

SECRETS OF SURVIVAL IN THE SERVING LIFE

By Titus Chu

MESSAGE ONE: SURVIVAL IS FOR GROWTH UNTO OUR MEASURE

To survive in the church life is not an easy matter. To my realization, most saints do not grow into what the Lord has prepared for them. “Survival” does not mean merely that you are able to remain in the church life. If that were the case, Christianity would be sufficiently successful, for denominations produce many who remain faithful members for their entire lives. The Lord gains very little from that. We may say that survival is the most crucial thing in our Christian life besides our being saved and our seeing the vision of Christ and the Church.

Regarding our growth, the first crucial matter, of course, is our salvation. The most necessary thing after being saved is that we receive a vision of who God is and what He is after on the earth. This vision then becomes the regulating factor for our going on with the Lord. Once we have received this vision, the crucial thing becomes how to substantiate it in our living. What we have seen should never become a mere slogan or outward belief to us; rather, it should become the very substance of our daily experience. But beyond even this, we must be those who endeavor to develop what the Lord has given us to the uttermost. If this is our situation, we are healthy in the church life.

GENUINE ATTAINMENT COMES OUT OF THE EXPERIENCE OF SURVIVING

It may seem that I should use the word “attaining” rather than “surviving,” but actually in our experience it is a matter of surviving. Because I possess a talent, I have a measure of function. When I function to my fullest extent, this is attainment.

In your experience, however, you are struggling, you are surviving; you do not sense attainment. You come upon frustrations which you did not anticipate. Your experience is that you cannot make it, that you cannot make all the meetings, read the Bible every day, read through the life-studies, preach the gospel all the time, have people over to your home, and so on. Our real experience is that we are tired of the meetings, yet we go anyway; that we have no interest to invite others to our homes because it is too bothersome and usually they don't come anyhow; and even if they do come they do not get saved, love the Lord, or come into the church life. Yet even with such discouragement confronting us, for some reason we are still pursuing. Are you encouraged? No. Are you discouraged? Yes. Then why won't you give up? You are surviving.

SURVIVAL IS PURSUING ON IN SPITE OF OUTWARD DISCOURAGEMENT

Survival does not refer to missing a meeting and then recovering to make the meeting the following week. No, it is that, by the Lord's mercy, in the midst of all the frustrating things we encounter, we still have the desire and ability to pursue on. This is the reality of surviving.

When I was just a young brother, I was given responsibility with two other brothers for one of the group meetings in Taipei. Of we three, one was in the military, and during (and due to) one of his absences our attendance tripled from twenty-five to seventy-five through our labor. When this brother returned, however, he took over the leadership, for he was not only older, but was also a commander.

During that time, as I watched those we had brought in and cared for drop away one after another, I had to learn to say "amen" to stand with this brother when he ministered. You have to learn survival, for the church life is like this.

In my thirty-some years in the church life there has been little seeming encouragement. Of course, there is some encouragement, as with this year-long labor. Yet even while I am so happy with all the trainees, every trainee also gives cause for discouragement. However, even when the situation with the trainees is discouraging, I am encouraged. Do you have the ability to develop such insight? This is a spiritual art. If you possess this kind of insight, you will be able to survive. Consider my background. Nearly all of those whom I grew up with in the church life are gone today. How can I now trust you young people? Now you see how necessary is the art of survival. I have seen what I have seen and yet I continue to survive.

Some of you have been in the church life a number of years. Perhaps some of you can even testify that you have been through all of Brother Lee's trainings on the New Testament. How glorious! You can also testify of many confusing situations and discouragements. How easy it seems to remember the negative experiences and forget the wonderful infusions.

There are many things which can potentially discourage you in the church life. Formerly, to be at morning watch was so enjoyable. Now to be in bed is so comfortable. Once you went to the campus to conquer it. Now you go and feel like grasshoppers among giants. Your environment seems to block you. This is the normal church life. This is also the normal human life. How many wives or husbands have come up to their spouse's expectations? A wife may look at her husband and feel, "I'm proud of him. I love him, and I am glad the Lord has given me such a husband, and yet...if only he were a little more ambitious!" Those with ambitious husbands desire that their husbands would spend more time at home.

There is not one thing in our human life with which we are satisfied. Even in the human life we live by surviving, for the more you can handle the negative things in your human life, the more successful you will be. This is a principle. Successful people do not arrive at success because of a smooth pathway; they arrive at success after surviving many failures and defeats.

All things are given to us by the Lord, whether good things or things which don't agree with us. Both the things we would like to happen and things which we are afraid might happen, happen. Some brothers who go through difficulties become weaker.

Other brothers going through the same difficulties become stronger. Some grow to realize their limitation. Some, realizing how hard it has become for the Lord to use them, struggle to grow, to break through the limitation. Others, realizing the same thing, give up.

