

## **The Group Life**

*Fellowship from Minoru Chen on September 19, 2021*

### **Prayer**

*Lord, continue to do the work of vitalizing in each and every one of us. O Lord, that we may be able to bear the burden to be Your loving overcomers today. Lord, to be Your pursuers and Your lovers to the uttermost. Lord, that You can have a way to bring forth a genuine renewing in all the churches where we are. O Lord, bring forth a genuine revival of the church life that is well pleasing to You. We look to You again for this afternoon, that only Your word would be spoken, not something from us, but something from You. Cleanse us and cover us again with Your prevailing blood.*

### **Group Life**

Thank the Lord for these times that He affords us to have this kind of fellowship. Today we continue the fellowship concerning the groups. I call it the group life. We're not yet talking about group meetings, though we will get there. We have spent the past two meetings painting the background, if you will, fellowshiping about why we're so burdened to build up a church life, practically speaking, based on groups of varying sizes and so forth. The point being, not just meeting in a larger way as the whole church in a meeting hall or with some larger number, but a kind of breaking down into a small group size. I hope all the Scriptures that we have brought concerning the history of the church over the last two thousand years, and even of course the very strong burden in the ministry since the 80s and into the 90s, would have made an impression upon us that this is not just something we like to talk about. It's not something we like to do because it's novel. There is an intrinsic burden here related to our

practice of the church life, particularly nowadays, especially in these GTCA cities. Our burden is that the Lord would build up a certain kind of model church life, meaning a church life according to the way God has ordained, not only in terms of the way we meet and the way we structure things, but particularly in regard to a vitalized, revived, renewed, richer, stronger, and fresher church life where we are. This is important to the strength in the Lord's recovery, and the testimony of the Lord's recovery in our different places. Surely, this is also crucial to the kind of church life that really facilitates the functioning of the saints, the blending of the brothers and sisters, and the building up of the Body of Christ. We have talked about the different advantages and even the commission of this group church life, and I hope you would go back to those things and be deeply impressed by them.

Today we're going to get into the formation of these groups. This is really not an easy subject to touch, because if we're not careful we could take this as some formula, or take this as some kind of a way, or as the only way to do something. In other words, we could become legal about these things. We could also do something here in a natural or worldly fashion, which would be counterproductive to what we're trying to do. I'm before the Lord so that this fellowship, or the way I speak, would not cause misunderstandings, and also on your side of listening, that there wouldn't be misunderstandings, but that we would receive these things and even practice these things in the way of prayer, with the Spirit, and above all else, through fellowship. I hope we would all be very exercised in this way and not take these things as we sometimes have in the past, taking something and sort of running with it (perhaps without adequate prayer, Spirit or fellowship) and cause problems here and there.

### **New Persons Walking in the New Way**

One more thing before I start here, which is parallel to what we're talking about concerning groups, meetings, and churching in groups. Very much on my heart is this matter of becoming vitalized people, or the burden for vitality. I am not going to talk much about it today, but

I am going to always remind us of this because you can even be given a roadmap of sorts, how to go from point A to point B, or a GPS to help us to go to a certain place, but it is not just that. The foremost thing in these practices is that they are practiced by a certain kind of person. Early in the 1980s, after Brother Lee went back to Taiwan to study the church's situation, he promoted the practice of what at that time he called the *new way* (formally he used the term the *God ordained way*). That is, that we need to drop the old way of churching, or meeting, and we need to adopt a *new way*. Somebody coined this term, but Brother Lee has spoken of it, saying that a new way can only be taken or adopted by new persons. The exact Chinese translation is "a new person walks the new way." The emphasis here is not just the way. Of course that's wonderful, but the emphasis is always on the person. If we are old people—I don't mean physically old—if we are spiritually old people, dead people, lukewarm people, non-vital people—we can have the best way given to us and it won't work. What makes any kind of way work, including the God ordained way, is the person. The person who takes that way makes the way work.

### **Personal Vitality**

This burden in me is just so heavy these days; the personal, I use this word in particular, the personal vitalization, or the personal vitality of every brother and sister. We know the word vital. We have spoken many times that it means two things. Number one, it means to be a living believer rather than a dead believer, as living as the Lord is living. In John 14:19 the Lord says, "because I live, you also shall live." Of course, this is a very deep verse, but in this context, I think it is applicable as the Lord is living. He also said in Revelation 1:18, "[I am] the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever, and I have the keys of death and of Hades." Here is the One who has overcome death and Hades, He now holds those keys. He was put to death, but death could not hold Him as the Prince of life, as the resurrection. He overcame death, He came out of death in resurrection. He seized the keys, and He has power over death. Such a One today is the life-giving Spirit. Such a One today is even the

sevenfold intensified Spirit of life and of power. Such a One today is absolutely living in us, even mingled in our spirit. What is it to be vital today? To be vital simply means that we live with Him, we live in Him, we live one with Him, we live unto Him, and we live for Him.

