

Five Commissions of a Small Group

Fellowship from Minoru Chen on August 29, 2021

Prayer

Lord, we still pray these days that You would do a special work, a renewing work. Lord, we pray even for a revolutionary work to breakthrough in our church life so that it would be a vital church life, a living church life. Oh Lord, we pray for the meetings. We especially pray for the group meetings. We pray even for our living in groups in the church. Lord, do something new according to Your heart's desire, even according to the pattern in the New Testament. Lord, recover us back to the beginning, that all the saints would open their homes. Lord, we pray that Your expression would be in the homes, in a living, rich, and attractive way. Lord, we pray that through this the church will be built up, the saints would function, people would be gained, and You would be expressed. Continue to speak to us and burden us. Lord, even move us to practice these things. We pray especially for the ten GTCA cities, we pray for Your grace and mercy in this particular endeavor.

History of Revivals Among Us

Well, brothers and sisters, I must tell you, the more I'm considering this matter of the groups, the small groups, the more I become burdened. It's almost like going full circle in a way for me. What do I mean by that? I have studied and observed, which I must humbly say should be no less than any other brother, this matter of the God-ordained way. Our brother started out calling this the new way. He endeavored to bring in this new way through his research and re-study of the New Testament, along with looking back at our own history. He even studied how other Christian groups met back in the 1980s when he returned to the island of Taiwan. Now, I must tell you

something for all of us to understand that Taiwan was a stepping-stone of sorts for our dear brother. He was shoulder to shoulder with brother Watchman Nee in China for about 18 years or so, from the time when he contacted Brother Nee and was brought into the recovery. Then he was sent from his service in Shanghai and in other parts of the country in which he traveled or went back to during the war years to his home church, the church that he helped form back in the very early 30s. That was a place called Chefoo. Some of you may have heard that city's name. It was there that he put into practice what brother Watchman Nee had put forth in his ministry concerning the practical church life. Brother Lee would always refer to those instructions as the blueprint that he received from Watchman Nee.

Following that, the late 30s into the early 40s was a time when the whole world was plunged into World War II, including Pearl Harbor in 1941. That was when the U.S entered into the World War full-fledged to fight the so-called Axis powers of Nazi Germany in Europe and also Japan, which by that time had joined with Germany to be the Axis powers, along with Italy and some other countries. It was exactly during that time that Brother Lee put this blueprint into practice. To make a long story short, that practice resulted in a great revival in the church in Chefoo during very dark, difficult, and challenging days of the war. By that time China had already been at war with Japan, the so-called Sino-Japanese war, for a few years beginning in 1937. Then in 1941 there was the attack on America by Imperial Japan. They had been living under a wartime situation, and you can imagine being occupied and being persecuted and so forth. I don't want to say more than that. If you are interested you can study that history. In that war-torn situation a revival broke forth in Chefoo, and that particular revival can be numbered as one of the main revivals in our midst.

In our midst meaning in the recovery's midst, beginning in the 1920s when the recovery was raised up through brother Watchman Nee. That revival would be the third among us. The first was in the 20s when the recovery was formed, and the second was in the early 30s

when Brother Nee was revived personally and brought in a revival to the recovery even though the recovery at that time was small, compared to today. It was just in China, not even in all of China. Our numbers were small, but the move of the Spirit was real and genuine. The third revival amongst us was the Chefoo revival. That was the one not brought in by Brother Nee, but by Brother Lee.

The fourth revival among us was the Shanghai revival, right at a time when the Communist regime was about to take over China and establish its government. That particular revival was surely a joint effort by Brother Nee and Brother Lee. In those years the situation was set for something to break forth while China had been in one war or another. This was well after D-day, well after the end of World War II when Japan signed the papers of their surrender in 1945, and China was in a civil war between two governments. Although Brother Nee's ministry had resumed in 1948, at that time he devoted much of his time to a training in a place called Kuling Mountain, which is in the Fukien province. He assigned Brother Lee to take care of the church in Shanghai, which he did. While both labored separately, yet in coordination, a revival was brought forth. It's hard to say where this revival started because there are various angles to look at in this portion of our history. But a revival broke forth in Shanghai and in one after another of the coastal towns in southern China, all the way to Hong Kong, where I came from in the Canton province. This was the greatest of the four revivals in our history, in the recovery's history in China. Unfortunately, there was a pause at the time that the Communists took over the mainland and Brother Lee was sent out of the mainland to Taiwan. Brother Nee, of course, remained with other coworkers until they were arrested, condemned, and sentenced. That is one side.

