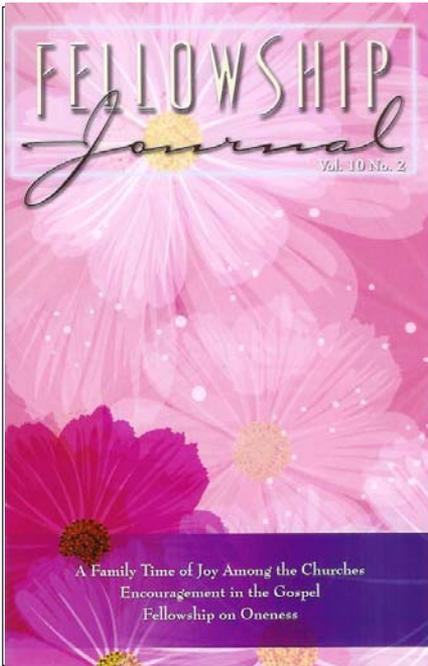


FELLOWSHIP *Journal*

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From Africa

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on Joyfulness

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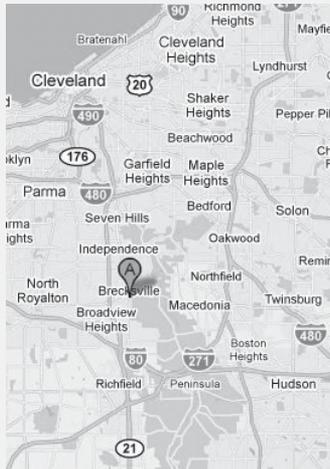
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The Church Now is Gathering in BRECKSVILLE

After the Gospel Odyssey last year in Brecksville, some moved there and others travel to gather with those in that city who desire the church life.



“When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.” - Acts 11:23

ENCOURAGEMENT
BY
WAY OF THE EXAMPLE
OF OUR BROTHERS
IN
AFRICA

We need to be careful not to think that to *really* do something for the Lord, we need to go somewhere far away. What is real is to stand for Him right where you are! The challenge we face is whether we can tell the Lord, "I want to start again. You are real and You've saved me for a purpose. I want it to be specific and I want everything from here on to be real. I want my life to count." When we see the Lord, we want to hear those words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

We shouldn't just generally count on grace, hoping that everything will be "okay." No, we need to realize we are indeed servants. In Christ there is grace, even special grace, that makes us who we are. We shouldn't look for anything grandiose, but we should aspire to live for the Lord, that our lives would count before Him. We have been chosen with a destiny and that destiny is related to how we've been set and formed and appointed to be fruitful! Our life can count for others. That is what is in the Lord's heart and He is confident in what we are able to do in Him. Therefore we must respond to the Lord and live that life in our seemingly small, challenging circumstances. It may be something for the inner city or for a particular neighbor or co-worker. You have those little seeds, but out of fear of failure, out of the necessities of the business of your life, those little promptings and hopes of the Lord in you may end up easily ignored. Therefore we need to ask the Lord to help us carry out whatever it is He has prepared for us.

My wife and I just returned from a time in Africa. Others have labored there before us and set themselves there and suffered there and cared for the gospel and the discipling of young believers there. A great price had already been paid before we arrived on the scene. We were urged on by that price that was paid, so we took the opportunity to go for a visit. The receiving of the saints and their hunger for the Bible and their desire to practically serve Christ was such an encouragement and lesson to us. Therefore we felt we could continue and

take a little time to serve. As a carpenter I can put down my tools and I can go; and I have a supportive wife who has met those dear ones as well and shares the same heart.

This thought of laying down a job for the sake of the Lord's work isn't with us as typical Americans. If you get your foot in the door in some employment, you feel like you have to keep it there! Too many live life that way, not realizing that we are all servants of the Lord! We are in our mid-fifties, and we have had our struggles, but we want to finish well by investing what we have! We may not feel we have that much, but we must realize we are a part of something, and because we have that, we have a lot for our neighbors and coworkers. It is there! Thus, when my wife and I go to Africa, there is a lot within us that we don't even realize we have, due to this inheritance we share with you all.

When Keith and Tina Miller went to Uganda, they mostly labored on the university campus. That university, Makerere University, is the best university in Uganda. Some of those who have given themselves to the Lord there, arrived there at a great sacrifice, being the first in their village to go to a university. Their families have emptied themselves of resources to put them through the university, and then one of their children believes, is baptized and wants to give his or her life to Jesus! We have visited some of these families and shared with them so that they might have some understanding and be willing to lend their children to the Lord.

Thus there is a good group of young believers in the capital city of Kampala, mostly from that university, who have given their lives to the Lord. The core of saints there has already spent a year under a special kind of training, and they are bearing the church. Now there is another group of young people who have also put themselves into a discipleship training. Vern Yoder is taking care of that, as far as their lessons are concerned, but practically they are carrying it together, since Vern cannot be with them very often. They are practically carrying it together, so they have a good discipleship training in the truth, and an active practice of having their own Bible studies and home gatherings. They are not just getting truth; they also have a strong labor to bring that truth to neighborhoods and to dorm rooms. There is a good, healthy core!

On the Lord's Day there may be 80 of us together or 120 of us together, mostly young people; but now there are also some families from the neighborhood. There is a good core for the church life! The brothers and sisters are so precious because of the price they have paid and are still paying to give their lives to the Lord.

From that city center we are getting to know neighborhoods farther away. One town is many hours away by bus. We met these saints through a young brother who meets with the brothers and sisters on the campus. He called his friends in this town and told them about the saints and the church and the truth, and they wanted to know more! Somehow they found a way to come visit. It costs 20,000 Ugandan shillings to make that trip, which is quite an expense for them. Even to purchase the air time to make such a phone call is a sacrifice!

After our Lord's Day gathering with the singing and the teaching and the fellowship, they came to us and said, "This is what we are looking for! We did not even know this existed. In our village you can hear the same priest for thirty years and not get this. In Uganda there are prosperity churches, miracle churches, entertainment churches and dead traditional churches, but *you* have the Bible! This is what we want! We don't need money; we need revival! We need the Bible!" So they invited us to come to their town, and we went. We took another young brother with us. We were so well received! They were hungry and so interested in the hymns in the hymnbook and the truth in the Bible. It was such a delight!

The brother who takes the lead there makes his living with a chainsaw by harvesting lumber out of the jungle. That is how he makes his living and supports the church and whoever has need. They really have that kind of caring heart! The father of the brother who introduced us to this place has a cow, and we enjoyed hot, steamy mugs of milk throughout the day. One day I asked, "Where is the calf?" They replied that the calf was what provided the school fees for this young man, their brother, to go to college. There were perhaps eight children in the family in a small two-bedroom house. They were comparatively well-off. They love the Lord and the saints, and really give themselves.

This brother would travel wherever he could to cut wood. He was the oldest of eight, who were orphaned when he was still a teenager. It became his responsibility to take care of the family, but he escaped and took the easy way out by alcohol. So he would work a few days and then drink it off. He had lots of friends, because he could make money, and they could all drink. He was living that kind of life and then met his wife-to-be. He said, "I fooled her. I pretended to be a Christian until we were married. And then she found my herbs." The witchdoctors and those who practice magic possess herbs that have real demonic significance. She destroyed his herbs and that put a fear in him. Then he heard someone preaching a hell-fire and brimstone gospel message. That message caused him to become afraid for his life. He couldn't sleep. He said, "If I still had my herbs, I would have been fine." Without his wife's knowing about it, he secretly went to

meet with a small Pentecostal group, and got saved. Then he went back home and was restored to his brothers and sisters. It turned out that one of his brothers had gotten saved in the meantime and had been praying strongly for him, even though it was generally assumed that he was dead. His brother who had been praying for him had been disciplined in the truth through a Brethren correspondence course. That family therefore got charged; they had the truth and a desire to preach the gospel and to plant churches. That is how they got their start in this town.

So there is a good network of dear believers with some basic truth, but they have carried it farther because of their desire for the gospel and for the churches and the church life. Their view is that they are servants of the Lord. So they work, but they work for the ministry, which to them means the ability to take a taxi to a neighborhood and share the gospel and encourage believers and meet with families in their homes. Or it means they can get food for their family and have some left so they can get on the back of a motorcycle and go fifteen to thirty kilometers from their town. But in Rukungiri, they walk a lot! If they say, "It is close, only twenty minutes"... it might be an hour! I feel I am a pretty good walker, but when you are there, you REALLY walk. There are ways to take shortcuts but it is rough going.

There is one mom who works in the city of Kampala so she can provide school fees for her children. She walked with her kids to the meeting with her children and later we walked back with them; I am sure it was ten kilometers. The moms walk to be with the saints. In that environment there is such a desire for the Lord and for the work, but it is fueled by the saints who pay the price to work and to go and visit.

These saints have actually, on a couple of occasions, been in prison because they are not meeting as a recognized Catholic or Anglican Church. They have been arrested for meeting without government approval and certificates, and have been beaten. They even have had their names put out on the radio. They have been given a bad name; but now they have been established long enough so that a lot of that accusation and suspicion has died down.

