

# ***HIDING HISTORY*** in the Nee and Lee Eras of the Lord's Recovery

## **Introduction**

I came into the Lord's recovery in 1971 and until this year had not known the history of the church in Shanghai under the leadership of Watchman Nee. Now, though, saints who were there have prepared an account of their experience, including the change in vision Nee introduced to the church which **caused a momentous shift in the church life from Christ as the center to Nee and his ministry also, as an additional center**. "We all sat there astonished" as the radical word "pulled out of him for over an hour" – W. Lee 1948

Later, Witness Lee was to follow a similar path during his own era of leadership, when he announced a new way featuring him and his ministry, moving the churches to new heights in their appreciation of him and his ministry, something he and Nee had both warned against in previous ministry. "The two visions cannot co-exist", said Don Rutledge, who had experienced the blessing of the original vision with Christ alone as the center; and, later, the strife and turmoil with the emergence of a second center.

Indeed, the paths of Nee and Lee run parallel in their respective eras of leadership. They began the same, but added emphasis later on the churches being one with them and their ministry, creating a new atmosphere and focus of attention. This additional center, Nee once said, "will create a sphere which includes all believers who attach themselves to that second center and excludes those who do not. This dividing line will destroy the God-appointed boundary of locality, and consequently destroy the very nature of the churches of God." (The Normal Christian Church Life, *p. 184*)

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### ***HIDING HISTORY*** in the Nee and Lee Eras of the Lord's Recovery

#### **Their Parallel Paths of Deviating from the Vision**

**1948** "According to Nee's new theory of the Jerusalem Principle, all the Local Churches had to hand over their churches under the leadership of 'the Work'. It contradicted his previous principle of the 'independence of each Local Church'. He also discarded his viewpoint of the Local Church: One locality, one church." *(A Timeline of Watchman Nee Era, p. 13)*

## **HIDING HISTORY** in the Nee and Lee Eras of the Lord's Recovery

This writing is a transparent rendering of the history of “the local churches” under the leadership of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee and their ministry(s), which now is in the hands of a group of “blending brothers” who were mentored by Lee and are fully engaged in promoting his ministry in and through the “local churches” associated with them and with Living Stream Ministry.

*“Living Stream Ministry publishes the works of **Watchman Nee** and **Witness Lee** providing the authoritative and definitive collections of treasures from these two servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. The writings of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee focus on the enjoyment of the divine life, which all the believers possess, and on the building up of the church, the goal of God's work with man in this age.” (from LSM Home page)*

The term “local church” is to be applied to Christians in a locality who meet on a ground of understanding that they are one in Christ with every true believer and desire practically to be built up with believers in their own locality according to Christ alone and God's own receiving of them. This is the view seen in the New Testament.

It is also the vision we see at the beginning of the Lord's recovery in the Watchman Nee era, but toward the end his view had changed dramatically as the threat of Communist interference rolled across China. The era of Witness Lee parallels that of his mentor: They both began with 1) Christ as life for building up local churches, with “administration local each answering to the Lord”; but ended up inspiring a movement in the churches to 2) “hand over” the reins of leadership to one man and his ministry.

### **Following the Vision**

**DON RUTLEDGE:** “In **1975**, we were having a conference in Dallas. Before the meetings, we would pray in the large home on our property and then walk across the parking lot to the large new meeting place we had just built. One evening I was walking with Brother Lee. He stopped, turned to me and then put his arm around my shoulder. (Never before and never since had I seen him embrace a brother. Thus, I realized he was about to tell me something very serious.) In his speaking **he shared with me that he once told Watchman Nee that he was not just following him, but rather was following the truth and vision Brother Nee taught** for practicing the church life according to the New Testament pattern. Furthermore, he told Brother Nee that he would not follow him if Nee left the vision, but that he, Brother Lee, would continue to follow the vision. He then looked me straight in the eye and charged me, ‘**Brother Don, if I leave the vision do not follow me, but follow the vision.**’ I was a little speechless but I did manage to return the embrace and assure Brother Lee that I would remain true to the vision and the truth.” *D.R.*

Brother Lee knew well of the deviation that Watchman Nee took in China in 1948 that was short-lived and ended abruptly at the hands of the Communist government in 1952.

When Brother Lee came to the U. S. in **1962**, he did not talk about the factors that ended the Nee era and published little on it later; he simply came back to the vision, with anointing and blessing that attracted people to come and see what the Lord was doing in Los Angeles. New ones were added and the churches grew and spread; until **1974**, that is, when the churches in the Witness Lee era experienced *their* turning away from the vision.

## The Vision and Practice of Receiving Believers

*On receiving fellow believers, Witness n Lee had shared in 1968,*

“It is only by being so liberal and general that we can receive all the saints in a proper way. If we are otherwise, we cannot avoid being sectarian in the matter of receiving. If we are special in anything and insist upon that, we will probably not receive those who differ from us in certain matters. Our receiving must be the same as God’s receiving, no less and no more. God’s receiving is the basis of our receiving. Our receiving must not be according to our taste, our opinion, or our assertion. It must be in accordance with God’s receiving. It must be based upon God’s receiving – nothing else.

“God **receives people according to His Son**. As long as a person receives His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, as His personal Savior, regardless of the concepts he holds regarding all other things, God receives him immediately. Since God receives people in this way, we too must receive people in the same way. **Our receiving must be in accordance with God’s receiving**. If our receiving differs from His, it means that we are wrong: either we are more narrow or more broad than God. This will cause much trouble and damage to the church life.” (W. Lee, *Practical Expression of the Church*, pp 66-77, 1968)

### Turning Away from the Vision

Don Rutledge as a former elder in local churches in Texas was well-respected among church leaders, including Witness Lee, and he wrote about the flourishing time in the sixties and early seventies when the churches were growing in life and numbers, and spreading. It was certainly a time of blessing on a path of receiving believers according to God’s Son alone. That is, until the seismic shift in the direction of the churches occurred and wide-sweeping changes throughout “the recovery” set the churches on the path Nee had taken in 1948.

#### 1974

**DON RUTLEDGE:** “The turn away from the vision Witness Lee had regarding the practice of the local church life began in **January 1974** at the very first special elders and co-workers conference. This is when the concept of the work began in the U. S. Few of the saints realize the magnitude of effect this meeting had on the churches. *With charts and statistics, Witness Lee and Max Rapoport came forth to launch the movement. It was boldly declared that the churches would use Witness Lee as the exclusive source of teaching* and Max would serve as the coordinator to bring the various churches, with their elders, into a unified movement. Two life-study messages a week were going to be given in Anaheim and ministry stations were set up in various cities to repeat the messages through designated brothers. Some smaller churches consolidated to the larger localities where there was a ministry station. The official list of twelve men who could give conferences was announced. Bi-annual trainings began that year. From that time on, the individual churches would be called to account if they were moving “independently.” In addition to coordinating the elders to act in a single direction, Max was charged to assist the various churches to be more effective with gospel preaching and outreach. “He began to travel and, in particular, to meet with the elders. Those who would not be good movement men were pushed aside, if possible, or moved somewhere to be out of the way. On several occasions, Max told me that he was working to bring the elders and churches into one coordination for the purpose of carrying out the burden of Witness Lee. He told me several times that only he could ‘put the whole thing together’.

"I am not attempting to call into question the motive of Witness Lee or Max. During this time, Witness Lee did some very good teaching and Max did some very good gospel work.

But what did happen was that **the nature of the various 'local churches' changed from being local in administration and spontaneous in actions to being directed from a center with clear administrative leaders and directors.**

“Things were definitely not the same. Some were saying the time of blessing has passed; or we changed our vision; or the moving of the Spirit left the churches; or teaching, doctrine, and methods replaced life. This time ended with a split between Witness Lee and Max Rapoport after a power struggle between them. Both had their followers, and Witness Lee won out. It was at this time, the time of becoming a movement that opened the door to Philip Lee and set the stage for the current Blending Brothers. After the split with Max, there was a pause in the development of the movement. Witness Lee began again to start up the movement consolidation in 1981. He bought property in Irving, Texas and began making plans to strengthen the movement. Benson Phillips and Ray Graver of Texas began traveling to the churches to promote Witness Lee, his ministry, and the office. By 1984 the first round of law suits had been won. WL declared that the boulders were off the road and the “Lord’s Recovery” could proceed. In 1986 the final pieces were put in place. The movement looked nothing like the early days of Elden Hall, Ohio, the Northwest or the East Coast.

1984

And, “the recovery” did proceed in **1984** with Brother Lee coming forward to announce the new way which would feature him and his ministry. The work for the spread of the ministry took on the look of local churches melting into unity under one universal leader who now held the reins of the churches in the movement he alone orchestrated. The key, he said, to “the Lord’s new move” is the one accord among the saints in all the churches. Thus, he sounded a call to have an army of followers under him as the "commander-in-chief", while brothers responded in **1986** by constructing and signing a paper stating their allegiance to him and to his ministry.

With such strong emphasis on the ministry, the question became, Are the churches aligned with the New Testament vision of Paul or John that oneness is according to Christ alone – without stressing one’s particular ministry also? Witness Lee gave the strongest warning about this in a chapter from *The Vision of God’s Building*, 1964:

### The Ministry Becomes the Lampstand W. Lee

1964

“All gifts and all gifted persons are for the building up of the Body; they are not for any work in itself. The practice of today’s Christianity is absolutely different in principle. Wherever there is a gifted person, a spiritual “giant” with a certain gift, that person will begin a work. He will build up a certain Christian organization or ministry, and possibly call it some worthy name. We are not opposing anyone, but we are against the wrong principles which damage the Body life. The Apostle Paul did not form any Christian organization; he did not set up any kind of work. **For possibly thirty years, he just established local churches. And, he did not keep any work in his own hands. In reading the New Testament we can only find the churches which were built up by him.**

“At the time the Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation he was greatly experienced and matured. Of the twelve apostles he was the only one remaining. **Yet he did not build up anything as his work, his ministry.** Consider the local churches in Asia to whom he wrote: most of them were exceedingly weak; yet those churches were the lampstands, not the ministry of the Apostle John. **John’s ministry was far more spiritual than the condition of those churches; yet he did not set up his ministry as a lampstand. In fact, he did not set up his ministry as anything.** All he did was to further the building up of those local churches as the lampstands. Oh, we

all must learn this! We must be aware of the dangerous tendency for any local church to become a work, kept in the hand of some gifted person. If such is the case, that is a real degradation. However much the Lord may use a gifted person, however great his ministry may be, the local church must not become his work. **God's intention is not to build up the ministry of any person, but to build up His church. This is not a small matter.**

"In the New Testament there are the titles, the "church of God" (Acts 20:28), the "church of Christ" (Rom. 16:16), and the "church of the saints" (1 Cor. 14:33); 1Thess. 1:1). There is never any "church of the apostles. The church belongs to God, to Christ, to the saints, not to any apostle.

"The greater our gift is, the greater is the danger that we will take over the church and keep it in our hands. This will greatly damage the church life. We must learn not only how to minister in the local church, but also how to keep our hands off the church. This is not easy. The local church is not our personal enterprise. The local church is the property of the local saints, not some worker's business. Some gifted persons put a local church in their pocket. Oh, this is a real problem!

"All the local saints must realize that the local church is their church. If the local saints are not clear concerning this, they will allow a gifted person to take the local churches into his own hands and treat it as his personal property. Then the entire church life will be finished. The local churches belong to the local saints. The gifted persons are just the means to perfect the saints to function; they are only the instruments used by the Lord to build up the churches.

"Consider the situation in Christianity today. Look at the situation even from the time of the Reformation: four or five hundred years have passed, and it is still basically the same. Whenever a gifted person is raised up, a certain kind of work is established. I establish my work, you establish your work, he establishes his work. Then the church is gone. This is the **source of all the divisions**. However, if one gifted brother comes to build a local church, and a second gifted brother comes to build up the same church, there will be no division. All the work must be for the church, not for the workers. **The ministry should be for the church; the church should never be for the ministry.** We must be exceedingly clear concerning this principle. We must drop all wrong practices. A gifted brother should keep his hands off the local church. Although a gifted brother may sometimes not speak openly in a way of ministry, yet he still may quietly maneuver behind the scenes. Any such maneuvering damages the church. All gifts and gifted persons must be entirely for the local church. This is a tremendously vital matter."

Dear brothers and sisters,

January 5, 2014

It has been 40 years to the week since the churches were impacted by the sudden change in direction for them instituted at the January 1974 leaders' gathering. From that event, though, we can see clearly the new path that was entered onto by the churches, paralleling Nee's movement away from his original vision. The following is an excerpt from an account of local church history in the U. S. which features views of spiritual blessing on a ground of oneness with Christ as life; as well as showing *seeds of deviation* in the churches that grew and became so openly manifest when the movement for a man and a ministry was officially launched in **January 1974**.

## History of the Local Churches

by Don Rutledge

### *An excerpt*

“Bi-annual conferences and trainings were a time of rich fellowship and mutual encouragement in the local churches. The saints in Los Angeles had a tremendous supply of grace to host complete strangers for days and weeks at a time. I was impressed over and over again with the phenomenon of finding myself in a room full of strangers who all happened to know Christ. After an hour or two of flowing fellowship, you felt as if you knew these people better than many of your relatives or old school mates. Many visitors to the conferences and trainings testified that the fellowship in the hospitality was even better and more enlightening than the messages in the conference meetings.

By 1968 the rich flow of spiritual life was so prevailing that meetings would start 45-60 minutes before the scheduled time. Many of the members of the church in LA lived within a 10-15 minute walk of the Elden Avenue Hall. Often a few saints would begin walking to the hall and as they walked they would begin to sing and praise the Lord. As they came closer to the hall, others would join the group and enter into the singing and praising. As you came closer to the hall, more small groups would appear and join the singing and praising. It was as if the tribes of Israel were going up to Jerusalem for a feast and began to sing the Psalms of Assent. The meeting had in fact started in the homes, continued on the way and culminated at the hall far before the scheduled time.

After the meetings, restaurants and homes would be full of brothers and sisters sharing and building up one another. Occasionally the fellowship would go on into the night or become a little too loud making a joyful noise, and the police were called. But the police would tell the complainers that the church people had turned a crime infested downtown neighborhood into one of the most peaceful districts in LA. Thus, they were not going to interfere with them. On the other hand the older saints did urge the young people to respect the neighbors, and usually all was well.” D. R.