From a Nursery to a New Base

The other side was Brother Lee setting foot in Taiwan. Clearly, it was God's sovereignty to keep such a person, one who was the most one with Brother Nee, one that Brother Nee trusted completely, and even

more than that, clearly proven over all these subsequent decades, was the continuation of that ministry of the age that Brother Nee had begun. Not just anyone can continue such a ministry. No, it had to be a particular vessel of God, which was Witness Lee. In Taiwan there was a period of ten to twelve years where through the preaching of the gospel and Brother Lee's leadership in the churches, the recovery found a base camp, if you will. Some of us and some others would go further and call it not just a base, but a nursery. A nursery is where you keep little plants to help them grow so that one day you can transplant and spread them. Taiwan became a nursery. I'd like to tell you, brothers and sisters, many of you were born and raised in this country, so you're not as familiar with all that history. In those ten years, the establishing of such a nursery or base was also something of the Lord, in anticipation of a further spread. What do I mean? I'm talking about the spread of the recovery from Taiwan to the US, from the Far East to the West, mainly through the United States. In 1962 Brother Lee came here, and I would say really began the second half of his ministry. The first half being in mainland China and Taiwan, and the second half being in the USA. From that point on, the USA became the base of the Lord's move on the earth.

Now, I say these things to tell you about my study of many things in the recovery, even the move of the Lord, the future of the recovery, and the direction of the recovery. Following Brother Lee's pattern and way, this is not something that you can just pray about and become clear on. No, it has to be based on the move of the Lord, what we call the footprint of the Spirit or the footsteps of the Spirit. You have to trace those footsteps, you have to study those footsteps, you have to be knowledgeable to see how the Lord has been moving and therefore will move in the future. In setting up this nursery in Taiwan, brother Lee dropped a number of the practices that we previously had in mainland China and began to pick up some new kinds of practices. One of the main new practices of the church life became the groups. This matter of the small groups is not something new today, even among us. It started back in the 50s, when there was a great influx of

unbelievers and new ones into the church life. Almost overnight the church in Taiwan grew from a few hundred to tens of thousands. How do you take care of so many people?

It's like in the church in Jerusalem where there were just 120 and suddenly overnight there were 3,000 plus the 120. How could they meet? There's no meeting hall for sure. How would they gather? The church is the *ekklesia*, the gathering or the assembly of God's called-out ones. That's the technical, basic meaning of the word church, *ekklesia*. How were they to gather or assemble? In the Old Testament, many of them were actually Jews. In Jerusalem, all of them were basically Jews from the diaspora. They had come from different parts of the Middle East, but they all had Jewish ancestry and that's why they were in Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Pentecost. They even spoke different dialects, so it was a real miracle that when Peter stood up and spoke, they all could understand him. That was not a miracle like Balaam's donkey speaking human language, we're not for that. This is a real miracle. Because of that, suddenly the church exploded in numbers to have over 3000. Soon after that many more thousands were added. So how did they meet? Well, they still gathered at the temple because they were Jews, that's what they did. Also, that was the only public venue that could contain so many of them. So that's what they did.

Meeting in the Homes – the New Testament Way of Meeting

Whether they met all together, or they met by the hundreds, breaking themselves down into smaller numbers, I don't know. But as far as larger gatherings, they met at the temple. Then, in Acts chapter two we're told that they met not only at the temple, but that they began to do something that was never done before in Judaism. They began to meet day by day, from house to house. Certainly, there was a kind of gathering among these Jews, these Jewish believers, that was not just three times a year in Jerusalem, that was not in the temple in Jerusalem. They left all those things. They were New Testament believers, and they had a new way of assembling according to the New

Testament economy. What did they do? They started meeting in the homes, in their houses. Now, I have to believe that not many of them had large homes. This was in the city of Jerusalem. I don't know what it looked like in those days, but probably just small flats or apartments, that's where they met.

There was no possibility that these meetings, as a rule, could be big. There was no room. They couldn't contain so many people, so they must have met in groups. In fact, they must have met in smaller numbers. Not only did they meet in these groups, in smaller numbers, and not only did they meet in the homes, but they even met every day. It was their life. It was a daily affair. There was no such thing as a Sunday service in those days, and no such thing as coming together for Easter or Christmas.

