

# **CONFERENCE FOR THE SISTERS IN THE FRENCH SPEAKING COUNTRIES IN EUROPE**

December 4, 2020

GENERAL SUBJECT:

## **MEETING GOD'S NEED AND PRESENT NEEDS IN THE LORD'S**

### **SCHEDULE**

09h00 - 10h30	Meeting 1
11h00 - 12h30	Meeting 2
15h00 - 16h30	Meeting 3

**MEETING GOD'S NEED  
AND PRESENT NEEDS IN THE LORD'S RECOVERY**

Message One

**Prayer to Absorb God and to Express God  
by Praying to God as a Friend So That We Can Co-work with God**

Scripture Reading: Psa. 27:4; Jer. 17:7-8; Matt. 6:6; Col. 2:6-7, 19; Isa. 37:31; Gen. 18:1-22

**I. The meaning of prayer is to absorb God; the more we contact God, the more we will absorb Him, and the more we absorb Him, the more we will enjoy Him as our light and our salvation:**

- A. In Psalm 27:1 David says, "Jehovah is my light and my salvation"; God's being our light and our salvation shows that God Himself is what we need; what God gives us is just Himself; light is God, salvation is God, power is God (1 Cor. 1:24), and grace is God (John 1:16-17; 1 Pet. 5:10; 1 Cor. 15:10; cf. Gal. 2:20); every spiritual need that we have is God Himself.
- B. David contacted and absorbed God by beholding Him as beauty (Psa. 27:4); when he contacted God to absorb God, he was enlightened and received salvation within:
  - 1. Beholding God as our beauty is a great key and a great secret to experiencing God for His heart's desire—2 Cor. 3:16-18.
  - 2. By the divine dispensing through the washing of the water of life in the word of Christ, He beautifies us as the house of His beauty to be His beautiful bride for His beautification—Isa. 60:7, 9, 13, 19, 21; 59:21; Eph. 5:26-27; Rev. 19:7.
- C. There is a hymn that says, "Just as I am" (*Hymns*, #1048); this means that we should come to God just as we are without trying to improve or change our condition; we received Christ in this way, and we should walk in Christ in this way—Col. 2:6-7a.
- D. To pray is to come to the Lord just as we are; when we come to the Lord, we should lay our inner condition before Him and tell Him that we are short in every matter; even if we are weak, confused, sad, and speechless, we can still come to God; no matter what our inner condition is, we should bring it to God.
- E. Instead of caring about our condition, we need to enter into God's presence to contact Him by looking to Him, beholding Him, praising Him, giving thanks to Him, worshipping Him, and absorbing Him; then we will enjoy God's riches, taste His sweetness, receive Him as light and power, and be inwardly peaceful, bright, strong, and empowered; we will then learn the lesson of staying connected to Him when we are ministering the word to the saints—1 Pet. 4:10-11; 2 Cor. 2:17; 13:3.

**II. Colossians 2:6-7 reveals that Christ as the good land is the rich soil in which we have been rooted so that we may grow with the elements that we absorb from the soil—cf. 1 Cor. 3:6, 9; Col. 2:19:**

- A. By working together with God, Paul planted the believers as the living plants into Christ as the soil; God put us, the living plants, into Christ as the soil (1 Cor. 1:30; Rom. 6:4-5) so that we may grow in Christ as life (Eph. 4:15-16) and be transformed in life to become precious materials for God's building (1 Cor. 3:12).

- B. According to God's economy, the one who trusts in the Lord is like a tree planted by water, signifying God as the fountain of living waters (Jer. 2:13; 17:7-8); a tree grows beside a river by absorbing all the riches of the water; this is a picture of God's economy, which is carried out by His divine dispensing (cf. Isa. 57:20-21 with footnote 1 on v. 20; 55:7; 12:1-6; John 4:10, 14; 7:37-38; 1 Cor. 12:13).
- C. In order to receive the divine dispensing, we as the trees must absorb God as the water (cf. 3:6); the riches of the supplying God dispensed into us as the trees constitute us with God's divinity and cause us to grow with the growth of God (Col. 2:19); in this way we and God become one, having the same element, essence, constitution, and appearance (Rev. 4:3; 21:11).
- D. If a plant does not absorb nutrients from the soil, the plant cannot grow; likewise, if we do not receive what comes out of Christ as the Head, the Body cannot grow; holding the Head is, therefore, equal to being rooted in Christ as the soil; to hold the Head is to remain in Christ, staying intimately connected to Him without any insulation between us and Him—Col. 2:19.
- E. The growth of the Body depends on the growth of God, the addition of God, the increase of God, within us; God's building is "growing into a holy temple in the Lord" in whom we also "are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit" by our absorbing the riches of Christ; the actual building of the house of God is by the believers' growth in life—Eph. 2:21-22.
- F. Individual growth becomes corporate growth; if all the members grow individually, the Body will be built up corporately—*Hymns*, #395 and #840.
- G. Colossians 2:7 puts being rooted and being built up together; this is because being rooted is for growing, and growing is genuine building (Eph. 4:15-16; 1 Cor. 3:6, 9); the only way to become deeply rooted in Christ is to contact Him as the soil in order to daily absorb the water in the word (Eph. 5:26); in this way we "take root downward and bear fruit upward" (Isa. 37:31).
- H. We need to take time to absorb Christ day by day by having a personal and private time with Him (Matt. 6:6; 14:22-23; Mark 1:35) so that spontaneously we will walk in Christ and live out Christ for the corporate expression of Christ (Col. 2:6-7):
1. Our daily need is to allow adequate time for prayer, which will enable us to absorb more of the riches of our God; in the morning many saints may spend time with the Lord, but they may not absorb much of His riches because they are in too much of a hurry; we cannot absorb the riches of Christ into us as our nourishment if we are in a hurry—cf. Psa. 119:48, 97.
  2. We must spend more personal and private time with the Lord in order to absorb Him; we must exercise our spirit to spend more time in our spirit to adore the Lord, to praise Him, to offer thanks to Him, and to speak to Him freely; then God will give us the growth as we enjoy Him as our banquet—Matt. 22:4; Rev. 3:20.
  3. The addition of God into us by receiving Him as our new nourishment and fresh enjoyment through His words of spirit, life, gladness, and joy (John 6:57, 63; Jer. 15:16) is the growth that He gives (Josh. 1:8-9; Psa. 119:15, 48).
  4. If we spend a considerable amount of personal and private time with the Lord daily in order to absorb God, the salvation of His countenance will become the salvation of our countenance—42:5, 11.

**III. The meaning of prayer is also for us to express God; in Psalm 27:4 David says that he desired not only to behold the beauty of Jehovah but also “to inquire in His temple”; to inquire is to let God speak within us so that the words spoken to Him in prayer are actually God’s speaking within us, God’s expressions:**

- A. Real prayer is our coming to God, letting God speak within us, and expressing to God what He has spoken back to Him—“When You say, Seek My face, / To You my heart says, Your face, O Jehovah, will I seek” (v. 8).
- B. John 15:7 says, “If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you”; this verse presents three crucial points:
  - 1. First, we must abide in the Lord, which is to remain in fellowship with the Lord.
  - 2. Second, the Lord’s words must abide in us; when we abide in the Lord and are in constant fellowship with Him, He speaks within us.
  - 3. Third, our asking the Lord comes from the Lord’s speaking within us; if we are in fellowship with the Lord, He will speak within us, and then we will have the words with which to ask Him, that is, to pray to Him.
- C. When we really touch, contact, and absorb God, He will speak within us; then we pray according to His inner speaking; to pray is to go to God, meet Him, draw near to Him, commune with Him, and absorb Him so that He can speak to us inwardly; when we pray to Him with His words to us, our prayer expresses God.
- D. In our contact with the Lord, we need to learn the following principles:
  - 1. We should not direct the Lord in our prayer (cf. 2:4); instead, like Saul of Tarsus, we should ask, “What shall I do, Lord?” not “This is what I will do, Lord” (Acts 22:10).
  - 2. When we draw near to the Lord and contact Him, He causes us to see our needs and points out our problems, faults, stains, and sins; the way for us to take the living water is to confess these sins to the Lord—John 4:15-18.
  - 3. When we draw near to the Lord to contact Him, we should seek the Lord Himself as the unseen spiritual matters, not the seen physical matters—6:27, 31-33; 2 Cor. 4:18; Heb. 11:27.
  - 4. Human opinions frustrate the Lord’s power, so not until we are hopelessly weak, an utter failure, and completely dead, will the Lord manifest Himself in us and to us as resurrection power—John 11:3, 5-6, 17, 21, 25-26, 32-35, 38, 41-44; 2 Cor. 1:8-9.
  - 5. When we draw near to the Lord, we need to let Him do what He wills in us—John 13:6-9; Luke 1:37-38.
  - 6. Even when we are cold and indifferent toward the Lord or have fallen into the world, He will manifest Himself to us; we may fail and change, but the Lord never fails or changes—John 21:1-25; Isa. 49:15-16; Jer. 31:3.
- E. Inquiring prayers honor God; David knew how to pray because he often inquired of Jehovah (1 Sam. 23:2, 4; 30:8; 2 Sam. 2:1; 5:19, 23); after God spoke to David through Nathan the prophet, David “sat before Jehovah” (7:18) and told the Lord, “Do as You have spoken” (v. 25b); he then told the Lord that because of His speaking, “Your servant has found it in his heart to pray this prayer to You” (v. 27).

**IV. The best prayer is to pray to God as a friend; Abraham was the friend of God; in Genesis 18 the God of heaven humbled Himself in order to befriend Abraham:**

- A. After he was circumcised and his natural strength was terminated, Abraham lived in intimate fellowship with God and became God's friend—13:3-4, 18; 17:1-16; 2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; James 2:23.
- B. The glorious intercession that Abraham made before God was a human, intimate conversation between two friends, an intimate talk according to the unveiling of God's heart's desire—Gen. 18:1-33.
- C. Even before the incarnation (John 1:14) Jehovah as Christ appeared to Abraham in a human form, with a human body, and communed with him on a human level (Gen. 13:18; 18:1-22); as Abraham was enjoying sweet fellowship with God, he received a revelation from Him regarding the birth of Isaac and the destruction of Sodom.
- D. The birth of Isaac is related to the coming of Christ as grace, and the destruction of Sodom is related to God's judgment upon sin; this means that Christ must come in and sin must go out.
- E. God revealed to Abraham His intention to destroy Sodom, because He was seeking an intercessor to intercede for Lot (vv. 16-22; 19:1; cf. Heb. 7:25; Isa. 59:16; Ezek. 22:30); God wanted to save Lot in order to protect Christ's genealogy through Ruth, a Moabitess and a descendant of Lot (Gen. 19:37; Ruth 1:4; Matt. 1:5).
- F. Thus, in God's intimate fellowship with Abraham, in a mysterious way, without mentioning Lot's name, God revealed His heart's desire; the proper intercession is not initiated by man but by God's revelation; thus, it expresses God's desire and carries out God's will—Gen. 18:17, 20-23; 19:27-29; Psa. 27:4-8; Heb. 4:16; 7:25; James 5:17.
- G. Apparently, Abraham was interceding for Sodom; actually, he was interceding for Lot by implication (Gen. 14:12; 18:23; 19:1, 27-29), showing that we should intercede for God's people who have drifted into the world.
- H. In Abraham's intercession for Lot, he did not beg God according to His love and grace; he challenged God according to His righteous way; God's righteousness binds Him much more than His love and grace do—18:23-25; Rom. 1:17.
- I. Intercession is an intimate conversation with God according to the inward intention of His heart; for this we must learn to linger in the presence of God—Gen. 18:25-32.
- J. Abraham's intercession did not terminate with Abraham's speaking but with God's, showing that genuine intercession is God's speaking in our speaking—v. 33; John 15:7; Rom. 8:26-27.
- K. In our intimate fellowship with God, we receive the revelation that all the impossibilities become possibilities with Christ—Gen. 18:10-15; 21:1-8; Luke 18:27.

