

CHAPTER FOUR

HOME GATHERING

(3)

1. To prepare ourselves for the meeting—1 Cor. 14:26.
2. Elders to labor in the Word—1 Tim. 5:17.

THE HOME MEETINGS AND THE BIG MEETINGS

Those whom we have observed who have practiced the home meetings may not have had much of the riches in life of Christ and the Spirit, yet **they have gained people through the mutual care**. Human beings need a community. Even in a small town if there is no home gathering, it would be hard to have the proper communal life. Once you set up the home gatherings, you will attract people. Simply to set up big gatherings for the Christians to come together to listen to messages would not be sufficient to catch people. The home gatherings are centers to catch people for the proper communal life. **The church life is the best society because it is the best communal life**. We should not consider taking another way besides the way of home gatherings.

Throughout this long period of time all the churches have been practicing to pay their first attention and give the first love to the big meetings. All the saints were affected and influenced in this way. **They lost their taste for the home gatherings because the big gatherings fit in with their natural concept and slothfulness**. They did not need to exercise their spirit but still preferred to talk about the world situation, home affairs, and their relatives, even until ten minutes before the meeting. This was their enjoyment. However, they still came to the meeting. They had not finished their conversation, and even after coming to the meeting, they still continued their talk in their thoughts. Not only their spirit but even their heart, their soul, and their mind were altogether not there for the meeting. This is a great backsliding.

I dare not cut off the big meetings, because we still need a big meeting to take care of so many Sunday goers. Today every nation has Sunday as a holiday. Many people consider that if you are going to be a Christian, you must go to church on Sunday morning. This has been a worldwide popular habit. Therefore, it is better to utilize this day and this habit, just as the Lord Jesus and the apostles utilized the way of going to the synagogues on the Sabbath (Luke 4:15-16; Acts 9:20; 13:5, 14, 44; 14:1; 17:10; 18:26; 19:8). The Lord took this convenient opportunity to contact those poor sinners in the synagogues. **Therefore, we may need a big meeting, especially on the Lord's Day**.

In every locality the church may have a big meeting on the Lord's Day to take care of the Sunday goers and all those who have the popular concept of coming to the church building. This is the way that we can get some people. **However, we should not mainly have the big meeting. That would be poor. To not have such a meeting would be a lack, but we should pay our primary attention to the home gatherings**. Our slogan should be Home meetings are first—we give our first love, first attention, and best time to the home meetings. We must give the first of everything to the home meetings.

A SHAMEFUL SITUATION

The home meetings are the very base for the church to be built up. History proves this, today's situation testifies to this, and our experience over the last ten to sixteen years also confirms this. In Taiwan for over twenty years there has not been much increase. In the matter of the riches in the Word and the riches of Christ, the others who practice the home meetings cannot compare with us. However, they gain quite a number of people. One group in the northwestern United States gained eighteen hundred people in ten years. Within eleven years another group in the eastern United States gained a hundred homes with fifteen meeting in each home. This is a shame to us. We have such riches in the Word and the riches in Christ, yet what have we done? For this reason I was bold to blow away all the oldness. We all should feel shameful that we have wasted the Lord's time and wasted His mercy, His grace, His riches, and all the divine truths that He has delivered to us. We all need to repent.

We must take care of the real situation based upon the real one accord among all the churches and upon the revelation of God's New Testament economy. You may have only a few hundred persons in your locality. This is not satisfactory. Within only eleven years in a little town of only thirty thousand people, one Christian group grew to fifteen hundred. How many do you have in your locality? You claim that you have the ministry with all the riches, and you use the materials of this ministry. However, you may be in a poor and pitiful situation. Let us all consider our ways. Haggai told the people, "Consider your ways. You have sown much, but you bring in little" (Hag. 1:5b-6a). Yet even though this is your situation, you may still be so contented with what you are doing. I would beg you all to reconsider your ways. Not one among us could boast peacefully. The Lord has given us so much, and the riches are here. Yet we have to labor much, to fast, to pray, to wait on the Lord time after time, to have a thorough dealing with the Lord, and to have ourselves fully dealt with by the Lord. We must also labor on how to take care of all the home meetings, to tend them, to enrich them, and to give them the proper word that they may use to minister to others.

We must not merely have a routine church in a routine way, where everything is set up with a routine schedule year round, every year the same. We all have been practicing this for over fifteen years. Year after year it is still the same. The routine is the same; the number is the same; everything is the same. This is deadness, coldness, oldness, and lukewarmness. Therefore, wake up! Reconsider the situation. Take the proper way, the living way, the biblical way, the way of life. In Taipei I spoke strongly, reminding the saints that there were over eleven thousand on the name cards but only about four thousand in the meetings. But thank the Lord, He has honored what I have done. So many dear ones were awakened. They would not remain in that pitiful situation any longer.

