

# FELLOWSHIP *Journal*

A VISIT WITH  
THE SAINTS  
IN AFRICA

EXPERIENCES  
OF LIFE IN  
THE PSALMS  
OF ASCENT

HOW TO  
KNOW THE  
LEADING OF  
THE LORD

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# Summer Events for the Saints in the Great Lakes Area

Dates and other information for most of the summer events have been announced, and are provided below. For current information, including the date and place for Gospel Odessey when it is announced, please visit [YoungSeekers.com](http://YoungSeekers.com). For details about Vision Week, visit [MinistryMessages.org](http://MinistryMessages.org).

Most of these events focus especially on the young people. However, Vision Week is for all the saints, and we especially encourage older saints to consider attending this training on a full-time basis.

## Schedule

### Junior High Camp

When: Sunday, June 24 to Friday, June 29

Where: Laurelville Mennonite Church Center in  
Mt. Pleasant, Pennsylvania

### Vision Week

When: Sunday, July 8 to Saturday, July 14

Where: Ashland Woods Retreat Center

### Interest Camps

When: Friday, July 20 to Wednesday, July 25

Where: Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio

### Mountain Top

When: Wednesday, July 25 to Saturday, July 28

Where: Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio

Update from Africa

# *A Visit with the Saints in Africa*

Mike Li

In April, I had the opportunity to visit the saints in Uganda. I had made two previous trips to the country, in October 2010 and November 2011, and it had been a great joy to be with the saints then. At the end of the last trip, when the brothers saw me off at the airport for my journey home, it was difficult to say goodbye. I wanted to tell theirs that I would be back soon. My heart surely had been knit together with them in our pursuit of the Lord, but I was not sure when I would be back to see them again.

And I was not sure what benefit I could be to them, so I didn't say anything at that time but I have carried those saints in my heart and my prayers ever since.

So, when I met the brothers at the airport on this trip, even before the words would come, I could not help but embrace them. What a joy it was to see them again! I had the deep sense that just being there with

them for their progress in the faith and our mutual enjoyment of the Lord in the church life, was a great benefit! A wonderful sense of peace and satisfaction began to rise up in me.

Brother Titus, along with Vern Yoder and Eric Yeh, had arrived before me. When I arrived, I immediately joined their fellowship with some of the responsible ones from several localities. The Lord is doing a marvelous





thing in many places! What a refreshing time and what an encouragement! Joy and thanksgiving rose up in my heart.

## A Perfecting Training and a Wonderful Conference

A week-long gathering began immediately. The weekdays were a time for a “perfecting training,” followed by a weekend-long conference. Titus began his sharing using 2 Timothy chapter 1. The opening verse of this chapter laid a strong and solid foundation for the week’s enjoyment; the saints began not only to recite that verse to one another throughout the week but also to enter into the vision being imparted:

*“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,  
according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus...”*

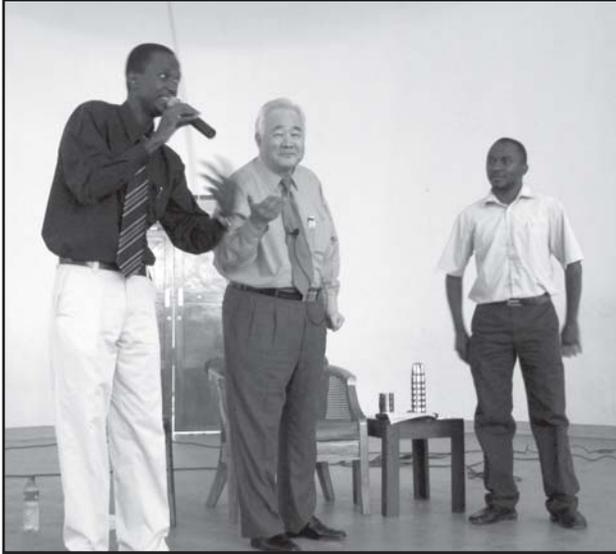
## Commitment! Vision! Substance!

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ.” What a committed person Paul was! “By the will of God.” Not only was Paul committed but this commitment was with a vision of God’s will and purpose! “According to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus.” In this we see that the carrying out of our commitment is not only with a vision but is also by the very substance that is promised by God!

Who are we? We are the committed ones! What are we committed to? We are committed to God’s will! We are committed to the fulfillment of His purpose! How do we carry this out? Our serving is by the very provision of God Himself, the promise of Life! This is not carried out in and by our own selves. What a wonderful and clear vision this is! The saints began to enter into this wonderful vision! “My life is of Christ and my living is with Jesus!” This cry echoed all around during the entire time.

## The Church Life

But we must see not only who we are, we must also see where we are, that is, where God has placed us. We are in the church life! The ecology,



spiritual nature, environment and characteristics of the church life are crucial. This ecology is established by the first generation of His lovers. If we are sloppy, careless, and indifferent concerning the things of Christ, the future generation will be the same. In contrast, if we are diligent, constituted, and committed, the future generation will have a way to grow and to follow. We can see

this in the first chapter of 2 Timothy. Timothy was raised in an environment where his mother and grandmother loved the Lord. Furthermore, he was served by a committed apostle! We all desire that the young ones among us might fan into flame the gift of God which is in them! For this, we must properly care for the ecology of the church life.

Paul was not content to merely have Timothy brought to salvation. His heart became occupied with Timothy's well-being. Timothy became dearly beloved to him. And Paul would do anything to ensure that Timothy grew properly as a healthy Christian. This is parenting. Parenting requires that you have a burden and also requires you to spend your being. You may have preached the gospel to many people, but do you have a dearly beloved son? This question surely opens our eyes. We see how we should live and function in the church life.

“Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord” (2 Tim. 1:2b). Here we see that our experience of the Lord in the church life is for us to be able to care for others and bring them into the same experience. The function and gift of each saint come from the Lord. He is the One who decides their future and how He will use them. We can only invest ourselves faithfully as committed servants. In this way dearly beloved sons might be raised up by Him.

## A Dearly Beloved Son

To raise up and care for a dearly beloved son is a matter of life. With Paul as our example in 2 Timothy 1:3-7, we see three important matters. Firstly, Paul pays attention to the matter of testimony, being a proper example; he served the Lord with a pure conscience, void of anything that would frustrate the Lord's move in the saints. Secondly, Paul pays attention to the ecology, the environment of the church life, that everything would be healthy, heavenly, and full of Christ. Thirdly, Paul pays attention to the proper care for the saints; they occupy his heart all the time. The gift of God is in the saints, so the spirit needs to be fanned into flame, while the mind, emotion, and will need to be regulated by the spirit. Remember the saints, be mindful of their tears, call to remembrance their genuine faith, and remind them to fan into flame the gift of God! This fourfold remembrance shows the genuine care by a committed one, genuine care for the dearly beloved sons.

## The Wonderful Enjoyment in the Church Life!

What a wonderful church life! The church life is the realm that is in Christ. In this realm we see the six aspects of salvation: regeneration, justification, sanctification, transformation, conformation, and transfiguration (glorification). Our Christian life does not stop at initial salvation: our complete salvation is a life-long process and enjoyment. And it is with all the saints in the church! My going on is for you and your going on is for me! Together we experience and enjoy Christ in many ways—sighing, groaning,



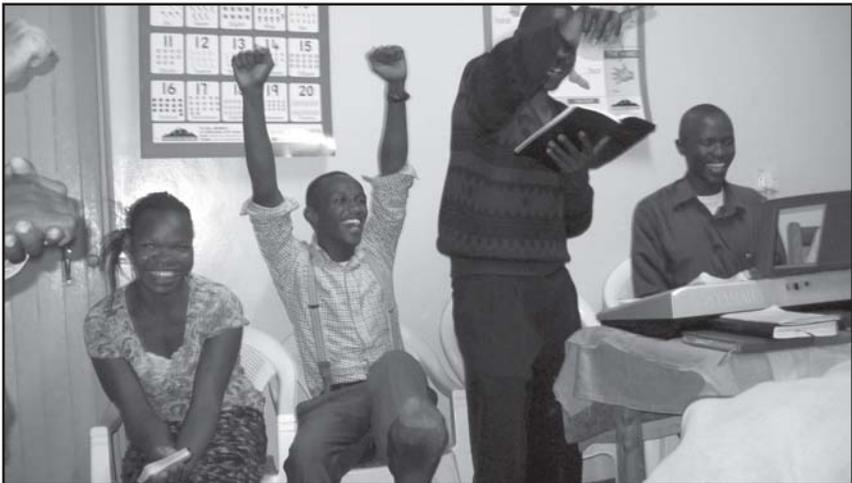
calling, praying, interceding, thanksgiving, pray-reading, read-praying, reciting, and enjoying hymns. Wonderful!

