

The House-to-House Church Life

Fellowship from Minoru Chen on September 12, 2021

Prayer

Lord, we do pray together in earnestness, even with a level of desperation, that in these days You will do a new thing in the church life in Your recovery. Lord, we pray for a revived church life, a genuine revival. Lord, for this we pray that the saints will determine to be vitalized God-men, to live in a vitalized way, and to overcome all kinds of deadness and lukewarmness, even barrenness. We pray through this kind of living, we can enter into a renewed practice of our meeting life, a meeting life that is uplifted, that is enriched, that is living and fresh, filled with content and impact. We pray church by church, that this will happen. Lord, continue to speak to us about the proper practice of the meeting life. Lord, stir us up. Speak to us and motivate us to put these things into practice. Lord, cover us with Your blood again this afternoon.

The Necessity of Revivals

As you heard in my prayer, dear saints, there is a very consistent, constant, deep, and heavy burden within me for a revived church life everywhere. I don't use this word *revive* lightly. I use this word very carefully and deliberately. Of course, it is in the Bible, the word of God. It is also in Brother Lee's ministry in his last years. And indeed, it is also in the history of the Lord's recovery. As I mentioned months ago, in various periods or occasions, revivals did take place, not only generally in the church history in the last 2000 years among God's people, but even in our own history.

In the last hundreds of years, there were times of revival because of

the necessity. What give place to this necessity? It is because even in the church and in the church life, we can suffer a kind of decline. To use a more serious word, a kind of degradation, a kind of failed and defeated situation. This happened in the Old Testament with the Israelites. For example, during the time of the judges the nation of Israel was not only in a general failed state of affairs, but they actually went through cycle after cycle of failures. That is why in those days God would raise up certain judges to lead them, to fight against their enemies, and to provide a temporary victory and stability amongst the Israelites. Their general condition was a poor one. They were in apostasy, which came from idolatry. But they were still God's people, so God would come, in His grace, and still take care of them, to revive them to go on.

History of Degradation

In the New Testament, the so-called church age, for sure it mirrors the Old Testament. The history of the church life really was not a glorious one. Yes, there were the glorious times and days and hours, but if you study the history of the church, it is primarily a history of decline and degradation of God's church being invaded, initially by the Judaic things and practices, and then by the secular philosophies of the Greeks like Gnosticism and others, and also by the wave of worldliness beginning to attack the church over time. Eventually, after Constantine legalized Christianity, there was a marriage between the church and the world. The church began to even baptize unsaved people into the so-called church, and there was the welcoming of all kinds of paganistic practices that were prevalent in the known world at that time. All this contributed to make the church something that was, according to Matthew 13, a great tree. Originally it was a little mustard seed, small in size, pure in nature, existing for the nourishment of man. But it was transmuted and transformed into a great tree, on which various kinds of evil birds were lodging. This was a prophecy of the Lord concerning the degradation of the church which ultimately became the Church of Rome, what we call the Roman Catholicism today.

This process began early on after the age of the church fathers and for the next 1000 years, what we now call the Dark Ages, it got so bad that eventually the whole pagan system was established. The pope became ascendant, the clergy-laity system was established, and the church became a human and secular and religious hierarchical structure that was filled with all manner of evil, idolatrous practices, and all kinds of leavened teachings of the world mixed up with the teachings of the Bible. Needless to say, at the same time, the practice of the church life that began in the early church in the very first century starting with the Jews in Jerusalem and later on amongst the Gentiles, lost the essence of the New Testament way of meeting, or the Christian way to meet according to God's economy. It was mingled with things of great rituals and all kinds of pagan practices. This was the degradation of the church.

Of course, God in His sovereignty began a process of restoration or recovery, starting from the time of reformation with Martin Luther and his contemporaries. At first, they wanted to call it a reformation because they wanted to reform the Catholic Church, and of course that was not to be. Being persecuted, they joined with some of the nations to start state churches. In Luther's case, with Germany, and under their protection, he eventually started the State Church of Germany, which today we call the Lutheran Church, and thus Protestantism began. So today we have mainly all these Protestant churches that started with the state churches. Today in Northern Europe, you still find the state churches in various countries, including the Anglican Church, the Church of England. Today, the head of the Anglican Church still is the queen. This is utterly against the scriptures. They however, continued to practice a lot of the things that the Church in Rome practiced. When the church split, it became the Western and the Eastern. The Eastern would be the Orthodox Church. Eventually there was even a third line, the line that would become the Orthodox Church that you see in Russia and some other places today. That is another main branch.

