

FELLOWSHIP *Journal*

THE POWER
OF PRAYER

THE LORD'S
RETURN &
OUR LIVING
TODAY

LAYING HOLD
OF CHRIST

EXERCISING
YOUR SPIRIT

LESSONS ON
MINISTRY

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About This Issue

This issue of the *Fellowship Journal* begins with a reminder from R.A. Torrey of our need to pray, based on James 4:2:

You have not, because you ask not.

So many things remain unfulfilled in our Christian life, so many things still hinder the progress of the churches, and we have failed to realize so many blessings, both spiritual and practical, simply because we do not come to God in prayer. What a weapon is available to us in prayer! Lord, may we use this weapon so much more, both for our own sake and to carry out Your purpose on the earth!

We also include an article that summarizes the sharing from a recent college conference, in which the focus was on how an expectation of the Lord's return will affect our living today; that is, it should purify us, causing us to live our lives solely for Christ.

The next several articles, including two shorter pieces on how we can exercise our spirit and on what our ministry should stress, are taken from Brother Titus' sharing in September of 2011, during the first corporate week of the 2011-2012 Great Lakes Christian Internship. This was a year-long training that was mainly for college-aged saints. Our brother's main burden during this week was on how these young saints could be kept for the Lord, and even be raised up to serve Him for their entire life. In the two-part article, "Laying Hold of Christ," he states the crucial questions they must face:

First, do you really have Christ? Second, do you really live under the government of Christ? And third, do you really exercise according to the vision the Lord has given you? If you are short of any one of these three things, you will never be healthy in your Christian life.

These articles are followed by a brief testimony from Watchman Nee's experience, and then we conclude this issue with an excerpt from a forthcoming book by Brother Titus, *A Sketch of Genesis*. The excerpt deals with Jacob's wrestling with God at Peniel.

Excerpts from the Classics...

The Power of Prayer

R.A. Torrey

You have not, because you ask not.

James 4:2

Reuben Archer Torrey (1856–1928), an American evangelist and Christian worker, was a co-worker of D.L. Moody. In this brief article he gives a simple yet powerful exhortation based on James 4:2 that reminds us of our need to pray.

Why Christians Today Are So Powerless

The seven words in James 4:2, quoted above, contain the secret of the poverty and powerlessness of the average Christian, of the average minister, and of the average church. “Why is it,” many a Christian is asking, “that I make such poor progress in my Christian life? Why do I have so little victory over sin? Why do I win so few souls to Christ? Why do I grow so slowly into the likeness of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?” And God answers in the words of the text: “Neglect of prayer. You have not, because you ask not.”

“Why is it,” many a minister is asking, “that I see so little fruit from my ministry? Why are there so few con-

versions? Why does my church grow so slowly? Why are the members of my church so little helped by my ministry, and built up so little in Christian knowledge and life?” And again God replies: “Neglect of prayer. You have not, because you ask not.”

“Why is it,” both ministers and churches are asking, “that the church of Jesus Christ is making such slow progress in the world today? Why does it make so little headway against sin, against unbelief, against error in all its forms? Why does it have so little victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil? Why is the average church member living on such a low plane of Christian living? Why does the Lord Jesus Christ get so little honor from the state of the church today?” And, again, God

replies: "Neglect of prayer. You have not, because you ask not."

Steadfast Prayer and The Early Church's Victory

I once went through the Acts of the Apostles, marking the note of victory in every chapter, and without one single exception the triumphant shout of victory rang out in every chapter. Why this difference between the early church and the church of Jesus Christ today? If you consider some passages in Acts, you will get your answer. Turn, for example, to Acts 2:42:

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in breaking of bread and in prayers.

That is a picture very brief but very suggestive of the early church. It was a praying church. It was a church in which they prayed, not merely occasionally, but where they all "continued steadfastly...in prayers." They all prayed, not a select few, but the whole membership of the church; and all prayed continuously with steadfast determination. Now turn to Acts 6:4 and you will get the rest of your answer.

We will give ourselves continually to prayer.

That is a picture of the apostolic ministry: it was a praying ministry, and a ministry that "gave themselves continually to prayer," or, to translate that

Greek word as it is translated in Acts 2:42, "They continued steadfastly in prayer." A praying church and a praying ministry! Ah, such a church and such a ministry can achieve anything that ought to be achieved. It will go steadily on, beating down all opposition, surmounting every obstacle, conquering every foe, just as much today as it did in apostolic times.

Present-Day Departure From Prayer

There is nothing else in which the church and the ministry of today or, to be more explicit, you and I, have departed more notably and more lamentably from apostolic precedent than in this matter of prayer. We do not live in a praying age; we live in an age of hustle and bustle, of man's efforts and man's determination, of man's confidence in himself and in his own power to achieve things, an age of human organization and human machinery, human push and human scheming, and human achievement, which in the things of God means no real achievement at all.

There is nothing else in which the church and the ministry of today or, to be more explicit, you and I, have departed more notably and more lamentably from apostolic precedent than in this matter of prayer.

I think it would be perfectly safe to say that the church of Christ was never in all its history so fully, so skillfully, so thoroughly, and so perfectly organized as it is today. Our machinery is wonderful; it is just perfect, but, alas, it is machinery without power; and when things do not go right, instead of going to the real source of our failure, our neglect to depend on God and look to God for power, we look around to see if there is not some new organization we can get up, some new wheel that we can add to our machinery. We have altogether too many wheels already. What we need is not so much some new organization, some new wheel, but “the Spirit of the living creatures in the wheels” we already possess.

I believe that the devil stands and looks at the church today and laughs in his sleeve as he sees how its members depend on their own scheming and powers of organization and skill-

fully devised machinery. But when the devil sees a man or woman who really believes in prayer, who knows how to pray, and who really does pray, and, above all, when he sees a whole church on its face before God in prayer, he trembles as much as he ever did, for he knows that his day in that church or community is at an end.

Prayer has as much power today, when men and women are themselves on praying ground and meeting the conditions of prevailing prayer, as it has ever had. God has not changed, and His ear is just as quick to hear the voice of real prayer and His hand is just as long and strong to save as it ever was.

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid [his] face from you, that he will not hear.

– Isaiah 59:1-2

When things do not go right, we look around to see if there is not some new organization we can get up, some new wheel that we can add to our machinery. We have too many wheels already. What we need is not so much some new organization, some new wheel, but “the Spirit of the living creatures in the wheels” we already possess.

Prayer is the key that unlocks all the storehouses of God's infinite grace and power. All that God is, and all that God has, are at the disposal of prayer. But we must use the key. Prayer can do anything that God can do, and as God can do anything, prayer is omnipotent. No one can stand against the one who knows how to pray and who meets all the conditions of prevailing prayer and who really prays, for “The Lord God Omnipotent” works from him and works through him.

From the Spring College Conference

The Lord's Return and Our Living Today

Compiled from Sharing at the
March College Conference

Over the weekend of March 8-10, more than 170 college students from churches around the Great Lakes area met at the Ashland Woods Retreat Property for the Spring College Conference. During this time, they studied and considered a foundational aspect of the Christian faith: the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. A dozen small groups examined different aspects of the "end-times," including topics like Armageddon, the rapture, antichrist, and signs of the close of the age. In several large meetings, the Lord's actual return was considered, especially regarding how this divine promise can and ought to affect our living today. As we consider this topic, may all of our hearts be stirred unto thankful prayer and hopeful watching!

This article is compiled from the shar-

ing during this conference by the brothers who serve the college-aged saints among us.

The Promise of His Return

Two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

- Acts 1:10b-11

Our lives are unstable. We may have the best plans, but such plans can fall apart in an instant. Even close friends or family members could be gone in a moment. Eventually we are left to wonder at the tremendous instability of the world we live in. Is anything lasting? What is reliable? The answer is in the Bible, which tells us that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and even forever (Heb. 13:8). Thus, Christians should live their lives for the stable, eternal things. Amidst a world of in-

As we consider this topic, may all of our hearts be stirred unto thankful prayer and hopeful watching!

We still live in the midst of an unstable world, but the expectation of the Lord's return frees our hearts from all the unstable and earthly attachments. Instead, we become fixed on the one reality, Jesus Christ.

stability, Jesus is different. He is the One who never changes.

The Gospels reveal a picture of Jesus coming as a gracious and meek man to bring salvation to the earth. Yet, when Jesus came the first time, He also promised that He would come a second time, a promise that was reiterated to all of His followers on the day He was taken up into heaven. According to the Bible, however, no one knows the day or the hour of His return. He might even come back before we have our lunch today!