[www.LordsRecovery.us/HistoryoftheLocalChurches.pdf](http://www.LordsRecovery.us/HistoryoftheLocalChurches.pdf)

## CHANGE IN VISION RESULTS IN CHANGE IN PRACTICE.

### **A Man, A Ministry and Two Turmoils** *Excerpt*

In 1981, Benson Phillips and Ray Graver began a campaign to promote brother Witness Lee and his ministry, with the inciting word that “we owe him”. The campaign became intensified in February 1986 when the same two brothers drew up a letter of allegiance to Brother Lee that was signed by 400+ elders and co-workers during an international elders’ conference in Southern California. Becoming immersed in such fellowship at that time and in the ensuing years, the leaders in the Lord’s recovery were galvanized into the same mindset and embarked upon a new way in the churches that featured oneness with a man, a ministry, and a ministry office, the Living Stream Ministry. Such a drive brought in confusion, chaos, and division and two major turmoils.

www.TwoTurmoils.com



## Brothers' Letter of Agreement

Dear Brother Lee,

After hearing your fellowship in this elders' training, we all agree to have a new start in the Lord's recovery. For this, we all agree to be in one accord and to carry out this new move of the Lord solely through prayer, the Spirit, and the Word. We further agree to practice the recovery one in: teaching, practice, thinking, speaking, essence, appearance, and expression. We repudiate all differences among the churches, and all indifference toward the ministry office, and the other churches. We agree that the church in our place be identical with all the local churches throughout the earth.

We also agree to follow your leading as the one who has brought us God's New Testament economy and has led us into its practice. We agree that this leading is indispensable to our oneness and acknowledge the one trumpet in the Lord's ministry and the one wise master builder among us.... (*My emphasis*)

A new mentality of expectation, cooperation, and oneness was being melded into the minds of elderships everywhere, the essence of which was for the elders to drop their reins in all the churches and hand them over to Brother Lee. He would lead the churches. He and his ministry were now a center. That center would identify those who were of it, and those who were not. Those who were of it were in "the oneness". When this "oneness" began to be vigorously promoted, a big turmoil came in to the recovery that led to division in the late eighties.

In 2006-2007 local churches were in another major turmoil for the same reason. This center has become officially endorsed by "the leadership" in the recovery through the issuing of the One Publication edict, which promotes the "new" center, and draws a line between all who are "of it" and those who are not. Only LSM-approved publications are to be acceptable in the churches for "a testimony of our oneness in the Body" and "a safeguard for the unique ministry in the Lord's recovery", and "to preserve the integrity of the Lord's ministry among us, which is crucial to the practical oneness among the local churches".

In the Holy Word for Morning Revival for the week of May 14, 2007, some of the Whistler conference fellowship from 2006 was given that is intended to help the saints understand the disciplinary action taken against a fellow co-worker accused of causing division. On page 166 the brothers responsible for the disciplinary action give a final word on the subject of *Shepherding the Flock of God*, which is what they felt their action against Titus Chu was and also what the action taken by Witness Lee in 1990 was following the late eighties turmoil. Titus then joined, as a quarantined one, the four brothers who were quarantined in 1990 - John Ingalls, Bill Mallon, John So, and Joseph Fung. The reasons for the quarantines? Essentially, the reasons these five brothers were quarantined were for not keeping the oneness of the "new center" that was being promoted in the recovery.

Three elders in Anaheim during the time of turmoil in the late eighties in fact resigned from the eldership primarily due to the "new center" promotions in their locality that they couldn't conscientiously support, and also due to an activist group for the new center within the church that usurped them. The following was shared at the time of two of the elders' resignation.

### **Albert Knoch and John Ingalls Resign From Eldership**

"On Tuesday, March 14, 1989, Godfred, Al, and I had fellowship and prayer during the morning and then lunch together. It was a memorable time, a decisive time. I expressed



strongly to the brothers my feeling concerning the futility and dishonesty of playing the role of elder in Anaheim any longer. It was hypocritical to go on in that status feeling as we did with strong conviction that we were in a system. Moreover, we were totally incapable of changing the course of the church or of practicing a generality with the saints where all were free to follow their own conscience. These considerations dictated that we should resign. Both Godfred and Al agreed. Of course, Godfred had already resigned and withdrawn from the eldership on November 13, 1988, about four months earlier, but he was still concerned for Al and me. We fellowshiped about this matter and felt very clear that we should take the step and resign. I proposed that we wait to announce this to the saints until I would return from a trip to Europe planned for the end of March, but both Godfred and Al urged that we should do it immediately. We decided then to make a statement to this effect in the coming Lord's Day morning meeting, giving the reasons for it.

This was a critical and momentous decision for us. I had been an elder in the church in Los Angeles for twelve years and in the church in Anaheim for fifteen years, during all this time closely associated with Brother Witness Lee. This decision would change the course of our lives and of the church, but we believed it was of the Lord.

On Friday evening, March 17<sup>th</sup>, Al and I met with the other elders, Minoru Chen and Philip Lin, and announced to them our intention to withdraw from the eldership, giving them some explanation. They received it and urged us to notify Brother Lee immediately. This we intended to do, and did so by letter the next day.

Thus on the Lord's Day morning, March 19<sup>th</sup>, I rose at the close of the meeting and announced our decision to withdraw from the eldership of the church. I made a few introductory remarks, saying that "I began to realize that our practices have differed and deviated from our vision. Our vision was the same, our teaching was mostly the same, the truth is always the same, but our practice has really differed." I included a statement that the nature of what we called the Lord's recovery had changed, and then spoke in a number of points the reasons and basis for our decision to withdraw. I did this briefly without much elaboration, speaking for twenty-two minutes. I record here in abridged form the salient points.

1. There has been a change in emphasis to the building up of the work or the ministry more than the local churches. The ministry has been promoted, exalted, and built up, and the churches have suffered greatly in the process.
2. There had been a great effort and promotion to unite the saints and the churches around a certain leader and organization.
3. There has been much pressure with full expectation that all the saints and the churches will conform to the burden of the ministry and be identical with one another in full uniformity of practice to carry it out.
4. In February 1986 we had signed a letter along with 417 other elders agreeing that we would be identical with all the churches, that we would follow the ministry absolutely, and that we realized Brother Lee's leading was indispensable to our oneness. Since these matters were not in agreement with the Word of God, we greatly regretted that we had subscribed to them, and I stated publicly that I would retract my signature.
5. There has been an emphasis, at least in practice, on a centralization of the churches and the work.
6. There has been a pervasive control exercised over the church, not so much directly, but very much indirectly, which makes it difficult to go on by getting our leading directly from the Lord.
7. Church history reveals that denominations have begun with the affiliation of groups of saints under one leadership followed by the commencement of a training center. We were also going that way.

8. I greatly appreciate Brother Lee's portion, but he has been exalted and honored above what is written, according to 1 Corinthians 4:6.
9. Brother Lee and his ministry have been made a great issue and factor of division among us.
10. Our going on and our relationship with the saints and with the church is made to depend on our relationship with Brother Lee. When this is done the ground of oneness is replaced with something else.
11. We have applied the teaching concerning the ground of oneness in a divisive and sectarian way, so that we divide ourselves from other Christians. This is due to an improper attitude and application of the truth. In the local churches we have become narrow and small as manifested in our attitude toward other Christians and in our reception of other saints.
12. Our attitude toward other Christians is one of belittling them and thinking we're superior. What we need is the reality of oneness, not just the teaching or slogan.
13. The Lord told us in His Word to go forth to Him outside the camp. The Lord is still calling His sheep out of every fold and every camp so that there can be one flock with one shepherd.
14. Our oneness should be as large as the whole Body of Christ. Any oneness that is smaller than this we should leave and not keep.
15. We should all go directly to the Lord for His leading in the church in order to have a local administration, at the same time maintaining a proper fellowship with other saints and other churches. At this point I quoted some sentences from a pamphlet entitled *The Beliefs and Practices of the Local Church*, published by the Living Stream Ministry. One sentence reads: "In all administrative affairs, the local churches are autonomous and locally governed."
16. There has been an over-stressing and distortion of the teaching concerning deputy authority, which has caused the saints to be fearful to follow their conscience, to be one with their spirit, and sometimes to speak their genuine concerns.
17. There has been too much emphasizing of methods more than the inner anointing, and external big success more than the experience of the inner life.
18. We have no problem with the matters of the "new way". We wanted to make that clear. Actually these things are not new.

In conclusion I said, "Based on the above points, we feel we must withdraw from the eldership. We are not able to lead you in this way, nor are we able to lead you out of this way. Many of you feel strongly that you would like to take a certain direction, and as elders we cannot lead you in that direction.... We really love you in the Lord. The Lord knows that. We care for you, and we wish you all the very best in the Lord. You are in our prayers. You will always be in our prayers. We ask you to pray for us too. Pray for Brother Al and me. If we've offended any of you saints, we ask you to please forgive us. We surely never intended to offend any one of you. We still like to keep our fellowship with you all as fellow-members of the Body of Christ."

Al Knoch then rose and spoke for eleven minutes, giving a very genuine and touching statement regarding his inner feeling about the eldership. I will just quote briefly here. He began: "I am so thankful that John could share those points, because I could not do it so clearly. I hold the same concerns.... These were the same concerns we presented to Brother Lee in all our times with him. So he knows all of these things already, and he has considered them....As elders in the recovery we do have a problem with many of our practices, and there's no way we could in a good conscience continue on in the position without the reality. How can we lead you? We can't lead in that way, and yet the recovery is going that way."

"So we brothers feel...it's good for us, it's good for you, and it's good for the Lord that we withdraw at this time. The reason we didn't withdraw sooner, though we were clear to withdraw last December, is that we felt the need to stand here for these very concerns for a while longer to see what could be done, and to see how the saints would respond to this kind of stand. But the more we have done this, the more clear we have become that there will not be any change at this time in the way the recovery is going."

The saints, generally speaking, listened well, only interrupting once. The Lord's presence and strengthening were with us. Minoru Chen closed the meeting, saying that we all must realize that the points I had made were an expression of my own personal view. He made a special point of controverting my assertion that the nature of the recovery had changed. He said that the nature of the recovery had indeed not changed. That was his view.

I also resigned by letter from the board of directors and the presidency of the corporation. A great step had been taken and a turn made.

The next day I left with my wife for Europe, where I rested, while visiting and fellowshiping with a number of churches. Upon returning to Anaheim on May 2<sup>nd</sup> I was not led of the Lord to return to the meetings on Ball Road, where I had met with the saints for fifteen years, and where I had resigned from the eldership on March 19<sup>th</sup>. I continued to gather with saints for the Lord's Table in one of the couple's homes, where I had been meeting for some time prior to resigning." END of excerpt

In spite of the turmoil and division over the emergence of a second center, brothers felt that they must follow Brother Lee, who now followed Nee in deviation from the path.

## **Hiding History**

### **Timelines of Nee and Lee Eras**

[www.LordsRecovery.us/TimelineofWatchmanNeeEra.pdf](http://www.LordsRecovery.us/TimelineofWatchmanNeeEra.pdf)

[www.LordsRecovery.us/TimelineofWitnessLeeEraUS.pdf](http://www.LordsRecovery.us/TimelineofWitnessLeeEraUS.pdf)

**The current leaders who have made the vow to Brother Lee to follow him should think about where they were in the beginning to where they have now been brought. Have the churches been led according to the original vision of receiving believers.**

**OR have they become the church of Gideon and his 300 men?**

[www.lordsrecovery.us/TheChurchofGideonandHis300Men.pdf](http://www.lordsrecovery.us/TheChurchofGideonandHis300Men.pdf)

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## History of the Local Churches

### Introduction

by Don Rutledge

In the 1950s, in American Christianity, there were a few inter-denominational churches but no Bible churches as today, and a home meeting was a rare phenomenon. Nearly all Christian congregations were a part of a ritualistic formal denomination or one that was a guardian of a particular Bible truth or the legacy of an historical person. There was some focus on evangelism and mission work. Billy Graham was unique. When he held a crusade, he invited all believers and churches in a metropolitan area to join together in the labor. This was unusual, because in those times most Christians referred to themselves first as Baptists, Methodists, Catholics, etc, and second, as Christians. In fact, the average Baptist might be suspect of the faith of any of the other denominations and vice versa. In my small home town, Baptists sought to do business with Baptist merchants, Methodists with Methodist, etc. The young people in my denomination, Southern Baptist, were discouraged from dating a non-Baptist or having too many close friends who were not Baptist. This was taught in the Sunday night "Training Union" classes.

Many of the so called church members were in fact "cultural Christians." They almost never read the Bible, rarely prayed except for a rote blessing at a meal, and left spiritual matters to the paid professionals. An hour on Sunday AM and honesty during the week constituted a very good Christian. There was a famine in the land, and many were hungry for the real thing.

Among the Lord's children who were hungering for more, Billy Graham was a blessing and hope. Thousands upon thousands attended his crusades and attended the myriads of mini-crusades held throughout the land where films of Graham would be shown and invitations given to receive Christ. Other evangelists appeared on the scene and were greatly used by the Lord to water and feed His people as well as to preach the gospel. In these gospel campaigns it was very common for so-called life-long Christians to receive Christ and to experience a new birth. In addition, there were a few great men of God who were exceptional preachers. Television began to allow many hungry Christians to avail themselves of their supply.

A few servants of the Lord began to appear from other lands. Ian Thomas of England, the leader of the Torch Bearers, brought the message of Christ as Life. His tapes and booklets were eagerly devoured by seeking Christians and he was responsible for many developing a yearning for more. Some publishing works such as Christian Literature Crusade bridged the denominational walls and began to awaken the Christian community to more than what they had known.

The works of Andrew Murray, William Law, and others from previous times were republished. The writings of Watchman Nee, published by CLC, began a stirring among Christians to know and serve the Lord in a more Biblical and living way that continues to this day.

Amongst the Roman Catholics, God was also moving in fresh and unexpected ways. The tremendous changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council were a blessing to many, while the spiritual writings of devoted men of God like Thomas Merton met the hunger of seeking Catholics everywhere.

The general populace of the USA had become immersed in materialism after World War II. There was a rising discontent, especially among the young people. Many asked, "Is this all there is to life?" Then came the Viet Nam war.

I was a college student at the time. By 1964-5, hardly a day went by that I did not see a girl weeping as she walked across campus. Why? She had received a letter from home telling of a local boy who had been killed. I received many such letters. A few years ago, I visited the Viet Nam War Memorial in DC. Never have I felt such an atmosphere of despair and grief. I can never forget my emotion as I read the names of boyhood chums engraved on the wall. As I type this, my hands tremble as my memory takes me back to those days.

