

## **The Two Offices in the Local Church**

**(Fellowship from Minoru Chen on November 23, 2020)**

### **Prayer**

*Lord, we submit ourselves to Your perfecting hand. Oh Lord, You are the true Perfecter. You are the unique Trainer. We pray that You will train us and perfect us, all the serving ones, all the brothers bearing some responsibility, that we would know how to conduct ourselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God. Lord, we are not here for method, but we need to know how. Grant us the training we need. Lord, You said You would build Your church, Your Body. Lord, we know that You do not build Your church directly, but You gave gifts to men who in turn perfect the saints who will do the work of the ministry unto the building up of the Body of Christ. Lord, we pray such building work will continue, such building work would be prevailing in all the local churches in Your recovery. We pray especially for these ten cities. Build up the churches. Build up the church life. Lord, build up Your testimony. We look to You, Lord.*

### **Introductory Word**

Brothers, I hope you have found this weekly Lord's Day fellowship to be beneficial. I say again that this is very high-level fellowship, a kind of a framework without too many details. All of these items deserve a lot more speaking and a lot more training. In fact, they require a lot of practicing and a lot of learning. I hope that, even though I spoke quickly and without many details, I have given you an impression and a broad view or picture of what is really entailed in building up a local church today.

## **The Need for a Spirit of Learning**

I have found that while we are very much in the truth – even the truth concerning the church, the church life, and the Body life – when it comes to the building up of an actual local church, not many brothers, myself included, know how. It is not only that they do not know how, in many instances they build in the wrong way. As a result, they build up something that you cannot say is not the local church, but something that is not according to the pattern that the Lord has shown us or at least not according to the way that is revealed to us with the help of the present day ministry of the Lord in His recovery. Hence, there are many local churches that are local churches but are strange looking and kind of odd. They are missing an “arm” or a “leg”, or worse, missing a “lung.” Using the illustration of a body, certain crucial organs may be missing, or certain parts may be benignly neglected. You find the church life incomplete, lacking, and, in many instances, unable to go on in a healthy way. This is my burden for us, brothers.

I hope that among you, there will be brothers who through this speaking would pick up a real burden and say, “Lord, I don’t know how to do this. I don’t. But, Lord, I would like to learn.” I would like to tell you my own little testimony – I first raised up a local church when I was 26 or 27. I really did not know what I was doing. Through the years, there were many learnings, many experiences, and many mistakes, for sure. It was like building up some pillar then needing to tear it down because it was built in the wrong place. Today, I cannot tell you that I am an expert. Only the Lord is the real Builder. Only the apostle Paul can call himself the master builder. We are all just practicing and learning, and I hope you will learn of me. I do not mean that I know what I am doing, and I know everything. I am saying that we need this spirit of learning, not just to learn the truth in the Bible or to know life, but to learn how to build.

## **The Need for Builders Who Know How to Build**

We are desperately short of builders, foremen, and superintendents. We are short of builders who know how to build up a group of saints into a testimony or into a local church, the testimony of which is fitting of the Lord's recovery and fitting to the truth that we know. We have a tremendous truth. The blueprint that we have is just absolutely gorgeous and beautiful. But when we look at the building site, what we see is this ugly looking thing that does not match the drawing in those construction documents. You then have to conclude that something is wrong here. The contractor may not know how to read the drawings, how to coordinate the subs, or how to schedule. He may be terribly unorganized – he should have ordered materials nine months ago because that is the lead time, but he found out five months late and the whole project is stopped because the materials have not even been manufactured. Brothers, with this illustration I hope you will see that this is why, to date, we do not have many prevailing, strong, up-to-standard local churches. It is not just for the lack of heart or zeal. It is not even for the lack of knowledge of truth and life. It is the lack of some who have learned how to build.

In the book of Exodus, after Moses was given the pattern of the tabernacle on the mountain, he called for consecration. So many with a willing heart and a willing spirit brought all the riches they brought out of Egypt – gold, silver, thread, linen. All the people were giving to the point that Moses said to stop because they had enough. They now had the materials and Moses had the blueprint, but how was the tabernacle built? Enter these craftsmen, these workers. Some of their names were even named in the Bible – this person was good with woodwork, that person was good with metals, that one was good with fabric. Exodus says that these people had wisdom. They coordinated and they put the materials together according to the pattern and the tabernacle was built.