Having the expectation of the Lord's return should change everything about our lives. When Jesus comes, our priorities will dramatically shift and what is real will come to the surface. Our lunch plans on *that* day will no longer matter. When He comes down from heaven, everything we know will be gone, except our knowing of Him.

If we have the thought that He could be back at any moment, it becomes an element in us that purifies our whole life. At His appearing, some who have been occupied with the things of the world will be afraid and say, "I'm not ready yet!" Others will say, "I don't care whether I have a house, and I don't

care whether I own a car. Lord, I only love You!" It is so easy for our heartstrings to become tied to things like our career, wealth, reputation, and success, but none of these will matter when He returns if we have them apart from Christ. The world we live in will always be unstable, but the expectation of the Lord's return frees our heart from all its unstable and earthly attachments. Instead of being occupied with worldly things, we need to be fixed on the one reality, Jesus Christ.

The Life of a Christian

And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears we may have confidence and not shrink from Him in shame at His coming... Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies Himself as He is pure.

– 1 John 2:28, 3:2-3

The life of a Christian can be explained in a very simple way: there is the calling of God, the experience of God's love and of His salvation, and then the waiting until the Lord returns. Such simplicity frees our heart from so many "junky" things. Setting our hope on the return of Jesus purifies us, and there is something special about a Christian who lives purely for Christ. It is not only that we are morally pure, but that we are living on this earth only

*“To Love His Appearing,
I Have to Love Him”*

I want Him to be my center! Success or no success, it doesn't matter if I have Christ; wealth or no wealth doesn't matter if I have Christ! Our home is with Christ, and anything our heart is tied to on this earth is not tied to Christ. If we are attached to our career, wealth, reputation, or success, then those strings of our heart are not tied to Christ. Our home needs to be an eternal Person, not any temporal thing!

The question I have to ask myself is, do I really want Him to come back? To love His appearing, I have to love Him. To love Him, I cannot love the world. My heart has to be set fully on Him and what He wants, for me to want Him to come back. If I love my family, my spouse, my career, my dreams, or my expectations more than Him, then I will not want to see Him, and consequently I will not want Him to return. I want to be one who has their heart set on Christ. I want my heart to be tied to eternal things, not things on this earth. Only then can I genuinely and fervently love His appearing. I need to sever any love I have for the world, for my heart to be able to desire to see His face.

– A Testimony from S.C.

for our dear Lord Jesus. It is a precious thing to be able to say this when the things of our life are shaken. We can be rejected by the university program we wanted, we can face many questionings, or we can even be in a messy church. But, we can still say, “Lord, I’m just here for You.” The one who can utter such words is one who has his hope set on the Lord’s return.

The Harlot and The Bride

However, while it is easy to make such a statement, it is hard to live it out. Why

is it so hard to live purely for Christ? To answer this question, the Bible shows us two different women who symbolize two different things. One of these women is called a harlot; the other is called a bride. In Revelation 17, the apostle John saw the great Harlot, called “Mystery: Babylon the Great.” Outwardly, this woman seemed beautiful! She was gilded with gold, precious stones, and pearls, all materials which are used in the Bible in relation to God and to His work. Moreover, in her hand was a golden cup. Though she looked so beautiful outwardly, however, she was inwardly “filled with

abominations and impurity” (17:4). The outside looked like it was for God, but the inside was very different. In Revelation 18, this harlot declared in her heart that she was self-sufficient (v. 7). Moreover, the merchants of the earth traded with her for all kinds of material items (vv. 11-13). These two aspects of Babylon, gilded religion and rampant materialism, are both battling our desire to be pure for the Lord. The great Harlot, Mystery of Babylon, can cause people to feel outwardly spiritual, but in reality she steals their purity and their love for God.

At the same time, what is Christ doing? He is washing and preparing His Bride. Ephesians 5:25-27 says that He is sanctifying the church He gave Himself up for, cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word. What an encouragement for us to wake up in the morning and open the Bible! We may not experience fireworks during our reading, and could even wonder if the word is doing anything at all. In reality, however, there is simply a little washing. Day after day, this washing is cleansing us and purifying our hearts,

How can we live a life that is not defined by circumstances, or by how well our church is doing? How can we live a life that is not even defined by whether we live or die? It is by living a life defined by the Lord's appearing in that day.

unto the end that we would be without spot or wrinkle, and that together we would become a Bride who has made herself ready (Rev. 19:7).

Living in the Light of the Lord's Return

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing.

– 2 Timothy 4:7-8

These verses show us a spiritual man at the end of his life, accounting for his life. Paul said that he had been fighting for something. He could have fled, but instead he fought the fight. He could have stopped running, but instead he finished the course laid out for him. When he could have dropped the faith, he kept it. Yet, as Paul looked back at his life, he also looked forward to the moment when it would all count and have meaning: the day that the Lord comes back. It was as if Paul said, “In *that* day, you will see whether my life had any meaning; you will see the value of my life.” This anticipation of the Lord's return was not only for the Apostle, but, as he added, for “all who have loved His appearing.”

How can we live a life that is not defined by our circumstances, or by how well our church is doing? How can we live a life that is not even de-

Suffering Becomes Sweet with the Lord

Before I came to this conference, I always thought of suffering as a burden. While I knew that it was part of the Christian life, it would still drag my spirit down. Instead of turning to the Lord first, it would make me depend on others or myself more. After the conference, I can confidently say that while suffering is hard, and will always be here, it becomes so much sweeter when you turn to the Lord because you love Him. And when the suffering has passed, you've not only learned another lesson about life or living, but you've come to appreciate that it was Jesus who carried you through it, and that's what makes you love Him even more. As sweet as that is, there's even *more*. We have this hope, this hope to look forward to, which is the Lord coming back.

I am always forgetting that Jesus really will come back soon, and that we will be glorified with him. Remembering this is key, because there is this hope that we will one day be joined again with Jesus and all of the sufferings that we've gone through will not compare to what we will receive from God.

Coming back from the conference, I feel much more at peace. As I put all these things together—going through sufferings, learning to love the Lord, and looking forward with this hope—I experience this peace. After learning I've received a bad grade, or experiencing the stress of having to find a job, I can hear Jesus saying, "It's okay; I've got this." I don't know if this peace will fade away, but I do know that now suffering is less of a burden and more of a chance to grow in my love for the Lord.

– A Testimony from R.L.

fined by whether we live or die? It is by living a life defined by the Lord's appearing in that day.

Living for That Day

If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

– 1 Corinthians 15:19

We often conduct ourselves as if our hope in Christ is for this life. Our turning to Christ is often tied to the situations we're experiencing right now, in this life, and for many this may seem adequate. Yet Paul said that if we do not consider what comes later, it is *not* okay! To say Christ fills our life with meaning is true. To say that He satisfies our heart's longing is precious. But, to stop there is to miss the crucial point:

Our Life on Earth is Temporary

Everything that you do reflects growth: you are either becoming part of the Bride of Christ, or you are becoming part of the harlot. This realization was sobering and was a reminder that the life I am living on this earth is temporary. Soon it will end, the Lord will appear again, and there will be a judgment. At this time, will I be part of the Bride of Christ, or will I have been caught up with the harlot? It is necessary to keep the Lord's return always in view, and to purify my mind by washing myself in the word daily.

— A Testimony from R.H.

that He came for a reason, and He is coming back for a reason. His two comings are pegs upon which our entire Christian life hangs. Every man's life can be considered in light of these two pegs—how they relate to Jesus' death in His first coming and how they look forward to His second coming.

There are many highs in the Christian life, but there are also many lows. Sometimes loving the Lord is the best, most enjoyable thing, and sometimes it can seem to be the hardest thing to

do. If we make the Christian life about our satisfaction *now*, we will be sorely disappointed. We can spend our entire life serving the Lord, and in the end we may have met with little besides disappointment and rejection. Paul's own life furnished an example of this, as all the churches he raised up in Asia eventually turned away from him. Despite such a disappointment, however, he remained confident that he had fought the fight, finished the course, and kept the faith.

