

SECRETS OF SURVIVAL IN THE SERVING LIFE

By Titus Chu

MESSAGE FOUR: THE FOURTH PILLAR: OUR LIFE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SAINTS

REVIEW

In the previous messages we have seen how God our Savior (I Tim. 1:2) is saving us through both the inward divine life and by His arrangement of our outward circumstances. We have seen how this divine arrangement is for our enlightenment. Nothing comes to us by coincidence. Our life-long realization should be that whatever happens to us is due to God's divine desire for our growth. Everything that comes to us is in response to who we are. Nothing happens to us due to unrighteousness or misunderstanding. These are not the real causes. We are the real cause. Things come to us because we need them. Some saints, not having this realization, go through the Lord's dealings and become proud and hardened because they value the experiences themselves and become untouchable. To go through the Lord's arrangement, we really need His grace.

Furthermore, we should realize that we do not need to petition God to bring about what He must measure to us. He already has, and He will continue to do so. If we seek after experiences of the Lord's dealing, we will become distracted by the experiences themselves, and will miss the Lord. We should love the cross, but to seek after the experiences of the cross may cause us to value the experience itself above the Lord Himself.

I have met many saints who appear very spiritual because of the sufferings and trials they have endured, yet you sense no life when you fellowship with them. They have been through so much, but nothing has come out of it, for they have not died. The Lord has no intention that we should suffer; His intention is only that we would die.

I have considered the difference between Watchman Nee and other Christian writers on this matter. We have a section in our hymnal entitled “Comfort in Trials.” Let’s consider some stanzas from a hymn written by Watchman Nee:

*First we must prepare the vessels
That the oil they may contain;
Dig the valley full of ditches
That they may be filled with rain.
First we must go through the Jordan
Ere anointed from above;
First in death we must be baptized
Then experience the dove.*

First, we must give ourselves to the Lord. Then, we must allow Him to empty us through the things He has arranged for us. Finally, we must be baptized into His death to experience the “dove.” Only then does one have the real experience of the Spirit.

*When we see the ripened harvest
Of the golden countryside,
We may know that many seeds have
Fallen to the earth and died.
Ere the fruit of life may blossom,
We must surely suffer death;
If with Christ we’ve not been buried,
We’ll not feel the Spirit’s breath.*

This hymn gives us Watchman Nee's view of the divine arrangement. He didn't see it as a matter of suffering. He realized the experiences for his termination. What we experience is not for us to suffer, to become ashamed, or to lose our face. All of God's divine arrangement has only one goal: that we would die.

Only when we experience death does the Spirit come to us. Only then can we be fully one with God in spirit. This is the third realization needed with regards to God our Savior's divine arrangement for us: First, we realize that things happen to us because we need them to. Second, we realize that there is no need to seek after the experiences of God's dealing. Third, we realize that the experiences are for our death rather than for our suffering.

OUR LIFE-RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SAINTS

Now we come to the second verse in First Timothy. "To Timothy, genuine child in faith." This is a sweet phrase. Paul, toward the end of his ministry, was able to call someone his genuine child. Paul at this time had nothing outwardly to boast in. The churches forsook him. Seemingly he had failed. Yet with regards to God's economy, he had succeeded. Why? Because he had given birth to a genuine child.

We are together as the Body of Christ, not a society. This is crucial. You must have a life-relationship with other brothers and sisters just as Paul had with Timothy. Can you point to some brother who is your genuine father? Can you call someone your genuine child? Or can you only say, "My brothers are all the brothers in the Lord's recovery." The Lord covers me to say I have genuine fathers, genuine mothers, and genuine children. Not only do I feel so, they also feel so. Some treat me as their father in life, some as their son in life. This is healthy.

Our Value in the Lord's Recovery is Based Upon Our Life Relationship With The Saints

You should not value yourself in the church life according to your talent, ability or seniority. None of these have any real value. Your real value in the Lord's recovery depends upon your life relationship with the brothers and sisters. Without this relationship with other saints, you are just a member without value. The more of this life relationship you have with the saints, the more you are healthy.