Because God is the living One in the universe, Brother Lee said we need to condemn the deadness, the dead condition of Sardis. Sardis was a church that had a name it was living, but actually it was dead. Sardis was a church that started out good but didn't complete its works, didn't complete what it started out with. Even whatever they had was about to die. It's not only a dead church, but a dying church. The condition of the church was always dying. It's like you're on a deathbed, you're still breathing laboriously, but you are actually dying. Do you see the point? You're not fully dead, but you are dying. That is definitely a non-vital situation, and we should not be like that. The churches in the Lord's recovery should be living, as the Lord is living. We are the house of God, the church of the living God. Livingness should be a sign of the Lord's presence.

The first attribute of the one true God in this universe is that this God is one. He is triune, He is Father, Son, and Spirit, but He is one God. The second important attribute of this God is that this God is living. Our God is living, He is a God of life, and He cannot tolerate, He is anti, He has nothing to do with, something called death. He put man in front of the tree of life to receive Him into Himself as his life and life supply and everything. But there was another tree next to it called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and after man partook of that tree what was the result? Man died. Man not only fell, but man actually died. Sin is the procedure, the means of the satanic stratagem to destroy man, to make man no good for Lord's purpose. But the result of that procedure, of that sin, is death. Through sin, death came into the world.

### **Becoming Intensely Living and Active**

The ultimate intention of Satan is to bring death to man, so that God

would have no man to use to express Himself through, to mingle with. So, the last enemy in the Bible is death, which will be cast, along with Satan, into the lake of fire after the one thousand years, the millennium. And so today, brothers and sisters, in the Lord's recovery, in the church life, we must be living. And, not just living—I quote the ministry—but *intensely living*, because the Spirit today is sevenfold intensified to overcome the deadness of the traditional church, which has become dead with only a name that is living.

The other side of the meaning of being vital, brothers and sisters, is to be active. Not just living, not just alive, but active. Active means you're not passive; active means you're energized. Active means you're always animated within. You're always stimulated within to do something. You're not sitting there. You are not in a permanently relaxed mode. You're not lying in bed all the time. You are full of energy, of course from the right source. And the source to do things for the Lord, to serve the Lord, is God Himself. We need power to overcome our environment, the sufferings, the adversities, and the other things that come our way. And, in the end, we even need power to overcome all the degradation in Christendom. To overcome all these things takes strength; it takes power. And for that, we need to be vital people, people with power, people with strength, people who can carry out the things of God's economy, people who can advance God's move on the earth. We need to be such people. This is not for a few brothers or a few sisters. No, this should be every one of us, every small potato, every small member of the Body. The whole clergy-laity system is built around the premise that most believers are no good; that they can't do anything. They have not gone to seminary. So, you need this group of clergymen, you call them priests or pastors or fathers, you call them whatever you call them, as the professionals. This is what kills the Body. This is what Satan does to prevent the building up of the Body, which is built up by perfected saints, not the big gifts. The big gifts given to the Body do the work of equipping and furnishing every single believer, and these perfected believers are the ones who do the direct building work of God.

You and I, as just brothers and sisters, we're not laymen. No, we are living, functioning, normal brothers and sisters, members in the Body. But we need to be in a vitalized state to serve, to preach the gospel, to nurture new ones, to shepherd the saints, to speak for the Lord in the meetings, and to do so many things to build up the church. If you're not vital, how can you do it? We have all kinds of things in life and in our environment that bombard us, all kinds of things that seek to wear us out, to tire us out so we couldn't do anything for the Lord. To overcome all of these things requires power and energy, vitality. Vitality. Dear brothers and sisters, let us not forget this—as we are getting into the matter of groups to work out the God ordained way—that we would be vital people.

## **How To Be Vital**

### **1. Through an Intimate Fellowship with the Lord**

These days, I'm speaking about these things here and there. So, I hope there's a way you can access some of these things. I can list right now, very simply, the five things that will cause us to be vital. Now consider that this has to be personal. No one can get vital for you. You have to be vitalized yourself; me too. Number one—this is all from the ministry—we are made vital through an intimate and thorough fellowship with the Lord. We are made vital through the absolute, clear, and thorough fellowship with the Lord, continuously. This is clear. If we don't have constant fellowship with the Lord, if we don't abide in the vine as the branches, there will be no life coming our way, there will be no Spirit dispensed into us, there will be no life supply and life energy given to us, and we cannot be living. We must remain in constant fellowship with the Lord, with nothing between. It's a big subject, but brothers and sisters, there's no other way but to contact the Lord and to fellowship with the Lord, not just a little in our morning revival but during the day, even sometimes spending longer periods of time to be with the Lord.

