

The Living God is Always with Us

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My name is Howard Self.

I was asked to share some testimonies about God's presence and work in my life.

As I reflect on my life, I can say that the most important aspect is really about how God worked throughout my life. Even when I was not yet aware of it, God was definitely doing His 95% in my life. So my testimony today is really about how God worked in my life and of course, primarily God works through people. Sometimes He worked through the people around me and then sometimes directly with me.

I started out life on June 7th, 1949 in Charlotte, North Carolina. I was born into a large family. I had six brothers and sisters. I was the middle child of the family. Fourth of seven, with three brothers and three sisters. We had a lot of love in my family, especially through my mother who is just an incredibly wonderful person and who is still living now. I went home not long ago to celebrate her 96th birthday!! She is still going strong; still living in the home that my father built just before I was born.

My family was a Christian family-Independent Baptist. We went to church often. Every Sunday we would go for Sunday service, and then also Sunday evenings we had what was called "Training Union," which was mostly Bible classes by age group. Then also on Wednesday nights, we had the Wednesday night prayer meeting. As a child, I would go to Vacation Bible School for a week or two every summer. So we were quite active. My father was a Sunday school teacher to the men's class and he was an elder of our church as well. That's the kind of environment I grew up in.

We actually were quite poor. We didn't have the usual bathroom facilities but had an outhouse. We also had no shower or running hot water. In fact, we literally were probably one of the last households to have an outhouse and no shower or anything like that. I experienced those things only at friends' homes when I would "spend the night" with them. Only after I grew up did my father finally put in a shower and bathroom. So, you might say, we were financially poor but spiritually very rich, with my mother providing unconditional love.

My first experience with God happened when I was 7 or 8 years old. My next older brother and I used to play with one of my first cousins. She was a little girl, very close to our age. One day, she was hit by a car and killed. This happened so suddenly. They asked the young kids like me and my brother to be the pallbearers for her. So at her funeral service, we were the pallbearers, carrying her casket. This was my first experience with death.

That night, lying in bed alone, I seriously began to think about death for the first time. My cousin was a

lively, vivacious, and wonderful person and now she was gone completely. What is death? Is that just like an empty void? What happens when you die? Where is she now? What happened to her? And then I started to contemplate about my own life and then in my young mind, extrapolate forward to the moment that I would pass away, perhaps 80 or 90 years later. As I thought about the moment I would die, I contemplated what would happen right after I died. What will it be like? Will there be any feeling or even thinking after that moment?



At first, it was quite fascinating for me to try to understand death. But after a while, it became quite scary and eventually terrifying. It became terrifying thinking about my death at 7 or 8 because in my mind I was standing right at that moment of death, and I couldn't think of anyone who could solve this pressing problem. I knew everybody was going to die one day. My parents who had always been with me and to whom I had always been able to go to with any problem, would die before I did. I thought, "From now, no matter how much fun I'm having with my brothers and sisters, or my friends, so what?, the thought that in the end, we are all going to die will come to me and take away all joy." With this realization, all meaning and hope began to drain out of me. I felt completely alone for the very first time in my life.

And then in my darkest moment of despair, suddenly very soothing, loving, warm thoughts began to come to me. They were very intriguing because these thoughts were outside of me and also they were inside me at the same time, but I knew they had another Source. It was like a voice in my mind that began to lovingly say: "You don't have to worry. I created you to live for eternity. Even after you leave this physical life, you will continue to live. There will never be a time that you cannot speak, cannot feel, cannot love, and cannot experience life. I created you that way, to live forever."

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And I understood then that Heavenly Father was there, embracing me. And I suddenly just filled up with the deepest kind of joy and the deepest kind of gratitude. I was so grateful that Heavenly Father had created us to be eternal spirits. My heart just filled up. I knew and felt to my bone marrow that I would never be alone again because I knew that God would always be with me. I felt so protected and so loved and I just began crying and weeping out of deepest joy and gratitude. My life seemed to be like an hourglass, that had narrowed down, seemingly coming to almost an end in my moment of despair; but then, because God was there, opened into an unending broad ever-widening venue.

