

Week 1 – Singing

WEEK 1 – DAY 1 –EXERCISING OUR SPIRIT BY SINGING

Ephesians 5:18b-19 Be filled in spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and psalming with your heart to the Lord.

1 Cor. 14:15 What then? I will pray with the spirit, and I pray also with the mind; I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing also with the mind.

My only burden is that the Lord would impress us that as Christians who are seeking the Lord, we must realize the secret and mystery of our relationship with the Lord, which is the matter of the exercise of our spirit. We must open our spirit, exercise it, and use it. The most helpful way to exercise our spirit is to pray, but sometimes it is even better to sing.

We may sing something short such as a chorus in a loud way, or we may sing something long such as a psalm in a quiet way. Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 both mention psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. In terms of length, psalms are the longest, hymns are shorter, and spiritual songs, which are like the choruses of hymns, are the shortest. Many times in the meetings we should sing a short chorus with our spirit and from our spirit.

We should each have some choruses memorized so that we can sing them all the time in our spirit and with our spirit. When the young people want to exercise, they often play basketball, baseball, or football. That is the best way for them to exercise their body. However, in order to play, they need a ball. Similarly, the best way for us to exercise our spirit is to sing, but we need a “ball.” We need to have some choruses in us so that we can sing them all the time. Then we must exercise to sing, not merely from our mouth but from our spirit and in our spirit.

Recently we have been working to prepare a hymnal. If the Lord is willing, it would be good if He raised up some saints to compose some songs on the book of Ephesians, perhaps a song for each chapter. Then when the saints come together, they could use these songs to sing the whole book of Ephesians. In addition, it would be wonderful to have songs on Romans 8 and Colossians 1. Many Christians today sing the Old Testament psalms, but that is not up to the standard of the New Testament. Very few people have composed songs on the New Testament revelation.

We must learn to sing because the more we sing, the more we get out of our mind and forget about our circumstances. The more we sing, the more we are in the spirit and the more our spirit is open and released. This is not my thought or opinion; this is the thought of the Holy Spirit and the thought of the apostle Paul. In Ephesians 5:18-19, Paul says that we should be filled in spirit, speaking to one another by singing. If we speak to one another by singing a psalm, hymn, or spiritual song, our spirits will be exercised and the Spirit will come out. We should not try to sing in a musical way but in a spiritual way. We should even forget about the music, the meter, and the rhyme. I am not a musician or an expert singer; I cannot sing that well. However, whether I sing well or not, I must sing. We must learn how to praise the Lord by singing. We need to read, study, and be able to recite some hymns. This way we can sing on the street or in the car. This matter is revealed not only in the New Testament but also in the Old Testament. When the people of Israel came together to worship God in the Old Testament, they sang as they were on their way to Zion (Psa. 133:1-3). If we sing while we are coming to the meeting in the car, the meeting will be in the heavens. We must learn to exercise and open our spirit by singing.

The Lord’s purpose is that we would express Him. Let us forget everything else and simply learn how to exercise our spirit by praying, praising, and singing. If we do this, the Spirit, who is the Lord Himself, will automatically be released from our spirit. Then we will grow every day and will be transformed by the renewing of our mind (Rom. 12:2). It is not by teaching, doctrine, or knowledge that we grow but by the exercise of the spirit. Thus, we must learn how to exercise our spirit so that we may continually grow and experience, enjoy, and partake of Christ. If we do this, we will be in Him all the time. This is the meaning of abiding in the Lord... We must learn to exercise our spirit by praying, praising, and singing. (*The Exercise of the Spirit for the Release of the Spirit*, pp. 38-41)

WEEK 1 – DAY 2 – LEARNING THE HYMNS

1 Cor. 14:26 What then brothers? Whenever you come together, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.

To know the hymns we have to know some of the crucial points of the contents of the hymns. First, we must know some of the hymns on the blessing and experience of the Triune God. The word blessing is used here not to refer to the good things the Triune God has given us but to the praise, the blessing, we offer to Him. An example of a good hymn on the blessing of the Triune God is #7—“Glory, glory, to the Father!”—and an example of a good hymn on the experience of the Triune God is #608—“What mystery, the Father, Son, and Spirit.” We also need to know hymns in the categories of the praise of the Father and the praise of the Lord.