This book is to be a history of the local churches and the work of Witness Lee, but unless the reader understands the times he may not be able to appreciate what God was doing in His mercy to meet the need of so many and in so many ways. Witness Lee, at that time, was also used by the Lord. In this book, we will consider the blessings experienced by the local churches, the errors, the warnings and the fruit produced - both good and bad.

As young people began to reject the culture of materialism and the nation entered the tremendous dislocation caused by the war, the young people turned to many escapes. Drugs, sex, and the hippy movement were prevalent. Suddenly the “Jesus People” appeared. Tens of thousands of disaffected youth came to Christ. But most did not meet Him in a traditional church or regular Evangelical Crusade. It was one-on-one, in small groups, spontaneous and full of the power of the Spirit. Where could they go to be shepherded, nurtured and cared for? They did not care for traditional Christianity, and traditional Christianity did not care for them. Thus non-traditional churches, seeker groups meeting in homes, and ministry from non-professionals appeared everywhere.

## ***CHAPTER ONE***

### **THE LOCAL CHURCH MOVEMENT IN THE USA IN THE SIXTIES**

There were many prevailing works of God during this time; but, as shared in the introduction, this book will focus on Witness Lee and the work of God in the local churches in the United States. I was there from September, 1965, until the summer of 1989. I knew Witness Lee personally and considered him to be a spiritual father and good friend. We never had a cross word, and he always treated me with dignity and respect. I have no personal axes to grind or offenses to even up. I will endeavor to give credit where credit is due, but will also seek to bring to light the failures among us, including my own.

This kind of treatment [of our history] corresponds to the Bible, which is a most unique book in that it exposes the major characters where they failed and came short of God’s call, as well as their victories and faithful deeds. In the Old Testament, the failures of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Solomon are not ignored or covered over, but are brought to light. Likewise, in the New Testament, the mistakes of Peter, John and James, Philip, Thomas, Barnabas, James the brother of the Lord and Paul are all exposed. This should tell us that the same should be done among us. If there have been significant failures, they should not be treated in a light manner and covered over; rather, they should be made clear to all the saints, publicly, for our learning and profit. Only the Lord Jesus Christ is without blemish in any way. All believers should be warned not to fall into any hero worship or to develop a loyalty to a man or a ministry. The old hymn, “Loyalty to Christ” should indeed be a theme for us all.

In 1962, there was a World’s Fair in Seattle, Washington. (The Space Needle was built on this occasion.) Witness Lee and his son, Timothy, had an exhibit at the fair. They displayed and attempted to sell manufactured goods from Taiwan. They had raised funds from members of the local churches in Taiwan. The endeavor was a failure and the products stored in a warehouse. The problems created by this business failure made it difficult for Witness Lee to return to the churches in Taiwan in good graces. But I believe

this human failure opened the door for a blessing for many of the seeking Christians in the USA in those early years (since Witness Lee remained in this country as a result of the problem, and ministered.)

Watchman Nee had visited the USA in the late 1930s and had received a poor impression due to the extreme materialism. He told Witness Lee that the USA was Egypt and he had little hope that the Lord would do much there. On the other hand, Witness Lee had grown up under the care of American Southern Baptist missionaries from Texas. He had a great appreciation for the USA. He came for a visit in 1958. He visited Brother Nee's brother-in-law and former business partner, Samuel Chang, in Southern California. He also visited a co-worker of Brother Nee named Stephen Kaung in New York City. He spoke to some Christian groups during these visits.

In Los Angeles, at Westmoreland Chapel, he met a young man named John Ingalls. John would become a pioneer in the local church movement, and a minister of the truth concerning the experience of the indwelling Christ and of the vision of a practical authentic New Testament Church Life. In the spring of 1962, Samuel Chang and John Ingalls were in fellowship one evening with Eugene Gruhler Sr., of New York City. Brother Gruhler encouraged them to go ahead, as they were so clear in their desire to practice the church life as taught by Watchman Nee. That night while driving home, John Ingalls had a deep and clear impression from the Lord that they should begin. On May 27, 1962, John Ingalls began with about 20 others to gather in the Lord's name to practice the church life as revealed in the book, *The Normal Christian Church Life* by Watchman Nee. John urged Witness Lee to join him and the few others who gathered. Witness Lee joined them on November 30, 1962.

### **FIRST CONFERENCE**

In December of 1962, Witness Lee, John Ingalls, and Paul Ma began to pray for a conference which was to be held at the end of December. They prayed every morning for three weeks. Then Witness Lee held his first conference in Los Angeles on 23rd street in the home of Samuel Chang. There were around 40 attendees. The highest number was 70 and the saints crowded the sitting room and stairways. Don Morsey of Sacramento testified that the Spirit was so prevailing that "they all sat three inches above their chairs." Witness Lee released a set of messages which became the book, *The All-inclusive Christ*, based upon verses in Deuteronomy. The saints who attended those meetings heard things they had never heard before, which opened their eyes to Christ as our Good Land, so vast and immense that we could labor on day by day. Songs issued forth from that conference that were used often in church meetings in the ensuing years, inspiring the saints to experience Christ. Lines from those songs such as, "Laboring on Jesus yields reality" and "Oh what a rich abundant Christ" were often sung, which helped keep the saints' vision fresh for enjoying Christ in their daily lives.

Witness Lee was traveling during those days and would minister wherever people would receive him. While traveling, and during his times in Los Angeles, he wrote hundreds of hymns. Many of them are rich in light and life. You can find the best of these hymns in the hymnal, simply entitled, *Hymns*, published by the Living Stream Ministry. John Ingalls was Witness Lee's collaborator in compiling and producing this original hymnal of 1080 hymns. During these days of great spiritual exercise on the part of many dear believers, hymns of all sorts were pouring out. Within the Body of Christ, the writing of hymns hit a peak between 1968 and 1972. Among the various local churches, countless hymns were written, and among the Jesus People and many other Christian works and ministries, hymns poured forth. "Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" were a sign and expression of the overflow of the rich experience of Christ among the members of His Body.

## **BILL MALLON**

In the summer of 1963, Bill and Barbara Mallon joined with the saints meeting in Los Angeles. Bill and Barbara Mallon had recently returned from New Guinea. They had served the Lord as a missionary and nurse deep in the mountains of New Guinea. They served among the tribes which had killed one of Rockefeller's sons in 1955. Through their ministry, over 6,000 were brought to Christ, and Bill was able to reduce their language to written form in order for the Bible to be put into their language. In spite of the success they had experienced, they were not content within and were seeking to serve the Lord in a more perfect way. They were driving across the country and Barbara read aloud from the *The Normal Christian Church Life*, as they drove. Bill and Barbara attended the first training given by Witness Lee in the summer of 1963 in Altadena, California. Bill would become one of Witness Lee's closest co-workers. Witness Lee, Samuel Chang John Ingalls, Bill Mallon, and James Barber met together nearly every day for many months.

## **INITIAL SPREADING**

During Witness Lee's travels, he visited Tyler, Texas in late 1963. There he met Gene Edwards, James Barber, Harry Goyer and Gene DeBerry, among others. Some later became pillars in the work and ministry under Witness Lee and some would adopt the teachings and concepts of Lee while developing their own ministry.

In Texas, Ian Thomas was an unwitting forerunner to Witness Lee. His message of "Christ as Life" stirred many including myself. He visited Wayland Baptist College in Plainview, Texas in 1962. The director of religious activities at this college was James Barber, who was a man in his late 20s. James was an ardent Christian who desired to serve the Lord without reservation. He was a gifted teacher and speaker.

There was also a group of young believers at Wayland Baptist who were on fire for the Lord. Out of this group would come many of the early and current leaders of the Local Church Movement. Benson Phillips was the leader and driving force of the group called the Mission Band (not musical.) They visited Baptist Churches and sought to set the young people afire for the Lord and to bring in a rededication to Christ among the church members.

James Barber, who had read the book, *The Normal Christian Life* by Watchman Nee, received a call from a brother who attended Witness Lee's Tyler Conference. He urged James to come to Tyler to hear from a co-worker of Watchman Nee.

James went to hear Brother Lee and afterwards decided to give up his career in the Southern Baptist denomination. Upon his return to the college, he collected many of the young people to whom he ministered and shared with them what he had heard. The message he heard from Brother Lee was regarding the personal and practical experience of Christ and the oneness of the Body of Christ.

## **THE EARLY FOCUS**

For the next ten years, Witness Lee focused on these matters—the practical experience of Christ, the practice of oneness in the Body of Christ, and the building up of the local expression of the Body of Christ. Many, including myself found in Witness Lee's ministry a key to unlock our experience of Christ in a consistent daily way. The help we received on the parts of man, the indwelling anointing, maintaining a good and healthy conscience and practical daily sanctification produced transformed lives and rapid growth in grace. There was continual criticism and opposition from religious figures, but friends and family gave many positive assessments of the changed lives they witnessed - changes which reflected Christ.



Witness Lee's ministry on the Oneness of the Body of Christ flew in the face of the common practice of the day. He urged all believers to receive one another in Christ and to lay aside any and all non-essentials which could cause division. He urged us to seek out our brothers and sisters and if we found any group of believers who desired to simply gather in the Lord's name and receive all whom the Lord had received, then we should strive to join with them and not to contend for our own work or meeting. Whenever we happened to meet another Christian, we sought to give and receive Christ without any agenda of recruiting them for our gathering. Witness Lee on many occasions declared that we could not be the only Christians who desired to meet in the Lord's name alone.

The practical local church was often referred to as "an expression of the Body of Christ." This term was used so much that often members would refer to churches in various places as "the expression in that city." During one conference, this term was used quite often and once Witness Lee made the comment, "But what is the expression? The expression of the local church should be Christ." That little comment made a deep impression on me. We were not seeking to develop and spread a type of Christian work or style of meeting. Our mission was to spread the wonderful expression of Jesus Christ regardless of local particulars.

### **BEGINNING IN WACO TEXAS**

#### **Actively Seeking Other Believers**

In September, 1965, I began meeting with the church in Waco, Texas, where Benson Phillips was in leadership. The church there began in the fall of 1964 on a park bench. There were three saints, Herman Massey, Kathleen Corley and Barbara Kratzer. Benson Phillips moved there in the spring of 1965. Don Looper left his position in the Southern Baptist denomination in the summer of 1965 and joined the Waco Church along with his fiancée, Judy Heathcote.

In Waco, we attended many a free group and small peculiar meeting looking for someone with whom we could join. In 1969, we moved to Houston, Texas and there also, Benson Phillips was very conscientious in carrying out Witness Lee's fellowship to seek out Christian groups with whom we might join. For example, in the fall of 1969, we came into contact with a Pentecostal group called "The Gospel Assembly." Some of us from the church in Houston went faithfully at least once a week for many weeks. Finally, on one Sunday evening when Benson, his wife Barbara and I were there, Barbara and I urged Benson to give up the endeavor with this group. They were non-denominational but were exclusive, truly only receiving believers who had spoken in tongues. Benson was very reluctant as he truly wanted to follow Witness Lee's admonition regarding being open to join with other believers.

### **EARLY DAYS IN THE CHURCH IN LOS ANGELES**

Bi-annual conferences and trainings were a time of rich fellowship and mutual encouragement in the local churches. The saints in Los Angeles had a tremendous supply of grace to host complete strangers for days and weeks at a time. I was impressed over and over again with the phenomenon of finding myself in a room full of strangers who all happened to know Christ. After an hour or two of flowing fellowship, you felt as if you knew these people better than many of your relatives or old school mates. Many visitors to the conferences and trainings testified that the fellowship in the hospitality was even better and more enlightening than the messages in the conference meetings.

By 1968 the rich flow of spiritual life was so prevailing that meetings would start 45-60 minutes before the scheduled time. Many of the members of the church in LA lived within a 10-15 minute walk of the Elden Avenue Hall. Often a few saints would begin walking to the hall and as they walked they would begin to sing and praise the Lord. As they came

closer to the hall, others would join the group and enter into the singing and praising. As you came closer to the hall, more small groups would appear and join the singing and praising. It was as if the tribes of Israel were going up to Jerusalem for a feast and began to sing the Psalms of Assent. The meeting had in fact started in the homes, continued on the way and culminated at the hall far before the scheduled time.

After the meetings, restaurants and homes would be full of brothers and sisters sharing and building up one another. Occasionally the fellowship would go on into the night or become a little too loud making a joyful noise, and the police were called. But the police would tell the complainers that the church people had turned a crime infested downtown neighborhood into one of the most peaceful districts in LA. Thus, they were not going to interfere with them. On the other hand the older saints did urge the young people to respect the neighbors, and usually all was well.

### **EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST AS LIFE AND THE PRACTICAL PRIESTHOOD**

During 1965-66, Witness Lee gave many messages from 1 Peter 2: 1-11, John chapter 6, Jeremiah 15:16 and other passages regarding taking daily spiritual nourishment. He gave many inspiring messages regarding the Manna, of the wilderness time, as a type of Christ as the heavenly food for us to enjoy daily. He also stressed the passage in 1 John regarding the anointing and gave messages on the type of the anointing oil in Exodus. This laid a foundation for many to begin every day with the Lord in the Word of God and to care for the Lord's speaking during the day, especially through their conscience. I personally was deeply impressed with the godly behavior and sincere humility of Christ that was so evident with most of the brothers and sisters who gathered in the church in LA as well as other places. Many of the testimonies given and encouraged were regarding the Lord's work of practical righteousness, keeping a clear conscience and making things right with anyone who had been slighted or wronged.

Another emphasis was on the functioning of the members of the Body of Christ as revealed in Romans chapter twelve and 1 Corinthians chapter fourteen. On Tuesday night, they held what was known as a practical or practice meeting. In Waco, Texas, where I met, we practiced praying and testifying each Tuesday. We said, since it was just practice, we need not worry about making mistakes. This was a help to get out of our self-consciousness. But in spite of much emphasis, there was little break-through. We had more liberty than most Christian meetings or services, but still about 10-15% of the attendance did nearly all of the praying, testifying or hymn calling.

### **PRAY-READING**

In 1966, Witness Lee gave a series of messages on the Priesthood as shown in type in the writings of Moses. These were classics that caused a year-long seeking and striving to see the Lord produce a practical functioning Priesthood among us that would include all the members. Eventually this ministry began to be realized. A key on the practical side was the development of "Pray-reading" and "Calling on the Name of the Lord."

In those early years, Witness Lee was committed to letting the Spirit lead the churches and not to impose any personal preferences. Thus many peculiar practices as well as peculiar persons were tolerated. On many occasions, Witness Lee spoke against setting up standards of behavior or dress codes; or methods of praying and testifying.