Allow me to testify, under the Lord's covering, regarding my experience. By the Lord's mercy and grace, I don't believe that I build up relationships according to work in the places I go. Wherever I go I endeavor to establish a life relationship with the brothers and sisters there. I don't go to be nice, and neither do I go to offend. Wherever we go, we should have the genuine life relationship in view. Some in the recovery are my parents, some are my brothers and sisters, and some are my children. Even I feel I have some grandchildren! I have seen my children beget children. This kind of life relationship should become the most crucial element in our consideration in practicing the church life. If you do not have such a relationship with the brothers in your locality, your region, and even to the entire recovery, your value in the Lord's recovery is very low.

FOUR THINGS WHICH ENDANGER THE LIFE RELATIONSHIP

To care for our life relationship with the saints, we must be careful of four things. First, beware of natural affection. Second, beware of exercising seniority. Third, beware of common taste. Fourth, beware of caring for mutual advancement. Any one of these four will kill our life relationship with the saints.

The Pitfall of Natural Affection

Natural affection means you just like someone. I would rather be with young brothers than old brothers. I may feel, “How much can the Lord transform the older ones anyway?” This, however, is my natural affection. Americans love Americans. Persons with quick dispositions love others with quick dispositions. Professionals love to be with professionals. All of these natural preferences unconsciously replace the life relationship. Relationships thus develop which are by no means divine and which do not require our spiritual exercise. This actually becomes a cancer, a faction in the church life. Yet aren’t we often with saints of the same feather?

Eventually natural relationships damage the church and frustrate the Lord. We must learn not to be selective. I am with a brother because the Lord has put him with me. The elders in a locality are a good example of this. They are a picture of extremes, yet they are a protection to each other.

I warn you who are growing and who are beginning to have some exercise in the church life. Natural affection is a killing element in the church life. To choose to be with those you like causes you to become a divisive person. Five brothers of the same feather who are always together, giving testimonies together, sharing together, praying together, may seem a real blessing to the church life. When an issue arises in the church, however, all five will flock together and produce a faction. This kind of closeness is actually a cancer, robbing the church of its intended nourishment.

Genuine Shepherding

If you never shepherd a saint out of the root of their problem, your shepherding has not succeeded. Everyone has a certain root which can and will cause problems. A good elder always exercises insight to cut off the root before it grows into a problem. If you can cut out the root, there is no more chance for the problem to arise. This is the sign of a good elder.

The Pitfall of Asserting Seniority

The second danger to the life relationship has to do with seniority. Our relationship with the brothers has nothing to do with how long we have been in the Lord. It has to do with how we are in the Lord. However, when you have seniority, it is hard to put it aside. It is difficult for a brother who exercises seniority to fellowship with brothers in life. I don't know of many senior brothers who know how to be with younger ones in life. Unconsciously they command, advise, or paternally encourage. It seems good, but actually the younger ones become afraid of them. By asserting your seniority you terminate your life relationship with others.

Your being a senior should mean you have more life. It shouldn't cause you to become Moses II. However, when you are with the younger saints, you are the one who knows all the answers and all the definitions. You will care to have the final say in a matter. This is the temptation for those who have been in the recovery for a while or who have been through this training.

One time a brother introduced another who had been in an earlier training to others in his group as "our senior." I rebuked that brother strongly. Once this training is over, it is over. There is NO seniority. If you hold on to this thought you cut off your life relationship with the saints. Go to the brothers with life, not with seniority.

Allow me again to testify. If you brothers have some desire to listen to me, is it because of my being in the church life for thirty-some years, or because of who I am? Is it because of my church life resume: “Trainee of Witness Lee 1953-1957, Leading Brother in such-and-such a place, Children’s Teacher when, Deacon, Church in Taipei, etc.?” Who cares for this? If I were here smoking, would you care to listen to me, even with such a resume? Yet isn’t it easy to carry our history about with us in our fellowship? Even if you don’t boast in your history, you may bear a certain attitude. This is a big frustration in the Lord’s recovery.

When you are with the brothers, fellowship with them according to life. Do not exercise your seniority. Surely I am a senior brother, and I may be able to help someone, but how should I help him? I must help him according to the life I have. Seniority doesn’t work. Life is real.