They don't have a thought that they are not full-time. They just have a thought, "I have to take care of the ministry," and the ministry is their word going out. They go to the Anglican schools, but through prayer and perseverance they have an open door. The headmaster knows his students need Christ and he wants the brothers and sisters to come. When I went they brought me to the schools so I could talk to the kids, for which they organize a special time. A hundred or so kids come together in the cafeteria. The assistant headmaster did not

want us there, but he couldn't offend his boss, so he had to go along. When it came to the point we asked who wanted to pray, he said, "The time is over." So we had to fight to give an opening for the ones to pray. I just said, "Raise your hands if you want to receive this Christ." I had just gone forward to pray with the first one when he closed the meeting. Only one or two were able to pray. Later one of the brothers who brought me told me that he had them when they were students and he had brought them to the Lord.

I just bring this up to point out they have found ways to preach the gospel and to visit their neighbors. They just bring the message of the gospel wherever they can, regardless if people seem "open" or not. That is the environment in Rukungiri. I made three trips to that area, and every time there were long walks to the neighborhoods. They get their neighbors together. In one house a girl had just completed her O-level exams for high school, and they were fifteen kilometers from the city. Even so, she invited three adults from her high school, including her headmaster, to hear the gospel. She is a young girl, and that is a somewhat stratified society. Even so, she would ask one of her teachers, the headmaster and the bursar to come to her house fifteen kilometers away. She had such a passion for the gospel and that they would come, as well as all her relatives. She worked with her mom and sisters to put on a dinner for us. I came with a couple of brothers. She had about twenty-five people who came to eat a meal and hear the gospel. And her bursar actually came! Some of the neighbors brought their chairs out of their houses and sat close enough so they could hear, even though they didn't want to come by her invitation. This was a farmhouse. Everything we ate was from her hand. When we left she gave me six eggs, which was her blessing to support. This is the environment in Rukungiri. She walked with us part of the way back, and asked, "When is the next discipleship training? How can I be in it?" She was a high school student, yet she really desired to be in the next training in Kampala.

The brothers and sisters in the training still had the songs and the hymns folded up in their pockets, kind of tattered, and wanted to sing those songs with us. One mother told me that after they finish the work in the garden, her son, who was in the training, goes out to preach the gospel.

This time I also got to visit some of the saints in Kenya, whom we had heard of in a roundabout way. One brother grew up in a small city in western Kenya, six hours from Nairobi. This brother works in a bank in Nairobi, and heard that there was a meeting in Kampala. He took a twelve-hour bus ride to Kampala to spend one day and one night with us, after which he took the twelve-hour bus ride back. He

did that because he was hungry for fellowship! He loves the saints and wants to be with them and to be a part of the circulation of life in the Body. He found out that there was going to be a conference in Ghana and took a plane from Nairobi to be in that long weekend conference. Through fellowship we found out that he wanted us to visit, so we took that twelve-hour bus ride to Nairobi. We arrived at 12:30 at night and this brother and his wife picked us up and brought us to his house. They had a big meal ready for us, and we fellowshiped until about 2 am. I got up early and they were already at work! We had breakfast with his brother and father. They are fighting for opportunities of fellowship. We went with him and his wife to another city, six-hours away, to fellowship with some believers there. He makes that drive twice a month. He has a little farm to take care of there, but he also fellowships and “networks” with the believers in that city.

They have a life that puts ours to shame. Compared to us, they don’t have resources, but they are looking for ways to share the Lord and the Bible with others. When they say “ministry” they mean their knowledge of the Word has to go out to others. They are wired that way from the time they are young believers. You wouldn’t think they were qualified, but they don’t see it that way. They have to meet with others and share the gospel and have a kind of church life together.

One brother has a little used-car lot, but surprisingly we saw him on the road driving from Nairobi as we were. We spoke to each other on cell phones, and found out he had loaned a car to someone and now he had to pick it up since he had sold it. But it was not driving well, and he had to take care of it. We stopped to buy some goat meat from some Masai, and found them later on the road on the side fixing the car. We stopped to help, but they told us to go on, because the brothers and sisters were waiting for us. They eventually made it. These saints had been meeting since midday Saturday, but we didn’t arrive until 6 pm due to some difficulty. They had been waiting and waiting, and when we arrived we ate a big meal. There were over twenty people in this living room. I was really impressed with the amount of chairs in their house. The walls are lined with chairs just to seat the saints. The next morning we met together for the Lord’s table, and every stick of seating was brought out of that house and placed under the trees so we could be together. One brother had eight plastic chairs tied to the roof of his vehicle. This brother took the biggest car from his lot, a Toyota Land Cruiser, to drive over twenty people in that car, with the chairs on top. I wish I had taken a picture of all the people who came out of that car! So there were over forty at that gathering under the trees, and over half must have come out of that car! They are characterized by their love for one another and their hospitality.

Every room in the home we stayed in was full of beds; five of us stayed in one room. I shared a bed with a brother; we were very glad to be able to sleep on a bed. One friend said, "This is not right! There are no boundaries in this house. Anyone can go anywhere and they love people that aren't even from their own tribes!" That is a tribal society. That was her complaint of that household, but isn't that a good compliment? Anyone can go anywhere and they love people, even from different tribes. That characterizes the saints there.

The sisters, when they come into the house, they go right into the kitchen and begin to peel and grate and cook. The brothers just get the benefit of eating. They even have a couple of college students who live with them as though they are sons. They have many sons and daughters, but they also help others who live with them.

They washed and ironed our clothes and shined our shoes. These are university-aged students who did this for us. Did we consider doing the same for others when we were that age? There are no washing machines over there. That reveals something of the heart of the brothers and sisters over there.

This last weekend Titus took the opportunity to go to Africa with Vern. Many came from many places to get together with them just for the encouragement and the fellowship. Elders from many places came. These are really "house churches" since there aren't many cars. People have to meet together according to the distance that can be walked. These saints really have an ownership of the church being theirs.

I asked one brother how he supported himself, and he replied that he made bricks. "When I get a chance, I buy some dirt, since I don't have any land. Then I hire a couple of people and we make bricks." They make the mud and then put them in wood forms; then they let them dry slowly under leaves and then cook the bricks in their own kiln. To this brother, this is like money in the bank. "When the Lord arranges it," this brother said, "I can feed my family and go on with my ministry." He shared with me that this was a good profession to serve the Lord in.

We are so flush and comfortable in this country, and yet we don't think we can serve the Lord, or we write ourselves off from having the ability to serve the Lord. They just live differently. It was an encouragement to my wife and I. They don't have a thought of retirement or putting things away to have a "safety net." What they have, they give. If there is a surplus, instead of the thought of saving, there is the thought of people! There are school fees and so on. They care for one another.

One brother I visited had a little canteen. People would come to buy cooking oil by the ladle. If anyone had a bottle of cooking oil, the

neighbors would be there because they needed it, and the brothers and sisters would give it out. Whatever they have doesn't last long!

I appreciate their generosity and their giving. That is their culture and that is their culture in Christ, to lend when you will not be repaid!

We in America don't have that life, typically. We say we are in tough times so easily, but we don't know what tough times are. Some older saints, living in a dirt floor house, grow subsistence crops; they struggle to pay school fees for six orphans who live with them. When there is money, the children are in school.

My meal in one place as an honored guest was some cold yam, but with some salt added on a palm leaf. That really tasted good! When you receive that, you feel privileged and thankful. Some brothers together were able to buy some woven papyrus mats, and that is what the hospitality stayed upon. We rolled them up during the conference time, and one brother asked if they could borrow those mats for their place to be used for the walls of the meeting place. We brought them out to the corner gas station, where we waited for a truck that drew up that might have room for them. This brother's mom is caring for orphan children and they go from house to house to preach the gospel. This is done with suspicion because they are an "unauthorized" gathering, so a government official will want money for a certificate. This shows how the saints are fighting.

I share these examples of people and places so we might have a little reflection about our life and time and money. It is difficult to get away from the bondage of the self and give of our money and time right where we are for people. We see in Africa and many other places how they love the Bible and they love the Lord; they preach the gospel and they love the saints and they put themselves in... that is it! In our country, however, people will not study the Bible unless they have their own office and desk! We can, however, be inspired, and I know there is something rising up in us. The world has its pull on us and our families, but we are without reproach before Him if we continue in the faith. The fact that we are here together shows that the Lord has worked in our lives and that we are continuing in the faith. Due to this reconciliation, Paul could boast and claim to fill up what was lacking of the afflictions of Christ for His Body, the church. This is the final goal, but it takes our participation in union with the Lord. We can be privileged to share a little bit in the sufferings of Christ for His Body's sake. Join with Christ, and suffer for His Body's sake. This is our privilege.

- *Randall Mann, Cleveland, May 1, 2011*

“Spring Family Fellowship”

MESSAGE ONE

JOYFULNESS IS A STATE

In the Bible, the word joyfulness is different from the word happiness. Happiness has to do with an emotion, whereas joyfulness is a state. The Bible does not command us to be happy, but it does tell us to be joyful (Ps. 100:1; Phil. 4:4).

For instance, my wife and I have been together for nearly fifty years. Over the years, we have discovered that being married does not mean we are always happy! Even so, the state of marriage that has existed between us has been strengthened as we have learned to enhance it. Our relationship may have begun based on our emotion, but it has grown into a state. The highest love is a state, not an emotion. Joyfulness is also such a state.

REJOICE IN THE LORD AND IN HIS PROVISIONS!

After His resurrection, Jesus told His disciples they should abide in the high state of joyfulness (Matt. 28:9). Joyfulness is something of high value. It is not something common; it is something organic that exists as a state for us to abide in. The Lord has provided us with something called joy for us to experience all our life, and the joy the Lord provides is not something that comes and goes!

