

A New Church Life

Fellowship from Minoru Chen on May 16, 2021

Prayer

Lord, thank You for this time again. How precious are these moments You have afforded us. Lord, we're all subject to You as the unique trainer and perfecter. Train us and perfect us to be truly useful vessels in Your hand. Lord, as you told Caleb of old when the Israelites were about to enter into the good land, that whatever their feet would tread upon, that land they would possess. The same principle is still here. Week after week, and in all these cities, we are treading, walking about claiming, but we are treading. We'd like to first possess You, and then possess the city where You have placed us. Be strong and be very courageous for Jehovah is with you. Lord, as we are going forward, we claim your presence as Emmanuel, God who is with us. Your promise to Moses is that "I will go with you." Lord, we need your presence as we are here in all our cities going forward and advancing. Lord, take us into a new land, a new place, even give us a fresh new experience in our Christian life. Lord, above all bring us into a new church life according to your heart's desire, a church life that will meet the need of this age. Lord, answer the prayers of all the saints. Thank you. Amen Lord.

Introduction

It is good to see you saints. The first thing I want to say is that if you have not done so, you really should subscribe to the beseeching.org website. There's no reason why you shouldn't sign up on that website. We started that website at the beginning of the pandemic to help the saints pray daily. As of today, we are on the 329th day. In another 30 to 40 days, we will have been praying, following beseeching.org, for

one year. I say this particularly because of the subject matter over the past two weeks, which is extremely necessary, and very much following the line of our burden in these meetings and GTCA. Today, day 329, is on prayer for the saints to pick up the Lord's burden to care for people. I would like to assure you brothers and sisters, that this is our need today. We can talk about fruitbearing, shepherding, or all kinds of things that are important, but in the end, it boils down to whether we have an interest in man, whether we have a heart for people or not.

A Ministering Life

I previously recommended the book called *The Normal Way of Fruit-bearing and Shepherding for the Building Up of the Church*, which I trust some of you are getting into. The book is composed of training messages given in 1975, which were life changing for me. I do not say that lightly. These messages changed my life in terms of my service to the Lord. If there was one word that I would use to summarize what changed my life it would be the word "people." Brothers and sisters, we need to live a ministering life, a life that ministers. The word minister really means to serve. Interestingly, the word minister in noun form, referring to the person, is the same word in the New Testament as the word *deacon*; which simply means a serving one, one who serves, an attendant, a caregiver, one who takes care or tends to another. To say that we need to have a living, ministering life means just that, a life that is given to the service of others. Of course, we're not just talking about this in a kind of worldly humanitarian sense, although it is something very noble for a human being to sacrifice for another human being. That is always something very moving and very touching because there's something built into the human being, according to God, that loves and cares for the wellbeing of his fellow man. We are created men in God's image, designed and built with the attributes of compassion, love, and simply sacrificing and giving oneself for another's benefit.

Today we have this very God in Christ, as the Spirit living in us. The

Lord Jesus as the unique ministering One is actually living in us. He wants to live in us again, live not only in us, but through us again. As He ministered in His earthly ministry, He is still ministering after His resurrection and ascension in these 2000 years. Isn't He the heavenly Minister, minister of the heavenly tabernacle? Isn't He still the Shepherd of our souls? Isn't He our Chief Shepherd? Isn't He the One who is saving us moment by moment, and dispensing grace, which is He Himself, as life and life supply to meet all of our needs day by day? Isn't He still doing that? Well, this One is also in us. If we say we're here to live Christ, or that we want to live Christ, well, the goal is not merely living a righteous life, having a holy living, or an overcoming existence, which are all true. But there's a greater aspect of the Lord's life that we should be living. This is the ministering aspect, the caring for people aspect.