**V. During the first aspect of our prayer, we enter into fellowship with God, who then anoints us with His burden for the work and reveals His intention to us; the second aspect of our prayer is then to inquire of the Lord by petitioning Him concerning His will and His burden for the work; then we carry out the purpose of prayer by coordinating with God to co-work with God—Isa. 62:6-7; 45:11; Ezek. 22:30; Dan. 9:2-4; 1 Sam. 12:23; 1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:1a.**

## **Excerpts from the Ministry:**

### **THE MEANING OF PRAYER**

#### **To Absorb God**

First, prayer is to absorb God; prayer causes man to obtain God. God is reality; hence, He is contactable and obtainable. The God whom we worship is not doctrine, theory, philosophy, or ideology, nor is He an empty character or a vain idol. The God whom we worship is Spirit; He is a real spiritual entity. He is as real as air, water, and sound. Just as air, water, and sound are in the universe, so also God, who is Spirit, is in the universe. We can worship Him, and we can also contact, absorb, and obtain Him.

We can obtain God through prayer. In order to obtain water, we must drink; in order to obtain air, we must breathe; and in order to obtain sound, we must listen. If we want to obtain God, we must pray. Hence, the first meaning of prayer is to obtain God. Regrettably, many believers pray often and for long periods of time, but they do not seem to obtain much of the element of God, because they do not understand the meaning of prayer. They have not seen that prayer is to contact God and obtain Him.

Ironing is an example. Clothes that are placed under an electric iron absorb heat from the iron and, as a result, get hot. A sister in Taipei was ironing her clothes one night and forgot to unplug the iron when she finished. As a result, the ironing board absorbed heat from the iron and caught on fire. This illustration of absorbing heat through contact with an electric iron explains the meaning of prayer. To pray is to contact God and to absorb Him in that contact. Thus, the importance of prayer does not depend on how much we say to God or on how much we cry out to Him but on how much we contact Him. The more we contact God, the more we will absorb Him, and the more we absorb Him, the more we will enjoy God and salvation.

Our enjoyment of God's salvation depends on our absorbing God. Let me say a word here to clear up our inaccurate concepts concerning God and His salvation. Psalm 27:1 says, "Jehovah is my light and my salvation." This verse does not say that God shines on us but that He is our light, nor does it say that God saves us but that He is our salvation. There are two different statements here. By shining on us and saving us, God is accomplishing something for us. But by being our light and our salvation, God Himself is what we need. When we have God, we have light and salvation. Without God we have neither light nor salvation.

We often say that God has given us His life, but strictly speaking, God has not given us His life; He has given us Himself as life. The New Testament does not say that God has given His life to us; rather, it says, "Christ our life" (Col. 3:4). This means that God is our life. Apart from God, we have nothing. He does not give us some of His light, salvation, power, or grace; rather, what He gives is just Himself. He is light, salvation, power, and grace. Hence, light, salvation, power, and grace are inseparable from Him. For example, electricity is the electric light in a lamp, the electric heat in an iron, and the electric power in a fan. Electricity is light to meet one need, heat to meet another need, and power to meet yet another need. Similarly, light is God, salvation is God, power is God, and grace is God. Every spiritual need that we have is God Himself. God has not given us anything besides Himself. Hence, if we lose God, we lose everything; that is, we have nothing.

Those who knew God in the Old Testament age experienced Him in this way, and those in the New Testament age also experience God in this way. David received revelation from his experience to see that God was his light and his salvation. Based on this he said, "One thing I have asked from Jehovah; / That do I seek: / To dwell in the house of Jehovah / All the

days of my life, / To behold the beauty of Jehovah” (Psa. 27:4). David was eager to contact and absorb God daily and hourly. David contacted and absorbed God by beholding Him. When he contacted God, he was enlightened within, and when he absorbed God, he received salvation within. David obtained God as his light and salvation by beholding God. This is a great key and a great secret to experiencing God.

The saints often say, “I am too weak!” We should not be surprised that we are weak, for we can never be strong. In order to make us strong, God will not give us strength, but He will give us Himself. Electric power will not make a fan more powerful; rather, the fan must be in contact with electricity in order to have power. When the fan is in contact with electricity, the fan is empowered. Whenever the fan is disconnected from electricity, it becomes powerless. The power of the fan is with the electricity. Once the fan is in contact with, connected to, electricity, the fan is powerful. Hence, it is inaccurate to think that by pursuing the Lord, we can grow until we are strong. Our strength depends on God; we can be strong only by contacting Him.

We can contact God through prayer. A brother once told me that he was very weak and did not know why he could not rise up. After a few encounters with him, I asked whether he prayed. He said that besides praying before his meals, he did not pray much. I was then clear that his weakness was the result of not contacting God or, rather, of not contacting God adequately. An iron that is plugged into an electric socket needs at least two to three minutes to become warm and much longer to become hot. If it is unplugged for one minute, the iron will no longer be hot. If an unplugged iron could speak, it would complain that it is weak and useless. An unplugged iron is not hot, because it is disconnected from electricity; it is not in continual contact with electricity. Similarly, if a person does not pray, he does not contact God and therefore cannot be strong.

Although this brother thought that my response was correct, he did not know how to pray and did not have much to say when he prayed. I told him that prayer does not require speaking. When we visit a friend who is not in a good mood, we may not have much to say, but it is sufficient to be with him, see him, and accompany him. He may have been heavy-hearted and depressed before our visit. But after sitting with us for a while and sensing our sympathy and understanding, he will be relieved within, and his burden will disappear. Such is the result of having good contact.

God is Spirit; hence, our contacting and absorbing Him do not depend on our words. Some people utter many words when they pray, but their words are like sounding brass or clanging cymbals; they do not have much value before God. We may not say anything when we come to God, but our whole being, including our heart, should face God. While we look to God, we may sigh and confess that we are incompetent, weak, unable to rise, unpresentable, and thirsty and that we lack words for the gospel and are not inclined to fellowship with the saints. We should lay our inner condition before God and even tell Him that we are short in every matter. No matter what our inner condition is, we should bring it to God. There is a hymn that says, “Just as I am” (*Hymns*, #1048). This means that we should come to God just as we are without trying to improve or change our condition. Our attitude when we come to God should be to come just as we are.

Many believers have the natural concept that before they can pray and draw near to God, they must wait until their condition improves or until their inner feeling is strong. This concept is not according to the meaning of prayer. To pray is to come to God just as we are. The closer we are to our true condition, the better. We do not need to wait for anything, change anything, or prepare anything. Even if we are weak, confused, sad, and speechless, we can still come to God.

A sister who has stumbled and is a complete mess can come to the Lord as she is. Perhaps she is so low that she cannot utter any words; she can still come like this to God. Perhaps she has not prayed for half a year and is embarrassed to meet God. She does not need to wait or to improve her condition; she should just bring her embarrassment to God.

God is everything to us. The expectation to be strong and have words for prayer without contacting God is vain. God does not want us to have such expectations. He is not concerned about whether we are bad, weak, or wrong. Our condition does not bother Him. He is concerned only about our seeing and contacting Him. As long as we come to Him, He has a way because He is the way. If we are weak, He is power. If we are not presentable, He is presentable. If we are unable to rise up, He is rising up. If we lack leading, He is the leading. If we do not have words, He is the Word. He is everything. We do not have to wait or improve ourselves. The more we come to God according to our condition, the better.

We usually groom ourselves before we meet others, and we pretend while we are with them. Sometimes we will not allow others to see us until we have finished grooming. A brother who has had an outburst of anger will not welcome any visitors, because his anger has not subsided, and he cannot pretend. A sister who is not neatly dressed will not want to see anyone. Although we should be neatly dressed, dressing neatly may be a form of pretense. We do not need to pretend when we come to God. A brother who just lost his temper should bring that temper to God. Even if his spirit is low and he cannot rise up to pray, he should still come to God. We do not need to pretend, and God does not want us to pretend. To tidy oneself up before contacting God is not the principle of prayer. Prayer does not require self-improvement. The more that we are in our true condition when we pray, the better. Our condition is our condition. To change ourselves is human work. We do not need to change in order to contact God. Our need is God and to let Him change us.

In Luke 15:11-21 after the younger son had squandered his estate by living dissolutely and spending all he had, he did not improve himself before returning to his father's house. He did not have anything that would enable him to improve himself, nor did he know that this would not deter his father. The younger son did not change himself; rather, he returned to his father in his true, unchanged condition and let his father change him. His father said, "Bring out quickly the best robe and put it on him... And bring the fattened calf; slaughter it, and let us eat and be merry" (vv. 22-23). The father changed his son's robe and his food, that is, his son's outer condition and inner condition. Previously, the younger son wore rags, but he now had the best robe. Previously, he ate carob pods, but he now ate the fattened calf. The father brought about these changes, not the son. This is the principle of prayer. To pray is to come to God just as we are in our true condition, without changing or improving ourselves. Our coming to God in this way is not an ordinary crying out; it is our meeting and contacting God. When we contact Him, we absorb Him.

A believer needs to learn to spend a considerable amount of time in God's presence daily. It is preferable to spend half an hour to one hour, although we should not make rules, because rule-making is futile. Eating is an example. We need to eat three meals a day, and the days that we are busy are not an exception. If we do not eat, we will become weak physically, and we will lose our health. This also applies spiritually. We have to spend time daily in God's presence. To compromise we can spend half an hour in His presence. To spend less than half an hour is too short. It is best to spend one hour in God's presence daily. This does not mean that we have to spend one hour in God's presence in one sitting. We can split the hour into twenty minutes in the morning, ten minutes twice during the day, and twenty minutes at night. This adds up to one hour.

If we would contact God, wait on Him, linger in His presence, behold Him, and absorb Him

daily, He will cause our condition to change. We do not need to ask Him for many things, such as power, strength, victory, zeal, or the ability to rise up. We only need to touch Him every day, and after some time He will become our everything. If we need warmth, He will be our warmth. If we need light, He will be our light. If we need power, He will be our power. If we need comfort, He will be our comfort. If we need support, He will be our support, and if we need leading, He will be our leading. He is whatever we need.