Pray-reading was a great help to many as it allowed them to drop trying to be "spiritual" according to some supposed standard. Praying and testifying with the word of God put everyone on a level playing field. Anyone could now have a good time with the Lord in the morning. No more did anyone try to pray as some of the mature ones prayed. Nor was eloquence or a spiritual prayer vocabulary or tone an issue. One could simply pray: "Lord thank you that you are my shepherd." Then repeat, "The Lord is my shepherd." "May I

know you as my shepherd today.” “Be brother and sister So and So’s shepherd today.” “I shall not want.” “Thank you Lord you meet all my need.” This type of devotional prayer (not a formula to be repeated in a rote manner) strengthened many of the members. Some found the practice helpful as part of small group fellowship. A passage would be selected by one of the participants. As the pray-reading would proceed, often an excellent devotional message was developed via the contributions of many.

In a short time, this practice became so enlivening that the church in LA changed their Friday night Bible study meeting to a pray-reading meeting. They took a chapter in a New Testament book each week in a sequential way. For example, Philippians would take four weeks to cover. The entire church would pray-read the chapter together. This lasted about 30-45 minutes and then there would be another 45-60 minutes of testimonies and sharing from the chapter. The meeting would conclude with a short summing up by one of the leading brothers. These meetings were extremely lively and dominated by the young people. All found it easy to jump in and pray-read by ones or twos or threes and most found the stage was set for just about anyone to give a short testimony regarding what impressed them from the chapter.

I do not know who coined the phrase “pray-reading.” It was a translation from Chinese regarding a new practice in Taiwan. News came to the ears of the churches in San Francisco and LA regarding a practice in the church in Tainan, Taiwan. The church had internal problems. The elders could not give messages in the meetings without being shouted down. To meet as the church was nearly impossible. The church in Tainan had the practice of gathering several mornings a week for a corporate morning watch. They began out of desperation to read and pray passages of the Bible. They were “pray-reading” the Scripture. A reviving came in and the unity of the church was restored.

When the reports came to the USA, some in San Francisco and LA picked up on this morning watch practice. In these two churches, many practiced a corporate morning watch two or three times a week. In Waco, Texas, the church had two corporate morning watch meetings per week. These times were good but again were dominated by a few more mature and bold saints. No instructions or ministry had ever been given on pray-reading but some on the West Coast began to try to practice what they surmised was happening in Taiwan. There was immediate benefit. This new practice gave many a way to lay hold of the substance of the ministry regarding feeding on the word. Many were freed from self consciousness. The practice was a help to strengthen their daily life and functioning in the church meetings.

Shortly after the beginning of the practice of pray-reading, in 1967, John Ingalls and James Barber went on their first trip for ministering to various local churches. They would make many trips in the future and were a great blessing to the churches they visited. They brought the fellowship on taking the word by means of all prayer. In the recent past, much has been made of expressions such as “get out of your mind.” It is helpful to consider from where this came. What was the original application? What did it eventually come to mean? Pray-reading has been linked to this expression as an alleged means to control the congregation.

Originally, when we began to attempt to practice meetings according to 1 Cor 14, many of the members would find themselves consumed with self-consciousness, worry and fear. Anxiety was written on many faces. To “get out of your mind” was often used to refer to the need to get out of self-consciousness. Another application was regarding the thoughts of a member being occupied with the cares of the day and family life, rather than what was happening in the meeting. I personally have always had to deal with this phenomenon. While someone is reading a passage of scripture or giving a testimony or while we are singing a hymn, I could journey halfway around the world or close three business deals in my mind. While this was going on, who knows what wonderful things of Christ I was

missing. Thus, I needed to shut down the wandering thoughts and turn my attention, my mind, to the things of the Spirit and what was happening at that time. A third common application of the term applied to someone who was overly analytical, wanting to know why this or why not that, etc. This is a true problem in almost any human endeavor as well as in spiritual things. Perhaps you have heard the expression “paralysis of analysis.” Too much analysis can stop healthy progress.

### **CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD**

Calling on the Lord did not originate with Witness Lee. The first person among us to practice calling on the name of the Lord was a sister, Donna Martin of LA. Donna, a local member, was working during the day and attending the training meetings in the evening. Witness Lee did have an unsuspecting hand in her practice.

During an evening training session in Los Angeles in December of 1967, Witness Lee was ministering on the members praying and speaking in the meetings. Suddenly he exclaimed in frustration, all can at least say four words. Then, (he later reported), I asked myself, “what four words?” Then he replied to the congregation, “Well at least you can say ‘O Lord, Amen, Hallelujah’”. Then without any further explanation of the four words, he hurried on with his message. The full time attendees had a double session in the mornings and a time of review in the afternoons in small groups.

Witness Lee continued the following morning with two messages and did not mention the four words. When the full-time attendees returned that afternoon, Donna Martin, who usually only attended the evening session during the week, was able to leave her work and join the review session. I was in the group that Donna Martin joined. She was glowing and overflowing with the joy of the Lord. She shared with us how she had applied Brother Lee’s fellowship. We had no idea of what she was speaking. She demonstrated how she had been calling out to the Lord while she typed. It was a spark that lit all our spirits. One by one we too called out with a true heart to the Lord. Then we began to call together. There were several groups besides ours gathered in the hall. Suddenly others joined in the calling.

That night the hall was abuzz. Testimonies about calling on the Lord came in rapid fire succession. When Lee and the elders joined the meeting, we were already launched into the third heaven. He inquired, “What is happening?” Someone related how we were enjoying the four words. Not until he was reminded did he realize what four words he had mentioned, as he witnessed the power of “O Lord, Amen, and Hallelujah”.

At that time, Witness Lee did not relate this practice to the verses in Acts regarding Saul having authority to persecute “those who called on the Lord’s Name.” He was not aware of Genesis 4:26, “then men begin to call on the name of the Lord.” Immediately after the initial experience, I began to search the Scriptures for confirmation. I introduced most of the verses from the Bible to the Local Church for “calling on the Name of the Lord.” I wrote the first booklet “Calling on the Name of the Lord.” Benson Phillips urged me to submit it to the Stream publisher and allow Witness Lee’s name to be attached. It meant nothing to me to be recognized and it was fine with me if that was required for something to be published. Others researched the Greek word “call” and found it to definitely mean to utter or even to cry out. (Many years later, I was studying Greek at the University of North Carolina. UNC, at the time, had the number two rated classics department in the USA. I asked my professor regarding the Greek word kaleo as used in the New Testament. He said it could refer to a student calling out to someone across the quad. He was quite surprised to discover such a practice in the New Testament.)

While “pray-reading” may easily be implied from the Bible as a way to apply various passages, “Calling on the Name of the Lord,” is clearly taught and demonstrated in Scripture. Of course, “calling on the Lord” is not merely restricted to reciting, “O Lord, Amen, and Hallelujah.” It means to invoke the Lord Jesus. I will share more on this teaching later in the book.

### **A TIME OF RAPID GROWTH**

These two devotional practices were critical for the door of the local churches to be open to the flood of new believers about to descend upon them. The ground was now level. No one had a superior spiritual status. Any believer could pray-read, call on the Lord and sing from the rapidly-expanding new song book. If anyone desired to regulate or control the brothers and sisters, they would find no tolerance. A common retort was “Don’t be so religious.” Song after song was written about the freedom in Christ enjoyed in the church life.

Starting in 1968, fresh new believers began to appear in Elden Hall, LA. Then there was a flood. During the months of September – October, 1969, 200 new members were added to the church in LA. Within a little over a year there was a six-fold increase. I wish I had time and the resources to compile a record of the wonderful works of God during those days. Miraculous stories of the Lord arranging “Divine Appointment” resulting in marvelous salvations or encounters of members with other seeking Christians were a staple of the day. By 1972, the church in LA had exploded into four halls and had over a thousand burning saints.

Similar blessings were pouring out on the churches in Texas, the Midwest, the Northwest and East Coast. For a while a publication came out called “News of the Churches.” Each month we eagerly waited for the latest copy. There we would read and rejoice over the wonderful works of God.

I attended my first conference and full time training in 1966. There were about 140, including the local members at the conference and exactly 70 full time at the training. By 1976, nearly four thousand attended the Hebrews Training in Anaheim, CA.

### **TEXAS EXPERIENCE AND THE FIRST MIGRATION**

To understand the history and current condition of the Local Church movement, it is vital to know the history and character of many individuals. What has transpired has much to do with not only Witness Lee, but also with many others.

### **BENSON PHILLIPS**

In Texas, some of the most influential past and current leaders were developed. The most prominent was Benson Phillips, the current president of LSM and the de facto leader of the (so called) “Blending Brothers,” the world-wide leaders of the Local Churches. Benson is the strongest and most determined individual I have known in any endeavor. At 23, shortly after his marriage, he developed Multiple Sclerosis. Yet during my 23 year history with him, he never complained or shrank back from a full involvement in the church life or Christian work we were endeavoring to carry out. I cannot count the number of times he laid aside his own comfort and needs to serve the need of the church or some needy member.

As previously mentioned, Benson attended and graduated from Wayland Baptist College. He became the most prominent student leader and headed up a group called the “Mission Band.” During my direct time with Benson from 1965-1986, he was always concerned for

the spreading of the gospel. Whether the location was Waco, Houston or Dallas, he constantly was seeking to help the church and the members to be fruitful in the gospel and in the care for new believers.

In Waco, there were six junior high teachers among us, two at each of three junior high schools. In the fall of 1968, Benson shared with us all that he wanted to share the gospel with the students. We prayed furiously for a few weeks that the Lord would open the doors. The teachers at each school approached the principals and were given permission to invite the students to a Christian meeting for junior highers on a Saturday night if the teachers first contacted the parents. More prayer was offered to open the parents. Each Saturday evening we gathered with students from the three junior highs. Before the year was over about 50 junior highers were saved and given a good start in their Christian life.

Benson was not an eloquent speaker but was very effective in the gospel whether it was in a group setting or one on one. Once in Dallas, at a Saturday night gospel dinner, I witnessed the power and anointing that a simple plain spoken man could possess. Our original hall in Dallas would hold about 150 for a dinner. We sat in circles while we ate and visited and fellowshiped with one another and with any guests in the circle. This night the hall was packed. There were about 15 guests. I was sitting in a circle with a post doctoral student at the University of Texas at Dallas. She was a very refined lady from Hong Kong. There was a business man of about 40 also in my circle. Benson was sharing the gospel message that evening. He was speaking on the vanity of life. He began to say over and over that such and such is nothing without Christ. Suddenly the lady stood up and began to argue with Benson. She shouted, "What about love?" Benson declared that love without Christ is nothing. She would then shout what about this and that. Benson would reply that without Christ it was nothing. Then the business man stood up and began to berate Benson. Benson never backed down but continued to declare Christ and that the need of every man is Christ. The man became so disruptive the ushers had to remove him. Eventually things settled down and Benson asked all who wanted to receive the Lord to stand up. Seven young men in their 20s stood up and all became vital members of the church.

On another occasion, we were in Austin visiting. Austin was a new church. In those days, often a few car loads would travel from the more established churches to help a newer church over a weekend. The church in Austin was very burdened for the gospel. Austin, in those days, was like Berkeley, California - full of hippies and street people - as well as the thousands of college students at the University of Texas. On this occasion, we held a gospel dinner. The brothers and sisters spent the afternoon inviting all they could find. The rented store front was packed wall to wall. After the meal, we had the gospel message. I had been asked to share. I was a little overwhelmed at the group. As I began to proclaim Christ and His salvation, a young man rose to his feet and declared he had tried what I was sharing and it did not work. Then another and another spoke out against the gospel. I was very confused and turned to Benson for direction. He leaped to his feet and shouted that those people had spoken lies from the Devil to keep you from receiving the wonderful salvation of Christ. After a few more words, he asked for those who wanted to receive the Lord to stand. People stood up all around the room. It was truly a glorious night of many genuine salvations.

I learned so much from those two times. When the Devil is throwing up a lot of dust, it probably means the Lord has prepared some for the gospel. Consider Paul and Silas' experience in Philippi.

During the first ten years in the church life, Benson's maturity and leadership were vital to the churches in the Texas region and a great help to me even though he was only four years older than I.



Another practice he had was to never be discouraged or downhearted. When we were in Waco, we would from time to time have a stretch of poor meetings or be in a down time. Benson told me he would tell the Devil that he may have won this round but he would not win the war. I have applied that principle over and over both corporately and individually. Maybe my flesh, a body of sin, won out in a particular incident. But I would declare that God has His plan and calling and has prepared good works for me to walk in and that this is my destiny, not this temporary defeat or setback. I see things in the same way for people in my life and for the saints with whom I now gather.

Benson was very generous with his money and his possessions and his time. He never shirked from pulling his share of the load and then some. This was in spite of his physical limitations. At one point in the first few months in Houston, a brother learned of some box cars that needed to be loaded. Benson heard of it and realized this was an opportunity to raise money for some of the needy among us. We had just moved there from the small churches in Waco, Lubbock and Denton. Benson had no thought that any of the money would go into his pocket. Only Ray Graver could keep up with him as he labored furiously night after night loading the box cars. We were paid by the box car not by the hour. He became the acknowledged leader among us because of his character and ability to inspire others by his example.

Benson shared with me that when he was in high school he had received a special call from the Lord. One evening he went out to a golf course and lay on a green as he prayed. The Lord showed him that he would head a world-wide religious organization. He also shared with me that he had had a desire to reform the Southern Baptist Convention. When he read *The Normal Christian Church Life* by Watchman Nee and then heard Witness Lee, he was clear that this was what his call was all about. He also shared that he used to lay out two maps on a table, one of the USA and one of the world. He would lay his finger on each state one by one and pray "Lord use me in California, use me in Oregon", etc. Then he would turn to the world map and put his finger on each country and pray "Lord use me in France," etc.

Benson had an intensity that far exceeded any of the other brothers. He was always considering what was needed to establish and to build up the local churches.

### **OTHER EARLY BROTHERS AND SISTERS**

When I was new to the local churches, the character, sincerity and love for Jesus Christ among the participants deeply impressed me. Not only was Benson an exceptional young Christian, but so were nearly all. During my first year in Waco, I met many of the young brothers and sisters from Wayland Baptist College who had served with Benson in the "Mission Band." They were all outstanding. Tim House, who had been president of the Baptist Student Union, would impress you with the presence of Christ without his saying a word. I felt like meeting him was like meeting Nathaniel, a man in whom was no guile. Bud and Judy Philley, Bobby Allen, Ben and Anita McPherson, Rodney Philips and Jim and Sharon Coleman were all truly men and women of God, and their devotion and faithful service was vital to the churches in Texas going from less than 30 in 1965 to over 1,500 by the mid-late 70s.