But the Lord must continue His recovery. After that time there were people who realized that it was not right or scriptural. Step by step, and age after age, there has been more study of the word of God, and more practice of the church according to the Lord's Word. Eventually there was the start of the so-called private churches. These were the people who were not with the state churches, and they become persecuted, and that is the source of today's denominations, the Baptist Church, the Presbyterian Church, etc., all of which are based on particular practices in the New Testament. However, those particular practices became the basis of their gathering of their so-called church, and they become denominations, and this is how denominations came into being. There are just many kinds of divisions.

The way we interpret the word in Revelation is that the harlot in chapter 17 of the book of Revelation, with its many daughters is Babylon. There are two Babylons; one is religious, and one is material. The material Babylon is Rome, and the religious Babylon is seen by the sign of this evil woman sitting on top of a beast, the Antichrist. I'm not going to get into all those kinds of prophecies, but the point is that Babylon the Great includes the mother, the harlot, and also the daughters, and you may say the mother is Catholicism and the daughters are all the various divisions and denominations in the Protestant church.

I know this does not sound good. Of course, you have to realize that I'm not talking about the believers; I'm not talking about the saints of the Lord; I'm not talking about all the brothers and sisters; I'm talking about the system. Systemically speaking, the Roman Catholic Church is a system, and this is Christendom, generally so-called, with Catholicism and Protestantism pictured in chapter 17.

Practice the Truths

Now, my fellowship in this Lord's Day Afternoon, is not touching the truth and matters like that. That is important and that is the basis of

how we live, how we serve, and how we meet, as the Lord's church, but I am not going to spend the time there. I thank the Lord that today, in his recovery, the Lord has blessed us very much by the rich truths that He has given to us. We have the word that is open and interpreted. That is a wonderful thing and that is our stand. We would not violate these truths and we would practice and live our life according to these truths. But these truths, the church being the pillar and base of it, need to be practiced, need to be lived out, need to be worked out, and need to become our testimony.

Church Meetings and God's Economy

Therefore, all these practices become important, which includes what we call the church life. And a big part of our church life is the church meetings. So, I hope, brothers and sisters, you will realize that when we talk about the meetings of the church, how to meet, how to return to God's way of meeting, from the beginning, I'm talking about from the early church. We are not just talking about outwardly the formalities or the programs of those meetings. No, we are talking about the principles that we see in the Bible on how believers should meet in a way that 1) there would be the building up of the Body of Christ; 2) there would be the proper testimony in our communities in the world today; and 3) in these meetings the Christian fellowship can prosper. We live by fellowship, the fellowship of the Father and of the Son and with one another. It is this fellowship of the Holy Spirit, or the flow of this Holy Spirit, that brings the divine life to us, dispenses the divine riches into us, supplies us with the divine life supply and the eternal life of God, and allows us to enjoy these riches and grow and work out something for the Lord. Not only so, in our church meetings each one of us can exhibit or exercise the gifts that the Lord has given to each member, the gift of grace. We all have been endowed with certain gifts from the Head, Christ, and those gifts are for us to use and exercise. The parable in Matthew 25 calls these talents for us to use for the edification of each other and also for the building up of the church. So, when we talk about the meetings of the church, it is something entirely connected to God's economy, God's purpose,

God's will, practically speaking, on the earth today.

The more I consider this matter, the more I'm burdened that we need a revival, a renewal, and a clear vision. It is very easy, if we don't have this view of the church meetings to degrade into something very common that fails to fulfill or achieve God's purpose. And worse yet, without a revival, our meetings will become a forum full of some programs, that eventually become nothing more than a routine which cannot work out all the things necessary for the building of the church.

Christians, over the centuries, have studied the word to find out exactly how they should meet. The matter of the church meetings is itself a line of recovery which has gone through a lot of phases and ages. Today, in terms of the meeting life of the believers in the church, we cannot say that we have exhausted or seen everything. But I would say that the Lord has already opened up a lot to us. The main thing we need today is for us to practice these things. To practice is not just to see them or appreciate them, but we must really put them into practice. This requires us to have the grace to shed, so to speak, and put aside the things or ways that are old and in the realm of religion. We also need to cast aside anything with the worldly elements and come back to the word of God in order to meet in a way that would satisfy Him.

