

Characteristics of a Healthy Church

Follow the Path of Restoration According to the Pattern on the Mountain

Brother Watchman Nee: The Lord's ordination for the church is to be built according to the pattern shown on the mountain. A church must first see what the pattern on the mountain is, take God's standard as its own standard, and only then realize its past shortcomings. What kind of condition should the church we are striving toward attain? Only when we behold the glorious church ordained by the Lord in the Scriptures do we realize how far short we fall and how much we lag behind.

The Root Cause of the Church's Failure

The fundamental failure of the church lies in its inability to meet its own need of begetting and nurturing spiritual children. The fluctuation of a church does not merely result from the mobility of brothers and sisters. When a church is strong, the number of transient believers is small; when a church is weak, such drifting believers abound. Merchants pay close attention to capital turnover and currency circulation. Likewise, the church ought to care for the spiritual mobility of its brothers and sisters. If a local church has three to four hundred believers yet fails to shepherd them well, within a year new believers will come in while old ones drift away — this is a great loss to the church.

Therefore, the church must preach the gospel to gain new souls and also edify those who already believe. The church's first responsibility is to save sinners, and the second is to nurture believers. If a church leads a hundred people to salvation in a few months yet loses a hundred people in the same time, it is a grave failure. The church fails because it begets spiritual children but fails to sustain and raise them.

The Law of the Holy Spirit' s Work

A strong church stands firm with steady direction; it can even control how many sinners are to be saved. For the church to be strong, it must walk and act according to the pattern revealed by the Lord on the mountain. If it departs from the pattern given by the Lord, leading people to salvation will seem an arduous task. But if the church abides by the Lord' s ordained pattern, it can gain five hundred new believers if it seeks five hundred, and a thousand if it seeks a thousand. When we walk faithfully along the Lord' s way, it is no wonder to see not merely three hundred or five hundred saved, but even three thousand or five thousand.

Thanks be to the Lord, some among us call the Lord “the God of revival.” In truth, whether revival comes depends on whether we labor according to the laws revealed by the Lord through the Holy Spirit. All who understand the principles of the Lord' s work will agree with this. When the church preaches the gospel in alignment with the Holy Spirit' s laws and labors in accordance with His working principle, souls will surely be saved. Once the church rises up to function, men cannot help but be saved, and the church cannot fail to experience revival.

God' s Way of Revival — The Whole Church in Ministry

Many among us have long been influenced by foreign missionaries and the mission societies they established, assuming God' s way of salvation lies in founding missionary boards or overseas mission organizations. Yet A.J. Gordon once emphasized: There is no such thing as missionary societies or mission boards in the Bible; these are all human-originated institutions. What God initiated is the church alone.

Man has created missionary societies, mission boards and evangelistic organizations, setting apart a special group of people to engage exclusively in gospel work. But God only ordained one way in the Scriptures and appointed one kind of

people to preach the gospel: all Christians without exception (Matthew 28:19). All whom God saves are Christians. Every brother and sister given to the church is called to renounce lusts, sin and the world, and together bear witness and preach the gospel.

God never singled out a special class within the church to forsake all to follow Him and preach the gospel, while leaving another group exempt from such calling. Thus the church today must never be divided into two categories of believers: those who offer themselves fully to the Lord, and those who love the world. There can only be one kind of Christian in the whole church — those who are absolutely consecrated. This is God's ordained way of revival. When the church is built in this way, the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it, and sinners cannot stand resistant to its testimony.

Our experiences in recent years have proven this truth. Where local churches practice whole-church evangelism, their numbers grow exponentially. In Taipei alone, the church has multiplied thirty times over last year to this year — a multiple increase, not merely a fractional growth. When the entire church enters into ministry, God's grace proves far too abundant for our capacity to contain. I can testify that from north to south and east to west, brothers and sisters willingly lay down all they have for the Lord.

We have no intention of drawing a dividing line among you, distinguishing who should consecrate and who need not. We do not seek to separate believers into two classes. May the Lord find no hindrance in us, and may His work flow unimpeded among sinners. May the Lord face no obstruction from the world in the church, and no bondage from sin in the hearts of unbelievers.