The Committed One Becomes a Sent One.  
The End Result: The Church As  
the Mutual Inheritance of God and Man!

The closing word from the conference was from Acts 26:15-18. Paul was a committed one, he saw the vision and became a sent one. We must rise up to follow this example! We are sent to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, to turn them from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, that they may receive an inheritance among the saints in Him! Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. The church became His bride (Eph 5:25). Christ inherits the church! The church inherits Christ! And God inherits us all! “In Whom also we were made [God’s] heritage (inheritance)” (Eph 1:11 ASV, Amplified). Hallelujah for this mutual inheritance!!

Blessing, Hospitality, and  
Practical Enjoyment

What a blessing it was to enjoy this rich fellowship with more than 300 saints! We met in an auditorium of Makerere University campus. About 200 of us were from out of town, representing about 10 different localities. Many more from out of town would have joined us, if not for the difficulties of transportation in that area. The local saints joyfully offered hospitality.



## Rwanda, Rukungiri, and Kenya

After a journey of more than 12 hours by bus, 19 saints joined us from Kigali, Rwanda. These were young students from universities visiting Kampala for the first time. Many testified how their eyes were opened to see Christ and the church. The brothers in Kampala offered to drive them back, and about a dozen of the saints squeezed into one van! I was so very fortunate to be able to accompany them on their journey home. What a joy!

Along the trip we made a detour to visit the family of one of the young sisters, close to the Uganda-Rwanda border. We enjoyed an unscheduled gathering in fellowship with her parents. All the saints in this group were eager to share their enjoyment overflowing from the conference. In Rwanda we continued to fellowship more.



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*Lord, grant Your mercy and grace that they all continue to stand firm in the Lord, that families would be raised up to care for these young students, and that they all stand for the Lord's testimony in that city!*

I also had the opportunity to spend some time with the saints in Rukungiri, Kabale and Naybikuku in western Uganda, as well as Eldoret, Kenya. The spirits of the saints were so refreshing to me!

### A Word About the Outreach

A group of saints came from Tororo to attend the conference. I was not even sure where that city was located; and I also was not sure how these saints were initially contacted. So I sought the opportunity to see them and wanted to hear how the Lord had reached them. Arrangements were made so that I could visit with them.



One of the sisters who is currently attending the one-year training is from Tororo, and I found out from her that it was near the Uganda/Kenya border. When she had last gone home she told her friends and acquaintances of the vision she had seen and the enjoyment of the Lord that she had found. So, some of them came to the conference to find out for themselves! All of them were already saved and had some connections and background with a denomination that they had been in. Now, however, they all expressed a desire to know much more of the Bible, something beyond their initial salvation. So, we shared with them the vision of Christ and the church, and the rich enjoyment of Christ being experienced with the saints in the church life. We shared the desire of God to have the Body of Christ, to have the church as His testimony, and to have the practical expression of oneness in each locality. It was clear that their eyes were opened and in their hearts they desired more.

During the last day of the conference I saw another group of saints waiting for the taxi (that is, a mini-bus) to take them home. They were excited to see me as I walked by and greeted me with hugs. Nineteen of them had come from Jinja, a town about one hour away from Kampala. As they were introducing themselves to me I realized that a brother who had been in the one-year training two years ago lived in that city. I had not seen him the prior week at the conference, so the brothers worked out arrangements for me to visit there

After some difficulties with transportation I arrived in Jinja. The brother was able to free himself from work and met us at one of the street intersections. He took us to his workplace as well as to the place where he met. After he finished the training two years ago he had returned home and had been struggling to work out a way to make a living in his hometown. This is not an easy thing in the current situation in that country. He met many people. He preached the gospel. He gathered them together in the evenings for Bible studies in his rented place. Even though he had not been

able to come to Kampala for the weekend conference, he had sent the 19 young believers who were meeting with him to attend that conference! As we parted I told the brother how much he had encouraged and strengthened me.

## A Vision Renewed

As we consider the saints in Africa we may unconsciously think that we need to go help them, to help them preach the gospel, or give them many practical things to meet their needs. However, I must testify that each time I have visited the saints in Africa my seeing has become more clear; the Lord surely pours out His blessing! He has now completed four one-year trainings. Out of these trainings He is gaining committed persons with a clear vision of the Lord who can carry out His purpose, and they are find-

ing in Him the substance of His provision. So now I must speak this word strongly: It is critical that these committed persons be raised up locally.

My heart yearns that we all stand together to bear this burden. We must pray that in the years to come many local saints would be raised up for the furtherance of the gospel, for the accomplishing of God's purpose, and for the further spread of the churches. May we all be like the Philippians in our fellowship (i.e., our participation) unto the furtherance of the Lord's interest!

During the past few years in my trips between the U.S. and Africa, I have met several groups of American missionaries, both young and old. Some are doing humanitarian aid missions, some caring for orphans, some helping to build "church" facilities, some conducting large evangelical events, and some bringing financial aid to various groups. As I have seen all these groups the Lord has touched me and caused me to ask, "What are you coming here for?" My answer is that the Lord has led me and burdened me to come here to be with the saints in Africa. Sometimes I don't know what I can do for them, yet, at the same time there is a conviction within me that matches the words of Peter and John when they met the lame man at the temple. "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you" (Acts. 3:6). I come, not with silver and gold to dispense, but I come only with the Christ



I have to encourage you all to go on! Deep within me, with thanksgiving, I pray that the Lord will have His way to fulfill His purpose in Africa.

I was deeply impressed by the saints desire to go on in the Lord. Yet questions lingered as to how to overcome the many practical limitations and to meet the many needs. When a group of saints begins to see that the desire of the Lord is for them to meet together on the ground of oneness as a testimony, they desire to meet together as the church in that locality. Where do they meet? What do they do as their number grows, exceeding the size of their living room? (Do they even have a living room?) They do not have the financial ability to rent a facility. What will they do? Then I realized that their situation is no different than what we first experienced in the early days of the church life here in America. How we have to worship



the Lord that He has strengthened us to fight through each difficulty that has been in our path, just as He strengthened the children of Israel to fight their way into the good land. The true blessing is not to march in and meet no resistance from the enemy. The true blessing is fighting through and conquering by the power of the Lord Spirit indwelling our spirit!

### A Further Word of Burden

We surely desire that all the local saints in the churches in Uganda and the surrounding countries learn to stand firm and to fight the good fight. But how about us? Can we merely say, “You need a strong vision and we stand with you in spirit?” How much more we need to see the same vision! How much more we need the practical experience of being spent! We see the



example of Paul in 2 Timothy. For a dearly beloved son to grow up properly, the parents are the ones who need to see more and who must spend their very being!

### My Prayer on the Flight Home

On the long flight home I kept praying:

*Lord, thank You for the vision! You have opened my eyes to see. Never allow me to deviate from this vision. I would be one like Paul, not disobedient to the heavenly vision (Acts 26:19). Lord, keep the saints in Africa in this same vision. Be with them in every situation. Keep them in this deep realization that they are the committed persons. Keep them in the vision to carry out Your plan by the substance that You have provided, the promise of life in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 1:1). And Lord, keep us here in America in the same way, with the same vision, with the same consecration. We would stand firm in the Lord. We would consecrate ourselves practically to shoulder the burden together for our going on together with the churches in Africa. Enlarge us Lord! Enlarge us that we care not only for our own locality but also for Your interest on this earth. Open our eyes to see beyond our own need to the needs of others!*



Message One from the Spring Family Fellowship

# *Experiences of Life in the Psalms of Ascent (1)*

Titus Chu

In these messages we will cover the Psalms of Ascent, which are psalms 120-134. However, we will not cover all of these psalms, but rather focus on the key points in them regarding our experience of life in Christ.

The fifteen Psalms of Ascent were sung during the festivals, or feasts, of Israel that were held three times a year in Jerusalem. The highest peak among Jerusalem's seven peaks is Mount Zion. On that highest hill is the palace of the king. Just beneath that, God's temple was built. This picture tells us that the king rules, spiritually speaking, through the temple. The Israelites sang these short Psalms as they walked higher and higher to attain to the very peak where they could fully enjoy the throne and the riches in the temple.

These psalms do not give us doctrines. They describe the experiences that every one of us must have as we grow in our spiritual life. As you pass through the experiences they describe, you are elevated to the place where the Lord desires to meet you and where you desire to meet the Lord. The more we enjoy the Lord's presence, the higher we go on this pathway and the richer our enjoyment of Him becomes.

