

**LIVING AND SERVING ACCORDING TO
GOD’S ECONOMY CONCERNING THE CHURCH**
(Friday—First Morning Session)

Message Four

A Proper Prayer Life for a Proper Church Life

MC Hymns: 769

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 2:1-4, 8; Exo. 28:29-30; 31:1-3; Col. 4:2

1 Tim 2:1	I exhort therefore, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men;
1 Tim 2:2	On behalf of kings and all who are in high position, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all godliness and gravity.
1 Tim 2:3	This is good and acceptable in the sight of our Savior God,
1 Tim 2:4	Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth.
1 Tim 2:8	I desire therefore that men pray in every place, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and reasoning;
Exo 28:29	So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastplate of judgment on his heart when he goes into the sanctuary, for a memorial before Jehovah continually.
Exo 28:30	And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be on Aaron's heart when he goes in before Jehovah, and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel on his heart before Jehovah continually.
Exo 31:1	And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying,
Exo 31:2	See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.
Exo 31:3	And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom and with understanding and with knowledge and with all kinds of workmanship,
Col 4:2	Persevere in prayer, watching in it with thanksgiving,

I. “I exhort therefore, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men; on behalf of kings and all who are in high position, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all godliness and gravity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of our Savior God”—1 Tim. 2:1-3:

- A. After speaking of God’s economy and after charging Timothy to war the good warfare for God’s economy (1:3-4, 18), Paul indicates that a prayer ministry is the prerequisite for the administrating and shepherding of a local church (2:1-3, 8).
- 1 Tim 1:3 Even as I exhorted you, when I was going into Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus in order that you might charge certain ones not to teach different things
- 1 Tim 1:4 Nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God's economy, which is in faith.
- 1 Tim 1:18 This charge I commit to you, my child Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you might war the good warfare,
- 1 Tim 2:1 I exhort therefore, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men;
- 1 Tim 2:2 On behalf of kings and all who are in high position, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all godliness and gravity.
- 1 Tim 2:3 This is good and acceptable in the sight of our Savior God,
- 1 Tim 2:8 I desire therefore that men pray in every place, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and reasoning;
- B. A prerequisite for having a proper church life in the Lord’s recovery today is to have a prayer life; a proper church is a praying church; all in the Lord’s recovery must be prayerful and stand against the sin of prayerlessness—1 Sam. 12:23.
- 1 Sam 12:23 Moreover as for me, far be it from me that I would sin against Jehovah by ceasing to pray for you, but I will instruct you in the good and right way.
- C. The elders in the church must take up Paul’s charge to “first of all” pray (1 Tim. 2:1); those

who take the lead in the churches must have a prayer life; if we exercise ourselves to have a prayer life, the church will be living and uplifted.

1 Tim 2:1 I exhort therefore, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men;

- D. Instead of talking so much and even instead of working so much, we should pray more; only after we have prayed for a matter thoroughly should we make a decision concerning it, not by ourselves independently, but in oneness with the Lord and according to His leading.
- E. The Greek word for *intercessions* denotes an approaching of God in a personal and confiding manner, that is, an intervening, an interfering, before God in others' affairs for their benefit.
- F. "Recently, my activity was limited for a time so that I could rest and care for my health. When I heard about certain needs, I prayed for them. Perhaps the Lord limited me that He might impress me with the fact that prayer is more important than work. May we all learn the lesson that the way to have a good church life is to pray. This is crucial. If our talking is turned into praying, the church in our locality will be transformed"—*Life-study of I Timothy*, second edition, p. 28.
- G. We should pray on behalf of all men because God our Savior desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth; our prayer is required for the carrying out of God's desire—1 Tim. 2:4.
1 Tim 2:4 Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth.
- H. "I desire therefore that men pray in every place, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and reasoning"—v. 8:
 - 1. Hands symbolize our doings; hence, holy hands signify a holy living, a living that is pious and that belongs to God; such a holy life strengthens our prayer life.
 - 2. If our hands are not holy, our living is not holy and is not for God; we then have no supporting strength to pray, no holy hands to lift up in prayer.
 - 3. Wrath and reasoning kill our prayer; wrath is of our emotion, and reasoning is of our mind.
 - 4. To have a prayer life and pray unceasingly, our emotion and mind must be regulated to be in a normal condition, under the control of the Spirit in our spirit.

