

Message 3

The Increase of Christ Being for the Increase of the Church by Ministering Life to Others according to the Law of Increase

Scripture Reading: 1 John 5:16a; Exo. 21:5-6; Isa. 50:4-5; 1 Thes. 2:7, 11; John 15:1-5

OUTLINE

« DAY 1 »

I. First John 5:16a says, “If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask and he will give life to him”:

- A. “Life” here is zoe, the spiritual, eternal, divine life (see footnote 1 on John 10:10, footnote 1 on Acts 11:18, and footnote 4 on Romans 5:17).
- B. This does not mean that the asker has life of himself and can give life by himself to others; it means that such an asker, who is abiding in the Lord, who is one with the Lord, and who is asking in one spirit with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17), becomes the means by which God’s life-giving Spirit can give life to the ones for whom he is asking:
 - 1. We have the privilege of giving life to the weaker ones in order to swallow up their death; this is a matter of life-imparting in the fellowship of the divine life.
 - 2. To be ones who can give life to others, we must abide in the divine life and walk, live, and have our being in the divine life.

« DAY 2 »

II. In order for us to minister life to others, we must do at least four things:

- A. We need an adequate contact with the Lord simply to spend time with Him, listening to the Lord in His dealings with us, so that we may speak a timely word to sustain the weary ones (Exo. 21:5-6; Isa. 50:4-5).
- B. We must learn in the presence of the Lord to be dealt with by Him under His light; in order to bear fruit, we must deal with the Lord to be new, fresh, and tender branches of the vine; we must deal with all the hindrances to have a living of bearing fruit, and we must deal with our natural disposition to become flexible in caring for people (1 John 1:7, 9; John 15:2).

« DAY 3 »

- C. We must pick up a burden to care for people—unbelievers, young believers, new believers, and weaker believers; we must care for them as nursing

mothers and exhorting fathers to be fishers of men and feeders of lambs (1 Thes. 2:7, 11; Matt. 4:19; John 21:15; S.S. 1:7-8):

1. We are cared for by the Lord by caring for others in the Lord:
 - a. If we water others, we ourselves will be watered, and if we desire to grow in life, we need to help others to grow (Prov. 11:25; John 7:37-39a).
 - b. The way to receive is to give, and the more we give, the more we receive (Luke 6:38; Acts 20:35).
 - c. If we turn our prayer from merely ourselves to others, we will receive what we desire (Job 42:10; Gen. 20:17; cf. 21:1-2).
2. We need to spend and be utterly spent on behalf of others, sacrificing our wealth and our life for others (2 Cor. 12:14-15; 1 John 3:16-18).
3. We must deal with our disposition for the sake of fruitfulness; because Paul's disposition was fully dealt with by the Lord, it was soft, bendable, flexible, and applicable to any situation; our disposition is the depth of our self, which must be denied (1 Cor. 9:22; Matt. 16:24).

<< DAY 4 >>

- D. We must learn to be interested in people; every day the Lord's people must be our "food"; many in the church need our shoulders to bear them and our breast to embrace them in love (John 4:3-14, 31-34; Exo. 28:9-12, 15-21, 29; Rom. 12:15).

III. Everything in the church must be in the nature of life, with the content of life, and in the imparting of life (John 10:10b; 14:6a; 1 Cor. 15:45b; Rom. 8:2, 10, 6, 11):

- A. The "currency" in the church "exchange" is not dollars but the divine life; the divine life is our only kind of "merchandise."
- B. The church is altogether a matter of life, because the church is the organism of the Triune God as the Body of Christ and as the vine with the branches (1 Cor. 12:12; John 15:1-5); our work, speaking, fellowship, service, ministry, message, Bible study, and prayer must be in the flow and imparting of life.
- C. When the branches of the vine receive a sufficient supply of the life-giving Spirit as the life-juice of Christ, they bear fruit as the overflow of the inner life supply (vv. 4-5).

<< DAY 5 >>

IV. We need to follow the pattern of the Lord Jesus as the Son of Man cherishing us and as the Son of God nourishing us, experiencing and presenting Christ as the attracting factor to minister life to

people and gain them in a normal way:

A. Illustration one:

1. Christ as the Son of Man became the Lamb of God to take away our sin (1:29)—cherishing.
2. Christ as the Son of God became the life-giving Spirit to give life to us and transform us (vv. 32-34, 42; 1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:6)—nourishing.

