

## CHAPTER TWO

### Further Blessing and Experience of the Spirit's Move on the Earth 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 weekend 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 Eldership 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 weekend. 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

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.