D. L. Moody and how his life was turned when he became clear that he had to serve the Lord full-time. He was a shoe salesman in Chicago. He was not a great person. He partook of the Kewick convention fellowship, which was very famous on consecration and the inner life. One of the brothers there spoke to D. L. Moody and said just this one sentence. This was repeated by Brother Gruhler when he said to me while looking right through me – "Today, God is still looking for one person on the earth who is fully consecrated to Him." That changed D. L. Moody's life. He gave up everything. The rest is history. When Brother Gruhler spoke that word to me, brothers, I felt like the Lord was speaking that word to me. I was consecrated. I was in the church life. But that word – one man, he said, one man who is fully consecrated – transported me to another realm. I said, "Lord, I want to be that man." Brother Gruhler reportedly died while he was shepherding a sister. Brothers, these are the two things that Brother Lee mentioned about Brother Gruhler, whom he greatly esteemed. Some of these things were spoken at the grave site at the funeral of Brother Gruhler in 1972. Brother Lee respected that brother. He had no eloquence or speaking gift. He was just an old brother, but he shepherded so many saints. I can tell you that many saints my age were shepherded by him.

Brothers, this is the church life. Build up the shepherding spirit and

heart. Weekly, set aside the time to shepherd some saints. Today, with Zoom, it is even better because you are so close face-to-face. I still do that, shepherding through Zoom. Of course, my wife and I co-shepherd. We are shepherding partners. But many times, I shepherd a brother one-on-one and she shepherds a sister one-on-one. There is no replacement for one-to-one long-term care, brothers. There will be a revival, Brother Lee said, when universal shepherding is practiced. But brothers, let us not just take this into some high place. Let us translate it to our church life today and build that spirit up.

Number one; have a heart for sinners. Number two; have a heart for the saints. Sinners and seekers. All the saints, including the unbecoming ones who need to be honored more by us. Brothers, it is all about people. If you build up your church on gospel preaching and shepherding – John 15 fruit-bearing and John 21 shepherding – that's it. That is the gospel of life, insofar as the charge of the Lord Savior goes. It is better that some other matters would be short, but these two things would never be short.

3. The Meetings of the Church

The third thing, brothers, to build up in our churches is our meetings, our meeting life. We are the church, the *ekklesia*, the assembly of the called-out ones. That is the definition of *ekklesia*. We are a gathering people, a meeting people. Do not cease meeting together, as the custom of some is – was the strong charge in Hebrews 10 to those wobbling and waffling Jewish believers. Our meeting life is a very important life.

The Lord's Table

Of course, today, in terms of meetings, number one is the Lord's supper. This is not really a meeting, but we do gather together. We have to build up the Lord's supper, the Lord's table. A lot of the Lord's table meetings are so weak, not rich, but scarce in praise and exercise. They are not satisfactory. In many cases, the Lord's table has become a formality, a "communion." Brothers, this meeting should be the top, the highest, gathering of the saints to remember the Lord and to worship the Father. Brother Lee, in the book called *Basic Lessons on Service* from 1979, devoted the first six or eight lessons on the Lord's table. He was training us on how to have the Lord's table using the type of the peace offering in Leviticus.

Oh, brothers, our church life is still so lacking in praise, in the praising spirit, in singing, in exaltation. Talk about the early church, consider their praising of God and exalting of Christ! Our kind of meeting now is not that attractive. It is not even attractive to us – forget about outsiders. We need to build that up. We need to train the saints. This is the topmost gathering. If you do not go to any other meetings, you must remember the Lord at His table.

The Prophesying Meeting

As part of the God-ordained way, one of the great recoveries is that we can all prophesy. But over time the prophesying time has become weak, lacking in content, and not rich. Some brothers have to be the corporate pastor to hold it up. Otherwise, the whole meeting will collapse, because no one is prepared or has much to say. It has become a kind of formality also. Now I may be too critical, too judgmental – you forgive me – but, brothers, we need to build up that meeting so that it is rich and attractive and so that the saints would leave that meeting consoled, encouraged, comforted, and edified. These are all words in chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians. We need to build up the meetings of the church. When was the last time that we looked at the book *How to Meet*? That book is mostly on praise in Psalm 68, Psalm 8, and Psalm 45. Brothers, we do need to build up the meetings.

The Prayer Meeting

Number three, we need to build up the prayer meeting. In the early years, at least 75% of the Lord's Day attendance showed up at the prayer meeting on Tuesday night. Nowadays, I am not so sure, but I think it is far off from 75% in most cases. Brothers, we need to build up the saints in their prayer life and in the prayer ministry of the church.

