

**BUILDING UP THE CHURCH LIFE IN THE HOMES
TRAINING AND EXERCISE (1)**

From Gospel Contacts to Vital Companions

**Hosts' Training Reference
Material (1)**

Name: _____

Church: _____

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A Word for the Hosts and Helpers— The Need for the Course

Let us first talk a little bit about the need for spiritual education. This is the main premise and the reason for why we are talking about new-believers' perfecting now. What is the importance and role of new-believers' perfecting? Before we talk about new believers' perfecting, we first talk about perfecting itself. What is the place of perfecting in the Lord's recovery, or in God's economy? We did not place enough emphasis on this matter before. A person's salvation and believing into the Lord is his receiving of the Lord's life. However, this life needs to grow. The growth of a Christian is the growth of this life. On the other hand, a person needs to be perfected in all aspects, not just in life, but also in truth. From the point of view of the physical life, if a person doesn't receive perfecting, but grows only in his physical life, then an aspect of his life is lacking. Thus, we must first see the importance of perfecting in the Lord's recovery and in God's economy.

First we need to know, when the Lord Jesus began to minister, much of His earthly ministry comprised of perfecting. In the gospel of Mark, right from the start He was the Man-Savior to fulfill His ministry of the gospel: first, to preach the gospel; second, to teach the truth, which teaching is a kind of perfecting; third, to cast out demons; fourth, to heal the sick. Mark 1:21 says, "And they went into Capernaum, and immediately, on the Sabbath, He entered into the synagogue and taught." The footnote on this verse says, "His teaching released the word of light to enlighten those in the darkness of death that they might receive the light of life." The Lord Jesus uses the way of teaching to put the word of life into man. This kind of teaching is not of death. The Slave of God became the Slave to the fallen man. In His ministry, what He carried out was, firstly, to preach the gospel, and secondly, to teach. Here we list all the examples of the Lord Jesus teaching in the gospel of Mark: Mark 2:13, 4:1; 6:2, 6, 30 and 34; 10:1, 11:17, 12:35, and 14:49. These are examples of the Lord Jesus educating the people. In other words, education is a big part of the Slave-Savior's earthly ministry. Then, in Matt. 28, as the Lord Jesus resurrected and ascended to the heavens, He gave His disciples a great commission to disciple the nations to be the Lord's disciples. In verse 20, the Lord Jesus instructed His disciples to "teach them", in other words, to educate these people. So one of the great commissions that the disciples received was education.

In the second half of 1996 in the last class of the Full-Time Training brother Lee conducted, His messages were on vital groups. In one of the messages, he said that

our shepherding of people needs to be of two aspects: first is shepherding; and second, teaching. Shepherding is to cherish people with love; teaching is to work all the points of the divine economy into the new ones. This is to educate His disciples in the constitution of the kingdom of the heavens, the outward appearance of the kingdom of the heavens, and the realization of the kingdom of the heavens. The constitution of the kingdom of the heavens is Matthew chapter 5 through chapter 7. The outward appearance of the kingdom of the heavens is found in Matthew 13. The realization of the kingdom of the heavens is Matthew 24 and 25. These are the materials the Lord Jesus taught, the contents of His teaching. He used these to teach. The gospel of John talks about how God entered into man to be mingled with man, producing an organism. This is another kind of teaching material for the spiritual education of His disciples. Therefore, the Lord Jesus' earthly ministry was to impart the spiritual truths, that is, the things that the disciples did not know, into them.

Last year during the Thanksgiving Conference, we spoke of the needs of the Lord's recovery in six aspects. The first need was to be purified. The first thing that the children of God needed after being recovered was to be purified, to remove all the unclean things. The second was the need for education. They did not know God's laws, so Ezra as the priest-scribe taught His people in God's laws. Thus we see that in God's economy, teaching is very important. Ephesians 4 speaks of the need for four kinds of gifts in the building up of the church: apostles to raise up churches, prophets to speak for God, evangelists to bring the new ones to salvation, and shepherds and teachers, which are two aspects of one kind of person. In other words, the two functions, shepherding and teaching are like the two legs, both are needed for walking. In the past among us, not only were we lacking in the shepherding of the new ones, but we were even more lacking in the teaching of the new ones. There are 'evangelists' among us, so it is not too hard to bring people to salvation. On all the major continents the Lord's recovery is well accepted, so it is not too big of a problem to preach the gospel. Prophesying is also not the biggest problem. Among us, we practice speaking for the Lord, and weekly we exercise to prophesy, to speak for the Lord. However the newly saved ones, those who were brought in by the 'evangelists', they encounter a gap between the time they are saved and the time when they become normal Christians. Until now we have not paid adequate attention to this gap. This gap is the time for shepherding and teaching, that is, the complete education. Suppose there were only the first three kinds of people in Ephesians. If you think about it, how big a lack it would be if there were only the first three kinds of people? We have the first three kinds of people, more or less, but there is a great lack of the last kind of people—the shepherds and teachers. One the one hand, we learn to shepherd people according to Him as the Shepherd. This is very important. But now, we are going to talk about whether having only shepherding is sufficient. It is absolutely inadequate. There is a big lack of teaching the new ones. This is the first point, that is, the importance of teaching.