Paul could be so confident because he did not serve for "today," but for the Lord's appearing. He did not claim to have won the fight, only that he fought the fight. His faith was not shaken when all of Asia forsook him, because he did not live for his own satisfaction, comfort, or fulfillment; he lived for a day that is coming. What a pattern for us! Even if our years of labor end in disappointment outwardly, we should still be able to say at that time that we did not labor for our satisfaction. We labored for *that* day. Despite the way things may appear in

Even if our years of labor end in disappointment outwardly, we should still be able to say at that time that we did not labor for our satisfaction. We labored for *that* day. Despite the way things may appear in *this* day, in *that* day it will be seen that all of our labor was so meaningful.

this day, in *that* day it will be seen that all of our labor was so meaningful.

Suffering in the Christian Life

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

– Romans 8:18

There is a reality in our Christian life called “suffering.” If we do not have our hope set on the coming of the Lord, this suffering will cause us to lose heart and stop following Him. In the verse above, Paul acknowledged the existence of suffering, but he also said there is something else coming: a glory to be revealed to us. His conclusion was that our present sufferings are not even worthy to be compared to that glory. It is as if he said, “Don’t even put them in the same sentence!”

Thus, in a sense it does not matter what our environments or situations are like today, or whether we feel good or bad. It does not matter whether a church meeting is fulfilling or not. It does not matter whether we like a certain song or not. These things only matter as we find Christ in them. Our environments matter when we turn to Christ and gain more of Him. Songs matter when we touch Christ in them. What matters today are our opportunities to abide in Christ. The day of the Lord’s return changes our perspective, and causes us to value everything in our life differently.

The Goal of the Christian Life

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

– 1 John 3:2

This shows us that the end of the Christian life is not to study the Bible or to have a rich prayer life, although we surely do need these things. The end of our Christian life is that we will be like Christ, for we will see Him as He is (cf. Rom 8:29). The principle is the same today: that as we see Christ we are changed to become more like Him (2 Cor. 3:18). Yet even as we catch glimpses of Him today, our flesh drags us down, and our hearts are often turned to things that have nothing to do with Christ. But in *that* day there will be no obstruction or confusion—only Christ.

Our pursuing of the Lord will be frustrated if our hope is based only on today and on our current circumstances. The verses in First John quoted above show us a hope based, instead, on His appearing and on seeing Him. In the meantime, we are told simply to abide in Him (1 John 2:28). To live a life in the light of His appearing frees us to cut out anything that does not help us abide in Christ. If something is preventing us from abiding in Him, it does not fit and will not matter in that day. What a way for our hearts to be purified from all the clutter of earthly things! Then we can echo the words

Reminded to Fear the Lord

I was really inspired by the small groups, and I was also reminded during this conference to have such a deep respect for the Lord my God, so deep that it could even be described as fearing God. Sometimes, we forget to be in awe of the Creator, to give all of the glory to Him, to worship Him for all that He is. I think having that healthy fear of God can help remind us that He is still the biggest One, the mightiest One, the most powerful One in this life and in this world. Also, this may sound weird but it was very amusing to come to terms with the fact that we do not know when Jesus is coming back, but the Bible still makes one thing very clear: it will be very obvious when He does come back. And then the word continues. It never just leaves us without some sort of advice or direction; it tells us exactly what we're supposed to do: be watchful and pray. It was a really good experience, being able to dig into His word with such a difficult topic and still come through with simple and clear directions.

– A Testimony from S.L.

of Paul in Second Timothy; we can be “those who love His appearing” (4:8). We do not love the Lord for what He can do for us now, whether it is to help us find our car keys or help us fix our marriage. Rather, our love is for the Lord Himself, and therefore, we love His appearing.

Preparing for That Day

So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

– 2 Corinthians 5:9-10

There are some days that change our lives, such as the day of our graduation from college, our wedding day, or the day a child is born to us. The day of the Lord's return will be unique, more than any of those days, because on that day we will see Him, and thus we will be like Him. Knowing that the day of His return will change our lives forever, will we allow it to affect our lives today? Will we begin to live today in the light of the Lord's return? Our eyes must be fixed on the future, knowing that today is for gaining Christ so that we may be ready for that day.

These verses in Second Corinthians apply to everyone, and leave no wiggle room concerning the judgment seat of Christ! Paul realized that all people, even Christians, have a capacity to do

good or evil in the body. Thus, the judgment seat of Christ is needed to sort things out.

This can, and should, produce a healthy fear in us, but we can prepare for that day. Suppose your teacher gave you a copy of a test weeks before an exam, which could be brought into the exam with all the answers filled out! In that case, the final exam would be a righteous judgment of how the students completed what the teacher gave them to prepare. Similarly, in Matthew 25 Jesus gave us two parables that show us how to prepare for the day we appear at His judgment seat.

The first parable is about ten virgins (Matt. 25:1–13). The fact that Jesus calls them “virgins” indicates that they had a certain kind of purity. But, while all ten were virgins, only five of them were called “wise,” because only five took oil in their lamps before they went to sleep. They did not know when the bridegroom would return, so they began to prepare beforehand. In the same way, we do not know when the Lord will return. If we are those who are pure toward Christ, we should begin to gain the oil for our vessels now, so

that we will be ready to enter with joy into the marriage feast of the Lord.

The second parable deals with servants who are entrusted with the property of their master (25:14–30). The master gave a certain portion of his belongings to each servant, according to the ability of each one. In the same way, God is able to match us with the treasures from His house based on our ability. We often wish to be someone else, but the apostle Paul said, “I am who I am by the grace of God” (1 Cor. 15:10). This parable illustrates that we should take who we are, in the divine life, and go out to “trade” with others. This could be trading the gospel with an unbeliever, or trading the Christ we have gained with another believer. Either way, it involves other people. We should not be stagnant! We should be encouraged that we have been given something that matches us from the Master’s house, and then put this measure of Christ into practice! At the end, then, we can hear the Master’s words to his faithful servants, “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master!” (25:21, 23).

The Facts Should Focus Us on the Lord

There are some significant events that seem to be signs of His coming, such as the fact that the Jews now have Israel back, and similar things. These are facts. They happened, and they are significant. We should see these things and think, “Lord, I really want You to come back. I want to purify myself for you and become part of your Bride!”

– A Testimony from B.S.

From the 2011-2012 Internship

LAYING HOLD OF CHRIST (1)

Titus Chu

Introduction

When we consider the situation of the young people among us in the churches, it seems that they are in a very difficult, even hopeless situation from the start. The church life is not for playing around; it is a very profound and demanding life. The positive side of this is that in the church life we are expected to be aggressive for the Lord's interest, but the negative side is that brotherly love does not flow among us in such a way that people are accepted simply for loving the Lord according to their measure. On the one hand, the church life provides a profound way to come into spiritual riches; you will not find many Christians in other gatherings who are as focused as we are on what the Lord desires. On the other hand, while this is a great blessing, at the same time it can make people feel as though they have no place among us if they do not have that same level of commitment.

Furthermore, within this culture, when our young people come to a certain age, there seems to be no place for them to operate with any kind of real responsibility. We simply do not practice what we preach about the church life! This is one reason why so many of our young people do not remain with us. As time goes on, our way seems to become more restricted when, instead, it should be expanding. Instead of developing and enabling young people and new believers, the way we have the church life seems to frustrate their progress. Our vision seems to be very clear—we claim that in the church life every member should be able to develop and grow and have a place and function—but in practice this simply doesn't seem to be the case.

Today we are gathered together for the start of a one-year training that is mainly for the college-aged saints among us. We have to consider: how many of you who are here among us today will still be in the church life after five years, ten years, or twenty years? As I look back through my own years in the

church life, I realize that very few of those whom I began with are still here today. Eventually, something happened to nearly every one of my companions that drew them off to something else. I tell you all this to wake you up so that you might realize that you have very little hope, unless you pay attention to what I am going to tell you.

Even if you are here fifty years from now, you will most likely be in one of three situations: you will have become rich, you will have become poor, or you will have simply become a common American. Yet, there is another possibility: you may be someone who has chosen to serve the Lord!

In view of this, and of my own experience, I have to consider, is there something I might pass on to you that could help to preserve you in the church life and for the church life?

What Are We Holding On To?

What you choose to lay hold of today is what will decide your future. You must not hold on to multiple “citizenships.” Many people come to America and seek to become citizens of this country. Once they gain their citizenship here, their appreciation of their previous country begins to fade as it is replaced with an appreciation of their experience in America. Sometimes, however, such as during the Vietnam War, those who are blessed with being citizens of this country might find themselves analyzing it and questioning its value.

In the same way, at a certain point in time, those who have followed Christ in the church life may find that they are no longer in the freshness of a living relationship with Christ and the church. Thus, they might ask themselves, “Is it still worth it?”