Following the Principles of How to Meet

In these times of fellowship, I am devoting the time to discuss the church meetings, and more specifically, what we call the group meetings. If you have the time, I encourage you first to get this book called, *How to Meet*. I may have already suggested it last time. This book contains messages given by Witness Lee in 1969 and 1970. It's a classic book on the working principles of our meetings. It's not a manual or an instruction book, but it puts forth some guiding principles based on the word of God and from the Old Testament types, with a particular focus on the New Testament way or pattern. It is a very wonderful book. I took time to condense some of these

chapters into outlines with the ministry for the Labor Day conference with the Mid-Atlantic churches. There was a total of five meetings on Zoom which were recorded and are available to you.¹ I don't have the time today to get into everything I covered during that time, but these outlines and messages are very useful and essential for us to have the full view of our meeting life and our practice of church meetings. The book and original messages by Witness Lee are wonderful, and very rich. I am not trying to sell my own goods here, but the outlines and messages provide a condensed form of these matters and is a very good place to start.

Now, there are many other books and chapters in the ministry on the matter of meetings, including what we call the small group meetings. While the book, *How to Meet* has 23 chapters, there's another thin little book I would recommend called *The Practice of the Group Meetings*. The messages in this book are from Witness Lee's speaking in 1990, twenty years after he spoke the messages in *How to Meet*. There are a lot of materials available to us on these matters. Even so, I have the burden to speak to you regarding these matters again, to really ensure that we will all be on the same page. In Proverbs 29:18a it says, "Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint." This means that without a vision, people run wild or perish. This is the same in our meetings. You may think, what does it matter, I'll just meet whatever way I want to, after all this is a free country. That's true, this is a free country, and you can do what you want. But we are practicing to really follow the Bible and the biblical principles, even in this matter. I hope brothers, you would all have this kind of spirit of learning, as we get into these things.

Home-Church Movement

For many years now, even among Christians globally, there is something called the house-church or home-church movement. This

¹ Outlines and video/audio of the messages are available at <https://ldc21.machurches.org/>

movement has been around for quite some time and that harks back to the book of Acts, where the believers met from house to house. In the early days, there was no cathedral, church, or meeting halls—there was nothing. These were believers who were just saved and when they had a large number of people gathering, they had to meet in public venues like the temple. At that time, these were Jews in Jerusalem, and the temple was a common place where they could meet. But besides that, you may say that the Spirit invented a new way for the Christians to meet. A way that was different from the Jews who met in the synagogue or in the temple in Jerusalem.

People then were limited, and if you were to meet, you would meet in that way with the priests and ones that would direct the worship and handle all the practices of the Old Testament such as the killing of sacrifices, making offerings, and burning incense. These Old Testament practices were done away with when the Lord came, died, and resurrected, in effect turning the page from the Old Testament into the New Testament dispensation. Then, it was no longer the age of just the Jews. Now, this became the age of Jews and Gentiles.

The Gentiles were those who believed in Christ. These ones, as a community, became the church, the *ecclesia* or the assembly of the called-out ones. They were a new kind of people, a new species of people, a new community that the world had never seen before with God's life and God's Spirit. So, they began to meet, and even though they numbered in the thousands, they were in Jerusalem and had no places to meet. Instead, they met from house to house. And these houses were not like meeting halls, they were just small homes. They had to meet in smaller numbers, because how can a thousand people meet in a house? Not even a hundred people can fit in one house. They met in a small way. And the Spirit was sovereign in doing that, because there are a lot of advantages to that kind of meeting. I spoke to you just a couple of weeks ago about this kind of a small meeting and the advantages they afford to you. I will only bring forth some to remind you.

Advantages of Small Meetings

1. Freedom of the Spirit

One advantage is that the size of these small gatherings of believers causes these meetings to be less arranged, ordered, planned, ritualized, or programmed. These small situations are informal and it's in a home, not in some church building. By being in the homes, where the people live, it gives the Spirit a free way to work. The Spirit is in each one and there's no need for some priests to do the work. Compare the small group meetings in the homes to the Catholic or Protestant churches where you still have the clergy or the "professionals" doing all the work and the rest are just laymen. This way is not the New Testament way. In the New Testament every saint, every believer is a builder. Every saint is a priest and a serving one. There should be no clergy among us. There are no trained professionals among us. We all are priests, and we practice the universal priesthood. The smaller group situation allows the saints to do that. In a big meeting, with upwards of 3000 people, there is a need for ordering the meeting otherwise it will result in a big mess. In a large group, you need a program, you need to arrange the time, and you need some plan. But in this kind of small situation, is it purposely spontaneous and not prearranged. The meeting is free. I say free as in the freedom of the Spirit. It just gives the Holy Spirit the way to move in these meetings and to guide these meetings.