We have other group meetings, but these are the primary church meetings that we need to spend time to build up. This will not happen overnight. Do you know the song *Let Us Exhibit Christ*? The meeting is an exhibition of Christ, where we bring the surplus to the church and thus exhibit Christ. I am not so sure that the saints today are filled with that understanding and vision: I have to bring something of Christ to offer in the meeting, I cannot go empty-handed; I need to prepare, I need to experience the Lord in my daily life to bring something to feed the saints and even to feed God. In all these things, we need a

recovery.

4. The Services of the Church

Number four, we need to build up the services of the church, including the spiritual services and the practical services. Spiritual services are taking care of the children, taking care of the junior highers, and, in some cases, taking care of the senior saints. In the old days, we had something called *visitation groups*. These saints visited the other saints. Of course, we would like to see universal shepherding and not just a small number of saints doing that. The spiritual services of the church need to be built up. I would even consider the promotion of our books from the book room, encouraging the saints to get into the ministry, to be quite spiritual. That is not selling books. There is a spiritual burden there for the saints.

On the other side are the levitical services, the administrative services. We have the church business office, the finances, the maintenance and many things related to the meeting hall, food services, piano services, etc. In a little church, you do not need to do so many things. As the church becomes bigger, you do need to take care of these things in a good way. This is a deacon's work. In building up these kind of services, it is a matter of finding the right persons and matching them to the services, of helping the saints to not serve in an individualistic manner, of helping them on how to coordinate, and of leading the saints in the right way to do things.

It is utterly wrong for these things to all be in the hands of the elders. The eldership passes on and arranges for many saints to enter into the service. The great revival in Chefoo in 1942-43 was brought in by the services of all the saints. Brother Lee took the blueprint of how to build up a practical church from Shanghai to Chefoo. He worked it out. He took the lead and he built it up. Do you remember how he talked about taking the lead to clean those old holes in the restroom floor? He eventually led the whole church into the services. When he had all the one-talented members serving, actively functioning, a revival was brought forth in Chefoo.

At the end of the day, brothers, the God-ordained way is to bring forth and release the organic function of every brother and sister where no one is idle. No one is just sitting there doing nothing. When everyone

is serving, everyone is living and active, that is a vitalized church.

I will just mention these four things. I do not know what you think, brothers, but to me this is very clear. When you build up these four areas, you build up the church. Number one, gospel preaching or fruit-bearing. Number two, the shepherding of the saints, the universal shepherding. Number three, the meetings of the church. Today, we have a lot of small group meetings, but they have become a form. We do not think that we need to help the saints or train the saints on how to meet. Lastly, number four, the various services in the church, both the spiritual and the levitical kind. This is the way we all-inclusively build up a local church.

When I was in the Bay Area in the last few years, I talked to the elders a lot. I was always on their case. I told them that we think the elders' job is to make a schedule for the church, to announce the schedule on the Lord's day, decide on the next Holy Word for Morning Revival, to choose the color of the carpet in the meeting hall and the paint color on the walls. Brothers, I am not saying that we do not do these things, but this is not building up the church. The building up of the church is about people. Someone can make the schedule. Someone can make the announcement. You know, there are some places where two elders fight on who gets to make the announcement. It is not about who gives the announcement and who would then have the final word. We are not here to build up that kind of thing. We are here to take care of people, to bring in the increase, to preach the gospel, to shepherd the believers. Brothers, I hope we have a shift in our thinking altogether. Why would some brothers be ambitious to be an elder or to have some position? Is it because they get to give the announcements, to be the decision maker in the church, to be somebody? Brothers, this is totally wrong. That is not the way to build up the church. I would rather learn from Eugene Gruhler, Sr., to not have any title but to be called by Brother Lee as his co-worker. He shepherded the saints and he prayed for the work, for the ministry. I would rather do that. One day at the judgment seat, see who will get the praise, the reward, from the Lord. Brother Lee talked in this way.

Questions and Responses

I am at a situation where I am in the church life just shepherding people. When we shepherd saints – I shepherd young people – do we

need to let the elders know that we are shepherding certain saints and what is going on with them? Is this something that we should practice?

Let me answer. Fellowship is always good. That is what we do. We do not act independently. We do not act like an isolated member. We need fellowship: fellowship with the leading brothers, fellowship with responsible ones, or fellowship with ones who are knowledgeable about some situation or case. But, brother, concerning this matter, the more organic we are, the better. If you wait for the elders to arrange and they do not arrange, what will happen? What if the elders have no burden to shepherd? Does that mean that you do not shepherd? It is the same with preaching the gospel. We need to fellowship. We need to not work in an independent way. Yes, that is the principle. But brothers, when you see someone drowning, do you wait and ask for permission? No, you jump in there and save the person – he is dying!