We have Christ, we have salvation, we have the church, we have the saints, we have the Bible, we have the speaking of the divine Word... all should lead us into the state of joy. Therefore, we should be those who rejoice! We have been granted the ability to rejoice in whatever experiences we obtain or whatever circumstances we arrive at.

BEING IN A STATE VERSUS SOMETHING IN FEELINGS

My wife thought she had married a spiritual man, but she found out differently! When she first knew me, she often saw me giving messages. She must have been impressed by my ability to speak, and most likely expected that I was a certain kind of person. After we married, she surely was disappointed! But she had entered a state that enabled her to declare, "Even though my husband may disappoint me, I give myself to him. I will not give him up!" Now, after so many years of marriage, it is difficult for us to be away from each other. A state exists between us in which she is mine and I am hers. Regardless of what happens, she is the one I love the most, and I am the one she loves the most. This results in a very peaceful state which, in the Lord, is called marriage. You love your spouse, and the Lord loves your spouse too. You care for your spouse; the Lord cares as well. The Lord is in our relationship! That is the state that exists between a husband and a wife in the Lord.

PHILIPPIANS IS PARTICULARLY A BOOK OF JOY

How about the state of a Christian? The state that a Christian experiences is very simple. The Lord says, "These things have I spoken to you that My joy may be in you, and that your joy might be made full" (John 15:11). In the Bible we are often told to rejoice. In Paul's book to the Philippians there is nothing but joyfulness. We may think that joyfulness would best be produced by the kind of revelation found in Ephesians or Colossians, or from the teaching of salvation found in Romans! Or in his letters to the Thessalonians, where Paul writes of the Lord's return, perhaps that is where we would experience the most joy! But instead the book we see it most frequently is in Philippians! Why? Because in Philippians we have

someone not only who is above us and coming to us, but also someone who is alongside us. This is why Philippians is particularly a book marked by joy.

TRUE JOY IS FOSTERED BY INTIMACY

Suppose a wife only sees her husband as her lord and master. And suppose her husband merely promises to provide for her, even to the extent of taking care of her every need. Furthermore, suppose this husband tells her that she must realize what a great person he is (and he is!) Yet regardless of the fact that he is so marvelous, and that she is his and is well-cared for by him, she will probably feel there exists a distance that separates them. If, instead, this husband held his wife's hand and walked with her and was so considerate and warm, placing his arm around her... a totally different state would be produced. So many books in the Bible contain high revelation, but the book of Philippians portrays an intimate relationship between the apostle and the church in which they walk and struggle together to produce what God is after.

THE JOY WE ENTER INTO IS THE VERY JOY GOD EXPERIENCES IN HIS PLAN

If you are someone who struggles for what God is after, you will know joyfulness, for the matter of joyfulness is something found in God Himself! The first transaction of joyfulness in the Bible is seen taking place between God the Father and God the Son as They prepared to do something in time with the view of eternity (Proverbs 8:22-31). There is nothing more precious than that!

GOD'S JOY IS ETERNAL

God would never do anything in time merely FOR time. We feel sometimes very happy to have gained a car or a house, but God never gives us anything without eternity in view. Unless what He does for us produces something of eternal value, there is nothing of value produced at all.

GOD THE SON AND GOD THE FATHER'S JOY IS SEEN IN PROVERBS 8,
WHERE THE FATHER AND THE SON PRODUCE THE INHABITED EARTH

“The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old” (Prov. 8:22). Before anything took place, Christ was there with God (John 1:1). From the following verses in Proverbs we can tell this refers to the creation. God the Son was with God the Father, and said, “I was beside Him as a master craftsman” (Prov. 8:30). The Lord was the engineer who produced everything according to His Father’s desire.

Verse 30 concludes, “I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him.” How significant this is! When a wife looks at her husband, he is daily her delight, as she is his. Suppose the wife is someone who does whatever she does just to produce what is in her husband’s heart. This is somewhat the picture here. In the day of creation, Jesus testified that He was His Father’s daily delight, rejoicing continually before Him. If we know how to be together in our marriages like this, they would really become meaningful! The Son was the Father’s delight, and He rejoiced always before His Father.

The Father is the Great Designer, and the Son is the Great Master Craftsman. This is the manner in which the universe came into being. The Son saw what was great and attractive in His Father, and produced what was in His Father, producing the creation. How profound!

MARRIAGE AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE STATE OF MUTUAL JOY

In a healthy marriage, there is no such thing as familiarity breeding contempt. Instead, there is only increasing appreciation and joyfulness in knowing one another. The more you are together with your spouse, the more you cherish each other. In fact, not only should there be a delight, but even rejoicing! Your marriage should produce such a state of mutual satisfaction and joyfulness. Regardless of how common your spouse may appear to everyone else, he or she is not so to you!

THE FATHER AND THE SON'S JOY IN THE EXISTENCE OF THE INHABITED EARTH

In Proverbs 8 the Son rejoices in what has been produced out from what was in the Father. Furthermore, we are told He rejoices in the inhabited earth and takes delight in the sons of men (v. 31). Everything the Father had in His heart, the Son worked out. The Son, as the Father's delight, produced what He saw in the Father's heart, and ultimately a third party, mankind, the "inhabited earth," entered into this rejoicing with the Father and the Son! Suddenly, man is present! What was within the eternal God as an eternal plan and purpose to obtain something, was produced by the Son who made real what was in the Father's heart. As a Master Engineer, He was able to produce everything, and the more He produced, the more joyful He became. In the midst of what was produced were those who could share in this joyfulness with the Father and the Son. In addition to God the Father and God the Son, so many human beings came into being and multiplied this experience of joy. This description of the Father, the Son and mankind provides the basis for our understanding of joyfulness.

The more the Son produced according to what was in the Father's heart, the more He rejoiced in it. But beyond this, the Son rejoiced in His inhabited earth, and His joyfulness was with the sons of men. How wonderful is this picture! What is portrayed is not merely the power of God, but rather a boast and even a cry that comes out of an overflowing joyfulness. This is what the Lord desires for us as well. He desires that we would stand with Him so that we might dwell with Him in this kind of joyfulness.

JOY AND GRACE

In the New Testament, the word *joy* is closely related to the word *grace*. Without grace, it is impossible to know joy! Grace actually means someone becomes the other party's enjoyment and satisfaction.

There are three ways a wife might provide a meal for her husband. She may do so with food yet without grace. “There is your food. All I do is work! All you do is eat!” Another way would be for her to call her husband to come and then for her to sit and eat with him. A third way, however, would be for her to be gracious and warm in presenting the meal. Surely in this situation, the wife has considered what is most pleasing to her husband! Such grace produces a certain state. The husband and wife find themselves in a relationship that is very different from the other two scenarios. When grace is present, the marriage life becomes very pleasant, and even a source of joy.

Where does joy come from? Joy comes from grace. The Lord is very gracious to us. If we cared for others only by scolding them and placing demands upon them, we might accomplish our “mission” but no joy would be produced. The best way to care for others is to be very gracious to them. For instance, rather than instructing others to read the Bible, you may ask them, “Do you read the Bible? It is so good! Let us read this together. This verse is so good! Let us use it to pray.” If we care for one another in this way of grace, something of joy will be produced.

Is not the Lord gracious to us? We make many mistakes and fail often. Yet the Lord does not typically rebuke us. If He were to rebuke us every time we made a mistake, how downcast we would become! Instead, He is gracious to us. He may require that we go apologize for something, but if so, He goes with us. Then, after we apologize, grace comes in, and with it joy. Is this not our experience? We offend others and we offend the Lord continually, yet when He shines and exposes our situation, He also brings grace. This is how we grow. We become joyful believers not because we are always good, but because we enjoy grace!

The grace we experience produces the state of joy. With such a wonderful Christ, we cannot be but joyful. Joy is gladness, delight and blessedness. It is the accumulation in one’s inner being of the grace dispensed according to God’s good pleasure. The more grace you

enjoy, the more you find that your life is different. You realize your life is for God and for what God desires. Your life is for God's testimony and His satisfaction! The more you enjoy grace, the more you become one with Christ. In this way we are led to God's will and His good pleasure.

On their own, no one can live for God... yet we are able to do so when we have grace! Grace brings us to this state where we are aware of a kind of satisfaction that goes far beyond anything the world can offer or provide. We must thank the Lord for this joy He makes possible for us!

JOY AND CONFIDENCE IN WHOM WE HAVE BELIEVED

Another Greek word that is translated joy is an even stronger word. It expresses a high degree of confidence in someone who is especially noteworthy. Those who experience such confidence enter into a great joy, even to the point of boasting. Perhaps this word could be used for the boasting joy a man feels when he is about to become a father. Joyfulness produces boasting. And who is the One with us who brings us such joy? Shall we not boast in the Lord Jesus Christ? The Lord Himself is with us! The Lord of All, the Lord of the heavens and the earth, lives in us! What a boast and what a joy! The blessed state we have entered into becomes our boast.

Both Greek words are used in Philippians to portray the matter of joyfulness.