Channels of Blessing

My brothers and sisters, I'd like to say that as much as the Lord has blessed His recovery, by next year it will be 100 years since 1922, when brother Watchman Nee started the meeting of the Lord's recovery in China. In these 100 years, much truth and many riches in God's Word have been opened to us, freely given to us. We are heirs of all these riches, and we are living in Joseph's storehouse figuratively speaking. There is not another Christian group who is so blessed like you and me. Just look at your library; I'm looking at one of the brother's screen and look at what's behind his head. Unbelievable riches have been given to us. Brothers and sisters, have we ever applied that word "to whom much is given, much is also required?" Because we have been blessed with so much, the obligation and the responsibility that come with that blessing are also phenomenal. Not only are we to be enjoyers of these blessings, but we should also be channels of blessing, dispensers, ministers of this blessing to our fellow human beings, to sinners and unsaved, to our friends, relatives, and acquaintances that the Lord has put around us. These are the people in this country that we belong to, our city, our state, our schools, and our communities. We should have a great sense of obligation. In

Romans 1 Paul says he's a debtor to those in Rome as far as the gospel of God is concerned. The Lord as life now fills that sense of debt and obligation with compassion and love for humankind. Shouldn't we be living this Christ out? Shouldn't we be a reproduction of this Christ today?

A New Church Life

A big problem in our church life, and by problem I don't mean that our church life is bad, but I do mean that our church life does not seem to be satisfying or meeting the Lord's want and need in a particular aspect. That need is the gaining of souls, the saving of men, the begetting of spiritual children, the bearing of remaining fruit for the Lord's joy, happiness, multiplication, and glory. I feel that this particular aspect of our church life, brothers and sisters, has been found wanting for many years. My burden for GTCA is not just that some of us would migrate and we would form some new campus teams, do this or that, or spread a little bit. Of course, those are wonderful things, and the Lord has blessed that in this round of GTCA. But my burden, brothers and sisters, is more than that; it's that these ten cities will take the lead to enter into a new church life. I'm not talking about giving up our truth, getting into some strange things, or starting a movement, but I am talking about a church life that is significantly different than the one we are used to.

People Focused

In every city we need to pioneer and build up a church life that is not self-focused, but rather people focused. With this word self, I don't mean only me, but I'm really talking about the corporate self. There is something called the corporate self, which is just as unsavory as the singular self. A self-focused church life is only focused on ourselves. "I want to be more spiritual; I want to be more overcoming; I want to be more holy; I want to be more victorious." Is there anything wrong with that? No, we all need to grow in life, gain more Christ, experience God's salvation more. That is all true. We need that. However, over time you can become so focused on how you are doing, what

condition you're in, that you lose sight of other persons. There are a few hundred of us here, but there are millions around us. What about them? What about their life, their need, their growth, their overcoming, their holiness? It's not just about you, or me. It's about them. Instead of being self-focused, we should be people focused. Instead of having an inward facing church life, just me, you, and I for decades, we should have an outward facing church life. What about those who are not in the church? What about those who don't have the Lord as their Savior and life? Do we think about them? Or do we just take care of our church? Which is wonderful. Do we spend a few minutes to turn our face outward? The Lord told the disciples in John 4 to lift up your eyes, behold, the harvest is white and ready for harvest. Brothers, shall we not take a few moments to lift our eyes? Rather than doing what I call navel gazing, "how am I doing today? Am I overcoming? Am I better?" How about taking your eyes off yourself and putting your eyes on someone that probably has a much greater need than you? That person is probably going to hell. How about that? Brothers and sisters I hope you're taking my word in the correct way.

Visiting People

We need to make a change in our church life from being meeting-centered to being visiting-centered. We have so many meetings; we should try not meeting. I am not saying that I am against meetings. I can have a burden for our meetings and also be burdened for us to change from being meeting-centered to being visiting-centered. These burdens are not mutually exclusive. Instead of just coming together to meet, we should spend more time going out, visiting people, giving them a call, and reaching out. Otherwise, our church life over time will become an ingrown church life. Consider your toenails, when they become ingrown, they are growing in the wrong direction. We do not want our church life to just be self-focused and grow in the wrong direction.