2. Knowing One Another

Another advantage of these smaller meetings in the homes is that it allows the saints to connect and to know one another. If you have a group of 3000 people, who are you going to know? You may not even know the person sitting right next to you. But with a dozen people or something like that, you will know everyone. This is how it should be, with the connection and the fellowship. It is relational based, and the small situations allow for relationships, fellowship, connections, and true community to take place. This is the beauty of meeting from house to house in smaller numbers.

3. Exercise of the Gifts

A third advantage can be seen in how every saved person is given the opportunity to exercise the gifts that the Lord has given to them. In Romans 12 and in First Corinthians 12, each member is given a gift according to their faith and according to the grace that they have received. Everyone has a little talent. When we exercise our talents, we minister Christ to one another and together we all participate in the building up of the church. Ephesians 4 says that the gifts that God has given to the church are the men who are gifts. Their work is actually to perfect the believers and it is the perfected saints that will actually carry out the work of the ministry for the building up of the Body of Christ. This takes place a lot in our meetings. It is not the meeting of the elders or the co-workers, it is the meeting of the church and the meeting of the saints where the building takes place. The smallness of the meeting allows all to participate and for everyone to function.

4. Mutuality

This kind of a smaller meeting is also much more intimate and that promotes mutuality in the church life and the "one-another" life because we know one another. Compared to a big meeting of 3000 people, we don't know who is sick or dead. It just one in a crowd of people and nobody knows. But with 10-12 people, if one is sick, we know and we pray and care for them. If there is one who lost their job, we can know and take care of them. In these smaller meetings, there will be a lot of mutuality, mutual care, mutual shepherding, mutual prayer, and mutual concern. A big meeting just won't do what we can do in this kind of smaller setting with fewer people.

5. Shepherding Care

A smaller situation is also a good place for people to come to hear the gospel and be saved. In the Christian way, they'll hold revival meetings in stadiums with tens of thousands of people. I wouldn't say that this practice is wrong, it does get people saved. The fact is, that in a lot of

those big meetings, the problem is not the message but it's the follow up. The people who got saved and revived, after that big meeting, the question is who cares for them? They all need a little place like a home where they can be cared for and be fed. They are like little sheep and lambs that need to be nourished and cherished. This kind of care cannot be addressed in a stadium or a big meeting. This is best taken care of in a smaller situation. That's normal. And so, for the gospel and for shepherding, and all of these matters we've touched on, the small situation or the small group meeting is advantageous, and this is the Spirit's invention. I didn't start this practice, you didn't start it, the believers in Acts just started to meet this way.

Paul's Charge to the Elders in Ephesus

I was reading, before we started the meeting today, in Chapter 20 of Acts where Paul—on his way to back to Jerusalem during his third journey— passed by Ephesus and he called for the elders to meet with him. What a touching chapter that is, where they met on the seashore and Paul spoke to these elders who represented the church. I'm not going to get too deep into that marvelous speaking, but Paul knowing that he would not see their faces again left them with this last charge that I want to touch on.

Two Kinds of Meetings

Paul spent about three years in Ephesus. You can read about that in Acts 19. He even had his own place there. He was preaching in the school of Tyrannus for two years, and before that he was there for many months. That church was raised up by Paul to be a strong model church. In the seven epistles in Revelation, the first one mentioned is the church in Ephesus in Asia Minor, today's Turkey. One of the things he said to the elders there was “how I did not withhold any of those things that are profitable by not declaring them to you and by not teaching you publicly and from house to house” (Acts 20:20).

“Publicly and from house to house” – do you see this? What you see, brothers and sisters, are two kinds of meetings. The first is the more

public meeting with lots of people. The second is a private meeting, a smaller meeting from house to house. Paul did both. He spoke publicly in the school of Tyrannus. That was how the word went out from there to all of Asia. It was a central, strategic port city in Asia Minor. I think that city had several thousands of people. It was the place where they had the temple for this Greek goddess called Diana. It was a very idolatrous kind of place. But there, the church was raised up by starting with twelve men – twelve men whom Paul baptized, who had received the baptism of John but not the baptism of the Spirit. It was through this that the church began and then became a sizable church. Paul spoke to them publicly in some bigger place and then also from house to house.