Brothers, today, we are missing such brothers. I am not saying we all can become the Apostle Paul or Witness Lee, but let us all learn. Let us not think that the local church would just pop up in this way: we

start a local church by going to the Holiday Inn and having the groundbreaking meeting, then the following week we start to meet in somebody's house and perform a few services, and we think we got the church, we got it down. Even elders and leading brothers may not know what they are doing. They may think that they will meet and fellowship about next week's Holy Word for Morning Revival, the schedule of the Thanksgiving conference, how to collect the offering of the saints, which bank to go to with the highest interest rate. Brothers, that is not it. I am not saying that these things have no place because these are practical, administrative matters. But if that is all you do and you think that is what a leading brother does, then you are just off, brothers. More than off. That is not the way to build up a church.

### **The Need to Be Trained on How to Build**

There is a lot of learning ahead of us. My hope is that, in these ten cities, you would all have a new beginning. I am not telling you to tear everything down, but from this point forward, let us humble ourselves, let us learn, let us look to the Lord to train us to be builders. We are co-workers together with God. That was the context of God's farm and God's building – there needs to be people. When you read the pastoral Epistle 1 Timothy, the whole book is on “...I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth” (3:15). Paul wrote that Epistle to basically instruct Timothy *how to* – the word is *how to*. If you say that you do not care for method or for ways, then you better take that verse out. Don't think that Paul did not have to tell Timothy what to do, that Timothy just needed to grow in life, to read the word. No, that book, 1 Timothy and the next book and the book after that – meaning 2 Timothy and Titus – are filled with instructions, practical instructions. Do this, don't do that. Be like this with the older widows. Be like this with older men. Be like this with young men, young sisters. To the rich, you do this. To the opposers, you do that. Then the qualification of elders and of deacons are in those books. Paul was a very practical apostle. He did not just write

Ephesians. He also wrote 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. In fact, he wrote those towards the end of his life. To have the vision and revelation of the church is necessary. That is the pattern. But how do we implement it? How do we execute it? How do we construct this church, God's house? This requires instructions and learning.

This is a huge subject. What I have been speaking to you are various aspects and parts of this construction project of the church in your locality. I hope that this is a good starting point. Next year, as the Lord leads, I would like to continue this training with all the saints because the building work is not in the hands of elders or some leaders or responsible brothers. No, it is eventually in the hands of every saint to do the work of the ministry, resulting in the building up of the Body of Christ. The operation of each one part and also through the joints of supply are how the Body builds itself up. But if the overseers or those who take the lead do not know what they are doing, it is the blind leading the blind and everybody ends up in the ditch. We have seen churches in the ditch and staying in the ditch for a long time. The whole thing is just wrong. There is a right way of doing things, brothers. If you do not find that way, you can be zealous, do a lot, even pray a lot, but it does not work. I pray for the Lord to have a new going on among us in the USA in this regard.

Last week, I talked about the organic structure of the local church. This was not from me. This was from Brother Nee and then from Brother Lee, and I applied their fellowship as much as I can. I am still learning. Eventually you begin to find the way to do this glorious work of building up the church. In the building of the temple, there are more details about the workers and how to build the columns, the pillars. These are all written in detail.

### **The Two Offices in the Local Church**

Today, I would like to generally talk about the different offices in the local church. In the local church there are only two offices: elders and deacons. There is not a third office that we can find in the New Testament church. I am not sure that we have received the proper

help and have the proper concept about these two offices. Hence there could be problems: an abuse of those offices or simply not matching up to the demands of these offices. These could cause a church life to be stuck.

The two offices are very practical and necessary in the building up of a local church. Of course, these are saints but there is a particular arrangement sovereignly ordained by God in these two offices for the building up the church and the maintenance of the church. I hesitate to use the word *governing* because that has political implications. Brother Lee was not happy with the word *management* because that has business implications. So, let us not use those words. Let us say *offices*. These two offices in certain parts of the New Testament are actually considered gifts. They are both gifts and offices.