## An Overview of Psalms 120-122

The first group of psalms in the Psalms of Ascent are Psalms 120-122. In Psalm 120, the world is exposed as being deceitful. After we see the world, we turn to the Lord; this is what is portrayed in Psalm 121. Then, after you enjoy Christ, we come to the third element, the church, which practically speaking is the local church life. This is seen in Psalm 122, where the psalmist says, "I rejoiced when they said to me, 'Let us go to the House of the Lord!'"

Therefore, these first three psalms speak of three things: how deceitful the world is; how marvelous is the Savior; and how joyful the church life is. These are the three elements in this first group in the Psalms of Ascent.

## The World Unveiled

You may think you are very complicated, physically speaking, but actually you are simply a composition what you eat, such as vitamins A, B, and C! In this respect, your whole life is related to the food you eat. Whenever you purchase something in the supermarket, you do not really know what you are getting. Yet, even though it may be killing you, you realize you need it. (This is one reason why we need to ask the Lord to sanctify whatever we eat!) Many sicknesses found in a country have to do with that country's diet. In the United States, for instance, obesity is a problem because of the abundant supply of certain kinds of food.

The world operates in this way. Its purpose is to fill us up with things that keep us from God. For instance, there are so many brands of clothing to choose from in America! The way food, clothing, and your very way of life are presented are all designed to occupy you. People become obsessed with such things to the point that they become enslaved. How strange that people take pride in such things!

One day, however, you begin to realize how deceitful this all is. This realization marks the first experience portrayed in the Psalms of Ascent, which is described in Psalm 120. This experience has to do with seeing through everything apart from God, all that presents itself as being so necessary for our sustenance and enjoyment. We must see how deceitful the situation is in the world. You may get the promotion you desired, but after the excitement wears off, you find there is no real satisfaction in it. In the world we are given to hope in things, but those things do not make good on their promise; the whole thing is deceitful. Every time you get what you are hoping for, you still find yourself yearning for something more. One day you ask yourself, "Is that it?" Only after you see this do you finally turn to the Lord, who was, until then, the second-most important matter in your life.

One person's life might be his violin. He practices six hours a day. How demanding it is to be a musician! Every gifted musician rises until he encounters a level in which nearly everyone is as gifted as he is. At that point he realizes, "I am not as great as I thought I was." Some of his boasting may be gone, yet he still may not see how empty it all is. During the performances something may seem worthwhile, but as soon as the performance is over, nothing has really changed.

Basically, the entire world is a lie. Suppose you can become a Ph.D. at age 24. If you think that is “it,” you are being cheated. And among the deceitful things, there are endless deceitful ways. What is presented as a “good deal” has so many strings attached that they never tell you about up front! People will tell you any lie they can if they think they can “get” you. The entire world is a matter of deceit; the whole world is a lie.

What then is left to turn to? Christ and the church! Once you see through the world you begin to realize that apart from the Lord, your life is meaningless. Furthermore, you realize that if you do not have the church life, God will not gain the glory He desires from you and you will be short of joy.

This explains the distress the psalmist describes. When you view the situation, it is full of deceit. All you can do is sigh and call out to Jehovah. “I cried out to the Lord, and He heard me” (Psalm 120:1). If you want to ascend and arrive at the goal the Lord has for you, the first thing you must realize is how deceitful the world is.

### Crying Out to Him Who Was, Who Is, and Who is Coming

To call is to cry out. The name Jehovah (Yahweh) is unique. His name means He is the one who is and who was and who is coming. This is how the Lord Jesus describes Himself in Revelation: I am the One who is, I am the One who was, I am the One who is coming (Rev. 1:8). In other words, He is everlasting, self-existing, and ever-existing. Yahweh is based on the word “hyy,” (*hiya*) which means simply “to be” or “to exist,” implying a generating life. When you cry out to Jehovah, you are calling to the one who is unchanging, who is forever the same, who executes exactly what He desires, who is never defeated, and who is always in a kingly place. Furthermore, you are calling on the one who gives you life.

I used to be quite active on the platform, but I no longer am able to be so active because of my age. I cannot say, “I was, I am, and I will be!” How precious it is that the Lord never changes. He never grows old or decreases, but He desires to increase in us! That is why we must go up.

Before the meeting, I was so tired I thought I would not be able to come up to speak. But when I “called out to Jehovah,” just saying, “Oh Lord Jesus,” I received life. Now I am very different than I was an hour ago. I have gained God, and I hope you have too! Whenever we are in God, we sense that we are more alive. How different it is to be in God than to be in the world! In the world we are cheated, whereas in God we receive life. When

we are with the saints enjoying Christ, and taking Him in, we receive life!

This Jehovah, who is eternal, self-existing, ever-existing, and life-giving, likes to hear our cry unto Him. When we cry out to Jehovah, He hears us. “Deliver my soul, O Jehovah, from lying lips and a deceitful tongue!”

To be deceitful is to beguile and to mislead. It involves treachery. The psalmist says the deceitfulness of the tongue is like the sharp arrows of a mighty man. The deceitfulness in the world hurts and kills people. The psalmist compares such deceitfulness to the burning coals of the broom tree, which was famous for producing a smoldering fire. When the broom tree burns, it burns for a long time; its coals “cook” you, and even after you think the burning must finally be over, it continues. The coals of the broom tree signify the persistence of the world’s consuming work in our lives.

This man then cried out, “Woe is me, that I dwell in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar” (120:5a). Some say Meshech is today’s Moscow. In Revelation 20:8 Gog and Magog are in the north, and according to Ezekiel 38, Meshech is the city of Gog that bears this element of rebellion. In fact, regardless of what city we live in, everything is about rebellion. Everything in your city is not one with God; rather, it is Meshech.

Nothing is real in the world. Furthermore, the world has the “tents of Kedar” (120:5b). Kedar was a descendant of Ishmael, so even though Abraham is his forebear, he is not on the line of Christ. Many Christians are like this. They proclaim, “I have been going to such-and-such Church since I was a child,” yet they have no idea what it means to experience Christ. This is the significance of the tents of Kedar. Do not think your Christian heritage means anything if you do not have Christ.

The psalmist then says, “My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace.” God desires harmony. What is the blessing of finding your “other half”? Peace. Before you meet that person, you are always looking. Then when you find that person and ask to spend some time with them, and the reply is “yes,” there is some peace. As you spend more time together, there is more peace. And when you agree to be married, there is still more peace; there is harmony now since something so wonderful has fallen into place and your life is no longer “out of order” in this regard.

Christians desire peace and harmony, yet the more peace you have with God and other saints, the more others will mock you. This is the meaning of the verse, “I am *for* peace, but when I speak, They are for war” (120:7).

## A Turn to the Lord

Once we realize the deceitfulness of the world, that it is completely hopeless,

we will also see that we need the Lord Jesus. We will lift up your eyes to the mountains, from which comes our help, because our help comes from Jehovah who made heaven and earth. The whole world is so empty and full of deceitfulness. Therefore we cry out, “Lord, save me,” and we lift up our eyes to the mountains. Our help comes from Jehovah, the One who is everlasting, self-existing and ever-existing, the One who gives life and brings us out of all the empty, destructive things. Who is this One? The One who made heaven and earth! (cf. Ps. 121:1-2).

In the final verse of this psalm, we read that Jehovah “will guard your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forever” (Ps. 121:8). This is difficult to explain. I would say that to “go out” is to bring the Lord’s presence to people and that to “come in” is to come in to the Lord’s presence. It is not simply that He is with you wherever you go. The meaning of going out and coming in is to go forth to bring Him to others and to come in to bring others into His presence. For example, to go to be with the saints is “going out,” and praying with them is “coming in.”

## Enjoying the Life of the Lord’s Testimony, the Church

Being with the Lord in such a way ushers us to Psalm 122, which presents the church life:

*I was glad when they said to me,  
“Let us go to the house of Jehovah.”  
Our feet are standing / Within your gates, O Jerusalem.  
— Psalm 122:1-2*

After seeing the world’s deceitfulness and turning to the Lord, there should be something that causes us to be very happy! Instead of feeling, “Do I have to go to another meeting?” You feel joyful about every opportunity to gather with the other saints. “Let us go! Let us go to the house of the Jehovah. Let’s go to the church gatherings, where the Lord is exalted and honored!” What a joy when our feet are standing within the gates of Jerusalem! The moment you begin to be with the saints and the Lord, you sense something so enjoyable. How blessed it is to be with the saints in the church life!

