

Called Out To Assemble

Fellowship from Minoru Chen on August 15, 2021

Prayer

Thank You for assembling us again in Your name. You have gathered us together. Gather us together into the Spirit. We're here expecting Your dear presence, Your refreshing presence as the ointment and as the dew. Lord, we pray for nothing else but for You to be with us and to speak to us. Strengthen the local churches in Your recovery. Bless these GTCA cities where we are. Strengthen them by Your Spirit. Strengthen them according to the richness of Your glory and strengthen them for the sake of Your name and Your expression. We trust in You, Lord. Cover us all again in Your precious and prevailing blood.

Introduction

Thank the Lord for the continuation of these meetings on the Lord's day. We have been taking a break because of the summer with the training and many activities, but we still felt led by Him to have these meetings to help us all and to perfect us all more.

In the very early days (I think most of you were not there) of the recovery in the U.S., back in the '60s and '70s, our dear brother Lee typically spent two-thirds of his time in Los Angeles, with the church there. The other times, he would travel across this country, whether to meet with free groups of seeking believers, or later on to visit various local churches. When he was in town he would conduct the summer training. In those days, the trainings were back to back with some conferences. It was not unusual that a training would go on for a thirty-day period. Unlike today, in which the training is just one

week, it would be four weeks. I recall saints from Texas and other places would come. Some of them would quit their jobs to come to L.A. and spend their summer to blend together with other saints in the recovery and to attend Brother Lee's conferences and trainings. Of course, the recovery at that time was significantly smaller than today.

But besides these bigger events, typically, our brother would conduct trainings during the year, especially in the springtime. He would call these informal trainings, or spring informal trainings, and the church would, depending on the year, even cancel some of the standard meetings during the week to allow our brother to conduct these trainings. There were a couple of months in which we actually suspended the prayer meetings of the church so there would be another time for Brother Lee to speak to the church. And today, many of these trainings are in book form or published in the collected works. I mention this because I have very strong memories, precious memories, of those informal trainings. I myself moved from the state of Oregon. I was an undergraduate student from Hong Kong, and I went to school in Oregon at first. Then, before two years of school were over, because I touched the Lord's recovery through the church life in Los Angeles, I was very drawn. Through fellowship, I decided to just leave Oregon and migrate to L.A. In February of 1969, I settled in Los Angeles and began my church life in L.A. From then until now, I've been in Southern California. Besides the summer trainings, and, of course, the various regular church meetings, I would say these spring informal trainings were my highlight. That's where I got the most perfecting and training from the ministry.

In 1969 and in 1970, besides other lines of fellowship, there was a training that Brother Lee conducted on life, service, and so on. However, in '69 and '70, he had a particular line on the meetings of the church. Today, you can get the book called *How to Meet*. I would recommend it to you. It's a book with many chapters; Brother Lee actually spent two springs to release all the messages there.

Our Commission - To Spread the High Gospel

In recent months, as I was looking to the Lord concerning the GTCA cities, not just this round of cities, but those in the coming years, I remember our brother said something in 1995. He had some fellowship with the coworkers and elders gathered together, who were there for the summer training (what we call the semi-annual today). In the summer training of 1995, he was still finishing up the Life-study trainings. Brother Lee would have meetings before the training and after the training, to speak to these brothers. In 1995, he spoke quite much concerning his burden for the truths that the Lord has given us. Mind you, at that time, he had begun to release what we call today the high peak truths. That was around 1995.

He was also exceedingly burdened by that time for the Lord's move in Russia, which had then been going on for about four years. He was quite burdened that the Lord would spread in Europe—eastern Europe and eventually western Europe—and actually all over the globe. He had two primary burdens, I remember: (1) the propagation of the truths that the Lord has given to us that the recovery has inherited — that these truths would not just stay with us but would be propagated, spread to the seekers, to the seeking believers, and Christians everywhere; and (2) a parallel burden to strengthen the local churches.