## **2. Through Thorough Confession**

Number two, we're made vital through thorough confession. This is very important. I'm working on a few outlines just on confession. I feel this is something we don't talk about enough among us. We don't lead and guide the saints enough on how to live a life of confession. Do you know Augustine? So-called St. Augustine who had a famous book called *Confessions* that talks about his experience of making confessions. Our sins, our transgressions, our failures, defects, mistakes, and wrongdoings—they are plentiful. Just like washing your hands, you need to do it [to confess] many times a day. We get defiled by sin. We get unclean by being in the world. Sometimes things are manifested; some things are hidden. Sometimes, we offend the Lord, transgress the Lord's holiness and righteousness. Sometimes we offend man. We need to confess our sins; this is a key to becoming a vital person.

## **3. Through Thorough Consecration**

Number three, we're made vital through thorough consecration of ourselves, with everything, to the Lord. We need to consecrate, as our brother suggests, every hour. At the top of the hour, we should consecrate ourselves again. We should always hand ourselves over as one who lives to the Lord. This kind of fresh consecration causes us to be vital. Consecration is not consecrating to do something for the Lord, but to consecrate ourselves to allow Him to do something in us, to enliven us, to burn within us, and to work through us.

## **4. Through Much and Thorough Prayer**

Number four, we're made vital through much and thorough prayer. Pray without ceasing. That's how you remain vital. Unceasingly pray, and I would even say, be desperate in our prayer, not praying some loose prayers, some easy prayers, some kind of common prayer, saying something at the dining table, but a kind of desperate prayer. Much and thorough prayer. Personally. This is the way to vitality.

## **5. Through the Infilling and Outpouring of the Spirit**

Finally, we're made vital through the infilling and outpouring of the Spirit. We need to be filled with this Spirit. Ephesians 5:18 says, "Be not drunk with wine, in which is dissoluteness, but be filled in spirit." This Spirit is both the essential Spirit of life and the economical Spirit of power. We need to not be drunk with so many things in the world. We need to drink this Spirit. We have been baptized into the Spirit to drink the Spirit. We need to drink and be soaked and be permeated with such a Spirit. This Spirit is the factor, the unique factor, of our vitality.

We have mentioned these things before, but I just feel I need to keep repeating them, dear ones. In whatever church you're in, in one of these GTCA cities, if we really mean business that the Lord would do something fresh, something new, something prevailing in our church, whether it's a bigger church or a smaller church, it doesn't matter—each one of us has to pay a price, has to make a decision, to become a vital person. These are the wonderful ways. All these ways involve a price. All involve time. You need to budget your time. All this includes inconveniencing ourselves in certain things, but the result is something called vitality. When we become a vital person, we can do these things and practice these things, in the groups, in the church life, in taking care of people, and all of these things in a vital way.

One last thing, this vitality is not just for a meeting, for a few minutes, or for a few days. I'm talking about a kind of durable vitality, if I can use that word, an enduring vitality day in, and day out. You may not be jumping up and down in that kind of way, but within you is like white hot coals. You don't even see a flame, but the temperature is higher than when there is a flame. Inside you, there is a vital person. Nothing can hold you down. You're irrepressible. Nothing can kill you because you're full of resurrection. Let us be those ones, dear saints, shall we? We can. Let us be today's overcomers in the Lord.



## **SMALL GROUPS**

### **Small for Function**

Now we come to the matter of the small groups. First of all, when we talk about a small group, how small is it? How many people? Well, the simple answer is that I have no answer. I'm not trying to dodge the bullet; I'm not trying to be evasive. From our learning, and from our experience, once we put a number down, it could become something legal. That's something we don't want. However, even though I cannot tell you "This is the ideal number for a small group," we can certainly talk about a range of numbers. Even with that range, we have to be very careful not to take it legally.

You remember in my previous series of fellowship with you, I was very much emphasizing the twos and threes. Matthew 18:20 says, "For where there are two or three gathered into My name, there am I in their midst." So don't forget that. That, two or three, actually is still the smallest unit, operating unit, in the church. That's something human. That's something even in God's creation. Even in human society, two or three is the smallest unit. Although here I am not specifically talking about twos and threes. The twos and threes are very important. In fact, we need the twos and threes to operate these small groups, as we will see in the coming days. The twos and threes operate, function, within the context of the groups in the church.