If you ever find yourself in such a situation, I would advise you to be very careful.

To avoid such a condition, you must firmly hold to what you have seen, and what you have seen must be very fresh to you. Otherwise, many things may arise and present themselves as challenges to what you have been holding on to. You may begin with a pure love toward Christ, but eventually find that some other aim has arisen to cause you to lose your purity.

Perhaps we can use marriage as an analogy. Many husbands and wives really love each other when they are first married, but at some point, instead

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of simply remaining in the blessedness of their marriage, they begin to entertain reasons for discontent. At this point, their considerations replace the freshness of the marriage. And when the freshness disappears, the strength of the bond established in the initial “laying hold” is lost or weakened.

Again I would ask, where will you be five or ten years from now, or in fifty years, when you come to my age? By what means will you be able to bless the One you are holding on to? His being blessed through you has to do with your sweetness and freshness towards Him, because that is what ensures you will produce the kind of fruit in your life that He seeks. Moreover, the freshness, or sweetness, of your relationship with Christ, and the reality of your holding on to Him, keeps your service in the realm of delight, rather than in the realm of duty.

Three Great Things We Must Lay Hold Of

Brothers, I tell you, from the very beginning of your Christian life, the first thing is that you need to lay hold of Christ, to lay hold of the Lord Himself. To be very open with you about this matter, you will eventually realize that in your Christian life the hardest thing is the question of what you are holding on to. That is, first, do you really have Christ? Second, do you really live under the government of Christ? And third, do you really exercise according to the vision the Lord has given you? If you are short of any one of these three things, you will never be healthy in your Christian life.

In 50 years, you will all be about 70, roughly as old as I am now. I hope that at that time you brothers will still be able to say, “I received so much profit from that one-year training! It only lasted for a brief time, and yet it established something in me that affected my entire life.” For this to be the case, the first thing you need to realize is what you are here for; you need to lay hold of something very firm. To stress these points again: you need to lay hold of the Lord Himself, you need to lay hold of the Lord’s government, and you need to lay hold of the vision.

We will cover the first point in the remainder of this message, and go on to cover the remaining two points in the next message.

Laying Hold of Christ Himself

First, you must have Christ. To use some practical examples to explain this, when you become naturalized as an American citizen, you have to make a

vow that you love this country and will fulfill certain requirements. It's the same when you get married. When you become a citizen, the U.S. should become your focus, and when you marry a person, that person should become your focus. But, for some reason, in this country today, marriage is not treasured very much. I'm sorry for that. Some of it has to do with what people see on TV and in the movies, which tell people that to be married is to have a noose around your neck. Hollywood has many strange ideas like this; the writers have a concept that is degraded and corrupted, and then they write a story that is according to that concept. Eventually, that story will affect peoples' human living, because so many people just follow whatever they see coming out of Hollywood; it seems that almost no one has their own mind. By the Lord's mercy, I hope that we will not be affected by that.

I didn't marry my wife because she would always be so young. She was not merely pretty, but beautiful. To be pretty is from the outside, but to be beautiful is from the inside, and there was something within her so that was good. Once we became married, she became my focus. Many times in our married life, things did not turn out the way we would have wanted, but in a very positive sense, she never changed. In my entire life, when I needed to travel to serve the Lord, my wife almost never asked me to stay. She was clear: a servant of the Lord doesn't belong only to his wife, but to many saints, and to the Lord's interest. This shows that our marriage was so precious because our focus was right. I focused on my wife, and she focused on her husband; this is right. Once the focus is right, whatever happens, the family is able to go through it.

When you become a Christian, you come to a realm that can make you wealthy, if you are wise enough. This realm can give you a social life with others who have the same taste, the same disposition, the same social status, the same level of intelligence, and even the same view of life. Such ones may become your very close friends, but even so, remember that what you lay hold of is Christ Himself, not merely a good social life.

One brother among us is a very precious full-timer, and is quite useful as well. That is very good, but it is also quite dangerous, because that brother

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may not realize, “I am a servant of God.” He may come to feel, instead, “I am a servant of good.” That means that, for some reason, Christ is no longer your first choice; instead, you want to be a good brother, even a good full-timer.

We always have to ask ourselves, “Is Christ my first choice?” When you come to my age, you have to consider this matter a great deal. Sometimes I feel I can’t afford to have Christ as my first choice, because if I do, I will really be in trouble. Why? Because people like a movement; people like a society; people like to talk; people like to defend themselves by judging others; and people can be mean. I am not only speaking of others; I can be this way myself.

To lay hold of Christ becomes a great trial throughout your entire life. Yes, today you love Jesus, but suppose you are a young sister and a young man comes to you who is handsome, very decent, and very wealthy, and who for your sake is willing to believe in the Lord Jesus. What would you do? Actually, you should treasure that opportunity. There is nothing wrong with marrying a rich man; they also need to get married, don’t they? It is only wrong if you marry him because he is rich. That is very wrong, because in that case, the focus is wrong. So, the right answer is to say simply, “I would trust in Jesus.”

To take another case, suppose you have a good job. Your boss likes you and appreciates your work. Then, another boss, several levels higher than your boss, comes to you and says, “We want to open up a new branch in a city that is in the middle of nowhere. We want you to move over there and head up that department. What is your decision?” Actually, wherever you decide to live, even if you are considering to move for the sake of the church life, you must have so much of Christ in your consideration. This will keep you pure.

A Practical Example

As a young person you may indeed love the Lord today, but how do you know whether, in another 50 years, you will still be so healthy? You can only say, “Because I insist on having Christ as Lord.” Yet, while it is very easy to speak of having Christ as Lord, it is very difficult to actually be in the reality of having Christ as Lord, because it is too easy to be attracted by so many other things. We may even be turned aside by the things in the spiritual realm.

A number of years ago I knew a particular brother quite well. He had a very good job with a very good income, but even so he came to me and told me, “I want to serve the Lord full time.” I somewhat discouraged him, and

told him, “You really ought to pray more.” To him, to serve God was so glorious that whether he had Christ or didn’t have Christ in that decision, he wanted to serve God. But, what would the Lord say? At that time the entire situation among the churches was very chaotic. Then he told me that the reason he was still here was because of a certain brother who had cared for the churches. It seemed that the real reason he wanted to serve was to stand with that brother. Wasn’t that genuine?

Despite the fact that he had a very demanding job, this brother always made all the meetings. A little while later he told me that he had become an elder in his locality. I said, “Very good; you have a proper way to serve.”

Still, when I considered his situation, I had very mixed feelings. On the one hand, he was making so much money, yet he was ready to quit his job in order to serve the Lord full-time; isn’t that marvelous? And, he insisted on staying among the local churches; isn’t that marvelous? And even more, he wanted to serve with the greatest capacity, so eventually he became an elder. Yet, on the other hand, he also said, “I love that brother who raised us up, and I will stay because of him, and to help stand against those brothers who are opposing him.” I don’t say this lightly. Even today I have a little fear concerning our situation. Some of you may feel, “We love Brother Titus, so we will be here with Brother Titus and stand with him for the Lord’s work.”

Actually, if the Lord will allow me to say this, there were two great turmoils in which the church here, and I myself, stood with the brother who raised us up, and each time this stand opened the way to restore the situation among the churches. So eventually, I began to consider myself, “Why are you here? Is it because of your appreciation of that brother?”

To return to our consideration of that other brother, when he told me that he had become an elder, I was joyful, for I thought to myself, “Now you can function and fulfill your burden.” To be an elder is not at all easy. Even more, he was so good that, in the midst of a great trial, when the situation was so chaotic, he insisted on staying with the brothers and fighting for the churches. He felt, “I am burdened; that is why I am an elder in the church life,” and he declared, “I am staying.” Also, he made all that money, yet he did not care for that; he was ready to give up his job to serve the Lord full-time. Isn’t he a model for us all?

While it is very easy to speak of having Christ as Lord, it is very difficult to actually be in this reality. It is too easy for us to be attracted by so many other things, even by the things in the spiritual realm.

If you want to serve,
you should say that it is
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To care for those
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You are still for Christ.

Yet, despite all of this, I would say that there is no agreement in my heart with such a one serving the Lord full-time. First of all, if you want to serve in this way, you should say that it is for the Lord's sake, not because of a certain brother. To care for those who serve the Lord is indeed a virtue, but don't overly appreciate that virtue, because it can replace the Lord. You are still for Christ.