So these are two things as a pair in parallel. And I somewhat felt that it was a charge, a commission from him to us co-workers, that this is how we should carry on with the Lord's recovery. To this day, I like to testify to you, dear brothers, that in my heart I still take this as my commission from our brother and from the Lord, that commission being how to move these riches out from Joseph's storehouse. For this, different things are done. But on my side, we started what we know of today as Bibles for America. BFA was specifically to distribute free Bibles and the classic spiritual books by Brother Nee and Brother Lee and by this ministry, until today. Now, I'm not saying Bibles for America is the only entity doing something. Many things were done

by Rhema, if you remember. Rhema gave out free literature all over the world. Actually, the Rhema distribution even opened the door for the Lord's move in Russia, and in other parts of the globe, and this is still going on. There is still a strong ongoing burden today for the GTCA cities and churches and for the migrations. This should be our commission.

So wherever you are in these localities, in these churches, the church should have a strong burden. This burden is not just to have a good church life, but really to be there in these cities and campuses and places to spread these riches, to proclaim this high gospel, to propagate all these basic and high and deep truths the Lord has given to us. These riches are not just for us to enjoy in the recovery. These riches are meant for all of God's children, all of His seekers and lovers. So we still have much work to do. That's why BFA is there somewhat as a kind of support, playing a supportive role, an auxiliary role, to help the saints discharge this burden.

I hope all the ten churches where you are would have this sense of commission. This country today compared to the '60s and '70s has many times a greater population. With the society and the environment where it is, it is very plain to see that the condition of vanity and emptiness is unprecedented. What people are looking for, what people need, is the same as ever. And so, we have this high commission. So, brothers, we need to go and tell them about these things.

How to Carry Out This Commission

Now, the last few months in our Lord's Day afternoon meetings, we spoke much concerning what we should do. That is, we all have to be vitalized ourselves, and we need to band together in twos and threes. We need to pray much. Pray much for the increase of the Lord's recovery, especially where you are. We need to seek the Lord regarding the people that we should contact in our little Jerusalem. There's no need to wait for that, and I don't know how many of you

have begun to put these things into practice. I hope some of you have, but I'd like to see more of us do this.

If you don't know where to start, you just start to pray in a much and thorough way. Those were the adjectives Brother Lee used: much and thorough. Don't just sit there and wait. Don't just procrastinate. You just pray, just contact the Lord, just pray into the Spirit and into His burden. Then, just look for some companions around you that the Lord has placed sovereignly where you are. And then you pray. Join together and pray with this burden.

Abiding in Him to Bear Fruit

And at the end of our speaking, we talked about fruit-bearing. Remember? John 15 - the vine tree? I even remember I showed you some pictures of some grapevines. As branches, we have not chosen the Lord, but the Lord has chosen us and even set us, grafted us, into this true vine, which is Christ, that we may bear much fruit and even remaining fruit, for the glory of the Father, and for our joy.

We've talked about how to do this as a branch or as branches. In our daily living, we need to live in the Lord, abide in Him (meaning to enjoy the Spirit, the flow of the sap), in the vine tree all the time. You see, without contacting the Spirit of life, we will not be vital. We will be dead branches. We won't be able to bear any kind of fruit. So there's no other way but to remain in the Lord, in fellowship with the Lord, touching Him, and being enlivened by Him. We need to be enjoying Him and being saturated by the Spirit and filled by the Spirit. And then we would have the burden, we would have the strength, to bear fruit.

A Condition of Love

We've also talked about how we need a condition among us of love, to love one another. Among us there should not be contention, there should not be criticism, there should not be murmuring. Rather, among us, there should be a sweet harmony and one accord in which we love the brothers. The branches love one another, and that love is

our morale. That love is our power as we go forward to contact people, to reach out, to speak the word of the Lord.

And then I also mentioned that in order to bear fruit, we cannot do something quickly. We cannot expect something quick or do something in a short-term way. Rather, it is a life that we live. This is our Christian life. This is our church life. That's just how we live. And it is something that we do all the time that occupies us. The destiny of the branch of a vine tree is just one thing, and that is to bear fruit.