Compassionate toward People

When the Lord was on the earth and carrying out His earthly ministry,

wherever He went, He was extremely aware of the people in the villages, the towns, and the surrounding areas. For example, He saw that funeral procession, or that sick person, those blind people, and the lame man. He saw them and he was filled with compassion. Last week, I talked about compassion. In His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus was filled with compassion. He went to speak to these people, to touch them, and to heal them. That was the way our Lord Jesus Christ lived. He was on the earth, not living for Himself, but for people, for men. He had no time for Himself. He laid down His soul life for His sheep, the sheep of the house of Israel. He came just to lay down His life and to serve. The Son of Man did not come to be served, the Son of Man came to serve. And Jesus said, "If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there also My servant will be." (John 12:26a). If we follow the Lord and He's serving, then we should be serving also.

Contrary to the Lord's life and the Lord's heart, we have the millennial generation which is known for being an entitled generation. They think everything is theirs. That society, the world, and other people owe them something. They feel like they are entitled to this and that for whatever reason. Then today's generation, even younger than the millennials, all have the mindset of being victims, that they got the bad end of the deal, they are mistreated. They ask, "when are you going to take care of me? They complain that nobody takes care of them. Brothers and sisters, this is a mindset that is inherently very wrong.

But these are really intrinsic things that we need to deal with before the Lord. The matters of confession, consecration, resolution, and then petition, I have not forgotten. I am not just spouting some words here. On the matter of confession, we need to have more time with the Lord. I hope that the book that you are reading, *The Normal Way of Fruit-bearing and Shepherding for the Building Up of the Church*, is helping you to do that. Even in today's *Beseeking* fellowship, he said, we need to go to the Lord, again and again, to be checked by the Lord

and to be exposed by the Lord. Through our contact with the Lord, He will reveal what is wrong and improper with us.

A Corporate Inward Transformation

In my experience, the Lord's finger was on one thing with me. This was the change of names related to Abram and Sarai. Abram's name meant the exalted father and Sarai meant my princess. But there was a name change and that meant there was a change in the person, a transformation. It was after that change, that Abraham and Sarah begat a child, Isaac, according to God's way. The change of Abram's name to Abraham, meant a change from being an exalted father, a beautiful, wonderful, exalted father to a father of multitudes. The name Abraham means a father of multitudes. That touched me and I wept before the Lord. I prayed desperately for the Lord to change my name. I was a good brother, a nice brother, even a well-liked brother, but I had no children, no descendants, no multiplication, no fruit. I knew that the Lord was touching and exposing me. I felt He said to me, that if you're like this, forget about it. You're a good brother, you're a wonderful brother, you can speak, and you can do this or that, but you cannot bear fruit. The Lord exposed me and asked, where are your children, your descendants, your fruit, your sheep?

The name Sarai means *my* princess whereas Sarah means just princess. In changing from Sarai to Sarah, the Lord got rid of the selfish aspect. Dear brothers and sisters, we're not here for our spirituality or for our spiritual beauty. We're not here for us to be exalted. We're not here to be appreciated. We're here to give, to minister, and to lay down our lives and sacrifice in order that men, the saints, and the sinners would receive the Lord. We are here that they would receive grace and be saved, and even grow. Until we have such a collective and corporate inward transformation, our church life will still be one that is self-centered and inward-oriented rather than people-focused and outward-facing. This is the need.

I want to give you four sets of verses out of the book we are reading.

These sets of verses have stuck with me; Proverbs 11:25-26, Isaiah 50:4-5, 2 Corinthians 12:14-15, and 1 Thessalonians 2:7-11. These four sets of verses changed my life. Let me read them to you.

Watering Others

Proverbs 11:25, “The blessing soul will prosper, / And he who waters will also be watered himself.” I was convicted by this verse, that I am here on the earth just to bless and to water others. The Lord Jesus said, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.” (John 7:37b-38). Yes, I drink the living water. But that water is not just for me, that water is for those around me. That water does not just water me, it waters those around me. I found the promise in Proverbs 11:25 to be faithful. The more I water others, the more I am watered. Brothers, there is no need to worry about whether you are watered or not. Go and water someone, go and pick up someone, go and embrace someone and start watering them with Christ, with love, and you will be watered. This kind of watering is a special kind of watering that is different from you just drinking the Lord and not watering others. It's a different kind of experience.