The Pitfall of Spiritual Taste

The third danger lies with your spiritual taste, which is something beyond natural taste. Common taste in spiritual matters can also become a root of death. When I was young, two other brothers and I were called the Three Musketeers. We were all about the same age and we all could minister. We all loved the Bible and were all ambitious to serve the Lord. This ambition was very good, but to be seen as the Three Musketeers was not so good. By the Lord’s mercy the Three Musketeers all went through a test. Eventually the musketeership was gone, and only the Lord was left.

How easy it is for those of the same spiritual taste to be together. Those who are able to preach, read the Bible, or find definitions of Greek words may associate together. Their similar spiritual tastes become the reason for them to be together rather than their life relationship. This very spiritual taste becomes the reason for exclusiveness.

For example, one brother may be a scholar in Latin, another in Greek, and another in Hebrew. They come together to exchange their knowledge on what the languages reveal with regards to the Bible.

This is not a life relationship. This kind of fellowship is exclusive. Within a church without their intending to be so, a small academic society can thus develop. Our relationship should be out of the divine life. The Lord may give us a kind of talent spiritually, but it must only be applied with and through the divine life.

The Pitfall of Mutual Advantage

The fourth danger to our life relationship comes from the incentive of mutual advantage. When we are practicing the church life, especially when we are serving the Lord, unconsciously we know who can help us in our advancing. Surely seeking advancement is not pure, but the desire of advancement is just there. Would you like to be Brother Nobody in the church all your life? I don't believe any brother after this year-long labor would be so emptied. We feel, "Lord, I surely would like to be a great blessing to the church!" With this in view, we unconsciously feel the need to be manifested. We desire to render to the church a great portion of Christ. Unconsciously something comes in which I call mutual advantage. I might share how I was praying with that brother and how we really received the Lord's blessing. That brother in turn would testify that, as we were preaching the gospel together, the Lord was with us. I exalt him and he exalts me. He becomes a "big shot," and I also become a "big shot."

I have seen this happen in the church life on many levels. On a small scale, it may occur among a few sisters in a small gathering. On a larger scale, when the co-workers come together they may exalt one another. They may be from famous universities, they are gifted and are able to preach.

They lift up each other, attempting at the same time to indicate that they are in the lead. One brother told me that a certain brother was the best in studying the Word. I was naive at the time, so I asked, “Is he even better than Brother Lee?” The brother didn’t answer, meaning he didn’t say “no.” These brothers eventually became a hot topic in Taiwan. They exalted one another in their messages. They elevated each other and the young people nearly worshipped them. They were considered the future of the Lord’s recovery. Eventually they all left the Lord’s recovery. They all spiritually died.

This temptation is always with us. Wouldn’t you like to ally yourself with someone? Wouldn’t you appreciate his recognition, and wouldn’t he benefit from yours? This is a danger. I have shared about a certain brother who was baptized on the same day as me. He is younger than me, yet I was greatly helped by him. I don’t believe he talks about me in his locality, nor do I talk about him. These days I am not in contact with him, unless there is a specific reason. Somebody encouraged me to work with him to develop a stronger combined region. It sounded like common sense. We were classmates. Spiritually, we grew up together. He could come to Cleveland for a weekend, and I could go to where he is for a few days. Surely we could accomplish something. But by the Lord’s mercy I did not reply to this brother. This is exactly what has damaged the Lord’s recovery. We were never together according to our human relationship. Neither do we have a work in view. If we did, we could seemingly become quite successful. That would also be quite dangerous. We only do as the Lord leads us. We go where the need is. We don’t go to where a greater work could be. We don’t care for mutual advantage. If this brother and I ever were to serve together, it will be because of the Lord’s leading, not because of our familiarity with each other. The Lord has granted us this purity, and I appreciate this.

These four warnings are quite crucial. Beware of natural relationship, seniority, spiritual taste and mutual advantage. We all need the Lord's purifying. Why am I with you? Not because we like each other. Not because I subdued you or you subdued me. Neither because we have the same spiritually-related interest. Nor because we can help each other advance in the church life. We are together because of the life of Jesus. What a blessing this is! Realizing these things is really the secret of our survival. To get through these things really requires the Lord's grace. May the Lord have mercy.

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