The first one is the office of eldership. The second is the office of deaconship. There are many verses but no time to get into them. I think a number of you have been through the two years of the eldership training, so you should have a pretty good view of the office of the eldership. We do not have a book specifically on deaconship, but at least we have a couple of lessons that touch the matter. The qualification of elders and deacons are almost the same length in 1 Timothy 3, showing that deaconship is not a lesser office in terms of the qualification of the person. This is very important, and I will say more about that.

### **New Testament References on the Two Offices**

#### **In Acts 6**

It is interesting that when the Lord Jesus said, "I will build My church" there was no mention of elders and deacons. All that started with the apostles. The first church was in Jerusalem. Interestingly, I did not find the appointment of elders in Acts. Have you ever thought of that? Rather, I found the appointment of deacons. Of course, one reason is that the 12 apostles most likely functioned, at least in a transitional manner, as elders. But if you go to chapter six, you will find that there arose a need in the dispensing at the tables because new believers

were being added to the church in the thousands at once. The Lord had fed 5,000 men, not including women and children, on the mountain, putting them in groups and in companies. He had five loaves and two fish, and He gave the people the “miracle bread” to eat. Is it not interesting that the same thing happened with 5,000 being added in Jerusalem in one day? I have to believe that the Lord was anticipating that to happen and trained His disciples on how to systematically feed the people physical food. The “miracle bread” is not a problem. The Lord looked to the heavens, broke the bread and the fish, and they just miraculously multiplied. That was not the problem. The problem was how to get the food to the 5,000 people, not including women and children. So the Lord had a system, a way to feed His followers. The disciples surely got trained, so that when they were faced with this need in the church, they had a way. They selected seven men – “well-attested men... full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3) – to serve tables.

In the first church, although there is no mention of elders, you have to believe they were there and included the apostles. Were they others? I do not know. Then for sure, there were seven deacons appointed. And I have to believe that there were other helpers, otherwise how could 7 feed 5,000. Also, very interestingly, the first martyr in the church age was not an elder, but a deacon. He died after he gave one of those most exceptional, long messages in the book of Acts. I say all this to remove our concept of what a deacon is. We think a deacon is just one running around, fixing the meeting hall, selling books. No, we need some martyrs to serve. We need some Stephens to serve. We need some men that are full of the Spirit. We need some that are full of the word – Stephen was such, otherwise he could not have given that message. We need some gifts in this way.

### **In Romans 12**

Let us go on to the Epistles. First of all, you find this in the book of Romans chapter 12, which is the first chapter on the church life. Paul listed out the various gifts of grace that are given to different members in the Body. The first one is the gift of prophecy. The second

one, listen, is the gift of service. What is the gift of service? Let me read the footnote: it is “the service of the deacons and deaconesses in the local churches.” Here I want to bring in a point. There are no “elderesses,” but there are deaconesses. Why? Because the eldership represents God's government. It is God's deputized authority in a local church, so no woman can occupy that office, just men, just brothers. But when it comes to deacons, serving ones, or helpers, brothers are not enough, you need sisters. I will make a case with you in a little bit that sisters may be more important than brothers in this regard. Going back to the gifts in Romans 12, service is the second gift mentioned. This shows how important service, practical service is in a local church. Let us be faithful in that service. The list of gifts goes on to teaching, exhortation, giving, and then it gets to “he who leads, in diligence” (v. 8). *Leading* here is clearly referring to the leading brothers, the elders, who are taking the lead to administrate the church. It is very interesting, brothers. Service is put way up there, and elders or leading is put way down the list.

I want to follow Brother Lee to make the point here. We have to give up our concept of rank, of hierarchy, of who is on top of who, of employers and employees. Look here – services first, then later on administration. Brothers, let us be delivered from this concept of organized hierarchy that the elders are bosses. I have seen this in churches – elders are bosses, the employers, the authority; they rule the church, and everyone has to listen to them. Yes, they are in the lead. Yes, they have the Lord's authority. But I am seeing the concept that there is a pecking order, and they are on the top of the totem pole. Brothers, get rid of that. That is wrong. This thought that I am *numero uno* and everyone is under me is what gives rise to ambition. We may not say it. We may even be humble. But this thought is launched there. You then become ambitious to be an elder and even your wife is quite burdened that you will be an elder, so that they, as Brother Lee said, become the “First Lady.” Brothers, this is altogether something of the world, of religion, Christianity. Please get rid of this. This has really stumbled us and caused a problem in the church life. Brother Lee made a strong point: elders are not employers; deacons



are not employees. He said to please get rid of that. So, there are these two important practical gifts of service and leading among other gifts such teaching, exhortation, and showing mercy.

