

Won-pil Kim Remembers the Early Days of the Unification Church - Part 1

Won-pil Kim

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Kim Won-pil joined True Father in Pyongyang, North Korea (before the division had been fully cemented). Father was 26 years old and Kim Won-pil was 18. God had called Father to pioneer the north, and he had set up a church in one district of Pyongyang. People were joining. It was the fact that Father's early witnessing efforts were so successful, especially among the faithful Christian members of established churches that led certain Christian leaders to complain about him to the communist authorities. In the end, Father was sentenced to hard labor and was sent to the Hungnam special labor camp, about which Father has spoken at length.

Kim Won-pil waited faithfully for Father to come out of Hungnam, supported him in his initial efforts to recommence his mission, and then journeyed with him to the southern area of the Korean peninsula. This is Rev. Kim's recollection of that time.



In 1971 Rev. Kim and several members retrace father's route from Pyongyang to Pusan

Father was released from Hungnam prison on October 14, 1950. His home village was only a three-day walk from Pyongyang, and Father could easily have visited his family. Instead, he contacted all the members who had been with him before he was taken to prison. If he was unable to visit them personally, he at least sent someone on his behalf to meet with them.

Father brought with him a few things from prison, among them a small bag of rice. Of everything he could have brought, food was the most precious present, because food meant life. After two years and eight months in prison, he was weak and malnourished. It took him ten days to walk from Hungnam, on the northeast coast of Korea to Pyongyang, near the west coast. During those ten days, he could find no good food to eat; any crops left in the fields were old and spoiled. Yet he ate those rotten, leftover crops, saving the precious rice flour to share with the members in Pyongyang. I had been staying with a spiritualist who used to prepare food and send it to Father in prison. She came from a whole family of pious Christians, and she was the best member of Father's group. While awaiting his return, she lived with her mother, mother-in-law, and a little daughter, attending to their needs.

Upon arriving in Pyongyang, Father did not immediately visit his members, but stayed with his mother's sister. He sent one of his prison disciples to inform me of his liberation and tell me where he was staying. We should have set up the condition to receive Father again and welcome him, but we were not so prepared.

Poor health and ragged clothing

I went to see Father, and he returned with me to the lady's house. Then I went to tell the other members that Father had returned. Externally, Father looked the same as before he went to prison, but because of the hardships of prison life, his physical health was poor. He coughed continuously; each time he coughed the phlegm left a bitter taste in his mouth.

During the war, everyone had suffered from hunger, since there was never enough food. When we did have food to eat, sometimes it went down so quickly that it rattled in our throats. If a famished person eats very rapidly, the noise he makes is sometimes scary. I noticed this as I was eating with Father, and it gave me a feeling for how extremely hungry he must have been. Many Koreans have experienced this type of thing and can understand exactly what I mean.

The clothes Father was wearing upon his arrival in Pyongyang were the same ones which the members had given him the first time in prison. Over the months and years, these clothes had become torn and ragged, but Father mended them many times over. Usually Korean clothes for cold weather are made of two layers, with cotton padding in between for warmth. As his clothes wore out, Father stuffed small pieces of cloth between the layers. Even pieces of cloth too small or too rotten to use, he saved and stuffed in his clothes. Father never threw away worn-out clothes, but made old and worthless things useful as substitutes for cotton padding. These clothes, sewn and re sewn by Father's own hands, were what he was wearing when we met him.

Rice cakes for the members

We should have welcomed Father when he returned from prison and made everything ready for him. Even as he was walking down the road, we should have been preparing for his arrival. Instead, Father prepared for us. He brought his precious rice powder—which was like life itself—to share with us.

Father gathered some members together and mixed the rice powder with water, making something like a thick pudding. He got out a big pan and using chopsticks which he himself made in prison, cooked rice cakes for the members. In Korea, people make rice cakes for special celebrations, and as he cooked the rice cakes, Father explained to us that even the prisoners also celebrated with rice cakes. One by one, he passed these cakes out to us.

This gift came from Father's deep love for his members. It is indeed difficult for children to understand the depth of parental love. But whenever small opportunities to help us understand it come our way, we should magnify them and make a desperate effort to understand this parental heart.

Song of liberation

Seven days after leaving prison, Father wrote the words to one of our holy songs, set to the tune of a simple traditional Korean song. The words of the song express Father's strong determination and gratitude for God's goodness. When you listen to the words of this song, "Blessing of Glory," you can understand Father's grateful heart.