B. Illustration two:

1. Christ as the Son of Man, in the form of the serpent, destroyed the old serpent, the source of sin, through His redeeming death (John 3:14; Heb. 2:14; cf. Rom. 16:20)—cherishing.
2. Christ as the Son of God speaks the words of God and gives Himself as the Spirit to us not by measure that we may have the eternal life (John 3:34-36, 15-16)—nourishing.

C. Illustration three:

1. Christ as the Son of Man (Jesus), going from Judea to Galilee, detoured into the city of Sychar, near Jacob's well, to purposely wait for the thirsty and water-seeking, immoral Samaritan woman (4:3-9)—cherishing.
2. Christ as the Son of God, sent by God as a gift, gave her to drink the water of life which springs up into eternal life (vv. 10-14)—nourishing.

D. Illustration four:

1. Christ as the Son of Man has been designated by God to judge all the people of the world, the living and the dead (5:27-29; Acts 17:31; 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:1; Matt. 25:31); the judgment of Christ has been preached to the sinners as a cherishing to them that they might repent unto God and receive Christ as the Son of God to have His eternal life; the judgment in Revelation 14:6-7, as a part of the judgment of Christ, will be declared to all the people on the earth as the eternal gospel—cherishing.
2. Christ as the Son of God was given authority by God to give the eternal life to His believers (John 5:19-26; 17:2-3)—nourishing.

E. Illustration five:

1. Christ as the Son of Man would not condemn the sinful woman (8:11b)—cherishing.
2. Christ as the Son of God (the "I Am") would free her from sin so that she could sin no more (vv. 11b, 24, 36)—nourishing.

F. Illustration six:

1. God sent His Son as a propitiation for our sins in His humanity (1 John 4:10)—cherishing.
2. God sent His Son to us that we may have life and live through Him in His divinity (v. 9)—nourishing; this is confirmed by John 3:16: God gave us His only begotten Son that we who believe into Him may not perish through His redemption in His humanity (cherishing) but may have eternal life in His divinity (nourishing).

G. The illustration of the entire New Testament:

1. Christ as the Son of Man came to redeem us from sins (1 Tim. 1:15)—cherishing.
2. Christ as the Son of God came to impart the divine life into us abundantly (John 10:10)—nourishing.

H. The illustration of Christ in eternity:

1. As the Son of Man, He is the ladder sustaining and maintaining the life union of all His believers with God (1:51)—cherishing.
2. As the Son of God, He is the life element of the New Jerusalem as the divine and human constitution of the consummated Triune God and His glorified elect (Rev. 21–22)—nourishing.

<< DAY 6 >>

V. In order to minister life to others and recover the dormant saints among us, we must have the loving and forgiving heart of our Father God and the shepherding and seeking spirit of our Savior Christ (Luke 15:4-6, 8-9, 20-23; Hymns, #471):

- A. We must take the Lord's heart as our heart and treasure the lost sheep (Luke 15:4-6).
- B. We must rely on the work of the Holy Spirit (vv. 8-9).
- C. We must love people with the Father's love and go to them with a cheerful countenance (vv. 18-24; Psa. 42:5, 11).

VI. The increase of the church is according to the law of increase:

- A. Christ and the church are the universal vine as the organism of the Triune God, and the believers as the branches in this vine are in an organic union with the Triune God (John 15:1-5).
- B. Since we believers are the branches of Christ, we abide in Him as the Son and are one spirit with the Lord, thereby participating in His position and authority (1 Cor. 6:17; Eph. 2:5-6; Matt. 28:18-19).
- C. By abiding in the Son, we receive the Father's nurturing, because the Father is the husbandman, the cultivator of the vine (John 15:1); by abiding in the Son, we are able to receive the Father's nurturing and to enjoy the riches of the Father's divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), that is, to enjoy all the riches of God (Col. 2:9-10).
- D. By abiding in the Son, we experience the Spirit of life as the realization of the Son in us, and this Spirit of life also becomes our life essence (John 14:17, 19; 15:26).

