# INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP TRAINING INSTITUTE

*A Seminary Program for Training Christian Leaders*



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## *COUNTING THE COST*

*Many churches today never mention sin, nor the need to deny ourselves and live for Jesus. Young Christians there are not taught that loving both the world and God is impossible. [Read: Romans 12:2; Colossians 3:2; Titus 2:12; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15] Their preachers popularize messages on how to receive God's blessing, without balancing it with teaching about the testing and trials, which accompany living our life for Christ. [Read: 2 Timothy 3:12; James 1:2, 3] New believers often think a Christian's life is supposed to go from one spiritual high to another. No one prepares them for the problems that will come, nor teaches them how to remain strong when they do. These churches are full of immature Christians, who are either so preoccupied with their own needs and desires God cannot use them, or crumble and fall when hardships arise.*

### Which Type of Christian Are You?

In His parable of a farmer sowing seed, Jesus tells four responses people have when they hear the Gospel. [*Read: Matthew 13:3-8; 18-23*] The first do not receive it, so remain lost. The other three are those who receive God's Word and become Christians. Of these, two remain weak and ineffective. They do not bear fruit, nor grow into mature Christians, and some fall away. The last are those who hear God's Word receive it, become firmly rooted in it, and are used by God. This parable isolates the two primary reasons Christians fail.

*FIRST* are those that have no root. They do not take the time to become firmly rooted in God's Word. When persecution or problems come they buckle under the pressure. We have all met people in this category. They come to Jesus with excitement and passion. You see them at every meeting sharing their testimony. Then something happens in their life, hardship comes, their bubble of enthusiasm bursts. They begin to waver and doubt and become despondent. Soon they quietly slip away, disappearing from church entirely.

We have a couple in our church that came to know Christ several years ago, and excitedly followed the Lord ever since. Recently they have experienced setbacks in their health, finances, and other areas of their life. In the years since they came to know God, no one had prepared them for this. At first they viewed these as attacks from the 'enemy' and rebuked them, commanding them to leave. Yet, things continued to decline.

When they sought help, they were told they might be under a curse, and led through a series of prayers renouncing and breaking curses. After which they felt liberated and set free, experiencing a great release from the spirit of oppression. Soon however more trials and tests came. The experience of having temporary relief, immediately followed by more hardship rocked their faith and started to crush them. The family has since stopped attending church, only the husband remains.

*SECOND* are those who have not taken their eyes off the lures of this life. Those who allow material possessions and the cares of this world to influence and hinder them. They attend church believing they are following Jesus, yet they are lukewarm, neither cold nor hot. [*Read: Revelation 3:14-18*] Because they are focused on their own wants, never putting God first, they are torn between their own earthly desires and God.

Several years ago, the Lord showed me a brother whom He had called to study ILTI. I approached the man telling him ILTI classes would begin a few months later. I asked him to pray about joining the class. He was excited at the idea and told me he would pray. A few weeks later he gave his answer. Yes, the Lord wanted him to study. Nevertheless, he had decided it was not a good time for him to study and would wait until the next round of classes.

Three years later, the Lord had me repeat the offer. Again he agreed to pray about it. A few weeks later, he came to me, and very excitedly told me the Lord had just spoken clearly to him, instructing him to take the ILTI course. I suggested he and his wife both take the course together. (ILTI allows husband and wife to study together at no extra cost.)

Two weeks later, he came to me again. This time as he walked toward me he began crying. He explained that he had talked with his wife and they had decided it was not a good time for him to take ILTI. He told me that in his field things continually changed and he needed to regularly take classes to become certified in new areas, increasing his earning potential at his job. He and his wife had decided if he took any classes it should be for his work. I reminded him that he had told me the Lord had given him a clear word. He simply responded "I know, but I can't." He went away still crying.

That brother chose to follow the desires of his heart above God. A month before he was to be certified in the latest programs, the director of his school stole the money and left. The school closed, and he did not get his certification.

## Counting The Cost - How Far Are We Willing To Go?

One of my "Heros of Faith," Pastor Richard Wurmbrand, spent years, in a Romanian prison being tortured for his faith. In the late 1970s, I was blessed to spend a few hours talking with him. It is unimaginable to me that he could withstand for so long without giving in, even temporarily. I wanted to know how he endured years of torture without breaking?