Another crucial point of the contents of the hymns is the filling of the Spirit. Some have used the term the fullness of the Spirit, but we have seen from the Word that fullness is used for the expression of the riches of our God. This is different from filling. The Bible reveals that there are two aspects of the filling of the Spirit—the inward filling for life and the outward filling for power. The Greek word *pleroo* refers to the inward filling and the Greek word *pletho* refers to the outward filling.

We also need to know hymns concerning the identification with Christ. I feel that identification is a better word than union. We are not just united to be together with Christ, but we are actually one with Christ. A number of hymns in this section of our hymnal were written by A. B. Simpson, the founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Many of these deeper and excellent hymns written by A. B. Simpson cannot be found in today’s hymnals of the Christian and Missionary Alliance churches, but we have included them in our hymnal.

The experience of Christ is another crucial point of the contents of the hymns. Hymn #499—“Oh, what a life! Oh, what a peace!”—and #501—“O glorious Christ, Savior mine” are excellent hymns in this category. We also need to know the hymns on the crucial points of the inner life, the church, the assurance of salvation, consecration, and comfort in trials....

We also need to know the hymns on the crucial points of spiritual warfare, the gospel, the meetings, the hope of glory, and the ultimate manifestation. Hymn #948 and #949 are excellent hymns concerning Christ as the hope of glory, and #972 is a very good hymn on the ultimate manifestation...

(Speaking Christ for the Building Up of the Body of Christ, pp. 77-78)

We must be raised up by the Lord to know the hymns. I would advise all of us to read the hymnal and become acquainted with all of the hymns. Thirty or forty years ago, we were very strict in the Lord’s table. We did not allow the saints in the Lord’s table to choose hymns that were far away from the purpose of the table. In the Lord’s table, we remember the Lord Himself by displaying His death. We do not remember His death but we remember His very person by exhibiting, or displaying, His death. In this sense, all the hymns that are chosen and used in the Lord’s table meeting should be in two categories: 1) The hymns in the Lord’s table should be concerning the Lord’s person and should always help people to appreciate Him. 2) We also need some hymns to show forth His death. If we can learn the hymns in our hymnal, we will be much better off in selecting the hymns. *(Speaking Christ for the Building Up of the Body of Christ, p. 85)*

I hope that we will spend some time to study the hymns. Our knowledge of the hymns will help us and will be a great help to all the meetings. It is really hard for us to adjust or correct the saints when they call an inappropriate hymn in the meeting. We may do this sometimes, but generally it is not so profitable. I hope that some leading ones in all the churches would say something concerning the hymns once a week for ten or fifteen minutes. Then the saints will gain some help for the long run and the meetings will be spontaneously adjusted and enriched. *(Speaking Christ for the Building Up of the Body of Christ, p. 86)*

The brothers and sisters should buy some song tapes and play them every day at home. While the brothers are driving, they should play them. While the sisters doing housework, they should also play them. Everyone should learn to sing hymns. In this way it will be easy for us sing hymns in the meetings. *(Key Points on the Home Meetings, p. 69)*

WEEK 1 – DAY 3 – SINGING HYMNS IN THE HOME MEETINGS AND GROUP MEETINGS

Ephesians 5:18-19 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissoluteness, but be filled in spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and psalming with your heart to the Lord.

Ephesians 5:18 says, “Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled in spirit.” We should not be drunk with wine, but we should be filled in spirit. If we are to be filled in spirit, we must sing. When we are filled in spirit, what we have within will spontaneously be expressed without. We will begin to sing. I always sing. Every day when I go for a walk, I sing. Singing is one outstanding trait of a Christian. I am the worst in music, but I like to sing more than anything else. I always sing off-key....

Praise the Lord that we have so many hymns. For example, this morning I was singing a hymn:

Give up the world, Christ to obtain, He is your heart’s very need.

Hymns, #1025

I wrote this hymn in 1947. During that year I conducted a conference in Shanghai, and after that conference I spent a day resting in a scenic area. As I was strolling there, I was humming some random melodies to myself. While I was thus musing, verse three of the hymn came to me:

Though very great is all the world,
And very small is your heart,
Yet the great world with all its wealth,
Never can fill your small heart.