Second, let's analyze the situation. From the past until now, there is a great problem, and that is that among us we lack a system of perfecting the new ones in the truth — we lack a systematic, regular, persistent and on-going spiritual education. It's like what happens in a nation. The work of education in a nation cannot be done haphazardly. To do the work of education in a country requires the development of educational policies. Once the policies are in place, no matter how many people we have, no matter the size or age of the general population, the same educational system is applied. Consider the modern history of China. When China changed from the dynastic system to the modern republic, and from the old educational system to the current educational system, the founders developed an educational system, from kindergarten, to primary school, to secondary school, to university. It was a system that had not existed before in the thousands of years of Chinese history. In the past, to pursue education in China meant to attend the rural tutoring class. It was at most for a few years. There was some advancement in knowledge. If one wanted to advance further, he would look for a private tutor and receive some private instruction. But there was no system of education. With the founding of the Republic of China, they began to have a proper education system. Nowadays, we all take this system for granted. What would happen if we didn't have such a system of education in the first place? Developing and implementing this system is to do the work of perfecting.

The problem we had in the past, and the problem we face today, are the result of us preaching without teaching. In 1984, when brother Lee went to Taiwan to carry out the New Way, he pointed out that in the past we preached, but we didn't teach. The preaching among us was well known, and many came to us because they were drawn by the preaching. Starting with brother Nee, we were famous for our preaching. But among us even though we had much preaching, we did not have adequate education. As a result, after many decades of preaching, if you asked someone among us a simple question, such as, "What is maturity in life?" or "What is regeneration?" he would not be able to answer you. The preaching gets better and better, but the students always stay at the same place. After thirty years, their spiritual understanding remains just the same. That is a great failure. This has been our problem. From that time on, we began to take the New Way. We started from the beginning. It was from that time on we began to emphasize the groups, the vital groups and the home meeting.

In these last few years, the home meetings and group meetings became wide-spread, and we began to have some shepherding. This was a cause for joy, but the nature of most of the small-scale meetings, that is, the nature of the small group meetings, the home meetings, was mainly shepherding. They were weak in teaching. Many times the new ones were lost in the teachings.

For this reason, we must look at the reason we lose people, particular the loss of new ones. Every church preaches the gospel and baptizes new ones. We even report the number of people who were saved. This is not a problem. However, in the past, when we did the statistics, we found the rate of new ones remaining among us after half a year was at most ten percent. Our birth rates are not bad, but our survival rates are poor. The birth rates are high, but the infant mortality rates are high as well. We need to face this problem.

We all know that the Lord's recovery is very rich. The ministry is all-inclusive and extensive. The Lord's recovery has stood the test of time. However, there is a high threshold, a high barrier to initial entry: there is a big gap between the stage of initial salvation, to appreciating this ministry, to affirming this ministry, to even being constituted with this ministry. This is the reason why there is such difficulty to bringing new ones into the riches of the Lord's recovery.

Additionally, even if our new ones stay, it is hard for them to grow. In the beginning, they may grow a little. But after two or three years, they stop growing, or they stop advancing. These are problems that we are facing. So what we would like to bring up for discussion now, that is, for us to take heed to, is this matter of spiritual education.

In the church, whether generally in the meetings or specifically in the small group settings, we must pay attention to the spiritual education of the new generation. For the church as a whole, there is a need for every district to conduct this kind of spiritual education. For the small group or home meeting, there is even a greater need for this kind of education. According to Brother Lee, eighty percent of the church life should be carried out in the small groups. In other words, when new ones come in, the small group should be their church life. If spiritual education is not an element of the small group, the advancement of the new ones is limited.