In the beginning of the New Testament age, the Spirit led the believers, the first group of Christians, to have two kinds of meetings. One is what we generally call the big meeting. Do not give up the big meetings. We need the big meetings, especially for ministering the word and sometimes for preaching the gospel. The big meetings are also what we call the congregational meetings. Besides this more public style of meeting, there are also the smaller meetings that are in the homes, from house to house, starting in Acts 2. House to house. Whereas these public meetings are not daily, the house-to-house meetings are absolutely day by day. Day by day, house to house. I forgot to mention another advantage of these small meetings, and that is that they are daily. They are not once a month, for sure not once a year. They are daily. In other words, this kind of small meetings is intricately related to our daily life, even our home life or our family life because we open our homes. Suddenly you do not have that barrier between your family life, marriage life, or home life in your private home and your church life in the meeting hall. That barrier could open the way for two personas, two persons. At home you are one way and out there you are another way. Here you are a bad person, there you just put on your “Sunday best” and have a show. You know what I am talking about. When the meeting is in the homes, when it is from house to house, that is not possible. Suddenly, the

daily life is brought in. That is another wonderful advantage.

Now, brothers and sisters, I am taking this a bit slowly because I do not want us to go, “Oh, we have something new. Let us go do it.” We need a vision. We need to see the big picture. We need to practice the meeting life properly, according to the scriptural revelation. It is not just a kind of freestyle, enthusiastic practice. It is really based on the word of God.

Day by Day and House to House

Day to day, house to house. We are not talking now about the big meetings. I already said that this does not mean we should sell the meeting hall. Do not get rid of the meeting hall, even in Atlanta. Because of a recent fire, they are now building a bigger meeting hall. We need that. We need a hall for certain purposes, when the whole church would gather for blending and the clustering of churches, for various kinds of conferences and trainings. We need meeting halls, so please do not rid of the meeting halls. Please do not lock up the meeting halls and say that we do not meet that way anymore. No, we have two kinds of meetings, like an airplane or a bird needs two wings to fly in a balanced way. But our burden here is not on the big meetings because we are already more used to those. Our real burden is for the Lord to recover the smaller, private, house to house, day to day church life with all its advantages. If we would practice this, we would have a new breakthrough and the Lord will revive our church life.

House to house really means that where there is a house, there is a meeting. So I would like to say, dear saints, your home is a meeting place, my home is a meeting place. In the US, the big thing is that each one can have a home. That is part of the American dream. But what is that home for? Is it just for your comfort, just for your family? No. If you have the view of God's economy, if you see the Scriptures, if you see the Spirit's sovereign leading, your home is for the church. But that is not just a statement: “My home is for the church.” No, your home should actually be open for the saints to meet in. That is the

house to house. Where there is the home of a believer, there should be a meeting there. We should think that way. We meet in smaller numbers in these homes. From time to time, maybe every Lord's Day and at other times, the church comes together in one place. That happens. First Corinthians 14:23 talks about that: "the whole church comes together in one place." But at other times, the church meets in smaller numbers in this way.

Under the leading of this ministry, this started in the '50s in Taiwan. But after a while, it sort of declined. In the '80s, Brother Lee went back to Taiwan to restore or recover this kind of meeting. When he came back, he also spoke to us and promoted this kind of smaller way of meeting. He said this kind of meeting, invented by the Spirit, is the top way, the super way, for us to meet. And I would say a big "Amen" to that. He was so burdened about these small meetings, whether you call them small group meetings, referring to the size, or you call them home meetings, referring to the venue or the place, we are talking about the same thing. He used these words variously to describe this kind of meeting. He said that these meetings are the foundation of the building up of the church. He said the big meetings *could* just be a display, a facade. But the actual happenings are in the small meetings. Therefore, they are the foundation, like the casings or the pilings in a building with a big, high, tall superstructure. Strong casings, strong pilings. So, in all our local churches, we have to build up the strong, vital, active group meetings or home meetings. He also said that these small meetings or small groups are the life pulse of the church. They are the foundation for the building up of the church. They are the life pulse of a local church. Thirdly, he said that the group gatherings are the lifeline of the so-called God-ordained way. The God-ordained way practice has these group meetings as the lifeline of that.