And if it doesn't do that it has forsaken or relinquished its destiny. Its fate is to bear fruit, its career, if I may use this word, is to bear fruit, its job is to bear fruit. It lives to bear fruit, it exists to bear fruit. It is the same with all of us, we are here as branches in this vine. Our meaning, our purpose, our career, our destiny, is to bear fruit for the glory of the Triune God, for Christ's multiplication, and for His enlarged expression. To gain people for the Lord, whether they be unbelievers, saved ones, or seeking brothers and sisters. Whether they would be our family and relatives, people from our job, people on campus, or whatever the case may be, there are many seeking brothers and sisters, hopeless, without reality, and trying to find the real meaning of their existence. Brothers and sisters, this is what we talked about, and I think the last thing I said was that we should trust the long-term labor, we should trust our enduring and persistent effort in gaining people for the Lord, in bearing remaining fruit. Don't expect something in a few weeks or even in a few months. But don't give up.

For this we need to schedule our lives, didn't I talk about that? Weekly we should have a schedule including not only the human things, like our job, but also the spiritual things. Without a schedule we don't do these things. We need to consecrate ourselves to the Lord, we need to carve out and designate certain times in the week to be set aside for the Lord's business, for the Lord's need. Whether it be one hour or a couple of hours. Some of us have more time, more hours. Whether

it's once a week, or some have more time, we mean business with the Lord. When we consecrate to Him, we make a vow to the Lord, to be for His recovery. This is a practical way that we're living for His recovery. So redeem the time, set up a simple schedule. Those times, they are sanctified, not for anything else, but to contact people on the Lord's behalf. Whether we use zoom, whether we go in person, whether we use the BFA materials as a start, there are many, many ways. If we have the heart, there is a way, right? Don't expect people will miraculously turn and don't think that people who seem a little resistant or disinterested are no good. No, it all depends on us, how much we would labor and spend the time with them. We pray and bring the Lord and His Word to them in a patient, enduring way. Oh, how I would like to see that a good number of brothers and sisters, if not everyone, in these ten GTCA churches would just live in this way. You know, the Lord, His need, His heart's desire should be our priority. We don't need great evangelists. We don't need great so and so's, we just need a group of faithful brothers and sisters who will live and serve in this way, and you will see the results. Through this each of us will be revived. And through the gaining of the increase the church will be revived as well. Now that the pandemic is being elongated and things are still kind of unknown, I hope we would not wait, let's just begin, let's start and do something. One finds another one, another two, another three or four. I spoke to you a lot about twos and threes, didn't I? I spoke about a lot of things, but it means nothing if we don't practice these things. And it's not that hard. It takes a will, it takes an effort, an endeavor, but it is not impossible. Let us take the opportunity in this GTCA move to have a new start in our personal lives and also in our church life.

Starting with this next series of Lord's Day meetings, I want to make not a full turn as such, but I want to touch another line, a very important line of things to strengthen the church life. I hope we won't give up what we heard the last few months, but rather, we would build upon that. As we go forward I come back to what I said earlier, that in 1969 Brother Lee gave us two years of training on how to meet.

That speaking revolutionized the church in Los Angeles. I'm not going to get into that book today, but I can let you know that this coming Labor Day weekend I'm speaking to the churches in the Mid-Atlantic area, including Pittsburgh, and I have a burden to start using this book in a condensed form to help the churches and the saints in this matter of the church meetings, which is a huge part of our church life.

The Church

Today we have to start here, with this burden: the church. That word is an old King James English word. It's a funny word, it has nothing to do with anything, but it has become the traditional word that we use to refer to the church.

The actual Greek word is *ekklesia*. In Greek *ekklesia* has the word *ek*, meaning out from, and the word *kaleo*, which means to call or be summoned. The actual meaning of the word church, *ekklesia*, is the called-out congregation or the called-out assembly. You can actually just drop the word church, the more accurate word is assembly. The British Brethren understood this. In Darby's translation, wherever the word church appeared Darby used the word assembly. You can check that, but they saw this, they realized that *church* is an old term, a traditional term. It gives people the wrong understanding that it refers to the Anglican Church or Catholic Church. Some people think it means the building down the street, the cathedral, or the chapel. All these things are wrong. Today it means denominations, groups, or Christian congregations. No, the word church simply means the called-out assembly.