JOY IN PHILIPPIANS IS A SHARED JOY GROUNDED IN JOINT PARTICIPATION

Joyfulness is produced as God's economy is carried out by both the apostles and the local churches. The joyfulness that characterizes Philippians is not produced due to some high revelation; the joyfulness seen in Philippians comes about because the Lord is with us, the servant of the Lord is with us, the saints are with us, and the churches are with us. The apostles and the local churches testify together what the Lord is doing in Philippians. This is why Paul could write, "I thank

my God on every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine, always making the request with *joy*" (1:3-4). What is the reason Paul is joyful? His joyfulness was due to their fellowship in the gospel from the first day he was with them even to the time he wrote this epistle (1:5).

THE PHILIPPIANS' FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL AND ITS JOYFUL NEWS

The word *gospel* denotes both Christ in His economy and the good news for those who receive it. *Euaggelion*, or "good news," was used when a new king came into his reign. The bearers of this news would go from place to place declaring that a new king had been crowned. On the one hand, it had to do with the person who was crowned, and on the other hand it had to do with the experience of the people, for typically there would be a cessation of taxes and a release from duties. Thus the gospel points both to the king and to those who heard the good news of his coming. When Paul wrote of the Philippians' fellowship unto the gospel, he was referring to a realm. In this realm there was a new King, who was very wonderful! It is this new King who has produced this realm. In this spiritual realm there is forgiveness and riches and salvation, even unto conformation to the image of Christ! How rich is this realm! Furthermore, in this realm we are also with so many other brothers and sisters as the Body of Christ! A new King with a new kingdom has come, and in this new kingdom are so many blessings! Christ's death and resurrection and enthronement are all a part of this gospel.

A new king with a new kingdom has come. This is the gospel. In this new kingdom are so many kinds of riches and so much blessing! The Lord has ascended and been enthroned to be the Lord of lords and King of kings. In this divine and mystical realm is a full salvation, having Christ Himself as the base, with salvation as the process, and with the Body as the enjoyment. Christ is in the heavens and within us, for salvation the Lord leads us and works over and within us, and in the Body life we practice the church life. This is God's economy. We today are thus in the fellowship of the gospel.

THREE QUESTIONS

How do you know whether you are one with God's desire? First, you must ask, "Do I have Christ as my King?" Secondly you should ask, "Do I have the process of full salvation from regeneration through transformation unto conformation as my daily experience?" Third, ask, "Do I have the church life, the Body life expressed in different localities, so that I might have the ability to go on?" If you can answer yes to these three questions, then you can say you are in the fellowship of the gospel that Paul speaks of.

When I come to others with a message from the King, pointing to the King, then those who hear also experience something different because of this new King. This is the gospel. When we are together enjoying such a gospel, we are fellowshipping in it. The Philippian believers were fellowshipping in this gospel with Paul from the very beginning of their relationship with him. They were growing and bore the testimony of Christ from the first day. Because of this, every time Paul prayed with them in view, he was able to pray with joy.

JOY IS FOUND IN SHARING THE SAME LIFE AND COMMITMENT

It is normal for people to be happy to see someone who also comes from their homeland and to talk with them. This is true for anyone when they arrive in a place where they are foreigners. Isn't this also true when we are out in the world and we meet other Christians? There is something about sharing the same life, commitment, and reason for living. This commonality makes us so happy! Paul was an old apostle, but every time he considered the Philippian believers, he rejoiced because in them he found someone who shared the same source, same realization and the same reason for living. Because of this, he was joyful!

JOY IS TO BE FOUND IN CHALLENGING TIMES AS WELL AS PLEASANT TIMES

Do you want to be happy, or do you want to be joyful? The Lord is not a happiness-generator. The Lord is a challenger! The only way we can

be “happy” is to live for Him, for His economy, and for His purpose! If your existence matches His, if your desire matches what is in His heart, if the plan of your life matches His eternal plan... then you will be a person full of joy!

THE OPERATION OF JOY

I hope you all would have this joy. I have loved the Lord since 1954. Since that time, I have had a joyful life. Even my tears of grief have been mingled with joy. Why is this? Because from the beginning I made a strong determination that the Lord’s economy would control my living. And now, as an old man, I can testify that I have not lived my life in vain. I believe many can testify this with me. I may wish from time to time that I could recapture something of the shininess of my youth, but I know that my life has been in a labor that was one with my God. A good number can testify with me that we have lived a life that has been one with God’s economy and desire. We are doing exactly what the Lord desires us to do! What a high life!

This is not to say we have not suffered discouragement or suffered from time to time, but grace has always come in to strengthen us to go onward. There have even been times we have not known how to go on, but grace always appears. Because of this grace, we have known joy on this pathway, regardless of the circumstances. We have always been able to come back to be one with what is on God’s heart.

How many people have a life as valuable, as satisfying, or as joyful as the life we experience? Yet when you look at us, you see a bunch of “goofers.” None among us can boast that they have been able to overcome much of anything. In fact, it seems we have been defeated our entire lives. Yet somehow we can boast that we are still here for what the Lord is after! What a blessing! How many can boast as we do? So many Christian places boast in ability or wisdom or possessions, but we do not. We can only boast in the gospel, and that in two aspects: we have the gospel that needs to be preached by the messengers, but even more precious to us is the One who has sent us forth in this gospel. This is not a gospel that just warns people about

going to hell; our gospel is that they also can and must live a life that matches God's economy! What a life this is!

JOY IN CHRIST BEING ANNOUNCED

Joyfulness also comes from seeing the gospel preached. "What then, that in every way, whether in pretense or truth, Christ is preached, and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice" (1:18). Paul indicates that when Christians begin to stand for the gospel, they often feel that the gospel is theirs alone, and that only they are qualified to preach it adequately. It is difficult to find others as narrow as those who claim to love Jesus! Even in business, people welcome competition for the benefit it brings. It seems only Christians frown upon others when they speak about Christ. Paul writes to the Philippians that there were some who were jealous of his success in the gospel, and sought to do something about it by preaching out of a motive other than the desire to see Christ's interest accomplished! Isn't this strange? Yet Christians are often strange. (Some, of course, do preach the gospel out of a proper motive.)

For instance, on college campuses there are a number of Christian organizations. How competitive we might become if we are not pure! When we hear about the success of some Christian group on campus, rather than rejoicing we may experience a selfish reaction. Ambition may be with us, and we may even seek to put down the work of other Christians! No one can persecute you more than your own brothers in the Lord. You should not be surprised at how Christians can act when the Lord is not at work in their conscience on a particular matter.

Paul said some preached the gospel for one reason and others preached the gospel for another reason. Some preached purely, while others preached impurely. We may grieve over the fact that many Christians are missing the mark when it comes to what is truly precious, but we should never feel sorry that people are getting saved! We may feel sorry that someone misses the top experience, but we should never be troubled when someone finds the Lord. It is

true that many may miss out on the best place for their growth, but we should be happy whenever people receive the Lord as their Savior, however that may happen!

No one among us should seek to have their own congregation!

The gospel has two sides. One side is related to Christ. It is a matter of God's eternal purpose and plan. Another side has to do with people. They need to be saved: not only justified, but also sanctified, transformed and eventually glorified. They need to be brought into the full experience of the gospel.

Even those who come in to cause trouble among us, as long as they find salvation, it should be cause for rejoicing among us. We will see them in eternity! Praise the Lord for such "spies"! The gospel brings full salvation to all who receive it. In eternity this shall be so. Even those who pretend to pray often really get saved! The Lord hears and honors His name.

"What then? Only that in every way, that in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached, and in this I rejoice, and shall rejoice!" What a boast Paul had! Let us likewise be such a joyful group of Christians bearing the Lord's testimony.
- Titus Chu, Cleveland, April 9, 2011

The state that a Christian experiences is very simple. The Lord says, "These things have I spoken to you that My joy may be in you, and that your joy might be made full" (John 15:11).

“Spring Family Fellowship”

MESSAGE TWO

THE APOSTLE PAUL WROTE “JOYFUL” PHILIPPIANS WHILE CONFINED

The apostle Paul was saved around 38 AD, and for ten years gave himself to learn of the Lord. (Prior to this he had studied the Scriptures extensively. After his salvation, he must have reconsidered the entire Bible in the light of Christ.) He then served for ten years by preaching and raising up churches. During this relatively short span of time, how many churches were raised up and how established the Lord’s testimony became! Around 58 AD he was arrested, and for six years he was imprisoned. Of the letters he wrote while under arrest in Rome, Philippians was one of the most remarkable. Why? It is marked by such joy!

Probably no one can really fathom how much Paul possessed by the time of his imprisonment. He not only had such a deep understanding of truth and had undergone so much as he served the Lord, but he also had been granted to see the third heavens and Paradise (2 Cor. 12:1-4). He really saw everything as it was. He heard words that were not to be uttered. Something very precious was given him. This spiritual man, however, filled as he was with riches and burden and desire,

found himself confined. Paul had almost nothing to do while he was kept under guard awaiting his audience with Caesar! We are simply told “for two whole years Paul stayed in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him” (Acts 28:30). The Chinese translation of this verse gives a slightly different sense, which is if you wanted to see him, he was available! To see some servant of the Lord is not usually easy. In Rome, though, this greatest servant of the Lord, with all his amassed experience and revelation and accomplishment, had nothing to do but hope someone might come by to visit!

In this seemingly sad situation, however, Paul wrote a book which tells us to be joyful! To what extent should we rejoice? Paul’s reason for living was to be a profit to the churches. To this end, Paul experienced the bountiful Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:19). After announcing this, he wrote an amazing thing: that he could not decide whether to depart to be with Christ (which was “far better”) or to remain with them for their sakes.

