

LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

Lesson 21

The Service of the Sisters (3) The Loving Mothers in the Church Life

Scripture Reading: Rom. 16:1, 13; John 19:25-27; 1 Pet. 5:13b; 1 Tim. 1:2-3a; Titus 1:4a

I. Romans 16 is a chapter fully on the practical church life; the emphasis in this chapter is on the sisters, not the brothers, and there is mention of a mother but no mention of a father—vv. 1, 13:

- A. Nowhere else do you find the phrase *our sister*; Paul began this chapter by saying, “I commend to you Phoebe our sister”—v. 1.
- B. There is another unusual concept in this chapter on the practical church life in verse 13: “Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother as well as mine.”
- C. Neither the sister nor the mother is the one in the flesh:
 - 1. “I commend to you Phoebe our sister,” is not a sister in the flesh.
 - 2. The mother is the mother of Rufus in the flesh, but she was also Paul's mother; surely she was not Paul's mother in the flesh.

II. According to the record in John 19, near the end of His crucifixion, the Lord Jesus looked at His mother in the flesh, and in a sense it was as if He said to her, “Mother, don’t behold Me, but behold your son”; at the same time, He said to His cousin John, “Behold, your mother”—vv. 25-27:

- A. This account is not merely a story, and there is a reason that it is recorded only in the Gospel of John, not in the other three Gospels.
- B. The Gospel of John is a book on life, not on the natural life but on the transferred and transformed life; the word of the Lord Jesus to John and to His mother was a word to show us that His life-imparting, life-releasing death transfers people’s lives—vv. 25-27.
- C. To fulfill his purpose John gives us a record to show how the life of the believers of Christ could be transferred by the cross of Jesus and by His resurrection; if you look at the cross of Jesus, you will be transferred.
- D. According to the life in the flesh, John was Mary’s nephew, and Mary was John’s aunt; but by looking at the cross, they received another life; in this second life the nephew becomes a real son, and the aunt becomes a real mother.

III. To have the practical church life to the uttermost, in the local church there should be some real sisters and some real mothers:

- A. As long as there is a shortage of sisters like Phoebe among us, the church life is not practical; yet the serving of that sister is at the beginning of Romans 16, in the first verse.
- B. When the church life in practicality reaches a peak, in every church there should be some real mothers—v. 13:
 - 1. There are a number of good, basic principles that have been missed among the believers for generations; if it were the practice for each one of the new believers to have someone care for them in a particular way as their real spiritual parents, so many of the new ones could be helped in their spiritual life and in the church life.
 - 2. In his training in 1948 Brother Nee told the saints, especially the sisters, that they should be a mother to another young saint; many sisters could each take care of two or three children in the spirit.
- C. The best way is to have a life transfer by looking at the cross; you need to bring a young one to the cross to look at the crucified Jesus:
 - 1. Jesus will say [to the young one], “Look at your mother. This is your mother.”
 - 2. And He will say to you, “Look at your son. This is your son,” or, “This is your daughter.”
- D. All the sisters of all ages need to be a mother to someone else; to pick up some younger ones as your children in the spirit will cause you to grow.

- E. However, to take care of some in this way is a big test; if your natural life has not been crossed out, has never had a transfer, this practice will become a snare; you will fall into the natural love and be trapped by the fleshly emotion.
 - F. Such a practice will work only by a life transfer through the cross.
 - G. All the sisters need to be encouraged to take care of some children in the spirit; this is not a matter that can be assigned to the sisters, but there is the need for you to pick up the burden.
- IV. No matter how young you are, one or two children in the spirit will be your protection and your support in many ways:**
- A. Without some children in the spirit, it could be so easy for the sisters to fall away.
 - B. Two children would be a protection, a guard, and a limitation to the mother, but they would also keep her from being defeated.
 - C. There is a need for all the sisters to be sisters in reality; “Phoebe our sister” in Romans 16:1 was a real sister; but to be such a sister in the church life is still not enough; in the church we need to have mothers.
 - D. Even the servants of the Lord need to have mothers; the apostle Paul needed a mother; the mother of Rufus was his mother—16:13.
 - E. Without a sister as a mother to take care of them, all those who bear the burden for the Lord’s service would be sorrowful.
 - F. If you really love the Lord, you need to look at the church family, with a number of teenagers who need spiritual mothers to care for them; you each need to pick up the burden to care for at least one as your child in the spirit.
- V. All of us have had the second birth, and we have the second family; in the second family we all need to have the second family relationship—cf. John 1:12-13; Eph. 2:19:**
- A. The family is in the relationship; if the relationship of the family is gone, there is no longer a real family.
 - B. Without the family relationship we cannot feel encouraged about the situation in the church life; without the reality of these matters we cannot have the practicality of the church life.
 - C. The sisters need to be trained as serving ones, and they need to learn to be the mothers; until there are the real mothers in the church life, the church life is not practical.
 - D. The matter of being a mother will bring in many lessons, and it will put you on the real test in every way; you will see how you love yourself more than others, how you care only for yourself.
- VI. Seventy percent of the practical building depends on the sisters; we all must pray that the Lord will have mercy upon the church that all the sisters will be Phoebes and will be mothers:**
- A. Without such a coordination with the sisters in this way, no matter how much the brothers labor in the church life, there will be very little result as far as the building goes.
 - B. If you sisters would be serving as Phoebes and loving as mothers, the church would be seventy percent built up right away.
 - C. Through this there will be a strong connection in the spiritual building, and a prevailing revival will spontaneously be brought in; Satan will be defeated; it will be fully proved how much depends on the sisters.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE LOVING MOTHERS IN THE CHURCH LIFE