All Consecrated and Perfected to Meet the Need of the Lord's Work

The church today has two kinds of work: one is the work of begetting new believers, and the other is the work of continuous spiritual growth. On one hand, we must gain sinners; on the other hand, we must nurture and build up the saints.

To consecrate oneself is not merely to give up material possessions, but to yield

your entire being to the Lord. The offering of money and goods is only a way for the Lord to move forward through us. If the Lord brings a thousand people into our midst this year, do we have the ability to lead them in prayer, guide them to read the Scriptures, and partake of the Lord's Table together? Without the whole church in ministry, we can never meet their spiritual needs.

The prayer meeting may become disorderly, the Lord's Table service may lose its reverence, those who ought to speak remain silent, while others speak recklessly, and everyone acts casually in word and conduct. How can we serve the Lord in such a state? We must have a clear way in spiritual service so that we can readily receive and shepherd new believers. Therefore, we must not only offer our possessions but also lay down our whole lives to serve. Only then will the Lord have a way to work in us, and a way to reach sinners.

Let me use an illustration:

The church ought to be like a large bakery. It receives raw flour and sends out baked bread. The church must have a large spiritual capacity to receive a great number of new believers and then send forth mature saints to serve elsewhere. The church must be able to accommodate and nurture every new soul who comes, instead of scrambling to find helpers at the last minute. The bread delivery machines in Shanghai are twice the size of those here, simply to meet the needs of the vast population there. Likewise, the church must train and raise up enough workers to serve, so as to fully meet the harvest need.

After the church leads people to salvation, we must never let newly saved believers drift away and be lost again. Otherwise, we may gain a few souls only to lose them a few months later; the number of believers will never increase, and the church will never grow strong. Brother Yu Lan Chang once said in the Taipei church: we must train brothers and sisters to such a degree that we can nurture five thousand believers if five thousand come, and fifty thousand if fifty thousand come.

Some among us may have been here for months yet remain ignorant of spiritual truth, with no one caring for or shepherding them. May we, after this fellowship, immediately arrange proper spiritual care and follow-up work.

Fifteen or sixteen years ago, when I preached in Shanghai on being anxious for nothing, I used an illustration about anxiety being like bricks and tiles used to build a house. Let me adapt it slightly here. Imagine laborers carry a load of twenty bricks and pass them upward one by one; some receive them halfway up, and others take them at the very top. Those in the middle have a vital role: every brick handed to them must be passed upward in full. If those in the middle fail to pass on the bricks they receive, or those at the top refuse to take them, the ones in the middle will be crushed under the endless stream of bricks.

When the Lord is not moving mightily, we may not realize how crucial new believer edification is. But once the Lord begins to work and the church continuously gains souls, we will see its absolute necessity. As soon as new believers come in, we must train and perfect them, showing them how to walk and serve. Those newly saved this month may, after three or four months, become capable of shepherding the next group of new believers.

The church can then care for believers in orderly stages: those saved in January can shepherd those saved in February. In this way, the Lord will bless the church to grow steadily and enable it to edify all who are added to it. For this reason, we cry out loudly: The whole church must consecrate itself without delay! The offering of material goods is only one small part of total consecration. We do not overemphasize material giving, and hope you will not either. Our earnest desire is that the whole church would yield itself, receive training, be perfected, and enter into universal ministry.

In ancient warfare, men fought one by one as guerrilla fighters. Today is different; modern warfare relies on coordinated, mobile collective operations. Paratroopers descend from the sky one by one, yet they do not fight alone—they unite and move as one unit.

I often observe that foreign missionaries working inland are like guerrillas. Sometimes a couple labors in one place for thirty or forty years, winning merely three or four souls. Their work is extremely hard, yet they persevere without discouragement. We deeply admire their perseverance in suffering, but we cannot

adopt their method of evangelism—it is far too limited for today’ s need.