Now I would say nearly the same thing to the dear ones in the United States. Consider for how many years the churches have been in this country. It seems that no one has ever risen up to say that they could not sleep well, that they could not eat well, that they were desperate due to the situation. Come together to fast and pray. If three days are not

sufficient, let us pray for seven days or even three weeks. In Acts 1 the one hundred twenty prayed steadfastly for ten days. Do not merely come together to talk about the way to drive the car. Even if you know the way, you are still short of gasoline. You need to prepare and pray and get your tank filled. Then just drive; there is no need to talk about the way.

PREPARING OURSELVES FOR THE MEETING

In speaking of [preparing ourselves for the meeting](#), I would primarily refer this word to the elders. We all need to be prepared for the meeting. Perhaps quite often even you as an elder were not prepared for the meeting. You simply went to the meeting in the routine way. You kept the scheduled time. Even in some localities the elders come to the meeting after the scheduled time. You were not only not prepared, but you even came to the meeting late. For a leading one in a local church to come to the meeting even ten minutes early is a shame. As elders, you should be the first ones to come to the meeting. If you would come to the meeting in this way, so many others would come early. They will follow you. You are the head sheep; you take the lead. If as the head sheep you come to the meeting only two minutes before the scheduled time, how could you expect the others to come to the meeting early? If you have already lost interest in the meeting, how could you expect others to have an interest? We must rise up and consider this seriously. Do we mean business to take the lead in the many churches in the Lord's recovery? If we do mean business, we cannot take this way in coming to the meetings. It is a shame for us to enter a meeting five minutes late.

To come early is a small thing. If you would practice this, it would become easy. However, to prepare yourself for the meeting implies very much. You could not do this in only half an hour. You must prepare yourself for the meeting every day. First Corinthians 14:26 says, *"What then, brothers? Whenever you come together, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up."* This verse uses the word *has*. This does not mean that whenever you come together, you should pray and wait on the Lord that you may receive inspiration. It means that you already have something, that something is prepared in you.

It is too late to get something after you come to the meeting. In many of the churches the brothers and sisters used to bring food for a love feast. Each one would bring something different; everyone had something. When each one came with something, there was a rich feast and a rich exhibition. When all the food was put together, you could see the riches. The exhibition became a mutual enjoyment. We could not have practiced to come to the meeting to attend a love feast with no preparation. If everyone came this way, there could be no feast. Even to have bought some groceries on the way to the meeting would have been too late.

ELDERS TO LABOR IN THE WORD

[Who among all the elders has been really laboring in the Word? It is not adequate simply to prepare a message to share. The church needs home meetings.](#) The church needs a

general meeting on the Lord's Day to take care of the ones who would only come on this day, and the church also needs the preaching of the gospel, the preaching meeting. Likewise, the church needs classes to teach the basic truths to help the saints to get a basic education. The church also needs to feed the saints at the Lord's table; after they come to the table, they still need spiritual food to nourish them. Even at the end of the prayer meeting the saints need some spiritual instruction. All these many needs are very evident.

It is the elders' responsibility to prepare all the messages for these meetings. If you are not responsible for these meetings, then who else would be? If you would not be responsible for the meetings, then there is no need for you to be an elder. For this reason I recently told the elders that some among them should be removed from the leadership. For many years you have not done your duty. This word should warn anyone who is ambitious to be an elder. It is hard for anyone to be an elder. Everyone would like to be the president of the United States, but if you would be, you may suffer high blood pressure after three weeks.

You may think it is so easy to be an elder; you think you only need my consent to be an elder, without bearing any responsibility. To be an elder is not merely to make a meeting schedule and give some announcements at the end of the meeting. Even a young boy can do that. **You have to prepare the proper word as messages to be given in all the home meetings, in a big general meeting, in the classes teaching the truth, in the Lord's table meeting, at the prayer meeting, and for the gospel-preaching meeting. The elders must be the ones to do this.** Perhaps now many of you would resign, saying that you never realized the eldership was this way. I hope you would not resign. This word should be a help to you for you to realize the responsibility in the eldership in the recovery. It is not as in the denominations. Those in the denominations like to be voted to be an elder, to be a member of the board. When they are elected, they are elders only nominally. They hire people to do things for them. This is not the way in the Lord's recovery.