PAUL REMAINED FOR THE SAKE OF INCREASED JOY AMONG THE SAINTS

Who has the boldness to say such a thing? People take the thought of going to Jesus at the end of their life as a comfort, but they do not seek to go any sooner than possible! In other words, who hopes they might soon die in a car accident so they may see the Lord? Some may be able to give a message on how glorious it is to go to be with the Lord, but is that speaker so anxious himself that he seeks to die?

I am not saying anyone should commit suicide! But Paul was hard pressed to decide. Like that famous quote Paul asked, “To be or not to be, that is the question!” But Paul’s realization went far beyond Shakespeare’s. There is nothing more crucial than this decision to die or to live. As I said, how many would be happy to find they have acquired some serious illness, realizing they are another step closer to being with the Lord? But Paul had been to the third heavens, so he knew what he had to look forward to when he would put off the “earthly tabernacle” of his body (2 Cor. 5:1).

REJOICING IN CONFINEMENT

By the American way of reckoning, I am 75 years old. The sign of being old is feeling tired. If you have the Lord, though, you do not feel tired so much. When he wrote Philippians in Rome, Paul was only about 65 years old. He had some years left. He realized, however, that if he told Caesar the right thing, he could be executed and he would be with the Lord, his trials over. If he lived, he knew how much he would have to struggle and suffer. Unlike anyone else, he had seen the third heavens, where Jesus sat enthroned, and Paradise. He knew what would be his after death. Therefore he desired to depart to be with Christ, which was “far better.” We might pray-read and declare this verse, but unlike Paul, few would say, “Lord, take me today!”

This is the man who sat in his rented house in Rome, awaiting someone to visit. To go to be with the Lord would indeed have seemed “far better.” Yet in spite of all this, his word was “nevertheless, to remain in the flesh is more needful for you” (Phil. 1:24). For their progress and joy in the faith, Paul determined to continue on among the saints.

In light of all this, who thus was really in control? Caesar may have felt he was in control, for he had Paul under confinement and seemingly held the power of life and death over him. Actually, Paul was not under Caesar’s power: he realized it was his choice that would decide whether he would live or die. He knew he could command Caesar as to his fate. How spiritual Paul was! He was indeed released and for a number of years he continued to preach the gospel.

JOY THROUGH GRACE

Thus, Paul had the confidence that he would remain with the believers for their progress and joy of faith. In the previous message, we shared that joy comes through the enjoyment of grace. Paul’s work was to dispense grace to the saints. Out of that grace, joy would come. He was confident of that. He realized that if he remained with the saints,

they would experience more grace, and that this grace would result in a boast, both in him and them! Paul knew something further would be produced if he continued on together with the saints. He would have more reason to boast, and so would they! His remaining on the earth meant that grace would be ministered to the churches, and more rejoicing would take place. He would have further reason to boast, and they would experience a furtherance of joy.

THE SAINTS' BOASTING IN THE LORD'S SERVANT

The Philippians were able to boast and experience a further joy because they had such a servant of the Lord, even one who decided to remain just for their sakes! What a joy and what a boasting this must have produced! "Our servant has provided us so much joy and so much life!" Their rejoicing would be made more abundant by his coming again to them (1:26).

TO BE JOYFUL, LIVE FOR THE CHURCH

The way to be joyful is to live for the church. This is the crucial point. Paul did not fear death and desired to be with the Lord, but when he saw the need of the church, he stayed for the saints' progress and joy in the faith. Are we for our retirement, or are we for the church? What a glory it is to live for the church! Among all the people of the earth, how many can claim such a thing? We are nothing special, and we may be old, but if we can say we live for the church that the Lord's testimony might be raised up healthily, so the younger generation can be raised up to love and follow the Lord, how glorious that is!

Some among us have migrated to the United States because they are ambitious to get ahead. I can guarantee you that whatever you aim to accomplish will not bring you contentment. After you get that degree or position you strove so long to attain, you will find yourself disappointed. Eventually you realize there is nothing that has real value. As Solomon said, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity...what has been done will be done again, there is nothing new under the sun" (Eccl. 1:2, 9). Yet for close to sixty years, in my experience there is one

thing that has never disappointed, and that is the love I have for the church. Every time I have given myself to the church and have invested myself for the saints' growth, I have always known a real joy in my spirit. Sometimes the result has been apparent failure, but there is always joy in knowing that I have served the Lord!

I have met a number of doctors, and I often wonder whether they really find their lives so satisfying. They have achieved a high level of success and prosperity, yet how many among them can say they are as joyful as Paul was or as others of us are who follow the Lord? We should be able to testify that we are so joyful because we live for the church! We may make a lot of mistakes, but our joy springs from living for the church, not from doing everything well! Therefore if you are not joyful, change the center of your life! Live for the church!

Isn't every child lovely? Every parent realizes he or she has made many mistakes, yet even so their child realizes his or her parent loves them. This is why the child tries to forget about whatever wrong things the parents have done. Love the church the same! We don't need to know how to do everything right, but we do need to love the saints and be willing to live and die for the Lord's testimony. This goes far beyond how perfect we are. Even as we are, if we live for the church life we can be so joyful! Such a life is so much better than pursuing one "carrot" after another until we are placed in a coffin.

Those who are able to say they love the church when they are young can know that their lives will have high value. In 1954, I consecrated myself to the Lord and told Him, "In my life I want nothing but You and Your interest." After that, there could be no more "then what" in my life. I was totally in a proper and healthy state. We may experience failure and troubles, but if we have set ourselves rightly, the Lord always has sufficient grace for us to be joyful, regardless. Joyfulness is a result of living totally for the local church, the Lord's testimony.

JOYFULNESS IN BEING IN ONE ACCORD

Now we come to something a little deeper. When we live for the church, there is joyfulness. In the church life, however, we need to be in one accord with the saints and with the servant of the Lord, the apostle.

To be in one accord with someone does not just mean that we are able to get along with them. It means that we share the same goal. When we are all pursuing the same thing, we are in one accord.

The apostle Paul made it clear that he wanted the saints as the testimony of Christ to be in one accord (Phil. 1:27; Rom. 15:5-6). Among the saints there should be nothing excellent but Christ! Christ must have the preeminence in the church life! When we pursue Christ together, oneness spontaneously is manifested.

How may we be one? When we look at how different we all are from each other, it would seem impossible. We are able to be one, however, because we are all for Christ and the church! When we are all after the same goal, we can say, "Hallelujah, how sweet this is!" One accord is more than saying, "I can live with it." It means more than being tolerant. One accord comes about when we share the goal to gain Christ and to bear the testimony of Christ. We may be different in our habits, personalities and upbringing, but when we share the same reason for our existence, one accord exists among us.

Even as we are in this one accord, there is still much to learn. But joyfulness comes from the fact we are in one accord.

In the first verse of the second chapter we read, "If there is any consolation in Christ, any comfort of love, any fellowship of Spirit..." out of these things Paul says, "Fulfill my joy that you be likeminded." This does not mean to be likeminded on particular matters. I may not like a certain kind of musical presentation, but that does not mean I should make an issue out of it. For instance, I

do not like to see a drum set being used in a meeting, because I feel drums might take over the Spirit's leadership of the singing. Everyone has the right to follow the Lord however they feel He is leading them, including those who are taking care of the music. In this way we can appreciate their service, even though we may not always find it agreeable to us. Who gives you the right to say something is wrong, when they do it to the Lord with the intention that the church be profited (Rom. 14:6-8)?

We should not expect the brothers to be one with us; we should do what we do so as to be one with the brothers! Our joy should be in their desire towards the Lord.

A JOY MUTUALLY SHARED BETWEEN THE SAINTS AND THE APOSTLE

When we fulfill the servant of the Lord's joy, we also experience joy. It is a mutual joy. It is as when the father tells his child at seeing good grades, "You make me so happy." When the father is joyful, the child also becomes joyful. When the Lord's servant is given cause to be joyful, the churches also are given cause to be joyful. This is because there is an organic relatedness between them.

Paul wrote, "Fulfill my joy, that you be likeminded." When our mind is not right, what we perceive is not right, either.

WORKING OUT OUR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING

Joyfulness comes about as the saints work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. (2:12). Salvation comes by grace; it is in your possession already, but you must carefully maintain it. The statement "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" can condemn if not handled correctly. Salvation is already yours. "Work out" means to make its reality evident. It does not mean to complete your salvation, but to make it known. Those who work out their salvation become Christ's luminaries to this crooked and perverted generation (2:15).

Christ lives in you, and He is growing in you. Praise the Lord! Our salvation is assured. But this doesn't mean we shouldn't go to any more meetings! We should not take our salvation for granted. The Lord will never leave you; He is being formed in you, and He will be glorified in you. But this doesn't mean we shouldn't check with ourselves whether or not something might offend Him!

Why should you take every opportunity to gain Christ? To work out your salvation! Always ask yourself the question, "Will this stumble anyone? Will this please the Lord?" These are the types of things that have to do with working out our salvation. Do not become involved with self-judgment. Satan likes to accuse us, and we like to take the accusations in. Just don't do things that offend Christ, and take every opportunity to do what blesses Him.

