

THE VITAL GROUP (1)

Scripture Reading:

Acts 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles, in the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Acts 2:46-47 And day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they partook of their food with exultation and simplicity of heart, praising God and having grace with all the people. And the Lord added together day by day those who were being saved.

- I. The vital group cannot be formed by organization.**

- II. The vital group could come into being only by a saint who is desperate and absolute for the increase of the Lord's recovery.**

- III. Such a desperate saint would spontaneously contact others by the Lord's leading and gain some companion or companions for him to have a vital group.**

- IV. They should definitely and absolutely fulfill the first four basic requirements:**
 - A. Intimately and thoroughly fellowship that they may be blended together.
 - B. Thorough confession of sins, transgressions, defects, wrongdoings, etc.
 - C. Thorough consecration of themselves and of all that they have and do to the Lord.
 - D. Praying unceasingly that they may be brought into the infilling and the outpouring of the essential and economical Spirit.

- V. They should pick up the burden and take the action to contact others, either sinners or Christians:**
 - A. Always taking care of two or three persons.
 - B. Not expecting to have a quick results, but setting a definite goal with a strong determination to gain at least one remaining fruit yearly.
 - C. With inexhaustible patience and unceasing intercession.

- VI. Build up a habit to contact people:**
 - A. Contacting people by telephone.

- B. Contacting people before and after the meetings.
- C. Inviting people home for the love feast.
- D. Going out to visit people weekly.

Reference: *Fellowship Concerning the Urgent Need of the Vital Groups*, Chapter 24; *Concerning the Lord's Recovery and Our Present Need*, Chapter 7 (not yet publish); *The Training and the Practice of the Vital Groups*, Chapter 6.

Excerpts from the Ministry:**A WORD OF BURDEN**

To have the vital groups should not be taken as a kind of movement. To be vital, to be vitalized, is an extremely personal matter. It is only possible to be vitalized if you yourself are pressed by the Lord to pursue Him desperately and absolutely in this matter. After being vitalized, you should not have a gathering of many saints to promote or to push this matter as a movement. After being vitalized, the only thing you should do is to seek the Lord's leading concerning whom you should contact among so many saints. You should absolutely follow the Lord's leading, and even His guidance, to contact others and fellowship with them, not more than two or three at a time. You have to give your testimony of how you have been pressed by the Lord to seek Him in the matter of vitalization. You have to initiate a thorough and intimate fellowship with your contact, which will usher you and your contact into prayers of desperation, which will be honored by the Lord.

You should also lead your contact to make thorough confessions to the Lord and also help him to pay the price at any cost as you have done. By this way a small group would spontaneously come into existence which will be vital, would spontaneously come into existence which will be vital, living, and active in the Lord's interest. When the number of such a vital group increases to ten or more, you should split it into two groups and charge every member in this kind of group to practice the vitalization along the same track as you have been doing all the time.

Since you have been vitalized and have raised up such vital groups, you should pray for the church and the leading ones. As the Lord leads, you should give testimonies in the church meetings, but not in the way of condemning or of promoting or pushing. Avoid the thought to change the church's way of meeting and service. Do not initiate any movement of changes. Prayer is needed, but any thought for any radical change must be avoided. After you get vitalized, do not despise anyone, especially the leading ones, the elderly ones, and the ones who are used to rendering help to others. Do not look down on the weaker ones, the indifferent ones, and the ones that seem to be without any care for spiritual things. In conclusion, you should not expect to see that the church is altogether uniform and unified according to your view and practice. The church is not artificial by man's doing, but organic in the growth of the divine life with the growth of Christ in the believers.