For this reason I felt burdened to call this urgent training. Nearly all the churches in the United States have heard what is happening in Taiwan. After hearing a little and listening to the tapes, you may simply begin to copy. That will not work. You must realize the contents of Book 7 in this series as the basic, unique item. Without this we are not qualified; we have no standing and even no right to copy what is happening in the Far East. Also, I want to make clear to all of you what the home meetings are, what being full time is, and what the teaching of the truth lessons should be. Every item is a hard thing and not so easy to carry out. Do not copy it lightly. Merely to copy does not work. You will only damage and jeopardize the entire move of the Lord. This is a desperate, life or death situation. It is up to the elders, the helpers, and the co-workers in your locality. Come together to pray and find a way to get one or more persons charged to prepare messages, a living word for each kind of meeting. This would not be a hard thing if you have the heart to do it, because we have the groceries in all the messages of the ministry.

However, you cannot simply pull out a message and apply it to a meeting. This does not work. The shoes will not fit the feet. You need to work, to labor. **The messages are only the groceries. You cannot put groceries on the dining table for people to eat. You need to do the cooking.** I have given you the crucial points of the fourteen Epistles of Paul. In every local church there must be at least one or two brothers to cook these points with some points from other messages as well. Then you may put out a message of two to four pages to use in the home meetings. Before the home meetings, you must train all the saints how to use these pages in a living way, not to read them, explain them, lecture on them, or give a sermon on them, but to speak them. Some of the saints will try to take the opportunity for a long utterance, to pour out all that is on their heart. This will waste the whole meeting and damage it. You have to restrict this, telling them that this message is about three pages, and should only take forty-five minutes. Within these forty-five minutes let all the attendants, perhaps ten or twelve, speak this one message on the three pages. Sometimes you may replace conversing with pray-reading. They may pray-read some crucial points, but it will still be a speaking.

No good minister among us could give a message as good as the one you select. Your selection will produce a living message, much better than a new message that anyone could give. To ask one to give a fresh message is to depend upon fortune. He may give you a good one, or he may give something else. However, to prepare such a message yourself from all these groceries will always be good. The rich groceries are here. What you need is the ability to select and cook. This will produce a good meal.

To invite someone to bring a meal to you is to rely upon fortune. It depends upon what he will bring. He may bring barbeque, yet one side may be raw. **You yourself must go to the rich groceries, message after message, pick up some good points, and put them together to make a living message, short, brief, yet to the point.** You must also train all the attendants to have the ability to use the message. This will be living, this will be enriching, and this will be very attractive. The key is your cooking. This is implied in Paul's word to Timothy, *"Let the elders who take the lead well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in word and teaching"* (1 Tim. 5:17).

In 2 Timothy 2:2 Paul says, *"And the things which you have heard from me through many witnesses, these commit to faithful men, who will be competent to teach others also."* In those ancient times Timothy may have kept a written record of Paul's speaking. To write down what he heard and learned of Paul and to pass it on to others was his cooking. What I am teaching here, I have considered very much, and it is according to the holy Word. I would not speak this if it had no ground in the Word.

In 2 Timothy 2:15 Paul says, *"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, an unashamed workman, cutting straight the word of the truth."* Cutting straight the word of the truth is the cooking. As an unashamed workman, you have to cut the word straight as in carpentry. When you pass on the word to others, you should not simply present the word as a whole. **You have to cut it, that is, to cook it. If you expect to have a living church in your locality with prevailing home meetings, it is crucial for you to prepare a living**

message every week that will be very applicable, useful, and prevailing. Do not merely pick up a Life-study message and use the first paragraph on the page. That will not work. You cannot simply buy groceries and place them unprepared on the table. You need the cooking. This must be your labor as elders. Otherwise, you had better all resign and give place to others to let them come in to try. Do not remain there to delay the Lord. See whether others could do it, even if you have to use the young people. I have been considering to bring the young people into this work and let them try. If the first generation cannot do it, let the second generation do it. Even my grandchildren can do many things much better than I can. There is such a need to have the prevailing home meetings, but the key, the crucial point, is the preparation of a living message.

In a city in which you have more than twenty homes, it would be hard to find twenty capable speakers to attend all the home meetings to give a living message. It would be impossible to work out. But thank the Lord, because we have so many rich groceries, it is easy to cook a meal and distribute this meal to every home. If your church is small and very close to another one, two or three churches could work together to prepare the same living message that will be good for all of you. I would not prepare such messages for all the churches and charge the churches to read the same message. Each of the many churches in this country needs a different kind of spiritual help each Lord's Day. Different churches on different Lord's Days need a different supply. You cannot serve the same kind of meal to everyone in a hospital. To those with stomach trouble you need to serve a certain kind of meal. For those with heart problems you need another kind of meal. You must have different meals to feed different people. Only you as the elders in your locality know what kind of meals your family needs. No one else knows your family's need. I considered this quite much. This must be done by each respective local church. The family cooking must be done by the family, each one respectively. Although in principle all the local churches should be the same, in this aspect all the churches could not be the same.