First Instructed, Then Ministering

The next verse is Isaiah 50:4-5, “The Lord Jehovah has given me / The tongue of the instructed, / That I should know how to sustain the weary with a word. / He awakens me morning by morning; / He awakens my ear / To hear as an instructed one. / The Lord Jehovah has opened my ear; / And I was not rebellious, / Nor did I turn back.” Here, these verses are talking about the Lord Jesus. This is a picture of the type of Christ as the Servant of God, but it applies to us as well. I prayed this verse as a prayer to God because the way we often serve people is by our speaking to them. We dispense to people with our words. So I prayed, “Lord, give me such a tongue of the instructed, that I should know how to sustain the weary one with a word.” This is similar to the speaking in Matthew 24 regarding the good and faithful slave, who dispensed food at the appointed time. We can pray for the

Lord to make us ones who know how to give a timely word for that particular season. We can pray for a word with discernment and wisdom, a word that meets the particular need in a particular person in a particular condition, a word that sustains them. I have much experience of that, both on the receiving end and also on the giving end. Today, if you took this experience away from me, if you do not allow me to give such a word to a weary one, you would kill me. I would find no meaning to live. Even in a glorious church life, I am looking for someone that I can sustain with a word from the Lord. I am looking for a weary and needy one. For this, I need to have a tongue of the instructed. My tongue needs to be touched. My speech needs to be transformed. If I am going around gossiping, then I won't have that tongue. I need to preserve my tongue and sanctify my mouth in order to sustain the weary brother or sister or sinner.

“He awakens me morning by morning; / He awakens my ear / To hear as an instructed one” (Isaiah 50:4b). If you want to take care of people, the first thing you have to take care of is your ear. You need to hear, first from the Lord, from the Spirit, a word so that you can be instructed in what to give to another. I'm not here boasting, brothers and sisters, this is the thing that I've been trying to learn all these decades. When I hear of a saint having a need, the first thing I do is not to go and speak to them. No, the first thing is to wake up in the morning and go to the Lord and say, “Lord, instruct me, speak to me, awaken my ear. And by listening to You, Lord, I would then have a tongue of the instructed to say something for You, on Your behalf, to this child of Yours, to this cold one, but this chosen one of Yours.”

The next verse says, “The Lord Jehovah has opened my ear; / And I was not rebellious, / Nor did I turn back.” This means the Lord would be faithful, to instruct us or open our ear to give us certain instructions. We need to learn to not rebel against that, we need to learn to submit to that, and to learn how to present such a word to a needy one.

Spending and Being Utterly Spent

Next, we have 2 Corinthians 12:14-15, this is just a representative passage of Second Corinthians. The entire book of Second Corinthians is on the ministering life of the Apostle Paul, where he just basically spilled his guts and opened himself up from the inside to these suspecting and suspicious Corinthians. The Corinthians thought Paul was stealing money from them, that Paul was bad, and so he used chapter after chapter, verse after verse to vindicate himself. This is one of the signs of Paul's apostleship. Paul said, "Behold, this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden; for I do not seek what is yours but you." (2 Corinthians 12:14a)

In 1975, that word smote me to pieces. Paul is saying that he didn't want their money, or what you can give to him. He didn't want to burden them. He said what he was seeking was them. He was after them. He was burdened for them, not for their possessions. "For the children ought not to store up for the parents, but the parents for the children." (2 Corinthians 12:14b)

Paul considered himself the father and the Corinthians as his children. You see Paul, had this parental spirit, this fatherly spirit. He was just there to give and to take care of his children, not the other way around. Even though they misjudged him and accused him of wrongdoing. He told them, "But I, I will most gladly spend and be utterly spent on behalf of your souls. If I love you more abundantly, am I loved less?" (2 Corinthians 12:15) This is one of the most touching verses. I just wept when I read this verse. To learn that there could be a person that walked the earth like this, other than the Lord Jesus. There was a man, Paul, who opened his heart and was ready to spend what he had and be utterly spent. Brothers, could we be like Paul? Are we willing to spend our person and energy on behalf others' souls, to care for the souls of others, even if they love us less, that doesn't change us. In fact, we need to love them even more so.