Romans 16 is a chapter fully on the practical church life. This chapter uses the term *church* or *churches* five times, and this term is used absolutely not in a doctrinal way. The first time chapter

16 uses the term *church*, it is in the way of a local church, the church in Cenchrea. Few other chapters in the Epistles use the terms *church* or *churches* so many times.

In addition, no other chapter in the Epistles uses the term *sister* more than once. The term *brother* is used often in the New Testament, but the term *sister* is used less often. Nowhere else do you find the phrase *our sister*. Paul began this chapter by saying, "I commend to you Phoebe our sister." In the following verses he greeted a number of brothers, but he did not say "our brother." Only in recommending Phoebe did he say "our sister."

HIS MOTHER AND MINE

There is another unusual concept in this chapter on the practical church life in verse 13: "Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother as well as mine." The emphasis in Romans 16 is on the sisters, not the brothers, and there is mention of a mother but no mention of a father. Neither the sister nor the mother is the one in the flesh. "I commend to you Phoebe our sister," not a sister in the flesh. The mother is the mother of Rufus in the flesh, but she was also Paul's mother. Surely she was not Paul's mother in the flesh. We do not have a verse to tell us the names of Paul's mother and father in the flesh. The mother in verse 13 is a mother in the flesh in relation to Rufus, but more important, she is a mother not in the flesh in relation to Paul.

The New Testament tells us that Paul had at least two sons, one named Timothy and the second named Titus, but these were not his sons in the flesh. Paul uses a very intimate expression to call them sons: "Timothy, genuine child in faith," and "Titus, genuine child" (1 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4). However, the New Testament tells us very little about the direct flesh relatives of the apostles. We cannot find a verse to tell us how many sons and daughters Peter had. But Peter did tell us that he had a son named Mark: "Mark my son" (1 Pet. 5:13). Surely Mark was not Peter's son in the flesh. The Bible tells us that Mark's mother was named Mary, but it does not tell us the name of his father in the flesh. Peter was Mark's father, not his father in the flesh but his father in the spirit, his father in the common faith.

Not one word in the Bible is wasted. According to the record in John 19, when the Lord Jesus was suffering during His crucifixion, He looked at His mother in the flesh. At that time four sisters were standing by the cross, watching how the Lord was being crucified. Mary was there, and her sister, and another two sisters also named Mary. Mary's sister was the mother of James and John, so James and John were the cousins of Jesus. Near the end of His crucifixion, the Lord Jesus looked at His mother in the flesh, and in a sense it was as if He said to her, "Mother, don't behold Me, but behold your son." At the same time He said to His cousin John, "Behold, your mother" (vv. 25-27). This account is not merely a story, and there is a reason that it is recorded only in the Gospel of John, not in the other three Gospels....

A LIFE TRANSFER

The Gospel of John is a book on life, not on the natural life but on the transferred and transformed life. To fulfill his purpose John gives us a record to show how the life of the believers of Christ could be transferred by the cross of Jesus and by His resurrection. If you look at the cross of Jesus, you will be transferred. The word of the Lord Jesus to John and to His mother was a word to show us that His life-imparting, life-releasing death transfers people's lives.

Originally, John was not Mary's son, and Mary was not John's mother. But because of the crucifixion of Jesus, Mary, the mother of Jesus, became the mother of John. John, who was the son of Mary's sister, became Mary's son. This is not a story of adoption, and it does not mean that the Lord Jesus was like a judge to carry out the adoption as they all stood by the cross. This was not an adoption but a transfer. According to the life in the flesh, John was Mary's nephew, and Mary was John's aunt. But by looking at the cross, they received another life. Another life came into them. In this second life the nephew becomes a real son, and the aunt becomes a real mother....