When Stephen was martyred in Acts 7, he gave that strong, long message before the Sanhedrin, mentioning how Moses was with or spoke to the assembly, referring to the Israelites, the children of Israel in the wilderness. That word is church. There's an Old Testament church, that's Israel. But it's not the word church, it's the assembly, it is God's congregation, God's people who have been called out of Egypt to be separated from that world unto Himself to be His people. That

is the church, that is God's called out assembly. They were called out, that means they were separated and sanctified from the unclean things. Remember in Second Corinthians that light and darkness have no fellowship, and we have nothing to do with the unrighteous, we have nothing to do with the unclean. "Come out from her, My people," we are those who have been summoned out of the world, out of the common things, out of idolatry, out of the things that have no God in them. We've been purchased by God's blood. That is the church in its most fundamental and elementary meaning. But we're not just called out, we're called out to assemble, to congregate, to meet.

Local Assemblies

I think *church* is the same Greek word used in Greek societies where they gather for political discourse. It's called the church, the assembly. When they come together in a town or a city to debate public affairs and legal things it's called the assembly. We are the assembly of God. No, I don't mean the denomination *Assembly of God*. I mean, we are the assembly of God. We are the assembly of the Lord, and we are the assembly of the saints. Local churches are simply local assemblies. What's my point here? My point is to impress us with the simple fact that each one of us has been called out. We've been separated from the world, from sin, from Satan, from everything unto God, unto Christ. We've been called out by Him. We've been called out not to go to heaven, but to assemble, to meet, to congregate, to come together. In the book of Acts the word church, or assembly, is not used until chapter five, but already there was a church in Jerusalem, right? There's no word church, but it says those who were saved gathered together. It also says that the Lord added to those who were gathered together. That's the church. The point is that the church is the gathering of the believers, which means there will be no church without gathering, without assembling. The church is a meeting of saints, of the Lord's believers. We are called out, saved, to meet together.

The Assembly Life

Just seeing this, brothers and sisters, will right away cause a shift in our thinking. The meetings of the church will become something so high. I know the church is the Body of Christ, which is the so-called universal church. That's an old term, but it is the Body of Christ. We emphasize that very much, and rightly so. We are one Body. All the local churches are parts, components, of the one Body of Christ and there's only one church, one Body, in this universe. Yes, essentially, that is correct. But in terms of expression, in terms of practicality, the one Body, the one church of God is testified and expressed in many places on the earth, in different countries, continents, cities, and so on. These are the local assemblies - where we meet together, where we congregate, where we assemble together. The church life is actually the assembly life, it's a meeting life. The church life is full of meetings. Not because we want to take away all your time, no, it's the nature of the church to meet. The church is in the meetings and the meetings are the church. I think many of us have lost count of how much we meet, right? We really meet in the recovery. We meet more than many other Christians. Most of the good ones meet once a week, some once in a few months, others on Christmas Eve or whatever. We meet two times, three times, four times per week, and those believers in Jerusalem met day to day, house to house.

To talk about the meetings of the church, we have to start in this way. Now I want to insert something that is very important and very much on my heart. In Ephesians five it says, husbands love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. Christ loved His assembly. Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. What is on my heart is this brothers and sisters: Yes, the Lord has one Body, the divine human organism. This is the expression of Christ the Head, the fullness of the One who fills all and in all, this is this is the Body of Christ, and this is what the Lord must gain today on the earth. But in this line of fellowship, I'd like to speak in a slightly different way. And that is that this Body is practically experienced, realized, and practiced in the local assemblies, in the churches where you are. John

the apostle said, if you don't love the brothers whom you can see, how can you say you love God whom you don't see? Remember that?