Now the light of glory arises
like the sun that shines on high,
Now awaken into freedom, O revive, you spirits, O revive.

Wake the mountains and the valleys;
bring alive the springs of the earth.
Light the world forever
with the light of your rebirth.
Light the world forever
with the light of your rebirth.

We are called to bring back the glory
to the life of God above;
Now the Lord in his greatness
fills the universe with tender love,
Ever seeking souls awakened,
ever calling them to be free.
How shall I attend Him
who is calling to me?
How shall I attend Him
who is calling to me?

From the dark of death I awaken
and rejoice to live in grace;
When the one who came to save me
holds me tenderly in his embrace,
I rejoice to feel the comfort
of the love He has for me.
What a blessing of glory,
to rejoice eternally.
What a blessing of glory,
to rejoice eternally.

Now He lifts me up to embrace me
in the blessing that is mine;
What a blessing to receive Him
in a love so tender and divine;
How can I return the Blessing?
Tho' in all my life I will try,
I can never stop feeling
how unworthy am I.
I call never stop feeling
how unworthy am I.

This poem is the song that Father sang in front of God. This song is not just for us. Father wrote it for God. After the difficult circumstances in prison and throughout the dangers that confronted him during his escape, he was always thinking about God, expressing his faith in God and his undying gratitude to Him. Father has an unchanging heart; his heart today is the same as his heart during that very difficult journey.

Visiting members for 40 days

Even in prison, Father knew that members were falling away from the small church he had established; still he prayed continuously for each one three times a day. But just to pray for them was not enough; he wanted to visit each of them, talk with them, let them know that he had returned safely from prison. He felt so responsible for each person, because he knew that they had pledged before God to remain faithful and continue this way of life. Because of that sense of responsibility, he yearned to visit each one. He felt the reason they had strayed from the church was because he had been cast into prison and had been unable to take care of them directly. If he could meet them and take care of them, he was sure they could return.

At first, Father stayed with me at the house of the elderly spiritualist lady, but when her family returned from the South, there was no longer any room for us. So we moved into an abandoned house, which had no kitchen or stove.

During those cold nights in late November, we had only one very thin blanket, which we shared. Father had not yet recovered from the fatigue and hunger of his prison years, but there was no other place for him to stay. Although the situation in Pyongyang became worse and worse, Father remained until the last possible moment, visiting members. He could have visited his own family, but he had to see those from the Cain realm.

One former member whom Father found ridiculed him and asked him, "Do you still keep this faith? Do you still believe in religion?" Sometimes I visited the members on Father's behalf. One man praised my

unchanging attitude toward Father, but explained that although he wanted to come, his difficult family situation prevented him from doing so. In such situations, I would bring the members a letter from Father. One man, however, refused to accept or read the letter, handing it back to me without opening it. So I returned the letter to Father.

There was one Christian group which had been preparing for the Lord of the Second Coming, known as the "Inside the Belly" Church. The leader of that group had been sent to prison; most of the members had been sentenced to hard labor in the coal mines or were killed by the communists. However, there were some members remaining in Pyongyang who still believed that their leaders would resurrect and return to work with them. These members were so sad and miserable at the loss of their leaders and really believed that those leaders would return.

Father sent me to the core leader of that church and invited him to visit Father. Feeling very responsible for that church, Father wanted to make contact with this religious group and bring one of its members south with him. One leader did come, but the situation was very chaotic and he was unable to get together with Father.

Thus Father was fulfilling his responsibility not only toward his own members, but to those from another church as well.

Finding Mr. Pak [Chung Hwa Pak]

One of Father's disciples from prison, Mr. Pak, had been liberated at the very beginning of the Korean War and returned to his home village near Pyongyang. However, he was received with persecution and beatings, because before the Korean War he had been a communist. After World War II, the communists began taking over North Korea, but as the United Nations forces began pushing north, the situation reversed and communists were being made to suffer. Mr. Pak's leg was broken in the course of the beatings.

Since it was too dangerous to remain in his home town, Mr. Pak came to Pyongyang, to stay with his younger sister. Father remembered that Mr. Pak had told him he would be at his younger sister's house, so he sent me to look for him.

Mr. Pak thought Father would have been released from prison by then and would have contacted him. Mr. Pak had promised always to follow Father and he felt a bit resentful at not hearing from him. When I arrived, Mr. Pak was overjoyed; he said he had cried for many nights, thinking how untrustworthy this world was. I put him in a wheelbarrow and took him to see Father.