The name “Jerusalem” is composed two words: “foundation,” and “peace.” In this place there is something so peaceful and solid. I have given my life to this “city” for sixty years. It has never failed me. I have always felt that when we are together, it is a blessing!

## The Walls of Jerusalem

Psalms 122:7a says, “May peace be within your walls.” What does a wall indicate? If there is a wall, there is a sphere or environment that can exist apart from other spheres or environments. Palaces represent a ruling. The church is a sphere, and there is a wall for its testimony. Whatever is deceitful, unholy, sinful, or fails to give people Christ is excluded by the wall. When your feet come within its gates, you have departed from everything that is negative. Furthermore, in the church life, we have the ruling of the King. Isn’t this marvelous?

For the church life to be so peaceful, there must be a strong wall. If someone is uplifted among us so that he becomes proud, something is wrong with the wall! The wall should keep out anything that is not pure. But it is even more beautiful when we see the ruling taking place. When we see the saints dwelling under the Lord’s ruling, being freed from pride and sin, we see something beautiful exhibited. Besides being within the walls, the Lord should be the One ruling over us in the church life. Those who stand one with Christ bring in the ruling element, and through them the ruling comes to others. Thus we have the “palaces.”

As the saints grow, the kingship is exhibited in their lives. How joyful this makes us feel! Let us go up to Jerusalem so that our feet might be placed within its gates. As we enjoy the gatherings of the saints, we enjoy the riches of Jerusalem. Then we can truly say, “Peace be within your walls, O Jerusalem!” Do not come into the church life for other reasons, such as having the hope of enlarging your business. Everyone in the church life must honor Christ alone. Anything that we bring into the church life must be able to pass through its wall, and what we do in the church life must testify only of Christ.

When we place ourselves in the church life, we experience the wonderment of what lies within its walls and we enjoy the Lord’s rule. Verses 8-9 state:

*For the sake of my brothers and my friends,  
I will now say, "May peace be within you."  
For the sake of the house of Jehovah our God,  
I will seek your good.  
— Psalms 122:8-9*

When the church life is so healthy, all the saints are so blessed.



Message Two from the Spring Family Fellowship

## *Experiences of Life in the Psalms of Ascent (2)*

I have been saved for nearly sixty years. The more mature you become in the Christian life, the greater should be your ability to communicate the riches you have with others. Therefore try to read such books as *The Journey of Life* for yourselves and even for your friends.

Richly enjoying Christ refreshes us much more than any knowledge we might possess. But of course, regardless of how much we enjoy Christ, we also need the substance of the truth! Therefore we have covered something related to our experience.

### The Key in the Psalms of Ascent: Living According to Revelation

The revelation in this first section of the Psalms of Ascent involves three things. Psalm 120 shows us what the world is. Once we see how deceitful the world is, it cannot gain us, no matter how tempting its offers may be. In Psalm 121, we see the Lord, and then in Psalm 122 we see the church. We must be controlled by a clear vision concerning these three things.

The world is deceitful, yet for some reason most people are willing to be fooled by it. Like fish, they jump to the hook and rise to the bait. Thus they live a life that really is a lie. As you look back, you may be surprised at all the nonsense you were involved with and wonder why you lived such a life. Once you see how deceitful the world is, it can no longer gain you. Only Christians who have seen the world and love the Lord are able to boast that they live their life without regrets. If there would be any regret, it would be due to not loving the Lord and the church more!

I am very thankful to the Lord that I was given to see through the deceitfulness of the things of this earth and turned myself to Christ and began loving Him and enjoying Him in the church life. Among men, I am blessed because I am a Christian. Among Christians, I am blessed because I love the Lord. Among the lovers of the Lord, I am blessed because I love the

church! I love so many brothers and sisters! I am very happy that my life has become something valuable due to seeing through the deceitfulness of the things on this earth and seeing the preciousness of Christ and the church.

Now we are brought to the experience of life. If this is what we see, what kind of life will be lived? It is very hard to apprehend this. In Psalm 120, we see through the world. The first reaction is to firmly attach ourselves to the Lord. When the psalmist mentions the tents of Kedar as well as Meshech, this means that not only does he see the vanity of the world in general, but also that he sees through the religious world. The religious world always seems to find a way to prevail.

Those who dwelt in the tents of Kedar were descendants of Ishmael. Ishmael's descendants were herdsmen, and so they always sought some new pasture for their herds. They could always say they gained something new, but actually they never kept anything they had gained. This is representative of the religious world, in which you are always doing things that seem to be successful, but eventually you end up with nothing.

Psalm 120 tells us that everything in the world is either Kedar or Meshech. Nothing in the religious world will remain. Religious success and large numbers will fade away. The only thing that will be left is whatever you have gained of Christ. How great a cheating there is when people, in the name of serving Christ, focus on things other than Christ!

## Servants Looking to Our Master's Hand

In Psalm 123, the psalmist's firm declaration is "Unto You I lift up my eyes, O you who dwell in the heavens" (v. 1). We must firmly attach ourselves to Christ. Since He dwells in the heavens, we lift up our eyes. And to what do we lift up our eyes?

*Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master,  
As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress,  
So our eyes look to the Lord our God,  
Until He is gracious to us.  
— Psalm 123:2*

As Americans, we appreciate freedom. If we want to do something or go somewhere, we do it! This, however, is not the way of a servant. If we desire to serve the Lord, we must serve based on how the Lord's hand leads us, rather than our own consideration.

The hardest lesson for us to learn as serving ones is to wait on the hand of our Master. This is true for every one of us who loves the Lord. Typically, we are too free. If we want to do something or if we think something is proper, we simply do it. But even if we feel compelled to do something, we should first ask whether that is truly of the Lord. If we really told the Lord, “Unless You show me Your hand, I am not going to do anything,” we may

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The hardest lesson for us to learn as serving ones is to wait on the hand of our Master.

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find ourselves refraining from doing many things we were planning to do, or we may do them sooner than we had expected. Either way, it would be the Lord’s hand that would be our guide rather than our own thought. You may think you know how to get things done, but

as the Lord’s servants we should act only under the Lord’s direction.

How do you know when you have the Lord’s hand? First, the Lord’s hand supplies. Whenever you feel there is a strong supply of life, the Lord’s hand is at work. Don’t think that increase is necessarily a sign that you are doing the Lord’s work! If the Lord is not supplying you with life in some matter, you don’t even have to bother asking the Lord whether something is of Him. The Lord may demand something that seems difficult, but in it He will always supply you.

Second, the Lord’s hand leads. Can a worker allow the Lord to bring him to a halt when his work is yielding an increase in number? Or does he simply say, “Praise the Lord for blessing my work”? If the Lord were to indicate His intention to wait, many workers might protest. Even if you felt, “I have made it,” the Lord would ask, “You have made exactly what?” There are congregations and denominations everywhere, but among them, how many are truly gaining Christ or are after Christ? How many look to Christ? It must be His hand that supplies and leads us in His work.

The Lord’s hand also supports. How do you know I am old? One reason is that I need a hand to help me go up or come down from places. Don’t think that things are going well when you can make it on your own. Your practice may be that you look to Jehovah your God until He is gracious to you, but if He does not bless you as you expect, you protest.

These past years, we may have forgotten something of this matter. When a certain organization was doing what it could to take over some localities, many seemed to forget that the Lord was still the Lord on the throne in the heavens; that had not changed. People may come and do whatever they can, but the Lord is still on the throne! Still, some elders responded aggressively, while others became very cautious. Different places found

their different ways. But as the eyes of the servants look to the hand of their master, so our eyes look to Jehovah our God until He is gracious to us. There is no thought of attainment; there is only peace. And when there is such peace, there is harmony. The Lord desires to see a harmonious church life. He says, "I don't care about success or failure; I want to expose where you really are." We need to tell the Lord, "I look unto You until You are gracious to us. In the process I need Your hand to supply me, to support me, to lead me, to comfort me, and yes, even to discipline me." The reason the Lord's hand becomes a hand of discipline to us at certain times is also so that we might receive grace.

The psalmist declares:

*Had it not been Jehovah who was on our side  
When men rose up against us,  
Then they would have swallowed us alive,  
When their anger was kindled against us.  
— Psalm 124:2-3*

After so many have risen up against the Lord's testimony, we are still here! I have so much thankfulness towards the Lord. Years ago, I dared not look at the situation or the saints' future. I had no idea what the Lord would do. But here the psalmist says, "We are not swallowed, for the Lord has been with us!" Six years ago I would not have believed saints could have behaved in such a way. But we have learned to say, "Our help is with Jehovah, who made heaven and earth." It is during such times that you realize your own inadequacy, and how wonderful our God is.