Regarding the desire to serve full-time, this brother's feeling was, "Not one thing can make me happy. I want to quit my job and serve the Lord full time." Still, to serve the Lord full-time is not your portion. I would stay with the churches because of Christ; not because of a certain man, but because the

Lord told me so. If it were me, I would continue to work and then offer half of my income to support those qualified to be full-timers.

Also, you fight so hard, you take the lead, and you are laboring. You try so much, and you do so much to become an able, serving brother who can bless the churches. To become an elder is not easy; there is a long process, and this brother made it. Still, I would come to the eldership by manifestation, not by doing so many things. In some churches the elders must do certain things to please others in order to maintain their eldership, but if I had to do such things, I would rather not be an elder. I would never sacrifice the interest of the saints, because the saints are the meaning of the church life. Yes, the servants are the backbone of the saints, but still, in the church life, the saints are the most crucial ones.

From all of this you can see that in your life, the hardest thing is to do everything according to the Lord. You need to have the attitude, "I must have the Lord, I must be one with the Lord, and I must firmly attach myself to the Lord." Until you have this kind of realization, nothing can be right. This is the most basic lesson.

The biggest trial, the hardest thing for you to lay hold of in all your Christian life, will be to have Christ. So many marriages begin with love, but before long they seem to lose it. Even though the marriage is still there, the original love is lost, and the relationship becomes dry. In the same way, we may feel, "I am still in the church meetings, but the sweetness has disappeared." The answer to such a situation is to tell the Lord, from the first day, "I want to come and tell You that I will only lay hold of You!"

From the 2011-2012 Internship

LAYING HOLD OF CHRIST (2)

Titus Chu

We Should Only Seek to Lay Hold of Christ Himself

In the previous message, we stressed that from the time you are a very young believer, you should have the realization that whatever happens to you, you will only seek to lay hold of Christ Himself. Whether something is reasonable or unreasonable, logical or illogical, you are only for gaining Christ. You have no idea how much of a protection such a concept will be to you.

In my own case, even while I was still young in the church life I began to realize that what the Lord has for us is more than worthwhile for us to pursue. It is even worth investing our lives in for His satisfaction. That is quite a realization to have. I was clear about Christ and His government, and the vision I had possessed me to a point that since then very few things have been able to bother me. Regarding some of the things I have passed through as I've served the Lord in the churches, I may rightly feel that I was not treated properly. Still, I would tell the Lord, "I'm so happy You were involved in these things; they helped me to realize that there's not one thing I should seek after besides Christ Himself." We all should have the realization that such things are under the government of the Lord and put ourselves absolutely under His government.

A few years ago, the churches in the Great Lakes area went through a very difficult time. As a result much of the work that had been built up among us was destroyed, and a number of the churches were damaged. I cannot tell you how sorry I felt for the saints we serve, and for so many of my co-workers who were hurt. But at the same time, I know that my Christ never changes. Consider the weather. To us, it is cold today, while three days ago it was hot. To God, however, the sun is always the same. We may go through a period of very cold weather, or we may have a period of very pleasant

weather, but the sun itself is still the same; it doesn't change. In the same way, the Lord Jesus Himself never changes. We must lay hold of Him, and not focus on particular situations.

Laying Hold of the Lord and of His Government

Once you are clear that you must lay hold of Christ, then you must also be clear that you need to lay hold of His government. Again, the sun is always the same, but our experience of it differs. We may feel that it's too cold, too hot, or very comfortable, but the sun would say, "Don't you know I never change?" The question is whether we know how to enjoy the different environments the sun provides. There is much to enjoy in both the cold winter and in the hot summer. In fact, if we know how to appreciate them, all the seasons can be so enjoyable.

Now we are gathered together for a week-long conference, which is part of a one-year training that you are all participating in. It may be that within a few days some of you will feel that you made a big mistake in joining this training, but I'm sure that most of you will very much enjoy this brief time; it's like a "spring time" in your Christian life. Even so, during this training, you will still have some "hot weather" and some "cold weather." That is what I refer to as the Lord's government; His government is over you. The more clear you are about this matter of His government—that the particular arrangements you pass through are of Christ—the more blessed you will be, and the more you will be in God's blessing. So, learn to enjoy the Lord's government and to lay hold of it. Tell the Lord, "Lord, I love Your government. I love all the things that You have arranged for me, and I love You."

The Two Sides of the Lord's Government

There are two sides to this matter of the Lord's government. First, under this government, there is always a rich provision and protection. Second, within this government, there is always a strong demand. That is, the Lord works on you, He limits you, and He disciplines you. Do you know that beautiful hymn by Watchman Nee, in which he speaks of the olives that need to be pressed to give their oil, and of the grapes that need to be crushed in order to produce their wine? In our current translation of that hymn, the first stanza, speaking of the olives and the grapes, asks:

Must I be bruised and pressed, Lord, such as these?

What does “bruised” mean here? It means to be hurt. In other words, the Lord says, “I love you so much, and because I love you so much, I desire to work upon you. That is My government, to work upon you a little bit.” So, He crushes you and He bruises you. You may respond, “Oh Lord, this is unfair,” but He would say, “There is no argument or reasoning with Me. There is no reason; I simply want to do it.” If we tell the Lord, “I give myself fully to You,” He will reply, “Are you ready?” When you are young, you tell the Lord, “Come, give me hard times.” But, when you become older, you say, “Please, just work with me a little; don’t be too hard.”

I tell you that to lay hold of Christ is not easy. You can be in a Christian environment that has so many good things, but one that is without Christ Himself. In such a case, where is Christ? To lay hold of Christ Himself is difficult, and then it is just as difficult to lay hold of His government and not escape from it.

Once you love the Lord—really love Him—your new life begins, and this new life is filled with sufferings. This new life is divine and heavenly, but as you enjoy the heavenly things, remember, with this new life, a great

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deal of suffering will also come to you. Do you understand this? The Lord will come to you and do unreasonable things, things which may surprise you. You may ask the Lord, “Must You do this? Why? Must this be so? Can’t it be another way?” It seems the Lord becomes very firm and says, “No, it must be this way; that’s it.” If you say, “It doesn’t make sense,” He will reply, “I don’t care if it makes sense, or if it’s fair or not, that’s what I want to do.”

For me to speak this way to young people in this country is difficult, because the concept of having to suffer is very much against the American psychology. In principle, Americans simply do not know what suffering is. Sometimes now I visit Africa, and when I do, I will often bring the saints there some children’s clothing that the saints here have offered; they are very happy to receive it. Actually, it may surprise you if I say that in general, Africans are just as happy as you are. You may think that they could not be so happy because their economic situation is more difficult. However, except when there is a real famine, that is not the case. Even if they have just a small portion of beef, they may enjoy that more than you enjoy a t-bone steak.

The Lord likes to come in and say, “Can I interrupt a little bit of your life?”

Can I interrupt a little bit of your plan? Can I make you perhaps not so happy? Can I bother you a little bit?” Do you know why the Lord wants to do this? So that you remember to love only Him, and nothing else. He would say, “Even in all your joyful times, remember to lay hold of Me. I need you, and I want to bless you with Myself.”

The Lord likes to work on you and to work with you, and many times it’s surprising how this can happen. Yet, if you murmur, if you complain and say, “Lord, it’s not fair! Why have You done this?” it shows that you have forgotten the Lord’s government.

You may try to find a way out. Years ago, a brother in Cleveland got a certain academic degree, and then he just couldn’t find a job. He had a strong desire to stay in Cleveland for the church life; his feeling was, “I need to be here for Christ, so there must be a job for me here.” Every time I saw him I asked, “Brother, did you find a job?” I was concerned that if it took too long, he would completely lose the value of his degree, so I thought of advising him to look for a job in some other place. Do you know how the Lord spoke to me? It seemed He said to me, “You are Judas, betraying Me.” I had to confess, “Lord, You have Your work; You are the government.” I was trying to make a decision for that brother in an effort to be so nice, and that was not right.

For some reason, whatever you want doesn’t seem to work. At times I consider the situation of many saints and many servants of the Lord. When I do, I always have a prayer, “Lord, why are You that hard on us? Sometimes, we may even wish we had never loved You, for we would be better off. We love You so much, and look at what You get us into.” But then I also have such rest. I feel, “Lord, You are the real government. You know exactly what You are doing. You are never wrong, and You will never be wrong.”

A Practical Example

If you want to survive in your Christian life and in your service to the Lord, you must remain under the Lord’s government; this is absolutely crucial. Let me give you an example from my own experience of serving the Lord.