If we would spend some time to pray every day in order to absorb God, the salvation of His countenance will become the salvation of our countenance (Psa. 42:5, 11). Perhaps a sister is very sorrowful and can only sigh in grief and sorrow during the twenty minutes that she spends in God's presence. However, after twenty minutes her countenance will change, and she will become joyful. Our countenance manifests the salvation that comes forth from God's countenance. Because we spend time face to face with God, the salvation of His countenance becomes the salvation of our countenance.

The first meaning of prayer is to absorb God. When we pray, we should behold His glorious face and linger in His presence to worship, praise, give thanks to Him, and muse upon Him. We should think of His works and His person and not look at our condition or our environment. By looking to God, waiting on Him, and musing upon Him, we can absorb Him into us.

### **To Express God**

The first meaning of prayer is to absorb God, and the second meaning is to express God. These meanings are related. To express God means to let Him speak, that is, to let God be expressed. Prayer is not our speaking or expressing ourselves. Prayer is our letting God speak and express Himself.

In Genesis 18 Abraham prayed for Lot and also for Sodom (vv. 23-33). However, the end of that chapter says, "Jehovah went away as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham" (v. 33). Although it was Abraham who prayed, it was Jehovah who spoke. It was Jehovah who finished speaking and who expressed His intention.

Whenever we pray, we should let God speak and let Him finish speaking. In the New Testament Martha had much to say. When Martha's brother, Lazarus, died and the Lord came, Martha did not let the Lord speak first. As soon as she saw the Lord, she said, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21). The Lord said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes into Me, even if he should die, shall live... Do you believe this?" (vv. 25-26). Martha replied, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God" (v. 27). What Martha said did not correspond with what the Lord revealed to her. Because she kept speaking, the Lord's words could not get into her. Everything she said was an expression of herself. That was not real prayer; it was man's natural crying out. Real prayer is our coming to God and letting God speak and express Himself instead of speaking our own words and expressing ourselves. We are often like Martha in our prayer. Our only care is to express ourselves, not to let God express Himself.

This does not mean that we should not say anything when we pray. We should speak when we pray; however, the question is, What do we say? In our prayer we should say what God is saying within us. God speaks within us, and to pray is to repeat what He has spoken back to Him. This is the principle of Psalm 27:8: "When You say, Seek My face, / To You my heart says, Your face, O Jehovah, will I seek." Such prayer is according to God's speaking within us. Therefore, the words we utter in prayer are an expression of the speaking within us. Without is man's speaking, but within is God's speaking. Once God speaks within, we speak without. Prayer is not our asking for something through speaking; it is our expressing what God has spoken within us. Hence, our prayer becomes God's expression. This is real prayer.

For example, we hear that the church needs to pray for a certain special meeting or for the revival of the church. Just as we begin to pray, we sense a word from the Lord telling us something concerning our inner condition and our situation. We should stop praying and forget about the revival of the church or the special meeting and follow the inner sense; we should speak the words that the Lord has spoken. If we sense the Lord's rebuke, saying, "You are full of the flesh," we should say, "Lord, I am full of the flesh." If we sense that the Lord is saying, "You are full of the self," we should immediately say, "Lord, I am full of the self."

There are times when we let God speak, and we pray forth our inner sense. However, only a portion of our prayer is according to the inner expression, because we add many of our own cries. This is our being tempted to beseech God for something. God may give us the sense that we are full of the flesh and the self, but we often add many things when we pray according to this sense. For example, we may pray, "Lord, cause me not to have the flesh any longer and not to be in the self." The problem is that such a prayer is our own crying out; it is not an expression of the speaking from within. Sometimes instead of touching the inner sense, we ask God to do things according to what we think. Such prayers are vain.

In Psalm 27:4 David said that he desired to behold the beauty of Jehovah and "inquire in His temple." David did not say "cry out" or "beseech" but "inquire." To inquire is to ask God. Abraham's prayer in Genesis 18 is a good example of inquiring. When God told Abraham that He would judge the sinful city of Sodom, Abraham said, "Will You indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed destroy...it?" (vv. 23-24). We would have said, "God, You must save Sodom. There are fifty righteous men in that city; hence, You must save them." Abraham did not pray in this way; rather, he inquired about what God would do if there were fifty righteous men in the city, and what He would do if forty-five were righteous, and God told Abraham what He would do. When Abraham inquired about ten righteous men, God said, "I will not destroy it, because of the ten" (vv. 28-32). By this, Abraham understood God's intention.

Although it was Abraham who continued to inquire in that prayer, it was mainly God speaking, not Abraham. Hence, at the end of the chapter the Bible says, "Jehovah went away as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham" (v. 33). The best and most valuable prayer is not one in which we speak but one in which God speaks. The best and most valuable prayer is not one in which we cry out or beseech but one in which we inquire and let God speak. To cry out is to tell God the things of man, but to beseech is to beg for the things of God. The best prayer is to inquire. To inquire is to let God speak so that the words spoken are God's speaking within man, God's expressions. This is the best prayer.

In conclusion, to pray means to absorb God and to express Him. Every prayer should touch God and let Him pass through us and be expressed. When we pray in this way, we will be anointed by God and be mingled more with Him. Then we will know that God is our everything. We will also see that He is always with us and is our supply in every need.

#### **THE BEST PRAYER**

John 15:7 says, "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you." This verse presents three crucial points. First, we must abide in the Lord. To abide in the Lord is to have fellowship with the Lord. Second, the Lord's words must abide in us. When we abide in the Lord and are in constant fellowship with Him, He speaks within us. Third, we ask the Lord according to our heart's desire. Such asking, or praying, comes from the Lord's speaking within us. If we are in fellowship with the Lord, He will speak within us. When the Lord speaks, we have the words with which to ask Him, that is, to pray to Him.

## PRAYING TO GOD AS A FRIEND

### God Humbling Himself to Befriend Man

The Bible says that Abraham was the friend of God. In Genesis 18 the God of heaven came to earth in order to befriend Abraham. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament say that Abraham was a friend of God (2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; James 2:23). Our impression of God is that He is too great and that we are so low. Although we cannot describe His greatness in words, we can say that we are low to the uttermost. We were made from dust, became evil and corrupt by the fall, and were dead in our offenses and sins (Eph. 2:1). There is nothing that qualifies us to commune with God. Because of this fact, we have the natural and inaccurate concept that since God is so great and we are so low, it must not be easy to converse with Him, draw near to Him, pray to Him, or even cry out to Him.

Very few people have a thorough and accurate concept regarding prayer. Very few know that we can pray to God just as we speak with other human beings. Since most people have the concept that God is so great and man is so small, that God is high above and man is far below, they think that we must be solemn and reverent when coming to God. They also think that we must implore God for His care and mercy so that our requests may be granted and our desires fulfilled. This is the concept of most people, and I was not an exception.

When I was newly saved, I would always tidy myself up, lower my hands properly, walk slowly to a chair, kneel down sincerely, and respectfully bow my head before solemnly praying to God. Although nothing was wrong with this, it was a natural form of worship; it was prayer out of my natural feeling. Praying in this way is the result of not knowing God, misunderstanding Him, and not having divine revelation. God never intended for us to pray in this way.

New Testament believers are more blessed and more intimate with God than the Old Testament believers. However, even the forefathers in the Old Testament, such as Abraham, did not regard themselves as small human beings who had to prostrate themselves when they prayed and dared not lift up their face to look at the great and high God sitting in the heavens. In Genesis 18 God wanted Abraham to pray to Him, so He came to be Abraham's friend. God did not lift Abraham up to the heavenly sanctuary of glory; instead, He humbled Himself and went to the lowly tent in which Abraham dwelt. God did not flaunt His prestige, majesty, or power. Abraham served cakes, a calf, curds, and milk, and God ate (vv. 1-8). God came to Abraham as an ordinary visitor. After He ate, the first thing He asked Abraham was, "Where is Sarah your wife?" (v. 9). Sarah did not come out but hid in the back. God said, "I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and then Sarah your wife shall have a son" (v. 10). When Sarah heard this, she laughed within herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" (v. 12). God, knowing that Sarah laughed, asked Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh?" (v. 13). Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," but God said, "No, but you did laugh" (v. 15). This situation was altogether like that of a person visiting in a friend's home.

### God Telling Man the Things on His Heart in Fellowship

After God finished speaking, He rose up to leave, and Abraham walked with Him to send Him away (v. 16). Suppose a brother visits me in my home, and after our conversation he rises to leave, and I rise in order to walk with him. Although he walks out of the door, I do not want to leave him, so I walk farther with him until we reach the main street. This is how Abraham was with God. God rose to leave Abraham's tent, but Abraham walked with God in order to send Him off. It was in such a sending off that Abraham "sent" God's words out. We should not think that God has nothing to do or that He has nothing to say. God has many things to do and to say, but He needs us to walk with Him, to send Him off, so that He can tell us what He wants to do.

Many of us have had such an experience. Suppose Brother A is troubled in his heart concerning a matter and goes to seek help from Brother B. Even though Brother B receives him, Brother A may not be able to speak about what is on his heart, because it is not easy to talk about matters that trouble the heart. After talking for a while, Brother A may rise to leave even though he still has something on his heart. If Brother B bids Brother A farewell, then Brother A will keep the matter that is on his heart. If Brother B is very close to Brother A and sees that Brother A is still troubled about something, he will walk with Brother A, not wanting to leave him. Brother A may say, "Please do not trouble yourself to walk any farther," but Brother B will say, "I will walk just a few more steps." It is at this time that Brother A will feel comfortable to bring up what is on his heart. We often cannot immediately disclose the matters on our heart. It is not until we rise to leave and our friend sends us off that we can disclose the things on our heart.

God had two purposes for appearing to Abraham. One purpose was to tell Abraham that he would beget Isaac according to the time of life. This was related to Abraham. The other purpose was to tell Abraham that He would destroy Sodom. This was related to Abraham's nephew Lot. God told Abraham the matter that was related to him near his tent. God was to give Abraham a son. It was easy for God to tell Abraham this because it was something that God would do for Abraham. However, this was only part of God's purpose in visiting Abraham. It was not easy for God to tell Abraham the second purpose, for God had to find someone on the earth who would pray for Lot to be saved. This is what God wanted Abraham to do; hence, it was not easy for God to bring up this matter. Before God can do something in a brother, He must first find someone to pray for that brother. This is a major principle of God's work.

Before God saves, edifies, or works in someone, He must find a person to pray for the things that He is about to do. Without our prayer, God cannot work. God visited Abraham so that Abraham would intercede for Lot to be saved. It is possible to say that God was asking Abraham to do something; hence, it was not easy for God to bring it up. It is easy to tell a person what we will do for him, but it is not easy to ask someone to do something for us. God wanted Abraham to do something, but in order to see if Abraham was willing, He did not bring it up quickly. If I want to ask a brother to help me, I would first talk with him to see how his heart is toward me. Only if he cares for me would I feel comfortable asking him to help me. This was the case when God spoke with Abraham. It was when Abraham walked with God to send God off and lingered in God's presence that God said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" (v. 17). God spoke with Abraham as if He was speaking with a friend.