Now I would ask all the brothers and sisters over sixty years old to stand up and sing this verse. Your singing is too proper. There is no need to be so proper. You have to sing like I do. I break all the rules of singing, yet I stir up others’ spirits. All of you older sisters should go to sing in your home meetings. You have to fire up everyone there. Do not think that only the young people can catch fire. If all the older ones sit still in the meeting, how can we have a good home meeting? But if the older ones would sing, their singing would surely cause the meeting to come alive. On this point I would ask you older ones to learn of me. Do not sing too properly.

When you break the rules, sometimes you sing even better. Today I may be the oldest one among all of you. I do not sing well, but I sing with life. Please do not act like an old man or woman. You must be bold to sing.

When I sing in this way, all my worries are gone and all the sicknesses are removed. Praise the Lord for giving us so many good hymns.

Brothers and sisters, why would you not sing? We all have to repent for not singing and praising. We all want the meetings to be living. Why then do we wait? Why do we not sing some hymns? (*Key Points on the Home Meetings*, pp. 37-41)

Now we need to consider the way to have a group meeting....

We need to speak and sing these psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs long before coming to the meeting. Even in our home, it is very good to be speaking and singing. The husband may say, “This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior....” Then the wife may respond with, “All the day long” (see Hymns, #308). Or she may say, “I have passed the riven veil. Here the glories never fail.” Then the husband responds with, “Hallelujah! Hallelujah! I am living in the presence of the King” (see Hymns, #551). If we are filled in spirit, we will have something to utter. The small group meeting may begin at 7:30 p.m., but if a couple begins to sing at dinnertime, around 6:00 p.m., the small group meeting will have already begun. Such a meeting can continue as they drive together to the meeting with the other saints.

If I go to the meeting place and no one else has arrived, I should not sit quietly and wait for others to arrive. I should begin to speak, pray, or sing....The group meeting can be started very spontaneously by speaking, praising, or singing. (*Exercise and Practice of the God-ordained Way*, pp. 230-231)

WEEK 1 – DAY 4 – SINGING HYMNS IN THE CHURCH MEETINGS

Rev. 5:8b, 9 The four living creature and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb...And they sing a new song, saying: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for You were slain and have purchased for God by Your blood men out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

Psa. 45:8 All Your garments smell of myrrh and aloes, of cassia; / From palaces of ivory, harpstrings have made You glad.

In our meetings we come far short in singing. We need to spend much time singing. While I am speaking in the meeting or while others are speaking, at a certain point you may just start to sing. At a certain point when your spirit is touched and you are in a kind of ecstasy, simply break forth into singing and the whole congregation will follow. In Revelation chapter 5, we read that when Christ ascended to the heavens the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders sang a new song, saying, "Thou art worthy. . ." They did not give a sermon or listen to a message; they just praised, praised, praised! "Blessing and honor and glory be unto the Lamb for ever and ever." And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" How good it would be if we could have a meeting just for praising. This kind of praising will simply bring you into an ecstasy; you will be in the third heavens with everything under your feet. (*How to Meet*, p. 116)

The most significant matter regarding Christ in this psalm is the sweet smell of His death and resurrection, and the most significant matter regarding the church in this psalm is the singing and praising typified by the harpstrings in Psalm 45:8. The early church in the book of Acts is the fulfillment of this psalm. Out of the death and resurrection of Christ came forth many local churches in various places, and from those churches came forth singing and praising to the Lord. This made the Lord glad.

The churches as ivory palaces come out of the death and resurrection of Christ and are in resurrection. Within these dwellings there must be singing all the time, music which makes the Lord glad (Heb. 2:12; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Thus, we need to sing. It is more difficult to pray than to gossip, and in a sense, it is even more difficult to sing. When we are not in the spirit, it is not easy to sing, but when we are in the spirit, it is easy, and the more we sing, the more we are in the spirit. We must be overflowing, bubbling over, and singing all the time. In our meetings there should be more singing than talking.

Because the church is in resurrection, our singing must also be in resurrection. Some people naturally like to sing. However, we should not sing in a natural or emotional way. When we sing, we should not think about the music or try to sing in a musical way. This will kill the singing. Instead, we should sing in a spiritual way. Before the meetings we should learn a new hymn and memorize some choruses or stanzas. Then there will be no need to sing from our hymnals; rather, we can sing from our heart. If we do this, we will see how living, active, and positive our meetings will be. We will be living, and we will be free from the letter and formality.