These gatherings were of Christians who got dynamically saved. They were only a few but were filled with the Spirit. They were filled with a heart for the Lord and remembering the resurrected Christ. They were a bunch of enthusiastic people. What could they do? They just daily started gathering together in small groups in their homes. They gathered together daily, from house to house, eating food together and breaking bread together. That was what was called the Lord's supper by Paul, to remember the Lord because the Lord, the resurrected Christ, was just so fresh to them. They were just dynamic. It was a living dynamic, communal life, meeting life, and assembly life. There was no such thing as "Should I go to a meeting?" No, you just live to meet. You just meet to live. That was the Christian existence. That was the church existence.

Do you see this, brothers and sisters? That was in the beginning. That was the very early church. As this continued and as the gospel spread to different provinces, to Samaria, to Asia Minor, and eventually even to Europe, they met continually in homes—the house of so and so, the church that is in so-and-so's house. Last time I talked to you about that, the first meetings. They just met that way. This is the New

Testament way to meet.

Now in Acts 2:46 you see a picture of their meeting, just filled with the Spirit, full of the joy of people being added to them daily. They had grace among people. They were full of exaltation. You can just imagine that it was just a dynamic situation. There are other very important verses. The first important one is in Acts 2:46, and the other one is Acts 5:42 that talks about them going on and meeting day to day from house to house. They did not cease teaching and announcing the gospel of Jesus as the Christ.

We have a little window there to see all the activities that were taking place in these groups, in their homes, and in small gatherings. They preached the gospel; that means they brought new ones to these small groups, to their homes, probably to eat a meal and then to preach the gospel to them. They broke bread. I am sure they prayed; don't you believe so? They met together; they must have prayed. They continued in prayer and in breaking bread. They continued to preach the gospel. All these glorious functions of the church were carried out, not in some public place, but in their homes.

You see in Acts that the apostles preached, and they ministered the Word in certain public places because of the need of the crowd. But here I'm not talking about ministry assembly or ministry meetings. I'm talking about the church meetings, the meetings of the believers, of the saints in the church. They didn't meet that way. They met in the homes. So many gatherings took place in the homes.

Remember Peter, he was in prison, right? He was arrested in prison. When the angel rescued him out of prison he didn't go to the temple. He didn't go to any public square. It says he looked for his meeting. Peter had a small group. This apostle Peter belonged to a group. He went there and it was John Mark's mother's place. He knocked on the door, and the maid couldn't believe it was Peter, and then they found out it was really him. They were gathered together, praying. Now, this

is proof that they prayed in the homes, in small groups. They were praying for Peter, I'm sure, and Peter was enjoying them. I think this is good enough to impress us.

Losing the Dynamism, Power and Livingness of the Church

This was the situation in the early centuries of the kind of a meetings in the homes. I don't know how long this continued, maybe a few hundred years. Then slowly after Christianity was embraced by Constantine and by Rome things started to change. People started to gather and build these, what we call today, houses of worship, or "church" buildings. In fact, this went on and on until this kind of architecture and building became more and more intricate. For thousands of years, they became one of the pinnacles of human architecture and culture, these cathedrals and churches. This was entirely off from what God had originally ordained. This was something from the pagan direction, something of the natural concept of man, and something even of a return to the way of Judaism. If you put all these things together, you end up with another kind of way to meet. The word "church" is still there, but the reality and the dynamism and the power and the livingness of the church are gone, lost.

In place of that, you have a mighty religion. You have Christendom. You have the church in Rome. You have the clergy-laity system. It was not just that those cathedrals and church buildings were wrong, but they built up a clergy-laity system hand in hand. In these speaker meetings you don't need all the saints to function. You just need a few clergymen or priests. You just need a few to officiate the ceremonies, rituals and services. The rest are just a bunch of lay people sitting over there. Do you see the corruption? Do you see the transmutation, brothers? Do you see the utter degradation? This is what happened.

The Way of Recovery

Now, of course, the Lord is a Lord of recovery, and over the ages in the last 2000 years, besides the recovery of the truth or of the Word

of God, of the divine revelation, there has also been a concurrent recovery of how the church should meet. There has been a coming back to the original way to meet, the way the church met in the first place.