### **In 1 Corinthians 12**

Let us come to 1 Corinthians chapter 12, which is another chapter on gifts in the Body or even in the local church. Verse 28 says, “And God has placed some in the church” – this is both universal and local – “first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then works of power, then gifts of healing” – then Paul came to two things – “helps, administrations.” *Helps*, according to the footnote, refers to helpers, the services of the deacons and deaconesses. After *helps* you have *administrations*: administrators, those governing, referring to the eldership in the church. After helps are administrations. Is there not an order here? Paul would say different things at different times, but it is interesting that he put helps first, then the administrations. It was deaconship first, then eldership.

### **In Philippians 1**

Then we have this wonderful, very sweet verse that Brother Lee had pointed out to us: Philippians 1:1. Philippi was a church that Paul loved and appraised. There in chapter 1, verse 1, in the salutation, Paul said this, “Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and deacons.” Again, these two offices are placed together. Overseers are elders in the local church. *Elder* refers to the person and *overseer* to his function to oversee. The deacons are of course the serving ones. The word *deacon* actually means serving one. These are the serving ones in the local church under the direction of the overseers.

The point that Brother Lee made here is that Paul did not mention these two offices like this in any other Epistle. Brother Lee said that this shows that the church in Philippi is in good order, not in an organizational pyramid way, but in that there are these functioning offices in that church life in Philippi.

### **In 1 Timothy 3**

Lastly, I come to 1 Timothy chapter 3 on the church life. In chapters 1 and 2, Paul mentioned some principles. In chapter 3, right away, he talked about overseership and deaconship. He would spend 7 verses on the qualification of the elders, then the next 6 verses on the qualification of a deacon. Of course, if I want to be an elder, I would gravitate to the section on elders and pay attention to the elders' qualifications. Please take a look at the qualifications of the deacons in verses 8 to 13. You will find they are not that different from the qualifications of the elders. Read it again. In fact, there are verses that are not even in the qualifications of the elders, such as verse 9: "Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience." That is not a qualification listed under eldership, but it is under deaconship. How about that – holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. He also said in verse 13: "For those who have ministered well" – you know, served well – "obtain for themselves a good standing and much boldness in faith, which is in Christ Jesus." Read it again. These are the qualifications of each serving one.

Why am I talking about this? Because, to build up a local church, we need these two offices to be healthy and proper. In a local church, in a normal, proper situation, you do need elders who are also called overseers, who are also called leading ones. In Hebrews, also in 2 Thessalonians, the leading ones take the lead. You also need the office of deacons and deaconesses, who are called helps. They are the serving ones.

### **In Romans 16**

Let me make my case on how Paul regarded the deacons almost more than the elders. Let us go to Romans 16:1-2. Romans 16 is a chapter on greetings. Paul was greeting the church in Rome. With full intimacy he mentioned name after name after name. It is a wonderful chapter. By the way, Brother Lee's last message on earth, in February 1997, was based on this chapter. The first commendation, the first mentioning, by Paul of anyone that he wanted to greet was not even

a brother, but a sister who happened to be a deaconess in the church in a place called Cenchrea. I have no idea how big Cenchrea was. I just know that it was a town very close to Corinth in today's Greece. Paul greeted a lot of people. I did not count how many, but he greeted many people by name. Nonetheless, the first greeting was, "I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a deaconess of the church which is in Cenchrea, that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints and assist her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been the patroness of many, of myself as well." I love these two verses. This mention of Phoebe even came before the greeting to Aquila and Prisca, who were Paul's co-workers, a couple so dear to him.

Brother Lee has a booklet called *The Serving Sisters in the Church* based on this chapter. I love that booklet. Brothers, you are not sisters, but please go get it and read it. Brother Lee mentioned the females in this chapter, the first of whom was Phoebe, and he really spent time on Phoebe. Paul had the highest regard and esteem of this lady, of this woman. Phoebe was probably either newly migrated to Rome or visiting Rome for a period of time. Paul was making a commendation of her, introducing her to the saints in Rome, saying to them to receive her in a way worthy of the saints. That was a very honorable mention of this serving sister. He also said to help her in whatever she would need because she had been a patroness of many. Paul was telling the saints in Rome to be a patron to her, to take care of her, to minister to her needs, just as she had ministered to the needs of many in Cenchrea, including me, Paul the apostle.