MOTHERS IN THE CHURCH LIFE

To have the practical church life to the uttermost, in the local church there should be some real sisters and some real mothers. In the previous chapter it was my burden to share with you that

you need to be a serving sister, but now I am burdened to share with you that you need to be a mother. As long as there is a shortage of sisters like Phoebe among us, the church life is not practical. Yet the serving of that sister is at the beginning of Romans 16, in the first verse. When the church life in practicality reaches a peak, in every church there should be some real mothers.

Earlier I suggested that the sisters needed to be trained to be serving ones just as nurses are trained in the hospitals to care for the sick ones, but I have to say that there has never been a training school on the whole earth to train mothers to be mothers. I have never heard of one person receiving training to know how to be a mother before she became a mother. The only way anyone could become a mother is by delivering a child. Then the child forces her to train herself.

Many parents try to train their children. Eventually, they have to give up because the training is not practical. It is like something in a dream. For a young lady, the most practical training to be a mother is one little child. Yesterday she did not know how to be a mother, but today a child was delivered, and tomorrow morning she will begin to be trained. Before very long, she will graduate from this training.

There are a number of good, basic principles that have been missed among the believers for generations. If it were the practice for each one of the new believers to have someone care for them in a particular way as their real spiritual parents, so many of the new ones could be helped in their spiritual life and in the church life.

In his training in 1948 Brother Nee told the saints, especially the sisters, that they should be a mother to another young saint. Many sisters could each take care of two or three children in the spirit.

For the most part, children do not like to respect the word of their own parents, especially when they become teenagers. But if I would take your children as my children, they would respect my word. If my children have some problems, they would not open themselves to me. But if you would take them as your children, they would open up their whole being to you. Although they would not take anything that I would say to them, they would receive whatever you would say. There are many problems with the parents and the teenagers. Very few teenagers would be submissive and obedient. Yet even the troublesome ones would be happy to listen to someone other than their own parents.

We all need a second birth, and we all need a second mother. If you sisters would pick up the burden by looking at the cross, getting yourself transferred in life, and take some young ones of junior-high age to be your children, within five years there will be a revival in the church. The best way is to have a life transfer by looking at the cross. You need to bring a young one to the cross to look at the crucified Jesus. He will say, "Look at your mother. This is your mother." And He will say to you, "Look at your son. This is your son," or, "This is your daughter."

All the sisters of all ages need to be a mother to someone else. Taking care of a child will cause you to grow and to be mature. In the natural life the best way for the young ones to mature is for them to have two children. Even more, to pick up some younger ones as your children in the spirit will cause you to grow.

However, to take care of some in this way is a big test. If your natural life has not been crossed out, has never had a transfer, this practice will become a snare. You will fall into the natural love and be trapped by the fleshly emotion. Such a practice will work only by a life transfer through the cross.

In the church life we need the real sisters and the real brothers, and especially we need the real mothers. All the sisters need to be encouraged to take care of some children in the spirit. This is not a matter that can be assigned to the sisters, but there is the need for you to pick up the burden.

PROTECTION AND SUPPORT

Without some children in the spirit, it could be so easy for the sisters to fall away. No matter how young you are, one or two children in the spirit will be your protection and your support in many ways. Caring for these children will bring about a big change in you. A young lady who has

no children would be too free. She would have no bondage and no limitation but also no protection and no support. Two children would be a protection, a guard, and a limitation to the mother, but they would also keep her from being defeated. Without children it is so easy for the sisters to make mistakes, but if there are two or three children there all the time, the children keep the mothers from making mistakes.

There is a need for all the sisters to be sisters in reality. "Phoebe our sister" in Romans 16:1 was a real sister. She was serving, she was caring for others as a nurse, she was a patroness taking care of all the needs of others. But to be such a sister in the church life is still not enough. In the church we need to have mothers. Even the servants of the Lord need to have mothers. The apostle Paul needed a mother. The mother of Rufus was his mother. Without a sister as a mother to take care of them, all those who bear the burden for the Lord's service would be sorrowful.

Many sisters need to become the real mothers in the church life. The best way to deal with the ladies who are so talkative is to give them twelve children. The more children they have, the more they do not like to talk, and the more they have to be practical. They realize talk is too much theory. Their talk becomes a plea for help. They have just finished nine and still have three little ones to bathe. They have no mind, no energy, no strength, no heart, no capacity, and no time to talk about who is getting married. The children will change the whole situation.

If you really love the Lord, you need to look at the church family, with a number of teenagers who need spiritual mothers to care for them. You each need to pick up the burden to care for at least one as your child in the spirit. All the parents will tell you that they need your help.