Sometimes I use the range from six to twelve. I have no scriptural basis to tell you except that the number twelve happens to be the number of disciples the Lord had. There were others, but the Lord chose twelve, and those twelve are somewhat like a small group. Elsewhere, sometimes people use eight to fifteen. We will talk later about the multiplication of the small groups, one group becoming two. The point is, when a group gets bigger than that, it loses the advantages of a small number. It loses the beauty and the functionality of why we have a small group. I'll say this, when you start to have two rows of saints, you're getting big. In a living room, okay, a small group should be a

place where everyone is front row. Everyone is needed. Everyone is functioning. Now maybe not physically exactly, everyone in the front row. In Europe, you have these tiny little apartments, and they sometimes have to have two rows. You get my point, though.

My point is when it gets to a size where you start to have a kind of front and back row situation, in which some are more engaged and participatory and others just kind of spectating and passive, you lose the nature and the purpose of a small group. I like to say that when you get to twelve or fifteen, you should start thinking about subdividing or multiplying. You can have five or six, or thereabouts, six to eight. That would be a very good place to start. That is not too small. Six is not too small. There's a couple with a few singles, or two couples with a couple of singles. You don't need to be big at all. The whole point is small. Remember that is why we use the word small, because it's small. The beauty is in the smallness.

### **Small for Multiplication**

However, these groups are also places where we gain people, new ones, recovering dormant saints. These groups should grow. When they grow to certain size, we need to do something to make them small again so they could split, like a cell. That's how cells multiply, and that's how our body becomes bigger and grows. A small group is like at a cellular level; we need to keep multiplying. I hope we have this kind of concept. Don't think you should have a group that will last until Jesus comes. That's not right. Don't think that way. A small group should always be growing and multiplying and growing and multiplying. That's how the church grows. I really mean that. When the groups in the church grow, that church is automatically growing. Logical, isn't it? Very logical.

I told saints before that we should actually have two ways of counting our membership in the local church. Number one is the Lord's Day attendance. By and large, that's what we do. That's one way. There should be another way of counting, and that is by small group

attendance. Not just Lord's Day attendance, but small group attendance. I like to say here that in an ideal, normal situation, the small group attendance should be larger than the Lord's Day attendance. That is the right situation, the right kind of condition. In small groups, we have lots of new ones, a lot of people on their way into the church life. There's nothing wrong even if the small group attendance is substantially larger than the Lord's Day. That is a very correct situation.

Today in the old way, we have more people in Lord's Day meetings than in the group meetings. That means we pay more attention to Lord's Day morning than to the daily house-to-house, day-to-day church life. Do you see the point? I hope we can have a change in our concept. This is why the group meetings are so important, the house-to-house, day-to-day church life is experienced in the group gatherings. There should be a lot more people in the small groups. Thank the Lord, today, in many churches that is the case, but still in so many churches, it is the opposite. There's a conceptual change we need to make, and we need to make a practical change. Build up the small groups. That's the way to build up the church. Grow the small groups in the number of attendees and in the number of groups, and the church life will grow.

We talked about how such groups come together. Well, today, it's kind of challenging because in many churches, there are existing groups. There are small groups here and there. And it's difficult and could be disruptive to say, "Okay, we will cancel all the groups, we will dismantle all the groups and start all over again." If the saints are open and ready to do that, that's one thing. But chances are, it won't be so easy and simple. So what do we do? We need to respect some of these groups where the saints want to meet together, where they are still burdened and so on. While doing that, we would form or start new groups. Some of these new groups will be composed of some people in the old groups that have a burden. They might be composed of some people that have no groups at all (like the new migrants to your

city, that are not in any groups, who are hoping to be in new groups). Already in their hands, these ones may have new ones that they have saved and baptized. They are ready to form a new group. So there are multiple situations in different places.

We need to be very careful and not cause problems. This is actually where there needs to be some involvement of the leading brothers and the elders. Not to organize, not to dictate, but to fellowship and help the different situations according to their oversight and insight of the saints' situations in different parts of the city, in different age groups, with different burdens. All these factors help in the formation of a small group.

## **FORMING THE GROUPS**

### **Beginning with Prayer**

Now, let me just give you some principles to go by. Absolutely, whatever group that is formed should be brought together, should be started, by the way of prayer. We're not here trying to organize things and put people here or there, to arrange things. I'm not saying that there's no place for some arrangement through fellowship; I'm not saying that. But it should be *started* by prayer.