Loving the Local Church

What's my point? My point is, we say we care for the Body, we love the Body, which we should. But I would like to ask, do you love your church, your local church? Do you honor your local church? Do you care for your local church, which is a part of the Body of Christ, the one Body of Christ? What about that? If you say, "I love the Body that you cannot see, but you don't love the church that you can see, where are you? "Oh, I love the Lord's recovery. But I dislike the brothers and sisters where I am." How can that be? It doesn't make sense. People claim "I'm for the recovery. I love the recovery." But they have no heart; they may even hate the saints who are with them.

I was thinking about this hymn that I love very much. It's one of my favorite hymns, and that is 852 in the Hymnal.

Thy dwelling place, Oh Lord, I love;
It is Thy church so blessed,
It is Thy joy and heart's delight
And where Thy heart finds rest.

It would be good if you can take this hymn and sing it later today.

For her Thyself Thou gavest, Lord,
That she'd be Thine, complete;
For her, I too my body give,
Thy heart's desire to meet

That's pretty practical.

For her, Thou hast become my life,
That she my living be;
For her, I would forsake myself,
That she be filled with Thee.

I would like to see, dear saints, a revival of love for the local church.

Yes, that means the church where you are. We should love all the people. We should love all the believers. We should love all the saints. Absolutely. We should love the Body of Christ. Practically speaking, in order for your church life, the church life in your place, your locality, to be strong, to be prevailing, to be powerful, to be impactful, we have to love the church where we are -- no matter what that should look like, and no matter what the condition in it may be, and no matter who is there.

When all the saints in a locality all love the church, they love the Body. Loving the church and loving the Body are not mutually exclusive; it's not one or the other. Actually, we love the Body by loving our church. We present our bodies to her, not to the universal church, which is a little mystical, but to the local church where I am. This is to "forsake or sacrifice myself that she be filled with Thee." How about we apply that locally? You would sacrifice yourself for the church, the local church, the saints, that that church would be filled with Christ, and the church in that city would be filled with Him.

God's Dwelling Place in the Book of Psalms

This love for the church is all in the book of Psalms. If you read in the book of Psalms, in type, you will see the attraction of God's dwelling place, God's house, the palaces of ivory, the mountains, the holy mountains, Jerusalem, the temple, all of which are types of the church. Yes, types of the Body of Christ, but also of the local churches. And if you read *Christ and the Church Revealed and Typified in the Psalms*, Brother Lee employed these types when he interpreted the Psalms in the 60s, and you can find this in his writings and in the footnotes in the Recovery Version. He interpreted a lot of these, the house of God and many other terms, to be not just the Body of Christ, but the local churches.

I will give you a few examples. I really urge you to get into these Scriptures yourself. One of the most famous ones is in Psalm 84:

How lovely are Your tabernacles Oh, Jehovah of Hosts

My soul longs, indeed even faints for the courts of the Lord. It talks about the two altars in this tabernacle, where the sparrow finds a home, the swallow finds a nest to lay her young. It says, "Blessed are those who dwell in Your house. They will yet be praising You." The house there is the church, in totality, the Body of Christ. But he says, "How lovely are your tabernacles." Those tabernacles refer to the local churches. Have you ever thought this way? "Oh, how lovely are the local churches? How lovely is the church where I am? How lovely is the church in Pittsburgh? How lovely is the church in Columbia?" How lovely is the church wherever. Do we see this, and do we have this kind of a feeling? I just use that as an example. There are many Psalms here. Another one is Psalm 45, verse 8 says "From the palaces of ivory, harpstrings have made You glad." Brother Lee interpreted "the palaces" as signifying the local churches, which are beautiful in the eyes of the Lord, because they are His expression. And from these local churches comes the praises that make the Lord glad. Do you see this?