- E. The law of fruit-bearing involves abiding in the Lord and being in union with the Triune God (v. 5); bearing fruit comes out of the law of life, not out of miracles; the law of life, which is the law of fruit-bearing, the law of increase, involves four points:
1. We should abide in the Lord, just as the branches abide in the vine, to absorb the life supply of the Lord.
 2. We should abide in the Lord to absorb the supply of God the Father as our source of nutrients and the supply of the Holy Spirit as our watering and refreshing.
 3. We should abide in the Lord to absorb the supply of God as our light and the Spirit as our air.
 4. We should abide in the Lord and live in the church, just as a vine has to remain in the garden, in order to receive protection and care.

<< WEEK 3 – DAY 1 >>

Morning Nourishment

Rom. 5:17 "For if, by the offense of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ."

1 John 5:16 "If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask and he will give life to him, to those sinning not unto death. There is a sin unto death; I do not say that he should make request concerning that."

Life in Romans 5:17, and in 5:10, 18, 21; 6:4; and 8:2, 6, 10, refers to the eternal, divine, uncreated life of God (zoe), which is Christ Himself as life to us (John 11:25; 14:6; Col. 3:4). It is different from both our physical life (bios—Luke 8:14) and our soulish life (psuche—Matt. 16:25-26; John 12:25)...In this eternal life we can reign. (Rom. 5:17, footnote 4)

[In "he will give life" in 1 John 5:16], the subject is still he, the subject of the first predicate shall ask, indicating that the asker will give life to the one for whom he is asking. This does not mean that the asker has life of himself and can give life by himself to others. It means that such an asker, who is abiding in the Lord, who is one with the Lord, and who is asking in one spirit with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17), becomes the means by which God's life-giving Spirit can give life to the ones for whom he is asking. This is a matter of life-imparting in the fellowship of the divine life. To be one who can give life to others, we must abide in the divine life and walk, live, and have our being in the divine life. In James 5:14-16 the prayer is for healing; here the prayer is for life-imparting. (1 John 5:16, footnote 3)

Today's Reading

The church is an organism, and what an organism needs is life. Therefore, our church service is mainly for ministering life to others. Even the arranging of chairs and the cleaning of restrooms are not for themselves; they are for ministering life. In ushering, clerical work, and any aspect of the church service, we must do everything to minister life to others. Of course, it is good for us to do things in a proper way. Not doing things well can be a frustration, but this does not mean that merely doing a good job is to have the proper service. In worldly religious organizations it is sufficient to do the jobs well, but in the church the main thing we need is the ministry of life. Even if we cannot do things very well, but by His mercy we minister life to others, the service is still successful. The main matter is to minister life to others.

Some may say that it is not we but the Lord Jesus who is the Life-giver. However, there is at least one verse in the New Testament which says that we can give life to the weaker ones. First John 5:16a says, "If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask and he will give life to him." Life here in Greek is not bios, the physical life; it is zoe, the spiritual life. This verse does not mean that if we pray for the brother's sickness, we can impart physical life to him. It means that we give him zoe, the spiritual life. We have the privilege of giving life to the weaker ones in order to swallow up their death. Many saints are not sick physically, but they are sick spiritually. They need us to pray for them and to give them life. We all need to be trained and to practice to take care of the weaker ones who are short of life and sick spiritually. In the churches it is often the case that death, rather than life, spreads from mouth to mouth. Therefore, there is the need of some stronger ones to minister life to stop the spread of death and to swallow up death. This is the main purpose of the service in the church.

The leading ones in the service...must help the saints not primarily to carry out the service; rather, they should fellowship with them and minister life to them so that they may grow. If the leading ones do this, spontaneously all the saints will do the same for others. Then the entire church will be under the care of the proper ministry of life. (The Normal Way of Fruit-bearing and Shepherding for the Building Up of the Church, pp. 12-13)

Further Reading: CWWL, 1973-1974, vol. 2, "The Normal Way of Fruit-bearing and Shepherding for the Building Up of the Church," ch. 1

<< WEEK 3 – DAY 2 >>

Morning Nourishment

Exo. 21:6 "Then his master shall bring him to God and shall bring him to the door or to the doorpost, and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl..."

Isa. 50:4-5 "The Lord Jehovah has given me the tongue of the instructed, that I should know how to sustain the weary with a word. He awakens me morning by morning; He awakens my ear to hear as an instructed one. The Lord Jehovah has opened my ear..."