Building Up in Smaller Meetings

Let me just quickly, with the rest of the time, say something about this. Big meetings have the good result – I mean this positively – of stirring up people. How often have we gone to the big meetings and

gotten stirred up by the word, by the Spirit, and by the speaking? But, listen to this – actually, the big meetings do not build up so much. There is a difference. It is one thing to be stirred up or inspired. It is another thing to have the actual building up of the saints, one with another, in the Lord. The big meetings of thousands and so on in the early church were needed for the ministry of the word, for the preaching of the gospel by the apostles at that time. That was it. But the homes were where the believers were added. Do you remember in Acts 2 that those who were being saved were added together with them (v. 47)? It was not in the big meetings, but they were added practically, actually, to these homes, to the small gatherings. Do you see? Even the gaining of materials, the gaining of new believers, the bearing of fruit, occurs in the homes.

It is also in these homes that there is the actual building up. First Corinthians says that when we all function, when we all speak one to another, when we minister Christ to each other for mutual encouragement and consolation, we are being built up together. This morning, my little group in Irvine met on Zoom. We are not a big group; I think we have fewer than 20 people. We had the sweetest Lord's Table for about 45 minutes. After that, we began to speak to one another in the so-called prophesying meeting. Because the number was small, even in a question-and-answer way, we began to speak to one another. Oh, how rich that was. After that time, I felt I was edified. I was built up. I was comforted. I also spoke something, so I was exercising my gift as well, along with the others, to contribute to that time. The result was that we were all edified by the Lord very much by His word. So you see, it is automatically there. But if I were with 300, I would probably have been speaking, with everyone listening. That has its purpose, but it is not the same.

Eighty percent of the work of the practical building up of the church, using Brother Lee's percentage, takes place in the smaller meetings. Brothers, let us love the smaller meetings. Let us give our lives to build up these meetings. Let us participate in these meetings. We also must

spend time, therefore, to study, to find a way to improve these meetings, so that these meetings will not be dull, full of silence, dead, and routine. Rather, these small meetings would be rich, strong, fresh, living, attractive, and so on. Let us do that. I think we can do that. That is the challenge in front of us – to have a renewed or revived church life by renewing our small meetings.

Brother Lee said that if these small groups are successful, then the church will be strong. I would also say a big “Amen” to that from my experience. Here in Irvine, the church has a level of strength, not because there are so many people, but because the small groups have been built up to a certain degree – I would not say fully, but I would say, to a certain degree. It is just like a nation: the nation is as strong as the families, the homes, the nuclear families. It is not possible to have a strong country without strong homes. Strong homes will constitute strong communities. That is the basis of this strong nation. It is the same thing in the church. It is not possible to have a strong church with no small groups, with no small group meetings, or if the meetings in the small groups are not strong and are just weak. I will tell you, brothers and sisters, it will not work. Trust me.

In big meetings, you need some strong brothers, some speakers, someone who can do this or that. That is a few men doing most of the things. But when it is spread into the small situation, everyone is doing something. There is not the need for some big members doing everything. I am not talking about the feasts or the conferences or trainings. I am talking about the church life. So without this kind of small gathering, we actually deprive the saints of that opportunity to use their gifts to function, to fellowship, and to be built up.

Small Meeting as Gateways

And, of course, I consider these small meetings gateways. I talked about the New Jerusalem having lots of gates. The New Jerusalem in miniature is a local church. The local church should have many gates. You may ask me, “What are those gates?” Well, in a way each one of

us should be a gate. But practically speaking, I would say that the gates are these little gatherings. Each small gathering is a gate, the gateway into the church life. People may not come with you on Sunday to a big meeting. You know, I think we should be really careful when we contact new ones. The first thing we may say is, "Come to my church. Come next Sunday." No, it is better to slowly get this new one into your small situation. He would find a home there. He would belong there. That would be his gateway into the church life. For gaining the increase, it is difficult to gain people in a big meeting, even if in a big meeting we can preach the gospel. Sometimes at big meetings, we can even do a kind of reaping. But that is not the entire job. There needs to be a lot of care, a lot of shepherding, to bring people into the church life. I will end this way – this small group meeting is really the way, brothers and sisters, for us to mobilize all the saints to do the work of the ministry, to mobilize all the saints to function as living members of the Body of Christ. I long to see, in all your churches, that there would be a renewal of this.