### **HERMAN MASSEY**

I was most familiar with the brothers and sisters who came from Waco and Baylor University. Herman Massey was the most sold out burning young believer I had ever met. I met him when I was a freshman at Baylor. I was standing with an acquaintance overlooking an intramural sports field as Herman ran by. The acquaintance pointed out Herman and warned me that he would surely bring up Christ if I was in his presence. Sure enough, not long after, I was hanging out in the dorm room of some buddies when Herman stopped by to see one of them. Within five minutes he was speaking of Christ and our



need for him. I was convicted by his presence as well as his speaking, and I wanted to be a Christian like him. Herman was the key person in bringing Witness Lee and the local church to Waco.

### **JAMES BARBER**

In 1964, Herman, his fiancée Kathleen Corley, and his twin brother Thurman were in the Washington D.C. area for a summer of Navigator training. In the spring of 1964, James Barber had returned from the Witness Lee conference in Tyler, Texas. He and about 20 students at Wayland Baptist College had left the Southern Baptist denomination and began to seek the Lord and to meet in the Lord's name as simply the church in Plainview. Witness Lee accepted an invitation to meet with James Barber and the seeking saints in Plainview.

### **MORE ON BENSON PHILLIPS**

Witness Lee traveled from Plainview to Dallas. Phillips was now a student at the Southwestern Baptist Seminary in Fort Worth. Benson Phillips' friends from Wayland Baptist College urged him to hear Witness Lee when he came to Dallas. In Dallas, Benson Phillips heard Witness Lee speak for the first time. He then began to study the book *The Normal Christian Church Life* by Watchman Nee and the New Testament regarding the proper practical practice of the church. Phillips made the decision to spend the summer with the fledgling local church in Los Angeles. His fiancée, Barbara Kratzer, a student at Baylor, joined him in Los Angeles. Barbara knew Herman and Kathleen and knew they were in the D.C. area.

Witness Lee was traveling that spring and summer. After the Tyler conference, Gene Edwards began to follow Witness Lee on his speaking trips. Lee traveled to D.C. to speak. Edwards went to the Navigator facilities and met Herman and invited him to come and hear a co-worker of Watchman Nee. Herman and Kathleen went and met Lee. They were very impressed. When Lee returned to Los Angeles, he gave a report and mentioned he had met two young people from Texas in D.C. and though he could not remember their names he asked for prayer for them. Barbara believed it must be Herman and Kathleen. She called them and invited them to cut short the Navigator training and come to LA. Herman asked the Navigator leaders for permission and they granted it. On their last night he and Kathleen sang a duet. They sang "He's in My Heart." According to reports the Lord's presence was very strong. They were to fly out the next morning as there were only two open seats for three weeks. The reservation was first class and way beyond their means to pay. Herman put all his and Kathleen's money in a sock and prayed. The next day he was waiting in the airport lobby hoping someone would walk up with the money. No one came. The last call was made. Herman ran to the counter and emptied the sock. The agent counted the money. It was the exact amount needed. Herman thinks that probably while he slept some of the other young navigator trainees slipped into his room and put the money in the sock. At any rate, they made it for four weeks in the church in LA and time with Witness Lee. That fall the church in Waco began on a park bench with three, Herman, Kathleen and Barbara (Benson's wife to be).

### **DON LOOPER**

Don Looper was a close friend of Herman. Don and I were both freshmen together and both scholarship baseball players. Male college athletes are probably the most self-centered men on earth. I had heard of Don Looper within a day of arriving at Baylor and of what a great player he was. When I met him, I could not believe that this was Don Looper the great ballplayer. He was the godliest man I had ever met. He was truly a great baseball player and would have had an excellent chance of being in the Major Leagues. Yet, he cared nothing for that. He loved Christ with all his heart and only wanted to please and serve Him. He was extremely kind and gracious to all. No one would guess who he

was without being informed of his reputation. Wherever Don went the Spirit of God worked in the hearts of men.

He and two others began to pray in his dorm room. Within a few weeks, twenty athletes - baseball, football and basketball - began to come for prayer. I saw men pray and open to the Lord that I would never have suspected of having any interest in the things of God. Several of the ball players were saved through Don. By the end of his sophomore year he was holding frequent week-end revivals and was the youth pastor of a Waco Baptist Church of about 500. Baylor students began to flock to this church which was on the far side of Waco from the University. When he was scheduled to speak on a Sunday night, word would begin to spread around the campus that "Looper was preaching." Men and women would make plans to go, not just to hear Don but to meet God.

Don began to fellowship with Herman concerning what Herman was seeing regarding the church and the experience of Christ as Life. (Don introduced me to Ian Thomas and to the teaching of Christ as Life.) In the spring of 1965, Witness Lee came To Waco for a week. Don attended every meeting and had much private fellowship with Lee. That summer Don visited the church in LA. When he returned, Don resigned from the Baptist ministry and enrolled in the school of education. Immediately the negative rumors began to fly. I was told that Don had left the ministry and was meeting with Herman. The report was very negative. I knew the tale bearer and I knew Herman and Don. I made a note to myself that I must learn more about this.

### **DON RUTLEDGE**

I will share a little about my own history. I was far below the spiritual stature of any of the Texas brothers and sisters I have mentioned. I was actually just a peasant from rural Eastern Arkansas. I managed to escape through sports. My only ambition was to be a professional baseball player. Somehow I had become the best ballplayer in Lee County, Arkansas. Nobody passes through Lee County. You have to be going there to find it. We used to say that it was not the end of the world but you could see it from there. But in spite of the isolation, I was being pursued by eight different major league teams. This was before the baseball professional draft, and a young man could sign with the highest bidder. Before age 21, only the approval of a parent was required. I had no intention of going to college but of only going pro. The Lord rescued me one May evening. A scout from the San Francisco Giants was pursuing me. His name was Skinny Walker. He had been a major league pitcher in the 1930s. He came to one of our games and as soon as he arrived he found my dad and asked him to go and to get something to eat. He asked my father, "Mr. Rutledge, why do you think I am doing this job? It is because it is all I can do. I have no education and only know baseball. If you really love your son you will insist he go to college. I will help him get a scholarship, but if he has to play pro ball I will sign him." Three months later I found myself at Baylor University. Many times I have thanked the Lord for sending Skinny Walker to Lee County.

I grew up a cultural Christian. We went to church just about every Sunday and I tried to be honest and not curse. At sixteen, I was saved. The sky had never been so blue nor had the birds sung so sweetly. The Bible became so living and was the most interesting book. My view of people changed. I found a surprising love in my heart for others. Being a forgiven man is a relief beyond imagination. I loved the Lord and believed He had arranged for me to go to college and that there I would find His purpose for me. And that is what happened. The men I have mentioned set me on the course of seeking to know Him and the power of His resurrection. I have failed many times and those around me have failed at times, but the Lord has never failed. I have absolutely no complaints toward the Lord. Rather, I can only tell of the joy of knowing Christ and must declare: Great is His faithfulness and His mercies are new every morning.

On the third Sunday in September, 1965, I attended my first meeting. There were only eight young people there. As I listened to the prayers, I realized that Jesus Christ was surely there. Benson Phillips shared on the two trees in Genesis. The Lord spoke through Benson's word. I saw why my efforts to do good had not resulted in a victorious Christian life and that Christ Himself could supply not only salvation but daily salvation by His life.

My personal theme verses had been Isa 40:30-31: "Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run and not get tired. They will walk and not become weary." During the meeting, I had such an overwhelming sensation that I was about to realize these verses in my Christian Life. After the meeting, Thurman Massey (Herman's twin brother) asked if I knew I had a human spirit. Suddenly I knew. Yes, I had found the Lord within me on occasion and realized that must surely be my human spirit. From that day to the present, I can testify that I have had daily fellowship with the Lord and have come to appreciate the indwelling Christ beyond anything I could have imagined.

During the spring of 1966, when Don Looper and I also to some extent were being harassed for being in the church, being able to deliberately, on purpose, draw grace and mercy from the indwelling Christ made all the difference. Perhaps my next book will be a compilation of experiences of discerning soul from spirit and of putting to death the practices of the body of sin by the spirit. Of whatever I learned in the local church, the practice of walking and living by the spirit is among the top.

### **MORE ON DON LOOPER**

Don Looper was a real star on the Baylor campus. He was the ideal young Baptist minister. He was an extremely attractive person. He was very intelligent and personable, as well as being a great athlete and full of sincere love for the Lord, for His people and for mankind. The Lord had gifted him in understanding the scriptures and in the ability to teach the Word of God. The religious leaders of the university, (Baylor was sponsored by the Texas Baptist Convention which covered 75% of the University's expenses), began to oppose him and to defame him. I and two other ball players had begun to meet with the church in Waco. Thus, the religious leaders feared that Looper would lead many away from the Baptist denomination and harm their position. It was similar to what took place in John 11:48, where the Jewish leaders feared that due to the resurrection of Lazarus, they may lose their position. At one point, the baseball coach, who was not a Baptist, felt he had to give an ultimatum that we either had to leave our "cult" or we were off the team and would lose our scholarship. For me that would be devastating. I would not be able to afford to stay in school and by then to not be in college probably meant a fast trip to Viet Nam.

The coach withdrew his threat and told us that he did not want to make us martyrs but that after the season we must resolve the problem. Don Looper was harassed by the coaches and began the season struggling to perform up to his previous level. I also was struggling. The entire team was playing poorly but Don was singled out to be the scapegoat. During the last third of the season Don and I caught fire. Neither of us had ever played so well before and the team tied for the Southwest Conference championship. This was the first conference championship of any kind that Baylor had won or tied for since 1921. Looper received no credit and was quietly removed from the team after the season. I was named all conference and told by the coach that he would assure me I would be drafted high in the newly instituted major league draft if I would drop the church. I was given until the end of the summer to make a decision. I knew my baseball playing days were over and the Lord found a way for me to complete my education.

Don Looper married a wonderful young Christian woman, Judy Heathcote. They cared for me in many ways. After I lost my scholarship, I had to carry a full load and work full time. I had a full time job loading trucks from 1:00 PM until 9:30 PM. Everyday Don would faithfully drive me to work and pick me up at 10 PM as I had no car. Many times Judy asked me to a meal. Often that was my only meal for the day.

When they married, I was invited to their wedding. There, I realized for the first time that they were many grades above me in the social order, yet they treated me as their dear brother in Christ and were always ready to serve me and any of the brothers and sisters. Not only Don, but all the brothers and sisters in Waco had a heart to assist the poorer saints rather than care for their own lives.

During the summer of 1966, I was working a construction job building an eleven story high rise. One day I was smashed against the building by a building crane. My right calf muscle was smashed. This occurred late on a Friday afternoon. I was taken to the hospital and told it would be some time before I could walk. The next day Herman Massey came to my apartment. He shared that he had thirty minutes for lunch from his job and felt to pray for my healing. He knelt to pray and as he prayed I felt an incredible heat moving up and down my leg. Another brother, Willard Cox, who lived with me at the time then also prayed. While he prayed, Herman got up and went back to work. When the other brother stopped praying, I stood up and could walk. The next day I played tennis with a friend and was back at work on Monday. Were the bosses at the site shocked when I showed up!

### **SHERYL RUTLEDGE**

During those days the Lord answered one of my most earnest prayers. Shortly after I was saved, I became very concerned regarding whom I would marry. A college athlete does attract girls. I did not trust any woman who was thus interested in me. I knew that my Christian life could rise or fall based on whom I married.

When I attended my first meeting of the church in Waco, there was a young woman, Sheryl Hays, from Shreveport, Louisiana. I spoke to her only briefly. The next morning as I was praying, the Lord showed me that Sheryl Hays would be my wife. I kept this to myself and waited to see what the Lord would do. The next summer, 1966, she moved to Waco and brought six young women with her. Sheryl was an elementary teacher and she had saved most of her money that year. She and one other were the only two of the seven women who had a car. Her car was always available to them and she supported several of them until they could secure jobs. As I observed her, I knew she was the kind of Christian who could lift me up. That summer and early fall we got to know each other through the church activities. In September, I shared with her that I had strong feelings for her. She had never considered me but within just a few days the Lord put a love in her heart for me. She has been such a helpmeet for me that words fail. We have been married for 40 years and still love each other deeply and continue to walk with the Lord step for step.

Our number in Waco grew to 25 not counting any of the junior highers. But four of the brothers were drafted and all were in Viet Nam at the same time. We prayed much that the Lord would preserve them physically and also emotionally. They all returned safe after a year.

### **FELLOWSHIP WITH LUBBOCK AND DENTON**

Because Plainview was such a tiny town of about 10,000, the brothers and sisters had moved to Lubbock in 1966-67. About every two months we would meet with the church in Plainview and then later Lubbock. Those were always blessed times. It seemed the Lord's presence and speaking was much more prevailing whenever we met with the saints from Lubbock. I assumed that it was due to their close walk with Christ.

## **GEORGE WHITINGTON**

In 1967, our close fellowship expanded to a new city, Denton, Texas. Thurman Massey returned to North Texas State University, in Denton, to complete his degree. There he met a young former Assembly of God minister, George Whittington. George had begun a home meeting near the campus and he and his wife Cleo were true shepherds. George was very gifted academically and a man full of the Spirit. Yet he was very humble. He was 27 years old. That made him quite our senior. Though he was older and gifted he never assumed any position and was an immediate supply to us and to whomever he contacted. We began to visit him and Thurman and those with them, and they began to visit us in Waco.

The Lord was with us and greatly encouraged us. Again, we in Waco assumed that the rich enjoyment of Christ during these times was due to the supply from the Church in Denton. Later as we compared notes we learned that those from Lubbock and Denton thought it was the brothers and sisters from Waco that were the reason for the abundance of Christ in our corporate gatherings. Altogether there were about 70 young adults who gathered in these three small churches.

During the summer of 1969, there was a seismic shift for the churches in Texas. This shift would affect many throughout the country. A good number of saints from Texas had gone to LA for a conference and training with Witness Lee. While there, some of them began to talk about moving together. This was a completely new thought to everyone.