Beside his faith and relationship with God, the main reason he was able to withstand torture was that he had made a firm resolution never to deny Jesus. Before he was arrested, he had realistically assessed the price he might have to pay for his loyalty to Christ and decided he was willing. Others were arrested too; Some broke under the pressure, denying Jesus. Most of those who broke and denied Jesus had never examined their hearts nor counted the cost prior to being arrested or tortured. They had not asked themselves what they were willing to sacrifice for Jesus. By the time their torturers were asking them, it was too late to make that decision and they crumbled.

Anytime we feel God is asking us to do something, before we begin, we must realistically assess what it will cost in time, energy, money, family, etc. Before saying "yes," we must ask ourselves, "am I willing to pay the price?" Only then, can we know that we are able to finish what we have begun.

Jesus says that before we become His disciple, we must first count the cost and decide whether we are willing to forsake everything for Him. [*Read Luke 14:26-33*] Those who don't, Jesus compares to a man who builds a castle (*Gk. purgos meaning tower, fortress, or castle*) but does not have enough money to finish it. When he runs out of money and has to stop, people laugh at him. He was foolish to begin building not knowing if he had the finances to complete the job.

As we count the cost, we must especially examine those areas that have become our treasure. Are we willing to sacrifice them to God? It may be our house, car, pension, prestige, respect, or as with the man mentioned earlier, our career. It is not wrong to have treasure. God blessed Solomon, Abraham, Job and several others in scripture with riches. If the Lord has given you riches, enjoy them as long as they remain in proper perspective. But if riches become our focus, and interfere with the way we serve God, they must go.

**Personal Lesson**

I inherited a love for learning from both my father and mother. My thirst for knowledge eventually led me to become an impassioned book collector. The best source, I found, was rural estate auctions; I would buy a box of old books for 25-75 cents, and eagerly comb through it, keeping any books that interested me and giving away the rest. Sometimes I found a real treasure, an out-of-print book from the 18th or19th century. As my collection grew, so did my pride. Whenever people came to my home, I would steer the conversation toward my books, and proudly show them my library.

I had never fully surrendered my book collection to the Lord. It was an area I was not willing to yield to Him. I knew it was wrong. He repeatedly warned me, but I refused to listen. My books had become a stumbling block, hindering my walk with Him. God needed to take direct and decisive action.

When God called me to Columbus, I brought my library with me. I had no place to shelve books, so I stored them in my apartment basement. After I inherited my father's theological library in November 1994, I added Christian material from mine to his, and left the remainder of my collection in my basement.

In April of 1995, I took a trip to Texas. While there, the water hose leading into my washing machine ruptured and split. It began spraying a fine mist of water onto the boxes containing my books. Once the boxes became waterlogged they began to fall apart. As they did, the drain clogged and the basement began filling with water. By the time I returned the bulk of my collection had been destroyed.

I could no longer deny the truth, they had become my idols and God had removed them. I thanked God for removing the idols from me. I asked him to forgive me. However, even though I had received the Lord's correction and asked His forgiveness, I did not follow up by asking Him to remove my sin from me. Deep inside me the sin lay as a dormant seed waiting to sprout and take root again.

*A few years ago, someone started to build a castle in Chiang Mai. He is like the man Jesus talks about in Luke 14:26-33. He ran out of money before he finished building. No one seems to know the circumstances around his decision to build, only that he never completed it. The castle sits unfinished as an empty shell waiting for someone to come rent or buy it, and has become the brunt of jokes and mockery by the local press.*

Over the next few years I enjoyed reading and studying my Dad's collection. No matter what theological issue or topic about Christian living I wanted to research, it seemed his library contained books on the subject. Trying to keep my self in balance, I would continually remind myself the consequences of pride and what God had done to my library.

In July 2003, ILTI moved its international office to Thailand.

The Lord led us to a wonderful house that perfectly suited our needs. A month later, the shipment containing the ILTI office equipment and my library arrived. It took days to sort and put everything away. As I put the books on the shelves, I felt like a little kid at Christmas time, surrounded by a wondrous assortment of toys. I had never taken time to explore my Dad's library and had only read books on whichever topic I was studying at the time. As I sorted through the books shelving each by category, I became more and more excited. It amazed me how many rare, hard to find books my father had collected. By the time I finished, I was convinced my father's collection was one of the finest private collections of Christian books I had ever seen. His library contained books spanning the last two centuries, including first edition prints from men such as D. L. Moody, and C. H. Spurgeon.