In the mid-1990s the Lord opened up the door for us to work in a certain large country. In 1996, the leading brothers came together from throughout that country and I gave them some trainings, which they very much appreciated. After that, they asked us to help them, and I told them that we were willing to stand with them.

Eventually, though, a co-worker from another country asked to have some

fellowship with me. He said that the brothers in his place had some burden for that other country. I said that was fine, and from that point on, for several years, none of my co-workers went there. I did not give up on the believers there, but I knew the Lord's government. I remembered what Abraham told Lot: "Please let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers" (Gen. 13:8). So I told the brothers with me not to go to that country anymore. But I did also pray and tell the Lord, "Please, take care of Your children."

After that my thought was to forget about that country. But, under His sovereignty, the Lord gave me a daughter who just always wanted to visit there. So, I would take her, and when I did, a number of the leaders would come and try to see me. For this reason, because of my daughter, we were never entirely cut off there. Then, about ten years later, around 2006, the situation among the churches changed a great deal, and after that I felt to begin to labor there again with the brothers. Soon, the Lord began to open up the door in that country again, and now, several years later, there are so many open doors for us there. In a very real sense, it was because we told the brothers, "Go ahead and take the work," that we can go on there today in such a fresh way.

The Lord is really the Lord. He likes to work with you, and sometimes He likes to work with you in a very hard way. We may say, "Please Lord, I need Your mercy," but He would respond, "No, this is My way. This is how I want to work with you. Just give yourself to Me and trust in My government. I know how to arrange what is best for your life." May the Lord have mercy.

We Need to Develop a Commitment

After you lay hold of the Lord's government, the next matter is to develop a commitment. If you lay hold of the Lord and lay hold of His government, but there's no commitment, your experience of holding on to Christ cannot be solid. When you enjoy Christ and love Him, that love should lead you to a consecration in which you put yourself under His government. This, in turn, should lead you to a commitment.

When you have such a commitment, you will feel that your life is very, very meaningful, because it is commitment that gives your life meaning. Yet, to be committed is not easy. Why is it that so many people become occupied with their computers for hours? Because watching a computer does not involve any commitment. If a Christian loves the Lord for one year, two years, three years, and yet has no commitment to the Lord, it will be very hard for that

believer to grow properly. How can there be growth without commitment? To have no commitment means that you can still play games with the Lord and with the church life, and then run away if you so desire. Once you enter into a real commitment with the Lord, you no longer have such freedom.

Of course, humanly speaking, marriage is the topmost commitment, because once you become married, you are responsible for your family. Today the Lord has provided very abundantly for my family and me, but in the early years of our marriage, more than once my wife and I came to our last dollar; that was simply what we had, and we had to live by that. One time when we were in this situation I went to a convenience store to get some milk for my son and to buy a loaf of day-old bread, since at that time if the bread was a day old they would reduce the price to 10 cents. Although I only had one dollar, I was so joyful that I was singing a song. Do you know why I was so joyful? It was because not many people have only one dollar, but that was our situation. This was during a time of inflation, and there was an older lady there in the store who saw that I was so happy, singing hymns, and she said, “Young man, why are you still singing songs when the price of bread is going up like this?” Of course, I didn’t answer; I didn’t even know how to answer. I was still just singing my song. I wanted to tell her, “Do you know why I’m so happy? It’s not because of the price of bread. I’m so happy because I have a living Lord! Now I have only one dollar left. I can tell Him, ‘Now Lord, You have to show me whether You really are living or not.’” My thought was not for myself; if I had no food it would just give me the opportunity to fast and pray to the Lord. However, my young son did need some food, so for his sake I needed to get some bread and milk. When you enter into this kind of commitment, when in such a situation your thought is no longer for yourself but for your family, suddenly your family becomes a real family.

We Should Never Leave Our Commitment

So, as Christians, we must realize that we need to lay hold of three things. First, we must lay hold of Christ. Second, we must lay hold of His government. And third, we must lay hold of our commitment. Unfortunately, it is common for Christians to get “divorced,” in a spiritual sense, from their commitment to the Lord. In other words, you may be very committed to Christ and the church today, but after serving for a time, you may separate yourself from your original commitment. For some reason, you just come to another commitment. Isn’t that a spiritual divorce? When we talk about di-

orce in reference to marriage, we feel it is very serious, but when we talk about divorce in the spiritual realm, it seems that it is very ordinary.

Do you know how many brothers eventually get a spiritual “divorce” from their original commitment? They

become divorced from what they were called to, divorced from why they love the Lord, divorced from why they live a life to serve the Lord, divorced from the commitment they had from the very beginning. Eventually, because of such a divorce, their life becomes very common. We have to ask ourselves, do we have any real commitment to the church life, or is it just something for us to play with?

Brothers, according to my disposition I am very free, but even so, I have never wanted to get a divorce. I would never divorce my wife, and I would never get divorced from the original commitment I had at the very beginning of the church life; I would never even consider dropping it. Nonetheless, certain people have claimed that I left the church life. Actually, the ones who say this are the ones who have left their original commitment. The church in Cleveland has been the same, according to its commitment, from the time it was first raised up in the early 1970s until today. I would tell such ones, “We have never changed, but you have changed; you changed to become institutional, you changed to follow a certain ministry. Don’t claim that we have changed or that we’ve left just because we don’t follow you in this regard.”

Brothers, to have a vision is not at all easy, and to remain committed to that vision is not at all easy. Many times I have seen brothers divorce their vision because things have not worked out to their satisfaction or because they did not get their way. If our vision and commitment is not clear from the very beginning, our whole life will become very hard.

Insisting that you must hold on to the commitment you have causes your whole life to become so very, very meaningful. If you allow me to boast a little, I’m very happy that I’ve had many opportunities to drop the church life. Sometimes it was due to my own problems, sometimes it was due to the overall situation among the churches, and sometimes it was due to the problems among the leadership, or to other reasons. Still, one thing I have been very clear about is that over fifty years ago, the Lord told me that this was my life. My response to Him has been, “Lord, I’m committed. Once I began to love You and to serve You, my life became very meaningful.” Now, so many years later, I would still say my life has so much meaning, and even that this meaning has been substantiated in my life.

We have to ask ourselves, do we have any real commitment to the church life, or is it just something for us to play with?

EXERCISING YOUR SPIRIT

Note: This word was given by Brother Titus in September of 2011 to a group of young saints who were just beginning a one-year program of Christian study.

You Need to Know Your Spirit

From the very beginning of your Christian life you need to know, and even be somewhat forced to know, your spirit. You need to know how to exercise your spirit, release your spirit, and touch your spirit. Once your spirit opens up, the whole field of spiritual things is opened up to you. Spiritual things, including the spiritual riches themselves, are all related to the spirit. Without the Spirit and the exercise of your spirit, you simply cannot have the reality of spiritual things. If you go to a theological school, you will often find that the ones who are there, even if they are desirous, don't know they have a spirit.

Becoming a Different Person by the Exercise of Your Spirit

You brothers who are in this one-year labor should get up in the morning and then go to the pond to run and shout, "Hallelujah! Amen! Hallelujah! Amen!" Just exercise yourselves, not only physically but also spiritually. After five minutes you will see who you are; you will become a totally different person. I ask you, do you even dare to do this? You will feel, "Wow, I never realized I could be a person like this after just five minutes!"

Don't laugh at this. In the 1970s, when I was around 30 years old, I went down to my basement and just shouted, "Oh Lord, Amen, Hallelujah!" After exercising your spirit like this, it will become so well established within you. You'll find that you not only have a spirit, but you will begin to possess it as a functioning organ within you so that it can come out in a strong way. Today I don't prepare myself to release my spirit; I can just release it when I need to, because I exercised myself and my spirit so much in this way at a young age. Don't be afraid of such a practice; even the most timid sister can do it.

We Should Not be Defeated

Some feel that to be a spiritual man they should look as though they've just taken a beating, because they are under the cross and learning to die with Jesus. But actually, Jesus died buoyantly. His last words were, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). He did not say, "It's all over"; He said, triumphantly, "It is finished! It's accomplished! I've completed everything!" If you have a Christ like this, why would you walk as though you are defeated? To walk in such a defeated way is a symptom of being a co-worker, because co-workers are not supposed to be buoyant. To our thought, if you are a co-worker, you are under the cross, you are suffering, and you need to be in humiliation.