## Mountains for Jerusalem

After seeing the world and turning to the Lord, you realize the need for a healthy, prevailing church life.

*Those who trust in Jehovah are as Mount Zion,  
Which cannot be moved but abides forever.  
As the mountains surround Jerusalem,  
So Jehovah surrounds His people  
From this time forth and forever.  
— Psalms 125:1-2*

I like these two simple verses. The first tells us that if we trust in the Lord, we are just like Mount Zion, where the palace of the king stood. It typifies God's throne in the heavenlies.

In Ephesians 2 we are told we were dead in our offenses, but the Lord made us alive and raised us up together to sit with Him in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:5-6). Where are we? We are in Mount Zion! We are at the top where the Lord as the King has His palace! We are seated together with Him in the heavenlies! If you trust in the Lord, you will know what it is to be in the heavenlies. The church life needs this reality. If some are not in the heavenlies in their experience, the church life can never be realized on the earth.

We must operate as those in the heavenlies. Your being should not be in a work, but in the heavenly realm! When you are carrying out a work or

trying to do something in yourself, you express one thing. When you are in the realm of the heavenlies, you express something altogether different.

You live in the realm you are in. I could dye my hair and say, "I am young again," but that does not change the fact that I am in the realm of an old man. Christians live in the realm of Mount Zion; we are in the heavenlies,

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On Mount Zion there is only life; there is only the person and dominion of Christ. It is in this realm that Christ operates for His church.

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which means we enjoy all the riches of Christ, as we see for example in Colossians. It also means that everything that does not belong to Christ is excluded.

I might like to take a few of my possessions to the heavens with me, but the Lord would say, "They do not belong here." In fact, when we come to Mount Zion we will find that many things do not belong there. On Mount Zion there is only life; there is only the person and dominion of Christ. It is in this realm that Christ operates for His church. So when the psalmist says that he trusts in Jehovah, it means we must live in that heavenly realm.

Furthermore, once you are in that realm you cannot be moved. You abide forever. This is a fact. Once you get saved, you live in this life and abide in this life even unto eternity. It is in this realm that we practice the church life, for the church life is in this realm. "So Jehovah surrounds His people / From this time forth and forever. "

The original name for Jerusalem was "Jebus," which means "harvest," but when David conquered the city he gave it its current name, Jerusalem,

which means “Foundation of Peace” (1 Ch. 11:4). Today, we need such a peaceful church life. And how can the church life become so harmonious and peaceful before God and man? In the presence of its “mountains.”

The psalmist’s declaration is that as the mountains surround Jerusalem, Jehovah surrounds His people. When I see many young saints, I am hopeful because I see some who could become mountains. We cannot say which young ones will become mountains, but there are older brothers among us who really are such mountains. When you talk about the church life, you have to see brothers with stature, riches, operation, love, and a strong serving ability. Jerusalem typifies the local church life, and in the church life, the number of mountains determines how healthy the church life is.

In the Cleveland metro area, there are a number of churches. If there were just one or two “mountains,” how lonely they would be! When I look around, however, I am happy, for there are so many mountains! When you consider a locality, don’t be impressed with how nice the hall is and so on. Instead, be thankful for the mountains, for when the mountains surround Jerusalem, then Jehovah surrounds His people! Without such mountains, the Lord cannot surround His people.

Whenever you see mountains, you know the situation in the churches is hopeful. In the church life, it is the brothers with stature who allow for Jehovah to care for His church. Therefore when you care for mountains, you are caring for the people. In a good sense, without mountains it doesn’t matter how many people there are meeting together. What the Lord needs for the church life are mountains! When the mountains are present, the church is strong. The Lord says, “I am Jehovah, but unless there are mountains surrounding my people, I Myself cannot surround My people.” Whenever some are standing so strong and firm for Christ and the church, the Lord’s presence is with all the people.

We must ask the Lord to have mercy on us so that many might grow to become such mountains. We shouldn’t be satisfied to be common churchgoers; we should fight to be those who abide in Mount Zion and become mountains for the churches. We should feel, “As long as I am here, the church is protected. As long as I am here, along with the other “mountains,” Jehovah surrounds His people from now unto eternity.”

Let us be those who look to the Lord’s hand and allow Him to lead us and supply us, realizing we are nothing, for unless the Lord protects us, we can be easily swallowed up. We trust Him because we know He is on the throne in the heavenlies. We also appreciate the mountains in the church life, for because of them the Lord always has a way to be with His people.



## *Experiences of Life in the Psalms of Ascent (3)*

The raising up of the Lord's testimony is not a matter of how many are meeting together or how successful the work is, but a matter of how many mountains the Lord has been able to raise up. When the mountains are present, the Lord is round about His people. The Lord desires to bless His people, but His blessing must go through the mountains. When high mountains have been raised up, then surely the Lord is able to bless His people.

As an old man, I look to the future. My desire is to see more mountains raised up. Many Bible scholars believe the Lord should return during this century. Yet, where is there any sign that the Bride has been made ready? Some leading ones have been raised up in some places. In other places you can see groups of Christians who love the Lord. But where are the mountains?

In principle, mountains are high, yet approachable. Furthermore, a mountain is something that has much life flourishing upon it. If a mountain is bare, how sad that is! Young people should give their lives to Christ, not only because He deserves our love, but also that He might gain them to become mountains, those who are rich in life from every angle for the sake of the Lord's testimony. But today, where are these mountains?

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I am afraid...that in the future many will be only shadows of the mountains they might have become.

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So many today are childish, looking for increase. There is little realization of what the Lord desires. For the Lord to take care of His people, Jerusalem must be surrounded by mountains! I am happy there are some among us who have the potential of growing into such mountains. Yet, if we put other things first in our lives, how can we grow to

become such mountains? Therefore I like to see signs that some are in the process of becoming mountains. Only time will tell whether someone actually becomes such a mountain. I am afraid, however, that in the future many will be only shadows of the mountains they might have become.

It is always difficult for a mountain to be raised up; it is especially hard for the sisters to become mountains, because their husbands and children occupy most of their time—though we should not forget that it was a sister who raised up Watchman Nee. There are choices to be made at every stage of life, and if you compromise at any stage, the possibility for you to become a mountain is lost. Too often we make our own decisions and hope that the Lord will bless us, instead of looking to the hand of the Lord as His servants. Yes, the Lord is with us wherever we go, but who is the one leading?

In any event, the Lord needs such mountains. It is only as mountains are raised up that the Lord has a way to raise up His people. If you are sincere, you can become a mountain. If you only attend the church meetings as your duty, you are still one of His people. But if you really mean business in following the Lord, you can become a mountain.

Preachers like to give messages. I would rather raise up mountains! The more mountains there are, the more the Lord is able to bless His people and to “turn the captivity of Zion” (126:1). In other words, we were in the world, in sin, and in religion, but the Lord has brought us back. Those who are mountains have the ability to turn the situation, as seen in the final section of the Psalms of Ascent, where we see the testimony and the vision increasingly realized as something we can enjoy, partake of, and enter into.

## Building the Organic Testimony of the Lord

Jerusalem, that is, the church, needs to be built up. Yet the psalmist says

*Unless Jehovah builds the house,  
They labor in vain who build it;  
Unless Jehovah guards the city,  
The watchman keeps awake in vain.  
— Psalms 127:1*

Every local church needs to be built up, but the building up is not in the hand of anyone other than the Lord. Every local church needs the watching of the more mature ones, but unless the Lord is the one protecting, their fighting on the church’s behalf is in vain. Why is this so? It is because all the work of Christ in His Body is something organic.

The Hebrew word for “build” used by the psalmist here is *bana*. It is first used in the Bible when God produced Eve out of Adam. As Adam slept, God opened his side and took out a part and fashioned, or more specifically

“built,” a woman as Adam’s counterpart. This word has at its root something that is very organic.

When Jesus died on the cross His side was also opened, and something was taken from Him that has and is being developed organically into His counterpart. When we talk about the church needing to be built up or edified, we must realize it is not something of man’s effort or way. There are so many Christians trying to do so much for the Lord, yet we must realize that unless the Lord builds the house, our efforts will be futile.

There are many who desire to serve the Lord. Indeed, the Lord calls many to serve Him. But everyone’s salvation is an organic matter, as is their loving of the Lord. Those who serve may labor faithfully to help others, exhorting and ministering to them, but if the Lord is not building, their labor will be in vain. Why is this? It is because the church is something organic that comes out of the Lord Himself. Therefore, if the Lord is with you when you preach the gospel, the church can be built, but if He is not, your effort will not produce what He is after.