Having the Heart of a Parent

The last passage is in First Thessalonians and is similar to Paul's word in Second Corinthians. Paul said, "But we were gentle in your midst, as a nursing mother would cherish her own children. Yearning in this way over you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own souls, because you became beloved to us." (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8)

Paul was yearning in this way. He imparted the gospel of God and gave his souls for their souls, for no other reason than because they became beloved, because they found their way into his heart. He tells them, you are just beloved, that is the only thing, and we just love you. Paul continues "For you remember, brothers, our labor and travail: While working night and day so as not to be burdensome to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, as well as God, how in a holy and righteous and blameless manner we conducted ourselves toward you who believe, Just as you know how we were to each one of you, as a father to his own children, exhorting you and consoling you and testifying," (1 Thessalonians 2:9-11).

Paul expected nothing in return. He just knew how to give and give and give. Paul was absolutely with a parent's heart. This is the heart, brothers and sisters, that we all need to have, whether for the unsaved, the dear believers in the Lord, or the saints in the church life. We need to be such cherishing and nursing mothers and such consoling, testifying, and exhorting fathers.

Fruitbearing, Shepherding, and Perfecting

As we talk about fruit bearing, we will be coming into the matter of shepherding. There are three main things that I hope all the churches will be strong in and will be the feature of every local church. First is a fruit bearing church, bearing new fruit from the unsaved and seeking ones. We hope every branch will bear remaining fruit. Second, we hope every church will be a shepherding church. Every church should be filled with shepherds. Everyone can shepherd, even a high schooler

among us can shepherd a junior higher. You may say, "Really?" Yes, really. It's a culture where the whole church community just shepherds people. To shepherd simply means we tend to people, we apply ourselves to the care of others. The proper way is not to just tend to yourself; you must tend to others like a nurse or doctor tends to a patient, a sick person. A shepherd is just someone who tends to or take care of another one. This is to be a caretaker, to be an overseer like in the case of a flock of sheep. Third, every local church should be a perfecting church. The church should be constantly cultivating, fostering, equipping, furnishing, and educating the young among us, the new believers, young people, the next generation. We perfect all these groups so that they can grow in life, know the truth of God, and then they can also serve the Lord in the church to build up the Lord's Body.

I hope that if I come to visit you in every one of these ten churches, I will touch that fruit bearing life, that shepherding culture, and that perfecting atmosphere. If a church is like this, then this church will surely grow, will surely be so living and so normal, and this church will expand and multiply.

Time to Advance

Now, I want to use about ten minutes or so to say something more about this new church life that I would like to see, which is what our Brother Lee shared with us. It's all in the pages of the books of the ministry. It is now time, brothers and sisters. We are in a new decade. The recovery in the USA is at another pivotal moment to advance, to go further, and to really practice what we call the God-ordained way, but not just in some old way that we have become accustomed to. We meet, we love the Lord, we read the Word, and we follow the ministry. These are good points. We prophesy and we walk according to the truth. These are the strong points of the recovery. But some of these things we are weak in and we are short in, resulting in the lack of increase and growth.

To Relationships

We need to build up the church that is not congregational (just to congregate) but is relational. You may have a lot of people congregating but have no relationships between these people. It's just a cold coming together of people in some place.

To Homes

We also need a church that is not hall-based. I'm not against meeting halls; I'm for meeting halls. But our church life cannot be hall-based. How many hours do you spend in the meeting hall? A few hours at best. I don't care how beautiful the meeting hall is; we are only there a few hours per week. Where do we spend most of our time? In our homes. So the church life among us should not be hall-based but home-based.