Here is an example. A brother's child was disobedient and often made his parents angry. One day this brother came to my home to fellowship with me. I asked, "Brother, what is it that you want to fellowship about?" He said, "Nothing much," and sipped his tea. He then talked about other matters and stood up to leave. It seemed that he wished to say something but found it difficult to bring up, so I walked with him to send him off. It was then that he said, "It is not easy to raise children." I responded, "No, children are not easy to handle." He then said, "My child has been in a lot of trouble at home for several days now." I then understood that he wanted me to help his child. When he walked into my home, he did not say, "Brother, please come see my child." Rather, he told me what was on his heart after he saw that I cared for him like a close friend. I immediately asked, "May I come see him tomorrow afternoon?" He said, "Nothing would be better." When I touched his heart, he told me what he wanted me to do.

God went to Abraham so that Abraham would pray for Lot. Genesis 19:29 says that when God destroyed Sodom, He remembered Abraham and rescued Lot. God's purpose was

for Abraham to pray for Lot, but instead of being like a master commanding a servant, He was like a person needing a friend's help. God did not say, "Abraham, I want to destroy Sodom; hence, you must pray for Lot." That would have been a master commanding his servant, not a conversation between close friends. Instead, God stood in front of Abraham that day as Abraham's friend. He and Abraham stood and talked as friends about the things on His heart. He said, "The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah, how great it is; and their sin, how very heavy it is! I shall go down and see whether they have done altogether according to its outcry" (18:20-21). Abraham immediately understood that God wanted him to pray for Lot, who dwelt in Sodom. God seemed to be speaking in a riddle; it was as if He had said something yet said nothing. Abraham was very wise and did not say, "God, Lot is still there; will You destroy him also?" Neither God nor Abraham mentioned Lot's name, but Lot was their goal.

### **Prayer Being to Express God's Heart**

Let us look at how Abraham prayed that day. He asked God, "Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed destroy...it?" (v. 24). God said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place for their sake" (v. 26). Abraham immediately subtracted five, saying, "Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five?" and God said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there" (v. 28). Then Abraham knew that there were not even forty-five righteous in the city. He therefore said, "Suppose forty are found there?" and God said, "I will not do it, because of the forty" (v. 29). Abraham was even clearer that there were not forty and subtracted another ten, saying, "Suppose thirty are found there?" and God said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there" (v. 30). Abraham knew again that there were not even thirty and said, "Suppose twenty are found there?" and God said, "I will not destroy it, because of the twenty" (v. 31). Then Abraham knew that there must not have been twenty and immediately said, "Suppose ten are found there?" and God said, "I will not destroy it, because of the ten" (v. 32). Then Abraham knew that the righteous ones whom God would not destroy must have been the family of his nephew Lot. Hence, he spoke no more. This is what makes prayer marvelous. God speaks the things on His heart, and we pray for them as His friends, but neither God nor we explicitly state the object of our concern. Both God and Abraham were concerned about Lot, yet neither mentioned Lot. This was the sweetness of that conversation between intimate friends.

The best prayers are prayers to God as a friend. Such prayers are not uttered by men who are far below a very high God. Such prayers are spoken by men to a God who is on their level. Some may condemn this and say that it is heresy to uplift man to the same level as God. However, in the matter of God communing with man, of His wanting man to pray, God likes to be on the same level as man. Thus, real prayers are made by men who stand on the same level as God and consult with God. This is not man uplifting himself but God humbling Himself. It is not our going to God's palace but God coming to our tent. Every real prayer is God condescending Himself in order to draw near to us, humbling Himself to come to us, and placing Himself on the same level that we are on so that we may be at ease to speak with Him. This is real prayer.

## **TWO LESSONS ON PRAYER**

### **Learning to Absorb God**

If we want to learn lessons on prayer, we must first learn to absorb God. We should not regard God as being so high while we are so low. This is not according to God's revelation. If we know God, we will be able to say, "God, under the blood of Your Son I can come to Your throne of grace to meet You and to behold Your beauty, face to face." We need to open our spirit

and absorb Him. We should not say much, nor should we pour out our miseries. We should offer God some praise. We may say, “You are so glorious, sweet, and humble. You came to be with me. I worship You and thank You from my heart.” To commend, praise, worship, and thank God in such a way is like the first part of Abraham’s fellowship with God. Abraham invited God in, set a meal before God, stood by without saying much, and watched God eat and enjoy the meal. This is the best prayer.

The best prayer is not one in which we tell God many matters. The Lord Jesus said, “Do not be anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, With what shall we be clothed? For all these things the Gentiles are anxiously seeking. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things” (Matt. 6:31-32). Hence, we do not need to tell God our distresses and miseries, for He already knows them; they are not a problem to Him. We also do not need to tell Him our condition. To do so does not require learning and is a natural prayer, not prayer according to revelation.

A prayer of revelation is one in which we do not consider our failures or weaknesses. Rather, in spite of how distressed or burdened we may be, we set our eyes on God and turn our heart to Him. Instead of caring about our condition, we enter into God’s presence to contact God by looking to Him, beholding Him, praising Him, giving thanks to Him, worshipping Him, and absorbing Him. This is a sweet lesson. If we would learn this lesson, we will enjoy God’s riches and taste His sweetness. If we would spend a little time to enter into God’s presence and absorb Him every day, we will receive light and power; we will be peaceful, bright, strong, and empowered.

An electric iron that is not connected to electricity has no way to heat up. But once it is connected, it will get hot. Hence, we should not say that we are weak and unable to rise up or that we cannot overcome and live a holy life. Even if we are cold, weak, defeated, and unable to rise up, if we would come to God, contact Him, draw near to Him, behold Him, praise Him, thank Him, and take time to linger in His presence, He will touch our spirit. Strength, power to rise up, and victory are in God. No method or message can make us overcome. Victory is God, and overcoming power is God. When we contact God daily, we are “electrified” within, become “hot,” and possess His riches. If we need leading, He is our leading. If we need light, He is our light. If we need comfort, He is our comfort. If we need power, He is our power. He is everything that we need. We must learn this precious lesson.

My greatest fear when I stand at the podium is that I would not be connected to God. Sometimes I do not need to spend much time to prepare a message; however, I do need to spend a long time to contact God in His presence, that is, to be connected to the “electricity.” My greatest fear is to be disconnected from God while giving a message. That would be miserable.

As Christians, we are miserable, weak, and unable to rise up when we are disconnected from God. When we are disconnected from God, we are through. God is everything to us, so we should spend some time and effort to contact Him every day. The first lesson on prayer is to contact God and absorb God.

### **Learning to Express God**

When we learn the first lesson, we will learn the second lesson spontaneously. When we touch and contact God, He will surely speak, that is, express His mind, within us. When Abraham contacted God, walked with God in sending Him off, and lingered in His presence, God said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?” (Gen. 18:17). This was God speaking, expressing Himself. Hence, Abraham was able to pray to God according to God’s speaking, and Abraham’s prayer was God’s expression. Every phrase of his prayer was God’s expression.

At the end of Genesis 18 the Holy Spirit did not say that Jehovah left after Abraham finished praying but that “Jehovah went away as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham” (v. 33). This sweet sentence shows that it was Abraham who prayed, but it was Jehovah who spoke. When Jehovah finished speaking, Abraham finished praying. Therefore, Abraham’s prayer was the expression of God’s speaking. Real prayer is God’s expression. If we really contact, touch, and absorb God, He will speak within us. Whenever He speaks, it is time for us to pray. This is how we pray according to His speaking.

It is regrettable that some saints have neither learned to contact God nor to let God speak and express His desire when they pray. There is no need for the elders to pray in tears when the church encounters problems, saying, “Lord, look at this problem. Please remember that we are weak and foolish; we do not have much spiritual weight, nor do we know how to administrate the church. Lord, have mercy on us and solve this problem for us.” Such desperate prayers cannot be maintained. This is the condition of most prayers: they neither contact nor express God. Some sisters cry in prayer before the Lord whenever their husband has problems, their children are sick, or a family member is in an accident. They utter many words, but it is merely their speaking; they do not give the Lord a chance to speak. Even if the Lord were to say a few words, they would misunderstand His words. Most people pray in this way. Many pray, but few touch the Lord, contact Him, wait before Him, let Him speak, or let Him express Himself. Such prayers in which God does not express Himself are abnormal.

In a normal prayer God speaks to us. Prayer should not be to take care of the problems that are on our heart but to contact God. To pray is to go to God, meet Him, draw near to Him, behold Him, commune with Him, and absorb Him. For example, an elder who is bearing a problem of the church on his heart should touch and absorb God. Instead of mentioning the problem of the church, he should let God speak. God may ask the elder concerning his flesh. The elder has the problem of the church on his heart, but God asks concerning his flesh. Then the elder will immediately sense that he is a fleshly person. God may say, “The church has a problem because of your flesh.” Then he can confess, “Yes, Lord. The problem is not with the church but with me. Lord, have mercy on me; save me.” Such a prayer is real. When we touch God and let Him speak, our prayer expresses God.

Here is another example. Suppose that a sister’s husband has a problem and that her child was in an accident, but she does not mention these matters to the Lord. Instead, she touches and absorbs Him. When the Lord touches her, He will speak. He might ask concerning her attitude toward her husband and toward her child. Immediately, she will have a sense and say, “Lord, I have failed my husband and neglected my child because of my disposition and my temper.” The Lord may ask whether she has been broken or whether she has learned the lesson. She can then confess, “Lord, I have not yet been broken, nor have I learned the lesson. My disposition and my temper have not been dealt with by You.” Even though the sister did not pray for her husband or child, God will bless her husband and child. This is according to the Lord’s word that “all these things will be added to you” (Matt. 6:33). This is genuine and normal prayer.

Our problem is that we often go to God in prayer, but we do not let Him speak to us. We must understand that the best prayer is not one in which we speak to God but one in which God speaks to us. The more we touch God in our prayer, the more He will speak to us. What matters is not how much we speak to God, but how much God speaks to us. What matters is how much we let God appear to us, speak to us, touch us, and point out our inner condition. We should drop all our burdens, forget our requests, and pay attention only to what God is touching in us. Then we should pray only according to that point. Whatever God asks for is what we say. Then our prayer will be His speaking, His expression. The most genuine and valuable prayer is one in which God expresses His prayer through man.