That was my first personal experience with Heavenly Father and it proved to hold true for the rest of my life. I never felt alone again. No matter what I was going through, no matter what kinds of things I did. Even when I was in the Army, I was never alone. Always I could feel that God was with me. I've always been so grateful for that base. Many times, I felt unworthy, at times leaving Heavenly Father alone too

long in between meetings with Him, but He never, never, never abandons us. He never lets us down.

Fast forward about 17 years. I am now 25, and I have just heard the Divine Principle. I am on fire to share with my family members the exciting truths that I have just learned. I was visiting my family home where my mother lives to this day. I was having a serious discussion with my older sister, Ruth, in the kitchen, sharing all that I had recently discovered. She too was a seeker and so our discussion was getting very intense. Our house is not too big, so my mother was taking part in the entire conversation from the next room, supporting me. As we discussed, from the next room, Mom would chime in and add her comments. Finally, my sister realized that something big was happening for me, and she asked, "So, what does this mean for you? What are you going to do?" I replied, "Well, bottom line, it means that God has called me to go and join the Unification Movement led by Reverend Sun Myung Moon. I don't know if I will be asked to be a missionary or a pastor, or what, but it is clear that I have to go and help. God has called me and I cannot resist this call from God."



Then, my mother came into the kitchen where we were. She was crying. We didn't know why so my sister and I hugged up around her. And then my mother, through her tears explained what had happened with me when I was only 2 weeks old.

She said, "I always knew Howard was going to be a missionary or a preacher."

(There had been a running joke in my family that I was "the preacher" because I had such a big mouth. Amongst the seven kids, I was always the loudest.) So when my mom said this, I kind of laughed and said, "Yeah, Mom, I always had a big mouth."

She said, "No that's not what I mean." And then she told us what happened when I was a baby, no more than two weeks old:

"When you were two weeks old you had a growth on your throat- some kind of tumor- and the doctors said they would have to operate. They told me that that operation might mean they would have to take your voice box and that you might not be able to talk. There would be a lot of scarring as well.



After hearing that news from the doctors, that night I began praying and I prayed all night long. At about five in the morning, Heavenly Father was there with me. And I asked Heavenly Father if He could heal this baby so that the operation would not be necessary. Then I promised Heavenly Father that if He would heal you, I would offer you to Him and when you grew up, God could call you and use your voice and speak through you.

The next day the swelling started going down. The second day, even more. And by the third day, the swelling was completely gone.

I took you back to the doctors, and the doctors were kind of flabbergasted. They didn't know what to say and could only say, "We don't know what happened, but it is completely gone. There's no need for an operation."

Ever since that day, from when you were two weeks old, I have been waiting and knowing that God would call you. And I know God has called you right now and has called you to this Movement. And I'm so happy."

Her tears were tears of joy- that at the age of 25,

God was calling me to my life mission.

My mother was so smart and wise because she never told me about this, throughout my whole life, until she knew I was called for my life work by Heavenly Father. And she has supported me all the time

throughout my 45 years now in the movement. She was always praying for me, always supporting me, and praying for the success of the project or mission I was working on. I could experience many times; how much God loves her and how close she was to Him.

And I knew just how important that condition was that she made, offering me up when I was two weeks old. My real foundation was made by her and given to me. She confirmed this to me many times throughout my experience in the Movement. That is how God worked through her.

I'm very very grateful to my mother for making that solid spiritual foundation in my life. Heavenly Father could use that Foundation to come to me when I was 7 or 8 and meet with me in such a dramatic way, helping guide me on the course that eventually led me to the Movement. I am now 71, and I have lived such a rich, blessed life. God has been there by my side throughout every moment of it. With His grace, we will continue together for many more years on this side of the "veil", and for eternity afterward. This is His heritage to all of us...the children of the living God.