

## The Witnessing Way of Life

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At the Hearst St. house in Oakland, California, Sheri wins a prize for being #1 witnesser of 1978.



*Sheri with her spiritual son Peter Bates, who wrote the poem.*

I would like to read a poem from Peter Bates, one of my spiritual sons. I feel it beautifully expresses something of what we all need to feel in order to successfully witness—a deep sense of eternal gratitude for being saved.

A long, long time ago  
(another life almost, it seems)  
you touched my eyes  
and raised my face  
to see a new beginning.

You prayed for me  
and I was given life  
and taught to pray.  
You cried for me  
and I learned to cry for others.

You sacrificed for me  
and I learned the joy of sacrifice.  
You committed yourself to me  
and I became committed to True Parents and to you.

You loved me  
and I finally began to understand love.

Sheri,

because you did these things for me,  
I look to a wintry world  
and feel the eager promise  
of a warm and sunny breeze.

I look at Denise and  
I know that soon our children will rule the world with love. My heart will always weep  
with gratefulness for life.

Always your son,  
In True Parents Family,  
Peter

My life is very rich because I have received the Blessing from True Parents; I have a loving husband and two beautiful children, and feel I have more than any human being could ever conceive of having, because somebody witnessed to me. Somebody cared enough to take a few extra hours of his time to pray that I could respond to God's eternal truth.

Because of this, and because of my desire to in turn be an agent of salvation for others, to love and cry for them as I have been loved, I can never stop witnessing.

First of all, none of us brings success in witnessing primarily on the basis of our personal "magnetism" or spiritual merit. We witness on the foundation of the historical, providential work of our True Parents and Jesus. We are never alone. When we call out to Heavenly Father, True Parents, Heung Jin Nim, and Jesus, they are there to assist us. But in order to get their help, we have to bring our own heart to the level of desperation they feel in their hearts.

Once when I was the witnessing team captain in Oakland, California, I went for three anguishing weeks without bringing a single person to a lecture. I witnessed every day from seven am until five pm. If nobody came, I went out again until 10 pm, sometimes witnessing all night at the bus station. Putting in all that time with no one coming, I began to realize that my attitude had to change.

Finally, one day I was standing on a corner near Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco when suddenly my spiritual eyes opened. The faces of the young people looked old and scarred. I felt they were crying, and I could see how much they needed Heavenly Father. I repented right there, saying to God, "I didn't understand what I was witnessing for. I'm sorry I wasted Your time the last three weeks, Father. I am not going home tonight-I'm not sleeping-until I can find someone who will listen to the Principle." That evening I brought five guests for the dinner program. All five people joined.

It isn't just the hours we spend on the street that matter, but the depth of our heart to love God's children. We have to treasure the chance to give life to others. You may wonder to yourself, "Should I go up to that person or not? Will he respond?" You may feel drawn to him, yet a little bit afraid. In that moment of doubt, try reflecting on the gift of life True Parents have given you. Think, "How can I not witness to this person? If I don't give him a chance, he might never know True Parents' love."

We have to become as desperate and as crazy as Father. Can you believe that a 16-year-old boy had the conviction and the willingness to sacrifice his entire life to save the world? Father thinks about his mission to restore mankind every single minute of every day. He eats it, he breathes it; he never stops. He went to jail in Danbury, and instead of feeling, "I can't believe this. I have to sit here for months!" (which is what I would have felt) Father took up the challenge and reached out constantly to his fellow inmates with love; he taught them by his example. Father always moves forward.

Witnessing is our greatest opportunity to understand God's longing heart and to grow to inherit True Parents' unconditional love. If ever I felt my heart closing, I would go back out on the street and witness. The more you witness, the more people you can bring; and the more experiences in loving people you have, the more your heart becomes stretched.

In the beginning I went out to witness only because I knew I should. But eventually, I reached the point where I would cry with Heavenly Father for His lost children. More and more desperation crept into my heart. Finally, I went out because I just had to witness. This is the point when you become successful in witnessing. Each person has his or her own course. Sometimes it takes a very painful experience to open your heart to feel God's desperation.

Witnessing can change your prayer and your entire life. You begin to experience what it's like to be a parent, learning to love, serve, and sacrifice for another human being. Two months after our first son was born, I told my husband David, "I don't think I ever loved anyone before. I can't remember at any other point in my life being so willing to get up three times in the middle of the night." Every aspect of a child's life is important to the parents, from where to put his potty to whether he should have carrots or squash for lunch. Now I realize that God cares that much about us! You and I are just as important to Heavenly Father. He is our parent and is concerned about every single detail of our life.

