

LEARNING TO PROPHECY ORGANICALLY THROUGH THE PRACTICE OF THE GROUPS

- A vital group is a group of normal Christians who build up the Body of Christ by prophesying
- All believers have the capacity to prophesy, to speak forth Christ
- In the group meetings we should learn to speak for the Lord by mutually asking and answering questions; thus we will learn to prophesy organically and spontaneously minister Christ to others

What a Vital Group Is

Now I would like to ask, “What is a vital group?” You may say that a vital group is a group that is living, burning, and bearing fruit. But this may be a doctrinal answer without vision. Actually, a vital group is a group of normal Christians. Today most Christians are abnormal, including a number of us in the recovery. My burden in endeavoring to carry out the vital groups is to change the generation.

After reconsidering the holy Word, we found out the way in which Christians should serve and meet. This is the God-ordained way, the way ordained by God in the Bible. This way ordained by God has four steps.

After the begetting stage, the nourishing stage, and the teaching stage comes the building stage. After you graduate from a four-year college, you have to do some business. Our business in the church life is to build up the church of Christ, the Body of Christ, by prophesying. This is fully developed and presented in 1 Corinthians 14. The church is not built by one minister, one preacher, speaking all the time. This concept came from Satan to spoil the Body of Christ, to nullify the headship of Christ, and to make the church nothing. The practice of one man speaking and the rest listening does not build up the church, the Body of Christ. Instead, it builds up a hierarchy, a kind of religious system with rank and position. In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul says that we should all desire to prophesy, to speak for the Lord (v. 1). Paul says that we can all prophesy (v. 31). To prophesy in 1 Corinthians 14 means to speak for the Lord and to speak forth Christ. We need the variety from many saints speaking in the meetings. After a new one gets baptized, he can say, “Praise the Lord Jesus! I love Him. He is so good to me.” In a family it is good to hear all the members of different ages speak, from the young children to the grandparents. The church life should be like this.

Thus, we have seen that God's ordained way has four stages: the stages of begetting, feeding, teaching, and building. Nearly everyone in the recovery likes the God-ordained way, but when we actually begin to practice it step by

step, we will be a changed generation. We will get out of the old generation and become a new generation. This is what I expect to see in the recovery—a change of generation. We must get out of the deadness, lukewarmness, and barrenness. We must get out of the oldness, the staleness. We must get out of the routine, the formality, the silence, and the prayers of the traditional way. We hate deadness, lukewarmness, and barrenness. We are struggling to fight them down. We need a change from the old way to the new way, from the old age to the new age in God's ordained way with four steps: begetting, feeding, teaching, and building. We need a change of generation. (*The Training and the Practice of the Vital Groups*, Chapter 6)

All Believers Having the Capacity to Prophecy

First Corinthians 14:31 says, “You can all prophesy one by one.” This verse is one of the clearest verses in the entire Bible. It says that all the believers have the capacity to prophesy. Capacity denotes an ability by birth. Dogs do not have the capacity to speak human language; they have the capacity only to bark. Human beings, however, have the capacity to speak. We, as members of the Body of Christ, all can prophesy one by one. Romans 12:6-8 mentions seven gifts, including prophecy, and says that these gifts differ according to the grace given to each member. These verses, however, refer to the exercise of the gifts outside the meetings. In the Body of Christ we have different gifts and functions outside the meetings. The gifts in Romans 12 are not the gifts exercised in the meetings. In the meetings all the members can prophesy (1 Cor. 14:24, 31).

Many saints among us may feel that all can prophesy except them. However, there are no exceptions. We may not be eloquent, but we can still prophesy. Verse 31 does not say, “You can all prophesy eloquently.” There is no such adverb in this verse. It simply says, “You can all prophesy.” It does not matter how we speak; it is sufficient simply to speak. The Lord wants all of us to speak.