PAUL'S REALIZATION

In the church life we confront all sorts of things which frustrate and discourage us. We may even be brought to the point where we question whether we are in the Lord's recovery, for our thought is, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Paul is the one who wrote this verse, and who was Paul? He was one who experienced sin and suffering in his flesh, watched the churches leave his ministry, and confronted so many frustrating circumstances. Even his co-workers left him. It was not due to favorable conditions that he said "God is for us." If that were the case, his statement would be of little value. When we first came into the church life we took this verse in this way. We felt nothing could frustrate us. God was for us. We were going to capture every major city from the beachhead in Los Angeles to the New York City bay! There was talk of taking the fifty largest cities.

We were in Akron, which was the fifty-first largest. Some told us we were in the wrong place. We said, "After you capture the fifty, you will have one extra. That's not bad!" However, that word was discouraging. You give your life to the recovery and then are told that you are not in the "flow." Many such things will come in to discourage and beat you. On the one hand we feel these things are hard. On the other hand we must learn to say, "Praise the Lord, they all are for my growth."

**THE LORD ALLOWS ALL THINGS
SO THAT WE MIGHT DEVELOP
A MATURE APPRECIATION FOR HIM**

We have such negative experiences because we need them. Without them we would never learn how to survive. Through such experiences the Lord brings us out of what is merely theory into what is real; He will not allow us to remain naïve. Experience produces the reality of maturity. How can a student become a mature engineer without field experience? You do not become mature because of the theories you know. If we live a life free of frustration and trouble, would we be able to offer to the Lord any genuine praise? We would be like the children who for Mother's Day buy a twenty-five cent card or draw a heart on a sheet of paper and write "Mommy I love you." They lack the experience to show something of real appreciation in their love. The love and appreciation a man has for his wife after fifty years of marriage is far beyond that which a young man declares to his fiancée, simply because of all the things they have gone through together.

If we all came to the recovery and proceeded along smoothly until the Lord returned, I don't believe we would have much to say to Him. We could say, "Lord, I have been saved!" The Lord may ask, "And then?" We would answer, "I saw the vision!" The Lord would reply, "Then?" "I'm in the church in Chicago!" "And then?" "That's enough; that's all I have."

I believe that out of my experience I should already have much to say. I may say, "Lord, I don't know how I made it. You know when that brother was killing the church, and how I saw the brothers I brought in one by one dropping out of the church life. I was just about to revolt, but thank You, Lord, You stopped me. You kept me in Your presence." There are many love stories. Then one's praise becomes full of genuine appreciation.

The Lord allows us to go through many tears, many fastings, many prayers, and many difficult times, even difficult beyond what we could imagine. Although perhaps it seems hard to believe that in a genuine church such-and-such a thing could really occur, yet through it you experience Christ. How have you attained? Not by “marching on, marching on, hallelujah, marching on.” Your attaining has been by falling down, failing down, hallelujah, falling down. You don’t know how, but you are surviving, and even attaining. Your appreciation to the Lord in eternity will thus be much greater.

THE REAL SHEPHERDS ARE PRODUCED THROUGH SURVIVING

Usually anything that results only in your encouragement is shallow. Once you receive a little encouragement, watch what happens. When you receive an “A” in class or a promotion at work, you come home and talk nonsense. When you are so high the church witnesses Peter on the mount of transfiguration saying, “Let us build three tabernacles!” It is when the discouragement and difficulties come that you are slow to speak. It is during such times that your word has meaning. On the one hand, we need the high experiences. The church needs buoyancy, for buoyancy attracts new ones. But for the brothers to be raised up in life, furnished with truth and equipped with experience of life, buoyancy alone will not work. The saints grow practically through shepherding, and shepherding is possible only because some brothers have survived so many things.

After you have been through so many of these things, you become more clear toward the Lord, more attached to the truth, and more able to follow the Lord according to His eternal purpose rather than your own personal psychology. When you go to the young ones, you know how to help them, for you now have genuine life experiences to back you up.

**SURVIVAL IN ATTAINING IS POSSIBLE
ONLY WITH A LEARNING SPIRIT**

In order to attain to what the Lord desires for us, we need to be in this process of surviving. This doesn't mean that we attain seniority in the church life, having kept ourselves in the church life for so many years. We are thankful for that, yet we also realize that this is not adequate. We must be able to testify, "Brothers, I survived, by the Lord's mercy, through all the bombs, storms, depressions, frustrations and discouragements, and I have gained Christ. My vision is more clear. I have gained more growth in life. My entire person possesses more divine constitution." Then you know all your surviving experience has been attaining experience. By exercising a learning spirit you are attaining to what the Lord desires for you.

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