*Question: How can I begin if I haven't had much experience witnessing?*

You can start witnessing by making some basic condition. Don't make it so challenging that you can never fulfill it, but do make it something definite. I try to keep a simple condition at all times—at least once a day I talk to someone about the Principle. In my current mission, I don't have so much time to go out on the street and meet people. But I do drive into gas stations, stand in line at the bank, and take the kids shopping. Therefore, at least once a day I witness to somebody. According to your personal situation, make a determination; God can work through it.

Half the reason we don't bring results is because we don't believe we will. In fundraising, if you think, "This is a bad area, I won't do well here." you won't. But if you think, "I'm going to do it, no matter what." you always will. It's the same thing in witnessing. Say to God, "I know the foundation I'm standing on, and I know Your chosen people are here or else I wouldn't be here. So I'm not going home without a spiritual child." If you have the courage to say that you will ultimately find one.

One of the things I learned about prayer and the spirit world is that it's good to be specific. Pray for exactly what you want, and really want it.

"Heavenly Father, I want to bring a righteous person who is going to make a commitment to True Parents and help save this nation." Sometimes we don't let ourselves want enough.

Once my son wanted a Mickey Mouse T-shirt like the other children at school. For three weeks all I heard was, "I want a Mickey. When's Mickey coming?" I thought I was going to go crazy, because I couldn't find one. Finally, my sister bought him a Mickey Mouse T-shirt. If I want a spiritual child, I should be asking God much more desperately than Jesse was asking me for a Mickey Mouse T-shirt. I should want it so badly that I would be pestering God all the time. Just pull on God's shirttails and say, "Give me a spiritual child! I want it, I want it, I want it!" Then you might be surprised. You will get it.

*Question: I don't feel so confident. How can I gain the confidence I need to go out?*

When you are out walking, God wants you to feel that you have Him on your arm, along with Jesus and Heung Jin Nim. Have the feeling you are going out with the "gang." It's not just you. Have the sense, "I can do it." Go out as if you and True Parents "own" the street.

Satan detests witnessing. He attacks you constantly while you are out there trying. A lot of times he makes you feel bad about yourself: "Boy, do you look stupid walking up to that person. What are you going to say if he asks you such and such?" If he's not telling you how dumb you look, he's telling you that no one is prepared: "That person won't make it. These people are no good. That one looks too intellectual, that one looks like he has too much money..." It's like a tape recording; all you have to do is switch it off. Tell Satan, "So what? Who doesn't need salvation?!"

I am still going to talk to this person. I'm still going to do what God wants me to do." You have to get to the point where Satan is frustrated with you and leaves you. Pray and make a determination and follow your intuition. Let the good spirit world guide you.

You will build momentum over a period of time. Start by being there for God and True Parents, and then little by little the spirit world will trust you and work with you more. If they know you are as desperate as they are, they will help you become more spiritually perceptive.

People respond because in their original mind they are longing for God's love. You have to give your heart freely. That's the way Heavenly Father uses you. Because there is so little love in the world, love always looks crazy. No one wants to admit it, but people are really touched by that craziness. I remember thinking the night I was witnessed to by my spiritual father, Jeremiah Schnee, "Why is this person staying up until four in the morning trying to convince me to come to a workshop? Why is it so important to him?" But the fact that it was that important to him stayed with me. I felt so called by his sincere heart and his desperation that I had to check it out.

All the people out there are pretending they have it together, but in their hearts, they know they don't. Everybody feels torn and divided inside somewhere. Honestly, there is almost no one to whom you are going to witness who hasn't been heartbroken and who isn't lonely for God's love. They might not be able to put a name on it, but that's what everyone wants. They really need you, not just for the mystical idea of salvation, but for the reality of salvation—for the actual, concrete love and guidance that each one of us has experienced. Think about how you've changed since the day you were witnessed to. Don't worry about being "cool."



*Left: her with five of her spiritual sons. Clockwise from top left: Peter Bates, Sheri, John Hovard, Tim Henry, Ian Haycroft, and David Burroughs. Right: A popular witnessing spot in downtown San Francisco. Kitty Wojick is seated front, talking to a guest.*

*Question: What do you focus on when you go out to witness?*

There's a voice that speaks to you when you are out witnessing. It usually tells you to do something you don't want to do. In my case it often involves physical activity—running, jumping. When the voice tells you a chosen person is around, listen to it. Sometimes I would be witnessing to somebody and all of a sudden the voice would tell me that the chosen person was walking down the other side of the street. I would just say, "Sorry, gotta run." and actually run away from him because the chosen person was across the street. If you are really willing, the spirit world will guide you to exactly where you should go.

One of my most incredible experiences happened several years ago when we were driving to the bus station in San Francisco. As we approached the station I noticed a girl in the distance. Everything in my logical mind said, "Forget it. You'll never catch her." But another part of me said, "Go for it." I hopped out of the car and ran down the street after the girl. She saw me and not only started running away from me but shouted, "Get out of here!" I was totally out of breath by the time she vanished inside the station. As I stood there breathing hard—and feeling remarkably stupid—a person walked up to me and said, "Do you know where I can get the bus to Clear Lake? I'm trying to find a spiritual community." I was shocked. I said, "Actually, I live in one a few blocks away." This person joined. Heavenly Father knew I wouldn't be at the bus station in time to meet him if I didn't run, so He told me, "Run."