In order for us to minister life to others, we must do at least four things. First, we need an adequate contact with the Lord. We must all purposely go to the Lord, not to pray for other things but simply to spend time with Him. We need to be like the purchased slave in Exodus 21. Verse 5 says, "If the servant plainly says, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free." After six years of service the slave was free to leave, but if he loved his master, he would not go out. Moreover, while he was in his master's house, he received a wife and had children. In type, the wife and children are the church with all the saints. We have not only the Master but also the church and all the saints as our family. We love our Lord, the church, and all the saints. We should tell the Lord, "Lord, I wish to stay. I can go out freely, but I will not. I love You. I love my wife, the church, and I love my children, the saints. I do not want to miss You, Lord, and neither do I want to miss Your church and all the saints. I want to remain here to be Your bondsman." (The Normal Way of Fruit-bearing and Shepherding for the Building Up of the Church, pp. 13-14)

Today's Reading

In type, to have our ear bored through is to open our ear [Exo. 21:6]. To be a good serving one does not depend upon our feet, our hands, or our eyes. It depends upon our open ear. To be a proper slave, we need an open ear, not to speak, do, or walk but to listen. We must not be as instructors but as the instructed, not as teachers but as learners. We all need to pray this way: "Lord, I love You, I love Your church, and I love the saints. I will never go out. Therefore, bore my ear; open my ear that I may listen to You. I do not want to be a teacher. I am a listener and a learner." Isaiah 50 is a prophetic word describing the Lord Jesus while He was on the earth. Verses 4 and 5 say, "The Lord Jehovah has given me / The tongue of the instructed, / That I should know how to sustain the weary with a word. / He awakens me morning by morning; / He awakens my ear / To hear as an instructed one. / The Lord Jehovah has opened my ear; / And I was not rebellious, / Nor did I turn back." One who has life and the timely word from the Lord can speak the timely word to sustain the weary ones. This is to minister life to the weary and weak ones.

Second, we must learn in the presence of the Lord to be dealt with by Him. We may say, "Lord, here I am. I know that I am not fitting and useful. I am natural, wild, and raw; I have never been 'cooked,' processed, by You. I am even sinful, worldly, and fleshly. Lord, in order to use me as Your bondsman, You must deal with me. I need Your dealing. I need Your 'cooking.' Lord, I open myself to You, but I do not depend on my opening; I depend on Your exposing. Bring me into Your light. Shine over me, shine within me, and shine through me thoroughly in order that I may be fully exposed." We all need such a prayer. It is better to pray in this way by ourselves. In doing other things we should not be individualistic, but in this kind of prayer it is better to do it individually. We should spend an hour or more in the presence of the Lord for this purpose, checking with Him again and again until we get through and until nothing further needs to be exposed. (The Normal Way of Fruit-bearing and Shepherding for the Building Up of the Church, pp. 14-15)

Further Reading: CWWL, 1973-1974, vol. 2, "The Normal Way of Fruit-bearing and Shepherding for the Building Up of the Church," ch. 2

<< WEEK 3 — DAY 3 >>

Morning Nourishment

Prov. 11:25 "The blessing soul will prosper, and he who waters will also be watered himself."

Luke 6:38 "Give, and it will be given to you; a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, they will give into your bosom. For with what measure you measure, it shall be measured to you in return."

After we reconsecrate ourselves and deal thoroughly with the Lord, we can pick up a burden before Him....We may pick up a burden for ushering in the meetings, but the ushering itself is not our burden. Rather, our burden is to take care of people by ushering. Picking up a burden in this way will make a great difference....Whenever we usher, we will minister life. There will be an outflow of life from us to others' spirits. The Holy Spirit always honors this kind of serving.

The Lord needs even the teenagers. I hope that the older teenagers will pick up the burden to care for those in junior high school....If some teenagers will do this, they will have the Lord's presence with them, and they will see the blessing.

The older sisters, for example, can pick up the burden to care for the older saints. No one can appoint us to this service. We must all go to the Lord, the Head of the Body, have a thorough dealing with Him, and pick up a burden...to care for people. (The Normal Way of Fruit-bearing and Shepherding for the Building Up of the Church, pp. 15-16)

Today's Reading

According to the divine economy of the Bible, if we desire to receive, we need to give. If we water others, we ourselves will be watered, and if we desire to grow in life, we need to help others to grow (Prov. 11:25). When we help others to grow in life, we ourselves will have the growth. The way to receive is to give, and the more we give, the more we receive (Luke 6:38; Acts 20:35)....We should not say that we can do nothing and are not useful. Rather, we need to say, "Satan, get away from me. I can do something, I have something, and I am useful in the Lord's hand"...When we say we have something, we add to what we have. Therefore, we should endeavor to water others and care for them.