I hope even existing groups today will go back to pray. And as they pray, along with all the church, the Lord may lead them. The Lord may say: *You have been like this for too long. There's no fruit that you've born, there's no increase. You need to change.* The Lord may say that, but it comes out of prayer. Some of us have a burden in our area or in our district, wherever we are in the city, to start a new group for our neighborhood. Well, start with prayer. You, me, personally, let's start with prayer. Let's honor the Lord. Not just plunge in and start carving out things and arranging things. Let us pray.

Now, I don't mean pray forever and do nothing, but go by *the way* of prayer, we should *first* pray. Basically, saints in the Lord and in the

church, we do everything by prayer. That is the only right thing to do. I hope you will pray very much, and this prayer will make you vital. Let us earnestly pray to the Lord, for the start of the group life, in *my* church, in *your* church. Let the whole church be brought into this burden. And I hope the elders would take the lead to firstly *pray*, not firstly arrange, not firstly do something. But spend some time for the whole church to be brought into this burden and begin to earnestly pray. Then, this will bring forth the blessing of the Lord. And this will give the Holy Spirit the way to work and move among us.

### **Allowing God to Blend the Body**

“God has blended the body together” (1 Cor. 12:24). You didn't blend it together; I didn't blend it together. God blended the body together. And He placed the members in the body as He willed. This includes these groups; they're God's placement. So let us trust in God, let us pray and give the Lord the way. Pray “Lord, we're burdened for this. Lord, I'm burdened even for a new group in my area; I'm burdened for this.” If you pray, the Lord will lead, but don't *just* pray.

At a certain point, you have to take action according to the Lord's speaking and also according to fellowship. Secondly, I'm hearing more talk not only about starting a new group, but even in reviving an old group. The same principles hold. We should find someone according to the Lord's leading. Suppose you are vitalized, you're a vital person, and you feel burdened for the Lord's increase in your locality, and you feel burdened to care for people and to have a group life. As the Lord leads, He may lead you to someone, or put some saint in your heart. Or it could be a couple, or a family. You may have heard something; you may have contacted someone. Through all of that, you have a feeling.

My whole point is—don't sit there and be selective or choosy according to your concept: “I like that brother; I want him in my group,” or “I like that couple; they should be with us and nobody else.” Don't exercise your natural preference and selection. Just pray and let

the Lord work. We have had many experiences in which the Lord worked in both parties. In many things there's an echo, a deep calling unto deep; it is the Lord leading us. You just pray and follow the Lord's leading. But start with one—another brother, another saint, or another couple, or something like this. If you are burdened, if you have the Lord's leading, you just seek out some fellowship, contact the person, pray for that person. And see how the Lord would do something.

### **Blend Through Fellowship and Prayer**

And thirdly, when we find one or two or three or four, this small number of saints should start again to pray. You may come together for a meal at the right time and invite some of these ones together. Don't start with arranging things. Start with fellowship. In fact, you should have had some fellowship already, and now you come together to have even more intimate fellowship. This more intimate fellowship is to come together to know one another. You may not know each other that well, but this is the time where you have some more intimate fellowship. We can call it blending together. The best way to blend is still by prayer. So have fellowship and prayer, much and thorough fellowship and much and thorough prayer. Do this in a more intimate way, in your home, in smaller numbers. You can really devote the time to do all these things thoroughly.

I would say, in the start, you don't need to decide the content of this meeting, or what you should read. Even that can wait a little bit. Start with fellowship and prayer. And this fellowship and prayer should touch not only you yourselves but should begin to touch the Lord's burden. The Lord's burden could be a campus and students, or it could be for people in your community or neighborhood, or for other couples. It could be a burden for some dormant or backslidden saints that you all know. It could be for all kinds of things.

Because you're already praying, this group has a particular commission. This group does not gather just to be a group and just to

have Friday night meetings and enjoy one another and have a meal together. No, the group exists to function as an operating unit to preach the gospel and to shepherd the saints. It should function as a gateway to bring people into the church life. It should function as a little family, a family for people to come home to. It is not the church, the whole church, but it is a small part of the church that is a gateway into the church life and into the Lord. So, start that way and pray that way.