There are a few components to spiritual education. The first consideration is the teachers. Second, for every kind of education, whether it is life-long education, or short-term education, or technical education, there needs to be a definite objective. For instance, after you take a carpentry course, you should have acquired a few definite carpentry skills. If you take a language course, after you finish the course, you should know the basic grammar, or say three hundred vocabulary words. It has definite objectives. Every course needs to have definite objectives. Third, it is very important to consider the method of education, that is, the materials to use, whether to conduct them through lectures or small group discussions, whether to conduct them through field trips or classroom teaching, whether it is one-on-one tutoring or a class instruction. In other words, how to work the instructional material into the students is crucial. Fourth, the focus of our attention is very important. The focus is not the teachers but the students. In other words, it is not

just a matter of producing a set of materials and giving lectures, while after the lecture, one cares less whether the students get the material covered in lecture or not. This would be like a scholar giving a set of talks in a Cambridge Lecture series. As long as he has given the lectures and they are published, his job is done. This is a lecturer-centric way of teaching. However, when you are in a primary school or secondary school, the focus is not the lecturer, but the students. When we have PTA meetings, the focus is not on whether the teacher has finished teaching the course material, but whether the student, that is, your son or daughter, has learned the material.

If we want to study the proper way to teach, we must take the student as the focus. Who are our students? Our students are the ones who were born through the gospel. How could these new ones learn what they need to learn? How do we know whether they have learned what they need to learn? Is our course beneficial to them or not? We must take care of these. Even if one course is helpful, we need to follow up, one month later, three months later, half a year later. How is his progress? If a church were to do a good job on education, she should have a census, every term, every half a year, every year; she needs to do statistics: how many graduates of the first class are living the normal church life now? How many from the second class? From the statistics, we find out the reasons why a particular class is doing particularly well. Brother Lee said, only God's creation is perfect from day one on. He said let there be light and there was light; there was no need to improve on it. But what man does always needs improvement. Whatever we do could be improved. However, the metric of improvement is according to the students, that is, how is their progress. After the first year, what is the retention rate of new ones among us? From 10% to 30%? That's good. But how come it's only 30%? Why not 50%? We need to advance in our study, scientifically and objectively, step by step.

In the past, I believe we had thousands of gospel meetings and tens of thousands of people were saved, but how much real increase do we have? We need to put a big question mark on this matter. What is the problem? The problem is not with the 'evangelists'. The problem is with the follow-up perfecting after the gospel. I do not take shepherding lightly. If we only know how to teach, have very good new-believer courses, preach well, have good curricula, but all the lambs die, that is useless. But on the other hand, if we only shepherd but do not teach, do not perfect, do not help them to exercise their function, this would not result in the perfecting of the new ones either. Therefore, we must walk with both legs. Among us there is a lacking in education of the new ones.

In our introduction brochure to the new ones, we bring out our objective in our training course. Number one, our objective is that the new ones will live a normal Christian life. After a new one is saved, the goal is that he will live a normal Christian life. What is a normal Christian life? Basically there are two aspects.

First, a person needs to have some basic knowledge; second, he must have some basic practice, and this practice must be habitual and on-going.

Concerning the basic knowledge there are two points: A, an understanding of the truth concerning the Christian experience, and B, an understanding concerning the basic revelations of the Bible. Concerning practice, there are four points. One, they need to have a daily or weekly habit of getting into the word and the ministry material, and at a very minimum, have daily morning revival. If a new one has not achieved this, we cannot say that he is normal. Two, they need to have some understanding of life. They don't need to be super-spiritual, and we do not require that they have dealt with everything natural. But at the very least, they need to have some knowledge of his spirit. They need to know how to contact the Lord. The Lord must be subjective to them to a certain degree. This is essential. If you want a person to call on the name of the Lord every moment of every day, that might be very difficult. Frankly, you and I can't call on the name of the Lord every moment of every day. We don't ask this of the new ones. They need to call on the name of the Lord, pray, touch the Lord to some degree. That's sufficient, but if they do not do any of it, that's not adequate. Three, they must have a habit of meeting. If they do not have a habit of meeting, on the Lord's day, if they do not sanctify that day, that is not normal. They must sanctify the Lord's day. That is the very least. Then, they need to go to the meetings. They need to have a habit of seeing the saints every week. Four, they need to testify to others concerning their faith, that is, telling people that they are now a Christian, and preaching the gospel to people or bringing people to the meetings. They need to participate in this service in the minimum. In practice, new ones must achieve these four points. That is our objective. If we can get them to do these four things, we do a good job of education.

Shepherding doesn't have any requirements, but education needs to have requirements. Many people are confused about this. He brings in a new one and he loves him very much and as a result dares not to require anything of him. But if we don't require anything of the new ones, that is not doing them any favor. You love much but you perfect little. This is the most crucial point in the training. The essence of training is that you must have requirements. Your requirements can be high or low, but you must have requirements. Otherwise, that is not a training. Every field of study, every kind of education needs to have requirements. If you have no requirements, you might as well just come audit a course.