To my observation, only a small percentage of the saints regularly speak forth Christ. In each Lord's Day morning meeting, many saints do not speak, but after the meeting they have much to say. We do not need to be concerned with how well we speak; we simply need to speak. Even if our grammar is poor, people will understand us. Many times we like to “save our face.” If we do speak, we desire to be the top speaker. However, we do not need top speakers; we simply need speakers. We all can prophesy one by one. (*The Practice of Prophesying*, Chapter 1)

The Organic Practice of the Priests of the Gospel Accomplishing God's Purpose

In the previous [sections], we have seen clearly that God's desire in the New Testament is that every saved one be a priest of the gospel. First, we need to go and preach the gospel to gain sinners that they may be regenerated so that we may offer them to God as sacrifices. After this we need to pick up the burden to go to their homes regularly to nourish and cherish them that they may receive the life supply and grow in the spiritual life until they can present themselves to God as living sacrifices. Then we need to continue to carry out in them the work of teaching and perfecting. This requires us to bring them to the small group meetings to have contact and fellowship with the saints that they may open themselves up to the saints to receive mutual care and supply. In such a small group meeting everyone has the equal opportunity and right to open his mouth to speak, to ask questions, and to answer questions. Everyone also can teach others and be taught by others. The questions asked are mainly of two categories: one category concerns the divine truths in the Bible, and the other category concerns our Christian pursuit and growth in life. It is best to have such a small group meeting once a week. For fifty-two weeks in a year, all should come together weekly to fellowship, minister, ask questions, answer questions, teach, and learn. In this way we can gradually enter into the knowledge of the truth and the growth in life. As a result, we will be perfected to do the same work that the gifted ones do, with all of us carrying out our respective functions for the building up of the Body of Christ.

In the stage of perfecting, we need to help others to exercise and learn to speak for the Lord, that is, to prophesy. This is not to gossip or speak ordinary words. Instead, this is to speak concerning Christ and to minister Christ, to speak forth God's eternal purpose, plan, and economy, and to speak forth the proper spiritual living and the spiritual experiences, which we who belong to the Lord should have. This is to prophesy according to the biblical revelation in coordination with our own experience of life and in conjunction with the instant inspiration that we receive. Hence, this kind of prophesying is organic and in the Spirit, not mechanical or according to doctrines and reasonings in letters. Such organic prophesying and spiritual speaking spontaneously minister Christ to others and release the light of truth so that people may receive enlightenment and life supply. This is not limited to two or three people, but all attendants have the equal opportunity and the same right to speak. Hence, prophesying is everyone speaking and everyone listening; it is mutual speaking and mutual listening.

In such a meeting for prophesying, at least over half of the attendants can speak. This does not mean that the others may not speak, but because of time not everyone may have the opportunity to speak. If someone does not have the opportunity on one occasion, he can wait for the next occasion to speak, if time allows. There may be some whose speaking is not rich or strong, but there will always be some who speak in a very rich and strong way. All the speakings are needed, whether they are deep or shallow, high or low, rich or poor. This is because a church meeting is not like a class in school. In a class all the students have the same status and are at the same level, but in a church meeting there are young ones, middle-aged ones, older ones, more advanced ones, and less advanced ones. All are blended together, and even the newly saved ones are encouraged to open their mouth to speak. Everyone presents what he has received of the Lord; in this there are true riches. Furthermore, everyone can receive much supply and edification from what is spoken, heard, taught, and learned. Then week after week the supply that we receive will be of a great variety, and the functions in which we are perfected will be extensive. (*The Church Life in the Lord's Recovery Today*, Chapter 5)

For our present church life we need three kinds of meetings. We need the home meetings in the new believers' homes to nourish and to cherish the new ones. We need the group meetings so that the saints can fellowship with one another, pray for one another, and take care of one another. In these group meetings, the saints can ask questions concerning the truth and concerning life, and everyone can answer these questions. Thus, in the group meetings everyone asks, everyone answers, everyone teaches, and everyone learns. After meeting in the group meetings in a regular way throughout the year, all the attendants will be taught with the truth and will be built up in life. Eventually, we will all reach the high peak of prophesying for the building up of the church. Prophesying is the highest attainment in our church life. (*The Advance of the Lord's Recovery Today*, Chapter 7)

Fellowship Questions:

1. What does it mean to be a normal Christian in the context of prophesying?
2. How could the traditional way of one man speaking affect our feeling concerning prophesying? Why do we need a "change of generation"? How does the way different members of a family speak illustrate the different kinds of speaking needed in the church?
3. What factors may hold you back from prophesying? How could your practice in the groups help to address some of these challenges?
4. In what ways can your group encourage and equip each member to function in the prophesying meeting?