Brother Lee wrote a footnote on the word *patroness*. It means protectress; a word of dignity, denoting one who helps, sustains, and supplies, it indicates the high esteem with which Phoebe was regarded because of her service in the church life in Cenchrea. It is a very short footnote, but very important. To me, this is a wonderful job description of a deacon and a deaconess. It is a very dignified term: someone who helps, someone who sustains, someone who supplies. I may be reading into this, but this covers all three parts of our

tripartite being. Helps. To our physical need, they serve food. Remember Steven and the other six of the seven? They served food. You may think it is lowly. We better have a change in concept – it is dignified to serve food.

The church in Irvine has a little name in that the church loves to eat. There was a number of years when, every Lord's Day, we had a love feast. We have a lot of saints in that church and every week, after the meeting, we had a love feast. We do not do this anymore. There would be these saints, brothers and sisters, old and young, who ran in and out of the kitchen preparing food, so that after the meeting the church could eat. To feed hundreds of people, you really need a lot of wisdom, otherwise, everyone is on everybody's toes. We also had a limited sized central courtyard. I would stand there in awe when I looked at these brothers and sisters. I would come early to the meeting and they were already working in the kitchen, under the direction of some brothers. Just watching them inspired me. The meeting supplied me from the word and from the Spirit. Watching them fed me and watered me. They were all helps.

Deacons and deaconesses help you in outward needs. There are a lot of women mentioned in the New Testament who made clothes. There was one who died and got resurrected – Dorcas. There was also that lady in Philippi who met the apostles by the river – Lydia. She was a seller of purple. And do you remember there was a group of sisters who followed the 13 – the Lord and the 12 – everywhere. Some of them were high society people, some of them were not, but they all followed. You may wonder where the Lord and the disciples ate. There was no McDonald's or fast food. There were some sisters ministering to their physical needs.

Our soul needs sustaining. Sustaining has to do with shepherding our soul. Supplying is supplying our spirit with the bountiful supply of the Spirit. Brothers, service is not just cleaning windows, it is actually ministering to people in all of their needs in all three parts. These ones may not be able to give a message or do works of power. They may not have the gift of healing. But they are just helpful. They minister

Christ to the saints in many ways: physically, psychologically, and spiritually. That is what Phoebe did. That is why Paul esteemed her so much. I have to believe that Phoebe opened her home to give hospitality, to take care of Paul and the saints, and the travelers and strangers.

### **An Atmosphere of Service**

Brothers, this service in the church that I'm emphasizing tonight is a huge matter. A good church, a strong church is a serving church. There may even be elders who are not the strongest, but the serving ones are prevailing. The service is prevailing. That church is a strong church. Who takes the lead to serve? This is not serving a meeting hall, but this is serving people. I have spoken about going back to a people-centered church life - serving people. Over the years in the church life, I have observed and witnessed brothers and sisters that are just like this. In the U.S. we never appointed deacons, not that I know of or remember. But that does not mean there are no deacons. We are very concerned about appointing elders, there's nothing wrong with that. Paul charged Titus to do that in every city. We haven't appointed deacons. But I would like to strengthen this point about the serving ones, those who serve in the church life. I want to elevate this. I would like to see that we build this up, not as a position, but surely as a gift, as a function.

When you have saints like this, serving ones like this, they will bring in an atmosphere in the church that is like this. You go to that church, and you will just feel that this church is full of serving. The service today covers many things. It could be collecting offerings, it could be ushering, it could be meeting hall maintenance, it could be book sales. I'm not saying those things are wrong. Absolutely not. I'm saying that in doing those things, the target or the purpose is to minister to people. Why do I clean the meeting hall? For the saints. Why do I arrange the chairs? For the saints. Why do I clean the bathroom? It is for the saints. Why do I play the piano? It is for the saints. Why do I make bread? It is for the saints. Why do I usher? It is for the saints, just serving others like the Lord Jesus, the Slave Savior. He said, "The

Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). That spirit of service will generate an atmosphere of service, and when that service is prevailing people are cared for.