### **Other Considerations**

Another point is that there are different factors to consider. Number one is geography. These are not rigid factors; we are always flexible, but these are things to be considered, such as where you live in the city. Where I am in Irvine, just logically and conveniently, our groups are with people who live close by. Not in a rigid way, not in a legal way, but generally. Number two, sometimes the matter of age plays a role. Sometimes the particular burden plays a role. For example, a burden for college aged, new ones, or students, or full timers. Sometimes a group has a burden for families with children, to gain even more family units for the church as a result of the group, and so on. All this should be part of the consideration, but not be the only consideration. The whole point is that we should not do things so rigidly, and we should not do things so narrowly. We should not do things just to satisfy our preference, but we should have a degree of flexibility and also a degree of generality in all of this. In time, things will become more and more clear. For example, how a group should function and what its burden would be will become clearer. So, I am just giving you some principles for us to consider when we start a group.

Now, I mentioned earlier that in all of this, the starting point should be the saints. It should be *a* saint actually, and then it should spread to the saints, but it is very important in every church that the leading brothers really take the lead in this matter. This is a huge mountain to climb, and therefore, it takes the whole church to be burdened about

the matter. And it requires the leading brothers to take the lead to shepherd and to build up this matter over time. Don't think, we choose a date, and on that day, boom, the church will have ten groups. It doesn't happen that way. You know, life is messy. Things happen here, and something happens there. It is better for us to just have more prayer and fellowship and have a good solid beginning. Give it some time.

Many years ago, when we started this kind of group life in earnest where I am in Irvine, California, it really took us over a year from beginning to end until the whole church kind of fell into place. We have a bigger church, but still, it took us a year until all the saints found themselves in the groups here and there. So, I'm not even telling you that it takes a year; I'm just saying take the time to pray and to build this up in a good way.

### **Questions and Responses**

Okay, I think it's almost the top of the hour; I had better stop here. I invite your questions. I'm sure there are some on this matter. I may have more to say next time, but I will just stop here for now. While you're waiting and coming up with your questions, remember, number one, we're building up the church. It's not that I'm building up my group to be something. No, we're building up the church. The group is the smaller way for us to actualize, to make practical, this building up. Number two, these groups are a constant labor. We don't arrive the first day. No, just have the idea that we need to build. We need to labor; we need to work together so that the commission of the small groups can be carried out. The meetings of the group, which I have not touched, are a big part of this group life, but they're not everything. The *people* are everything, and the *people* that we want are everything. The meeting only helps us to bring the people together once a week or whatever the case may be. We'll talk about those details more later.



**Question 1:** Amen. First, I would just like to say thank you brother Minoru. I feel like when you're speaking, there's just a strong amen in my being that this is exactly what we need to hear. And it's so helpful. So praise the Lord for this speaking! My question, I guess it's in regard to the matter of multiplying. I was wondering if you can speak a little more to that, and especially a little more practically with the view of some couples or saints that are able to bear the responsibility of the small group, and how to multiply with that in view?

**Response 1:** So again, please don't take my answer in a legal way. So let me say something as a principle, then I will say something of my experience. Before I even answer that question, in an operating group, let's say you have a group going, I would suggest that every year the whole group would evaluate that group. Evaluate what you should do the next year. So the group does not just go on and on and on and on. Just like the church, every year the elders need to reevaluate everything. It is like a business; we're enterprising. We always have to evaluate and learn and improve the situation. So even in a group, there should be this kind of a spirit. It is not just a snapshot, and we'll always be like that. No, there's a constant evolution, a constant growth. Growth means always changing and evolving; the same thing with our groups, okay.

So, the multiplication of a group when it gets to a certain size is just a part of this evolution. It is something spontaneous, something organic, that a cell would split, so to speak, to generate more cells and to make the body grow. So I would say that number one, the number dictates when the group is getting too big. So if you have fifteen people, you really should be praying and considering how to make the group become two groups. And then they will grow again and so forth. So number is an important factor.

Number two, take it in the right way, the leadership in a group is very important. There have to be pillars, burden bearers, in every group. There's nothing official, like you're some coordinator or group leader;

there's no such thing. But, some in reality have to be the nucleus or the core. And these ones may be more burdened so that a group can thrive, the group can go on. This is one thing—the leadership. A church without the proper leadership cannot thrive and be sustained. The proper leadership is needed.

The third thing, and this is also the burden, there may be a change of burden or acquisition of different burdens that this group comes to, in a good way, in a very positive way. I don't mean there's infighting or that kind of thing. I'm just saying there's a furtherance, a development of some other burdens. Say, for example, this group now has half a dozen new ones. Let's say over time, the Lord blesses, and now it just makes sense that three of these new ones go with some and three of these new ones go with some others. This will enable more care to be rendered by having two groups, and they can even gain more people by having two groups. So that becomes another kind of a factor. Needless to say, you have people moving in and moving out, and the church life is changing. This will also have an impact on the groups. So you need to consider these things.