From Big to Small

For this reason, we would like to adjust our aim of the church life from being big. Our brother said a certain bigness of a large congregation could be just a façade. Rather than big, we're looking for small. What do you mean by small? You can have a church with 100 people, but the concept is big. You can have a church with 1,000 people, but the concept is small. It's not the total membership; it's the relationships. The small group of one on one and two or three is where the building takes place. That's where relationships are established. That's where the members of the church can function. Basically, we don't want a "big" church life, which is what I mean by congregational. We want a "small" church life, which is why I use the word relational. Starting next week, if the Lord would lead us, I want to begin to talk to you about "two or three" in the Bible. The two or three is the smallest community of Christians because the Lord said in Matthew 18, "For where there are two or three gathered into My name, there am I in their midst." There's no "midst" in one person; it takes at least two to have a midst for the Lord to be in. Having two or three is a great thing that we need to recover in the church life. Later I will talk about what is known today as "small group," which is different from "two or

three.” Then beyond that I will talk to you about districts. The point of all of this is not to have some pretty structure or hierarchical structure. Forget about that.

We need to do all this in an organic way. But there's a reason for going from large to small, and the principles are to facilitate these few things which are all important for the building up of the believers, of the function of the believers, and of the operations of the members to build up the Body of Christ because we know the Body is not built up by a few big gifts. It's ultimately built up directly by all of us, the perfected saints.

To Facilitate Intimacy

The point of the new kind of small church life is to facilitate intimacy. The proximity and the small size would facilitate the intimate concern and care for one another. When you go into a hall with a couple of hundred people, it's not intimate. You and I know that. It may be large and exciting or impressive, but the intimate care and concern found when we know each other and know each other's need cannot happen with a big meeting. It really happens in a smaller situation where there are two or three, a small group, or even in a district situation.

To Facilitate Mutuality

To have mutuality implies an “each other” relationship. Again, if you have a big number of people, it's hard to be mutual. But when you have two or three it is very mutual. I can listen to you and you listen to me. I say something and you reciprocate. We all know this even in our human experience. Mutuality is with one another.

To Facilitate Function

In the new church life, we would like to facilitate the universality of function. We all know that the Lord is not after just some priests like in the Old Testament. There they had just one tribe, the tribe of Levi and the house of Aaron. What the Lord wants to gain in the New

Testament age is to have every saint functioning as a priest in this holy and royal priesthood that Peter the apostle spoke of in 1 Peter. If you have a hundred people, then only a very few will speak or function. That's just the nature of things. But for all the saints to be able to function, then the smaller the number, the less spectators there will be and the more participants there would be. That's the beauty of being small; universality in function.

To Facilitate Activity

I would say one more thing. When we have this kind of a church life, there will be more activity. By that I don't mean just doing some activities, but I mean, the activeness of the saints will be heightened. When you are in a big congregation, everyone will get passive. You just sit there and watch the show. You're on the benches and watching the game. But when you are just two or three, you're in the game. You're a player and not a watcher or a spectator. So, the saints would be automatically more active.

Conclusion

Dear ones, today I'm just setting up a nail here a little bit so that we can talk about these things in the coming weeks. I'm very burdened about this new church life, and I hope that you will all be as well. Please pray for this. For all the things we talked about up to this point, I would say you don't need to wait. You can just begin to practice these things. It will take some time for us to build up this new culture, new atmosphere, and new spirit in our church life, but let us do it. I look to the Lord to have some breakthroughs among us in these days and in these years. It's about time. This country is ready, people are ready, and I think we are ready for a new start.

To conclude, let me just read the last paragraph of today's Beseeking.org. This is from the book, *The Normal Way of Fruit-bearing and Shepherding for the Building Up of the Church* (CWWL, 1973-1974, vol 2, ch. 1, pp. 527-529,531): "We can pick up the burden for some specific persons. We should make a list of their names,

always keep it in front of us, and pray for them one by one...We need to be interested in people and involved with people. Then we can pick up a burden. Many in the church need our shoulders to bear them and our breast to embrace them (Exo. 28-9-12, 15-21, 29). We must love them. When they fall, we should weep, and when they rise up, we should be joyful. We must bear them as our burden.” This is a good way to conclude the fellowship today. Amen.