This is why the new ones must sign up, register, because they must pass through some thresholds, enter into some requirements, and enter into some kind of regulations. If he meets the requirements, we give them rewards. If they don't, we encourage them to go on. Those are the basic principle of education. We need to have rewards and encouragements.

Next, we need to have something to measure their progress. When he completes the subject, we also need to measure the amount of progress in the subject. According to these criteria, we consider what is a reasonable amount of time for training for a new one. "Reasonable" means not too short, and not too long. For a new one, how long is reasonable? Three weeks? Six weeks? Nine weeks? Twelve weeks? Sixteen weeks? Half a year? A year? We think that for new believers, twelve weeks is reasonable. Twelve weeks is equal to three months. This is particularly like course work on the campuses. For most schools, each term is not longer than three months, and it is not going to be much shorter than three months. Three months or twelve weeks is reasonable, not too long and not too short. We will start with twelve weeks. What I just talked about are concerning the primary goal; that is, to help a new one become a normal Christian, living a normal Christian life.

There is another point concerning the training. In the past we failed to do a good job because we carried out trainings mostly in a unidirectional way. We took the way of preaching of conferences and applied that in the new believer's course. We thought that after we preached, our responsibility was fulfilled. This was overly confidence in our own speaking. Instead, what we need in our meeting is mutuality. Some of our meetings have some degree of mutuality, but that is not enough. For example, in our meetings our hymn-singing is somewhat mutual. We don't just invite a choir to come sing for us, but we all open our mouths to sing together. This is a very good example of mutuality. We should maintain this. Our perfecting should be similarly mutual. Teaching should be done in twenty to thirty minutes. After we finish the teaching this is the time for mutuality.

When a newly saved one is a newborn, what are the basic things that he needs? Number one, he needs to exercise breathing. The spiritual breathing is to call on the name of the Lord. Every practice must come with a knowledge item. To call on the Lord's name they need to know why they need to call. For that reason, they need to know the mingled spirit. Man has a spirit and God is spirit. His fellowship with God is through the spirit--this is the knowledge, or truth part. After he has that knowledge, now he needs to enter the practice, which is to call on the Lord's name. The mingled spirit and calling on the name of the Lord are therefore one unit.

The next unit is that God's word is spirit and life. This is the basic understanding about the Bible. After a person has this basic understanding, he needs to enter the practice by pray-reading God's word. This is the second practice. The third practice, concerning the Body of Christ, is meeting. The fourth practice, concerning the New Testament ministry is everyone serving. Every topic is a knowledge item plus a practice item. Besides these four points, we need to add one more point, and that is God's economy and man's consecration as a response to it. Every new one needs those four points plus consecration.

Our course has twelve lessons, six of which relate to practice, and six of which relate to revelation and truth. Lesson one teaches people to know the spirit and then learn to call on the name of the Lord and to pray. Number two teaches them to know the Bible, appreciate the Bible, and then to know the essence of the Bible and how to contact God. Number three is on being a member of the Body of Christ. The Christian life is corporate and we need to have a meeting life. Number four is on God's New Testament Ministry and its service. Everyone of us needs to serve. Additionally, we need to consecrate and love the Lord. These are related to practice. In addition to these practices, we also need to have the revelation and truth concerning our salvation, concerning the triune God, Christ, the Spirit, the church and the kingdom. This way, in twelve weeks we cover practice one week and truth and revelation the next week.

Basically, if we could have these basic elements, we reach our goal.

We need to make a registration form with a detachable portion. The detachable portion is not just a registration form, but a simple pledge. In effect, it is asking the new one to agree to participate in this training course. They have to agree to participate in such exercise and to sign their name to their agreement. We will do this all year round. In the first quarter of the year a new one is saved. Then we lead them to participate in this training in the second quarter. We use three months to bring a person to salvation. Thereafter we use three months to perfect them. After that we help them to go preach the gospel to gain someone else. In the fourth quarter we can bring the person who is saved through the first one into the training. In this way, we gain two solid new ones within a year.

The best student-teacher ratio is one to one. But this is impracticable, because we always have more than one new ones. For this reason, every time we do this kind of new believer's course we always need many teaching assistants and small group partners. To teach new ones actually involves both teaching and mentoring. Often times we teach them, but we don't mentor them. It's not enough we have teachers, but we need to have mentors. The teachers teach the materials, the mentors are responsible for one on one pursuing with the trainees. These mentors are the shepherds. Each shepherd should have a lamb. If there are fifty trainees then we need fifty shepherds.