On a Monday evening toward the end of that time, Herman Massey and Ben McPherson arranged for Witness Lee to visit with them in the furnished apartment that they had rented for two months. After they ate, about 20 of the Texas saints began to gather at the apartment. Some of the brothers shared with Brother Lee the feeling that some had concerning moving together. He was quite shocked that we would consider such a thing. During the fellowship, the Lord's presence was very prevailing. We all, including Brother Lee, realized we had touched the Lord's heart. Then we began to consider where. Those from Lubbock said no to Lubbock. Those from Denton and Waco did not feel their city was the place. Suddenly, Judy Looper mentioned Houston. Everyone's spirit jumped. Witness Lee proposed Dallas. No one had a witness that the place was Dallas. By 9:00 PM we were all settled. We would move to Houston.

But what about those back in Waco, etc? Phone calls were made. The Lord had already gone ahead. As soon as each brother and sister heard the fellowship, all had a strong amen within. Not one had any contrary feelings. It was really quite amazing. (There are many events and persons who are, no doubt, also worthy of inclusion, but time and space do not permit this account to be all-inclusive. I will leave the task of writing a history that would address issues or persons I omit to others.)

The next chapter will tell of the experience in Houston and the coming migrations to places such as Seattle, Chicago, Akron, Atlanta, and Dallas.

## ***CHAPTER TWO***

### ***Further Blessing of the Spirit's Move and the Seeds and Beginning of Deviation***

Eventually during the fall of 1969, about 70 brothers and sisters moved to Houston and secured housing and jobs. As it turned out, different clusters of saints were scattered about Houston. A big part of the church life took place in the apartment complexes and neighborhoods where the various families resided. During the first year, the number grew to around 100 brothers and sisters and by the summer of 1971 there were over 125 in the church in Houston.



A fascinating phenomenon was seen which confirmed the reality of Christ: the Spirit worked in completely different places, with completely different sets of people, but in the same way. For example, one of the brothers was a printer. He began to print three by five cards with gospel slogans, such as: "Taste and See that the Lord is Good," "Christ is Reality," and "Jesus is Lord." Different brothers and sisters would then pass these out in various public places. Many would display them on their refrigerator or coffee table. Some began to put them in windows and to tape them to their car windows. The brother printed several larger "Jesus is Lord" cards. Some began to place them across their back car windows. These may have been some of the first "Christian" bumper stickers. Within a few months, Christians all over the country were putting signs on their cars. Of course, they could not have heard about the little band in Houston where maybe a two dozen or so were doing this - it was a real move of God in the Body of Christ."

We never knew where the Lord would send us or who we would meet. During the summer of 1969, just before the move to Houston, my wife and I attended the summer conference in Los Angeles. In one of the meetings, we noticed a new shining young man sitting behind us and we made a point of meeting him. His name was Fred Koch, from Louisiana, my wife's home state. We exchanged phone numbers with him, and introduced him to others. We enjoyed his testimony of how he happened to be in Los Angeles and just happened to meet someone from the church in Los Angeles.

After we moved to Houston, someone contacted this brother and one week-end he appeared with his younger brother and another young man, both of whom were students at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. This inspired several of us to begin to visit Baton Rouge and several LSU students also began to visit Houston. This continued for about two years. A newly saved brother who was both bringing other students to the Lord and bringing them for visits to Houston was Collie Joseph, the president of the student body at LSU.

In the spring of 1971, we had a small conference on the campus at LSU. Meetings were held in the auction barn of the Veterinarian School, where we set up folding chairs in the dirt, sawdust and cattle droppings and had a wonderful time in the Bible and in the presence of Jesus Christ. In the summer of 1970, the church in Houston purchased a little over an acre of land and began to build a meeting place with about 35 brothers doing the work during the day. Several were school teachers and were on summer break. Others used vacation time to work on the hall. Others joined in after work and all would work from dawn till dusk on Saturdays. Ray Graver and Benson Phillips were a whirlwind of energy and activity. Ray was a natural at organizing men of various abilities related to building and leading them to coordinate together. The project was completed by the end of the summer.

### **THE FORMATION OF THE CHURCH IN HOUSTON**

The leadership of the church in Houston consisted of Benson Phillips, Ray Graver and Ben McPherson. How these three came to be in the lead is a story in itself and eventually became a problem to the churches in Texas, as well as many other places. Shortly after we arrived in Houston, Benson announced that there would be a meeting of any brothers who felt the burden to be in the lead of the church. All of the men except for Don Looper and myself attended the first meeting. Don and I had fellowshiped that this was surely not the way of the New Testament and we could not see any New Testament examples where someone put themselves forward as the leader. Did not the Lord declare in Matthew 23:11-12, "But the greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled: and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted"?

Benson, Ray and Ben were all teaching at the same public school and rode to work together. At the school they made decisions regarding the church and carried them out at the “leading brothers” meeting, where other brothers were present also. Ray and Ben were dedicated, fine Christian men, but I doubt that many (if any) of the brothers and sisters in the three churches that came together looked to them for leadership. Their major qualification was a close friendship with Benson Phillips, going back to college days. They both had a deep dedication to, and admiration for Phillips. The “leading brothers” meeting eventually disintegrated. Some of the brothers told me there was no coordination there. Rather, these three brothers had already decided everything in advance. Eventually, this type of pattern became the way things were done among the elders and co-workers in many places. The inner circle would decide ahead of time and then execute their decision at the general meeting, all the while giving the impression of having had open fellowship. Since Ray was an elder in the church in Houston, and Houston became a prominent church, he had a position to influence many brothers and sisters throughout the USA.

### **RAY GRAVER**

After a few months, I was living in the same apartment complex as the Gravers and had many peculiar experiences with Ray. He was a different kind of person and obsessed with Witness Lee. Once, I was asked to share a gospel message and I needed to pray and coordinate with Ray. He asked me if I had some verses and any specific direction. I said I did and asked him if he had some leading. He replied that he did not. I shared my feeling and the verses I wanted to read. I had selected several verses from various books of the New Testament. Ray became quite agitated and declared that we should follow Brother Lee’s example of only selecting verses from one book of the Bible whenever he gave a message. I was dumbfounded since Witness Lee would share a message using verses from all over the Bible, and besides, why did it matter what Witness Lee did or did not do? Should we not pray and seek the Lord and follow the anointing? I truly found Ray’s notion to be absurd, but Ray was adamant. If we desired the Lord’s blessing, we should follow Witness Lee and only use verses from one book. We had no seeking prayer for the Lord’s mind, only general prayer. It seemed that the main consideration was to copy Witness Lee. Over the years, Ray would introduce many strange and dubious Lee-isms, which he pushed onto others.

In the church life at that time, Witness Lee was very much in the background among the churches. While we sought the Lord for our daily walk, family life, and function in the Body of Christ, Ray would constantly reference Witness Lee for all matters – personal, local, and extra-local. Ray often told others that they needed to be able to “read between the lines” of what Brother Lee was saying and “hear what he really means” and that “he does not tell you directly what he wants”. Ray was always bringing Witness Lee to the foreground in the church, a trend that only increased with time. Because of his position of leadership, Ray, with his superstitious notions, eventually became a great problem to many. One of Ray’s ambitions was to serve Witness Lee directly, and he believed that one day Witness Lee would relocate to Texas, probably to Houston.

### **RAY AND DEPUTY AUTHORITY**

Ray was strongly bent toward the teaching of “Deputy Authority.” He believed that in every activity of the church deputy authority should be manifested. Before the consolidation in Houston a few brothers in Waco and Lubbock were given copies of the “Eldership Papers.” These were messages given by Witness Lee in Taiwan. One of the main points was that there was an order in the eldership and in all manifestations of God’s work. There was a number one elder, a number two elder, a number three elder, and so forth. The same was true in the practical service in the church, such as cleaning the meeting hall, serving in the children’s meeting, and preparing food for a love feast. Until the number one person made a decision, there would be discussion (fellowship) regarding



a matter, but once the “number one” gave his judgment all fellowship was over on that matter and any desire for further discussion was considered to be dissension and against God’s authority.

Ray Graver had come up with a teaching and a principle from the listings of the names of the twelve apostles in the New Testament. He discovered that the various listings in Matthew, Mark, Luke and Acts could be divided into three groups of four and that the first name in each grouping was always the same. Therefore, one might infer that here was a clue regarding divine deputy authority. While the order of number two, three and four could shift, the number one was always the same.

This was introduced about the same time that the elders set up the practical service with various service groups. The elders used a model that Witness Lee had used in China and Taiwan. All the members of the church were organized into various service groups: children’s meetings, cleaning, yard work, visitation etc. They also appointed four deacons including myself four deacons, one of which was myself. Ray met with me personally to go over the entire service list. He emphasized that I was the number one deacon and should communicate with each service group through the number one person listed under each group. I was specifically charged to draw up a procedural manual for the deacons called “the common way.” This was a term and practice lifted directly from Witness Lee’s practice in China and Taiwan. The elders charged each service group leadership to develop a “common way” and to submit it to the deacons.

I never complied and never developed a “common way.” I was the youngest brother and newest Christian among the deacons (Don Looper, Herman Massey and Jim Coleman being the other three), and for me to have some kind of official leadership or authority was a little silly. When I moved to Dallas, the “number one” concept and “common way” practice were left behind in Houston with Ray Graver. We did have service groups with leadership and oversight, but did not carry out Ray Graver’s concept.

Ray was very gifted in the area of organizing activities and projects. He worked hard to push for one project after another. Over time, his projects became more important than his participation in church meetings, shepherding, fellowship and gospel work. The more he dedicated himself to the projects coming from Witness Lee or Benson Phillips, the more he became suspicious of individual saints and different churches. Eventually he saw a competition between the spiritual work of an individual saint and an LSM project. He seemed to always think that the worst motives were motivating an individual saint, and especially those of a local leadership.

Witness Lee had an illustration regarding how “the self” is expressed and how to apply the cross to “the self.” He often declared that your opinion is the expression of the self. Thus, when someone offered a different perspective from that of a “number one,” they may be exhorted to deny their self by denying their opinion even if they are “right.” Ray Graver and a few others ran with this notion. They applied it widely. It seemed that there were a number of West Texans who latched onto this idea: Francis Ball, James Barber, Benson Phillips, Ben McPherson and others. Though Ray was originally from Virginia, he went to college at Wayland and adopted the West Texas code. I believe that the cultural background of the leadership was a big factor in the development of the local churches in the USA.

The men from West Texas brought a male-dominated and male-centric culture into the local churches that melded well with the male-dominated culture of China, the place where Witness Lee and other leaders were from. These West Texans were anything but weak. Several came from the oil fields and working ranches. They could sacrifice comfort and self interest and expected the same from others. The West Texas culture promoted strong leaders and fierce loyalty to the leader. The followers of the leader were expected to

lay aside their own feelings and follow the leader fearlessly into whatever situation they may face.

Lest the reader ask “where does Don Rutledge get off talking about West Texas culture?”, let me mention that Baylor University, my school, has the Texas Library and Texas Ranger Museum. It is the center for the study of Texas history. While in Waco, I developed an interest in Western history and particularly Texas history. This has been a hobby of mine for forty-plus years. I have read scores of books on this subject including many on the character of the early and later Texans.

In contrast to West Texas, I come from the poorest section of the USA, the lower Mississippi River valley. I did appreciate the West Texans’ rugged character, as I myself had slept in the rain, had friends who needed to hunt and fish for food and who worked “can till can’t” in the hot southern sun. (“Can till can’t” means this: you start working when there is enough daylight so that one “can” see and you do not stop until it is so dark that one “can’t” see.) There was no lunch break. You ate whatever you had while you worked. You were not paid by the hour but by the day, provided the boss thought you had worked hard enough. I did see young teenage boys sent home without any pay because they had not pulled their share of the load. As a result, they faced a beating at home. But the next day, they did “jump up and turn around” and carry their share of the work. Thus, I appreciated the West Texan toughness, but I did not come from a culture which honored a leader as did the West Texans did. In fact, we in Arkansas had plenty of resentment toward the exploiting “planter class” which oppressed the peasants. It was sports that provided us a level ground with the sons of the planters. During pre-season, our high school football team had live scrimmages and hitting drills every day. The hitting and contact was ferocious. Not one son of a planter ever survived pre-season. They all would quit rather than continue to take the beating the peasants handed them.

We peasants had sympathy toward the weaker members of our society, and especially for ones oppressed. I believe the Lord Jesus puts into his believers a strong desire to bestow more abundant honor on the less comely and to protect the weak. One of the main reasons I eventually left the local churches was the rough treatment received by weaker ones and ones whose opinions did not match the leaders’ ideas. I recognize in some ways my reaction to the “lording it over” that came in later days may have been partly due to my culture. Ransford Ackah of Ghana once told me, “Don, you always favor the poor.” I had to confess to him that his statement was true. Regardless of our background, culture, disposition, or how our mother raised us, we all need to be transformed and conformed to Christ. As this book develops, I ask the reader to allow me to comment on the personalities and background of different leading figures.

### **SERVING THE MINISTRY**

Eventually, Ray Graver invented a teaching called “Serving the Ministry”, which came from verses such as the following:

Phil 2:19-25, “But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. 20 For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. 21 For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. 22 But you know of his proven worth that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father. 23 Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me; 24 and I trust in the Lord that I myself also shall be coming shortly. 25 But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need.”

2 Cor 12:18, "I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Titus did not take any advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit and walk in the same steps?"

2 Cor 8:16-20, "But thanks be to God, who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus. 17 For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he has gone to you of his own accord. 18 And we have sent along with him the brother whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches; 19 and not only this, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work, which is being administered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself, and to show our readiness."

2 Cor 8:22-23, "And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have often tested and found diligent in many things, but now even more diligent, because of his great confidence in you. 23 As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ."

Col 4:7-9, "As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. 8 For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; 9 and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here."

Phil 2:28-30, "Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly in order that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you. 29 Therefore receive him in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; 30 because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me."

Philem 17-20, "If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me. 18 But if he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account; 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (lest I should mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well)."

2 Tim 4:9-13, "Make every effort to come to me soon; 10 for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. 12 But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. 13 When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments."

From the above verses and a few more, Ray surmised that some co-workers were one with Paul while others were not. Some were partly one with Paul." Some lost their devotion to following Paul, while others served Paul practically - which was likened to serving the LSM office (Philip Lee), that is, "serving the ministry". Ray was truly amazing in his ability to take a verse and declare some hidden economical practice that had been hidden there and applying it to Witness Lee. In addition, Ray believed that all the brothers and sisters were in a constant ongoing test regarding their faithful service to, and oneness with, "the apostle" and "his ministry", including any practical administration "the apostle" might employ.