THE PRACTICAL FAMILY RELATIONSHIP

If we call one another brothers and sisters in the church life, and yet when we come to the practical things, we do not care for each other's children, all the second generation would realize that our brotherhood and sisterhood is not genuine. To them the brotherhood in the church life becomes something in the air. But if someone would pick up those young ones and care for them as their own child, the brotherhood in the church life becomes the real brotherhood. Both parties will get the benefit. This was Paul's concept in writing Romans 16. Otherwise, how could he write in this way: "I commend to you Phoebe our sister... Greet Rufus,...and his mother as well as mine"? This means that all the people in that time in the church life had the life transfer through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. The cross is here. On this side of the cross Mary was Mary, and John was John. These two in blood and flesh had nothing to do with one another. But on the resurrection side John becomes Mary's son, and Mary becomes John's mother. They have a second relationship of the family, not the first. The first relationship is in the flesh, but the second is in the transferred life. This matter is in the Bible, but it has been missed by most of today's Christians.

In the New Testament it is really hard to trace the flesh family of the apostles. But it is so easy to see that among the early believers there was the second birth with the second family relationship. Among today's Christians there is talk about the second birth, but there is nearly no talk about the second relationship. If we have the second birth, surely we have the second relationship, surely we have the second family. If we have the second family, surely there should be the family relationship. It is not enough to say that we are in a big family. We must have the family relationship with the real sisters and the real mothers.

To take care of others is not an easy thing, and it is even harder to be taken care of by others after we are grown. Nevertheless, we all need the care of others. Their care is our real nourishment, our real protection. The older sisters should not consider that they are no longer the daughters because they have become mothers. They need to learn to be daughters also and let others take care of them.

All of us have had the second birth, and we have the second family. In the second family we all need to have the second family relationship. The family is in the relationship. If the relationship of the family is gone, there is no longer a real family. Without the family relationship we cannot feel encouraged about the situation in the church life. Without the reality of these matters we cannot have the practicality of the church life.

The sisters need to be trained as serving ones, and they need to learn to be the mothers. Until there are the real mothers in the church life, the church life is not practical, and more is needed.

The matter of being a mother will bring in many lessons, and it will put you on the real test in every way. You will see how you love yourself more than others, how you care only for yourself. All these things will be tested and exposed. Without this testing, you could never realize how selfish you are and how much you are in yourself. These things would not be exposed until you pick up some as your children. These good children in the spirit would expose you to the uttermost.

You may talk about being broken. Many times I have said that the sisters need the husbands with some little helpers to break them, but the best ones to do the breaking are the children in the spirit. How much breaking will come if you pick up one to care for as a mother. We need the grace to take this way. It is not adequate to be a brother or a sister in a general way. All the sisters need to be serving sisters, and whether or not we have children, we all need to be the mothers. This is the best way to receive the blessing, the growth, the spirituality, and the real enjoyment of the Lord.

When you become such a mother, everything in the church life would be practical. There would be no more vain talk. The sisters like to talk so much because they do not have children, and they do not take care of their children. If you would pick up a child and take care of that child, right away you will become very practical. No one else can help you so much to stay away from your natural disposition. Such a child will take you from the earth to the third heaven....

Romans 16 is a chapter on the practical church life, not in doctrine but in practicality. Until we see the real serving sisters and so many mothers, our church life is not practical; it is not sufficient.

If you sisters would be serving as Phoebe and loving as mothers, I can assure you that the church would be seventy percent built up right away. Seventy percent of the building of the practical church life depends on the sisters. Without such a coordination with the sisters in this way, no matter how much the brothers labor in the church life, there will be very little result as far as the building goes. When the sisters are serving and are mothers, right away the church will be built up. Through this there will be a strong connection in the spiritual building, and a prevailing revival will spontaneously be brought in. Satan will be defeated. It will be fully proved how much depends on the sisters. Seventy percent of the practical building depends on the sisters. We all must pray that the Lord will have mercy upon the church that all the sisters will be Phoebe and will be mothers. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1975-1976*, vol. 1, "A Word for the Sisters," ch. 2, pp. 47-55)

Study Questions:

1. Based on John 19, how can the sisters have the real transfer of life to become the spiritual mothers?
2. How does having a few spiritual children under your care become your protection and support while you are functioning as a spiritual mother?
3. What do we mean by a "second family relationship" and how can we practice this in the church life?

References and Further Reading:

1. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1975-1976*, vol. 1, "A Word for the Sisters," ch. 2.

LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

Lesson 22

The Service of the Sisters (4) The Prayer of the Sisters

Scripture Reading: Acts 12:11-12; Eph. 6:18

I. In the church life the sisters should take the lead in the matter of prayer:

- A. In Acts 12:12 we see that in the house of Mary a considerable number were assembled together praying.
- B. This indicates that the prayer concerning Peter was offered mainly in the home of a sister.
- C. From this we see that in the church life the sisters should take the lead in the matter of prayer.
- D. According to the basic principle in the Word, the activities should be carried out by the brothers, and for the most part the sisters should do the supporting work behind the scene; the main supporting work is to pray.
- E. This was exactly the situation in Peter's case; after he was released, he went to Mary's house, where many of the saints were still praying—vv. 11-12.

II. We should not allow circumstances related to time or place affect our prayer; as we learn to exercise our spirit and to pray in spirit, circumstances related to time or place should not hinder us from releasing our spirit in prayer:

- A. If we allow circumstances of time and place to affect our prayers, we will encounter many situations in which our spirit is closed.
- B. Our exercise should not change simply because we are by ourselves or because we are with other brothers and sisters; our exercise in the prayer meeting should be the same as our exercise in our morning time with the Lord.
- C. Some brothers and sisters come to the prayer meeting determined not to pray:
 1. A sister may feel exhausted from her busy day and be willing to let others pray, while she only says Amen; another sister may feel that it is not her place to pray.
 2. When many brothers and sisters do not open their mouths, the entire meeting is heavy and dead; we must turn this around.
- D. From this time forward, we must learn to pray at every time in spirit (Eph. 6:18), regardless of the situation.
- E. It is difficult to have an open spirit when we do not have a spirit that is strong, living, full, and uplifted; if we desire to have a strong, living, full, and uplifted spirit, we must spend time in prayer.

III. We need to learn to restrict ourselves and turn to our spirit in prayer:

- A. Many times our distracting thoughts are a frustration to our prayers; they cause us to turn away from our spirit so that we cannot pray:
 1. If we are undisciplined and loose before God, we will be unable to be calm; we will have wandering and distracting thoughts.
 2. By the Lord's grace, if we learn to control ourselves, our thoughts will come under control; when we stop to pray, we will immediately be calm, and it will be easy for us to turn to our spirit.
- B. "Please allow me to say that I have seen many brothers and sisters—sisters more so than brothers—who are very loose in their speaking; this does not mean that they use unclean words, but they are undisciplined in their speech" (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1958*, vol. 1, "How to Enjoy God and Practice the Enjoyment of God," ch. 19, p. 552):
 1. Since they are undisciplined and loose in their speaking, their thoughts fly all over the world; after speaking in this way, they may need to wait until the next day before they are able to pray since they are unable to be calm and turn to their spirit.

2. Even if they wake up early in the morning, they may still have all kinds of thoughts racing through their mind, and therefore, they still cannot pray.
3. Everyone who is plentiful in words cannot pray; when a person speaks continuously, his entire being is led astray; he has no way to stop his being, and he cannot pray.
4. Therefore, a person who learns to pray must learn to control his speaking; he must learn to restrict his being, not only in one thing but in everything.

IV. We need to learn to behold God before we pray:

- A. We must first touch God before we can pray; this means that our spirit must touch the Spirit of God—John 4:24:
 1. When we want to pray, we must free ourselves from all affairs, stop our mental activities, and turn our entire being from outward things to our spirit.
 2. We must learn to exercise our spirit to touch God's Spirit; then we will learn to behold God.
- B. By reading the word we are aided to turn to our spirit:
 1. If we cannot turn to our spirit or be calm, we can start by reading the Word.
 2. We can then use the words of the Bible to calm our thoughts in order to turn to our spirit; we can turn any words that touch us into prayer; this is an easy way to turn to our spirit.
 3. Then we will behold God, we will see God; our spirit will contact God, and we will be able to offer genuine prayers.

V. The brothers and the sisters should coordinate together to pray; if only the brothers pray in a meeting and the sisters do not respond, our meetings will be like a paralyzed body, which is neither beautiful nor living:

- A. After a few brothers pray, a few sisters should join in, and after a few sisters pray, a few more brothers should join in with more prayers:
 1. If the brothers' prayers are too quick, the sisters may not be able to keep up; this requires the brothers to be willing to pause and wait so that more sisters can join in to pray.
 2. Furthermore, when there is a pause in the middle of a strong atmosphere of prayer, the sisters should realize that the brothers want them to join in.
 3. At such a time, the more experienced sisters need to pray immediately; if the experienced sisters do not pray, the young, meek, and timid sisters will be less likely to follow.
 4. Then when a sister joins in to fill the time created by the pause, the brothers need to realize that other sisters may follow; thus, there is no need for the brothers to rush to pray again; they should leave time for more sisters to pray.
- B. We hope that the brothers and sisters will begin to pray in coordination in a strong way; typically, more sisters than brothers attend the meetings, so they should be allowed to function more; this will fill the meeting with enjoyment:
 1. If the sisters have more opportunities to pray, they will be more released.
 2. The brothers have a responsibility to give the sisters more opportunities to pray, and the sisters have a responsibility to offer prayers at the right time.
 3. This coordination will allow the functions of the brothers and the sisters to be carried out in a proper way.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE SISTERS TAKING THE LEAD TO PRAY