Deep in the recesses of my heart, I felt proud. I tried to lock it away deep inside me, and not allow it to surface. Immediately that still small voice inside me warned me not to allow these books to become an idol the way my collection had years before. Trying to silence my conscience and avoid letting God deal with my pride, I reassured myself that I could control myself, and would never let that happen again. Like most wives, Yai could see my heart. The Lord used her to warn me several times, but I did not listen.

**Making Excuses**

I looked at the home God had provided. It was so peaceful and serene, a perfect setting for those who wanted to sit before the Lord in solitude and be renewed, refreshed and restored. So I named it "Restoration House" and dedicated it to the Lord. I rationalized that it was part of God's blessing for Restoration House to have an extensive library like this. I justified my actions and made excuses for my attitude by telling myself it was ok, I had dedicated my library to the Lord.

Whenever another missionary came to the house, I would explain my vision for "Restoration House." I would give them a tour of the place, showing them the shaded arbor down by the water, the prayer chapel, and tables set in various locations around the premises where they could sit in secluded study or prayer. Lastly, I would show them the library, inviting them to take advantage of it and study anytime.

All of this was a false vision, a ploy of my mind to justify my pride. As my pride in the library grew, so did my sin. Soon it started to interfere with my willingness to serve God. I began to worry what would become of my library if God ever called Yai and me to work in a closed country like China. "What would I do with it? How would I protect it? Where would I keep it?" As it grew in importance, it became an area of concern as Yai and I planned our travels. "Who will watch over the library? Should I hire someone to work and live here so that it can be cared for?"

I prayed about these and other concerns, but did not receive an answer. [*Read; Proverbs 1:28-29*] Nevertheless, as I prayed, I began to see the pride in my heart. I resolved to stop showing my library, and asked God to forgive me. However, I did not take the next step and ask God to remove the pride from me. My outward actions changed, but my heart did not. I was still proud. God warned me, but I did not listen.

**Declaring God's Verdict**

As I was preparing lessons for our trip to the Phillippines, I asked the Lord what should I teach? He told me to teach a series of lessons on "How to Lead an Overcoming Life," (*keys to true repentance*) "Having the Heart of Obedience," and had me wrap it up with a series entitled "Keys to Hearing, Listening & Obeying God" (*including a message on "Counting the Cost.*)

Each lesson God had me teach, while there, related specifically to my sin. (*Disobedience, not listening, and pride*) I did not realize God was having me preach His verdict on my actions, just as King David did when the prophet Nathan came to him with a parable of a rich man having stolen a poor man's only sheep. David pronounced the judgment upon the rich man, and Nathan immediately told him that he was that man. [*Read; 2 Samuel 12:1-14*]

**God's Reaction Is Swift**

*Doug in the Phillippines Teaching on Obedience*

Two days before Yai and I left for the Phillippines, I finished writing and formatting the first article on "How to Hear God." After formatting it, there was extra space left on the last page. Without hesitation, a feeling of remorse, nor even a prick from my conscience, I added an appeal for people to send me books to expand my library. *"... For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." Matthew 12:34b* I had hardened my heart, not realizing, that by asking for more books, I had not only stopped listening to God's rebuke, but had taken steps in the opposite direction. Before we left, I forwarded the newsletter to the US to be published and sent out. God's reaction was swift. By the time we returned from the Philippines God had destroyed my library!

Sunday, August 14th, as Yai and I were about to begin our last day of ministry in the Philippines, the Ping River surged over its banks, flooding the ILTI Office. Rest assured these things had to happen. Through it God opened my heart and brought much needed correction, challenging me to walk with Him, in a deeper, more committed way.