Jehovah is very clear when it comes to what He is building. When He produced Eve, He knew exactly what He was after. I have often encountered frustration. Whenever I push for something, the Lord does not seem very happy, but when I simply rest in His work, He seems very happy to work out what He desires through me. The result of your work is not something that is up to you. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, and to eat the bread of sorrows, for the Lord gives His beloved sleep. We simply need to learn to rest in Him.

Those who determine to serve will have a hard life. What is the secret of this life? To be restful, to sleep. When I was younger I labored strenuously in many things, but I eventually learned to be restful. When things no longer bother me, all the saints become so lovely! I become a “grandparent,” rather than a “parent” in my experience! Learn to go to sleep. Be restful, and let the Lord do whatever He must do.

Being restful does not mean to be unconcerned about anything. But it is vain to build and plan so much. If you want to trust in the Lord and be one with Him, then rest in Him. Sleep!

## Suffering So Life Might Be Produced

The testimony is a building, and it is built up organically by the Lord Himself. If you want to build as a builder, you must go on to the next section of the Psalms of Ascent, where we are told of the afflictions of the psalmist. He even tells us that the Lord allowed some to plow long furrows up and down his back! (Ps. 129:1-3). Why would the Lord allow such a suffering?

He allows such things to happen in our lives so that we might experience what He intends for us and arrive at the peak of the spiritual life.

Think how humiliating it is to be bent over or made to lay prone while a plow is laid upon you! Many think this verse should read, "Many a time they have afflicted me in my youth, but they have not touched me at all!" It is simply not so. In His government, the Lord often allows others to "make their furrows long" upon us.

Do you want to be a blessing to the Lord in His work for His Body's sake? Then be prepared. Do not expect glorious experiences. Instead, expect wounds, for if there is no wounding, life cannot be produced.

For this process the first necessity is to be laid low, so that the plow can do its work. Next comes the plow. As you experience the cutting you may cry out, "Lord Jesus, this is unfair!" Nevertheless, it is by this process that you are freed from your pride. Still, the real reason the Lord allows us to be treated in this way is so that we might bear the fruit God seeks.

Life cannot flow easily from someone when they remain intact. We may think that eloquence wins men for Christ, but it is the furrows that actually allow fruit to come forth. To undergo the necessary plowing is not an easy thing for us or for the Lord. The Lord may use brothers near us, or He may use something else in our environment. This is how the Lord gains the opening that He can use to sow the seed into us. Physical harvest comes from seed sown into broken ground; spiritual harvest comes from the Lord sowing seed into a broken us! In the process you may feel you are dying, but in reality life will be multiplied. First, however, the ground must be made good for the Lord's seed to grow and produce fruit.

The Lord will not be dissuaded. When the plowing begins, you may complain, "Lord, what are You doing?" Then the Lord may reply, "I am simply plowing. I am producing furrows for sowing that something may develop." So do not try to rise up! If you try to rise back up before the process is complete, the seeds will fall out and the Lord will have to use another occasion to start again.

This is not easy. We want to be respected; we do not like to bear anything of shame or humiliation. The Lord, however, wants life to be produced in

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Do you want to be a blessing to the Lord in His work for His Body's sake? Then be prepared. Do not expect glorious experiences. Instead, expect wounds, for if there is no wounding, life cannot be produced.

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# The Lord Arranges for Us to be Brought Low

*A Song of Ascents.*

*“Many times they have persecuted me from my youth up,”  
Let Israel now say,  
“Many times they have persecuted me from my youth up;  
Yet they have not prevailed against me.  
The plowers plowed upon my back;  
They lengthened their furrows.”  
— Psalms 129:1-3*

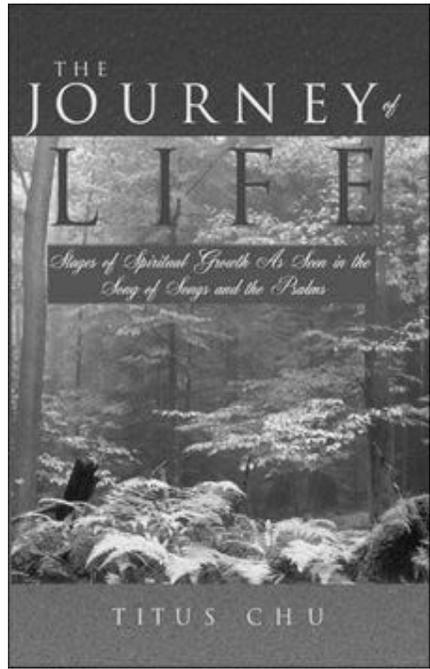
The third verse of this psalm is one of the most precious verses in the Bible. It is so profound that it is difficult to appreciate: “The plowers plowed upon my back; They lengthened their furrows.” (v. 3). This is a poetic description of environmental dealings and affliction. Affliction causes us to be made very low, because we are constantly under something we can’t handle. We usually think that our usefulness comes from our being made high and victorious. But from the Lord’s point of view, our usefulness comes from being brought low. For example, we often like to be involved in spiritual activities because they make us feel we are important. We are in the front. But when the Lord puts His hand upon us, He often pushes us to the back. He doesn’t allow us to be so high. This is an example of what it means for the “plowers” to “plow on our back.”

Whenever you are involved in spiritual activities, you feel that you are a high person. You may even feel that you are on the “cutting edge” of the church life. When I was a young brother I hated to miss any spiritual activity. I always liked to be in the front, but the Lord always pushed me to the back. There was a period of time when I would come to the meeting hall after school every day. There I would meet with some other seeking brothers to study the Word and to pray. Then one day all of a sudden they weren’t there when I showed up. For several days when I went, they wouldn’t be there. Finally I saw one of them. I was happy to see him and

asked him where all the brothers had been. He replied that the elders had selected some brothers who were “hopeful” and had taken them someplace to have a special training. My thought was, “Oh Lord, I gave my life to You, and I’m not even hopeful! All the hopeful ones went, and I’m not even selected!” But this was from the Lord. The Lord desires to make us low, but we desire to be high. We like to rise up, but the Lord tells us to come down. The Lord will arrange everything in our environment for us to be made low.

It is for this reason that the psalmist says, “The plowers plowed on my back; they made their furrows long.” This portrays a deep experience in life.

The Lord will cause a plow to bring us low. The Lord not only makes us low, He also cuts us deeply. When we are plowed and brought low, it is to



the degree that no one sees us. We are no longer up front, and we are no longer so high. We are as low as a furrow in the ground. We are in a situation where no one even sees our face. Although we have given ourselves to the Lord and His purpose, for some reason the elders don’t even notice us. We have been so desperate to consecrate ourselves to Christ, yet no one finds that out. This means that we are brought low. We are even “cut” in

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The Lord desires to make us low, but we desire to be high. We like to rise up, but the Lord tells us to come down. The Lord will arrange everything in our environment for us to be made low.

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our experience. We are like the earth, being plowed upon our back. — Pages 80-81.



*This book is available online as  
a free download in PDF format at  
MinistryMessages.org.*

# *A Gathering at Ashland Woods*

Mark & Sherry Jordan

On the weekend of May 18–20, 2012, a group of saints mainly from Goshen, Indiana, and Pittsburgh joined together at Ashland Woods in Ohio, the perfect venue for a church getaway. It was the first joint gathering of the two localities, though there has been some traffic between us over the years. Although the numbers were smaller than we had hoped for, several newer families joined us, and it was a joy to see the Lord adding to the churches.

The weather cooperated beautifully: clear skies, temperatures in the 80's, and a gentle breeze. We arrived Friday evening and awoke Saturday morning to the aromas of hot pancakes, sizzling bacon and sausage, and farm-fresh scrambled eggs, all compliments of Goshen's own Keith Miller who had raised the very hog ("Wilma") we now enjoyed. This set the tone for a weekend of enjoyable meals, all brought in and cooked by the saints in Ashland Woods' excellent kitchen.

After breakfast, we gathered in the fellowship room to continue our enjoyment in eating, this time the spiritual food. Our "cuisine" for the weekend was the offerings in Leviticus. Vern Yoder had prepared copies of a section from *Christ as the Reality of the Offerings*, by Witness Lee, which we read and discussed, while adding in our own testimonies. Several of the attendees were new to the church life and their offerings were tender and inspiring. For us oldtimers it was good to see Christ in the offerings anew.