II. In order to be infused with the instruction of God to care for the church, the elders must have much and thorough prayer so that they can enter into the reality of "reading the saints," just as the high priest in the Old Testament read the stones on the breastplate with the Urim and Thummim in the presence of God—Exo. 28:29-30:

Exo 28:29 So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastplate of judgment on his heart when he goes into the sanctuary, for a memorial before Jehovah continually.

Exo 28:30 And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be on Aaron's heart when he goes in before Jehovah, and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel on his heart before Jehovah continually.

- A. After the Urim and the Thummim were put into the breastplate, it became not only a memorial but also a breastplate of judgment—v. 30:
Exo 28:30 And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be on Aaron's heart when he goes in before Jehovah, and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel on his heart before Jehovah continually.
 - 1. *Urim* means "lights," "illuminators"—v. 30:
Exo 28:30 And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be on Aaron's heart when he goes in before Jehovah, and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel on his heart before Jehovah continually.

- a. The Urim was an illuminator inserted into the breastplate under the twelve stones; it had the capacity to contain oil for burning, and the fire used to burn the oil came from the altar.
 - b. The Urim had twelve illuminators, one to illuminate each of the twelve transparent precious stones on the breastplate so that they could shine with light (David Baron).
 - c. The Urim typifies Christ as lights, illuminators (John 8:12; Luke 1:78-79), shining through the Spirit (the oil) and the cross (the fire from the altar).
 - John 8:12 Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall by no means walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.
 - Luke 1:78 Because of the merciful compassions of our God, in which the rising sun will visit us from on high,
 - Luke 1:79 To shine upon those sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.
2. *Thummim* means “perfecters,” “completers”—Exo. 28:30:
- Exo 28:30 And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be on Aaron's heart when he goes in before Jehovah, and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel on his heart before Jehovah continually.
- a. The names on the twelve stones on the breastplate contained only eighteen of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet; the remaining four letters were put on the Thummim, making it the perfecter and completer (David Baron).
 - b. By the shining of the Urim on the individual precious stones and by the darkening of the stones, the full alphabet of twenty-two letters could be used to spell out words and sentences.
 - c. The Thummim typifies Christ as the perfecter and completer (Heb. 12:2); thus, He is the spiritual alphabet for both inscribing and completing (cf. Rev. 22:13a).
 - Heb 12:2 Looking away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down on the right hand of the throne of God.
 - Rev 22:13a I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, ...
 - d. Together, the Urim and the Thummim typify Christ as God's witness, God's testimony (3:14), as the means for God to speak to His people (Heb. 1:2).
 - Rev 3:14 And to the messenger of the church in Laodicea write: These things says the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the beginning of the creation of God:
 - Heb 1:2 Has at the last of these days spoken to us in the Son, whom He appointed Heir of all things, through whom also He made the universe;
 - e. In the New Testament, the reality of the Urim and the Thummim is the mingled spirit—the unveiling Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, indwelling our receiving spirit, our regenerated human spirit—Rom. 8:4, 14, 16; Rev. 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10.
 - Rom 8:4 That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit.
 - Rom 8:14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.
 - Rom 8:16 The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God.
 - Rev 1:10 I was in spirit on the Lord's Day and heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet,
 - Rev 4:2 Immediately I was in spirit; and behold, there was a throne set in heaven, and upon the throne there was One sitting;
 - Rev 17:3 And he carried me away in spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

Rev 21:10 And he carried me away in spirit onto a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,

- B. According to the Old Testament, the Urim and the Thummim added to the breastplate were a means for God to speak to His people to indicate to them His leading; thus, we may say that the breastplate of judgment is a “breastplate of leading”—Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21; Deut. 33:8; Josh. 7:16-21; 1 Sam. 23:6, 9-12; 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Neh. 7:65.

Lev 8:8 And he placed the breastplate upon him, and in the breastplate he put the Urim and the Thummim.

Num 27:21 And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, and he shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before Jehovah. At his word shall they go out and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the children of Israel with him, even the whole assembly.

Deut 33:8 And concerning Levi he said, May Your Thummim and Urim be with Your faithful man, / Whom You tested at Massah, / With whom You contended at the waters of Meribah —

Josh 7:16 So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel near by their tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken.