Treasuring the Meetings of the Church

Brothers and sisters, to love the church means you love the components of that local church, you love the saints. But in this line of fellowship, I would like to say that to love the church is to love the meetings of the church, because the church is in the meetings - the gatherings of God's people, the coming together of the Lord's people, the assembling of the called-out ones. We would love the meetings, we would care for the meetings of the church, we would honor and respect the meetings of the church. I'm afraid that sometimes the meetings have become optional, like "I go when I want to, and if I don't want to, I don't go" or, "I have a little headache. Maybe not now." We don't have a kind of valuation or treasuring of the meetings of the church, a kind of attraction to the meetings of the church, a kind of dependency on the meetings of the church. And so, without that kind of a heart, without that kind of a sentiment and feeling, the church meetings are just kind of "well, it's just another meeting." And you know . . . Lord's day, another meeting, the Lord's table meeting,

the prayer meeting, the prophesying meeting, the small group meeting, whatever it is. We don't have that kind of a feeling of how the Lord loves the local churches and how the Lord loves when His people gather together. The tabernacle in the Old Testament was called the tent of meeting. It was not just a place where the Israelites met. It was where the people of Israel met with God. Well, you say, "No, no, no, God is in me; Christ is in me, I'm good. I'm fine. I'm at home. I'm in my bedroom. The Lord is with me." Yes, that's true. Christ is in you, He's your hope of glory. But I think we can all testify in varying degrees, that that kind of presence of the Lord cannot compare with the Lord's presence when we're gathered with the saints. We gather as the church when we meet together. The Lord commanded the blessing of the running ointment, of the descending dew on the mountains of Zion, and those mountains, plural, of which Zion is the peak, are the churches, the local churches. The Lord loves every local church, the Lord loves His church. And to Him, that is His beauty. This is the Lord's joy. So the church and the meetings of the church should be so attractive to us, and a joy to us, and a blessing to us. The meetings keep us in one, in unity. The meetings are when we gather together in His name and are presided by His presence. When we gather together "there am I in their midst." His presence is in our midst when we gather.

The meetings are referred to in other places: in Matthew 18, where we exercise his divine authority, the authority He has given to the church. The meetings are where all the saints would minister Christ, where "each one has" to build up one another. The meetings are where even unbelievers are subdued, saying, "Christ is among you." This won't happen in my bedroom. This happens when the church gathers in some fashion.

I've run out of time already. Today, I did not talk about how to meet or what to do because I am very burdened for a revival of the assembly life, the church life in so many localities, that it would be strong, sweet, attractive, and rich. This depends of course on our daily life and

daily living. But I will tell you, dear ones, the church is in the meetings. The meetings are of the church. I pray that the Lord would grant us the blessing of a revived love and care. And like Psalm 84 says, "My soul longs" -- the longing for the church and her meetings. It even says, "indeed even faints." When you are so much in love, you faint right? For the courts of Jehovah, your heart and your flesh cry out to the living God. "Blessed are those who dwell in the Lord's house," which is in the meetings of the church, in the gatherings of the church. This kind of a sentiment is what I am trying to get to here.

Now I know in the pandemic, we cannot be in person. This pandemic will not last forever. We also now have technology to help us. One way or another, brothers and sisters, I hope there would be a revival in our meeting life. But it has to start with our regard, with our attitude, with our heart, with our soul, with our love for His church, city by city, locality by locality. This morning, I was in the Zoom Lord's table like many of you. We had the Lord bless us with a wonderful table of His for about 45 minutes. And then we started to speak to one another. And my, the saints, one after another just spoke, we were together for another 45 minutes very easily. It was almost like we couldn't stop. I joined in to speak, my wife, the saints, as well as all the people there. My, that experience you cannot have just by yourself, no matter how wonderful of a private life you have with the Lord. But my, you just feel the Lord's presence, you feel the anointing Spirit, you feel the life supply. Psalm 36 talks of the river of Your pleasures" in God's house. There's the fatness of this House, there's the fountain of life. And there's also a filling with God as light. All these wonderful riches of the Triune God are given to us, are experienced by us in the church, which is the meetings. I'm here praying that this will stir us up in our view, and then in our feeling concerning the importance of the gatherings of the church. I know we meet, and I know we go to meetings, but I'm talking about the intensity of that feeling, of that burden.