To pray by letting God speak and express Himself is to pray according to the Lord's word in John 15:7. When we abide in the Lord, have fellowship with Him, and let Him speak within us, what we ask will be according to His words. Such prayer is not out of our self, nor is it initiated by us; rather, it is out of the Lord, and He is its source. We are not uttering our own words but the words that the Lord has spoken within us. Such prayer is not the expression of our will but the Lord's will, and it is not our asking apart from the Lord. Such prayer is our praying to the Lord by abiding in Him and being mingled with Him. Such prayer is the issue of our mingling with the Lord. This is the best prayer! (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1956*, vol. 3, "The Meaning and Purpose of Prayer," pp. 222-239)

**MEETING GOD'S NEED  
AND PRESENT NEEDS IN THE LORD'S RECOVERY**

Message Two

**Our Need to Walk in Newness of Life,  
to Serve in Newness of Spirit,  
and to Be Renewed in Our Inner Man Day by Day**

Scripture Reading: Rev. 21:5a; Rom. 6:4; 7:6; 12:2; 2 Cor. 4:16; 5:17; Gal. 6:15

- I. "He who sits on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new"—Rev. 21:5a.**
- II. As believers in Christ, we have been made a new creation—a person regenerated with the life of God and living in the inner man, not in the outer man—2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; John 3:3, 5-6, 15; 2 Cor. 4:16.**
- III. As a new creation in Christ Jesus, we need to walk in newness of life—Rom. 6:4:**
  - A. To walk in newness of life means to live in the realm of resurrection and to reign in life—v. 4; 5:17.
  - B. Concerning the matter of life, Romans 5:10 says that we will be saved in the life of God's Son, 5:17 speaks of reigning in life, and 6:4 declares that we have died and have been buried with Christ so that we may walk in newness of life.
  - C. After baptism we become a new person in resurrection; resurrection is not only a future state but also a present process—2 Cor. 5:17; Phil. 3:10-11.
  - D. We were buried with Christ into His death, and we have been resurrected as He was; hence, we should walk in newness of life—Col. 2:12; Eph. 2:5; Rom. 6:4.
  - E. Newness of life is closely related to the life-giving Spirit, who is Christ Himself in His resurrection; the Spirit is the way to walk in newness of life—1 Cor. 15:45b.
  - F. Walking in newness of life is the kind of living that deals with all that is of Adam in us until we are fully transformed and conformed to the image of Christ—Rom. 8:29.
- IV. As a new creation in Christ Jesus, we need to serve in newness of spirit—7:6:**
  - A. Our living should be in newness of life, and our service should be in newness of spirit—v. 6:
    1. There should be no oldness in either our living or our service.
    2. Concerning our service, we should have the newness of spirit instead of the oldness of law and letter—2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 7:6.
  - B. In Romans 6:4 newness of life issues from our being identified with Christ's resurrection and is for our walk in our daily life.
  - C. In Romans 7:6 newness of spirit issues from our being discharged from the law and being joined to the resurrected Christ and is for our service to God.
  - D. Both newness of spirit and newness of life are results of the crucifixion of our old man—6:6.
  - E. In Romans 7:6 *newness of spirit* refers to our regenerated human spirit, in which the Lord as the Spirit dwells—2 Tim. 4:22:

1. Everything that is related to our regenerated spirit is new, and everything that comes out of our spirit is new—John 3:6; 4:23-24; Rom. 1:9; Eph. 6:18.
2. Our regenerated spirit is a source of newness because the Lord, the life of God, and the Holy Spirit are there—1 Cor. 6:17; 2 Cor. 3:16-18.
3. Like Paul, we should serve God in our regenerated spirit by the indwelling Christ, the life-giving Spirit, not in our soul by the power and ability of the soul—Rom. 1:9.

**V. The Christian life is a life of being renewed; we need to be renewed in our inner man day by day—2 Cor. 4:16; Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23:**

- A. Our outer man is being consumed, but our inner man is being renewed day by day—2 Cor. 4:16:
  1. The outer man consists of the body as its organ with the soul as its life and person.
  2. The inner man consists of the regenerated spirit as its life and person with the renewed soul as its organ.
- B. In our experience we are in the process of becoming a new creation by being broken and renewed—5:17; 4:10-12, 16; Eph. 4:22-24:
  1. In the sense of being in Christ, we are a new creation, but in actuality in our daily life, we are not that new because we do not yet have Christ as the only One who occupies us, fills us, and is our life, nature, appearance, and expression—Gal. 2:20; 4:19; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 3:16-17.
  2. We have been regenerated, but still there is a mixture in our daily living because our living is partly the new creation and even more the old creation—2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 8:4, 14.
  3. Although our spirit has been regenerated, our soul with its faculties of mind, will, and emotion remains in the old creation and needs to be renewed—12:2; Eph. 4:23.
  4. The cross is the greatest help to accomplish the renewing for us—Matt. 16:24; 2 Cor. 4:10-12.
  5. To be renewed is to have God's ever-new essence dispensed into us to replace and discharge our old element—v. 16; Rom. 12:2; Titus 3:5.
  6. Through the process of renewing, we are transferred from the realm of the old creation into the realm of the new creation to become the New Jerusalem—Col. 3:10; Rev. 21:2.
- C. In our Christian life for God's purpose, we need to pass through the process of renewing—a process that involves suffering—Rom. 8:17-18; 2 Cor. 1:7; 4:10-11, 17; 1 Pet. 4:13; 5:9:
  1. We are destined to suffer so that we may be renewed; all sufferings are the process to make us new—Col. 1:24; Phil. 1:29; 2 Cor. 1:6; 4:17.
  2. All the sufferings that God has assigned to us have one unique purpose—to renew us—Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23; Titus 3:5.
  3. The sufferings that we pass through are a process to transfer us from the realm of the old creation to the realm of the new creation—2 Cor. 5:17.
  4. The suffering that we pass through to be renewed does not compare with the glory of our being new—4:17-18; Rom. 8:18.

5. As we pass through afflictions, there needs to be a continual renewing taking place in us day by day so that God can accomplish His heart's desire—2 Cor. 4:16-17; Eph. 1:4-5, 9, 11-12.
- D. The renewing of the inner man takes place as the inner man is nourished with the fresh supply of the resurrection life of Christ—John 11:25; Phil. 3:10:
1. As our outer man is being consumed by the killing work of death, our inner man—our regenerated spirit with our inward parts—is being metabolically renewed day by day with the supply of resurrection life—Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10; Rom. 7:22, 25; 12:2; 2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 4:23.
  2. The more our inner man is renewed, the more the functions of our soul are also renewed—Rom. 12:2.
  3. Our mingled spirit spreads into our mind and becomes the spirit of the mind; it is in such a spirit that we are being renewed for our transformation—Eph. 4:23; 2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:2.
- E. Because we have been born of God to be children of God with the life and nature of God, we all have the divine element energizing in us—John 1:12-13; 3:15; 1 John 5:11-12; 2 Pet. 1:3-4:
1. In this divine element is the renewing capacity—Rom. 12:2.
  2. In the resurrection life of Christ, the divine life has the renewing capacity—John 11:25; Phil. 3:10; Rev. 21:5a.
  3. The capacity in the divine life is renewing us in all our actions—Rom. 6:4; 7:6.
  4. We need to experience and enjoy the renewing capacity in the resurrection life of Christ so that we may be renewed in our inner man day by day—2 Cor. 1:9; 4:16.

### **Excerpts from the Ministry:**

#### **BEING RENEWED BY INCREASING WITH THE INCREASE OF GOD**

The New Testament says that God chose us before the foundation of the world and marked us out (Eph. 1:4-5). He desires to make His chosen ones the new creation. His way to do this is first to put Himself into us, to regenerate us. We are reborn, regenerated, to become God's children. This is wonderful, but the New Testament reveals that regeneration alone is not adequate. After regenerating us, God has to renew us, sanctify us, transform us, conform us to His image, and glorify us. Transformation needs sanctification and also renewing. Transformation is a metabolic change. When we are transformed, a new element is added to us metabolically to replace the old element. The new element is God Himself. God is "new" (as a noun). There is no oldness with God.

After we have been regenerated, we have God, but we do not have much of God. This is why Colossians 2:19 says that we need to grow with the growth of God, or increase with the increase of God. This means that we grow by the increase of God within us. If we have little increase of God, we grow little. If we have much increase of God, we grow much. When we have God in us to the fullest, we will have the full growth. God has to be increased within us. When God is increasing within us, His new element is being added into us. When the divine element comes into us, it renews us regardless of whether we are slow or quick in our natural disposition. As we are contacting God, God infuses Himself as the divine element

into our being. This new element is added into our existing element. When this new element is added into us, something is worked out within us.

God desires to add Himself into our being, but He does not increase in us when we do not contact Him. We may go through a period of time in which we do not contact God or pray to Him. Instead, we are doing everything by ourselves and in ourselves. During this time, God is not added into our being, and we are not increasing with the increase of God. This is why we encourage all the saints to have morning watch. Our morning watch with the Lord is not just for us to exercise our mind to read the letter of the Bible, but it is for us to exercise our spirit. This is why we have to say "O Lord Jesus." Our calling on the Lord is our spiritual breathing. We have to contact God by praying to Him and calling on Him. Then He adds Himself into us. When we contact Him, He is adding more and more of the divine element into our being. As the new element of God is being added into our being, this new element metabolically renews us. I may be a quick person naturally, but because God's element comes into my being, this element renews my natural habit. I may be slow in my natural disposition, but God renews me with His element to discharge my old element.

#### **BEING RENEWED DAY BY DAY WITH THE DIVINE ELEMENT THROUGH SUFFERINGS**

We may be good saints in the church who have been kept and preserved by the Lord, but have we been renewed with the divine element? Is there some renewing going on with us, or are we remaining the same day by day and year after year? It would be tragic if we would pass through many sufferings and still remain the same. In order to consummate His renewing work in us and with us, God becomes our life and nature within. In addition to this, God as the sovereign Lord controls the entire universe in order to renew us. God uses the environment in order to work His life and nature into us. Without the environment, we could never be renewed. We would remain the same.

According to our view and consideration, we always base our judgment of things upon whether something is good or bad. We deal with things too much according to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and not according to the tree of life. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is the tree of good and bad. The tree of life does not have anything to do with good or bad. Only life, which is God Himself, constitutes the tree of life. Our view and consideration are most of the time based upon whether something is good or bad and right or wrong, but God does not consider things in this realm.

We may say that God punishes us by chastising and correcting us because we are so wrong. In a sense this is correct. There are verses from the Bible that support this understanding, but if we know the Bible in its principle, we can see that God desires to renew us. God cares for whether we are still in the old creation or whether we are being renewed. We may be the most right persons and still be the most old persons. We may be strong in our habit and strong in what we are. God's intention is not merely to chastise or correct us but to use the outward environment to trouble us, to remind us, and to wake us up to realize that we have God as our nature, yet we do not live Him according to His nature. We possess Him for our enjoyment, but we do not live Him as our nature.

Do we discipline our children according to God's nature? We may discipline them according to our disposition, our being, and our habit. God, therefore, uses the environment to put us into "prison." Then we are reminded to pray, and the eventual outcome of our prayer is not merely that we get corrected but that we get renewed. Then when we are going to discipline our children, we will consider whether we are disciplining them in ourselves or with God and through God. Formerly, we disciplined our children with ourselves, by ourselves, and in

ourselves. We did not have God in us as our life and nature while we were disciplining our children. Now God is in our disciplining of our children, and our disciplining them becomes a human-divine disciplining. The father is doing the disciplining, yet his disciplining is the divine disciplining because it is full of God. God is in it. God uses the outward environment in which we suffer to renew us.