Brother Lee spoke again and again that, in these things, there is too much arrangement, too much control. He liked to see the saints take the initiative on their own accord, not in an individualistic way or in an uncoordinated way. We all have to be persons of fellowship. But in terms of the burden, Brother Lee said to go to the Lord. The Lord will touch you with specific persons as far as gospel candidates to contact or saints to fellowship with. In a larger church, the leading brothers do not know all the saints' situations, but you know. You could be in the same group, the same district, or the same area. You would know some of the situations, so according to the Lord's leading you should pray and care for the saints. And I would say, one-on-one. Going by my experience, the most fine and thorough care for a person is one-on-one. Paul said that he exhorted every man, he taught every man. Paul was very particular in the way he shepherded people: every man, a man at a time, one by one. That is the most detailed way of helping a person. Having said that, in a lot of the situations in the church, you are not able to do everything by yourself. In some cases, you can. But a lot of situations would require that you coordinate with other saints. I told you that my wife and I co-shepherd. We shepherd a lot of the situations in marriages among couples. We have to coordinate between us, and many times we have to coordinate with another couple to take care of this couple or this family. That is in the principle of fellowship, but not in the way of arrangement. How would I, for

example, arrange to give you a baby? If I have a baby, then it is automatically mine. I have to raise up that baby, feed that baby, care for that baby. It should be that way. Does that help, brother?

A lot of times the saints will have a contact, and they will tell me and my wife that this person needs to be contacted so we should go contact them. We then wonder if we are contacting them because we have the feeling or because the saints are telling us to do so.

Brother, the main thing is that we pray and have appropriate fellowship, then we can go and contact people. You know, a lot of times, I might not have had that much of a burden, but through fellowship, the brothers felt that I was the right person for a particular situation. And so I went. You know what? After I contacted the person one or two times, I picked up a burden. What was passed on to me became a very organic burden within me. This also happens. It is better to not be too much in our mind, but to just follow the Lord and be in the fellowship, as long as our heart is pure. We check ourselves that we do not have any ulterior motive, we are not trying to gain someone for ourselves. Do you know what I mean? Sometimes, when we care for someone, we feel that we have control over that person, that person is "mine." Brothers do not have this kind of a thought at all. We do not own the saints. We are not here to build up a private little clique of loyalists who we care for. Do not do that, brothers. Our heart is pure. We have no motive. Our heart is just a heart of love.

I had a class with the FTTA three days ago. They read a chapter on A Lover of Men from the book *The Character of the Lord's Worker*, Chapter 2, from Watchman Nee. I spent a whole hour talking with them about just one thing, and that is compassion. I shared about the time in the Old Testament when God called Moses up to the mountain a second time, after Israel sinned and worshipped the calf, to re-give him the two tablets of stone. God asked Moses to come alone. The first thing that Jehovah did was to unveil Himself again to Moses. And He introduced His name: "*Jehovah*" (Exodus 34:6). This was Jehovah speaking. The first thing He said about Himself was "*God compassionate.*" We say that God is love, but the Old Testament says that God is compassionate, and His lovingkindness endures forever. He is slow to anger. He suffers long. Among these attributes, the first is compassion. In the New Testament, when the Lord Jesus saw the

crowd bringing the sick to Him, Matthew and Mark say many times that the Lord was moved with compassion. Moved with compassion, He healed the leper and the others. Brothers, caring for people requires love and compassion. It requires an enlarged heart. It requires unselfishness, patience, and longsuffering. This basically requires a heart transplant, for us to have the Lord's heart.

There was this couple in a GTCA city from long ago. They went there with a motive. This couple felt that they had the right way to do things. They felt that the elders did not know the way to do things, but that they knew. Eventually they did their own thing, and they did a work within the work of the church. It was to build up their own little group, doing things their style, their way. Brothers, that is wrong. Never do something like that. We are not here to build up anything for ourselves. We are here to build up the church. Whatever we may do, we do not do anything apart from the church. This does not mean that we do not take initiative – I said that already. This touches the purity of our motive in caring for people. We have no motive to build up anything for ourselves. Our only one motive is to care for the person and to care for the church. These things that I am talking to you about, brothers, have happened over and over again. Some fight for new ones. Especially sisters, they fight – this is my sheep, not yours. This absolutely happens. How come she got that one, and I got a bad one here. All these kinds of things are impure, and they eventually create problems.

Brother Minoru, I know we are out of time. Maybe I could pose my question and you could address it another time. Is there an outline to pray to be a gifted evangelist? I have gone out on the gospel a few times over the last several years and have been disappointed because I am just not good at it. I would like for one who knows what they are doing to perfect the saints, me first, so that I could help take the lead to help the saints preach the gospel on a regular basis. I just know that I do not have the skill. I do not have the knack. I do not even know how to get started.