THE VITAL GROUPS CANNOT BE FORMED BY ORGANIZATION

Today we must admit that the deadness of Sardis and the lukewarmness of Laodicea have come into the Lord's recovery. We need to condemn the condition of Sardis among us and also abhor the situation of Laodicea. We need to hate these things, and we also need to get out of these things. This is not a common thing but a matter of life and death facing the whole recovery. It is a life and death matter that we all must be vitalized. (*The Blending Conference Message 1993 Concerning the Lord's Recovery and Our Present Need, pp.142-143*)

The vital groups cannot be formed by organization. We can testify from our experience that the way of forming vital groups by organization does not work well. Anything that is organic cannot be formed by organizing. Something that is organic can come into being only in a spontaneous and organic way. We need a drastic change in our concept. We should not attempt to organize vital groups by neighborhood, geography, language, or some other factor. This is not the way to be vital. In forming the vital groups, the first thing that we need is to be vital.

**A VITAL GROUP CAN COME INTO BEING
ONLY BY A SAINT WHO IS DESPERATE AND ABSOLUTE
FOR THE INCREASE OF THE LORD'S RECOVERY**

A vital group can come into being only by a saint who is desperate and absolute for the increase of the Lord's recovery. A vital group begins with one person. It does not begin with nine or ten persons; it begins with one vital saint. We all need to tell the Lord, "Lord, I want to be that saint, a saint who is desperate and absolute for the increase of the Lord's recovery."

...According to our experience, when we are desperate and absolute for the increase of the church, we have a burden to be vital. If we do not care for the increase but rather are content to see the number in the church remain the same year after year, there is no reason to be vital. We desire to be vital for a purpose, for a goal, and that is for the increase of the Lord's recovery. For this we need to be desperate and we need to be absolute. To be vital we need to begin by taking this matter as life or death. If we take anything as life or death, we are vital in that thing. We need to be desperate and absolute for the increase of the Lord's recovery; then we will be vital.

**SUCH A DESPERATE SAINT WOULD SPONTANEOUSLY CONTACT OTHERS BY THE
LORD'S LEADING**

Such a desperate saint would spontaneously contact others by the Lord's leading and gain some companion or companions for him to have a vital group. A vital group cannot be formed by promoting or by gibing a message or by exhorting the saints to form vital groups. A vital group can be formed only by a saint who is vital. By the Lord's leading such a vital saint will find some others to be his companions. These will then come together to have intimate and thorough fellowship and begin to vitalize one another. In this way the genuine vital groups will be formed and produced in the church life from within. May the Lord give us this kind of desperation and this kind of absoluteness.

**THOSE IN THE VITAL GROUPS DEFINITELY
AND ABSOLUTELY FULFILLING
THE FIRST FOUR BASIC REQUIREMENTS**

There are four basic requirements that we must take care of in order to become vital and to be sustained in our vitality. We must be definite and absolute to fulfill these requirements.

Intimate and Thorough Fellowship That We May Be Blended Together

The first requirement is for the intimate and thorough fellowship that we may be blended together. The basis of our blending, the foundation of our blending, is our fellowship, and our fellowship must be intimate and thorough. We need to have an intimate and thorough fellowship in Christ as the element and sphere by exercising our spirit with much and thorough prayer, concerning our status, spiritual condition, and present situation in and with the Lord. Such fellowship is the flowing, the current, of the oneness. We need to have this kind of fellowship for the sake of being blended together into one accord. The way to be blended is by much and thorough prayer, as fine flour of the wheat, with all the members of our group, with the Spirit as the oil, through the death of Christ as the salt, and in the resurrection of Christ as the frankincense, into a dough for the Lord (I Cor. 5:6-7a; Lev. 2:1-13). If by the Lord's mercy we are able to experience such a blending, we will be absolutely different from what we are today.

The New Testament tells us that we, as the many grains of wheat (John 12:24) become one lump (I Cor. 5:6-7a) and eventually we become a loaf (I Cor. 10:17). After we become a loaf, we mean something and we are something in the hand of the Lord. The loaf is the group. At the Lord's table, we often praise the Lord for the loaf, the bread, yet in actuality we may not be a loaf. As the grains of wheat, we have not been ground, broken, and blended together. The way to become a loaf is to be blended together in the groups by the intimate and thorough fellowship with much and thorough prayer.