Confucius also said that we need to be renewed day by day, but his concept of renewing was merely to have a change. In other words, a person who loses his temper needs to renew himself by limiting his temper. The Bible does not teach us in this way. It teaches us to be renewed according to nothing of ourselves. We are renewed by the addition of God into our being, by having more of the divine element added into our being. I have been living the Christian life for over sixty years, and I can testify concerning what the real Christian life is. The real Christian life is to have God added into us morning and evening and day by day.

We may discipline our children without God, only according to our likes or dislikes. When we hear this fellowship, we may think that God does not want us to discipline our children. This is also wrong. We are not saying that God does not want us to discipline our children. What we need to see is that God wants us to discipline our children with Him. This is a difficult lesson for all of us to learn.

Very few of today's Christian teachings would point out that the Christian life is not a matter of what we do or do not do. The problem today is that people do everything without God. What God cares for is that His chosen ones would learn to cooperate with Him by allowing Him to be added into them day by day. God is daily being added to us for the purpose of metabolically transforming us. The new element of God is coming into us to replace the old element. This new element is God Himself, and the old element is us. We need to be replaced with God as the new element.

Our being replaced with the divine element does not mean that we should be abandoned. It is correct to say that our old man should be replaced, but we should not say that our old man should be abandoned. Galatians 2:20 says, "I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live." When we read the first part of this verse, we may think that Christ lives in us and that we have been abandoned. Paul says that he no longer lives, but he goes on to talk about the life which he now lives. I have been crucified, and it is no longer I but Christ, but I still live. The old "I" is replaced by a divine person to create a new "I." Our God is daily waiting for a chance to add Himself into all of us. If we would give Him the opportunity and the opening, He will add Himself into our being as the new element, not merely to correct us but to replace us, to renew us.

This renewing process is gradual. It takes a long time. From regeneration to glorification is a long process. In this long process God has to sanctify us, to separate us from the world. He has to transform us by renewing us metabolically. This renewing transforms us from one form to bring us into another form. Our old form is a form without God, but the new form is with God in us as our life, as our nature, as our appearance, and as our expression. This renewing brings in the conformation to the Lord's image. Then in doing everything we are like God, and we do things according to God at the right time. What we need is to be renewed day by day.

Sometimes God may allow the church to pass through a "storm." God may allow this "storm" to occur because He wants us to be renewed. The tragic thing is that while we are suffering in the "storm," we would remain the same with no renewing. I hope that we will consider this matter. We have to pray, "Lord, I don't want to remain the same. I do not want to remain the same this year as I was last year. I want to be renewed day by day." God's intention is for us to be renewed day by day. In order to be renewed, we need the new addition of

God into us daily. Daily we need to contact God, open ourselves up to Him, and let Him come into us to be a new addition into us day by day.

#### THE RENEWING CAPACITY OF THE DIVINE LIFE IN RESURRECTION

We should not think that God is inactive. When God is added into us, He does not just remain there, doing nothing. Philippians 2:13 says, “It is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure.” God is not within us in a silent and inactive way. God is operating within us. The Greek word for *operates* in Philippians 2:13 is equivalent to the English word *energizes*. God is operating in us, energizing in us.

The divine element is very active. It is energizing, it works, and it is organic. Anything that is organic has an energizing capacity within it. Within the divine life that we are enjoying today, there is a renewing capacity. This capacity is not merely the measure of the divine life. When I use the word *capacity*, I mean the ability of the divine life in its nature. In God’s divine nature there is the ability that is energizing all day. Once the divine life with the divine nature gets into us, it energizes within us. We all have the divine element energizing in us, and in this divine element there is the renewing capacity.

We may use soap as an illustration because it has the capacity to wash away dirt. There is the ability to wash away dirt in the nature of the soap. Likewise, in the divine life that we have received and that we are enjoying, there is a renewing capacity according to its nature. Thank the Lord for the renewing capacity of the divine life. We need to enjoy the renewing capacity of the divine life in resurrection day by day.

This is why we have to learn to die to ourselves. How do we die to ourselves? Every morning we should contact the Lord. First, we have to confess our sins. Second, we have to reject ourselves. In rejecting ourselves, we pass through the death of Christ, and the death of Christ kills us. In 2 Corinthians 4 Paul talks about “the putting to death of Jesus” (v. 10). This means that Jesus, in a positive sense, is always killing us. In many medicines today there is a healing element and a killing element that kills the bad germs and bacteria within us. In Jesus there is the killing element. He is our medication to heal us, enliven us, and kill all the negative things within us. In this dose there is the killing power. Morning after morning we need to come to the Lord and take Him as our antibiotic. Jesus is our daily antibiotic. When we take Him as our medication, we enjoy the killing of Jesus, or the putting to death of Jesus. This killing is the process of renewing. Furthermore, this killing brings in resurrection. Jesus does not only comprise killing but also resurrecting. In the resurrection of Christ the divine life has the renewing capacity. When we reject ourselves in the morning to receive God into us, we have the sense during the day that a killing process is going on within us. Also, there is a capacity in the divine life that is renewing us in all our actions.

Philippians 2:13 tells us that God is operating in us, and then verse 14 tells us to do all things without murmurings and reasonings. If we receive the addition of God in the morning, this addition has the killing power. It will kill our murmurings and reasonings. In the previous chapter I told you that when I was young, I heard someone say that the church in Philippi was the best church, but Philippians 2:14 shows us that even the church in Philippi had murmurings and reasonings. Murmurings are of our emotions, mostly by the sisters; reasonings are of our mind, mostly by the brothers. In the church the sisters are used to murmuring because they are emotional, and the brothers are used to reasoning because they are logical. It is mostly the brothers who consider according to their reasonings who is wrong and who is right. Psalm 133 tells us how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity, but if the church life is full of murmurings and reasonings, how can we live together in peace? Murmurings and reasonings are according to the old creation.

In my early days of ministry I advised people to take care of their behavior, but this only worked with them temporarily. In a training in 1953 and 1954 I stressed thirty aspects of character. All the trainees received this fellowship and practiced it. After a short time, however, many of these aspects of character disappeared from them. Many of the trainees, including the co-workers, went back to their old character. Our character is the old creation that needs to be renewed to become the new creation.

God's intention is altogether to make us new. This is not an overnight matter. It takes a long time in our life, and it requires us to contact God, to receive God, and to get God added into us all the day. It requires us to pray, confessing our sins and rejecting ourselves to take the cross of Christ. To take the cross of Christ is a killing, and this killing is death. This death brings in resurrection, and in this resurrection the divine life in us will carry out its renewing capacity. Then we will be changed metabolically. This process of renewing takes a period of years. Brother Nee once said that this renewing requires twenty years.

The renewing process should be continuous. Moment by moment we have to receive God so that He can be added into us, and we have to reject ourselves to receive the death of Christ so that we can cooperate with the Lord within us. Then we will enjoy not only the renewing capacity but also the renewing result, which is a metabolic change in our behavior, in our character, in our disposition, and even in our habit. The most difficult thing to renew is our habit. When we experience God in Christ daily, we will see that God's intention is to renew us bit by bit, especially to renew our habit. This is the real experience of being renewed day by day. For this purpose God raises up all kinds of environments to consume our outer man so that our inner man can be renewed day by day.

God desires us to be the new creation. When all of the Lord's children pass through the process of renewing to become the New Jerusalem, they will be in a state of being fully renewed. The holy city is called the *New Jerusalem* because it has no old element of God's old creation. As we pass through afflictions, there needs to be a continual renewing taking place in us day by day so that God can accomplish His heart's desire. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1989*, vol. 2, "Being Renewed Day by Day," pp. 357-363)

**MEETING GOD'S NEED  
AND PRESENT NEEDS IN THE LORD'S RECOVERY**

Message TRhree

**Our Need to Labor on the All-inclusive Christ  
to Have the Produce to Exhibit Christ in the Church  
and to Have a Surplus of Christ to Bring to the Church Meetings  
for the Corporate Worship of God Our Father**

Scripture Reading: Deut. 8:7-10; 12:6-7, 11-12, 18; 16:15-17; Eph. 3:8; John 4:23-24

- I. As believers in Christ who have been led by Christ into Himself as the good land typified by the land of Canaan, we need to labor on Christ—1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 1:12:**
- A. After the people of Israel entered into and possessed the land of Canaan and received their allotted portion, they labored on the land—Deut. 8:7-10; 12:6-7, 11-12, 18:
    - 1. Whether or not they were willing to labor on the land was a serious matter; they had to labor on and cultivate the land.
    - 2. This is a picture of how we need to labor diligently on Christ so that we may enjoy His all-inclusive riches—Eph. 3:8; 1:7; 2:7; 1 Cor. 15:58; Phil. 3:10.
  - B. The life we live after entering into Christ as the good land is a life of laboring on Christ—Col. 1:12; Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor. 15:10:
    - 1. As the Lord's people who are living in the all-inclusive Christ, we need to labor on Christ, seeking Christ and enjoying Christ in every situation—Col. 1:12; 3:1, 4, 10-11.
    - 2. We are in a very rich land, but if we do not labor on it, there is no produce for us to experience and enjoy—Eph. 1:7; 2:7; 3:8; 1 Cor. 15:58.
  - C. Although we need to labor on Christ as the land to produce Christ, we need to realize that it is not we who produce Christ but Christ who produces Himself in us through our labor—Phil. 2:13; Eph. 3:17; Col. 3:15-16:
    - 1. We all need to labor on Christ and let Christ give us much produce; then we will have rich experiences of Christ—Eph. 3:8; Phil. 4:19.
    - 2. The harvest of Christ is the Christ on whom we have labored and have reaped to be our harvest—3:10.
  - D. Every morning we need to pray, asking the Lord for the day's portion of grace and consecrating ourselves to the Lord for the purpose of experiencing and enjoying Him by laboring on Him—Rom. 12:1-2; 15:16.
  - E. Throughout the day we need to maintain our fellowship with the Lord and thereby contact Him, labor on Him, apply Him, experience Him, and enjoy Him—John 15:4-5, 11; 16:22; 1 Pet. 1:8.
  - F. Exercising our spirit is the key to laboring on Christ, experiencing Christ, and producing Christ—1 Tim. 4:7:
    - 1. The way to labor on Christ is to exercise our spirit to contact the Spirit, the reality of the all-inclusive Christ as the good land—Gal. 3:14.

2. Throughout the day, in every situation and in all our circumstances, we should exercise our spirit to contact the Lord and experience Him—1 Tim. 4:7; Rom. 8:4; 1 Cor. 6:17; Phil. 4:11-13.
- G. We labor on Christ as the good land by exercising our heart to have faith in the Lord and to love the Lord and by exercising our spirit to contact the Lord and to receive the dispensing of the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, the reality of Christ as the good land—2 Cor. 3:16; 13:14; Gal. 3:14.