Second, in [Acts] 12:12 we see that in the house of Mary a considerable number were assembled together praying. This indicates that the prayer concerning Peter was offered mainly in the home of a sister. From this we see that in the church life the sisters should take the lead in the matter of prayer. According to the basic principle in the Word, the activities should be carried out by the brothers, and for the most part the sisters should do the supporting work behind the scene. The main supporting work is to pray. This was exactly the situation in Peter's case. After he was released, he went to Mary's house, where many of the saints were still praying. (*Life-study of Acts*, msg. 34, pp. 293-294)

NOT LETTING CIRCUMSTANCES RELATED TO TIME OR PLACE AFFECT OUR PRAYER

We should not allow circumstances related to time or place affect our prayer. As we learn to exercise our spirit and to pray in spirit, circumstances related to time or place should not hinder us from releasing our spirit in prayer. In the past, we have allowed circumstances of time and place to influence our concepts and our willingness to pray. Although many brothers and sisters realize the need to fellowship with God by praying in spirit, they do not see that they allow their fellowship and prayer to be affected by considerations related to time or place. Our exercise should not change simply because we are by ourselves or because we are with other brothers and sisters. Our exercise in the prayer meeting should be the same as our exercise in our morning time with the Lord. If we allow circumstances of time and place to affect our prayers, we will encounter many situations in which our spirit is closed.

For example, when we attend a message meeting, we often have a concept that only the brother who is giving the message and the brothers who are leading the Scripture reading and singing need to pray, because we are there only to listen to a message. Thus, from the very beginning, our spirit is closed and our mind does not consider the matter of prayer. Sometimes we even behave in this way in the prayer meeting. Some brothers and sisters come to the prayer meeting determined not to pray. One brother may feel ashamed to pray because he did something in the flesh. Another brother may feel he should not pray because he is a new believer, who has little experience of praying and who is not familiar with the Bible. A sister may feel exhausted from her busy day and be willing to let others pray, while she only says Amen. Another sister may feel that it is not her place to pray. When many brothers and sisters do not open their mouths, the entire meeting is heavy and dead.

We must turn this around. From this time forward, we must learn to pray at every time in spirit (Eph. 6:18), regardless of the situation. As long as there is an opportunity, we should pray; we should seize every opportunity to pray. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1961-1962*, vol. 2, "The Priesthood and God's Building," ch. 4, pp. 42-43)

Praying

In order to be open in our spirit, we must spend time in prayer. If we desire to be open, we must exercise our spirit more. The exercise and use of our spirit mainly involve prayer. If we are short of prayer, we will have a deflated spirit. It is difficult to have an open spirit when we do not have a spirit that is strong, living, full, and uplifted. If we desire to have a strong, living, full, and uplifted spirit, we must spend time in prayer.

Our spirit is an organ to contact God, and the most crucial way to contact God is to pray. An audible prayer is prayer, and a silent prayer is also prayer. Even looking to God for a brief moment is also prayer. As long as we pray in these ways, our spirit will touch God. If we pray more, our spirit will touch God more, and our spirit will be strong, living, fresh, full, and released. With such a spirit, opening our spirit will be something that is quite spontaneous.

Our mingled spirit is a praying spirit (Rom. 8:16, 26), and the Spirit of God is even called "the Spirit of grace and of supplications" (Zech. 12:10). Such a Spirit causes us to pray. If we want our spirit to be strong, we must pray; if we want the Spirit of God to increase in us, we must pray. By

prayer our spirit is exercised, and by prayer our spirit is opened. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1961-1962*, vol. 2, "The Priesthood and God's Building," ch. 5, p. 56)

LEARNING TO RESTRICT OURSELVES AND TO TURN TO OUR SPIRIT IN PRAYER

Some brothers and sisters may be clear concerning praying in the Holy Spirit, but they might not know how to enter the Spirit. Every person who learns to pray encounters this problem. We often have distracting thoughts when we kneel down to pray. When we try to reject one thought, another comes. While we are dealing with the second thought, another one invades our mind. The thoughts come like a swarm of bees. They buzz around in our mind and prevent us from praying. If we are unable to control our thoughts, we may become angry and declare that we will not pray any more. In this situation we have failed. Many times our distracting thoughts are a frustration to our prayers. They cause us to turn away from our spirit so that we cannot pray.