SHINING AS THE LORD'S LUMINARIES

The churches are the Lord's luminaries, where all the saints shine together. The responsibility of a luminary is to shine out, whether or not anyone receives it. I visited one place and told a brother I appreciated their hall, but the brother answered that unfortunately it was located across the street from a bar. The responsibility of the church, however, is to be a testimony; a luminary is responsible to shine, not for how it is received. It simply needs to shine! The impact of that shining will come about in ways we may not be aware of.

We are really as lights in the world. This has to do with the testimony of the local churches. Some churches are very prevailing, meaning they are shining very brightly. Some churches may be less so, but there is something called light, regardless. They are all luminaries! Therefore, be very joyful with whatever amount of shining you have. Together, the saints where you are bear the light of Christ for others to see. Our light might not be overpowering, but after others have seen us, they know where they may find Christ.

HOLDING FORTH THE WORD OF LIFE FOR THE APOSTLE'S BOASTING

Paul writes that his boast is that the saints hold forth the word of life. Their holding forth the word of life as a shining light indicates he had not run in vain or labored in vain. The servant of the Lord and the church in Philippi were organically related; they were really together. As long as they held forth the word of life, Paul could boast.

THE APOSTLE'S ADDING OF THE DRINK OFFERING UPON THE SAINTS' SERVICE

Paul continues, "But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the priestly sacrifice of your faith, I rejoice, and rejoice together with you all." Whenever you rejoice in the Lord and praise Him, an offering is going up to the Lord. When it reaches a certain point, a drink offering is added to it, making it even more pleasant to God. Many churches think to be prevailing is good enough, but Paul writes, "I wish you were prevailing to the point that I might become a drink offering upon your sacrifice" (Phil 1:17). Therefore never say, "We are adequate." No matter how good you are, you need a servant of the Lord to pour his extra "cup" of riches upon whatever you have to make it a richer, sweeter savor to God and to Christ.

Paul continues to stress rejoicing in the next verse. "For the same reason you rejoice, and rejoice together with me." For the same reason, the saints rejoiced and boasted with Paul. When the servant pours himself out upon the church's rejoicing, everyone feels more joyful. Whenever the church life is enjoying something marvelous, that is a good time for the servant of the Lord to come and add to it.

No local church should be "on its own." The servants of the Lord labor so that the churches might be fervent and burning. When a church becomes fervent and burning, the servant of the Lord then adds something to make the joy even more complete.

JOY IN RECEIVING THE SAINTS

Joyfulness comes also from having a capacity to love and receive the brothers (2:28-29). How can you be a joyful brother? The saints in Philippi sent a brother, Epaphroditus, to care for Paul. They realized money alone wasn't sufficient. Therefore they sent Epaphroditus as well. This brother, however, became sick, and thus became Paul's headache rather than Paul's blessing. Paul, however, took care of this brother, and after he was somewhat recovered, sent him back to Philippi with a good testimony. This indicates that the church's receiving in his case may have been questionable due to his apparent failure, or else Paul would not have had to send such a word to them.

Regardless of their weaknesses or limitations, we must learn to receive the believers. Paul called Epaphroditus, "my brother, and companion in labor, and fellow soldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. For indeed he was sick, near unto death. But God has had mercy on him, but also on me, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow." This is a book of joyfulness. In the process there may be sorrow, but even through the sorrow there is joy. By the Lord's mercy, Epaphroditus recovered. Paul's only desire was to return him healthy. If the Lord had not healed him, Paul would have had "sorrow upon sorrow." But when Paul knew the saints had received him back in good health, his sorrow was alleviated.

Paul charged the saints to receive Epaphroditus in the Lord in all joyfulness, and hold him in honor. Had he failed his mission? Perhaps somewhat. But he did minister to Paul's need. Paul begged the church in this way because a good number must have had questions as to why he was not able to do what he was sent to do. Thus Paul gave a word to receive him and hold him in honor.

We are often selective in our receiving. We should know how to receive all the saints, regardless what their background might be. I

heard in Cleveland there was a Caucasian brother who is meeting with the Chinese-speaking by listening to translation. I was very happy to hear this. We should not care about whether someone is of one background or another. Simply learn to receive and participate wherever you may be. Don't make distinctions. Learn to see Christ in all the saints, and receive whoever Christ has received (Rom. 15:7). Our unique desire should be that Christ be magnified and the church built up. We should all be able to say, "I am with the church" no matter what our background may be.

Epaphroditus was sent as a representative of the Philippians, with money and their blessing. Then the news came that he was sick, and even near unto death. I do not know why the Philippians needed this kind of recommendation from Paul. They should have simply been concerned for him. He ministered to Paul's need on their behalf.

May we be those who know how to receive and appreciate all the saints.

- Titus Chu, Cleveland, April 9, 2011

The way to be joyful is to live for the church.

This is the crucial point. Paul did not fear death and desired to be with the Lord, but when he saw the need of the church, he stayed for the saints' progress and joy in the faith... What a glory it is to live for the church!

“Spring Family Fellowship”

MESSAGE THREE

The word in the New Testament most commonly translated *joy* is *chara*, a word closely related to *grace* (*charis*). Whenever we enjoy grace, a state of joy is produced.

Joy is a state which involves a kind of overflowing satisfaction. It is different from happiness. A man may be happy on his wedding day, but after a few weeks he will have had a disagreement with his wife about something. Does that mean the state of marriage itself is affected? No. Happiness comes and happiness goes. (If that weren't so, people wouldn't always be seeking it in so many places of entertainment!) What the Lord desires for us is that we enter a state in which there is joy with peace and satisfaction.

THE JOY OF GOD CAN BE THE JOY OF MAN

This state is the very state the Lord Himself experienced with the Father in Proverbs 8:30 and 31. Between them there was a mutual joy in that new thing they had accomplished for eternity. What was in the Father had been carried out in the Son as the master craftsman. The reason they shared such mutual joy was because in addition to themselves, another entity had been brought forth that would become added to them to join them organically.

That state that came into being, joyfulness, is not something that comes and goes, because what was produced is eternal. It is this joy the Father and the Son share that we also participate in as believers as we partake in this same divine economy and purpose.

Thus joy is not merely an emotional matter, as happiness is. It is not a sensation. It is a matter that springs from a settled satisfaction and rest. When one realizes everything has been accomplished with regards to what one has ultimately sought, there is joy. Certainly the Father and the Son knew Satan would do his best to cause trouble, and that each one of us would be a “case” they would have to deal with. They knew of the rebellion and failure and naughtiness that was yet to come. None of this bothered them, however, because the divine economy had been accomplished. Something healthy, proper and wonderful had been added into eternity that nothing could detract from. Something had been produced that nothing could frustrate. Now, they want us to share in this very joy.

JOY IS A STATE WE CAN EXPERIENCE WHEN WE SET OUR LIFE ARIGHT

Does this mean we will never have sadness? Of course not. But you can experience sadness and still be in joy. This is not true with happiness! Since joy is a state rather than an emotion, it is with us regardless of what else we are experiencing. God desires that we would be joyful, even as God rejoices with the Son at the universe and the inhabited earth!

Seeing all this, let us set our lives properly so that we might also be joyful! If we set our lives upon the wrong thing, we may experience happiness occasionally, but we will miss joy. For instance, if someone sets themselves upon the success of a certain sports team, he will experience happiness when his team wins. That happiness, however, will vary with the success of his team. If someone wants to achieve something in the world, any happiness that goes along with that will also fade. Whenever people invest themselves in that kind of life, they find themselves

on a “street of no return.” They live like the donkey chasing the carrot on a stick. When you set the course of your life in light of the divine purpose, when you know why you are on this earth, when you can declare your existence matches God’s desire, then the joyfulness of God becomes *your* joyfulness!

Thus, if you are for God’s economy, you will be joyful. If you live for the gospel and for the building up of the local churches, you will be joyful. When you are in one accord with the apostle and one another, you will be joyful. When you operate as luminaries, holding forth the word of life, you will be joyful. And, if you are someone who is able to receive all the saints as the Lord has received them, you will be joyful.

RECEIVING EVERY EPAPHRODITUS

This last point may seem difficult, because not one person you meet will fail to disappoint you in some way! Even if you were to stay with someone recognized as great and spiritual, you would still discover he has flaws. The better we get to know one another, the more we may have problems really receiving one another!

The saints in Philippi expected Epaphroditus to do a good job in taking care of Paul, but Epaphroditus got very sick! The saints may have become upset or disappointed with him. We like to believe some can be heroes, but the Lord does not allow anyone to be such a hero. He gives us brothers and sisters instead!

People are selective according to their own standard as to how they receive others. This is one reason Christians lose their joyfulness. Jesus tells us to give Him the first place in our lives, and to receive whomever He receives. This should be reason enough for rejoicing!

One reason many were hurt during the various turmoils was because their expectations were exposed as being false. Instead of living in dreams, we need to live in the receiving life!

God is very fair. It is normal for a person to think they are somehow attractive. In the same way, it is normal that each one of us should consider ourselves as beautiful in the eyes of the Lord, and we are, as long as we hold Him as being first in our lives. When we fail, we should confess. If we are caught in something we should not be in, we should call on Him. That is to remain in the state of being an overcomer. It is not a matter of effort. It is a matter of remaining in the state. A woman considers herself beautiful and her husband does too, otherwise he would not have married her! It is the same with the Lord. If we remain in the state of being an overcomer, the Lord will find us to be overcomers in His eyes. Therefore, let each of us remain in the state of being an overcomer! Who you are is already of high value to God; there is no need to make an effort to make yourself "beautiful" to Him. Focus on the Lord Jesus and give Him the first place. This is what it means to be in the state of being an overcomer. And as you focus on Christ in this way, you will experience joyfulness!