**II. If we faithfully labor on the all-inclusive Christ, we will have the riches of Christ as the produce to exhibit Christ in the church—Eph. 3:8; 1 Cor. 14:26:**

- A. The proper life of Christians is to labor on Christ every day and thus have the rich surplus of Christ to bring to the meetings for a rich exhibition of Christ—v. 26:
  1. We come together in the church meetings to have an exhibition of Christ—Col. 1:18, 27.
  2. Through our daily experiences of the riches of Christ, these riches will become an exhibition of the produce of Christ—Eph. 3:8, 17-18; Col. 2:6, 9-10, 17.
  3. Our meetings should always be an exhibition to show forth what Christ is, what Christ has, and what Christ does—Heb. 1:3; 2:9, 14; 1 John 3:8; 4:9, 15; Acts 2:24, 32-33; Rev. 1:17b-18.
- B. We meet to exhibit not only the Christ given to us by God but also the Christ we have produced, the Christ on whom we have labored and whom we have experienced; this is the Christ whom we come together to exhibit—Col. 1:12-13; Phil. 3:10.
- C. If we continually labor on Christ, we will have the rich surplus of Christ to bring to meetings for a rich exhibition of Christ—1 Cor. 1:24, 30; 10:3-4; 14:26.
- D. Whenever we come together, regardless of the kind of meeting we are having, we should come with the Christ experienced by us as the surplus to be offered to God and exhibited to the whole universe and to the enemy, putting him to shame—John 4:23-24; Eph. 3:10, 17; 4:15:
  1. Then our meetings will be enriched and strengthened because they are full of Christ—Col. 3:4, 10-11.
  2. Such a church life is an exhibition of Christ, an expression of Christ—Eph. 3:21.
  3. We need to bring the surplus of Christ to every meeting to exhibit Christ—v. 8.
  4. We need to enjoy Christ in our daily life and come together to exhibit Him—1 Pet. 1:8.
- E. To have proper Christian meetings, we need to contact the Lord daily in our personal life and then come to the meetings with the realization and understanding that we are coming to exhibit Christ and share Christ with others—1 Cor. 14:26.
- F. “Whene’er we meet with Christ endued, / The surplus of His plenitude / We offer unto God as food / And thus exhibit Christ. / Let us exhibit Christ, / Let us exhibit Christ; / We’ll bring His surplus to the church / And thus exhibit Christ”—*Hymns*, #864, stanza 1 and chorus.

**III. We need to labor on the all-inclusive Christ in order to have a surplus of Christ to bring to the church meetings for the corporate worship of God our Father—John 4:23-24; Eph. 3:21:**

- A. The experience of the children of Israel is a picture of a proper Christian meeting—Deut. 12:6; 16:15-16:
  - 1. God commanded them to not be empty-handed when they came together to worship Him; they had to come with their hands full of the produce of their labor—Exo. 23:15; Deut. 12:11; 16:16.
  - 2. When they came to worship in the place designated by God, they worshipped God by offering to Him the top surplus of their labor on the land—vv. 15, 17.
- B. For our worship of Him, the Father requires that we come to Him with a harvest of Christ; thus, we need to come to the church meetings with the riches of Christ—John 4:23-24; Eph. 3:8.
- C. Daily, we should labor on Christ to have a harvest of Christ's riches to bring to the church meetings for the corporate worship of God the Father—Deut. 12:6; 1 Cor. 14:26; John 4:23-24; Deut. 16:15-17.
- D. A life in the all-inclusive Christ as the good land is a life of laboring on Christ, producing Christ, enjoying Christ, sharing Christ with others, and offering Christ to God the Father that He may enjoy Christ with us—John 4:23-24; 1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 3:21; Rev. 5:13:
  - 1. This kind of enjoyment and sharing is an exhibiting of Christ to the entire universe—19:7.
  - 2. This is a worship to God the Father and a shame to the enemy—John 4:23-24.
- E. It is crucial that we diligently labor on Christ to have our hands full of Christ and then come to the church meetings to enjoy this rich and glorious Christ with God's children and with God the Father Himself—1 Cor. 10:31; 14:26; John 4:23-24; Rom. 15:6.
- F. Whenever we come to the Lord's table meeting to remember the Lord and worship the Father, we must come with the riches of Christ produced by our daily laboring on Christ—Deut. 16:15-17:
  - 1. To worship God with Christ is to worship Him collectively with all the children of God by enjoying Christ with one another and with God—1 Cor. 14:26.
  - 2. We need to produce enough of Christ so that there will be a surplus to share with others and to offer the best part of the produce to God the Father for His joy, delight, and satisfaction—Deut. 15:11; 18:3-4; 12:11.

### **Excerpts from the Ministry:**

#### **WORSHIPPING IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTHFULNESS**

In these messages we will consider the proper Christian service. This is a big subject that covers many matters. We will be concerned not merely with messages, teachings, doctrine, and knowledge. Rather, we will deal with practice and experience.

The service actually includes all Christian activities. We do not use the word *service* in the same way that Christianity does. Service also includes how to have the meetings. In Christian service and activity the first and most important thing is to meet, to have meetings. Without meeting it is impossible to have the Christian service or any kind of Christian activity. In other words, all Christian service and activities depend on meeting. Therefore, the first thing we must learn is how to meet.

The genuine Christian meeting is not a meeting like that in today's Christianity. Meetings in Christianity today are according to the system of the clergy and the laity. I hope that

we would not have *clergy* and *laity* in our dictionary. We have to drop these two words. We have no such distinction. We are all priests; we believe in the universal priesthood. For us to come together means that all the members, not only a few responsible brothers, need to share the responsibility of the meeting. In the meetings, strictly speaking, there are no responsible brothers. All are simply brothers. When we come together, we come on the same standing with the same status. When we meet, we share the responsibility in the meetings.

In these messages we will also consider how to reach people, how to have an outreach, that is, how to preach the gospel to the unbelievers. We must learn how to bring Christ to the unbelievers and also how to contact believers. We also need to learn how to help people in life. This needs much practice. It involves knowing how to minister life to people and how to help them go on in the spiritual life.

### **WORSHIPPING GOD IN OUR HUMAN SPIRIT**

First, we must see the basic principle for our service, work, and activities. When we speak about service, work, and activities, we need to remember well what the Lord taught us in John 4. Verses 23 and 24 say, “An hour is coming, and it is now, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truthfulness, for the Father also seeks such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truthfulness.” In these verses in two instances the word *spirit* is not capitalized. This is very important. Many people know these verses, but most understand that *spirit* here is the Holy Spirit. The thought in today’s Christianity is that we worship in the Holy Spirit. This is not wrong, but what is more basically important is that in the New Testament time we must learn how to worship God in our human spirit. This has been neglected very much in Christianity. It is rather hard to find a message telling us that we have to worship and serve God in our human spirit.

### **WORSHIPPING GOD IN TRUTHFULNESS**

In addition, many may think that *truthfulness* as mentioned in John 4 is teaching or doctrine. Others say that *truthfulness* here means “sincerity,” that we must worship God with sincerity. Neither of these is accurate. *Truthfulness* here does not refer to mere doctrine or sincerity. Because God is Spirit, it is easy, logically speaking, to understand that we must worship God in spirit. But it is more difficult to understand why we must worship Him in truthfulness.

Why must we worship God, who is Spirit, in truthfulness? In order to understand a portion of Scripture, we first need its context. The context of these two verses gives us the background. This is the word that the Lord Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman. That woman raised the problem of worship, saying, “Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, yet you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men must worship” (v. 20). The background of the word spoken here is the worship in the Old Testament. Therefore, we must see what the worship in the Old Testament was.

### **Worshipping on the Unique Ground**

There were two main matters related to the worship in the Old Testament. According to Deuteronomy 12 through 16, the first main item was the place appointed by God as the center of worship, which eventually was Jerusalem. All the worshippers of God in the Old Testament time had to go to Jerusalem, to the very spot chosen and appointed by God. This kept the oneness of the people of Israel. No Israelite had any right to set up another place as a center for worship. If they would have had that right, it would have been too easy to have divisions. The unique, central place was the very factor that kept the unity of the people of Israel for all their generations.

Throughout thousands of years on this earth there has always been only one temple; there have never been two. All the people of Israel knew that no one had the right to choose any other place as a ground, a site, to raise up a temple. Even if they built a temple in Babylon exactly the same in size, shape, and material as the one Solomon built in Jerusalem, it would not have been the real temple, because it was not on the right ground. The right ground was the very factor that kept the oneness of the people of God.

According to Deuteronomy 12 through 16, the people had the right to enjoy every kind of produce of the good land of Canaan, but when they were going to enjoy that produce for the worship to God, they had no right to do it in any place other than the unique place, Jerusalem. This is God's wisdom to keep the oneness. Later on, after the captivity, the Jewish people had many synagogues, but they never dared to have a second temple.

### **Worshipping with the Riches of the Good Land**

The second main item related to worship was all the types in the Old Testament. We need much time to learn the types. There were many types. The most basic one was the good land of Canaan into which the people of Israel were brought, which typifies Christ into whom the people of God today have been brought. This refers us to Genesis 1:9-10, in which on the third day of creation God brought the dry land out of the water of death. This signifies the resurrection of Christ; Christ as the land buried under the death water was raised on the third day. Out of that land came many different lives—the vegetable life, the animal life, and the human life, which is in the likeness of God. This typifies that all life comes out of the resurrected Christ. Later this land became the good land of Canaan, which God prepared for His people. In this way the people of Israel's being brought into the good land typifies that we today have been brought into Christ, who is our good land.

After being brought into the good land, the people of Israel lived in the land, by the land, and with the land. They walked in it, moved in it, worked in it, and did everything in it. They obtained their food, their clothing, and their dwelling place from this land. They had everything for their living from the land. This also is a type, typifying that Christ is everything to us. We have to walk in Him, do things in Him, move in Him, and live in, live by, and live with Him. We also obtain our food, clothing, and dwelling place from Him. All that we need is in Christ.

There is a saying that a picture is better than a thousand words. For this reason, I like the Old Testament more than the New Testament. Many people say that the New Testament is better, but in a sense the Old Testament is better than the New Testament, because as young children we need a "kindergarten" that teaches with pictures. If we tell a little child about a dog, he may not know what a dog is, but if we show him a picture of a dog, he will right away understand. We need the Old Testament to show us the pictures. We need to spend time to meditate and pray about the good land and consider how much the good land meant to the people of Israel. Everything they needed came out of the good land. The record of the good land speaks of many things, including vegetables, animals, minerals such as bronze and iron, mountains, rivers, and springs. From these unsearchable riches of the good land the people of God received all that they needed.

Whenever the people of God came to worship God, they were commanded not to come with their hands empty. They had to come with their hands full of the surplus of the produce of the good land. We use the word *surplus* because the people of Israel put aside a certain portion of their produce from the good land for the purpose of God's worship. We usually think of this portion as a tithe of one-tenth, but if we study Leviticus through Deuteronomy carefully, we find that the people put aside at least three portions of one-tenth (Deut. 16:16). They

had to put aside one-tenth, another tenth, and another tenth of the produce they obtained from the good land, not for their own living but for the purpose of worshipping God. In this way, whenever they came together to worship God, they brought a surplus of the produce of the good land to God.