Do you know the story about the Wesley brothers? In those days, they did something very revolutionary. They started to meet outside of the church buildings. They started meeting in the open air, in the public places. They started to preach there and meet in that kind of way. Over time there were many lovers of the Lord or seekers of the Lord who would not take and follow the main line of the Christian religion to meet in the religious way. Some became outcasts and had nowhere to go. And so, they had to meet in their homes, in a private way. They even had the term “private churches” at one point.

Whether they studied this or whether they intentionally did this or not, that happened to be the way that Christians were supposed to meet—in homes, from house to house. The meetings or church life cannot be disassociated from the daily life. Do you see this? You don't live one way, and then go to church on Sunday, pretending by putting on a show, which is what happened a lot. No, it's meshed together: our daily life, church life, family life, and meeting life are all one. You don't just go to church; you church in your home and in one another's homes. This is a huge thing. The communal life, family life, and meeting life all kind of mingle together.

Our Own Assembling Together

Number two, in these kinds of smaller gatherings in homes, suddenly the way must be very mutual, instead of a clergy-laity one-directional, one-man speaking way. Ministry meetings are necessary, but in the church meetings, clearly, you can see, especially in 1 Corinthians 14, that everyone functions, everyone has, and everyone can speak for the Lord. Other key verses we always refer to are Hebrews 10:24-25. These are very important verses, *“And let us consider one another so as to incite one another to love and good works, not abandoning our*

own assembling together, as the custom of some is..." This assembling together means the New Testament way of meeting, our own assembling together. Brother Lee underscored "our own assembling."

This is not just the so-called "church meeting," this is my meeting, this is our meeting. The six of us, the twelve of us, this is our meeting. We're responsible; we're part of the church. We're not the whole church, but our assembling together is important. At the time the book of Hebrews was written to the Jewish believers, they were waffling, weak and drifting slowly back to the old, Judaistic ways of gathering. They were drifting back to the Old Testament offerings, and to the meeting at the temple with all the rituals and Judaistic teachings and practices were coming in to invade the church and degrade the church.

The writer was trying to help these ones to stay put, not to be affected, but to remain in God's New Testament economy, and to remain in the New Testament way of meeting. He said don't abandon your assembling, this kind of assembling together, *"...as the custom of some is..."* This meant that some were leaving and took the old way. We need to *"... exhort one another; and so much the more as you see the day drawing near."* This means we should do this until the Lord comes back. Here, you have three "one another's." They considered *one another*, they incited *one another*, and they exhorted *one another* by assembling together. What do these small group, home-based gatherings do? What is the feature? What is the attraction? It is one another.

One Another Church Life

Brother Watchman Nee said that the strongest feature of the Christian assembly is mutuality. That means I have something to give and you also have something to give. I give you something, you reciprocate by giving me something back. It is mutual, not one-directional. It is a gathering where all the saints function, all do something. What do they do? They consider one another, think of one

another and care for one another. In a big church of thousands, no large number of elders can take care of all the saints. All the saints should take care of themselves, thinking of one another. We're in the same neighborhood; we're in the same small community. We know one another. We cross paths and therefore consider one another. Don't forget one another. We each have each other's back.

The second thing it says is “we incite one another.” This means we encourage one another. We stir up one another. If one of us may become cold, we go and heat them up. If someone is a little discouraged, you go and encourage them. If someone is beaten down, you go and minister to them. This kind of “one another” is not happening only in a meeting, per se, once a week. This is every day. This is our group of saints. We look out for one another, we call one another, and we see how one another is doing. It's a life, brothers and sisters. This is not a once-a-week service. It's the church life. It's a life. It's 24/7, 365.

Eighty Percent Church Life

Oh, brothers and sisters, don't you long for this kind of a church life? It was so, in the beginning. There's no reason why we should not have it today. Today, the church is just a once-a-week affair: “go to church,” go to some building, sit there, listen to a sermon, and come home. No, no, no, the church is a community. The church is a people that live together unto the Lord. Finally, they “exhort one another.” That means they teach one another. They share something of the Word to one another. They speak to one another to edify one another and to build one another up. I tell you, this is so beautiful, so natural, so divinely natural. It's so logical. It makes sense. This is the way the church, the church life, can function to build up itself.