### **Building Up A Spirit of Service**

These deacons or deaconesses are not just people tending to physical responsibilities. They are also ones serving the saints, serving the believers in the church, caring for them. I was once not well, and then the doorbell rang. When I opened the door there was a sister there with a bowl of soup. Chinese black chicken soup. The most nutritious soup - not white chicken, but black chicken. I was standing there for a moment. I didn't know what to do because this sister just did it. She just took care of me with a big pot of soup, with a crock of soup. That was not just soup. Brothers, that was not just a nutritious chicken. That was a ministry to my spirit, to my soul, and to my body. That's a deaconess.

In the old days in China, I came from Hong Kong, which is part of China, my grandmother was a deaconess. She was possibly appointed indirectly by Brother Witness Lee, who was there with Brother Nee in 1951, bringing in a great revival. Brother Lee was charged by Brother Nee to set up the church, to put the church in order. That meant appointing elders and deacons. My grandmother, who was a widow, was one of them. She and another sister would go out virtually every day to visit the saints. She was not working of course, as she was older. Sometimes she even visited me, her grandson. That is what teachers do. They go to visit the families, to see how the children are, how is this one, how is that one. They prayed with them, and then they would go to the next house. That was it. That revival in Hong Kong was brought in or certainly maintained for a number of years by this kind of service. Then in the meetings at the hall she and others would put on these gospel robes, which designated them as ushers. She would give you a hymnal. I was just a little boy. They did many other things. It was almost like an all-inclusive service.

Brothers, if in your local church, the saints would be imbued with such a serving spirit, your church is on the way. So how do you build up the church in this aspect? It is to build up the services of the church. This is not just specifying this service or that service, or saying this person is responsible, that person is responsible. I'm talking about building up a spirit of service, an atmosphere of service, a culture of service. And to do this, we need brothers *and* sisters who would take the lead just to serve with no thought of any kind of enumeration, any kind of gratitude, or any expectation of position. Nothing. They just serve the saints. Think about it, if you're a new one and you've come to a church like this like this – wouldn't you get caught? Wouldn't you love this kind of place? Wouldn't you leave a big tip when you have a waitress like that? This is a warm place, this a place that cares, this is a place that is walking the talk. In comparison, some churches are just cold. Nobody cares. You come and you go, nobody even shakes your hands. Someone is sick and dying at home, and there's no visitation. We don't even find out until after the fact. I'm exaggerating, I apologize. But I'm making a point. You ask what does this have to do with the gospel? What does this have to do with shepherding? Let me tell you – everything. The deacon's work, job is all-inclusive. They should be able to teach, admonish, and exhort. They need to know the Word, go read the qualifications again. They need to know how to have a proper life as a testimony so they won't bring reproach to the Lord's testimony. They cannot be greedy for base gain. A deacon has to be such a proper person to be such a helper. Needless to say, their heart has to be so big that they would inconvenience themselves for the benefit of others. We love the saints. Brothers, how sweet, how beautiful is this church. This church will grow. Now we do need elders, but I'm not here to talk about elders. That's not my main burden today.

### **A Revived Serving Church Life**

Brothers, let's talk about the ten churches. We're coming together to have the church life, some are migrating etc. Usually the first thing is, "Who are the leaders? Am I a leader? Why don't you invite me to the leadership?" Or some places start practicing a democracy like "every

man, one vote – all the brothers come and take the lead.” Well, this is against the Bible. But the thought is, “everyone is a leader, everyone is the same.” That's not the church, that's Laodicea. It's called people's opinion. That's what it is.

The appointment of elders and leading ones will happen, as necessary, at the right time and in the right situation. But what is really needed is not just that. What is really needed are just saints, brothers *and* sisters whose heart is just like Phoebe's. They just see a need and they go meet that need. In a sense, you may say they don't wait to be appointed or assigned. They are observant of the needs of the saints. They visit, they reach out in practical affairs, and they make themselves available. Brothers, in your church I hope there would be a group of brothers and may I say, a group of sisters like this. They just serve.