The right way to exercise our spirit is to pray, but sometimes singing a hymn is even better than praying. If we try singing a hymn in the morning, our spirit will be exercised. The more we sing, the more our spirit will be released and strengthened, and the more our mind will be focused, our will subdued, and our emotions purified. Singing in the proper way will deliver us from our natural mind, emotion, and will. This is the best way to be liberated from the things of the natural life. Our singing is a test of whether or not we are in the spirit. If we are in the spirit, we will constantly be singing. Even while we are driving, we will have a song or a hymn with which to praise the Lord. Our singing and praising are a strong testimony to others that we are Christians. (*The Exercise of the Spirit for the Release of the Spirit*, pp. 22-23)

John and Charles Wesley sang every day. If we sang for even half an hour each day, our spirit would be much stronger, and the meetings of the church would be much more living and powerful. The meetings would have an impact and an effect on people because something would be constantly flowing and bubbling in the meetings. As Psalm 45 indicates, we must have these two matters—the overflowing and the singing with the music of the harpstrings. If we are praising, singing, and overflowing all the time, we will realize the death and resurrection of Christ and will be the real ivory palace filled with God. We will have the gold, the divine nature, wrought into us. (*The Exercise of the Spirit for the Release of the Spirit*, p. 25)

WEEK 1 – DAY 5 – SINGING AND PSALMING THE WORD IN OUR DAILY LIFE

Col. 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God.

Ephesians 5:18b-19 Be filled in spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and psalming with your heart to the Lord.

Colossians 3:16 says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God.” The word *dwell* means “make home.” In this verse the words *teaching*, *admonishing*, and *singing* modify the verb *dwell*, indicating that the way to allow the word of Christ to dwell in us is by teaching, admonishing, and singing. The more we teach, admonish, and sing, the more the word of Christ will make home in us.

Ephesians 5:18-19 says, “Be filled in spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and psalming with your heart to the Lord.” This verse shows that our speaking and our singing should be not from our mind but from our heart and our spirit. Letting the word of Christ make home in us is a matter not of remembering with our mind but of exercising our spirit.

Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:18-19 show that our reading of the Bible should become our singing. The highest way to enjoy reading the Bible is to sing the words with a spontaneous melody. This is a sweet experience. Instead of merely memorizing the words of the Bible, we should sing them.

Eating the word in the morning by pray-reading and sing-reading verses will result in a healthy spiritual metabolism for the whole day, killing the negative things in our being and nourishing our inner man to grow and be empowered. The proper way to live the Christian life is to contact the word in the Bible, which embodies God, Christ, the Spirit, and the divine life. We can read, pray, and sing the word to receive the elements of Christ, His killing death, and His nourishing resurrection. As a result, we will walk with the Lord and in the Lord, always experiencing the killing and the nourishing, the operating of death and life (2 Cor. 4:12). This is the Christian life. (*The Healthy Word*, Chapter 8, Section 1)

Many of us have read the Bible for years without realizing that we can receive the Word of God by singing. Is it your practice to take a verse of the Bible not only by reading, but also by singing? Christians have been taught to study the Bible and to read it, but not to sing it. We are thankful for the recovery of pray-reading the Word. Now we must go on to sing-read the Word of God. We need to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom by singing. This is not my teaching; it is the charge given by the apostle Paul in Colossians 3:16.

Even though we have been reading Colossians for years, we have not paid adequate attention to taking the Word by singing. Many Christians claim to be scriptural. But instead of being wholly scriptural, they may be formal and religious. It certainly is scriptural to sing the Word of God.

We should sing the Word not only in the meetings, but especially in our daily life. In particular, we should sing the Word at home. When you are alone in your room or with others at the dining table, sing the Word of God. Singing the Word is an excellent way to exercise the spirit. To pray is to exercise the spirit, but to sing is an especially good way to exercise the spirit. (*Life-study of Philippians*, Chapter 40, pp. 355-356)

If we sincerely desire to be saturated with the living Word so that we may live Christ, we need to follow the practice advocated by Paul in Colossians 3:16. This means that we must let the word of Christ inhabit us in a rich way, not by mere knowledge from the mind, but by every kind of wisdom from our spirit, including singing and psalming. Oh, we need to sing and psalm the Word of God! To sing the Word is better than reading it, and to psalm the Word is even better than singing it. Psalming the Word includes musing upon it and enjoying it. As we psalm the Word, we dwell upon it, muse on it, and enjoy it, thereby giving more opportunity for the Word to saturate us.