Once Ray moved to Irving, he held fellowship sessions with visiting saints and elders who had come to help build the Irving conference center. In these settings he presented his insights on serving the ministry. In Dallas, which is thirty miles from Irving, we heard Ray

had some new light. We invited him to come to Dallas and spend some time with the elders to go over his new light. He never responded though we asked several times. (This tactic of ignoring others who desired communication with him was to be used by Ray again and again when it was detected that those “knocking on his door” were not in lock-step with him and his concept of serving the ministry office).

### **PROMOTING THE MINISTRY**

Eventually, Ray proclaimed that the churches were for the ministry and not the ministry for the churches! (This happened to be the reverse of what Watchman Nee and Witness Lee had taught.) Ray explained that a central key church would provide an audience for Witness Lee, “the Apostle.” That church was the “injection point” for “the Ministry” to be injected into the Body of Christ. Then others churches and saints who were one with the office would function to “get out” the riches by editing, printing, shipping, etc. Finally, each local church should focus on getting “the Ministry” into the members and spreading it to believers outside the local churches. Those brothers and sisters - and elders in particular - not promoting this program were suspect and often warned against and defamed.

Many dear ones became confused in their walk with the Lord, feeling that they could not cooperate with this program without violating their conscience and the leading of the Spirit. Many found that their family life and work life were also negatively impacted by the promotions of the ministry, since their time and energy were shifted in order to “serve the ministry”. (This section is not done in a sequential order but is important for showing the deviation in the churches from the New Testament revelation and practice which led to major problems in the future.)

### **BACK TO HOUSTON**

In November 1969, my first son was born. He cried most of the day and night with severe stomach problems. We assumed it was colic and he would grow out of it. I walked him for the first half of the night since I had to be up by 6:00 to drive a school bus and teach. My wife took the second shift. A brother in the church who was a doctor began to prescribe “colic medicine.” We were to put a few drops in his bottle four times a day. It was not working and the doctor kept prescribing more and more. After 14 months his situation was worse than ever. We had noticed a kind of darkness had come over our apartment. I was filling the latest prescription and the druggist balked. He asked me if I knew what I was asking for. I did not. He informed me that I was asking for a large bottle of pure opium abstract! We then went to the M.D. Anderson Hospital and learned that our son no longer had colic but had become addicted to opium. He was currently taking 90 drops 4 times a day. We were instructed to reduce the dosage by one drop every three days. We began to follow the regimen but starting on the day of reduction, he would have about 36 hours of withdrawal pains. It was an absolutely terrible experience.

We asked the elders for prayer. Herman Massey and two elders, Benson Phillips and Ray Graver, came to our apartment. We prayed and laid hands on my son. I flushed the opium down the toilet. Suddenly my son fell asleep and never had a sleepless night or problem again. The darkness lifted from our home.

In those days, we all believed that the Lord was heading up the church locally and universally and that the Spirit could move spontaneously and simultaneously in many places amongst many believers. As stated before, we had many experiences of this reality. One further example occurred in a prayer meeting while we were still meeting in the YMCA in Houston. Unbeknownst to any in Houston, while we were meeting some were gathering in Los Angeles to pray and consider where they should move. Toward the end of our prayer meeting in Houston around 9:30 PM CST, and seemingly right out of the blue, a sister, Cathy Buice, prayed “Lord, what about Atlanta?” The meeting took off like a

rocket and the whole congregation joined in the intercession for the city of Atlanta. Later I learned from Bob Bynum that at the same time a note was being passed around in the meeting in LA, at about 7:30 PM PST. The note read, "It is Atlanta."

### **MOVE TO DALLAS**

In the early summer of 1971, Witness Lee came to Houston for a conference. During the conference, he shared that there might be a burden for Dallas. He asked me if I had any leading to move to Dallas.

Earlier in the year, we made a gospel trip to Dallas. A younger sister of Jane Anderson and a younger sister of Joan Adams had visited Jane and Joan, respectively, along with the church in Houston. They invited some to come for a visit on a week-end. I was asked to accompany the Andersons, Joan Adams and a few others. When we arrived, we learned that the hospitality had fallen through, as well as the home where we were to gather. Several of us piled into John Anderson's mother's apartment and slept on the floor. We prayed desperately that night and the next morning. Suddenly another home opened up. Those who had invited us, along with their friends, joined in for a wonderful time in Christ. We met more seeking young people during breakfast at Denny's restaurant. Several young people received the Lord that weekend and were baptized in a swimming pool, and others consecrated themselves to the Lord. We returned to Houston that Lord's Day evening full of rejoicing. Something was deposited in me for Dallas.

We also had contact with some believers in Dallas who were about our age. There were two couples and one single man. They were very interested in Watchman Nee and the concept of the New Testament church. They were also very interested to hear that the Lord was bringing His people back to the original standard. In those days, the concept of "recovery", "that is," believers coming out of religious camps to gather unto Him, was not unusual. Many serious Christians had this thought at that time. During these years, I heard many speakers express similar concepts. Many books and booklets were written along this line such as Gary Handley's "The Quiet Revolution." Bob Mumford in Florida had a similar concept. Gene Edwards had been at Elden Hall for a few years and had started his own version of "The Recovery", that is, the so-called "Ephesian Line" in Isle la Vista, California. He wrote an adventure story about the first century church entitled "The Early Church", which was a rejection of the Witness Lee version of recovery and a promotion of his approach. It was a very exciting read.

During that spring and summer, I and a few others began to visit these two couples and this single brother. They also came to visit us in Houston. We wanted to encourage them in their pursuit of the Lord and also to receive encouragement from them. Both these ones in Dallas and we in Houston were seeking to practice the New Testament church life. One of the couples in Dallas had spent a short time in the church in Los Angeles and had left the Assembly of God ministry to seek the Lord and a more perfect practice of the church life according to the New Testament.

When Witness Lee first asked me about moving to Dallas, I was only interested in visiting occasionally. I was very happy in Houston and had what I considered a nearly perfect teaching position. But the Lord within began to compel me toward Dallas. I hoped we could join with the couples and the brother with whom we had spent time. When I shared that I was considering moving, they were visibly bothered. At the time, I did not realize that they considered that a race existed for Dallas. Gene Edwards wanted to move there and set up his "Ephesian Line." Gary Handley was interested in bringing his "Quiet Revolution" from Chicago to Dallas. These few saw us from Houston as wanting to establish a Witness Lee version of the New Testament church. This competition for turf and position was an early indication of the problem with Watchman Nee's concept of "the Work" versus "the church." This concept was introduced in the USA through Watchman

Nee's book "The Normal Christian Church Life." There is not enough space here to discuss this teaching in detail. Please refer to the appendix. But let us say that the rivalry among so called "workers" and the ease with which believers will align themselves with "workers/ministries" is a problem and has always been a problem from the very beginning of the Christian Era.

Take away Watchman Nee's teaching on "the Work" and very few of the future problems would have developed. In fact, I believe we could have worked out things with those in Dallas, but unfortunately people began to line up versus Witness Lee and with Gene Edwards.

In September of 1971, Gene Edwards and Jon Braun, a former Campus Crusade leader, along with the two couples appeared at a prayer meeting in my home in Dallas. There were about fifteen in the meeting who had moved from Houston or who had joined us from Dallas, in addition to these six. We went through with the meeting, but I can only remember the end. George Whittington, a Dallas native, had just moved from Houston to be with us. Gene Edwards, who knew George Whittington personally, asked in his very distinct, dramatic voice, as only he could utter, "Brother George, am I permitted to speak?" No one was comfortable and all eyes turned to George who replied quietly "No, brother." Edwards responded "Why, is it fornication?" George stated, "You need to clear up some things up in Los Angeles." Edwards went to the chalk board which was set up in the corner and wrote "September 1, 1971, Ichabod." He then walked out with "the glory of the Lord" in his pocket along with his entourage of five. He never moved to Dallas. The single brother returned to Tampa and the other two couples left the area. Gary Handley, who had visited earlier, never returned.

(At an August conference in Los Angeles the month before, I spoke with Witness Lee regarding Gene Edwards. Earlier in the summer, as I just mentioned, I had learned that he might be moving to Dallas. Witness Lee never endorsed nor warned against Gene Edwards. Later that week Gene Edwards came to the conference. He met with Witness Lee after a meeting along with some others. He did not want any others there but wanted a private time. Witness Lee wanted their conversation to be before witnesses. Gene Edwards would not say anything of substance. Witness Lee spoke to him regarding the criticism he had directed toward the church in Los Angeles and his coming to meetings to contact and recruit young people for his church in Isle la Vista.)

Shortly after the strange meeting in my home, we began to celebrate the Lord's Table on the Lord's Day evenings. Unlike the later practice in the local churches, there was no "taking the ground meeting." Nor did we ever do such a thing in Houston. I first heard this phrase in 1973. I never heard Witness Lee use this expression. I mention this here because I can assert that this was another deviation or addition to orthodox practice which would lead to divisive practices.

### **EARLY MIGRATIONS**

Sincere and seeking Christians began to move to the church in Los Angeles in 1964. Most did so with an understanding that this was probably not their last move. They desired to spend time experiencing a practical church life and being perfected in Life and Truth. Then they expected to migrate at some point to other cities or return to their home city in order to spread what they had experienced and learned in LA. Whenever I visited the church in LA, I would often be in fellowship where in which migration was being discussed in a most hearty way. At times, I was told that we who met in the churches in Texas could not really know the church life unless we had spent time in LA directly under Witness Lee. Others informed me that we were taking an unorthodox way in Texas but Witness Lee seemed to be giving us a pass. I just listened to these notions, feeling that they were peculiar and would have no consequence. One point in Watchman Nee's book



on the Church Life was this: if the churches are local in administrative scope, then peculiarities or even heresies will be isolated. He believed that a universal practice opened the door for deviations to spread throughout the Body of Christ.

### **TITUS CHU**

In the winter of 1970-71, brothers and sisters in the Midwest were led by the Lord to come together in Akron, Ohio. Brother Titus Chu had been raised up by the Lord to preach the gospel, and he was shepherding a number of small congregations. I first encountered him in 1966 during a Bible training in Los Angeles.

In those days, Witness Lee would ask various brothers to share on a topic before he spoke on it. A brother could be called on with no warning and was required to handle the assignment alone. During my first time in LA, he asked me to share on Romans 1:4, “who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,” ... His specific questions concerned an explanation of the “Spirit of holiness.” I walked to the front and immediately declared “I have no idea. I never noticed this title of the Spirit until this very moment. May I have some help?” He agreed and I called on Thurman Massey. Thurman came forward and also had no idea. We were allowed to be seated and Witness Lee then proceeded with his message.

During the same training Witness Lee called on a stranger to us, Titus Chu. A very slender young Chinese man with a huge Bible came humbly forward. Out of his mouth came a flood of life and light in answer to Witness Lee’s question. After about five to seven minutes, the young stranger finished and returned to his seat. A murmur went through the congregation. An elderly sister from Scotland, Sister Roy, stood and declared, in her beautiful Scottish brogue, “Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus.” (2 Cor 7:6).

In the winter of 1970, the scattered seeking saints in the Midwest and the few small congregations under the care of Titus gathered at a campground in Erie, Pennsylvania for a New Year’s conference. Six from Houston, including the Massey twins, Herman and Thurman, drove to the conference. There these young saints testified of our experience in coming together in Houston. They greatly inspired many at the conference. Before the month was out, the move to Akron, Ohio, was on. I was able to visit the saints in Akron a few times, and the fellowship was rich with Christ, the Lord’s presence was thick, and the ministry was full of light.

The church in Akron was a beautiful bouquet of the redeemed of the Lord. Titus Chu was able to reach local people of all races, not just the Chinese. In Dallas, we were able to secure his visits several times. Every time, his portion was a great help. Eventually, Titus became the most fruitful brother from the USA. He was a blessing to the Midwestern USA, Africa, the Far East and South America; but, he was always viewed with suspicion by some from Southern California. This was another sign of an underlining perceived problem with some that you had to be in a church in Southern California and under Witness Lee on an ongoing basis to be truly effective in building up the genuine church.

### **The Northwest and Bill Freeman**

Bill Freeman was a man on fire for Christ. He was saved in high school out of a Catholic family. He immediately gave himself to serve the Lord full-time. He became a minister in the Friends Church. Later he became a minister in the charismatic movement in Southern California. He was overseeing a small congregation in Yorba Linda, California, and held meetings in the house where Richard Nixon was born.



I met him in conferences in LA. He was about as excited about the Lord, the Word of God and the practical church life as anyone I had ever seen. But I knew some in Elden Hall who had a problem with him because he continued his ministry in Yorba Linda. Again, some had the notion that all should move to LA and “get directly under the ministry.”

About the time we were moving to Dallas, the church in Yorba Linda received a leading from the Lord to move to Seattle, Washington. Looking back, this seems quite astounding, but in those days of great grace no sacrifice was too much. We were the captives of the Lord and were always ready to go wherever the Lamb would lead. Their experience mirrored that of Houston and Dallas and Akron. There was a substantial increase in the Lord’s life and in numbers.

One common characteristic of the moves in Texas, the Midwest and the Northwest was the ability of the congregations to receive local believers and to bring local unbelievers to Christ and into the fellowship.

### **MIGRATIONS FROM LOS ANGELES**

From 1968 through 1972 there was a large increase in the church in Los Angeles. The number went from around 200 in 1967 to over 1000 committed members. They subdivided into four meeting halls. Spreading the experience of “Christ and the Church” throughout the nation and the world had become a constant topic of fellowship. Groups began to gather in LA to fellowship regarding who would go where. While this was happening, new and old contacts throughout the nation were made. Small scattered groups came into contact with the church in Los Angeles and the ministry of Witness Lee. They were very interested in either being strengthened in their place or joining with others in a new place. During 1971-73, groups from Los Angeles moved to, and joined with, local believers in Chicago, Detroit, Minneapolis, Cleveland, Toronto, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Memphis, Atlanta, New Orleans, Indianapolis, Tampa, Miami, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Providence, Boston, Austin, Denver, San Diego, Portland, Spokane, Vancouver, London (Ontario) and other places. There were many wonderful testimonies of grace experienced and contacts made with seeking believers and new believers receiving Christ.

For a while a newsletter was produced on a monthly basis called “News of the Churches.” Initially, it was the source of much rejoicing. Gradually, some competition between the various reporting churches began to develop. It seemed that a movement mentality was developing and various places or brothers were looking for recognition or status. Some of the reporting unfortunately became exaggerations of facts. Eventually the paper had to be put to rest. If there is no movement, if there is no “work” or “ministry” in which one may advance, many impurities can be expelled and the Body will remain healthy.