Saturday afternoon began with make-your-own sack lunches followed by excursions to several local attractions: go-kart racing for the young, a cheese factory, and a visit to the very fine art museum at Oberlin College (one of the top five college art collections in the nation). We returned for much-needed naps and visiting. The deck outside the dining area was a popular place all weekend for eating, talking, and getting to know each other. The evening meal was a tasty treat of chicken and rice prepared by Pittsburgh.

As the sun went down a cry went out: “Anyone who wants to take part in a baptism, go to the pond!” The baptism was of a newly saved brother named David; his son, a young guitarist and Jesus lover, helped to baptize him. They stepped back onto the pier with muddy socks and light hearts.

We capped the day off around a campfire roasting marshmallows and truly ad hoc singing. Dave Canfield learned that you can indeed “line out” a song as he called the lyrics out from his smartphone. (He got better at it as we went along.) Marilyn called for “He’s Got the Whole World In His Hands,” a song we made more personal by inserting the names of every single person. (“He’s got

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The setting is Midwestern  
idyllic: deep green  
woods, acres of grass  
and meadowlands....  
The entire place invites  
reflection as well  
as fellowship.

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Jim and Pat Ruffin / In His Hands....”) By eleven o’clock the sandman was calling . . . to us oldsters. The young folk amongst us were still going strong.

A word about the accommodations at Ashland Woods is in order: it is a wonderful place. The care given to it from the hands of Tim Miller is visible everywhere, from the well-manicured lawns and walkways to the sparkling clean rooms; it looks as fresh today as the

day it opened. The setting is Midwestern idyllic: deep green woods, acres of grass and meadowlands, and the sounds of a passing train punctuating the quiet with regularity. The entire place invites reflection as well as fellowship.

Sunday morning the Goshen sisters presented a colorful, European-style breakfast with fresh fruit, cheese, and pastries. Again to the deck we went, forming new groups, meeting new people.

At ten-ish, we gathered again in the fellowship room and sat in a circle, singing, praising, bread-breaking, reading, discussing, and sharing our experiences. There was no top-down agenda to the fellowship other than the fact that the Leviticus material was prepared ahead of time. We continued on past the noon hour. After a fine lunch of lasagna and garlic bread served by the Pittsburgh saints, it was time to clean our rooms, pack our bags, and hit the road. For us Goshenites, that’s a four-hour trip. For Pittsburghers, three.

We’ve mentioned the physical and spiritual feeding that took place this weekend but a gathering like this feeds the whole person, body, soul, and spirit. Our souls were indeed fed greatly in mingling with saints, both old and new to us. We left with new friends and a renewed appreciation of the Christ that lives in each one of us. In the end we decided to do it again in the fall! We hope that because of the good report we will each take back with us, even more will join us the next time.



# *A Visit to Chicago to Preach the Gospel*

Mark Miller

From May 7-11, a number of young people who are participating in the 2011-12 Great Lakes Internship traveled to different cities for what we called, simply, “Gospel Week.” The name expressed our desire for this weeklong adventure: to share the gospel in face-to-face conversations with as many people as possible. To achieve our goals, we planned for at least six hours of gospel preaching a day—far more than any of us had ever done before! The other teams went to Kalamazoo and St. Joseph in Michigan; to Cleveland and Columbus in Ohio; to Hanover, Pennsylvania; and to Fayetteville, West Virginia. Our team went to Chicago.

We arrived in the Chicago area on Friday, and on Saturday night in Naperville we had a very enjoyable gathering with all of the young people from the different churches in the area. On the Lord’s Day morning we split up and met with the churches in Naperville and Evanston. Then in the afternoon, to inspire our gospel zeal, we visited the Billy Graham museum at Wheaton College. Later that night we had a time of singing, fellowship, and prayer together.

Our actual gospel preaching began on Monday, when we spent the entire day in Northwestern University’s student center. On Tuesday we went to Millennium Park in downtown Chicago, which is a large tourist attraction, and a big pool of people to share the gospel with! On Wednesday, we visited Wicker Park and Lincoln Park in the morning, before going to some of the smaller campuses in the downtown Chicago area. On Thursday we again spent the whole day in and around Millennium Park.

Every evening the Lord provided food from the saints in Chicago, whether it was a backyard BBQ or a simple meal around a dining room table. We surely experienced the Lord’s promise to care for us, as for at least one week we were workers thrust out into His harvest!

## Our Method

*“Do you have any spiritual beliefs?”*

This was the question we learned to start conversations with. Over the course of the week, we studied and learned methods used by several well-known street evangelists, which we then tried to incorporate into our personal conversations. Many people become defensive when the name of Jesus is spoken, yet most are willing (and even eager) to talk about their own spiritual beliefs if given a chance. This question opened people to spiritual conversations in a way that was casual and undemanding.

Several follow-up questions were asked to see what a person thought about Jesus, about heaven and hell, and about their own eternal destiny. If they were open, we were ready to turn our Bibles to Romans 3:23, 6:23, and John 3:3. Many people felt that they were “good enough,” not realizing that our good deeds are actually like filthy rags before God. Walking through the Ten Commandments often left even the “best” people with a realization of their sin and guilt before God. John 3:16 became a favorite verse of ours, not only because it shows God’s love, strong to save a perishing soul, but because it also revealed a need to believe, or receive, the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord.

In the end, our goal for each conversation was to bring people to this moment of decision. If we felt we had adequately shared the gospel and that the unbeliever understood what the Bible says, we asked if they were willing to receive Christ into their heart. We never forced or pushed anyone into this decision. Rather, we left this decision of the heart in the hands of God, through His Holy Spirit.

## The Results

During our time several dozen unbelievers came to a moment of decision regarding Jesus Christ. Of this number, 13 received the Lord into their hearts! Even the negative responses gave us much to pray for. It is a sobering thought to think of the birds coming down and snatching away the seed, so our prayer, even now, is that every person we talked to would have the good earth for the seed to grow in, and that in the proper time there would be a harvest for the Lord (Matt. 13:1-9). And as the Lord tells his disciples in Luke 10:2, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest”



...Continued from page 29

us. To be His servants, we must know what it is to be low, for only then is it possible for the Lord to use us to produce life. Therefore He will plow our backs to produce furrows as long as possible; these very furrows will become the sowing-places for life to come out!

Perhaps you want to build the church, but do you still dare tell the Lord, “Have Your way”? Being knocked down will be a prerequisite, for it is the

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furrows that bring life. How many bear such furrows? Such persons have the presence of Christ. Apart from these furrows, all that can be produced is something of work. Yet, how difficult it is to undergo the experience of being plowed! The only way to survive it is to abide completely in the Lord. In His life on the earth He Himself endured such experiences to produce life. If today we want to take part in His ministry of life, we ourselves cannot expect to escape the plow. But if we would allow ourselves to be brought low and to undergo such experiences, we shall become fertile ground for the Lord’s sowing. In due time, there will be a reaping!

Thus, a servant of the Lord can never elevate himself. The principle here is very simple. Become low and allow yourself to be plowed. The Lord may

knock you face down in a green pasture and barely scratch you, or, He may operate much more severely upon you. Regardless, this is how we become useful to the Lord. In the process let us cry, “Lord, I do not see how I can bear it, but let Your will, not mine, be done. Please give me grace that I might allow You to gain all that You are after.”

On the one hand, be at rest, knowing that the Lord’s work is an organic matter. He is the one building the church, so sleep! On the other hand, do not be surprised if the Lord really works on you. The result will be what is seen in Psalms 133 and 134, in which the church life is brought fully into existence as the Lord’s testimony. Let us follow the Lord as He leads us higher, and allow Him to bring us all the way to the peak of the experience of Mount Zion!



# HOW TO KNOW THE LORD'S LEADING

## THE LORD'S LEADING COMPARED TO DISPOSITION, ENVIRONMENT, AND ADVICE

How do we know whether or not the Lord has led us? This is not easy. As human beings, we usually do not live by the union and communion with the Lord. Our life is usually decided by our disposition, our environment, or by the advice that we receive. Most of our decisions are made this way. Many times we think the Lord has led us, but it is actually our disposition which has led us. We like something because it fits who we are, but we say, "The Lord has led me." And many times it's our environment that leads us. For example, to decide to serve full-time should not be based on what everyone else is doing. We should not let the environment lead us. If we serve full-time, it should be because the Lord has called us. We must be responsible to Christ. The environment should only confirm the Lord's leading. We must learn how to say, "The Lord has told me so."