FAILURE SHOULD NOT FRUSTRATE JOY

I have been loving the Lord and following Him for nearly sixty years. Nearly every day of those sixty years I have experienced some kind of failure! But whenever I become aware of anything, I tell the Lord, "Sorry Lord that I get myself involved with things that end up wasting the time I have been given." It is a good thing we are so prone to forget our failures and instead dwell on what is encouraging. If it were not so, we would have a hard time going on! Failure is not to be encouraged, but it can be tolerated. When our priority is wrong, however, then everything is wrong.

Joyfulness does not come about due to the absence of failure. Joyfulness comes about when our life is established in correspondence to God's will. When we are in the right place and position with the right aim in our life, joyfulness comes. Even though we may experience failure and temporarily forget about Christ, if we are for Christ and for His purpose we will still experience joy.

STARTING NOW, CONSECRATE YOUR LIFE TO GOD

Watchman Nee declared that whatever the size of the “cup” he still had left, it was the Lord’s. His word was, “Pour into it whatever You want to pour into it.” Don’t look down on this declaration, for this is what enables you to be kept in the state of joyfulness! Young people unconsciously feel they have a big “cup,” and older ones realize their “cup” is smaller, but regardless, whoever can declare that “cup” is for the Lord will know joy in whatever portion remains.

Do you want to be free of frustration in your life? Then become a vegetable, because such people are free from frustration. The problem is, they do not experience any accomplishment either! Only those who can claim their life is for Christ and Christ alone discover how the Lord is able to carry them through everything and anything.

FORGET ABOUT EVERYTHING EXCEPT CHRIST

How can you be joyful? By knowing that your relationship with God is in the realm of the Spirit. Furthermore, it is to reject whatever is of man in order to lay hold of what is of Christ.

TO LIVE IN REJOICING, BEWARE OF DOGS, EVIL WORKERS, AND THE MUTILATION

In Philippians 3:1, Paul could say, “Rejoice in the Lord” because his focus and path and existence were healthy and filled with heavenly meaning. He could also say, “For me to write this again is not tedious; for you it is safe.” Why? Because we should be rejoicing. When we are not rejoicing, there is something wrong. To rejoice is proper, and a safeguard.

In fact, according to Paul, there are three things we must be watchful about. First, we must beware of dogs. Second, we must beware of evil workers. Third, we must beware of those whom Paul calls the “mutilation” (3:2).

Sometimes we ourselves can be dogs, or evil workers, or, most easily, those who “mutilate.” But Paul said, “For me this is not tedious to write, because I know exactly what joyfulness is. For your joyfulness to be safeguarded, however, you must beware of these three things.”

What is it to be a dog? A dog does not have a spirit, so no matter how faithful a dog may be, it is not able to know what it is to be a human being. In a family there may be children and parents and a dog. What is the difference? The dog does not share the life of the others. Even so, a dog insists on partaking in whatever the family does!

Whenever a Christian group forgets about the divine element and simply wants to produce something pleasant, that group becomes a “dog pound.” Many times Christian groups are caught with such things. For instance, many today focus on entertainment. The people that come, therefore, come not for Christ, but for entertainment. Paul tells us we should be sure that our church gatherings are only ministering Christ, supplying Christ, focused on Christ, and elevating Christ. Everyone should leave the time realizing they have gained Christ!

Paul follows his warning about dogs with a warning about evil workers. What is an evil worker? An evil worker is a person who loves to be among Christians and loves to produce things that make a Christian gathering into a “dog pound,” full of things that simply do not have their source in Christ. The Lord would say, “I do not appreciate this. I appreciate those who worship Me in spirit.” Don’t become someone who produces things in the name of God, things which actually take people away from Him!

When people come to such congregations with a desire to seek Christ, they may end up instead losing their desire for Christ. Pride or excitement about something of their congregation may replace the desire for the Lord Himself. The saints may become proud of their congregation, rather than boasting in Christ!

What does Paul mean when he mentions mutilation? He is deriding circumcision, which is what the Jews required of the Gentiles to satisfy their religious standard. They viewed circumcision as a way of dealing with the flesh. To mutilate therefore is to do things by way of asceticism rather through Christ. Religion doesn't work, and religious works don't work. Trying to overcome something in yourself by your own effort does not work. If you fast to deal with some problem, it will never work; if you fast to gain Christ, you will forget about your problem! Paul boasts that we serve by the Spirit, our boasting is in Christ Jesus, and that we have no confidence in the flesh (3:3).

If you are young, you probably still have a lot of confidence in your flesh. Those who are older realize how incapable the flesh is. Do not trust your ability, your planning, or whatever you may think the Lord has given to you. Boast only in Jesus Christ!

THE APOSTLE'S JOY AND CROWN

Joyfulness comes also from the saints in the local church who are able to stand firm in the Lord. Such saints become the apostle's joy and his crown (4:1). When a local church is so prevailing, the Lord's servant who serves that local church can joyfully declare they are his crown. "Wherefore, my brethren beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord, my beloved." Paul didn't have much eventually. He produced so very much, and yet Jerusalem and many other churches gave him up. How he struggled on behalf of the churches! He wrote to the Galatians that he travailed for them, because they were off! Corinth gave him no encouragement. The saints in Ephesus and Colossae must have been so much in their mind! But there was one church in a military town, Philippi, that Paul could call "my joy and my crown." What a joy it is to the Lord's servant when the churches are so healthily built up!

REJOICE IN THE LORD'S NEARNESS

We also experience joy whenever we see that the Lord is near. He is coming!

Paul waited only for about thirty years for the Lord to return. As one who now sleeps, the time of his waiting will remain thirty years. Many may say, "We have been waiting for two thousand years," but that simply isn't true! Every believer only waits for as long as he or she has lived as a believer. Therefore no one can say, "Lord, we have waited so long!" Even if we are able to serve Him for seventy years, that still isn't that long. The Lord is near!

Many today are claiming the Lord will come in 2012. Don't believe in that! One spiritual scholar wrote that he felt the Lord should return in 2070. I also read somewhere that according to Isaac Newton's reckoning, the Lord should return in 2060. The stature of these men somewhat made me feel there might be something to that timeframe. But more important than the date is how near He is right now to us. That will always be what is precious. Therefore no one should say, "Lord, I have been serving You for this many years. Where are You?" The primary thing is that we know He is near.

LOOK TO WHAT IS ETERNAL: YOUR NAMES
ARE WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF LIFE!

In Philippi there were two sisters, Euodias and Syntyche (4:2) who needed help to be "of the same mind." I sometimes think of them as "You Owe Me" and "So Touchy." The apostle asked them to be of the same mind in the Lord, and he asked the brothers who labored with him to help these sisters. This could indicate that these sisters had their followers or sympathizers. They were good sisters— they had helped Paul in the gospel—but they were holding on to some kind of disagreement. When we find ourselves in this predicament, Paul indicates that the secret is to look on what is eternal. That was why he reminded them that their names were written in the book of life (4:3). For instance, if these sisters knew that the Lord was coming the

next day, would they still care about whatever issue lay between them? When we see what is eternal, everything else pales in comparison. No one would care anymore about whatever they were holding onto. When we see eternity, whatever preoccupies us is quickly put into perspective. This is why Paul wrote "...whose names are written in the book of life." Therefore we need to keep eternity before us, for when we lose sight of eternity we easily find ourselves fighting over things of little consequence. When we see what is eternal, however, we spontaneously are freed. Who will care about what university they graduated from, or who used someone else's shampoo? Hold the proper focus and outlook and you will spontaneously experience joy and rejoicing (4:4)!

THE APOSTLE'S JOYFULNESS IN SEEING THE SAINTS' ADVANCE

Joyfulness is also enjoyed by the saints as they stand with the apostle. Paul wrote, "At last your care for me has flourished again, although you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity" (4:10). Through their financial offering, the Philippian believers had displayed their care for Paul and the Lord's work.

A Christian's offering often goes in stages. First, when someone is young spiritually, they simply do not offer; they don't even think about offering. Then, when they become conscious of needs, they offer to the saints in need. When I began to offer, my offering went to saints I knew, rather than to the church as a whole. Then, later, I began to offer to my local church.

Offering is a godly matter. Too often saints offer only when there is an announced need. We must realize there are co-workers who are struggling for the gospel. If the Lord gives you the grace, you should learn from the church in Philippi. It was not a rich church, yet what the saints there cared for was beyond their own local need. They cared for the testimony of the Lord, and they cared for the gospel and for those who gave their life to serve the Lord. How blessed they were! May we also learn of them.

Paul rejoiced because it became evident that the saints' care for him had flourished again. He said this because a brother had reached him with their gift. Paul wrote, however, that his joy was not because of relief from want. We are here to bear the testimony of the Lord, regardless of what our situation may be. Paul could say he was happy with whatever the Lord provided. He knew how to be abased and how to abound. He could say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (4:13). Paul didn't write, "I rejoice that your care has flourished again, as I have been caring for all these co-workers." No. His coworkers had learned as Paul had learned. But if there was a shortage, Paul himself would have found a way to care for them. Why? Because Paul realized they needed the time to get into the truth. In Paul's view, they still had so much to learn. How sweet! Philippians concludes with the proper care for the needs of the saints, the local church, and for those who struggle for the testimony of the Lord.