What we need now is paratrooper-style church migration: using coastal ports to send batches of trained brothers and sisters inland to western China. I am convinced that once we keep pace with God’ s move in this way, spreading the gospel across all of China will be no difficult task at all.

Being Trained, Perfected in Coordination, Ready for Migration

Brothers and sisters who go out for migration must possess special professional skills, and the church must make thorough arrangements for all practical affairs related to migration. For this reason, every believer must first receive training—both in vocational skills and in gospel work. Even elephants in a circus are clumsy by nature, yet through rigorous training, they can dance and perform.

We also hope believers will coordinate with one another in secular occupations for the sake of the gospel. Cooperation in business enables them to earn more provision to support migration and the spread of the gospel. Young brothers and sisters in school should also coordinate in their studies, learning diligently for the gospel so they can support themselves financially after migrating.

Take those who have signed up to migrate to Yiyang for example: some are well-educated and spiritually mature yet lack practical skills, while ordinary masons are far more useful. Intellectual ability without self-sufficiency becomes a hindrance to migration, yet skilled laborers can support themselves and serve effectively in a new place.

There are several essential lessons all who go out for gospel migration must learn:

First, every migrating believer must master one solid, practical skill.

You may think such learning troublesome, yet remember the Lord’ s word: It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). We must learn to be givers, laboring with our own hands not only to support ourselves but also to supply the needs of others.

Second, believers must learn practical service. If you can serve competently in

Hong Kong, you must be able to do the same in Chongqing. Therefore, receive the church's training in practical ministry, learn the secrets of evangelism, and master the way to lead others to salvation.

Third, you must learn to know and study the Bible thoroughly in the church.

This universal consecration among us turns the entire church into a spiritual school, even a clinical training center, where we can practice shepherding and discerning the spiritual condition of others.

May those who have heard this fellowship see our path more clearly than ever. Only in this way can the gospel advance outward without hindrance. From now onward, all training in Hong Kong church concerning evangelism, practical administration, and Bible study will be led by Brother Chang Shou.

Do not live an easy, lazy life, except for those who are physically unable. Let every one of us be watchful, diligent, fully committed, and keep pace with the Lord's move. May the Hong Kong church be like God's army, a church marching in spiritual warfare (cf. Numbers 1 - 2). May the Lord grant us grace.

Return to the Original Condition of the Early Church

How long has the church been on the earth? Nearly two thousand years.

How widely has it spread? It can be said to have reached almost every corner of the world.

How many people has it touched? Multitudes upon multitudes.

Consider this: after such a long time, over such a vast sphere, and among so many people—has the church departed from its original pattern? When we buy things, we always want the original factory version. Do you realize that the church today has already become something altered and changed? If you purchase an item, would you choose the original or a modified one? Everyone would surely answer: the original, of course.

Likewise, unless we deny that the church has drifted from its original state, I believe we all long for the church as it was at the beginning. Over these two thousand

years, the church has declined and become corrupted. The church we see today is no longer what it once was. Our standing today is one of restoration, so we cannot be indifferent to this matter; the more questions we raise, the better. When we examine present-day Christianity from every angle, can we honestly say it is the church as it was in the beginning?

Nothing in this age influences us more than Christianity. What we hear everywhere is people's impression of Christianity. We must remember: when we lead others to salvation, we are not merely bringing them into nominal Christianity. If it is only joining a religious organization, there is grave error. Therefore, let us keep raising questions. Such questioning will turn us back to walk God's path of restoration.

Not only from the Scriptures, but also in spiritual fellowship, I deeply sense that especially from 1940 to the present—the past decade, or dating back to 1939—the highest peak of God's restoring move in the church is this: the whole church rising up to serve, all brothers and sisters consecrating themselves to receive training, and then going out in batches for migration. Only in this way can God advance swiftly among us.

Over these past five or six years, I have endured physical illness, been pressed by circumstances, and faced opposition from others. All these have brought precious lessons in my spiritual life. Hence, according to my inner fellowship with the Lord, our training of believers must follow these great principles:

outwardly, coordination in service; inwardly, spiritual growth and edification; inward toward the local church, the work of evangelism; outward toward distant places, the move of migration.