Thorough Confession of Sins, Transgressions, Defects, Wrongdoings, Etc.

The second point is that we need to have a thorough confession of our sins, transgressions, defects, wrongdoings, etc. We need to confess the sin of individualism and individuality. We also need to confess our sinful nature, its defilements, its attachment to the contamination of the world, and its oldness, asking for the Lord's cleansing with His precious blood. All of these things concerning our sinful nature related to our fallen human being and our natural man become real hindrances to the blending, so our confession is a real need for the vital groups. We need to have the thorough fellowship, and we also need to confess all of the hindrances that we may be blended together into one accord.

Thorough Consecration of Themselves and of All That They Have and Do to the Lord

In order to be vital persons and have the vital groups, we must be desperate. We need to be the vital persons, the overcomers, to rescue the church from its degradation. The Lord will gain what He desires through His overcomers. To be such people we need to put aside our personal interests, our care for the necessities of this life, and make a strong resolution and an absolute consecration to the Lord. Second Timothy 2:4 says that no soldier entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please the one who

enlisted him. If we are going to be vital-persons, we must clear away all earthly entanglements.

**Praying Unceasingly That They May Be Brought
into the Infilling and the Outpouring of the Essential and Economical Spirit**

The secret to being filled with the Spirit inwardly and outwardly is our prayer. We need to be desperate in our prayer.... We need to pray, "Lord, make me vital! Make me living and active! I want to be a factor for the increase of the Lord's recovery." We also should pray desperately, "Lord, fill me up. Transfuse Yourself as the Spirit into my being, my constitution, and pour Yourself out as the Spirit of power upon me." In order to be brought into the infilling and the outpouring of the essential and economical Spirit, we need to pray unceasingly (I Thes. 5:17) by exercising our spirit (I Tim. 4:7) to redeem the time (Eph. 5:16).

**THEY SHOULD PICK UP THE BURDEN AND TAKE ACTION
TO CONTACT OTHERS, EITHER SINNERS OR CHRISTIANS**

After we become vital and are grouped together in the vital groups, we need to do something... we need to pick up a burden, and then we need to take action to contact people...Once we are living, we also need to be burdened and we need to take action to contact people. We should make a list of those who are unsaved among our relatives, friends, colleagues, and classmates, and we should begin to pray for them in a desperate way. While we are praying for them, we need to exercise our discernment according to the leading of the Spirit to select two or three from our list for us to work on for their salvation. We should have the loving concern of God's heart for the salvation of sinners, and we should be burdened not just to save souls but to convert sinners into members of the Body of Christ for the carrying out of God's economy. The Lord may lead us not only to contact sinners but also to contact some Christians who are seeking, backslidden, or dormant, and gradually, little by little and step by step, to lead them into the church life. We must believe that there are some people in our sphere of influence who are being worked on by the sanctifying Spirit to separate them unto the Lord. They need us to pick up a burden and to take definite action to go and contact them.

In our contacting of people, we should not expect to have a quick result. Rather, we should set a definite goal with a strong determination to gain at least one remaining fruit yearly, with inexhaustible patience and unceasing intercession... because we still expected a quick result and did not see that kind of result, many of us became discouraged and dormant regarding the contacting of people. This shows that we do not have the proper concept concerning the way to gain the increase.

According to John 15:16, we have been chosen by the Lord and set by Him to go forth and bear remaining fruit. Fruit-bearing is our destiny, and to bear remaining fruit every year must be our definite goal with a strong determination. However, in order to do this, we must not be loose or idle. Before the season for fruit-bearing comes, the vine tree is not idle. On the contrary, it is producing the fruit. While we are waiting for the season to come, we need to produce the fruit. We need to live a certain kind of life. First, we need to abide in the Lord through unceasing prayer in intimate fellowship with Him (w. 4-5). To abide

in the Lord is to live in the Lord under all kinds of suffering. The vine suffers for many months before the season comes to bear fruit. Like the vine, we should expect to bear fruit only in season and through much suffering.

