

## HPHC Japan: Bang Sang-il: Walk with conviction in the power of God's words

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February 2, 2023



*On November 27, 2022, a Special Meeting of the Fukuoka District was held at Fukuoka Family Church (Fukuoka District), where Mr. and Mrs. Bang Sang-il, Regional Group President of the Heavenly Japan of the Heavenly Parent's Holy Community were welcomed. In his message, Bang told the audience that the Family Federation is like the eldest son amongst religions, and called on those in attendance to lead people to God - the Parent of humankind - and True Parents.*

### **My wife's side is the place I can feel most relieved**

Good morning, everyone. I am so glad to see all of you here.

Every day, when I see the reports in the mainstream media, I feel you must all be deeply hurt. However, I have been encouraged and strengthened to see your wonderful faces as your smiles shout out, "We are not hurt, so please don't worry!"

I came to Japan on April 24, 1998. At that time, I did not even know "a, i, u, e, o" (Japanese alphabet). Recently, I had this kind of conversation with my sixth child.

He said, "Dad, your Japanese has improved a lot, but your pronunciation is still a little strange. Try saying 'ta, chi, tsu, te, to.'"

I replied, "That's easy. Ta, chi, chu, te, to."

He looked at me and sighed, "Hmmm, it's still weird."

I am confident that I am second to none when it comes to delivering a message in Korean. However, even now, 24 years after coming to Japan, I still feel awkward speaking in Japanese in front of many Japanese people.

This happened at the first church I was assigned to in Japan. The pastors wanted to greet the new pastor, so they started coming up to me one after another. But I was afraid of them because I could not communicate in Japanese and they seemed like tigers to me. It was my wife who saved me.

When a baby can't see its mother, it gets anxious and starts to cry. They know that their mother will do her best to protect them. My wife was just like that for me. Just like a chick chirping after its mother, I would follow my wife to the bathroom and wait for her to come out. My wife's side was the safest place for me, my heaven.

### **The religion amongst religions, the Family Federation stands as the eldest son**

Members of the "former" Unification Church, whom I respect and admire so much, the name "former Unification Church" has become well established in the world due to the daily news reports.

We are the Family Federation. More than ever, we will emphasize the importance of the family. For this reason, your families must become heaven.

True Father said that when husbands look at their wives and wives look at their husbands, they must see God. It is the same when parents look at their children and children look at their parents. Families always

encounter God through each other. The Family Federation was born to expand such families throughout the world.

Do the men here look at their wives' faces and feel like they see demons? Do the women here look at their husbands' faces and feel like they see yakuza bosses? (Laughter.) If that is the case, then you cannot make an ideal family nor an ideal world. No matter how diligently you study God's word, unless you love each other and live for each other as a family, and practice living with God, the word will end up as a mere ideal.

The Family Federation is not the only religion that stresses the importance of the family. Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, any religion will teach this. No religion tells its followers to kill people. Religions exist to lead people to happiness.

The Family Federation stands as a religion amongst religions; in other words, as the eldest son.

If you have three boys in your family, the order of birth is first son, second son, and third son. Do you only cherish the first son? Not at all, right? Love flows from the top down, so the youngest son, the third son, may be the most loved. On the other hand, the eldest son may have the greatest responsibility to his parents and siblings.

The Family Federation has the responsibility to solve all problems in society. Despite this, it is frustrating that society still sees us as a problem.

### **Husbands and wives, parents and children, put in one hundred percent for each other**

It looks like many of you here are in your sixties and seventies.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is said that there are more than 90,000 people in Japan who are over 100 years old. There are island nations in the South Pacific with populations less than 30,000, and a population of 100,000 is even considered large. When you look at it this way, Japan's elderly population is nothing short of astonishing. And, about ninety percent of those over a hundred years of age in Japan are women.

My mother lives alone in a place called Sooncheon in southern Korea. She is now ninety-seven years old.

I visited her one day in April and the sun was warm, so we sat in the sun on the side of the road in front of her house. As we sat there, a dirty-looking old man was walking toward us. I looked closely at him and noticed that he looked like the father of a friend of mine. I told my mother, "That must be so-and-so's father. What happened to him?" She replied, "His wife passed away two years ago. He's only been eating pre-packed meals for breakfast, lunch and dinner. He doesn't throw out the garbage and leaves it lying around the house. He doesn't even change his clothes."

A short while later, a beautiful old lady walked up the street. I asked my mother if that was so-and-so's mother, and she said, "Yes, that is." I asked my mother why she looked so young, and she told me that her husband had passed away two years ago. Because of that she no longer had to take care of him, and so whenever she was free, she would put on makeup.

My two older sisters married and my two older brothers were killed in car accidents. I have one younger brother who lives far away from our parents' home.

My mother laments that even though she gave birth to six children, there is no one by her side. Both of my brothers had accidents when they were forty-nine years old. Those accidents must've been really devastating for her.