Brothers, I would urge you to just forget such nonsense. You don't need any work of the cross; you died already! Actually, I hope all of you in this labor would have the feeling, "We are buoyant! The Lord's testimony will have so much to do with our standing for Christ, and with the fact that we are here!" I would urge you: rise up! Be strong! But, to have such a buoyant attitude begins with the release, the exercise, and the nourishing of your spirit.

I hope we can we try this for at least a few days this week, to go to the pond to shout, "Hallelujah! Amen! Hallelujah! Amen!" I'm sure that if we exercise like this today we will not have a meeting tomorrow in which we are defeated. This is supposed to be the beginning of a new year, and yet everyone is so defeated. If that's the case, what's going to happen during this time?

You do not need to sit here wondering, "What is Titus' burden?" What does that have to do with anything? You can make things happen. Suppose I had no burden; what would you do then? Or what would happen if I disappeared? The brothers who are responsible for the training may say, "We have no burden." If that happens, you brothers should be able to respond, "If you have no burden, then we do! If you don't know what to share, we will let you know!" Actually, this is quite normal. Even if you're very young, tell the brothers, "Don't worry. As long as I'm here, there is life!" You need to be so buoyant. Don't say, "Lord Jesus, I beseech You by Your mercy, speak through Brother Titus." Spend some time to get into the word, and then tell the brothers, "As long as I'm here, you will be blessed!"

I'm very hopeful. I know that if you exercise in this way, you will be blessed, and you will be different when I see you tomorrow. Even if you only exercise five minutes a day in this way, sometimes by yourself and sometimes with others, you will see a change. Learn to pray over the Bible and to memorize specific verses and passages with a strong spirit. The life we have is vital, and you will be surprised by the vitality of such a practice.

LESSONS ON MINISTRY

Titus Chu

Two Important Aspects of Ministry

When you minister the word, you need to realize that most of the saints care mainly for two things. I learned this when I was very young in serving the Lord. The first thing they care for is that they are nourished. They would ask, “Did I receive something of life?” If you’re in a meeting and begin to enjoy some element of life through the ministering and fellowship, you will feel very nourished and at peace. If this happens, half of the ministry’s purpose has already been accomplished. The second thing the saints care for is, “Did the Lord have one specific word, one statement that really spoke to me?” If so, the other half of the ministry’s purpose has also been fulfilled.

No matter how well you preach, no one will remember your preaching. You brothers have heard many of my messages. Recently I was with another group of saints for a year, and we spent the entire time on one short passage of the Bible. I had never done that before, but we all felt it would be very helpful to do this, and eventually it did seem profitable. Still I would ask, how much do the saints remember from that time?

Some Practical Examples Concerning Ministry

Many years ago there was a co-worker of Watchman Nee who visited this country. He was a well-known co-worker when I was just in high school in Taiwan, and when he came here I began to contact him. He was a very sweet, faithful servant of the Lord, but he really should not have tried to give any messages. When he did, it became a kind of torture to the saints. He would say, “Today I have five points.” So, we would all get ready, because we knew we were going to get it. Then he would say, “I have one more point,” and accompany that with another point, and then add still another point. Then he

would give the concluding point, then there was the point that was really the last point, and then there was still more one last point. By the time he was finally done not one person knew what he was talking about, because there were simply too many points. Through that experience I learned something about ministering, because I actually did respect that brother very much.

When I was still very young in the Lord I was helping take the

lead with some older brothers in one of the meeting halls in Taipei. I was only about 20 years old, but I was very zealous and really loved the Lord. Every Saturday night we had a gospel meeting and invited different brothers to share. So one day we asked the elders to send us a brother to share the gospel, and they told us, “We are sending Brother So-and-So.”

This brother did not at all match my thought of a good speaker. When I considered it, it seemed to me that there were several problems. First, when you looked at him, he was quite heavy. Second, he just did not know his spirit. This was in part because he was a businessman, which can really limit your service to the Lord. It is not a sin to do business—and I’m not saying there was anything improper with this brother. Still, in general being in business is difficult, because it is sinful to be greedy about money, and also, greediness will bring in corruption. Then, the third problem this brother had was that he spoke a peculiar dialect of Mandarin which was quite awkward and difficult for others to understand. My feeling was that it would be torture for the saints to listen to such a brother give a message. However, we had asked the elders to send us a brother, and this was the one they sent, so we had no choice but to have him speak.

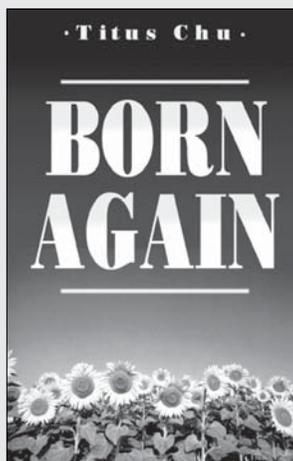
As it happened, I was not there the day of the gospel meeting. Still, I was very concerned about how it would go. When I asked a brother about it the next day, he said “It was very good!” I asked how it could have been so good, and he replied, “It was very interesting. Throughout his entire message, he simply repeated one sentence: ‘Come home, come home!’” He had spoken only a few words, and no one understood anything he said, but it was very clear to everyone in the meeting that they needed to come home! His simple message, “Come Home!” became very prevailing.

The first thing the saints care for is that they are nourished. They would ask, “Did I receive something of life?” If you’re in a meeting and, through the ministering and fellowship, you really begin to enjoy some element of life, you will feel you are very nourished and at peace.

A few years ago I was ministering in another country. There is a young sister with us today who was in those meetings, but at that time she just did not understand what I was saying. Actually, I realized that no one there understood my sharing. I spoke a good number of messages, mainly on Ephesians 4, on how the Lord gained a train of vanquished foes for the building up of the Body of Christ. Although not one person there knew what I was talking about, I think that sister had the feeling in her spirit later, “I don’t know what this was about, but I touched something! I only really heard one or two words, but that has changed my life! And now I am very happy.”

Never Save Your Message

So I would tell you, never try to save your message. When you listen to me speak, you may realize that I don’t even care about what message I’m giving. I simply abide in whatever comes to me and share that, because I realize that to try to give a certain message just doesn’t work. No one cares about your message, and even if they try to memorize it, they will eventually forget it. However, if they are nourished, if they are anointed, by your speaking, that is crucial. That is why I am working so hard with you brothers.



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The Lord's Way to Care

The Lord told Watchman Nee to share what he had,
and then cared for his need also.

You don't need to make Watchman Nee a hero, but some of his experiences are quite attractive. It's worthwhile to know about such testimonies.

There was a brother in mainland China who invited him to his home town to preach the gospel. However, Brother Nee did not have enough money to get there, but went to the river bank anyway to try to find someone to take him. While he was there, he met another brother, and had the feeling that the Lord was telling him to give that brother some money. He told the Lord, "I am already short of money for this trip, and You want me to give it to that brother?" Finally, Brother Nee did give that brother the money, after which he only had ten cents left. So he told the Lord, "Lord, I have no way to go."

At that point, the Lord seemed to tell him, "Why don't you pray that you would have a way to get there, instead of praying for a ticket?" He had been hoping to receive the money for a ticket, but now he realized that his prayer was not right. So this time, instead of praying for a ticket, Brother Nee prayed, "Lord, get me to that place."

Not long afterwards, a little boat approached and the man piloting it asked him, "Where do you want to go? You can go in my boat; I only want ten cents." Brother Nee asked him why he wanted so little. The man explained that his boat was chartered by a government official who allowed him to carry one or two extra passengers for some extra income, so long as they sat in the back. That trip today by car takes less than two hours, but at that time by boat it could take perhaps two or three days. Still, Brother Nee was able to take that trip on that boat for just ten cents.

After he returned, he met the brother to whom he had given the money before he left. The brother asked him, "On the day you gave me that money and told me, 'This is what the Lord has prepared for you,' did you know my situation?" Watchman Nee said "No." The brother then explained to him that he and his wife had just eaten their last bit of rice, and they had no money left for any more food; that gift had enabled their whole family to survive.

– Told by Titus Chu

WRESTLING WITH GOD

A Sketch of Genesis, by Titus Chu, is scheduled for release soon. This article, on Jacob's wrestling with God at Peniel as he prepared to meet Esau, is taken from chapter 15 of that book.