- Titus Chu, Cleveland, April 10, 2011

Joyfulness does not come about due to the absence of failure. Joyfulness comes about when our life is established in correspondence to God's will. When we are in the right place and position with the right aim in our life, joyfulness comes.

Fellowship on Oneness

I and some others recently had some fellowship about our vision and our stand, and specifically about the practical expression of the church. When this topic comes up, I know the reaction many brothers have. Instead of getting into issues and controversy, however, it may be good to step back to look at the matter of oneness itself first.

GOD IS ONE AND WORKS IN THE WAY OF ONENESS

The best way to begin considering the matter of oneness is to consider God Himself. God is essentially and unequivocally one! The Bible states emphatically that God is one. The Father, Son, and Spirit are one.

Why do we talk about oneness? Because God is one, and the Bible tells us so for a reason.

As Witness Lee noted in his book, *The Genuine Ground of Oneness*, God's four great acts in the universe exhibit His oneness. When God does things, His way of doing them testifies of oneness. Firstly, in creation, He created one universe, one unique earth, and one man. From the very beginning, God has done everything in a way of oneness. Then, in His selection, He called out one man, Abraham, out of whom came the chosen race. Why did He not call out many men? Wouldn't that have seemed more prudent? Yet God operates according to a certain principle, and that principle is oneness. Then, further, we see oneness in the formation of the church as one new man. In one Spirit we were baptized into one Body. There are many members, and each has a different function, yet they form just one Body. Finally, there is the New Jerusalem, a city composed of "ones": in it we see one throne, one river, one street and one pearl for each gate. God does what He does in the way of oneness.

Christ's work on the cross destroyed all dividing walls, creating a oneness among His believers. He broke down the wall of enmity, making both Jews and Gentiles one. Abolishing the law of commandments in ordinances, creating both in Himself into one new man, He reconciled both Jew and Gentile in one Body. Christ's work on the cross dealt with our sins. On the cross, our old man was crucified. Christ's death also destroyed division and created oneness. Christ's cross destroyed the dividing middle wall and created oneness! Thus the most important event of all time, Christ's death on the cross, clearly applies to oneness. This oneness created by Christ on the cross is something every Christian must contend with.

CHRIST'S WORK ON THE CROSS WAS TO PRODUCE ONE BODY

Through His resurrection Christ's believers were all baptized into one Body. The Bible emphatically portrays the oneness of the believers through terms such as the one Body of Christ, the one flock, the one new man, the church, the bride, the one new man, and the New Jerusalem. The Bible refers to this matter repeatedly. This obviously points to something that the believers must express.

THE BIBLICAL AND PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE ONENESS OF THE TRIUNE GOD

In case someone thinks that only a "spiritual" oneness among believers is required or possible, the Bible also explicitly mentions this oneness is to be practiced. Thus also mentioned is the one accord of the believers in prayer, fellowship, giving, among the workers, and even in praising the Lord. The Bible almost seems to imply that there may be a oneness that is NOT one. There is also a one accord that makes the apostle's joy full. This indicates there is something that must be done for the sake of one accord. To "keep" something implies some sort of action. There is the need to stand with one spirit and one soul and to arrive at the oneness of the faith (Phil. 1: 27).

ONENESS IN MINISTRY

How must the workers care for the churches? In oneness! Paul states that those who plant and those who water are one (I Cor. 3: 8). The workers have to be one. There are different ministries, yet one and the same Spirit who operates through them.

ONENESS IN EXPRESSION

Oneness among the Lord's believers is a testimony to the unbelievers of the oneness of the Triune God. In the same section, the Lord told His disciples that He had given them the glory of the Triune God that they may be one.

All of this should make it clear that oneness is of God; oneness is God's way; oneness is in Christ's work on the cross; and oneness is in the practical application of the believers on the earth. This is something that should be very important to us. When we look at it all together, it is impressive to see the deliberate emphasis in the Bible upon oneness.

ONENESS IN TYPES

What about the types in the Bible? In Deuteronomy 12, for example, God tells His people He will chose a place to put His name. This phrase is used 21 times in Deuteronomy, emphasizing the importance of this statute in God's view. Jerusalem was the place to offer sacrifice, vows, to keep the annual feast, to settle disputes, for the Levites to serve, and the place to come hear the law read in public. This statute prevented every man doing whatever was right in his own eyes. This statute requires that all other places be destroyed. The practical application is in the Old Testament. Even though there is no such direct correlation in the New Testament, you can see

God's intent in having a place, one particular place, on the earth for His people to worship and do things in His name.

There is also the type in Psalms, where we see the subjective experience of the oneness. The psalms are very sweet. How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity. It is like the precious ointment upon the head... The subjective experience of anointing, of dew, of being in the Body, of being attached to the Head, and so on. There are many kinds of experiences of oneness.

What I would like to share with you tonight, is that the first thing we have to contend with is oneness in the Bible and how important it is. If it is not important, let's not be bothered with it. But if it is important to God and to how He does things, then we, as Christians, need to get into it. We better know it, experience it, understand it, see it, and practice it accordingly. That is what I would bring before you today. God is one; God's way is one; on the cross He created oneness; in resurrection is oneness; the church on the earth is in oneness; and the practices of the church are in the atmosphere and realm of oneness. The Old Testament backs this up very clearly. There was one place where God wanted His people to do things. Those who have experienced it can testify there is an anointing, a dew, an enjoyment that comes. What comes after that? That is not so clear. But we need to see, understand, enjoy and even do something to practice and keep the oneness. - Vern Yoder

It's not a matter of seeing anything less than the oneness that has its source in the Triune God. When we look at the matter of the ground, the churches in the cities, the source is God Himself. In John 17, the Lord's last prayer before He went to the cross, contains three particular things. First, He gave us the Father's name that we could be one. Then, He gave us the Word that we could become one as They are. That prayer is so mystical, yet full of reality. As the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father, we might be in Them. That is quite profound. Lastly, He gave us the matter of glory. He wants us to be in that glory. Just as He is in the Father and the Father is in Him, He wants us to be perfected into one.

PERFECTED INTO THE ONENESS OF THE TRIUNE GOD

The word "perfected" in one sense means to be mended into one; another is that oneness has to be completed and developed. First, you start looking over the pattern. Is the matter of the church in the city merely a practice? If so, I can take it or leave it. If you like to call on the Lord, that is fine; if you do not, that is fine. That is not something prescribed. It is described, not prescribed. I wish the Lord had given us some word telling us exactly what to do after He was gone. I'm an engineer; I like to have the cookbook formula. The Lord didn't do this, however. What He did, as the pattern, developed through the rest of the New Testament. And this pattern predominates. Are there other aspects that can be considered? Certainly. We have all been through various materials over the years. In Matthew, the Lord said no one lights a lamp to place it under a bushel, but they place it upon a lampstand. He follows this by saying, "A city set upon a hill cannot be hid." Why would He have said that?

It was because there needs to be some manifestation, some testimony. When there is a city set upon a hill that is visible to all around, people have to acknowledge that this testifies to who Jesus is.

We are testifying what the Triune God is, and the Triune God is absolutely one. When I was going through my religious training, one thing was always recited in Hebrew, and translated. That was, "Hear O Israel; the Lord our God is one God." This was the battle cry. The unfortunate thing among them was that they didn't get it. They did understand, however, that they had to be according to the one God. With that as our base, we also have to be according to the nature, the expression and the testimony of who God is. So when you look at the matter of the church in the city, it is really helpful to see this. It is not a doctrine or a practice; it is the expression of the one God in His one Body. This is a crucial thing. If we cannot manifest the oneness of the one God, then we don't express who He is. The matter of being in oneness is a huge factor. Otherwise, what differentiates us from anyone else.

THE TYPE OF JERUSALEM & VINDICATION OF THE SPIRIT

There are so many wonderful Christian groups. They hold the Bible, the gospel, and so many things dearly. The differentiating factor with us is that something has been unveiled to us. For years this was something that was spoken again and again and again. Perhaps some of the Old Testament types were pushed too far. You can only take a type to a certain point. You cannot use a type to describe an absolute truth; but even so they are significant. In the Old Testament there was one place, one city and one nation. In the end, finally, there is only one city. There is not going to be one country. There is a country that the city is in today, but when the New Jerusalem comes down as a Bride, it is enterable. It is there for all the nations. In the end, only a city is there.

I've asked myself over the last period of time, "Why the city?" A city has something to do with a unit of government. In the Old Testament the city-states were there. In medieval times there were also city-states. It wasn't so clear. It ties in to the kingdom being manifested among us, and the city is the best pattern portrayed in the New Testament as the kingdom of God in the government of God.

Remember Ananias and Sapphira? They sold their land and they indicated they only received so much, when in reality they were putting some in their pocket. Peter's comment was, "You've lied to the Holy Spirit. When it was yours, you could have kept it. But as soon as you entered into this sphere of the kingdom, and lied, it is more serious." They died. Peter wasn't the judge or jury or executioner. The Spirit was doing something to establish the authority of the church in that city. Some may find this example distasteful; but if the church in the city is not clearly delineated, then everything can go wild. We could spend meeting after meeting displaying the various positive aspects of the church in the city, but we wish here to lay before you that the source is in the oneness of the Triune God; the pattern of oneness is throughout the whole New Testament, and the pictures in the Old Testament definitely portray oneness.

- *Paul Neider*