

The Witnessing Way of Life - Part 3

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Sheri with five of her spiritual sons. Clockwise from top left: Peter Bates, Sheri, John Hovard, Tim Henry, Ian Haycroft, and David Burroughs

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 to do it, 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.



A popular witnessing spot in downtown San Francisco. Kitty Wojick is seated front, talking to a guest

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 that was 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?