Second, in order to bear remaining fruit, we need to labor diligently and pray desperately and unceasingly. We should exercise ourselves to always have two or three persons under our care so that one of these could be remaining fruit at the end of a year. As we labor on these people, we should not be anxious or be in a hurry concerning their progress. Instead, as we labor on them, we should enjoy Christ as our inexhaustible patience. We must keep in mind that the vital groups need to gain the proper increase through much prayer and labor. As we pray for people, we should not be discouraged or disappointed but should have the full assurance that at the proper time the Lord will answer our prayer and fulfill His word to us. If we live properly prior to the season of fruit-bearing, we can be assured that at the end of every year we will have one or two as remaining fruit. This is the God-ordained way of fruit-bearing. May the Lord carry this out fully in all the vital groups. (pp.143-153)

BUILD UP A HABIT TO CONTACT PEOPLE

Today the church's need is shepherding. My burden is to stir you up that you may realize that today the Lord's recovery needs you to rise up to contact people. You have to build up a habit. If you do not contact people, you cannot be satisfied. You should even become addicted to the Lord's love to take care of His people.

I want to remind you to make a list of all your acquaintances. You may think that you do not know that many people, but when you make a list, you may find out that you have over a hundred people whom you know. You should pray over these names, seeking the Lord's leading as to whom you should contact. Sometimes when you contact someone, you may feel that he is the wrong person. But according to my experience, no contacts are wrong. Do not say that you caught a fish which is the wrong fish. No fish is wrong, as long as it was hooked by you. The only thing that is wrong is for you not contact people.

We can also see from George Müller's autobiography that no person would not believe in the Lord Jesus if you keep contacting him continuously for your whole life.

From now on we all have to run the race by practicing to contact people. This is not an easy thing, because we do not have this habit and practice. We need to have a change in our natural being. We should not excuse ourselves by saying that we were born to be a certain way, but we have been regenerated. Our being generated made us an old creation, but in regeneration God has made us a new creation, so we must be new persons.

After regeneration, we experience transformation. Transformation is not an outward correction or adjustment, but an inward, metabolic change. A number of us were born as persons who cannot contact people easily. But this training requires us to have an inward change, a transformation. We need to pray, "Lord, grant me to have a change in contacting people. I don't like to contact people. I don't like to be invited by others to contact them, nor do I like to invite people to contact me. I don't have this kind of

disposition. Lord, You know I don't have this capacity. So You have to transform me, Lord." We have to cooperate with the Lord to be transformed.

Contacting People By Telephone

I would propose that from tomorrow morning you begin to contact people by using the telephone. Before you drive away from your home, you can make at least one phone call to someone. This will begin to build you up with a habit to contact people, to know people, and to become interested in people.

Contacting People Before and After the Meetings

After the Lord's Day morning meeting is also a good time to contact people. I have observed that many brothers and sisters contact only their familiar acquaintances after the meeting. They do not go to contact the new ones in the meeting. Thus, the new ones are left as orphans. Before the meeting and after the meeting we should create an intimate and loving atmosphere in the hall. When the new ones come in, they should be able to sense the warm care and intimacy among us. A new one may not have even heard the gospel yet. He may not even have believed yet. But he will be impressed with loving atmosphere, the intimate atmosphere, among the saints in the meeting hall.