I am not saying we should not have a meeting of the whole church coming together. I'm not saying we should go and get rid of the meeting halls. I'm not saying that. There is a place for the whole congregation to come together. We need a meeting hall or halls for

that matter. Here in Irvine, we have three halls. So no, I'm not saying that. I'm saying that there must be a balance, and there must be an assignment of the relative importance, by virtue of how often they get together, by virtue of how they can function. We may not need that many big meetings. Brother Lee said twenty percent. But, these smaller gatherings, day-by-day, from house-to-house should make up eighty percent of our church life.

In a big meeting, it's hard to have this kind of "one another" experience. You couldn't even see the other person across the aisle. You don't know who's who. But, in a small situation, you know and you care. You can serve together, you can function together, you can preach the gospel together, you can gain people together, you can shepherd together, and you can do so many things together in this kind of a small group way. I know I'm repeating myself here, but I just feel so burdened.

The Small Groups

Now, when I say full circle, I mean this: in 1984 Brother Lee went back to Taiwan for four to five years to re-study how we should meet and how we should serve in the recovery. The recovery had by that time entered into a dormant, cold, lukewarm, and barren situation. Brother Lee was burdened to find a way to break through, so he went back to Taiwan because the nursery was there. There were a lot of saints there, and there were physical assets there. There were churches that were receiving of Brother Lee and ready to coordinate with him to study and practice these things. The first thing Brother Lee did when he went back was to promote the small groups, in those days called "the small group meetings." I remember as clear as day. This was in 1984.

In his ministry in Chinese, he said, "heaven and earth can disappear, but never miss the small group meeting." That was a very famous word he spoke, that showed his burden. He even studied other places, other Christians, and how they met. He found that this kind of small

group must be the way that we take to recover the function of every believer and for the mutuality to be built up in the church life. Even for the spread, the increase of the church, we must rebuild the small groups. And that's what he did. The so-called "New Way," or what we call the "God-ordained Way" today began with the small groups.

Now, this was over 35 years ago. Brothers and sisters, I'm very burdened. I know, this matter of small groups and all these things are not the central lane of God's economy. I know that. This is what we would call the "leaves and branches" as far as the truth is concerned. But let me tell you, as far as the practice of the church life is concerned, without such a living church life, we cannot work out God's commission. Remember, the practice of the church life is not just for a happy church life; it is for the building up of a local church. In aggregate, it is for the building up of the Body of Christ by every saint's normal living and functioning. It is by every saint preaching the gospel, every saint shepherding people, every saint edifying and perfecting each other, and every saint speaking and prophesying. Without this, even the vision of God's economy has no way to be carried out. I would like to say, yes, this may be leaves and branches, but if we don't have such a living church life, we cannot work out the Lord's commission to us today. And I believe there's something within all of us that wants this kind of church life. I believe that many Christians seekers are looking for this kind of church.

Five Commissions of a Small Group

Today, I will finish this way. Last time, I gave you a few advantages of the practice of the small group. I hope you remember that. Today, I'm going to give you five commissions of a small group. That is, what's the goal, what's the purpose, and what's the commission of having a small group? This is all from Brother Lee.

1. To Restore the Dormant Saints

First, what a small group does is more than the meetings and the grouping together. What the grouping in a small group does is to

recover, restore, and bring back the dormant saints. There are many brothers and sisters who are not in the meetings, or who have backslidden, or who have become cold. But they are still part of the church; they are still one of us. There are these brothers and sisters of ours who have not been meeting for a long time. There are some young ones like this and there are some older ones like this, but these are *our own*. For a small group, one of the commissions is to find them and shepherd them back to the church life. Not back to a big meeting, because they don't want to show up in the big meeting. They're too embarrassed to be in a big meeting, but how about in a small group? The small group is very communal, very intimate, very caring.

You know, I don't have time to talk about this today, but later on I will tell you, I've been talking to you a lot about the twos and threes. What are the twos and threes? The twos and threes are the little units, the functioning units in a small group. That's what it is. Twos and threes added together is the small group. In a daily way, these twos and threes function to have a "one another" experience: to pray with one another, to consider one another, to stir up one another, to incite one another, to exhort one another, and even to operate with one another to seek the lost sheep and bring them back to the shepherd's tent. I consider a small group a shepherd's tent, like in the Song of Songs.

2. To Preach the Gospel

Second, the small group is for preaching the gospel. Don't trust in the big gospel meetings. I'm not saying we don't need some in-reaping meetings, but the regular preaching of the gospel is best done in a small group. The small group is the gateway. There are twelve gates around Jerusalem: there's a way in through each gate. The more gates the better. Each small group is a gate for new ones to come in.