A Spiritual Turning Point

God doesn't restrain us from using our ways. He allows us to use our own ways and methods until they come to an end. Do you have your ways when you follow the Lord? Use your ways. Do you have talents? Use your talents. Do you like to work for God? Go ahead and work. Are you gifted in speaking? Use your gift to speak. Like Jacob, when we eventually come to the end of all these things, we will reach a spiritual turning point. At this time, we will realize how much we need such a turning point. Without the Lord, we can do nothing, even when we use all our ways and talents. After Jacob tried

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everything he could think of, he was still anxious and worried. The whole situation became a heavy weight on his heart. He had come to the end of all his talents and strength. Therefore he had the experience of Peniel.

Even if we are saved, are consecrated, love the Lord, and give everything to Him, God cannot touch us deeply as long as we still have our own ways. Our problem is that we have our own ways. The Holy Spirit will lead us to this turning point. God will arrange our environment so that eventually we lose all confidence in our own natural wisdom, ways, talents, and abilities. God may even allow a thorn in our flesh to make us weak (2 Cor. 12:7). The weakness in our flesh will make us uncertain of ourselves so that we cannot but rely on the Lord, live by faith, and drop all the things we trusted before. Every time our self-confidence begins to rise up, the thorn reminds not to rely on our abilities and talents but to rely on Him. This thorn helps us to know ourselves. God's dealing brings us into a new realm.

Wrestling with God at Peniel

Now [Jacob] arose that same night and took his two wives and his two maids and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream. And he sent across whatever he had. Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him... and he was limping on his thigh.

– Genesis 32:22–25, 31

Jacob didn't foresee this wrestling experience but God did. God knew Jacob had exhausted all his abilities. He knew that this was the right time. When Jacob had exhausted all his own efforts at self-preservation, God came to wrestle with him.

God wrestles with us like He wrestled with Jacob. This wrestling deals with the basic problem to our growth in life. He wrestles with us and touches the socket of our natural strength so that it is dislocated. Afterward, we limp whenever we try to walk by our own strength.

Then [God] said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But [Jacob] said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." He said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have

striven with God and with men and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him and said, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And he blessed him there. So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved."

– Genesis 32:26–30

The experience of wrestling with God at Peniel was the turning point in Jacob's life. After Peniel Jacob, the grasping supplanter, became Israel, the prince of God.

We should desire this experience so that our natural ability may be brought to an end. We are full of our own ways and plans. We don't trust God. We rely on our abilities, our talents, and the things that God has given us. We look to Him but trust ourselves. May God raise up all the right environments for our natural abilities to come to an end. Only after we have tried everything and still feel weak and unable will we realize that without God's mercy we cannot go forward.

We shouldn't be satisfied with our current situation. We should expect Him to touch us so that we limp and dare not use our own strength, ways, and abilities. After God wrestles with us and we see Him face to face, we will have our turning point, our experience of Peniel. From then on, we cannot but trust Him.

Today we are not like Jacob—we cannot physically see God face to face and wrestle with Him until He touches our thigh—but we may learn from the

spiritual principle of his experience at Peniel. God will touch the strongest part of our natural ability—what we are best at and surest about, what we boast in and are proud of, and what we have faith in more than God. Spontaneously, our natural ability is diminished. We may still try to use our own ways, wisdom, talents, and gifts, but we find ourselves limping. We try to walk fast but are not able. We can only limp. This is the experience of Peniel.

The Principle of the Experience of Peniel

Only God can give us the experience of Peniel. It is not something we can produce, nor do we even need to seek after it. Sooner or later, God will give it to us.

The principle of this experience is that we are enlightened inwardly by the Lord's presence and outwardly through our environment. We may ex-

We often repent and confess our sins without actually coming to God.

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We love ourselves too much to stand with God in condemning this "foremost of sinners."

perience both at the same time or one at a time or even one many times. But no matter how we receive it, real enlightenment will bring us to a turning point. It will break us thoroughly so that we begin to limp, and we will become Israel, the prince of God.

Thorough Enlightening

We often repent and confess our sins without actually coming to God. Paul, in the light of God, felt that he was the foremost of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). However, even if we would tell the Lord, "I am the foremost of sinners," we don't actually hate or despise ourselves. We love ourselves too much to stand with God in condemning this "foremost of sinners." Though we repent and pray, and even testify that we are the foremost of sinners, we have no idea how God condemns sin and how we should be condemned.

One day the Lord will come to meet us and thoroughly enlighten us. It may be while we are praying or spending time with Him in the Word. It may be when we have used up all our natural ability or when the environment is so difficult that we feel we can do nothing but come to the Lord. The light in His presence is so intense that we want to crawl into a hole and hide. In this light, we don't even know how to repent. Even as we kneel before the Lord, we dare not lift up our eyes to heaven. We can only bow down before Him. We wish we could shrink so small that God could not see us. Yet we feel His light and know He is there.

At this moment, we cry, repent, confess, and feel remorse. Although we have loved the Lord, served Him, pursued Him, and were zealous for Him, it now seems we haven't even known God all these years. We were not pure and simple, and it seems even our love was fake. We feel God should have smitten us long ago. Why does He still allow us to bow before Him?

This experience of thorough enlightenment should cause us to judge, condemn, and despise ourselves. Although the Lord has not yet returned, we experience a foretaste of seeing Him face to face. Although Christ has not yet set up His judgment seat, we experience a foretaste of being in the light of His judgment. The Lord's enlightenment pierces us and exposes whatever we have been hiding from Him. We cannot escape.

At this time, we feel, "Lord, I am worthy of nothing but death. If I still have breath in me, it is Your mercy. That a sinner like me can bow before You, pray to You, and receive Your enlightenment is Your great unspeakable mercy!"

Judging Self in the Light

Under this thorough enlightenment, we not only know we are sinners but we also hate ourselves as sinners. We not only know our talents, gifts, and abilities are useless, but also abhor them. We not only know our plans and ways are unreliable, but we also despise them. We feel our life is mean-

ingless. Why didn't we die and leave the world before this?

This is the time God brings us to another realm. We can tell God from the depths of our heart, "I surrender to You completely, even though there is nothing in me that can stand before You or please You. There is nothing in me to be appreciated. I am rotten from within to without."

This becomes a turning point in our experience. We put aside our self-confidence, hidden pride, and whatever we thought we could boast of before God. We tell the Lord, "I am nothing but a dead dog. If only there were a hole for me to hide in. I live only because of Your mercy. From now on I can only rely on You. O Lord, I owe You my breath. As long as I breathe, I live for You."

At this point we know we cannot bargain with God or make any demands on Him. We realize how base and useless we are. Though we consecrate ourselves to the Lord, we have no confidence that our consecration is reliable. Though we say we love God, we fear our love is false. We know we never really loved God before. We never fully entrusted ourselves to Him. For many years we only performed before God. When we are enlightened like this, we can only look to the Lord for mercy.

Israel, the Prince of God

God wrestled with Jacob at Peniel and touched his thigh, the source of

Only one who has had this experience of Peniel can become a prince of God.

his natural strength. From this time, Jacob limped. It was only after this that God changed his name to Israel, the prince of God. Only one who has had this experience of Peniel can become a prince of God.

We cannot mature before God without this experience. Without the enlightening before the Lord and through our environment, we cannot know ourselves and thoroughly surrender to the Lord. Those who have encountered God at Peniel can now serve with others, impart life, know God's authority, and manifest God on a higher plane. The church needs many who have the experience of Peniel.

The Result of the Experience of Peniel

As a result of Jacob's experience of wrestling with God at Peniel, he began to know God in a fuller way. He began to see God's plan, God's work, and the value that God placed on him. This affected his living—he began to live a life of the altar and tent.

Knowing God

After Peniel, Jacob had a different feeling toward God. Previously he knew God as the One who gave him

grace, blessed him in every situation, and could be bargained with: "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father's house in safety, then the Lord will be my God" (Gen. 28:20–21). Now he feared God. He began to know Him as the Lord of life. Though he might harden his heart and forget his consecration, he knew God would keep working on him according His plan. Jacob called the name of this place Peniel, for, he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved" (32:30). His knowledge of God advanced.

Seeing God's Plan and Work

As Jacob looked back on all his past experiences, he must have realized that all the situations he passed through were used by God to work on him. God's plan included him as Israel, the prince of God. This plan needed to be fulfilled through him. He couldn't be foolish anymore. He feared God because of the value God placed on him.

We need the Lord's mercy so that we may clearly see God's plan, His work on us, and the value He has placed on us. Once we see this, we can no longer act or walk as we wish. We will walk in His restriction. We will no longer consider our preferences but will focus on the fulfillment of His plan.