When we contact the saints and the new ones in this way, it helps us to function in the meeting; it makes it easier for us to prophesy. Suppose I come every Lord's Day morning, yet I do not contact anyone, and no one contacts me. Then every face looks cold to me. When I stand up to prophesy, to speak for the Lord, it is difficult because the people seem so cold. After speaking a little in such a cold atmosphere, it will be hard for me to continue. But if everyone is so familiar to me, some will smile at me while I am sharing. Their smiling tells me to "sail on" in my speaking for the Lord. We must have such an atmosphere in the church meeting, an atmosphere in which people know that we really love one another. We are really a big, loving, intimate family with brothers, sisters, and parents. Some older ones are really our parents in the Lord (Rom. 16:13; 1Cor. 4:15). (*The Training and the Practice of the Vital Groups*, pp. 65-67)

Inviting People to Home to Have Love Feast

We should also try to invite people to our home....The Lord's blessing will follow us if we practice this in a loving and intimate way. If a brother received a number of invitations every week, he might not be able to go, but these invitations would encourage him and make him buoyant....When we invite others to our home, we do not have to prepare a rich feast. We should just prepare a simple meal. We are not getting together for eating. We are coming together for blending. When we come together, we talk about the Lord....

Going out to Visit People Weekly

If certain saints are not coming to the church meetings, we can begin to visit them once a week or once a month in a regular way according to what their situation allows. We can give them some copies of the gospel tracts we have published. We can read a phrase or a paragraph to them. May be this will stir them up and give them a desire to come to the meetings. There are many ways to shepherd people. My point is this-

we need to build up a habit of contacting others. We should not be limited in our contact. If we have the burden to visit our relatives and acquaintances who are unbelievers, we should do this. We need to practice this one lesson-to contact people. (pp.73-74)

BLENDED TOGETHER WITH PEOPLE TO BECOME A LOAF

The New Testament...tells us that eventually we all become a loaf (I Cor. 10:17). In a sense, the grains, the fine flour, the lump, and the dough are nothing until they become a loaf. After we become a loaf, we mean something and we are something in the hand of the Lord. The loaf is the group. At the Lord's table, we often praise the Lord for the loaf, the bread, yet in actuality we may not be a loaf. A number of saints among us may never have been ground or broken. Although we are grains, it is possible that we have never been broken and ground into fine flour. On the other hand, we may be broken, yet we may never have been blended together. Thus, we are far from being a loaf. The way to become a loaf is to be blended together in the groups. The loaf is the group.

The way to be blended is by much and thorough prayer, as fine flour of the wheat, with all the members of our group, with the Spirit as the oil, through the death of Christ as the salt, and in the resurrection of Christ as the frankincense. We need to pray over all these points with much and thorough prayer. We need to be blended into a dough for the Lord. Our becoming dough implies our being broken, our being ground, and our being blended. According to the type of the meal offering in Leviticus 2:1-13, to be blended requires the adding of oil so that the flour will not be dry. It is impossible to blend fine flour that is dry; oil is needed to make the flour moist. In the same way, we need the Spirit as the oil to "moisten" us so that we can be blended together.

To be blended together, we also need the salt, that is, the death of Christ, to kill all the germs within us. We need to realize that we have many germs in our being. All these germs need to be killed by the death of Christ. Then, we also need to be in the resurrection of Christ. In the blending we need to experience the Spirit as the oil, and we also need to pass through the experiences of the death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ. If by the Lord's mercy we are able to experience such a blending, we will be absolutely different from what we are today. It is not enough just to put people together and call them a group. That can be done very quickly. The proper grouping with the blending of the members will take time.

In order to be blended together, we need to confess the sin of individualism and individuality. Our individualism is a kind of principle, a kind of policy, with us. Every one of us has his own policy, his own human logic. Our individualism becomes our logic. The educational system in America educates the young people to be individuals. The logic of being an individual, or the logic of individualism, is a sin in the eyes of God. We need to condemn individualism and individuality. In our church life we may be full of individuality. We may not care for others but may care only for ourselves. Even though we may love others, we may not care for others. In loving others we may still care for ourselves. This is individuality. We need to confess this sin. As long as such germs remain within us, we cannot be one and we cannot be blended.

