

MULTIPLYING THE GROUPS

- We need to consider the condition and the function of the vital groups; the condition of the group is that the members are intimately related to one another, and the function is to visit sinners or dormant saints to gain them for the Lord; without the proper condition, the function will not have any impact
- When a group reaches 12-15 members, it is difficult to maintain the condition of the group, and therefore the function of the group gets lost
- We need to use the little power that the Lord has given to us to learn how to multiply the groups so that there can be more building and more increase in the church
- Splitting the groups regularly gives us a new start and keeps the vital groups from becoming our “new routine”

The Function and Condition of the Small Groups

[The small group meeting] is the most important meeting for the building up of the church. The function of this meeting is to sustain the brothers and sisters, to recover those who have not been meeting, and to bring in new ones. The ability of the church to increase depends on the condition of the small group meetings, because in the small group meetings there are mutual fellowship, care, shepherding, and exhortation, which constitute the base for the building up of the church.

There are presently three or four thousand brothers and sisters meeting regularly in the church in Taipei. In the past the church in Taipei had only eight to ten elders, and there was no way for them to care for so many people. Presently there are more than eighty elders, but there is still no way for them to adequately care for all the saints. Therefore, all the brothers and sisters must function in the small group meetings and bear the responsibility to feed and care for one another. It is easy for eight to ten people, who meet together once a week in a small group meeting, to know one another. Moreover, even if they do not have any feeling for one another, after meeting together two or three times, they will begin to care for one another, because human beings are social by nature and rich in emotions. They will know one another and care for one another's condition, health, and job. Instead of feeling as if they are strangers, they will be concerned for one another and

cherish one another. There will be a sweet feeling in the meeting. (*Three Crucial Matters for the Increase and Building Up of the Church*, Chapter 4)

It is best that a group meeting be started with a small number of persons. To start with too many persons makes it difficult to get thoroughly, intimately, and lovingly acquainted. However, with only two to five members it will be difficult to practice the proper function of the group, which needs to visit sinners and gain them for the Lord. It is better to have seven or eight in a group. After a period of time everyone will be acquainted with one another. Before this time we should not go out to work. We should first form ourselves into an acting, working, and moving group by getting acquainted, built up, and trained. Then we can begin to function by visiting people for the preaching of the gospel. In this way new ones can be gained gradually, one by one. If the group gains people little by little, it will not be difficult to follow up on and care for the new ones.

Seven can gain one more and become eight. Then eight can work together to gain another new one. It is easy for eight to care for one new one and thus become nine. Gradually, after working for six months, the group may have fifteen or sixteen. By that time everyone will be acquainted and trained. The group can then divide into two groups. After becoming two groups, everyone will be able to work because they have already become acquainted and have had practice and training. Every group will begin not with new beginners but with trained persons. These will be the foundation for the next generation, and that generation will be ready to go on. We should spend the first five or six months in the groups to get ourselves built up. After this we can double our number in the next half year. This will double the number in the groups. After this number doubles two more times, we will have at least a onefold increase of the whole church. Perhaps our progress will be slower than this, but we anticipate that this way will be successful if everyone will labor. (*Fellowship Concerning the Urgent Need of the Vital Groups*, Chapter 5)

Splitting a Group When It Reaches a Certain Size to Maintain its Condition and Function

On the average each of our groups has about eight persons. When you bring one to your group, this does not mean that he is vitalized yet. He or she is still not vitalized, but they may like to come to your vital group meeting. When we bring two more to join our group and we reach ten saints, we should divide our group into two groups of five each. Each of our vital group meetings presently has about eight members. When we gain two more and

reach ten members, we should divide. (*Fellowship Concerning the Urgent Need of the Vital Groups*, Chapter 24)

Our regular and adequate spiritual exercise is in the small group meetings. We must spend our energy on the small group meetings. The number of people in a small group meeting should not exceed ten. It is best if there are only seven or eight people. If the number in the meeting exceeds twelve people, the meeting should be split into two groups. Because human beings are social, it will not be easy for us to split a meeting after the saints meet together for a period of time. Initially, the members of a group might not know one another, but gradually they will feel that the meetings have flavor because they know one another, care for one another, and fan one another into flame. Gradually, their number may increase to twelve, fifteen, or even twenty. Then they will feel that it is difficult to split the meeting into two groups. However, a meeting that does not split into two groups will not spread. Therefore, the meeting must split. We hope that every home will have a meeting and that these meetings will flourish and split until the home of every brother and sister has a small group meeting. (*Three Crucial Matters for the Increase and Building Up of the Church*, Chapter 4). Please note that the reason the suggested size at which to split a group varies is because this is not a fixed rule but a principle to help the groups maintain their condition and function.

Taking this Way with Just a Little Power, Keeping His Word, and Not Denying His Name

I would like us to take note of a few points to help us go on with the Lord: (1) We all have had some start. (2) We need to improve, to grow, to mature. (3) We are used to analyzing, to lingering, and to doubting about what we have experienced, and we would not forget about what we have experienced and be brought on to maturity, to perfection.

We need to realize, however, that we are not worthy of being analyzed. We have to say, “Thank You, Lord, that You have afforded me the grace to learn the ‘ABCs.’” This is better than nothing. Yet we also have to say, “Lord, grant me further favor that I could learn more.” Maybe we have the feeling that we have not started so well. This kind of feeling, on the one hand, urges us to go on. Yet on the other hand, it is also a kind of hindrance, because we do not have the assurance that we have started.

Satan is subtle, and our self is also hard to deal with. No one among us can have a thorough, “one hundred percent,” start. No one among us can

have a repentance with a confession that is thorough to the uttermost. So we should not be disappointed, nor should we be contented. We can pray, “Lord, thank You. Since I heard the messages on the vital groups, I have started, Lord, by Your mercy, to repent and confess. Yet dear Lord, You know that my repentance needs to be improved, my confession needs to grow, and my whole practice in the vital groups needs to mature. I look to You to take me on.” I want to say again that the Lord is the One full of authority, full of power. He has the key, the power, to open the door that no one can shut, and He has the power to shut the door that no one can open. Yet He was so clear about the situation of His best church. Even His best church had only a little power. The Lord was satisfied with this. The Lord did not expect that this top church could have great power—just a little power. But why was the Lord so appreciative of this church? Because she had a little power and also kept His word and did not deny His name. We do have a little power, and we can pray, “Lord, thank You for Your mercy. We have started. Yet Lord, we still need more mercy. Have more and more mercy upon us that we could go on, that we could grow, that we could improve, and that we could mature.” (*The Training and the Practice of the Vital Groups*, Chapter 10)

The Lord has shown us that the only way for us to go on is to come back to His Word, and His Word tells us that He ordained a way in the New Testament for us to take. He has shown us that we cannot take this way as a form or a ritual. If we do, we are just dropping an old ritual and picking up a new one. You hate the old routine, but you love the new routine. We do not want to pick up another routine. This is why you have to go to the Lord directly. (*The Training and the Practice of the Vital Groups*, Chapter 9)

Fellowship Questions:

1. What is the function of the small groups? What is the condition of the groups? How are they related?
2. How is the function of a group connected to the number of saints in that group? What has been your experience in this matter?
3. Is your group increasing in number? Why do you think this is?
4. Has your group grown to a size that is too large to maintain an intimate atmosphere among the members? If so, how can you fellowship about caring for both the condition and function of the group?