Cultivate an area. At Fisherman's Wharf, I always walked around and around a particular four-block area. Somehow, the spirit world knew I was there. If they wanted to send someone, they knew I was going to try hard to meet them.

Don't assume that people are negatively influenced by bad reports in the media. One time there was a terrible article on the front page of the local newspaper. Depressed, I was just reading it when a young man walked up to me and said, "Do you know where I can get Rev. Moon's address?" I thought he was joking. He elaborated, "I read an article about him in a magazine that gave his birthdate. I did his astrological chart and found out he really is a holy man, so I want to find him." I said, "Yes, I know exactly where he lives."

*Question: What kinds of things do you say to people?*

I say something different to everybody. I try to feel that each person is the most precious chosen person. Internally I ask, "Father, speak through me! Please let him come."

One time I tried to talk a young man into going up to camp. I knew he was really prepared. He said, "Well, I already have plans for this weekend; I'll come by on my way back through here." I knew he wouldn't. Finally, I went up to the prayer room and just cried, "Father, please make this person come no matter what!" Then I came downstairs to where he was, looked him in the face, and said, "You are so arrogant. You are so selfish. Here God is trying to give you something. You might actually learn how to love somebody in a true way. Instead you are just going to go around traveling and doing your own thing. You have no sense of responsibility." (I had never met this person before!) Finally, he replied, "All right, here's the workshop fee. Where's the bus?"

That's the only time I ever did that. I would not recommend it as a technique. But I said it because I really



prayed, and I felt that that was what the person needed; the spirit world just used me to give it to him. The key point is your sincerity. People can feel your sincerity and your desperation through your words. You don't have to feel afraid to look desperate, because Heavenly Father is desperate.

*Question: Do you recommend working with a partner?*

Working with a partner can be very effective. For example, you can help inspire each other. Your own individual determination and heart are vital, but the bond of unity you can make with your partner creates a strong foundation that God can work through to bring someone to you.

Question: I have a fulltime mission and am not assigned to witness per se. How can I find spiritual children? It's important to make practical choices that will allow you to witness. Whenever you have to wait for others or for some event to begin, go outside. There's always a chance someone will be walking by. One place for sure you're never going to find a spiritual child is in your living room! When I first joined the church, I had a car because I was working as a public health nurse. For three weeks I made a condition to take the train instead of driving and talk to at least three people on the train going and coming. It was because of that condition that I could witness to the man who later became my husband. Making extra effort and going over your own concepts will nearly always bear fruit.

*Question: Your experience seems to be primarily street witnessing. How can it apply to home church?*

Honestly, to me they are the same. They require the same exact quality of heart-the "heart of salvation." Externally the process is different, but if you pledge to God and True Parents that the people in your home church area belong to them, then miracles can happen. In 1982 I did home church work in a small center with four other members. Based, I believe, on the incredible intensity of one sister's tearful prayer and desperation, the principal of the high school in our area was led to join our church. At the time it felt like a miracle, but it was her desperation and sincerity that brought this victory.

*Question: How do you encourage your spiritual children to join?*

Let your life be your testimony to True Parents. I feel Heung Jin Nim is crying out to us, "Witness with your heart." I like to share with people my own life experience with True Parents, about how coming to the church has changed my life. Sharing about Father as a great man and all the great things he has done can be very inspiring to people, but it's even more powerful for somebody to see that you've changed because of True Parents.

I always try to introduce the people I meet to as many brothers and sisters as possible. Then each person can be cared for by everyone in the center or at least by several other members. Your guest might be able to relate to another member who shares similar interests, a common background, or some specific experience. God works through such a bond. It also helps to have a lot of people praying for each guest. You can draw up a prayer list and pray for each other's spiritual children; such support benefits both you and your guest.

*Question: Where do you find the motivation to witness on a day-to-day basis?*

A healthy spiritual life with nourishing vertical and horizontal relationships is a vital element in witnessing. When I was in Oakland, we constantly studied the Principle. Even if we didn't have a guest, we often went to the weekend workshop to hear the Principle ourselves, to receive love vertically and to practice sharing it with others. When we are not receiving God's love, we tend to seek for fallen love rather than looking to give life to others. The key point in making close, pure, and warm relationships with brothers and sisters is to maintain a strong vertical relationship with Heavenly Father, True Parents, and your central figure. Then we don't reach out to each other out of loneliness; we reach out to each other out of a principled desire to make good horizontal relationships. In Oakland, we always used to have meetings as a trinity-three or four or five of us would gather and share the things we were gaining spiritually in the deepest part of our heart. We learned to love each other in that way.