### **Our Need to Labor on Christ as Our Good Land**

The surplus of the produce of the good land typifies Christ, and the way to have the surplus is to labor on Christ. Regrettably, some brothers and sisters are lazy. D. L. Moody, who throughout his life brought myriads of people on two continents to Christ, said that he never saw a lazy person get saved. Perhaps he was too extreme to say this, but I can say that I have never seen a lazy person who could be spiritual. A lazy person may be saved, but I am sure that he cannot be spiritual. You can be brought into the good land, but if you are lazy, you will have no surplus. Rather, you will be a beggar. If we are diligent and industrious to labor on the land that God allotted to us, we will have much produce from this rich land. This produce will be enough not only for us to live on but also for us to have a surplus.

The surplus is the first tenth, not the last tenth. The Israelites had to separate every first lamb and every first tenth of the produce for the Lord. This typifies that after being brought into Christ, we need to labor on Christ, to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to live by Christ. Some may say that we should not use the word *labor*; because today is the dispensation of grace; they say everything is of grace, not of works. There is no doubt that the good land given to us is a grace. The sunshine, the air, the early rain, and the latter rain are also a grace. However, we still have to till the ground. We cannot say that grace will till the ground for us; grace will never do that. From the very beginning of the Scriptures, after Adam was created, man had to till the ground. We need to till the ground, sow the seed, and reap the harvest. Grace will not do these things for us. We cannot bring rain down from heaven. That is not our ability; that is something beyond our ability. That is truly something of grace. Sunshine, air, rain, and the rich soil are all of grace. However, we must realize that we all have our responsibility.

Every morning we have to rise up early. Not one farmer can be lazy; everyone has to rise up early in the morning. If we do not rise early in the morning to spend a little time with Christ, I am certain that when we come to the meeting, we will have nothing in our hand. We will come to the meeting with empty hands. We need to rise up a little earlier, contact the Lord, read the Word, and pray a little to till the ground, sow the seed, and reap the harvest. Some may say that we should not be legalistic in this way. However, we need to be legalistic three times a day in order to eat. We can fast only for a while; if we fast all the time, we will not be able to live.

Day by day we must rise up early to spend some time with the Lord; this is our labor. We have to pray; this is our labor. We also have to exercise our spirit to contact the Lord throughout the whole day; this also is our labor. Moreover, we must deal with many enemies, including the flesh, the self, and the environment. Even our family, friends, relatives, neighbors, colleagues, classmates, and roommates are problems we have to deal with. We also have to preach the gospel and learn to help others. All these are items of the labor we should have. If we labor in all these ways, we will have the rich produce of Christ our good land. Then when we come to the meeting, we will come with our hands full of the riches of Christ. Because day and night we labor on Christ, we will have a rich produce that is not only good enough for us to live in Christ and by Christ but also good enough for us to come to worship God. In this way, when we come to God, we come with Christ.

As we have seen, there were two main items related to the worship in the Old Testament:

the central place and all the types. If you spend time to read the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit will lead you to understand the background of the worship in the Old Testament. Based on this, the Lord told the Samaritan woman, “An hour is coming.” This means that at the time the Lord spoke this word, the age, the dispensation, had changed. Before that time was the old age, the old dispensation, in which there was the worship of the Old Testament. Now, however, the age has changed. Now the proper worship, the true worship, is not a matter of a place or of the types. It is a matter in the spirit, not of Jerusalem, and it is a matter in truthfulness, not of the types. The worship of the New Testament time is a worship in the spirit and a worship in truthfulness.

### **Worshipping with the Christ Whom We Have Experienced**

Along with the types there were also regulations, rules, and laws related to the worship in the Old Testament time. However, all those types, rules, and laws are only empty figures. They are not the reality, the truth. Now the age, the dispensation, has changed. God is seeking to have people who worship Him in spirit, not at Jerusalem, and in truthfulness, in reality, no longer in types and regulations.

We all know what our human spirit is, but what is the reality? The reality is Christ (John 14:6). All the offerings—the sin offering, the trespass offering, the peace offering, the burnt offering, and the meal offering—are types and shadows. Those things are not the reality. The reality of all the offerings is Christ Himself. Likewise, the reality of love for God and love toward our neighbors is Christ. Now there is no need to keep the laws and regulations. There is, however, the need for us to take Christ as our life and live by Him; then we will have the reality.

In the ancient times people came to God with the produce of the land. Now, in this New Testament time, we come to God with the Christ whom we have experienced. In the ancient times people also worshipped God by keeping the commandments, such as those concerning loving God and loving their neighbors. Today, however, we worship God not by keeping the commandments but by taking Christ as our life. When we take Christ as our life, Christ is love for us to love God, and Christ is love toward our neighbors. All those commandments are empty; they are not the truth, the reality. Today Christ is the reality.

### **OUR NEED TO EXERCISE OUR SPIRIT**

If we realize the background of the Lord’s word in John 4, we will know the proper meaning of worship. We must realize that worship today—our service, work, and activities—must be in the human spirit and in Christ as the reality. It must not be in forms, rules, or regulations. Throughout many generations, at least from the time of the Reformation almost five centuries ago, many devoted Christians have tried again and again to study the New Testament to find the proper way for Christians to worship God. However, no one could find the answer. I myself did the same thing, and I could not find the answer. Eventually, I found that the principle is to worship in spirit and in reality.

Sometimes dear brothers ask me if it is best to begin our meeting with a hymn. I say that this is perhaps right but not absolutely right. It depends on whether the hymn is called and sung in the spirit. If the hymn is called and sung in a formal way as a ritual, it is wrong. Some brothers ask if it is right to have hymns first and then prayers. I reply that this is fine if it is in the spirit. However, it may not be in the spirit; it may be done according to a program, not a program printed on paper but one printed in our mind. In this case, it is wrong. We all have to learn how to exercise our spirit.

The exercise of our spirit is one of the items of the Lord’s recovery in these last days. To

worship in the human spirit has been much neglected by today's Christianity. Many today have forgotten about the exercise of the human spirit and instead exercise their mind. Therefore, in order to be trained in a proper way in the Lord's service in the church life, the first matter is that we must learn to exercise our spirit. We may compare exercising our spirit for our service to using our feet to play soccer. When I was a young boy, I was fond of playing soccer, which we called football. Even in the classroom while I was listening to the lecture, I was exercising my feet, because I knew that after class we would go to play a game. In the United States, however, the game of football is played more with the hands than with the feet. To exercise our mind in the service is like using our hands to play soccer. We need to learn how to exercise our spirit.

We need to learn to exercise our spirit in our daily life. The Epistles tell us that we must walk according to the spirit (Rom. 8:4-6). The King James Version often uses *Spirit* with a capital letter in passages such as these, but the better translations render *spirit* with a lower-case letter. To walk in spirit means to exercise our spirit by our daily walk. If we are exercised to walk according to the spirit, our spirit will be active when we come to the meetings. We will know how to exercise our spirit. How can I play football if I do not know how to exercise my feet? Many Christians simply do not know how to exercise their spirit, so when they come to the meeting, they do not know how to worship God in spirit.

In these days we cannot overstress this matter. We should always stress that we must help the brothers and sisters to learn how to exercise their human spirit. Even in our home, in dealing with our family, we must learn how to exercise our spirit, to do and speak things not by our mind, emotions, desires, or likes but by the inner feeling, the consciousness of the spirit. We must learn how to exercise according to the deepest feeling in our spirit. Then we will be used to exercising our spirit, so whenever we come to the meeting, we will be ready.

In order to play tennis, we have to exercise our wrist. When we are accustomed to exercising our wrist, we can play tennis, but if we do not exercise in this way, how can we play the game? In order to be trained in the church life, the first thing we must consider is the exercise of the spirit. We must learn how to worship God in our human spirit, because today God as the Spirit dwells in our spirit.

God is Spirit, and this divine Spirit dwells in our spirit. For this reason, the apostle Paul tells us that the Lord is with our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22). There are many expositions of the book of Galatians, but it is hard to find one that speaks on the last verse of that book. At the end of Galatians, the last verse says, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" (6:18). Regardless of how much we know the teachings of Galatians, if we do not know how to realize the grace of Christ in our spirit, we will not be able to have the experiences of Christ taught in this book. In the first four chapters of Galatians we have the teachings concerning Christ: Christ revealed in us (1:16), Christ living in us (2:20), Christ put on us (3:27), and Christ being formed in us (4:19). The last two chapters, however, deal with the spirit: walking by the Spirit (5:16, 25), who dwells in our spirit, and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ being with our spirit (6:18). All the teachings concerning Christ must be applied in our spirit; then we will have the experience of Christ.

We must learn how to discern our spirit and to exercise it all the time. Then whenever we come together, we will know how to use our spirit. Our spirit will be on the alert, ready, active, and living. If we do not learn to exercise the spirit, we will not be able to have the proper church life. The church life is a life in the human spirit with the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit today indwells our spirit, so we must know how to exercise our spirit. This is one aspect of the principle of the New Testament worship.

### **COMING TOGETHER TO EXHIBIT CHRIST**

As we have seen, the other aspect of the New Testament worship is to worship in truthfulness, that is, in reality, in Christ. When we come to the meetings, we have to exercise our spirit, but what should we exercise to do in our spirit? The people in the ancient times had to bring all their surplus to Jerusalem to offer it and enjoy it with one another in the presence of God. At least a part of what they offered was food to God. Not only the people of Israel enjoyed the surplus, but God also enjoyed it. This typifies that we come to the meetings to exercise our spirit to exhibit Christ. When the people of Israel came together and brought all their surplus to Jerusalem, that became a “fair,” an exhibition, of the produce of the good land. Likewise, when we Christians come together, the Christian meeting is an exhibition of Christ. We exercise our spirit to exhibit Christ.

### **LABORING ON CHRIST TO HAVE A SURPLUS OF CHRIST**

We all must learn how to exercise our spirit to minister Christ, apply Christ, and share Christ with others. This depends on our daily labor. If we do not labor on Christ and live by Christ, we will have nothing of Christ in our hand. Even if we understand how to exercise our spirit, we may have the technique but not the material. When we come to the meeting, our spirit may be positive, active, living, on the alert, and ready to exercise, but we may be poor and empty-handed, not having anything of Christ to minister. If this is so, we are worshipping in spirit but not in reality; we are in Jerusalem, but we do not have a surplus in our hands. Therefore, the church life depends on our daily exercise of the spirit and also on our daily walk in Christ. We have to labor on Christ, walk in Christ, live by Christ, and have many experiences of Christ. Then we will be rich in Christ and with Christ. When we come to the meeting, we will know how to exercise our spirit, and we will have much surplus of Christ. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1964*, vol. 4, “Serving in the Meetings and in the Gospel,” pp. 73-82)