Josh 7:17 And he brought the family of Judah near, and the family of the Zerahites was taken. And he brought the family of the Zerahites near warrior by warrior, and Zabdi was taken.

Josh 7:18 And he brought the house of Zabdi near warrior by warrior, and Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.

Josh 7:19 And Joshua said to Achan, My son, give glory to Jehovah the God of Israel, and make confession to Him. And tell me what you have done; do not hide anything from me.

Josh 7:20 Then Achan answered Joshua and said, It is true; I have sinned against Jehovah the God of Israel; and this is what I did:

Josh 7:21 When I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle of Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And now they are hidden in the earth in my tent, with the silver under it.

1 Sam 23:6 Now it so happened that when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, he came down with an ephod in his hand.

1 Sam 23:9 But when David learned that Saul was planning evil against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, Bring the ephod here.

1 Sam 23:10 And David said, O Jehovah the God of Israel, Your servant has heard for certain that Saul is seeking to come to Keilah in order to destroy the city on my account.

1 Sam 23:11 Will the men of Keilah deliver me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as Your servant has heard? O Jehovah the God of Israel, do tell Your servant. And Jehovah said, He will come down.

1 Sam 23:12 And David said, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And Jehovah said, They will deliver you.

1 Sam 28:6 And Saul inquired of Jehovah; but Jehovah did not answer him, not by dreams or by the Urim or by the prophets.

Ezra 2:63 And the governor told them that they should not eat of the most holy things until a priest stood up with Urim and Thummim.

Neh 7:65 And the governor told them that they should not eat of the most holy things until a priest stood up with Urim and Thummim.

- C. In spiritual experience, in order to know God’s leading we must judge whatever is of the flesh, the self, the old man, and the world; the fact that God’s speaking as His leading was through the breastplate signifies that God makes His leading known to His people through the church.

- D. The breastplate of judgment for God’s leading was like a heavenly, divine, and spiritual typewriter, and His way of speaking through the breastplate with the Urim and the Thummim is the opposite of what we would expect:

1. God speaks not through the stones that are shining but through the stones that become dark; this means that God speaks through negative situations; because the Lord’s speaking by the breastplate of judgment is through negative situations, that speaking is a judgment.

2. Normally the twelve stones in the breastplate were under the shining of the Urim; suddenly a piece inscribed with a certain name would become dark; this darkening of a particular stone was God's instant speaking:
 - a. Paul's Epistles and the seven epistles of the Lord Jesus to the seven churches in Asia (Rev. 2—3) were all written according to this principle; they were written according to the negative situation of the churches, not according to the positive things found in the churches.
 Rev 2~3 be omitted.
 - b. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians according to his reading of the negative situation at Corinth, but although his writing was based on the negative things, in this Epistle he ministered positive things—the riches of Christ—to the church—cf. 1:9.
 1 Cor 1:9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
 - c. The saints in Corinth became the letters used by Paul in the spiritual typesetting of his Epistle; in the same way, in a local church the leading ones need to seek the Lord's guidance by reading the actual situation and condition of the saints.
 - d. The problem among Christians today is that because there is so much darkness, there is no way for God to expose the darkness; in order for the darkness to be made known, there must first be the shining of the light; God speaks through things that become negative in the midst of the shining of the light—cf. Eph. 5:8-9.
 Eph 5:8 For you were once darkness but are now light in the Lord; walk as children of light
 Eph 5:9 (For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth),
 - e. By reading the negative situations in this way, we come to know God's leading, His judgment; then in our locality we will know what God wants us to do, and we should then follow His leading.
- E. The breastplate is the building up of the Body life and the means for us to know God's will concerning His people; by much and thorough prayer, we can experience the reality of the breastplate; then we will receive the Lord's judgment of what we have to do or what we must not do; we will know the Lord's way, and the whole church will go on according to the judgment given by the Lord.
- F. The elders need not only the Bible and the Holy Spirit but also the brothers and sisters as the alphabet; this means that they need to bear the brothers and sisters before God and read the condition of every brother and sister before God; in this way the elders' meeting will become the watchtower of the church, and the elders will know what God wants them to do and what God's present will is in the church life.

III. The leading ones, those who minister the word in the church, should take the lead to have a prayer life; they need to “persevere in prayer, watching in it with thanksgiving”—Col. 4:2; Acts 6:4:

Acts 6:4 But we will continue steadfastly in prayer and in the ministry of the word.