In every church, even if there's no officially appointed elders, there needs to be a core group of brothers. Don't ask me how many or how big. It's organic. It depends on the fellowship with the coworkers. There should be a core group of brothers to provide so-called leadership to bear the administrative responsibilities of the church. In time, according to the manifestation of the gift, the function, and the fellowship, there may be a kind of appointment. But even so, there still needs to be a core group of brothers. Because sometimes even elders cannot cover all the bases. You need more hands, more brothers to bear responsibility. You need that core. In fellowship regarding these ten churches, we're slowly considering this matter. But I am saying that beyond the so-called core, including the core, we need brothers and sisters who would be engaged in all manners of services.

Brothers, to build up a church we better take care of the sisters. Brother Lee said two thirds, 66% or 67% of the building up of the local church depends on sisters. How much do we pay attention to the sisters? Brothers, we need the sisters just like we need the brothers to serve in this kind of way. This service covers everything. This service covers the gospel. This service covers the shepherding. This service



covers young people. This service covers children. This service covers various Levitical needs in the church: book sales, book room, service office, business office, and many other practical things. The more saints that can engage in this, the better. In the end, all saints should be serving. This is the New Testament view. A priesthood is comprised of everyone serving as a priest in the gospel, serving to shepherd people, and serving in all these many areas. A priesthood is to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God.

At the right time next year, I would like to talk to the saints about the great revival in Chefoo, from 1942 to 1943, under Brother Lee's leadership. It was not just gospel-centered, it was a revival based on the built-up service of the whole church there. This is our history. When everyone functions, revival is there, rather than just a few doing all the things which is the clergy laity system. Brothers, we need to not only reject that in principle, but we need to practice and help the saints and take the lead and be examples to serve. The group of brothers here today are not all elders. Not all of us will be elders. Don't pine for that. If you are, you are. If you're not, you're not. That's not that important. The important thing is what the Lord has given to you, and that according to the portion of grace and faith, you serve faithfully. We serve in fellowship, not in an independent way, but surely in a coordinated way. Eventually all the saints will serve under the overseership of the elders. I pray for a revival of a serving spirit in all the local churches. A serving spirit will be a revival in itself, a factor for sure, a factor of revival.

### **All Saints Learning to Serve**

I see a few young faces here, though I don't know how old you are. Very good. For example, even if you are a teenager, you grow up in a church, in a family where everyone works. The dad washes the dishes. The first son takes out the trash. The second one feeds the dog. That is a wonderful family. Everyone is chipping in, everyone is helping. That is a wonderful family. There's a place for young ones to serve. I would like to see even those in junior high serving. I'm not joking, brothers. It is good for the younger ones to contribute to their family,

to share in the responsibilities. This is the way to grow up. This is the way for them to be established as young saints. It is the same for the sisters. Those in junior high can help in the children's meeting. At a very young age they can learn to serve other people, rather than being selfish. The college-age can do this for sure. Oh brothers, I think you can tell where my heart is. Brothers, I would exhort you to build this up. The gospel is a service. Shepherding is also part of this service. So many would be cared for.

The way to gain a new one or to recover a dormant saint is not just to bring them to a meeting. It's to bring them into service. Trust me, when a person is serving, they finally belong, they're part of it. When they are contributing, bearing responsibility, they are part of the family. So we should help new ones to serve. They may not know all the truth about the local ground but help them to serve. In the services is where we can minister to one another. By serving together you can shepherd a young one. You can help them to know the truth and to know life. The service is a place where we can learn to coordinate and not to be independent. The service is the place where we are built up and blended. All these services are how a local church is built up practically. I know we also have to build up the meetings, we will talk about that another time. My emphasis today is on this line.

In the Old Testament, the picture is the priests and the Levites, both are from the tribe of Levi. I would say today in the New Testament, in a sense, the elders are the priests, and the deacons are the Levites. Today, we should be a Levite elder, a Levite priest, or priestly Levite. Elders should not be sitting like a Commander-in-chief giving orders, writing checks, making announcements. That doesn't make you an elder. Actually, you better leave that kind of work to a deacon. Some brothers just want to have the last word. The elders may have to sit in the front row, not because that is their throne. It is so that they can coordinate to cover the meeting. We may think position or hierarchy, but that is wrong. There is order, there is authority, but not in that kind of a way. Oh, the serving spirit, the serving life, the serving heart is what we need. Brothers – build up the church in that way.