To be blended by the Lord, we also need to confess all our defects, shortcomings, wrongdoings, mistakes, transgressions, trespasses, outward sins, and inward evils. We need not only to confess these things but also to ask for the Lord's forgiveness. The New Testament is full of the promise of the Lord's forgiveness (Acts 2:38; 10:43; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; I John 1:9). The Lord is willing to forgive and even to forget (Heb. 8:12), but we need to confess. We should make a thorough confession so that we can be forgiven and justified. Then we can be blended.

We also need to confess our sinful nature, its defilements, its attachment to the contamination of the world, and its oldness, and ask for the Lord's cleansing with His precious blood. Although we have been regenerated, we still have the old sinful nature with its defilements and its attachment to the contamination of the world. Our inward filthy nature is easily attached to the outward world. The reason that we are so easily attracted to the department stores is that within us something corresponds with the department stores. The department store managers have prepared the merchandise in their stores to correspond with our sinful nature. We all need to experience the death and resurrection of Christ to annul our sinful nature with its defilements and its attachment to the contamination of the world.

We also need to confess the oldness of our sinful nature. As long as we are natural, we are old. We need to confess all this and then ask for the Lord's cleansing with His precious blood. We need the Lord's forgiveness, and we also need His cleansing. Forgiveness is to justify us, whereas cleansing is to purify us, to make us clean. Then we can be Mended.

We also need to confess our dispositional problems and our peculiarity in our character. We have many problems because of our disposition. All these problems prevent us from being blended together. We also have our peculiarity in our character. In general, a rough person does not have many peculiarities; the more fine a person is, the more peculiarities he has. The peculiar traits in our character also prevent us from being blended with others.

We also need to deny our self, our habit, and our old way of doing things (Matt. 16:24). This will afford us the way to be blended together.

Furthermore, we need to love all the members of our group with an equal love. It is common for us to prefer certain saints over others. This shows that we do not love all the saints with an equal love. Philippians 2:2 says that we should have the same love for all the saints.

To build up the vital groups, we need to keep the oneness of the Spirit, that is, the oneness of the Body, in the one accord according to the Lord's desire with much and thorough prayer (Eph. 4:3; Acts 1:14; 4:24). Without the one accord we cannot keep the oneness. The one accord is the heart, the kernel, of the oneness.

To keep the oneness of the Spirit we need to condemn all the self-exalting views and drop all the divisive opinions. We all have some self-exalting views. Some of the saints may feel confident that they are more knowledgeable and can do things better than the elders of the church. This is self-exaltation. Every member of the church, whether old or young, has some self-exalting views. Whoever has a self-exalting view surely has opinions. No one is without opinion. We need to condemn all the self-exalting views and

drop all the divisive opinions.

To keep the oneness of the Body in the one accord, we need to forsake all self-preferences and disregard all personal tastes. The sisters are often stronger in the matter of personal tastes than the brothers. Our self-preferences and personal tastes are a great hindrance to the keeping of the oneness of the Body.

Finally, to keep the oneness of the Spirit, we need to follow the Spirit's direction and respect our fellow members' feeling. Regardless of our view or opinion, we should always follow the Spirit. We must turn to the spirit to follow the direction of the Holy Spirit within us, and we must respect and take care of others' feeling.

For the building up of the vital groups, we need to make, with much and thorough prayer, a corporate Nazarite's consecration for the Lord (Num. 6:1-4). We need to do this until we are blended, until we become dough. All the members of a group should come together to consecrate themselves as one entity, as a group of Nazarites, to give the Lord a corporate consecration.

We need to let the Lord gain our whole group as one entity for the carrying out of His New Testament economy. Our corporate consecration should not be to fulfill any kind of formal duty, but to serve the Lord according to the organic leading of the Spirit. (*Fellowship Concerning the Urgent Need of the Vital Groups*, pp.81-86)

Questions:

1. 1. How to form a vital group?
2. 2. What are the four basic requirements we need to fulfill after we have formed a vital group?
3. 3. How to pick up the burden and take action to contact people?