- A. Whether the church is living and fresh and enriched depends on this one thing—that we are being filled continuously with the Spirit; in order to be filled continuously with the Spirit, we need to be those who are willing, empty, and praying—Phil. 2:13; Matt. 5:3, 8; Luke 1:53; Eph. 5:18.

Phil 2:13 For it is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure.

Matt 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.

Matt 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

- Luke 1:53 The hungry He has filled with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.
 Eph 5:18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissoluteness, but be filled in spirit,
- B. The wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and skill for the noble work of building up the church must be God Himself as the Spirit to us; only the Spirit of God can build His own dwelling place through us—Exo. 31:1-3; Zech. 4:6.
- Exo 31:1 And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying,
 Exo 31:2 See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.
 Exo 31:3 And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom and with understanding and with knowledge and with all kinds of workmanship,
 Zech 4:6 And he answered and spoke to me, saying, This is the word of Jehovah to Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says Jehovah of hosts.
- C. Because the elders are short of prayer, they are short of the Spirit; it is when we are fully condemned in our prayer under the shining of the light of the Lord’s indwelling presence that we receive wisdom and the real understanding of the Lord concerning the situation, concerning people, and concerning the church.
- D. If all the saints in all the churches persevere in prayer, the recovery will be greatly enriched and uplifted; furthermore, the saints will enjoy the Lord, His presence, and His instant and constant anointing; all day long they will enjoy the smile of the Lord’s face, and the living person of Christ will become their experience and enjoyment.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT THROUGH PRAYER

“Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom and with understanding and with knowledge and with all kinds of workmanship, to fashion skillful designs, to work in gold and in silver and in bronze, and in the cutting of stones for setting and in the carving of wood, to work in all kinds of workmanship. And now, I Myself have appointed with him Oholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and in the heart of all who are wise in heart I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded you” (Exo. 31:1-6).

These verses, which we covered in a recent life-study on Exodus, have a good point for us to consider. I would especially like to talk about verse 3.

THE NEED TO BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT OF GOD

The elders or the leading ones in the church responsibility are those most in need of the constant infilling of the Spirit of God. No need to say to build the New Testament church, even to build the Old Testament tabernacle, the record in Exodus stresses strongly the infilling of the Spirit of God. Yes, there is a difference between the New and the Old Testaments, yet in the reality of God’s economy there is no difference. What we need today, they needed in ancient times.

THE SPIRIT—GOD REACHING US

Actually, the tabernacle was designed by God Himself. Yet—here is a basic principle—the tabernacle was not built by Him directly. It was built by His people who were filled with Him, that is, with His Spirit.

The Spirit of God is God Himself. Do not think of God as in the heavens and sending His Spirit down to earth to enter into the designers to do the work. It was not that way. Whenever God reached man, He was the Spirit. Even today what is the Spirit of God? It is God reaching us. When He reaches us, the very reaching God is the Spirit.

THE BURDEN

What I would like to share with you brothers is this: To take the lead in the church life requires

the infilling of God Himself. We need the infilling of the Triune God. As you know, the Spirit today is much, much richer than the Spirit of God in Old Testament times; but the principle is the same.

A WILLING HEART

You may say that in the case of Bezalel and Oholiab, God initiated the matter of filling them with Himself. It may be so, but I have a doubt. I believe these two dear ones had a seeking heart. When they learned that God was going to have a dwelling place built on this earth, I believe that they began to have a heart to seek for wisdom to design what would be needed. No doubt Moses saw every part while he was on the mountain; the Bible says that God showed him the pattern (Exo. 25:40; Heb. 8:5). He saw the things, and he took down a record of the measurements. Even Moses himself, strange to say, did not have the wisdom to design what he had seen, what he had been charged with. It was Bezalel and Oholiab who received the wisdom to make the designs. I think their designs must have been checked by Moses. He must have said, "Yes, that's it! That's the same as I saw on the mount."

The two of them, I believe, began to have a heart of willingness to work for God's dwelling place and therefore sought the wisdom to design what was needed. In principle, it is the same today in the church life. If you do not have a heart to seek after the Lord's mind, to pick up the burden for the church life, God has no way to initiate anything with you. God's initiation begins with your willingness.