Questions and Responses

Question 1: *How do we have group meetings and bring those in our community into these meetings to have real remaining fruit?*

Response: Somebody anticipated that question. Starting next week, I will begin to talk about how these small groups can be formed and can come together in an organic way. A lot of people ask this, and it's a legitimate question to consider what should be the size of a small group? I will talk about that as well based on our experience and based on the word. So, I am taking my time because I feel the vision regarding the church and the church meetings is most important before we just jump in and do this and do that. Some of us already are in groups and meet in groups, but I hope even through this, we would be renewed in our practice. So how to come together and how to start a small group? There's another matter that I did not talk about, and I want to make a distinction between just a small group and a small

group meeting. Yes, we're here talking about the meeting life - how a small group should meet; there's no doubt about that. But I also want to emphasize here that it's not just a meeting, it's the people. So, it's not just the small group meeting, but the small group itself and the saints in this group. The brother who just asked this question touches on this matter, and that is, who should meet together? How should we bring a new one into the group? How do we even bring a recovered saint into the group life? How do we bring the seeker right to this? We will talk about all these things in the coming days and step by step to help us practice these things. Sorry, I didn't answer your question, but I'm punting to next week. I'd say in the meantime, consider these things and begin to pray even for the Lord to build up the group church life where you are in an organic and a strong way.

Question 2: *What happens if people ask, "Can I come with you to where you meet on Sunday?" Do we just redirect them to a small group meeting?*

Response: I don't have a hard and fast answer simply because every case is different. There are some who would really benefit from a bigger meeting in the meeting hall or whatever the case may be. But I would myself tend to be more careful and conservative and take it in a progressive way. This is the right approach for new ones in almost everything anyway. It is better to go slow rather than bringing them right away to a big meeting, which is a bit strange for most people. The way we meet could cause some to be immediately offended or troubled or even stumbled by such a meeting, and we may lose them. We have seen this. People who are just open and then after they see the way we meet, they say, "Thanks, but no thanks. I'm your friend, but this is not for me." So, it's too quick. Now we're touching the whole matter of shepherding a new one into the church life, and especially some who have a certain religious background and stuff like that. I tend to advise saints not to be so quick, especially with someone you recently met even if they may demonstrate a certain level of enthusiasm and desire. Just be slow. It's better to invite them

to your home for a meal and for fellowship. To invite them with a few neighboring saints for a meal, and then if you have a group meeting, into that group meeting. To slowly expose them in a more ordinary and less threatening environment than a meeting hall. This is our home, a very private and neutral place that disarms people especially if you invite them into your home. You take them to “your church,” and suddenly they are on foreign ground. You understand? So be patient in caring for people. In gaining people we need to exercise patience even if they say, “Get me there. Get me there.” In some cases, maybe, but generally taking it step by step is much safer.

Question 3: *What is your experience with telling your coworkers or people you meet, “Hey, come over to my house for dinner and a Bible study!” I have friends or people who I know, and I think this is a blockage for me just to ask them if they want to come over to my house for dinner and a Bible study. I don't know how to say that. What is your experience?*

Response: So, let me introduce another little element that I have talked a lot about in prior months, and that's what I call the twos and threes. Do you remember that? Twos and threes? I didn't talk about it here, but this is an essential component in the practice of our group life of our groups. Next time I will talk about the numbers, the range of numbers, the size, and all that kind of stuff. But I will tell you, the twos and threes are key, which I call companions. I would distinguish that from a small group. These are companions, and these companions are even more mobile because they don't even need to meet in a home necessarily; they can meet at Starbucks or in the park. So, what am I getting at? Your question is how do we slowly bring them into our fellowship, to relate to them, to socialize with them in a very sanctified way? People are people. We're all human beings. That's why we say that even in the preaching of the gospel, it is good to start with the people who you know, the people that are in your life's circles like a colleague, a co-worker, a classmate, a schoolmate, relatives, families, the people you meet in the grocery checkout stand