Although the Lord promised a child to Abraham, the child did not come for many years. The Lord even put Abraham into a situation in which he was forced to pray for the household of Abimelech so that they could have children (Gen. 20:17). If we were Abraham, we might have found it difficult to pray....However, when Abraham prayed, God answered the prayer not only for Abimelech but also for Abraham (21:1-2). If we turn our prayer from ourselves to others, we will receive what we desire (Job 42:10). It is because we are too self-centered in our prayer that the Lord needs to teach us a lesson. If we water others, we will be watered, and if we care for others, we will be cared for.

The apostle Paul said, "I will most gladly spend and be utterly spent on behalf of your souls" (2 Cor. 12:15). This passage has the sense of sacrificing one's wealth and one's life. Spend refers to the spending of Paul's possessions, and be utterly spent is the spending of what he was, referring to his being. If we have a spirit to spend whatever we have and to be spent, to sacrifice whatever we are, we will have a great increase each year.

[Paul] was on earth for nothing else but to gain people....[He] seemed to have no disposition of his own. He was simply like a piece of wood that could be cut into any shape. Because his disposition was fully dealt with by the Lord, it was soft, bendable, flexible, and applicable to any situation.

Our disposition is the cause for our not bearing fruit and using our talent to care for people....Our disposition is the depth of our self, which must be denied. If we are not useful in the Lord's hand for taking care of people, it is due to our raw, natural disposition. (The Normal Way of Fruit-bearing and Shepherding for the Building Up of the Church, pp. 38-42)

Further Reading: The Normal Way of Fruit-bearing and Shepherding for the Building Up of the Church, chs. 3-4

<< WEEK 3 — DAY 4 >>

Morning Nourishment

John 4:34 "Jesus said to them, My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work."

Exo. 28:12 "And you shall put the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the ephod as stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel. And Aaron shall bear their names before Jehovah on his two shoulders for a memorial."

29 "So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastplate of judgment on his heart..."

After we have a thorough dealing with the Lord and pick up a burden, we must learn to be interested in people. Because of the fall, many of us are not interested in others. We consider that whether others go to heaven or to hell is their own business. We do not care whether others grow in life, and we feel that it is sufficient for us to care for our own spiritual welfare. However, the church service requires every one of us to be involved with others. We need an interest in the Lord's people...Every day the Lord's people must be our "food" (John 4:31-34). Some older teenage sisters should say, "All the young girls between ten and fifteen years old in the church life are my food. I am interested in the young people to this extent."

However, we must not be interested in people in a natural way...or social way but in the way of life...to see them saved, grow in life, and become matured. (The Normal Way of Fruit-bearing and Shepherding for the Building Up of the Church, pp. 16-17)

Today's Reading

We can pick up the burden for some specific persons. We should make a list of their names, always keep it in front of us, and pray for them one by one...Many in the church need our shoulders to bear them and our breast to embrace them (Exo. 28:9-12, 15-21, 29). We must love them. When they fall, we should weep, and when they rise up, we should be joyful...Our service is not to arrange the chairs, do the cleaning, usher, or do clerical work. These are temporary matters as the means, instruments, and channels for us to take care of people.

As those who have been born again, we have the divine life. However, we may not exercise the divine life much in the church service. We may simply do things and talk, gossip, ask questions, and exercise our mind and emotions in the name of "fellowship," yet without the exercise of the divine life in us. To come together to have a friendly talk without the ministry of life is not fellowship; it is merely something social. Genuine fellowship is the flow and the mutual imparting of life. I minister life to you, and you return life to me, and in this life current there is the real fellowship...Everything in the church must be in the nature of life, with the content of life, and in the imparting of life. The "currency" in the church "exchange" is not dollars but the divine life; the divine life is our only kind of "merchandise." The church is altogether a matter of life. Our work, speaking, fellowship, service, ministry, message, Bible study, and prayer must be in the flow and imparting of life.

In the church we must have life, training, and fruit-bearing. Every member of the church should be a branch that bears fruit. The word of the Lord in John 15 is emphatic and definite. He said, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes it away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it that it may bear more fruit" (vv. 1-2). If we are saved, we are a branch in the vine. We cannot deny this. Therefore, we must realize that every branch in the vine must abide in the Lord to bear fruit. This is not a small matter.