This is why 1 Timothy 3:1 says, "If anyone aspires to the overseership, he desires a good work." This aspiring is no doubt the initiation God has worked out within you.

ABANDONING YOUR NATURAL CAPABILITY

But suppose you are Bezalel: you have the willingness to do something for God's building, but you must realize that your natural capability has to be altogether abandoned. Your willingness is worthwhile, but your ability is worthless. God treasures your willingness, which He initiated, but your capability—what you can do, what you know—in God's estimation means nothing. If you will reject your ability, this abandonment will give God the ground to come in and fill you. First you need the willingness; then God needs your openness.

According to my observation, some of the elders by the Lord's mercy have had the willingness. But in the eldership they brought in their capability, their knowledge, their education, and their strength. This damages the entire job. On the one hand, willingness is really valuable; but on the other hand, the natural capability must be discounted, even entirely abandoned.

THE EXAMPLE OF MOSES

When Moses was young, he had the willingness to be used by God to do something for his people, who were under the tyranny of Pharaoh. Moses' willingness was initiated by God, perhaps while he was still a teenager. But when he grew up, he went out and by his own hand killed an Egyptian. He acted from his own ability. God could not use him. Why? He had the willingness, but he did not have the openness. God, as we all know, spent forty years to empty or unload him, until he was fully deprived by God and was absolutely empty. He became just a shepherd in the wilderness, thinking he did not know anything and could not do anything. But God came in. God came in to give the unique vision. As you know, he saw a bush burning but not consumed. That bush was Moses. The vision meant that God would use him but that He would not burn the fire with Moses' fuel. Whatever you have, God will not use.

EMPTYING YOURSELF

God will use only you, not what you have or can do. Therefore, you must empty yourself. To empty yourself means to have an absolute openness to God. The real openness to God means emptiness. You may say that you are open, but you are filled. A jar may be open, but it may be filled with sand. You may say that you are open to the Lord. You may be open, but you are not empty. There has never been an unloading. What part of you needs to be unloaded? Your capability, your knowledge,

your wisdom, your education. It is only when you are empty that God can come in to fill you. When God fills you, it is His Spirit who fills you.

We in the leadership of the church life do have the willingness. There is no problem with this point. The problem is that we are not emptied and therefore cannot be filled with the Triune God as the filling Spirit today. The problem is our education, our knowledge, our experience. Some of you have been in the leadership for over fifteen years; you have had many experiences. But even real experiences of the church life have to be emptied out. Every day, all the time, you and I in the leadership of the churches need to be freshly filled with the Triune God.

Do you believe that the Spirit of God filled Bezalel and Oholiab just once for all? I believe that all the time, every minute, they were being filled. In other words, they were really one with God. God cannot build His dwelling place by Himself; He can do it only through willing and empty vessels. Whether the church is living and fresh and enriched depends on this one thing: that we are being filled continuously with the Triune God. For this, dear brothers, we need first the willingness and second the emptiness.

PRAYING CONTINUOUSLY

The third thing that we need is the instant, constant prayer. We must pray. If we are able to do things, we do not need to pray much. We have confidence, we have knowledge, we have a way, we have ability, we have strength: we are certain we can handle the situation. We need to empty ourselves, knowing that whatever we can do is not counted; it is not only rejected but even condemned by God. Whatever the old man can do is condemned by God. We have to realize this. Then we will see our need of God and will pray constantly and instantly.

SETTING AN EXAMPLE

Elders in the church are not a special class; they do not have a special rank. They are normal believers. They are not leaders, but they take the lead. They are patterns of all believers. In organized Christianity, in both Catholicism and Protestantism, bishops are considered to be of extraordinary rank; then elders and deacons are considered to be of lower rank. Such ranking is wrong. But this kind of human thought may have invaded us already; we may have in our understanding the thought that we have the rank of elders, that we are a special class. No! Elders are just normal believers; they simply set a pattern for the rest of the believers to follow.

Thus, when the Bible tells us that all believers should pray unceasingly (1 Thes. 5:17), the elders should set an example. All that the New Testament charges the believers to do, the elders should do. Not all believers can fulfill all the charges, but the elders should. Since you are taking the lead, you should carry out all that is commanded by God; all believers may not be able to do this, but you should.