There is something we received when we were regenerated, when we received the life of God. The life we received wants to serve because that life is a serving life. We received a serving life, the life of Christ, the Servant of God. Only when you exercise that life will you feel fulfilled as a Christian believer and as a member in the church. You won't be fulfilled, if you're not serving. There is something within us that only would be happy and fulfilled when we serve in some manner. Even children can serve. How about that? You may say they are not even saved yet. Oh, there is too much on this matter of service in the New Testament.

### **Questions and Responses**

*As I noted in my email, I have been fellowshipping a lot about many of the saints who are considering migrating to our locality. Most of the saints look like they are all in their 50s or 60s or older. We talked a little bit about the need for younger couples. We have been praying much about this and having much fellowship. Not that we would have further fellowship with anybody in particular, but could there be more fellowship with all the ones that are considering migrating, regarding the basic needs of some of the churches? Maybe in one locality there is a need for some older couples. It seems there is a need for more of a balance.*

Well, this kind of unevenness of distribution of age groups we don't control. Hopefully, we trust over time things will even out. If your church just has older saints, of course, that's not the best situation. But neither should a church have no older people and just young people; neither is that normal. We need all ages. I was thinking I need to have one time in these meetings to talk about all ages for the church life. But the point is in terms of migration, I think that you need to fellowship with the coworkers and other churches, to see if some of these migrants of a certain age group would be free, available, or flexible to migrate to other cities where their age group is more needed. We are not here playing chess and arranging everyone's life, but through fellowship and with a view to the need of a local church we can see if we can work out some of these things.

In some of the fellowship with the different ten churches, we get into these things. We absolutely should have this kind of fellowship. We thank the Lord for all the saints in the different ages. Let us consider the older saints a blessing and not an inconvenience. It is a blessing to have older brothers and sisters. Really, it's a blessing. However, the fact of the matter is, as we go on, the main burden should be borne by the younger generation. They should be the backbone, the waist or strength of the church. This is normal, this is right. They have more energy since they are at the prime of their life and can do more. This is like the age group of 30 to 50 in the book of Numbers. Actually, at 25 years of age the priest started to be an apprentice, and at age 50 is when they complete their official service. After that, the Word says they retired, except that retirement is not what we think of as retirement. Rather they move on to do something else, that is, to shepherd and mentor the younger ones. We do need to raise up more younger brothers, this is right. But this is not to say that the older ones are useless, or we put them out to the pasture. No, not at all. Their function, because of their maturity in life and experience in human life, human affairs, is very needed.

We need the oldest saints mainly to do two things. Number one, to enter into the ministry of prayer. Number two, to do the work of shepherding, which includes the work of perfecting the younger ones. This includes teaching the younger ones how to be. It says old women in Titus should train the younger women how to love their husbands, how to care for their children. There is a mentoring needed in the church by those who are more experienced. We need all ages. But if there's an uneven distribution, all I can say is to fellowship and see if in the migration scenario some could be encouraged to consider this city rather than that city.

*How do you shepherd the sisters? In particular, the newly married sisters and the single sisters?*

The best thing is for sisters to shepherd sisters. Of course, that's the most natural thing. However, not all the sisters can shepherd others, some themselves have not learned that much. They're not that

experienced. But it's a great blessing to have older sisters in a church. Just to know how to help, train up the younger sisters how to be proper sisters. I have *48 Lessons on Sisters*. Those are wonderful lessons for all the sisters. These can be used to help the sisters and to fellowship with them. The brothers, obviously, cannot do any one-on-one shepherding with a single sister or with a married sister. I would suggest from time to time you would use these materials. They have proven to be helpful. They include outlines, lessons, recordings, and so on. But in terms of case-by-case shepherding, you do need some older sisters. I don't mean you have to be of a certain age; I'm saying with a level of maturity and experience. For example, there are sisters who themselves have not been dealt with or have not learned certain lessons, yet they go around matchmaking. Well, I won't question that burden to help a sister get married. But that doesn't mean this sister is the right person to do it. I say this because I've seen marriages that didn't work out because of this. It's because there has not been the proper kind of learning to minister to the younger saints in this matter, which is a very important matter.