Heung Jin Nim is helping us to realize that we really need to learn how to love brothers and sisters. We can't pretend to love the world if we can't love the person in the room next to ours or working alongside us. And caring for our spiritual children doesn't stop when they join. If we go out and show a nice face to the people we witness to but don't have the heart to develop a deep, lasting relationship with them, then the spirit world can't work, and we can't really move people.

Heung Jin Nim has been saying over and over again, "Study the Principle!" I think we sell the Principle a bit short. Oftentimes we say, "Well, I know the Principle but I still have all these problems." Actually, we can never hear the Principle enough. Father himself is still discovering the Principle and sharing new parts of it with us. God gave it to us-we have to use it! Study the Principle of Creation together. Even lecture to each other. I believe that everybody's problems can be solved with the Principle. As a central figure, I can't tell you how gratifying it is to walk into my center and find three people of their own volition, sitting in a corner doing lecture practice! Anyone can initiate this-studying not because our central figure said so, but because the Principle is our life.

Father said we need to read the Principle book 70 times! It's hard for me to read; it's easier for me to study. You can creatively set up ways to study. For example, you can hold a workshop for all the mothers and have the husbands watch the children. Then have a husbands' workshop while all the mothers watch the children. If you are on a witnessing team, why don't you make a condition to witness to three people and then meet your partner to study and discuss some point in the Principle? Before you go to bed, lecture one page of the Principle to another person. Study while you're waiting for someone.

You have to be intimately involved with Father's words and teachings if you want to learn how to think like True Parents think. When you love a person deeply, you almost know what they want before they ask you for it. That's what it is to know someone's heart. Studying the Principle is essential in order to become that close to True Parents.

What keeps us from witnessing is that we forget the truth. If we can remember the truth with excitement about who we are and where we are in providential history, we will always feel like witnessing. It's our separation from the truth of the Principle that makes us feel less than enthusiastic about doing it.

My prayer becomes deep only when the Principle is alive in my heart. When we are not studying the Principle, we easily forget what salvation means. As a Blessed Family counselor I've talked to a lot of people who believe in what I call "hypothetical salvation." Just saying, "I am blessed." can be meaningless if you don't deeply understand what the Blessing means. And honestly, we can't understand it unless we study and pray.

Prayer needs to become a part of our living reality, like breathing, especially when we are witnessing, because while witnessing we are actively concerned with salvation. We need to constantly reinforce the parent/child relationship we have with Heavenly Father and True Parents, and lean on that relationship, in order to get the power to witness. That relationship becomes very strong only through a lot of give and take in prayer. Prayer guides you to know what to say to each person.

*Question: I want to witness, but many members have left the church. How can you trust anyone will stay? How can you let yourself be vulnerable again and again?*

My heart has been broken many times in the process of witnessing. My last spiritual child who left the family was someone in whom I had invested my whole heart. When he left I was so hurt that I couldn't pray for him for a full year. Rev. Won Pil Kim shared some profound words that enabled me to sincerely embrace and pray for that person. He said, "I am always honored for being the first Unification member, but I don't deserve the honor." Tears were in his eyes as he went on, "Actually more than 100 people joined before me. Some of them even saved Father's life. Many of them are resting now [not active in the church], but I pray that someday you can thank them and honor them instead of me." I was deeply moved because I realized he had no malice towards anyone who had left. Instead, his heart was pure, and he was simply grateful for what they had done.

If we want to be successful witnesses, we have to have gratitude for everyone who works for the sake of God's providence, no matter how much or how little he gives. Nothing we invest in a person is ever wasted. Father says, "Make sure the door becomes wider because you joined. Never be caught in the situation where the road becomes more narrow for someone because of you."

*Question: How do you continue to feel "fresh" spiritually after so many years in our movement? How do you find the power to keep going?*

Our life depends on the reference point we choose. I have a memory of the first time I really felt Father and Mother were my own father and mother. At that point in my spiritual life, something changed. My feeling for them has become deeper as I study the lives of True Parents and use them always as my reference point. That is, I ask myself in each situation, What did Father and Mother do or

what would they do in such circumstances? If you start to feel some resentment, immediately ask yourself, "Is there some point in Father's life when this happened to him? What did he do?" Father explained at the beginning of the Children's Course in 1981 that this is now our chance to have the same experiences True Parents had, so we can become like True Parents ourselves.

When I see myself responding in an off centered way, I repent because I actually do want to be like True Parents. Especially now that I have blessed children, I feel even more the necessity to be an example of the heart and tradition True Parents have given us. If we can start to use Father and Mother as our reference point, we can become closer and closer to them. What is more natural than for children to aspire to be like the parents they admire?