Our thoughts distract us because we are loose persons before the Lord. An undisciplined and loose person has distracting thoughts. If we are undisciplined and loose before God, we will be unable to be calm. We will have wandering and distracting thoughts if we are loose before the Lord. The looser we are before the Lord, the more distracting our thoughts will be. By the Lord's grace, if we learn to control ourselves, our thoughts will come under control. When we stop to pray, we will immediately be calm, and it will be easy for us to turn to our spirit.

Please allow me to say that I have seen many brothers and sisters—sisters more so than brothers—who are very loose in their speaking. This does not mean that they use unclean words, but they are undisciplined in their speech. When they converse with others, they do not seem to be able to stop speaking. Since they are undisciplined and loose in their speaking, their thoughts fly all over the world. After speaking in this way, they may need to wait until the next day before they are able to pray since they are unable to be calm and turn to their spirit. Even if they wake up early in the morning, they may still have all kinds of thoughts racing through their mind, and therefore, they still cannot pray. Everyone who is plentiful in words cannot pray. When a person speaks continuously, his entire being is led astray. His entire being is captured by thoughts that wander all over the world. He has no way to stop his being, and he cannot pray. Therefore, a person who learns to pray must learn to control his speaking. He must learn to restrict his being, not only in one thing but in everything.

Many saints have learned some lessons in the matter of restricting themselves. Some are able to stop themselves in the midst of their temper and turn to God to confess and pray. Such prayer and confession are altogether a matter in their spirit. Such a person can easily pray in his spirit. This does not mean that a person who readily loses his temper can easily pray in his spirit. Rather, a person who can control himself even while he is losing his temper tends to find it easy to turn to his spirit to pray.

There are, of course, many brothers and sisters who cannot control themselves once they lose their temper. Even when others try to stop them, they are unable to control themselves once they lose their temper. They do not know what it means to be under control. They can be compared to a car that has no brakes; they are unable to stop themselves. It is not easy for such a person to turn to his spirit and pray. He may need to wait for a week before he can pray again. His entire being has been expended through his temper.

This illustration should help us to see that if we want to learn to pray, we must learn to control ourselves before God. If we control ourselves in ordinary things, it will be easy for us to control our thoughts when we pray. Our thoughts will be submissive, and it will be easy for us to stop, be calm, and turn to our spirit. We will easily be disentangled from our thoughts in order to turn to our spirit. A person who wants to learn to pray in spirit must learn to control himself at all times.

We often classify people as either extroverts or introverts. It is difficult for those who are extroverted to learn to pray. They seem to be able to do everything, but it is difficult for them to be calm in order to pray. It is, therefore, difficult for them to absorb and enjoy God, not to mention the fact that they have many unanswered prayers. This is a great loss. It is profitable for a person to devote some time every day to calm his thoughts and turn his entire being to God in order to contact

Him. However, such a person must be one who restricts himself. If we want to learn to pray in the Holy Spirit, we must learn the lesson of restricting ourselves in our daily life, controlling ourselves in everything. If we can control ourselves in this way, it will be easy for us to stop our activities and pray.

LEARNING TO BEHOLD GOD BEFORE WE PRAY

If we are able to restrict ourselves and turn to the Spirit in this way, we should not immediately open our mouths to pray. In chapter 5 we considered ten points we should pay attention to when we pray. After being calm we should behold God. This means that in order to pray, we must first touch God. We must first touch God before we can pray. This means that our spirit must touch the Spirit of God. When we are busy with many outward things, there is no way for us to touch God. When we want to pray, we must free ourselves from all affairs, stop our mental activities, and turn our entire being from outward things to our spirit. We must learn to exercise our spirit to touch God's Spirit. Then we will learn to behold God. Because God is Spirit and dwells in our spirit, it is not difficult to touch Him. When our entire being is occupied, and we live in our mind, God seems to disappear. However, He has not disappeared; rather, we have turned our backs on Him. We are not beholding Him. But as soon as we are free from our thoughts and turn from the outward things to our spirit, we touch God immediately. This is to behold God, and this is to touch His presence in our spirit. As soon as we touch God in our spirit, we feel solid within; we feel that we have the anointing and the moving of the Holy Spirit. At this point we can open our mouths to pray.

BEING AIDED TO TURN TO OUR SPIRIT BY READING THE WORD

Some may say that it is difficult to turn to their spirit and behold God in this way. New believers may find it difficult to practice praying in this way. If a person cannot turn to his spirit or be calm, he can start by reading the Word. He can then use the words of the Bible to calm his thoughts in order to turn to his spirit. He can turn any words that touch him into prayer. This is an easy way to turn to our spirit.

