

The message of True Parents is how to rebuild the broken hearts and damaged souls of the world

Neil Salonen
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True Father is reviewing plans for Bridgeport University that Dr. Salonen is showing him

Dr. Salonen joined the church in 1967. He was president of the church in the United States from 1972 to 1980. Since 1999, he has been president of the University of Bridgeport. His remarks, which were recorded earlier, are offered here to honor True Father on the second anniversary of his ascension.



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I was in Washington DC when I met some members of our church that brought me to their center where they were living. In those days, you studied the Divine Principle very slowly, just one lecture a week; it took weeks and weeks. The woman who later became my wife was my teacher. She began teaching and everything seemed so clear. When we came to the conclusion and talked about the coming of the Messiah, I suddenly realized that the Messiah didn't come to take responsibility to do the work of salvation; he came to take responsibility to teach us to do the work of salvation. From that moment on, I never doubted the basic truth of the Divine Principle.

Almost two years later, True Parents came to visit Washington DC. We listened to them, and I could just feel that everything I had been taught was real. Father is the only person I can truly say I always knew was saying whatever he was saying -- even when he was scolding me -- for the purpose of helping me to become a better person. I found I could trust him

unconditionally, absolutely, and that feeling never went away.

Many times, I was asked to work on projects that were different from the usual project. We used to have an anti-communist movement in the U.S. that we called the Freedom Leadership Foundation. We spent all our time trying to persuade people that God was the answer to the problem of freedom, not some economic theory.

An Unexpected Posting

Ultimately, those times changed, and then I was asked suddenly and to my great surprise to become president of the American church. I didn't think I was the most religious member. I did believe that I wanted to do everything in my power to support and help True Parents. So when we began these tours throughout America, it was exciting because it was an opportunity to organize, and to proclaim to people in a realistic way -- in a strong realistic way -- what kind of change had to come. We went to every state in America.

I saw Father and Mother every day, month after month, and that time only confirmed my deep faith that their devotion, their determination, was absolute. Probably everyone else in my life had days when they were on duty and days when they were not on duty. I never saw that with True Parents. They were devoted to their duty every minute of every day for every year that I ever knew them.

That, probably more than anything else, confirmed to me that they were the most real thing in my life and I wanted to do everything I could to help them, and I still do.

We went on small visits throughout every state, but then we had several big visits. We did Madison Square Garden and Yankee Stadium and ultimately we did Washington DC. In Washington DC, we divided the whole area into many small parts, and we spent all of our time asking people to come to hear a message of hope. We worked night and day. Brothers and sisters came from Europe, came from Japan -- they came from everywhere.

We all came together and it was a great celebration. In some respects, it was one of the peak moments of victory for Father's public appearances in the United States, because at that time, even though there was some controversy from people that could not understand the whole of our religious message, there was no doubt that our message was intended to bring hope and excitement. The many, many people that were joining at that time, were excited. They were sincere.

Righteous and Unafraid

We were sometimes accused of separating people from their own church background or from their parents, so we went around the whole country having parents' receptions, where we invited all the members' parents to come and to talk. Ultimately, I think we helped to convey the idea that we were not against the family. We were at the very heart of family. Nevertheless, when some people, especially some of the most fundamental Christian critics, persuaded a few of the leaders in Washington to attack, they did so mercilessly and unfairly. We tried so hard to speak to them. One famous senator at the time said, "If the IRS can't find something wrong with Rev. Moon, something is wrong with the IRS." Shameful! Shameful!

Actually, through a series of unbelievable distortions, Father was accused and convicted of something that any other person would just have had to pay a fine for. In his case, we were told privately, that if he left the country, that was fine, but if he did not agree to leave the country, they would put him in jail.

Actually when he got that news, he was in Korea. He did not have to come back, but he did in order to show that he was not afraid to be put in jail, and he went to jail for little over a year. It was a very painful time for us. I visited him in Danbury one time and he was the same Father. He said that it was taking all his strength not to be mad at America for what had happened. He understood that our job was not to turn against the people we were attempting to save, but no matter how long we had to keep expressing our love, our love had to be unconditional and unending until it was successful.

A Genuinely Forgiving Heart

Some years later, we had a meeting at the UN and True Father spoke. On the panel with him was that same U.S. senator that had been responsible for putting him in jail. That same senator praised Father and said many wonderful things about him at that time.

At the end, True Father got up, walked across the stage and hugged the senator. I happened to be where I saw Father's face at that moment, and his smile was fantastic because what he was saying was "true love won. I melted his heart. I changed him and changed hatred into love."

I have never forgotten that, and every challenge I have ever faced, no matter how wrong the people are that might attack us, and no matter how distorted or angry they may be, I realize it's not our job and it won't solve the problem to try to fight back. What will solve the problem is finding a way to love them more. Based on that I have tried to accomplish everything I can in the spirit of our True Parents.

He Is With Us All, Always

Shortly after Father was released, I was asked to get involved with the University of Bridgeport and eventually came here. When I came here, he said that our mission was to make a great university where people come together, all different cultures, find mutual respect and become great leaders. He came to visit several times in order to reinforce his commitment to that goal.

Some years later, when True Father was ill and began to pass into the spirit world, I went to Korea for his Seonghwa and I still felt he was right here. I still knew he was right here. Everything I do and everything I try to do, I know that someday I will have to stand right in front of Father and say, "This is what I tried to do."

Every time I need advice, I feel that I can ask him, "What's the best way to solve this problem?" He's with us still. I feel it, and when I see True Mother, I feel that he is still with her as well.

Unity Will See Us Through

So much depended on True Father in the years that he was with us on earth that it is very natural that after he passed into the spirit world our unity would be tested. I think anyone would recognize that our unity has been tested. During these years, people are wondering if this is right or that is right.

The most important thing is to remain united around our True Parents. If we can maintain our unity, all the other problems that we have can be solved. At the end of the day, our work is not done until we have all entered the kingdom of heaven, so we cannot divide into this group or that group.

We have to work together as one family. I know it's easy to say but not easy to do. Yet, each of us has to be responsible to do his part, to stay strong in our loyalty and unity with the True Parents but continue to do our best to reach out in love to all of our family. We need to remain one great unification family in order to become God's hope for the restoration of the world.

Love Will Carry Us to Better Times

After Father's Seonghwa, I told many people that I thought that for three years, our unity and our focus would be tested, but if we could remain determined for those three years, God's blessing would really come.

I think the leadership in the different states and the different regions are doing quite well in this regard, even though they are being tested by some of their friends and sometimes by former members. In most cases, I see them passing the test. Increasingly I believe they will again find their momentum to proclaim the urgent message that is needed, which is that the only thing that can transform the world is true love coming from God.

That is the message of our True Parents. That is how you can rebuild the broken hearts and the damaged souls of the people of the world to make them capable of building a new society. I see it happening. I believe it is happening and I believe that Mother will see that happening too. We want to inspire her and we will.

Along the same lines of what I've said, since I have been here at the University of Bridgeport, we have been blessed to see many wonderful things happen and to receive support from the governor and both of our senators. Yet, one person has been unbelievably critical. I won't mention his name, but some of what he has done has been very harsh and unfair. We get frustrated. I worry that the members will feel hurt. When I reported to Father about that, he just smiled and said, "Keep loving him." If there is one phrase that I remember when I am faced with a difficulty or an opponent or a situation that seems unfair or a burden that feels too heavy, I just remember Father's words, "keep loving, keep loving," and I know that it works.