Last but not least, don't do anything suddenly. Okay? And never break up into groups because of a fallout, "I can't stand you; you cannot stand me." Don't have a divorce. Okay? It's like in the church, you don't divorce the church. We are just one church; this is the Lord's limitation and salvation. We have to listen to and learn the same lessons. But there are other situations that may come into play, factors we should consider. But don't do anything quickly or in a rush. It's always good to have some time to fellowship and evaluate regarding what to do. My testimony with my wife, we have had this kind of group for decades, here and there. In our home particularly. We mainly focus on students, full timers, and people involved with a campus; that's just our thing, if you will, our burden. We started with a view to always multiply. So we have a particular burden to have new couples join us, with a view that they will stay with us for a year or two, be trained, and be perfected. At a certain time, they will take

some, and they will have some others, and they will start their group. I will tell you; this has happened multiple times. So I know it works. But it has to be very purposeful. It doesn't happen "willy-nilly." You have to have a burden; you have to have a view to perfect these younger couples. And now some of them have thriving groups. This is not recent; this is years ago. I can testify that this works. But it always takes an enterprising spirit, and it always requires a kind of laboring to build it up.

**Question 2:** *Minoru, we have three questions that have been submitted in the chat. One of them is related to what you're talking about right now. And the question is: what about when you are in a large group of about 15? But it seems you don't have sufficient pillars to multiply. And it doesn't seem to change after a year or two.*

**Response 2:** I think there's no magic solution for sure. I would suggest that you really fellowship with the leading brothers and others, who would have more of an overview of the whole church, and your particular situation, and consider whether there is another way. Sometimes all kinds of things happen. For example, two groups, together, become three groups. This has happened a lot. Not by a kind of a formula, but organically it has sometimes worked out that way. Two groups, and then we have a third group. And then because that third group has some good pillars or leaders, and in these other two groups, it's a bit weak, so the third group supplies the "leaders" and the two groups have different strengths and weaknesses. Somehow it works out that there can be a kind of a distribution of riches, of assets, to make three groups happen. Now you say, "Oh, this sounds so artificial or so humanly engineered." Well, it depends; it depends. If we do it in a way of prayer, in a spiritual way, and through much fellowship, it will work out in a good way. So, it all depends. Fellowship.

**Question 3:** *That's a good thought about two groups joining together to make three. Here's another question, a very practical question. How*

*can we fellowship without it being gossip? A new one among us was bothered that the saints knew about her situation when she hadn't talked to them about it.*

**Response 3:** Well, all I can say is, again, the principle in the church life, brothers, is we have to all be very restricted and limited by the inner life, especially concerning talk. Not just in the group setting, but in everything, to just not gossip, for sure, and definitely not to spread rumors, nor even to not talk too much. Many good things are spoiled by premature talking. They're not wrong, and they're not bad. But they are premature, they're not at the right time with the right people. And they spoil the whole thing. So we're not looking for the secret; that's not the point. The point is we need to exercise common sense. We need to follow the Spirit. We also need to be more self-aware in these things. Everything we do, brothers and sisters, must be for profit and not to stumble anyone. Anything we do must be for the profit of the church and for the saints. So be very exercised in this, to not stumble people. When the moment is ready, at the right time with the right people at the right occasion, we can let more know about what we're doing.

**Question 4:** *Amen. Okay, here's another one, also quite practical. Two other families in mind have been taking care of another family that came to the church almost ten years ago. However, these saints they have been taking care of never share anything from the word or the ministry with us. They enjoy coming to the meeting and enjoy singing, but when it comes to sharing anything from the word, they go quiet. We feel desperate and have tried different things to get their mouths open. But at this time, we don't know what else to do. Any fellowship on this?*

**Response 4:** Well, this is where prayer for sure is very important. It sounds like this couple that these two families have been working on for ten years is overdue for some particular help, to bring them through to another level at the right time. I need to have another kind

of training with us that is called “progressive shepherding.” Shepherding is not “Oh, I got this dream” or “I’ve got that burden.” Shepherding is progressive. The proper shepherding, to turn one from a lamb to a sheep, to lead some to follow the ways, the footsteps, of the flock, is a progressive thing. And many of us don’t know this so we don’t know what to do next. So that is one thing. In other words, we must see progress and when there is no progress we have to fellowship and consider why. I don’t know whether you have done that or not. You should actually tell me the answer, not me tell you the answer. Why? You have to study. You may need to talk to some others who may know this couple and find out. I don’t know what the reason may be. They may be short of some particular help. The other thing is that we need to learn some skills. Skill is important—spiritual skills and human skills are important. You need some skill, the right skill to help the person to go on. They may be stuck in something, in their concept maybe about the spiritual things. Maybe they’re stuck in not exercising their spirit and they need a breakthrough in that matter. Or maybe they need, frankly, another environment besides these two couples. Ten years is a long time. I would say a change is overdue. So what you cannot do, some others may be able to do. The environment maybe has become old, too comfortable, and thus a difficult one to help them in. So maybe a new situation is necessary. So study these things and consider these things.