You must not simply have two weeks of training and immediately begin to practice the home meetings. You must prepare a living, applicable, and very attractive message. You need much prayer, much investigation, and much study in all the messages. The good cooks study their groceries very much. They study which vinegar to use. Different vinegars make different tastes. Cooking is not so easy. You are serving the church as elders. I have no intention to rebuke you, to control you, or to command you. Rather, I am serving you all as an old father serves his family. You should do the same thing to serve the saints.

For a mother to serve the family by cooking is not an easy thing. My wife serves me every day. She has to decide every day what she should serve, what will be nutritious and easy to digest. The elders must pick up this responsibility. Otherwise, you should not expect to have a living church in your locality; it would be impossible. First Timothy 3:1 says, *"If anyone aspires to the overseership, he desires a good work."* I encourage you all to aspire, but I condemn any kind of ambition without the sense of responsibility.

You must prepare a good message for the general meeting. To merely charge one person to do it is not adequate. It is too heavy for one to bear. The best way is for all the elders, the helpers, and the co-workers to work together to prepare a living message and charge a particular one to deliver this message in a living way. The way to deliver or present the message should be discussed and fellowshiped among those who prepare it. Be assured you will have a good message. This will edify you as the elders, the helpers, and the co-workers.

Do not say that you could only do what has been done in the past. For twenty years you may have done things in the same way. However, in today's world everything is improving. Terminate the old way, and take a new way. We need to improve. Do something in a fresh way, in the newness of life. Life grows every day, so newness belongs to life. If we remain in one way, this indicates that we are not in life. If we are in life, we are being renewed every day.

You need to prepare a message for the end of the Lord's table to nourish the attendants. They will not receive much if they only take the bread, drink the wine, and have some spiritual prayers. **You need to feed them something solid with a living message. Simply take half an hour, and leave some time for them to share. Without such a solid message there will only be the sharing of the saints.** They will tire of doing this week after week. Every Lord's Day at the end of the table meeting, we need something solid to feed the attendants. This will attract them to come back. It is the same with the prayer meeting. This is why the prayer meeting is reducing in size. When we met in Elden hall, from ninety to one hundred percent of the saints were in the prayer meeting. Now less than one-fourth attend many of the church prayer meetings. I have attended some meetings and counted the number. If out of two hundred saints forty would be in the prayer meeting, some would be excited. This is the poor situation. You should not blame them for not coming. Their coming is somewhat in vain. They come simply to hear some repeated prayers. Every week they nearly pray the same thing. Although the words may be different, in principle, the prayers are always the same. Who would want to attend this meeting?

BEING DESPERATE ABOUT THE CURRENT SITUATION

For years the situation has remained the same, but what elders would consider it and spend some time to be desperate, to fellowship together, to fast, to pray, and to have a thorough fellowship with all the attendants of the church? **Let us fellowship about the prayer meeting, whether we should have it or not. If we should, then let us all come. If we should not have it, dig it out and throw it away. Be serious.** We should hate to see this going on, all the time the same, with no change, while no one is caring for the situation. **The elders must certainly do a lot. In the meeting one may stand up to speak five times, speaking vanity. This is the right time for you to "control," but you would not do it. At the wrong time you control the wrong things, yet at the right time you do not control the right things.** You are afraid to offend people. You would like for all the saints to feel good about you so that you could be the elder. **If I am wrong, please forgive me, but how else could you explain the situation?** When one stands up speaking in a poor way, the elders

would allow this poor situation to go on for fifteen minutes or more. I have seen this, and it greatly bothered me. After such a meeting I walked home, hanging my head. Is this the church meeting? Where are the elders? Where is the Spirit, and where are the riches of Christ? There are such incidents that I could speak of.

Have a time to get together, or even separately to reconsider your way. You may sow much, but you reap little. Not much blessing can be seen in the meetings in your church. There must be a reason. The reason is altogether wrapped up with the elders. I do not blame the saints; I blame all you elders. You must bear the burden. You must be held responsible for the situation. If you would be so faithful to what I have fellowshipped with you in these few messages, a big increase will come in, and many backsliders will be brought back. Many who have not come to the meetings for a long time will show up. Even the prayer meeting will be full of people. *Elders' Training, Book 08: The Life-Pulse of the Lord's Present Move, Chapter 4*