WILLING, EMPTY, PRAYING

Do not think that your teaching in itself will help others. Nor can I trust in my teaching to help you. If you are short of willingness, short of emptiness, short of prayer, I cannot help you. Nor can you be of help to others. We all need these three things. We should pray, "Lord, by Your mercy I am willing. In Your grace I am empty. I am open to You with utter emptiness. I do not want to hold on to anything of my past experiences. I want to be fresh." All the time, unceasingly, pray to be filled with Him. Then you will experience wisdom, understanding, and knowledge coming to you like a tide. You will be under the flooding of divine wisdom, divine understanding, and divine knowledge. You will know how to contact the saints with the divine nature, how to supply them with Christ, how to build them up with the redemption of Christ and with God's judgment. You will also have an inner ability to build up the saints in transformation and in the church life; not just to build them in character but to build them up as a dwelling place for God.

If talks like this are to be of help, they only avail when you are willing and empty and praying. If you are short of this constant prayer, I assure you that you will be very poor in the leadership. To be rich in the leadership, we need a willingness, an emptiness, and continuous prayer.

MANY THINGS TO BE DROPPED

We have brought many things into the leadership that we need to get rid of. The longer we have been in the leadership, the more of these things we unconsciously have. Yet we do not realize that those things need to be condemned. If, however, we are willing to bear responsibility for the building of God's dwelling place, and if we open to the Lord with complete emptiness and pray continuously, God will surely fill us up. Then we will discover all these things, and we will be enabled to let them go. We need a further, wider, deeper evacuation.

One of these things, which you have picked up through the years and which you must drop, is the way you are related to others. Your fellowship with the saints is not even. You have your choice, your preference: you like to fellowship with this one, and you avoid having fellowship with that one. Thus, your fellowship is biased, unhealthy, not genuine. Your personal taste, your personal preference, is hidden there. That is honey, which in typology was not to be added to the meal offering (Lev. 2:11). Sooner or later it will corrupt your leadership or the church life. What is needed is salt (v. 13).

In a doctrinal way it is easy to understand these things, but in practice it is only as you are open with complete emptiness to the Lord and praying continuously, that you will recognize how much honey you have brought in. You must put an end to that. Then you will know how much salt you need to add, and you will be able by exercising in a strong way to add the right amount of salt. Then your leadership will be pure, or purified, and there will be no corruption in it. Teaching cannot help much with this; only the very God who fills you can do this work.

I believe we have all had some experience of this. Whenever we have been emptied and are in a prayerful spirit, if we stand up in the church meeting, we are aware, and all the other saints are also aware, that we are living, fresh, and rich. Other times we may stand up and share a lot, but the congregation has the feeling that it is from the old man, that it is empty. When we contact others, we may speak the same word, talk about the same point, but sometimes there is a result, and other times it is lifeless. It is when we are willing and empty and continuously praying that we have the wisdom to work in the divine nature and to minister to the needy ones the very Christ they need, not just to minister in a general way.

FELLOWSHIP OR DISCUSSION?

When the elders come together, they should pray, not just discuss things. You like to call it fellowship, but maybe it is only a discussion. The elders need to pray: to pray their mind, their different understandings, into the oneness. Rightly speaking, you should pray yourselves into the spirit. When you are praying in the spirit, you have one mind; you are in oneness. Whenever you meet together, you should pray yourselves into the spirit.

Even in shepherding, in visiting either the unsaved or the saints, we should be constantly in prayer. We have all experienced that if we pray continuously, when we go, we do not speak what we thought we would. We find ourselves saying things we had no intention to say; what we say is new. By being in continuous prayer, our spirit is released, and we will find that we speak from our spirit.

SHORT OF PRAYER—SHORT OF THE SPIRIT

The crucial lack is this continuous prayer on the part of all the elders, whatever the locality. You are short of prayer, so you are short of the Spirit. It is when you are fully condemned in your prayer that you receive wisdom and the real understanding of the Lord concerning the situation, concerning people, and concerning the church.

The Christian life is a life of prayer. Elders are not extraordinary Christians. To be a proper elder is to be a normal Christian. Many Christians are abnormal. Thus, the elders should set up a normal pattern, giving the saints a normal lead. In this way the church can be built up. Try to practice this, looking to the Lord for His mercy and grace. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1983, vol. 1, "Practical Talks to the Elders," pp. 71-77*)