These three things - our disposition, our environment, and the confirmation and advice from the brothers - can help us. For example, we cannot deny disposition. In a certain way, even God's leading is related to disposition. God let Peter be the one to open the door to the Gentiles, because his disposition was always that of a pioneer, whether he was right or wrong. In a similar way, God let Paul take the lead in the work because he had an extremely aggressive disposition. And then God let John be the "mender" of the church, because of his affectionate disposition. John was the one lying on Jesus' bosom, which shows that he was a tender person. So in his epistles there is such a rich affection. However, disposition should not be what leads us. Disposition should only stand with the Lord's leading.

Environment can also help. Many times an environment comes which tells us to reconsider. For example, if Paul desired to go to a certain place, or stay at a certain place, on one hand the Lord's leading was there. But even in Paul's labor, an environment was often raised up which forced him in a certain way. As with disposition, environment can work with the Lord's leading, but the environment itself is not the Lord's leading.

In the same way, confirmation and advice from the brothers is for our help. This is especially true after we have the leading. The brother's confirmation then becomes crucial. But again, it cannot replace the Lord's leading. Our disposition, the environment, and the confirmation and advice from the brothers can all be a help to us. But no matter how crucial these three things are, they can not replace the direct leading of the Lord. If the Lord has not led us, then nothing else works.

## **THE NEED FOR UNION AND COMMUNION WITH THE LORD**

The question remains, how do we know that the Lord has led us? Knowing whether or not the Lord has led us is related to the matter of union and communion. We must abide in communion with the Lord to substantiate our union with Him. We must abide in communion to apply the reality of our union. How do we do this practically in making a decision?

Firstly, we should be restful. We should not consider too much. If we are always praying, "Lord, should I be a full-timer? Should I be a full-timer?" then our prayer will bring us into trouble. If we are considering full-time, we only need to pray once, "Lord, do You want me to be a full-timer?" This is good enough. Then we don't need to do a thing. We should learn to be restful. Our responsibility is not to ask, "Lord, what should I do? Should I get a job? Should I serve full-time?" Our responsibility is to be restful. We don't need to pray or worry so much. We should tell the Lord, "Lord, I'm very restful. I'm happy with wherever You put me."

Then secondly, in our restfulness, we should seek the Lord's presence, not His leading. We should desire to have the Lord's presence. Many times we tell the Lord, "Lord, please lead me." The Lord would say, "How can I lead you? You think too much. In whatever way I lead you, you will analyze it too much. 'Is this right? Is this proper?' I just want you to rest. If you can rest, I can lead. If you can learn to be quiet, I will tell you what I want you to do." Then at the proper time, the leading will come.

Then thirdly, while we are learning to be in the Lord's presence, we should have a ready spirit. When our spirit is ready, then the Lord can speak to us at a particular time. Maybe it will be in the Lord's Table, while we are very much in the Lord's presence. Maybe it will be while we are reading the Bible or having a morning watch. When we are strongly in the Lord's presence, and we have a ready spirit, then the Lord can lead us.

## **WHEN THERE IS NO LEADING FROM THE LORD**

However, even when our spirit is so ready, there may be no speaking from the Lord. If there is no speaking from the Lord, it means that the Lord doesn't have to lead us. If the Lord desires to lead us, then in His presence, there will be His speaking. If there is no leading from the Lord, it may be because we already know. Or it may mean that He wants us to remain in our situation. He wants us to continue as we are with no changes, so there is no need for Him to lead us.

Sometimes we don't need the Lord's leading because we already know. Balaam the prophet was like this. He knew already what the Lord's answer would be, but he kept praying anyway. He was very clear what the Lord wanted him to do, but he still prayed as if he didn't know. When he was told to curse the Israelites, he should have said, "Jehovah will never curse the Israelites. Just forget about it." Instead he was "spiritual" and acted as if he

would do whatever Jehovah wanted him to do. In our experience, many times we are already clear, but we refuse to be clear. We seek the Lord's leading, but actually we know already. This is why the Lord will not speak.

We should also realize that the Lord may not tell us anything because He wants us to remain as we are. If there needs to be a change in our lives, the Lord will speak. If He does not desire a change, then there is no need for His speaking. But if we pray every day, "Do You want me to serve full-time or not? Do You want me to get this job or not?" then we will become a mental case. If we already have a job, we should just work until the Lord tells us otherwise. If we are already serving full-time, we should just be full-time until the Lord tells us to get a job.

### **HOW TO RESPOND TO THE LORD'S LEADING**

If the Lord does want to lead us, then His speaking will come while we are in His presence. When the Lord's speaking comes, we should learn to answer, "Lord, thank You for leading me. But please forgive me. I am very subjective. I can often make decisions for myself, and think that it is You. So Lord, if this leading is of You, then I am willing to follow. If this is truly of You, then please speak to me again." When we learn to speak to Him this way, we can live a restful and peaceful life before the Lord.

Then after we hear the first speaking, at another time, when we are very much in the Lord's presence, the same speaking will come again. If the same speaking comes again, then we have to say, "Lord, I've heard this speaking twice. If this is of You, I'd like to follow Your leading." Then we will have a real peacefulness and restfulness. Setting our mind on the spirit is life and peace. We will have an assurance that this is what the Lord has told us to do. Then we are not living by our disposition. We can tell the Lord, "This may be against my disposition, this may be against my view, but Lord, I want to follow Your leading." When we have a strong drive to do something, we shouldn't overly trust it. It could just be very emotional. We shouldn't have so much strife when we make a decision. Rather, we should learn to be in spirit, learn to be in the Lord's presence, and learn not to seek for any leading. While we are in the Lord's presence, while we are enjoying and touching the Lord, there may be a certain leading. Then we should just respond. We should learn how to say, "Lord, if this is of You, I would like to follow. But please speak to me again." Then we should learn how to put it aside. We shouldn't quickly go to a brother and say, "I feel this now. How do you feel?" There is no need for us to be so quick. Just put it aside. If it is of the Lord, the Lord will tell us again. Then we will have the clarity. If the Lord has told us to serve full-time, or if the Lord has told us to get a job, we will say, "This is really from the Lord. I know!"

When we are at a crossroads, we should just consecrate ourselves and be restful. "Lord, I give myself to You. I am Yours. Nothing else occupies me. My only consideration is what makes You the most satisfied. Whatever makes You the most satisfied, that is how I would like to live my life." Then

just let it go. Live a restful life. Our responsibility is to be in His presence. It is up to Him how He leads us. And if we must make a decision, and we don't feel led one way or the other, we should make our decision based on the sense of peace. For example, do we have more peace to work? Or do we have more peace to serve full-time? We should make this decision based on where there is the most peace.

### **SEEKING THE INTEREST OF GOD'S ECONOMY**

There is another aspect in our making these kinds of decisions. That is the interest of God's economy. We should always have the interest of God's economy in view. This means that anything which is against this interest, we will not do. We don't always need to seek the Lord's leading. Even if we don't sense anything from the Lord, we should not take what is against God's economy. If there is a job that requires us to work too much and frustrates our ability to meet with the church, we should say, "No!" If there is a job which causes us to travel too often, we should say, "No!" For this we don't even need the Lord's leading, because we know the answer already. We should learn how to say "No!" to whatever is against the interest of God's economy.

We have previously seen that out of our enjoyment of the divine life, our appreciation of God's economy, and our union and communion with the Lord, there is a receiving of what is healthy and a rejecting of what is unhealthy. So when we are deciding whether to get a certain job, there may be no direct leading. But there will be a spontaneous rejecting of whatever is against God's interest. "I can't do this, because it will take me away from the church life." There will also be a spontaneous receiving. We will receive whatever is the most profitable to God's interest.

### **WHEN THE LORD'S LEADING SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE**

Another question is, what should we do when the Lord's leading seems like an impossibility? For example, the Lord is leading us to go full-time, but we still have too many loans and debts, or we have too many children who need to be cared for. The Lord has clearly told us to be full-time, but it's impossible. How should we handle these situations? We need to learn to say, "Lord, if You are leading me this way, You are responsible for my needs. If You are leading me this way, You are responsible for solving the situation." We must still learn to follow Him, and trust in His wisdom and care. This often goes beyond common sense or human reasoning. If the Lord has led us to serve full-time, then He must provide for our needs. The Lord can provide for us beyond our imagination. If we only use our logic to make these decisions, our ability to trust in the Lord will be gone. We must learn to put the Lord in the place where He must prove how trustworthy He is. We should learn to tell the Lord, "Lord, humanly speaking this is impossible, but if You have led me this way, then I will follow You." Once we know that we are led by the Lord, then we can put our complete trust in Him. - *Titus Chu, spoken to those in the full-time labor in Cleveland, Ohio, April 1999*