Under ordinary circumstances, I should have been there for my mother after my older brothers passed. When my mother told me, "You may be alive, but you're as good as dead," my heart ached as if it shattered into a thousand pieces.

Yet, every time my mother calls me, she tells me to take care of myself and to be careful of cars. No matter how many months have passed, she is still the same mother who wishes for the health and safety of her children. No matter how long I have lived a life of faith, I fall short of the depth in heart compared to her. Parents are truly great in this way.

We all want to live well as a couple and age beautifully. To do this, we will have to respect each other (husband and wife). And we must live for each other. Husbands are to put in one hundred percent for their wives, wives for their husbands, parents for their children, and children for their parents.

Japanese people, both men and women, do not seem to express their affections very often. Americans say, "I love you," several times a day. Does it cost money to say, "I love you," to your family? It does not. And

yet, it brings back great joy that money cannot buy. Men, when you go home, tell your wives, "I love you. I am so happy that you are here." You can be sure that a delicious meal will be served. (Laughter.)

At one of the leaders' meetings, I told the leaders that they should always hug their wives before leaving for work. Are all the leaders here practicing this? When you hug them, tell your partners that you will do your best and to take care. Start the day with these kinds of words for each other. I also hope all the women representatives practice this from tomorrow.

No matter how much we preach, "live for the sake of others" or "true love," or no matter how many times we may read the Divine Principle, it's meaningless if we do not practice love. Children watch their parents very closely. Their pure eyes are the judges. [If you do as I just said,] they will say, "Dad and Mom never quarrel and they are always in love! They are like God." Let us make sure that they come to say things like this.

### **No matter how old you are, it's important to set goals and keep on challenging yourselves**

I will try to tell you a story that will make you realize that you are still young and can try many things.

In Korea, one university president retired at the age of sixty-five. Nowadays, the average life expectancy in Korea is getting longer, but three or four decades ago, a whole village would celebrate when a person reached the age of sixty, and not many people lived over seventy.

That president had said that it was almost time for him to go to the spirit world, and since he had worked so hard, he should enjoy his remaining time and travel around. After five years passed, he became more and more energetic. He decided to spend more time enjoying his life, and before he knew it, he had become ninety years old. All of his friends had already passed away.

When he had turned ninety-five, his sons decided to gather all his relatives to celebrate at a hotel.

On that day, he had tears running down his face throughout, and the relatives thought he must be happy to have such a celebration. Towards the end, he gave a speech. He said:

"When I retired, I thought my life expectancy would be about seventy. That's why I kept doing things I wanted to do. If I had known that I would stay healthy until I was ninety-five, I would not have wasted so much time. I led the worst kind of life. I regret it. I should have learned English because when I was the president, I felt bad because I couldn't speak English...I am here to make a resolution to all of you. I will master English from this day forward!"

Five years later, more than twice as many people gathered, than the previous occasion, to celebrate his one hundredth birthday. He began his five-minute speech in fluent English by addressing the crowd as, "Ladies and Gentlemen." He then declared that he would study German next.

When he turned 103 years old and was about to leave for the spirit world, he told his family in the hospital that he had no regrets in life. Even though he felt he had wasted his life until he was ninety-five years old, the eight years since then had been the most joyous days of his life. With that, he told those by his side to cherish each and every day.

There is still time left for all of you. Please set goals and challenge yourselves. True Mother, who will soon be eighty, is still leading the way toward the goal of realizing a Heavenly Unified Korea. She has even set the goal of achieving the Heavenly Unified World by the year 2027.

### **Democracy is being eroded by communism and extreme individualism is rampant**

I used to be so happy to write letters to True Mother, which included testimonies from the field. I believe that Mother was also empowered by the testimonies of the Japanese members. However, for the past five months, it has been very difficult for me to write her. I am so tired that I almost collapse by the time I finish writing. It takes me courage to muster up the strength to write, and I have to make a determination and write to Mother, "No matter how much the mainstream media beat us up, Japanese members will not be intimidated. We are together with Mother and have nothing to fear. Please rest assured that the subregional leaders, district leaders, church leaders, and women representatives are leading the way on the frontlines."

Ladies and gentlemen, do religions develop through a life of faith in ease? No. Christianity became the state religion despite severe persecution and oppression by the Roman Empire. Furthermore, it spread throughout the world. Which religious group is most persecuted in Japan today? ("The Family Federation!") Then there is no doubt that we will develop and grow.

True Father overcame six prisons, including the concentration camp at Hungnam, Seodaemun Prison in

Seoul, and Danbury Prison in the United States. Each time, God graced him and the church had developed.

True Father went to Danbury Prison, although he was innocent. At that time, he called on the American members not to cry for him, but to pray for America. Although America was founded with God's blessing, it was moving further and further away from what God had wanted for that country. Father did everything in his power to protect America, which was leaning to the left, by founding the Washington Times and making other significant contributions. Until then, democracy in the U.S. had been eroded by communism, and individualism had become prevalent throughout the country.