So here in your city, there's a campus, a big campus. There should be many saints living around that campus, and each and every home is open. There should be a number of small groups, and in these groups, you have some older saints, some middle-aged saints, some young

saints, some students, and some full-timers. These are all coordinating together in various small groups to care for these ones that are being contacted in these universities.

For the gospel work on a campus to be strong, it must be upheld and supported by many homes and small groups. Dear brothers and sisters, I am speaking from experience here. Here in Irvine, even many years ago, we practiced this kind of church life, back in the 70s. We really did. We didn't have the term "God-ordained way" or "small groups," but we were practicing all these things! And I can testify to you how effective it was. I can testify how powerful it was, how many new ones, new students from the campuses, came into the church through these groups, homes, small groups, and these twos and threes.

The group meeting must be built up as a strong foundation for all the spiritual work in a local church. The home gospel, the community gospel, and of course the campus work must have the small group as a base. Even the young people need to belong to these small groups and grow up in these small groups. Without this kind of group, there's no way for us to do a prevailing work of outreach, whether with the community, with a campus, with the young people, high school students, whatever it may be. Even with the children's work, we used to have something called a neighborhood children's meeting. This group meeting is like a Swiss army knife. It's all-purpose. You can use it for many things and many purposes. I have certainly in my church life benefited from this greatly. Today in Irvine without these groups, we wouldn't be doing much of anything.

In these small groups we shepherd people and perfect people. You know, some of these new ones started to serve in the small groups—not in the meeting hall but in our small group. Everyone learns to bring food, everyone learns to help cook. Everyone learns to help clean the dishes. Do you see what I'm saying? It may be something small, but that's how the atmosphere is raised up. It is the

church life in miniature. It is a local church in miniature, small enough not to intimidate people, where everyone can function. It is in an intimate setting, in a home, with the kitchen here, and with the living room there, with a little garage there. It's a life. And people are attracted to this kind of communal life with the Lord, with the Spirit, with joy, and peace and with the enjoyment of Christ. They will be attracted to this.

3. To Uphold the Saints

Number three, small groups are needed to uphold, to maintain and sustain people, including ourselves. You might say: "Well, I don't need that. I'm very strong." We'll just wait and see how strong you really are by yourself. No, you need a group. I need a group. Peter needed a group; otherwise, when he got out of jail, he would be wandering on the streets of Jerusalem not knowing where to go. But he had a home. That was his group. He went there, and they were praying for him. Even if no one else may be praying, that group was praying for him. This group would be our family, our expanded family in the church. You know, today, everything can break down, but the family cannot be broken down. At the end of the day, it is the family that supports us. The family must be held together. Today, people are all looking for this family, this divine-human family life. This is what is attractive. This is what keeps us together.

You know, I've been quarantining with my daughter and son-in-law and their two kids for the past year and a half now. The grandkids are just at the age where they are ruining everything. Sometimes, I must confess, it's crossed my mind more than one time: I just can't take this anymore. There's just too much going on. You know, this morning, I had to take them out; grandpa had to take them out. And they have these scooters and they said: "we're going to have a race, okay? And you must race with us!" And I have no way to race. Grandpa cannot run like that anymore. Grandpa is 70. But what can I do? I have to race with them. Then I sit down and consider that I need to wait a minute. If we were not together like this, for this year and a half in a pandemic,

I'd probably be dead by now. You know, out of loneliness. I have this house here, but I would be dead from loneliness or something. You get what I'm saying. It's the family. That is my physical family, my biological family, but we have a dear church family, and dear saints, the group allows us to practice this church-family life.

4. To Strengthen and Enrich the Church

Number four, the group meetings are where the church is strengthened and enriched. You know, if I just see you on Sunday, you just see me on Sunday. But if we are like this: building up one another, admonishing one another, speaking to one another, caring for one another both in life and in the Word and in so many things, both our lives will be so enriched in a daily way. This will affect our Christian life to be stronger. And it will certainly make the whole church life richer. Absolutely! And, of course, we have a job to do, and that is to strengthen these groups. This is our job: to build up and maintain and strengthen and even spread these groups in the church life.