If we will bear even one fruit, the life supply will flood in. The life-juice will stream in, and we will bear more fruit. To bear the first fruit is a breakthrough. We must have such a breakthrough. We need to go to the Lord to have a thorough dealing with Him. (The Normal Way of Fruit-bearing and Shepherding for the Building Up of the Church, pp. 17-18, 35-37)

Further Reading: CWWL, 1973-1974, vol. 2, "The Normal Way of Fruit-bearing and Shepherding for the Building Up of the Church," chs. 5-6

<< WEEK 3 — DAY 5 >>

Morning Nourishment

John 1:29 "The next day he saw Jesus...and said, Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

32-33 "And John testified, saying, I beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He abode upon Him. And I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water, He said to me, He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and abiding upon Him, this is He who baptizes in the Holy Spirit."

Once we have had a thorough dealing with the Lord and have become flexible, we need something in our daily living that attracts and convinces people. The disciples mentioned in John 1 were brought to the Lord by being attracted to Him...John the Baptist [recommended]...Jesus [as] the Lamb to take away the sin of the world [v. 29] and...the One with the dove to baptize people so that they may receive God as life [vv. 32-33]. These are the two attracting factors of the Lord. The Spirit of God always works through these two attracting features. Immediately after this attraction through recommendation, two of John's disciples followed Jesus (vv. 35-37). (The Normal Way of Fruit-bearing and Shepherding for the Building Up of the Church, p. 64)

Today's Reading

Our sin is the most troublesome thing to all of us, but Christ became the Lamb of God to die for us, to accomplish redemption for us, to take all our sins away. This is the greatest cherishing to us to make us happy and restful.

Our God is like a mother. First, He cherishes us, makes us happy. Then He gives us some nourishment to transform us from clay to precious stones for God's building. Without Christ's cherishing, no one would come to receive Him as the life-giving Spirit.

Christ as the Son of Man, in the form of the serpent, destroyed the old serpent, the source of sin, through His redeeming death (John 3:14; Heb. 2:14)—cherishing. We were bitten by the old serpent in the garden of Eden in Genesis 3, so we have the poison, the essence, of the serpent in our being. It was not sufficient for Christ merely to become our redeeming Lamb. He also had to become in the form of the serpent. Paul in Romans 8:3 said that God sent His Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin. Christ became a serpent in form, not in element. He was the reality of the brass serpent in Numbers 21 (vv. 4-9) to destroy Satan, the source of sin, through His redeeming death.

Christ as the Son of God speaks the words of God and gives Himself as the Spirit to us not by measure that we may have the eternal life (John 3:34-36, 15-16)—nourishing. The unlimited Son of God speaks God's words and gives the Spirit to the hearers of God's word. Those who hear His word and receive the Spirit are regenerated to be His increase, His bride (vv. 29-30).

Christ as the Son of Man (Jesus), going from Judea to Galilee, detoured into the city of Sychar, near Jacob's well, to purposely wait for the thirsty and water-seeking, immoral Samaritan woman (John 4:2-9)—cherishing. The very God who became a man traveled from Judea to Galilee, and He purposely detoured to a small city to cherish an immoral woman. As the Son of Man, Christ is the detouring Savior.

Christ as the Son of God, sent by God as a gift, gave her to drink the water of life which springs up into eternal life (John 4:10-14)—nourishing. First, He was the Son of Man to cherish her; then He was the Son of God to give her the living water that flows into the New Jerusalem, the totality of the eternal life.

Christ as the Son of Man will be the ladder sustaining and maintaining the life union of all His believers with God (John 1:51)—cherishing. In His humanity Christ is the standing ladder, strong and unshakable...to bring heaven to earth and to join earth to heaven. This is to bring God into man and to bring man into God.

As the Son of God, Christ will be the life element of the New Jerusalem as the divine and human constitution of the consummated Triune God and His glorified elect (Rev. 21—22)—nourishing. (The Vital Groups, pp. 83-84, 87)

Further Reading: The Vital Groups, msgs. 9, 4, 6

<< WEEK 3 — DAY 6 >>

Morning Nourishment

Luke 15:4-5 "Which man of you, who has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he finds it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing."

John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing."