Meeting the Inner Spiritual Need of Believers

The above are the great principles, but how do we begin to carry them out? We must start from the small and practical details, which can be viewed from two aspects. A local church must be able to meet the inner spiritual hunger of its own members, as

well as the spiritual needs of outsiders. If we fail to supply the inner need of our brothers and sisters, there is something wrong with the church.

When every believer comes into the church, the church ought to minister to their inner man. If it cannot supply them, there is undoubtedly a deficiency. Different generations receive different measures of God's grace. What we have seen, tasted, and heard has never been experienced by those of past generations. For this reason, I worship the Lord with tears in my spirit. God has dealt bountifully with us, revealing these truths to us alone among so many others, that we may be stirred to draw near to Him and walk in His way.

The inner longing of brothers and sisters is itself proof that God desires to advance quickly in the path of restoration. I treasure these matters greatly. This is now the reality among believers in Qingdao, Yantai, Beijing, Shanghai and many other places.

Because of this burden, I am constrained to look to the Lord. We have not yet been fully gained by God; individually, we have not yet allowed God to work thoroughly in us. So many brothers and sisters in the church have such spiritual thirst, yet we cannot supply them. We bear absolute responsibility for this shortcoming. Otherwise, the whole-church service and migration will remain empty words.

All Consecrated to Answer God's Demand

Among all the brothers and sisters, if even one person refuses to answer God's requirement, God cannot use the whole church, and He will have no way to move forward in the church. In this present age, God desires to advance swiftly in restoration, and His minimum requirement is that the entire church rises up to serve, evangelize, and go out in migration. Whether God's move can go forward hinges on you.

God's servants have His word and spiritual revelation, and believers have this inner hunger—yet without your cooperation, nothing can be accomplished. Therefore, first and foremost, you must consecrate yourself: yield your whole person and all that

you have to answer God' s demand.

Consecration is not merely giving material possessions, nor does it focus only on money and goods. It refers supremely to the consecration of your very person. If every brother and sister is willing to give themselves over, corporate coordination and spiritual training will face no obstacles.

From 1940 to 1943, we did not clearly understand coordination and training. Today we see we need coordination in every aspect and training in every area. Last night as I sat at the back, I saw coordination not only in evangelism and consecration, but also in secular occupations.

Consecration means two things:

Yielding your person and all your possessions to answer God' s calling;

Placing yourself in the church to accept its arrangement, coordination, and training.

Submitting to the Church' s Arrangement and Training

In the past, we tended to over-trust the leading of the Holy Spirit while neglecting the church as the Body. We used to say, "Let the Holy Spirit work directly." Today I am not telling us to reject the Holy Spirit' s guidance; rather, I urge us to trust the leading of the Body of Christ.

Over these years, we have seen many who claim to follow the Holy Spirit' s personal leading, yet their ways are full of error. It is far more secure to commit ourselves to the Body and receive its corporate leading.

Once we consecrate ourselves, we discover we need training in every part of our spiritual life — even the prayer meeting requires training. At first, believers gather simply to pray; later, many criticize one another, complaining that some prayers are too wordy, too mental, or lacking proper reverence in addressing the Lord.

When you truly consecrate yourself, the self is put aside. No one can retain the natural self and still participate in the coordinated service of the whole church. As long as the self remains intact, corporate church service becomes nearly impossible.

We must learn to accept the breaking of the self that God ordains through the church.

For years, many of us have pursued spiritual dealing and sought brokenness of the self, yet failed again and again—the self remained uncrushed. But once you place yourself in the church and accept the dealing of the Body, the self is easily broken and dealt with. In this way, you are not only prepared functionally for service, but also truly perfected in your spiritual life.

Do not refrain from acting and training for fear of making mistakes. Even if there are minor errors in practical matters, your inner spirit will still receive genuine edification. May we all have a heart willing to be trained, to accept dealing, and to keep learning before the Lord.