Some saints are able to turn directly to their spirit without any help. Whenever they want to pray, they only need to close their eyes, and they can stop their entire being. Sometimes they do not even need to close their eyes; they can turn to their spirit even while others are talking beside them. They are not bothered by distractions. One brother said that he had learned to pray even while others were fighting in front of him. He could calmly pray to touch the Lord, sense His presence, and be brought into the Holy Spirit, no matter how loudly they shouted. Such a person is very experienced in his spirit; his spirit is very strong. He is able to control himself and is not bothered by anything. When he wants to pray, he can turn his entire being to his spirit.

However, many brothers and sisters have not learned to pray in this way. They cannot even be calm when they are alone, not to mention being calm when others argue and fight in their presence. This shows that they are not restricted before God and that they are immature in the Lord. We should never think that a person is mature simply because they have been a Christian for many years. Maturity does not depend on the number of years one has been a Christian, and it does not depend on the amount of teaching a person knows. Rather, maturity is related to our ability to be calm and turn to our spirit when we pray. If we can do this, we are somewhat mature. If we cannot, we are still quite young and cannot restrict ourselves. For this reason, we must continue to exercise until we can stop ourselves and turn to our spirit when we are ready to pray.

We may not find it easy when we begin to practice, and we may need to use the Bible. If so, we can read through the Bible slowly, allowing God's Word to touch our inward being. We can then turn the words of the Bible into prayer. In this way, it will be easy for us to be calm and turn to our spirit. Then we will behold God, we will see God; our spirit will contact God, and we will be able to offer genuine prayers. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1958*, vol. 1, "How to Enjoy God and Practice the Enjoyment of God," ch. 19, pp. 551-555)

COORDINATION IN THE MEETINGS

THE COORDINATION OF PERSONS

The first aspect of coordination in the meetings is the coordination of persons. For example, after a few brothers pray, it is better for a few sisters to follow. The brothers and the sisters should coordinate together to pray. If only the brothers pray in a meeting and the sisters do not respond, our meetings will be like a paralyzed body, which is neither beautiful nor living. We are not saying that the brothers and sisters should take turns in a set order; we are simply emphasizing that a coordination of persons is needed. In the meetings the brothers and the sisters need to coordinate with one another in a living way. After a few brothers pray, a few sisters should join in, and after a few sisters pray, a few more brothers should join in with more prayers. If the brothers' prayers are too quick, the sisters may not be able to keep up. This requires the brothers to be willing to pause and wait so that more sisters can join in to pray. Furthermore, when there is a pause in the middle of a strong atmosphere of prayer, the sisters should realize that the brothers want them to join in. At such a time, the more experienced sisters need to pray immediately. If the experienced sisters do not pray, the young, meek, and timid sisters will be less likely to follow. Then when a sister joins in to fill the time created by the pause, the brothers need to realize that other sisters may follow. Thus, there is no need for the brothers to rush to pray again; they should leave time for more sisters to pray. The brothers also need to learn not to ignore others when they receive an inspiration.....

....Later, Jacob met Esau, his brother. In 33:13-14, Jacob said to Esau, "My lord knows that the children are frail and that the nursing flocks and herds are a concern to me; and if they overdrive them for one day, all the flock will die. Let my lord please pass on before his servant, and I will lead on slowly according to the pace of the cattle which are before me and according to the pace of the children." His young children and his nursing flocks and herds could not walk too fast, so Jacob accommodated them. Likewise, in the meetings we need to accommodate the sisters. Sometimes, as soon as the sisters begin to pray, the brothers take control of the direction of the prayer. If the sisters have more opportunities to pray, they will be more released.

I hope that the brothers and sisters will begin to pray in coordination in a strong way. Typically, more sisters than brothers attend the meetings, so they should be allowed to function more. This will fill the meeting with enjoyment. The brothers have a responsibility to give the sisters more opportunities to pray, and the sisters have a responsibility to offer prayers at the right time. This coordination will allow the functions of the brothers and the sisters to be carried out in a proper way. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1961-1962*, vol. 2, "The Priesthood and God's Building," ch. 24, pp. 233-234)

Study Questions:

1. From Acts 12:12, how can we see that in the church life the sisters should take the lead in the matter of prayer?
2. How can we practice to restrict ourselves, especially our thinking and our speaking, such that we can easily turn to our spirit and pray?
3. How should the brothers and sisters learn to coordinate in prayer such that the meetings become beautiful and living?

References and Further Reading:

1. *Life-study of Acts*, msg. 34.
2. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1961-1962*, vol. 2, "The Priesthood and God's Building," chs. 4, 5 and 24.
3. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1958*, vol. 1, "How to Enjoy God and Practice the Enjoyment of God," ch. 19.