**Question 5:** *Okay, there’s another question that was asked. And I think what it gets at is related some to this matter of skill. A sister was concerned that she had brought some new ones and then one of the sisters in the group began talking about the vaccine, how she didn’t believe in it, and it became a problem. And this sister also seemed to insist that the new ones use the Recovery Version. And both of these matters together turned off these new ones.*

**Response 5:** So here, again, yes, is the need for skill. Skills have to be picked up by experience and sometimes by negative experiences. In other words, we learn lessons. In this case, I think, in both matters,

the matters of vaccination and the use of the Recovery Version shouldn't have been made into an issue. Not only in the group, but also in the church. The church is a general place, not a place where we politicize things, this is not a place where we get into a worldly debate about the vaccination. And also, in terms of what Bible they want to use, if they just love to use the King James Version, it's wonderful, it's the Bible! No problem. You use the Recovery Version, or he uses the New International Version. It's okay. But in time, by your skillful fellowship they will see "Whoa, oh my goodness, where do you get that? This Bible is rich. This is not a weird Bible; the translation is excellent. It just has footnotes and things like that to help me understand the Bible." So in a very skillful way, in time, you introduce that person to this dish, this new dish that is so exotic and will one day taste really good to them. But you need the skill to do that and not just say, "Use the Recovery Version." You will turn people off; this is not wise at all, I would say. Amen.

**Question 6:** *That brother mentioned something about age playing a role in a situation where you have the seniors, who are really in the minority, and then you have young children, so many young adults, young couples. How does that work? Seniors with the seniors isn't that easy.*

**Response 6:** Okay. I have two ways to answer. Number one, this is a fantastic question because there are always going to be age differences in the church, just as in human society. In principle, we need all ages in the church life. All ages are needed. We love all ages. There should be no discrimination. There should be no segregation or anything like that. Please pick up the book *All Ages for the Lord's Testimony*, 1977, I believe. Start there. It's a book based on the book of Numbers, regarding the usefulness of the different age brackets. Get that book. Number two, it sounds like, sister, you're considering yourself a senior among the others. Wonderful, we love you. The seniors themselves also have to be very self-aware in how they can function to serve. It is right that in the church, a lot of the burden

should be on the shoulders of the younger generation. Do you agree with me? This means this church has a future, right? We should celebrate that; we should be happy about that. But it does not mean the older ones have no role at all. I can tell you three things an older person can do. Number one, pray. I tell you we need the prayer of the senior saints. Absolutely. If the senior saints can come together on the phone or by themselves to pray daily for the church, for the younger saints, for the elders, for whatever, that will be such a blessing to the church. I hope the senior saints will enter into the ministry of prayer and live a life before the golden incense altar. I hope so. This would be such a blessing. This is a ministry, the highest ministry there is, okay. Number two, the seniors can do the work of shepherding the young. They're not on the front lines, they may not even be sitting in the front row. But behind the scenes, here and there, they can shepherd. I do this. I'm a senior actually and so is my wife. We do a lot of shepherding work individually, with couples, all kinds of saints, middle-aged saints, younger saints and all kinds. We just shepherd. You know, today, what is the greatest need in the church life? Shepherding. You should invite ones to your home, feed them a meal, and shepherd them. And you should pray for them and care for them. My goodness, if there are older saints in the churches doing this, that church will be a blessed church. And number three, you can play a supportive role in many things, you can cook (assuming you can) to feed the young people. You can cook to bring a dish to the campus, even some can open their homes for some kind of special gathering. My goodness, there's so much to fill your time in a productive way. You don't need to be in the lead. You don't need to call the shots. You can do this kind of behind-the-scenes service, which is so necessary.

*Yes, we cook for the groups.* Yes, even in the groups, even for the college students. It is very good and wonderful. There's a book called *Preaching the Gospel on College Campuses*. It's also from the 1970s. I would encourage you to look at the last chapter, which is on the homes, opening the homes. In that chapter, Brother Lee specifically talks about the older saints and their role in the campus work.