5. To Have the Corporate Expression of Christ

Number five, Brother Lee said, in combination, when all this happens in the locality, there would really be the corporate expression of Christ. There will be this dynamic, glorious expression of Christ, that we call the church life. So I'll stop here. I hope you sense my burden. And I hope you would speak these things to one another and pray about them. We will get into more things, of course, related to this group life and the group meetings. But I think it is important to cover some of these points from the outset.

Overflow, Questions, and Responses

Brother: I remember one time when Brother Lee was talking about the word "small." He said small is beautiful. I love the "small" groups because small is the way life works. It's just the way life is. All these things are all so practical. That's where it all takes place.

Sister: I would just like to say that I was saved in a sister's meeting.

And if it wasn't for that small group, I wouldn't be here. I just felt so cherished there. Amen to your speaking brother!

Comment: We think "I can only be in one small group." No, you don't, you can be in two. You may have a group of some families in your neighborhood and single ones and working ones, and you have another group with the sisters, and so on. But of course, you have a main place because you don't want to be all scattered. The point is they met day to day; they must be meeting in one another's houses and not always in the same one house, right? By rotation, either by this way or that way. In our place, the senior saints group together during the day because they are retired; that's another group. The students also have some other groupings on the campus. So there's many groupings doing different things. But the main point, brothers and sisters, is that these groups are actually the communal units of the church, with diverse functions, all inclusive, much like a family, much like a physical family, it covers all the basis. However, also like a family, you have to work on it. You have to build up a family, you have to raise a family, you have to take care of the family members. When the family units are strong in the nation, the nation will be strong. The nation, the country, is as strong as the families are strong. That is for sure. In the same principle, when the groupings are strong in a church, that church will be strong.

Sister: I'd like to speak regarding these meetings. I came into the church life approximately 20 years ago. I was already saved a long time. I came in through my son who invited me to come to a college-age meeting, although there was a good mixture of ages there. It was a very large college-age meeting. And I was so astounded. Oh, these college-age kids were enjoying and loving the Lord so much. And then I went on to participate in another meeting that was closer geographically to my home and ended up supporting that meeting where we had some college-age, some older ones and even a couple little two- and three-year-old children were there. It was so precious, that was a true family. Both of these groups were sustaining and

growing, and new ones were coming in and taking care of ones who were coming to the university. This was like a real family, a generational family, and it was just so precious. Now I'm retired and in my 70s, and I meet with the sisters in the daytime. It's just precious to grow in this way. And I wanted to say that in reference to the leaves and the branches, no plant will be sustained without those leaves taking in the light from the sunshine. The plant, even a vine will die if it doesn't have those leaves. They are so critically important.

Brother: Here in Charlotte, we've had an influx of a lot of families. I started counting up like how many families are in our area where we live, and there are thirteen families. We are kind of perplexed because we don't know how to begin a small group. We've been together in a bigger way, but we feel like it should be smaller. Could you fellowship a little bit about how to begin a small group? Our feeling is "small is good," like just one family with another family, as a beginning point. We don't want to offend anyone. We don't want to give any impression that we are excluding 'so and so.'" We want to be inclusive; but still, we wanted to start. Could you fellowship about that?

Comment: That's something that I want to get into because there are many factors to consider. In Charlotte, you have some who are local, like yourself, and there are some newcomers. By now you also have a sizable church of scattered saints in different areas of the city. You have those who are closer to campus, and those who are closer to this place or that place. From experience, we have to either start or restart with much fellowship and coordination. Not just everyone doing what's right in their own eyes; that will sometimes get messy, and we can offend others. I would just say that, on the one hand, the leading brothers do not arrange, like organizing things. The saints must pray; they must be burdened and be led by the Lord according to the environmental factors. However, there is a place really for the whole church to go forth in one accord in this practice.

In Irvine about fifteen years ago, we had small groups. We had such a burden for the church to breakthrough into a new stage and grow. We wanted to revisit this matter very seriously to have a new start. So, we brought all the saints into the same view to practice this. Thank the Lord that over one to two years' time, we made it. When I say one to two years' time, my point is we didn't do it hastily. There was a lot of prayer and consideration. By that time we already had three halls. So how do you do this? Some saints are ready to take action, many others are not, they are more passive. We have to consider the entire flock of God in the process. The first thing I think is important is for the church to have the same vision on this matter. The leading brothers then will pray much and get into this matter and even study this matter in the context of the local church. Then there should be some more particular fellowship locally, or by cluster, about this with the saints. Then through a lot of fellowship, area by area, home by home, something will in time begin to fall into place. Sometimes there is a need to have some arrangement; don't say, there's no place for that. There is a place for that, because sometimes saints really don't know what to do. Sometimes there is a need for some adjustment, because in certain situations there may be some problems, situations, or history there.