We did not hear about the flood until we reached Bangkok, Monday. Immediately I knew God had destroyed my library. As we flew to Chiang Mai, I asked God to forgive me, and show mercy. Our area had never flooded before, and no one expected this one. Our neighbors tell us it took less than an hour for the flood to come. The water rushed down the street, and hit our gate, bursting it open. (*We lived at the very end of the street.*) The flood waters were about three feet deep on the main floor, and the bottom floor, which housed the ILTI office, was entirely submerged for two days. It contained thirty-three years of ministry files, and of course the bulk of my library, none of which was salvageable. The Lord dealt with me the

same way a father disciplines a son. [*Read Proverbs 13:24*] He had disciplined me, and I received it with gladness.

**God Is Merciful**

Praise God, He is merciful! The computers needed for the ongoing day by day operation of ILTI were on the top floor and escaped harm. Although the bulk of my library was destroyed, the main books I use for theological writing and editing, (*Greek, Hebrew, Christian History, Commentaries, etc.*) were shelved on the main floor, and narrowly escaped destruction. The flood waters came withing inches of destroying those books, but they were miraculously spared.

In what I first presumed was part of God showing mercy, He also spared several of my rare books. It took me about a week to understand God's reason for sparing them.

*Gong Trying to Save ILTI Material*

**True Repentance**

Knowing you did wrong and being receptive to correction and parental discipline are only the beginning. You still need to change your attitude and behavior. *"Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance." Matthew 3:8* Repentance requires more than just being sorry for your sin. When we truly repent, we turn, walk away from our sin and go the opposite direction.

Of my own free will, I needed to allow God to finish what He had already begun. I needed to take the next step. Instead of hoarding books, I needed to give them away with a glad heart. Since then, I have been looking through my books, separating out and keeping only those I can use or need and giving away the rest. Praise God, what a wonderful experience!

Since the flood, Yai and I have downsized tremendously and moved into a small apartment. We rented another room across the hall to use as the ILTI office. This is a marvelous blessing. It is as if God has lifted a burden off my shoulders. We are now free, to come and go wherever the Lord sends us with no worries about belongings or other entanglements.

**Restoration**

Within a few weeks of sending out our newsletter I received messages from several people that they had tried unsuccessfully to send us books. They had been informed that Thailand's Customs office would not allow them to be imported. I felt relief as I did not want to receive books just to give them away or send them back again; nor did I know, without offending the senders how to ask them not to try to send anymore.

All that changed a few days ago. When Yai and I went to the Post Office to pick up our mail, a box of books shipped from the US was waiting there. My heart sank. I did not know whether to send the books back, or give them away. Either way I would need to contact the couple that sent them, and explain that they had gone through all the trouble and expense of sending them for nothing.

I waited until we had returned home to look through the books. As I did, God completed the last stage of my lesson. Except for only a couple books, they were all ones I needed or could use. Now that my pride was gone, and my heart the way God wanted it to be, He was restoring me.

Once we not only are sorry for our sin but are truly repentant, allowing God to remove it from us, we take on His righteousness and become clean. I no longer took pride in my books. I no longer had the desire to amass a collection. After having failed twice, I did not expect God to entrust me with more books. [*Read Luke 16:10-12*] But that is the nature of God's restoration. I do not know if God will ever bless me by giving me a large library again, it no longer is important. What is important, is how I view and use it. My library nor my books will ever have a hold over my life again.

**Conclusion**

Many of us have never asked ourselves what we are willing to do for Christ, or what we are willing to give up. How much are you willing to sacrifice for God? Is there any area in your life where you have not allowed Him to become master? Does Jesus come first in your life? If God asked you to give up your home and have no permanent residence, could you do it? In the event that He asked you to leave your job, and live by faith, would you say yes? If the Lord told you to give away everything you own and follow Him, how would you react? Even if you knew it meant death to be labeled a Christian, would you let your light shine?

Each of these questions centers on our willingness to do them if God asks. Each of us needs to take a look at how much it will cost us, and decide what we are willing to give up for Jesus. God may not actually ask you to do any of these things. But if we wait until the time comes when we are being forced to choose, we will hesitate and falter.

Is there anything that stands between you and God? Take the time to examine yourself. How much of your life are you willing to let God have? Ask God to reveal to you any area of your life that needs changing and purge it from you. It may take time, just as it did for me; however as long as you are willing to put God first in your life, and ask Him to guide you, He will.

*Doug Heil*

***"But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ" Philippians 3:7,8***