Very good. First of all; I do not mean that we all need to become super evangelists like Billy Graham. I do not mean that any one of us will bring people to be baptized every week, or every month, or even every year. This is not what we are talking about. We are not

interested in a gospel movement. We are burdened, brothers, to bear fruit, to help ourselves and to help the saints to bear fruit. Brother Lee called fruit-bearing the highest form of gospel preaching. We can all bear fruit just like we can all have spiritual children. As we go on, I would like to devote time to share in more detail how to build these things up, so that even one who is a “gospel chicken,” who does not have the knack, or who does not have the “gift” can still bear fruit.

Also, we have the principle of the vital groups. On the one hand, there is the one-on-one care. But when it comes to gospel preaching, there is something called the corporate fruit-bearing by twos or threes – what Brother Lee called the vital groups. We need to take that way. When you have two or three saints, some are better at this, others are better at that. Even in the FTTA, we have gospel partners. One can be very good at teaching this new one. The other one is very good, not at teaching, but at cherishing. They pray and work together, and they gain this new one together.

There is a lot more we need to talk about in detail, how we get into it ourselves and then lead the saints. Brother Lee spoke abundantly on these matters, but what comes to mind is a couple of chapters in the *Elders' Training Books*. It is also a standalone booklet with two chapters called *The Eldership and the God-Ordained Way*. I am not saying that we are all elders, but those chapters are a very good word to help us take the lead to do something and then inspire the saints to follow us. Another book that would be good is *Messages for the Working Saints*. There are eight messages there, and the even number of messages are very practical, especially for working brothers and sisters.

Brother, I would also like to say, do not despise yourself in any way. Do not say that you are not good, you do not have the gift, or you are not a gospel preacher. Neither am I, to tell you the truth. I am not a gospel preacher, in that sense. But I can be a burdened for people. I have friends and relatives. I have colleagues. I have a lot of material that I can use, and again, I promote the BFA and all those gospel materials.

Let me tell you a story. There is a leading brother in a church in western United States, not a big church. He was burdened with this

kind of speaking and he has been practicing this. He made a vow to the Lord to do this. He is a very successful businessman, so he is a busy man. And he helps in the leadership of the church. Before the Lord he accumulated a list of names. This is the first thing Brother Lee told us: come up with a list of names, your little universe, your little Jerusalem, friends, colleagues, relatives, neighbors. This brother accumulated 70 plus names over a period of time. On Lord's Day mornings and on Wednesday mornings at 7:30 before he goes to work, he gives 35 minutes – I do not know why 35 minutes and not 30 – to the Lord. This means he spends one hour and 10 minutes every week. In those 35 minutes, he writes emails and sends texts to the people on his list individually. These are all very brief, not long, emails. The first thing that he will write is a verse of scripture that is fresh to him. The second thing is a quote from the ministry, a video, or a track – whatever the person's need may be. Finally, he will have a very simple prayer for this person to pray. Lord's Day by Lord's Day, Wednesday by Wednesday, he has been doing this faithfully. And he said that almost no one has refused him. Some are saved, some are not saved.

This is what Brother Lee talked about. Brothers, we can do this. See, we are not after Billy Graham's here. We are not after D. L. Moody's here. We are after saints who regularly, frequently, and on a schedule have a burden for the gospel, for the people around us. Brother Lee said that the problem is that we do not do this consistently. When we are stirred up, we do something. He said that the regularity and the persistence in this kind of work is what will bear fruit. It is not gift. It is not how powerful you are. It is a farming work – the work of a farmer is just labor, labor, labor.

Today, we are working on a program. We are learning from Amana Trust in England, UK. They are distributing Bibles, and through a sequence of emails, they would get some amongst the Bible recipients to sign up for a one-on-one Zoom Bible study. Out of 20,000 Bibles, they now have 200 people who gave their phone number, email, and permission to be contacted. 200 are now having Bible study with saints in England. These saints are mothers and working saints, not full-timers. The hope is that after much acquaintance and Bible study, at the right time they will gather them together for some meeting or forum or get-together. Then amongst them, there will be those who would seek the Lord more and come into the church life. This is also

gospel work, although this is not preaching to the unsaved but to the seeking ones.

There are many ways, brothers. The ways are plentiful, but it is our heart that matters. It is our view of the importance of this commission. It is our commitment. It is our endurance and our perseverance that will bring forth the result. There is not one way. There is no silver bullet in this. This is why I say that we are at a threshold of something. Brothers, we need nothing less than a new building up of a new church life, according to the God-ordained way under Brother Lee's leading. I believe that, brothers, it is possible. I believe that when this is worked out, it will really help to bring forth a new situation among us in America.