First, in the implementation and working out of the groups, at the beginning, we should receive more infusion and speaking so that we're in one mind and in one thinking. Second, we need a lot of prayer. This is something critical in the building up of a local church and the enemy will fight. We need to really commit this matter to the Lord in prayer. And then through a lot of fellowship, there will be a way to work this out in time. Meanwhile, we should reach out to one another in the homes and families nearby. We may share a similar burden for the campus, or we have a similar burden for a certain area. We can contact one another just to get acquainted or to pray organically. There is nothing wrong with that. With all these things, something will work out. Amen.

Brother: We've been in Charlotte for a long time, and we've been in the same small group for about twenty years now. We've been involved with several groups that meet over Zoom. I know it's not like a home meeting, but it seems to meet a certain kind of need. So I was wondering if you could make any comment on that?

Comment: Well, there's a lot to get into regarding the small groups. For example, eventually, how a small group can get old, the same people, doing the same thing. The spread and multiplication of the groups is another topic in itself with something to learn. I think these questions require more time to talk about, and there is not just a quick answer that I can give to you. But I'm glad to hear that the saints have been maintaining and have been very sustained the last three years. I'm not saying that we're not practicing the small group at all. I know many churches have practiced the group life for a long time. But the burden here is to have a renewal, a refreshing, a renewed burden and endeavor in this matter in a very particular way, so that the Lord can go on further amongst us. Amen.

Comment regarding receiving others and loving others:

Right now, with this whole pandemic, Zoom, in-person meetings, and all these kinds of things can become quite an issue, if I may, even among us, and of course, everywhere. People hold different beliefs on these matters. The same is true in the church. This has also baffled me. All the time, the same question comes up – what should be our attitude? What should we do? Well, I do not have any policy to prescribe. I don't have any, recommendation to “do this or that.” But the other day when this question came to me again, it did occur to me that we have some speaking in the Word.

Paul's way of dealing with the receiving of the believers in Romans 14 and 15 in Romans and in First Corinthians, the dealing with the eating of foods offered to idols. In these portions you can draw some principles as to how we receive one another as God has received each one of us. As the Lord has received, we should receive one another,

no matter what our beliefs may be. On vaccination, on masking, on all these things that are dividing people, dividing this country up. We don't want this to happen among us. This matter is less than leaves and branches, I don't know what you call these things. These kinds of differences should not rise to the point of causing division and problems among us. We must stand together and not allow that to happen.

The first principle is to receive one another, whether you keep this day or not, whether you eat meat or vegetables, that is your personal conviction and belief. If you have to do something according to your conscience before the Lord, we respect one another on these matters. If we would have this kind of attitude, I believe this will help very much. We don't judge one another; we don't condemn one another. Each one should just be before the Lord in our living, and we respect that. We receive one another. But there is another side. The other side that Paul brought up in both Romans and First Corinthians was something called love. The most prevailing way is the way of love. In First Corinthians, there's a whole chapter devoted to this. While we receive one another, we respect one another's convictions and beliefs. We also love one another, meaning we take care of one another, and not do things that would stumble one another. We would not insist on things that would cause other people to suffer. For example, some people feel they need to do certain things to stay healthy, to not risk becoming sick. Some people think, "No, you don't need to do that." So again, here, the case is not a matter of tolerance, not a matter of just respecting one another, but it's a matter of loving one another. That means, brothers and sisters as we do things, we should not just think about ourselves. We need to consider what it is to love one another. It is to think about others, to think about other people.

There are state mandates and local mandates regarding certain things that we as citizens and as a church have certain obligations to society to take care of as citizens. We, in principle, according to the Word, are

under authority. There is deputy authority that God has set up in human society. That's very clear in Romans 13. I think we're all clear about that. So, we do things according to our conscience, but we should not just think about ourselves. We should also all think about each other. This is to think about other people, to care for them. You may feel nothing is going to happen. But these people feel we have to be more careful. So, think about them. Don't just think about yourself, think about other people. This is love, to really take care of others' feelings and take care of others' needs. I think between these two principles, this should help us a lot. Sorry, I just had that burden to say something. Amen.