We must take the Lord's heart as our heart and treasure the lost sheep (Luke 15:4-6), loving the brothers and sisters who have not been to a meeting for a long time and paying the price to find them. Although there is a price to pay in visiting people, requiring not only the expense of time and energy but even a considerable amount of thought, the price the Lord paid was much higher. We must have a spirit to lay these dormant saints on our shoulders like lambs and bring them back to the church.

As we seek out the saints, we must rely on the work of the Holy Spirit. I truly believe that my return to the meetings was altogether the work of the Holy Spirit; it was the Holy Spirit who brought me back. The work of the Spirit is likened in Luke 15 to a woman who lights a lamp to seek a lost coin. The Holy Spirit is able to shine upon the saints with the Lord's word and is willing to search for them until they are found (vv. 8-9). (Crucial Words of Leading in the Lord's Recovery, Book 4: The Increase and Spread of the Church, p. 172)

Today's Reading

We must love others with the Father's love...[like] the father who eagerly welcomed his prodigal son in chapter 15 of the Gospel of Luke....The father had only love toward his son [vv. 22-24].

We must take the Lord's heart as our heart....The father spoke only of slaying the fattened calf in celebration of his son's return; he did not mention things from the past or touch his son's wounds. He forgot the past. Even if the dormant saints want to bring up their past, we must let them know that it is not necessary, because of the Lord's grace....As our brothers and sisters return, we can minister what we have experienced and enjoyed of Christ according to the need. In this way, we will gradually recover them. I hope that we will receive this burden and actively stir up the small groups to seek out, visit, and restore the saints who have been absent from the meetings for a long time.

As long as we visit people, this is good enough. Many times, our words are not appropriate, and because we do not know their inner condition, it is easy to hurt them and cause them to feel bad. However, if we go with a cheerful countenance, they will be comforted and touched. They will feel that neither the Lord nor the church has forgotten them. This will give the Holy Spirit a great opportunity to work in them.

The law of fruit-bearing involves abiding in the Lord and being in union with the Triune God. Bearing fruit comes out of the law of life, not out of miracles. The law of life, which is the law of fruit-bearing, involves four points: First, we should abide in the Lord, just as the branches abide in the vine, to absorb the life supply of the Lord. Second, we should abide in the Lord to absorb the supply of God the Father as our source of nutrients and the supply of the Holy Spirit as our source of watering and refreshing. Third, we should abide in the Lord to absorb the supply of God as our light and the Spirit as our air. We must receive a supply from God as our nutrients, water, light, and air so that the life within us can grow and bear fruit according to its law. Finally, we need to abide in the Lord and live in the church...just as a vine has to remain in the garden, in order to receive protection and care....Under these conditions, we will bear new fruit according to the law of life. (Crucial Words of Leading in the Lord's Recovery, Book 4: The Increase and Spread of the Church, pp. 172-173, 171, 65)

Further Reading: A Word of Love to the Co-workers, Elders, Lovers, and Seekers of the Lord, ch. 2; Crucial Words of Leading in the Lord's Recovery, Book 4: The Increase and Spread of the Church, chs. 3-4, 11

WEEK 3 — HYMN

How can I ever stay away Consecration — Returning to the Lord

471

Musical score for the hymn "How can I ever stay away". The score is written in 3/4 time and consists of two staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a 3/4 time signature. The melody is written in a simple, hymn-like style. The second staff continues the melody and includes a fermata over the final note. Chord symbols are placed above the notes: C, G, G/F, C/E, F, C/E, Am, G/B, C, F, G, G7, C. The lyrics are written below the notes.

1. How can I ev - er stay a-way And grieve Thy Spir - it all the day While Thou dost wait for me? I
now am will - ing to return, And wait no long - er, for I yearn Hence - forth to fol - low Thee.

2. I offer now without reserve
All that I am and all I have
Thy purpose to fulfill.
Oh, may the Lord accept and keep,
That henceforth I may only seek
To do the Father's will.
3. When I look back, what grief and shame
That I've brought none to trust Thy name,
Thy word I've locked within.
Oh, may the Lord anointing give
And richly through my being live,
That I may speak of Him.
4. My gracious Lord has giv'n much grace,
Exceeding e'en a friend my place;
I fain would be His bride.
I'd share His life and suffer loss,
Accepting willingly the cross,
With Him identified.