The problem with communism is that it denies God's existence, but True Father said that excessive individualism is as big a problem as communism. The U.S. began to think only of itself.

What room is there for people to criticize True Parents, who have testified about God, the Parent of humankind, and have taught us to live for the sake of others, the nation, and the world? I can only think that today's mainstream media is controlled by communism and promotes extreme individualism.

### **The footprints of loving God will never disappear**

In 1620, one hundred and twenty-two English Puritans traveled to the North American continent aboard the Mayflower in search of religious freedom. They left Plymouth in September and arriving and dropping anchor in late November.

They spent the winter on board and nearly half of them died of hunger and cold. In such a harsh environment, they lived for the sake of each other and the first thing they tried to build was a church. Then, it was only after building a school to educate their children, who would be the future of the country, that they built houses for themselves.

They were practicing the spirit of "loving heaven, loving people, and loving the country" which True Parents have taught us.

Since its founding, the history of America is more than two hundred years. That is much shorter when compared to the history of Japan. Despite this, America has become the world's largest country in every aspect, including the economy and military.

You are probably familiar with the Empire State Building. It is a symbolic building of the United States located in New York City. It is said that it was built one hundred and two stories high in honor of those who crossed the ocean on the Mayflower and laid the foundation of that nation. The footprints of those who sought and loved God will never be erased from history.

The Family Federation of Japan is now passing through its winter season. We have been subjected to an all-out attack by the mainstream media and have had heartless words thrown at us. These things are necessary for our growth. Let us take them seriously, review our shortcomings if any, and boldly push forward with church reform.

Amongst several of True Mother's greatest wishes, twenty second-generation district leaders have stood up. Thirteen of them have experience as church leaders. The other seven bypassed being church leaders to become district leaders. How great is the pressure they must've been feeling? And yet, they accepted their mission.

Whenever I see them, I feel hope. I have seen them give lectures, which were intellectually and emotionally understandable, and I could tell that Heaven has great expectations for them.

### **Become people who can anticipate and realize the hopes of True Parents**

True Mother once called me and wanted me to tell you that she really appreciates the support from the Japanese members. Even though the world is against us, I told her that we would do our best not to cause worry for True Mother, and she knows very well that all of you have prayers of determination and are walking this path. Mother spends sleepless nights thinking about the situation her beloved children are in.

I think I have shared this story before about going out to eat at a conveyor belt sushi restaurant with my four sons. Some of you may have already heard this.

I had thought they were all 100 yen a plate, so I urged my sons to eat as much as they could. My sons, who had rarely gone out to eat, were so happy to know how good sushi tasted.

However, the plates ranged in price from 100 to 500 yen, depending on the color of the plate. My eldest son (then in his third year of middle school) noticed this as soon as he entered the restaurant and only ate

the 100-yen sushi. I was moved to tears when I saw him smile and say, "The 100-yen sushi is delicious, too." I knew he was concerned about his parents' situation and felt he had grown so much.

There are countless religious organizations in the world. They are in the position of second, third, and fourth sons, and I believe that the Family Federation is a religious organization akin to the first son. Therefore, before heaven tells us what to do, as the first son, we must realize heaven's hopes and act accordingly.

My oldest son attended the 21-day workshop in Chiba in August. Prior to that, he only went to church about once every six months or so. He has good character, but he had little interest in church matters. When my son came home after the workshop, he told me, "Dad, thank you so much for letting me participate in the 21-day workshop." He even said, "Oh my God! True Parents are wonderful, and without their words, we would be worthless."

I told him that inspiration would wane over time. So I asked him to tell a couple of his friends how wonderful the 21-day workshop was while he was still motivated. Since that day, my son has continued to introduce the program to his friends, and this month, three of them attended. I encouraged him not to stop at three, but to aim for four.

My eldest son promised he would bring 40 of his friends and acquaintances to the 21-day workshop within 100 days. (Applause.) Seven people are scheduled to participate in December, and another seven in January. When I told him to try for a hundred, my eldest son was surprised and said, "What?!" But he didn't seem phased. When we are moved by the word and our spirits are restored, we will be empowered in this way.

Everyone, please believe in the power of God's word. Special 40-day workshops on the Divine Principle are held throughout the country, so let us all read and experience the Principle every day and receive grace from the Holy Spirit and the truth.

I don't have to tell you the meaning of [the Chinese character] "fuku" in Fukuoka. ("Fuku" means "blessings" in English.) "Oka" means "small, elevated land." If you take a closer look, it consists of two hieroglyphs: the hieroglyph for "mountain" and one for "net."

Are you familiar with casting nets, one of the methods of catching fish? You can catch fish by throwing a weighted net that spreads out in the air. Let us be confident that many people will be led to God, the Parent of humankind, and True Parents as you cast the net, which is God's word.

Let us turn the fortunes of witnessing from the land of Fukuoka and uplift the whole nation of Japan.