A very common problem was the melding of the migrating saints from LA and the local seeking ones. There was a sense on the part of some of the LA saints that they knew more than the local saints or those who had not been in LA. Some used a phrase “he has the ‘experience’”. That meant a brother or sister from LA had been in a real, legitimate church life experience and could thus be entrusted with care and oversight regarding local responsibility or a local need. Some of the new churches struggled because of this melding process. Still, the brothers and sisters were growing in grace and being forced to seek the Head, Christ, for the way to go on.

### **BACK TO DALLAS**

These migrations did not take place during a time of great national prosperity. Jobs were not abundant. In Dallas, the two largest employers had gone out of business. The economy was in a deep recession. When we got there, you could obtain a foreclosed home if you would agree to paint it. Some of the saints bought homes for a \$300 down payment. But getting a job to make the payment was another thing.

One couple, Tom and Betty, moved from LA to Dallas. Betty had grown up in Dallas. Tom had a job in California as a P.E. teacher, but only had a college degree and a temporary California teaching certificate. Betty's mother was very upset that they had given up a good job to move where there was no work. I also was out of work and pounding the pavement. Tom and I met each morning and went out looking for something. We considered applying at Dallas Public Schools but we had learned from the local newspapers that due to all the professionals who were out of work, there were 43 applicants for every one opening.

We could not even find work loading trucks. On a Thursday, before school started on the next Monday, we decided we could at least get on the substitute list and perhaps some part time work would open up in the fall. We went to the central administration office around 1:00 PM. What a scene!! There was a very large reception area. Every chair and couch was filled and men and women were standing shoulder to shoulder along the wall. Tom and I got an application and stood in the middle of the room and began to attempt to fill out the forms. Suddenly a man came out of an interior office and headed straight for me. "What do you teach?" he asked. I told him I was a math teacher. He grabbed me and declared he had just gotten an opening for a math teacher. When I got into his office, the Lord told me to ask for a job for Tom. For a moment I thought of the crowd outside and my own need for work, but then I spoke. I told him that he must also find a position for my friend or I would not be able to take the post. He asked what Tom taught. I told him PE. He declared that at the same school he had just been notified of an opening for a male PE teacher. Back out we went into the reception room. Another administrator was leading Tom into another interior office. My man grabbed Tom. Suddenly there was a tug of war over Tom. I cannot forget the faces of the hungry would-be teachers as Tom, who had no Texas teacher's credentials, was being offered two jobs. My man exclaimed, "I must have this man or I will lose my math teacher!" Tom and I started at the same school on that following Monday. After we started, we learned that two more positions at the school had opened. We immediately went to the principal and Thurman Massey and Dee Moore now had work. Praise the Lord. Tom never missed a paycheck and it was a wonderful testimony to Betty's mother of the Lord's faithfulness.

Not just in Dallas, but in so many places the brothers and sisters were learning to cast all their cares on Him. For example, in Providence, RI, the new church had to practice pooling their funds and groceries. Not only was our practical living dependent upon the Lord's providing, but also matters such as how to meet, how to care for one another in Christ, and how to preach the gospel and shepherd the new believers. We were forced to cast ourselves on Christ and we were not disappointed with Jesus.

George Whittington and I were asked by Witness Lee to take the lead in Dallas. We did not practice the Houston way of eldership. George and I sought the Lord directly and prayed for every step of establishing the church. We sought out fellowship with all the saints and included their input. Of course, there were less than 30 in total at the beginning and thus it was simple to include all. When any issue, positive or negative, occurred, we would call the saints together for prayer and fellowship. In Romans chapter 12, the Body of Christ is first mentioned. The context is the expression of Christ through the living and active functions of the various members. One function is "he who takes the lead with diligence." Later in the chapter, we read Rom 12:16, "Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. George Whittington was truly a correct person to take the lead. He was very diligent both in his care for every member, no matter how lowly, and in his honoring Christ as head.

We were looking for a meeting place and daily drove by 3.5 acres for sale with a large home and a smaller cottage. Eventually, some of the saints felt we should investigate. George and I reasoned that there was no way we could buy this property, since we were a

new congregation and we had no money. Several of the members insisted that they had a positive anointing that the Lord would give us the property for the church life. They insisted that we inquire. George, a local brother named Deward Lawrence who had recently joined us, and myself went to the home. The owner met us at the door. Incredibly, she had been the neighbor of George for several years during his childhood. She was so glad to see him. She escorted us in and began to make arrangements to sell her property to "George's church." Deward showed her how it could be done by owner financing along with a small bank loan. After strong church prayer a neighborhood bank gave us the needed funds. By December, we had renovated the large home and began to meet in the large living room. Almost immediately it was full and our number jumped to around 50 members. That summer, on the property, we built a small meeting hall for \$10,000. All the brothers and sisters came together and built the hall with their own labor. After one year, we had increased from 30 to 70 saints in the church in Dallas.

The second largest high school in Texas, Bryan Adams High School, was in our neighborhood. A young girl, a senior in high school who was Deward Lawrence's relative, moved from the Ozark mountains to Dallas to live with Deward's family and to participate in the church life. She began to share Christ with schoolmates and in a few weeks she had been instrumental in two young girls coming to Christ and in two young brothers joining us in the church life. These five young believers began to meet at the school flagpole each morning to pray for the school. They may have been the first to practice this. During the next several months, I learned that this was beginning to happen in many other schools throughout the nation.

Some other students would stand opposite those praying and mock them. The chief mocker was a notoriously tough young man named Gary. One morning as the believing students prayed with bowed heads, they heard a new voice joining in their prayer. It was Gary, the mocker. The day before a carpenter with whom Gary worked had led him to Christ. Not only had the students been praying for Gary, but they had asked the whole church to pray for him. Gary was baptized in the church and moved into my home. He has loved and served the Lord ever since.

Nearly everyone in Dallas was under 30 years of age. We felt to ask an older brother, Bob Bynum from Atlanta, to join us. He concurred and proved to be a blessing for many years.

In 1973 George Whittington moved to Austin, Texas, to begin the church life in Austin. Benson Phillips moved to Dallas and immediately began to take the lead there. Bob Bynum had been divorced and did not officially take the lead but for all practical purposes he was "one taking the lead with diligence" (Romans chapter 12). Not long after his move to Dallas, Bynum was recruited by Witness Lee to represent his new Daystar business in the Southwest. (More on this later.) This would prove to be a real suffering for Bob.

The church in Dallas continued to grow under Benson Phillips' leadership. The practice in the church came to be very close to that of Houston. The elders' meetings and fellowship and the content of the meetings changed. Now, only the elders plus Bob Bynum set the direction of the church. We always had general prayer and then we went over Benson Phillips' "to do" list. At the end of the elders' time together, Bob Bynum and I would be given the opportunity to bring up something.

The church meetings began to be centered around the latest speaking of Witness Lee. We went from one series of messages to the next. One of our practices was to be represented whenever Witness Lee was speaking. We would take copious notes in the meetings and in the private fellowship times with Witness Lee. Since I was rather academic and by then had a flexible schedule as a salesman, I was often sent to the various conferences. Thus, I got to know many brothers and sisters, including elders and co-workers, throughout the

nation and abroad. I also got to know Witness Lee fairly well. I cannot recall any negative experiences in any church and all the saints were kind and focused on Christ.

Phillips also promoted visiting smaller churches and places that may be struggling. We occasionally visited the small church in Albuquerque, New Mexico. In late 1973 while visiting there, we were joined for a day by Max Rapaport of San Diego. It seemed like an audition. He spent a long time, two to three hours, telling us how well San Diego was doing because of his leadership and “his” gift in the gospel and shepherding. He told us Witness Lee wanted him to be president of Daystar. According to Max, the business was about to go under and needed him to rescue it. He said he was willing to give up his very successful insurance business in order to serve Witness Lee. He declared that he did not want Witness Lee occupied with business but rather to give his full attention to the ministry of the word. He also stressed that Witness Lee was very concerned for the lack of gospel work and increase in the churches and was looking to Max to help all the churches. Finally, Max stated that many of the elders were not qualified to care for the churches.

As soon as Max finished with his report, he left to return to San Diego. He seemed to have no interest in what was happening in Albuquerque or in Dallas. Bob Bynum told me I looked like the RCA dog staring into the phonograph as I listened to Max. The next day, on the way home, I asked Benson Phillips regarding what had transpired. He said that if Witness Lee was going with Max, he was going with Max. Things would never be the same again

### **LIFE EBBS AT ELDEN HALL**

An interesting thing occurred in Elden hall which now was one of four halls in Los Angeles. Witness Lee and John Ingalls had stayed there. Up until then, many had equated the blessing on Elden with having the ministry of Witness Lee and to a lesser extent the ministry of John Ingalls. By early 1973 I began to hear of the staleness and flatness of the Elden hall church meetings. I visited there and frankly most of the new churches were much more on fire and lively in Christ than Elden was. Elden still had the ministry, but it was clear the blessing was not there. I heard Witness Lee state on many occasions that he needed to leave Elden, and that the Lord needed a new start with his ministry.

Eventually in 1974, Elden Hall was given up. The remaining saints in Elden moved to the city of Rosemead, and Witness Lee, John Ingalls, Max Rapaport and a few hundred others moved to Anaheim.

Anaheim never prospered and was a continual hole into which people and money were poured with no increase and no blessing. The Daystar experience was a great frustration to the move of the Spirit. In 1975, we were having a conference in Dallas. Before the meetings, we would pray in the large home on our property and then would walk across the parking lot to the large new hall we had just built. One evening I was walking with Brother Lee. He stopped, turned to me and then put his arm around my shoulder. (Never before and never since have I seen him embrace a brother. Thus, I realized he was about to tell me something very serious. He told me that he had made a terrible mistake with Daystar. He said that if he saw Brother Nee he would not know what to say since Brother Nee had warned him not to mix the church with financial matters or business. He then told me that he had once told Watchman Nee that he was not following him (Watchman Nee), but rather was following the truth and vision that Brother Nee taught. Furthermore, that he (Witness Lee) would not follow Watchman Nee if Brother Nee left the vision, but he (Brother Lee) would continue to follow the vision. He then looked me straight in the eye and charged me, “Brother Don, if I leave the vision do not follow me, but follow the vision.” I was a little speechless but I did manage to return the embrace and assure Brother Lee that I would remain true to the vision and the truth.

## **DAYSTAR**

Starting around 1972, Witness Lee expressed a concern for the financial suffering of the migrating saints and their need to be able to purchase proper meeting places. I was in a meeting of visiting elders and co-workers in which he introduced the Daystar business. He shared that his son Timothy had approached him about a business and that the business seemed to Witness Lee to be ideal for us (the local churches). The brothers and sisters could invest money, earn a nice profit of around 35%, and generate significant profit for the support of the new churches. He then spoke of manufacturing only the finest product. We could produce the product in Taiwan, which would help the believers there with employment and sell the product in the USA. He spoke at length concerning how the members of the churches should only invest their surplus and that he felt very positive that this was of the Lord. The business consisted of manufacturing and selling an expensive motor home. This was certainly a very different meeting than anything I had ever attended. I and others left with our heads spinning. I was bothered and asked James Barber what was going on. He replied that Witness Lee was God's anointed and I should be very careful about criticizing. He declared that even if Witness Lee was wrong, God would bless the endeavor.

Shortly after this meeting, Witness Lee was scheduled to come to Houston for a conference in late 1972. I planned to attend. By that time I had left teaching for a sales job. The night before the conference I had a dream. I was sitting in the living room of Ben McPherson in Houston with Witness Lee. The other brothers in the room were very clear to me, as was where they were sitting. Suddenly, Witness Lee turned to me and said he wanted me to work for him in Daystar. In the dream, the Lord made it very clear I was not to take the offer. The next night there we all were, sitting in exactly the right seats. Witness Lee turned to me and offered me a job. Thank the Lord for the warning. I never worked for Daystar and never invested a dime.

## **MYTHS AND GENEALOGIES**

We are warned in Paul's first letter to Timothy: 1 Tim 1:3-4, "As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus, in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith." NASB

This is a warning which we all must heed. About this time, I was learning about Watchman Nee and Witness Lee, and a folklore was developing regarding God's move in the Far East. I read several magazine articles about Nee, Lee and various other gifts of God in India and China. I can never forget an article about the seven co-workers of Watchman Nee who "struggled ashore in Taiwan" and began to preach the gospel. Within just a few years they had established a thriving Christian community of over 20,000, a number that exceeded the fruit of 100 years of Western Missionary work on the island.

In the church in Los Angeles, there were many who spent their time telling others about the ideal church life that had existed in China and was now in Taiwan. In the fall of 1965, Witness Lee returned to Taiwan and also visited the Philippines, Hong Kong, Southeast Asia and Indonesia. He took some of the new American brothers with him including John Ingalls, James Barber and Gene Edwards. I remember in Waco the reading of letters from Helen Edwards reporting on the travels. I expected to hear of wonders from the brothers upon their return. James Barber told me that while Witness Lee could get an audience of 6,000-plus at any time in Taipei, and that the work had spread throughout the Far East; yet, the congregations and leaders were somewhat old and not very living. Gene Edwards declared "the emperor has no clothes." Gene declared that the spiritual health was far from the vision of the teaching and that the Lord would need to do something totally fresh in the USA.

During 1964-1966, Witness Lee met regularly with Samuel Chang, John Ingalls, James Barber and Bill Mallon. Ingalls, Barber and Mallon all shared with me separately and on many occasions that these sessions were full of complaints from Witness Lee about the problems in the churches in the Far East, and especially among the co-workers. I also heard many times from Lee about his disappointments in the Far East. Many times he declared that he was dropping what was done in China and Taiwan and starting over in the USA. That did not mean he was abandoning what had been accomplished in the Far East, but it certainly did not purport some ideal to be duplicated.

In 1968, I was one of 140 Americans who traveled with Witness Lee to the Far East for six weeks of visiting and mingling with the saints there. Witness Lee desired to demonstrate to the churches there something of the new fresh move of the Spirit in the USA. In Taiwan, the Philippines and Japan, I met some of the most precious brothers and sisters I have ever known. I greatly admired the universal desire to bring friends and relatives to Christ and their success in the gospel outreach. However, the meetings were not very lively and were somewhat formal. They definitely had a clergy-laity system.

Although Edwards was correct that the myths being described were somewhat legends, they did have some genuine work of God. And yet too many have been stumbled over the years when the myths they have heard have not been confirmed. (D.R. history to date)