or at 7-Eleven, etc. These are the people who are already in your little Jerusalem. That is always a good place to start because there's already a relationship and there's some knowledge already, so it's not totally strange. You are with them in the workplace, and then they exhibit some openness to hear more from you. Well, the first thing is for you, in the workplace, to talk to them more and maybe have lunch together or take him out to Starbucks. Have a little bit deeper conversation according to where they are. This person may be a seeker, a Christian, or this person may be an unsaved person, and you can begin to speak to them and pray for them and have these little appointments with them. And, even at the right moment, invite them to your home for dinner or for tea. This is very human, very social, yet very caring and normal. You know, they see your dog, they see your kids, and it's a very normal environment. Then, from there I mentioned the twos and threes. You must have a few companions of yours - maybe it's another couple right down the street - and then after some time, you can introduce that couple or some saints together and have a corporate dinner together. Maybe even in their house. You say, "I have a friend down the street, and they want us to go there to eat a meal and maybe read a little bit of the Bible." You don't even need to say, "Bible study." Don't make it so heavy. In this kind of very normal, personal, and intimate kind of a way, you just take them step by step. After some time, you may even bring them to your group with maybe eight or ten people or something like that for a group meeting. Dear brothers and sisters, I tell you that the slow way, the patient way, pays off. We have seen that the quick way does not work out so well most of the time.

Even our small group can get old. Even our small groups can get routine. Even our small group can die. It has happened. So, in the end, it still comes back to our personal vitality and burden. I will say more maybe next time. I want to make the distinction between the meetings of a small group and the group itself. I call this the group *life*, not group meetings. I want to build up in a church a group life. There's a life, a church life, in a small group of believers, and that is not just a

Friday night meeting in somebody's home. That is one part of it, and that's a very important part of that group life, but that group of saints care for one another. Some of our small groups go and do things as a group, they go on hikes or have a barbecue. The church life is a communal life. It's a divine society, a holy society. We're human beings. We're not just angels touching wings, you know what I mean? We are human beings, and this is our society. When a new one not only gets saved and hears the truth, they also have a desire for a home and a family life, which is what a church life should provide. A lot of elements of the family life or communal life is human with the divine things and the divine nature, but it is very human. So, we must learn how to do these things. You're opening up something very important and something that actually explains why we're lacking in fruit, in long-term remaining fruit, why people don't stick, and why they will not come into our little community. We will touch those things in the coming days. But I am here talking about an *environment* where these things can occur. So, just a meeting hall won't do it. We need the homes, the smaller numbers, the intimacy, the mutuality, and so on.

Question 4: *We feel the Lord is leading us according to the burden to take care of the college students. The church, however, has many needs and services, which some have wanted us to be involved in. We don't want to offend, but we don't want to be occupied by other burdens that may dilute our reason for migrating. What is the best way to handle this situation?*

Response: I will answer that question quite delicately. I know just based on the question where this question comes from, and I admire that. I hope all the migrants have this kind of spirit: *I'm migrating for the Lord's increase to gain people, whether it's college students or whatever*. That is wonderful, so don't lose that. That said, whether we move to a new church or whether we're in a church today, there is a church life and that church life is the basis for our labor, whether it's the campus labor or young people's labor, children's labor, whatever. The church is the basis for us to do all these things. We don't labor

outside of the church; we labor *within the church*. For that reason, even for our particular burden for campus or whatever, which is wonderful, we need a church life that will be the container of the blessings of people that we gain from the campus and students. We also need a church life to be our support. If you don't have a strong church life supporting your work, then your work will dry out. We don't do "a work"; we do a work *for the church* and *in the church*. In Irvine, our main work, if you will, is at the University of California in Irvine. For decades we've gained so many people. That's a work that we concentrate on and we have many families that are dedicated to that. My family is one of those families. For years we have been opening our homes, having small groups, full timers, and everything. But at the same time, we realize without a strong church, without a normal church, we have no basis, and we have no support, and this will not last. We should never do a churchless work, in other words. For that reason, even though we are primarily burdened for the campus, we must not lose sight of the church needs. Let's say the church has various services, even the Levitical practical services, I would say you can still offer yourself to sign up to do something. That's just part of your portfolio, so you still serve in something, and we can do that if we have this kind of vision. You may not dedicate that much time, and this particular service may not require so much time and that's good. You can dedicate more time to the gospel, and that's wonderful. But that touch, that link, that involvement in the church, even though it is in a minor or in a smaller way, will keep you in touch with the other saints in the church, with the other people in the church that are not where you are serving. This is not mutually exclusive, but it's a matter of a major and a minor depending on the time and depending on your schedule and burden. I would strongly suggest that you serve in something in the church life.