If we only read the Word, there is little opportunity for the portion we read to sink into us and saturate our being. But if we sing the Word, and especially if we psalm it, we open our being more fully to the Word and give it the opportunity to sink into us and saturate us... (*Life-study of Philippians*, Chapter 40, pp. 356-357)

WEEK 1 – DAY 6 – PRACTICING TO PRAY, SING, AND PSALM THE WORD AND GIVE THANKS

Col. 3:16-17 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God. And whatever you do in word or in deed, do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Ephesians 5:18-19 is parallel to Colossians 3:16. In these verses Paul says, “Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled in spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and psalming with your heart to the Lord.” Notice that in Colossians 3:16 Paul tells us to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly, but in Ephesians 5:18 he tells us to be filled in spirit. When we put these verses together, we see that we should be filled in spirit with the word of Christ. These two portions of the Word have the same goal—that we should have our spirit filled with the Word.

We may compare our spirit to an automobile needing gasoline, and the Word, the Bible, to a gas station. When we sense that we are empty, we should come to the Word to be filled. In the Word we have an inexhaustible supply of spiritual gasoline. The way to pump this “gasoline” into us is by singing and psalming the Word. If we are filled in this way, surely we shall speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. We shall also discover that singing and psalming the Word are higher than pray-reading it.

The more we sing and psalm the Word of God, the more we shall be delivered from the influence of religion, the influence which causes us to come to the meetings in a formal way. Let us build up the habit of singing the Word day by day. Then our meetings will not be formal. Instead of any kind of performance, the meetings will be filled with an exhibition of our daily life. What we exhibit in the church meetings will be the way we live day by day. In particular, we shall sing in the meetings because we sing the Word daily. (*Life-study of Philippians*, Chapter 40, pp. 357-358)

Concerning the singing of the Word of God, my main burden is not that the meetings will be enriched; it is that we shall be saturated with the living Word. We shall participate in the bountiful supply of the Spirit and enjoy the riches of Christ by receiving the Word of God.

In the past I lost many opportunities to be saturated with the Word because I did not know to sing the Word. I spent a great deal of time reading and studying the Bible, filling several Bibles with notes, but I did not realize I could sing or psalm the Word. It is one thing to read Ephesians 2 and another thing to pray-read it. But once again I wish to emphasize that singing the Word is even better than pray-reading...I am confident that the more we sing and psalm the Word, the more we shall be washed by and saturated with the element of Christ. (*Life-study of Philippians*, Chapter 40, pp. 357)

Don't take this word just as a message. I don't like to see all of these things taken as a kind of doctrine. This is not a mere doctrine. If you don't practice these things, you are wasting your time coming to this Perfecting Training. You must practice these things. Don't pray for other things; pray the Word. I surely hope that we all could pray through these four books: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. Then not only pray through them, but sing through them. Then you can psalm. Psalming doesn't need much of a melody for singing. You can psalm with your own tune and even with all kinds of irregular tunes. You will see what will come out. There will be a sweet and strengthened receiving of the divine element. Then we need to practice thanking through the Word. If we all would practice praying the Word, singing the Word, psalming the Word, and thanking through the Word, the church life will be much uplifted.

This is a direct word. Just these three or four things are worthy to talk about: first, our God today wants us to live Him. Second, He is the Spirit. Third, He is the Word. Last, He wants us to take Him in through the Word and the Spirit by praying, by singing, by psalming, and by thanking. We all can testify when we pray in our spirit we get the infusion of the divine element, of light, of life, of love, of sanctification, of all the divine things we need. When you sing, that is a real musing upon the Word. To muse upon the Word is not just to have a deep consideration or a deep apprehension of the Word. To muse is to enjoy the Word. The best way to muse upon the Word is to sing. A deeper musing is psalming. Psalming even gives you more enjoyment than singing. Thanking may be considered as a kind of conclusion. You must pray, you must sing, you must psalm, and eventually you must give thanks to our God. (*Perfecting Training*, Chapter 17, Section 3)