

Testimony of Dr. Bo Hi Pak – Part 1

Seog Byung Kim
November 14, 2018



During the time he was working closely with True Parents, Dr. Bo Hi Pak told the story of his life to Today's World magazine. Through his testimony of faith and love, we can glimpse how the challenges he faced in his youth, and in wartime, forged the loyalty and virtue that have guided his life.

Part 1 Younger Days and the Korean War

I began life on August 18, 1930, in a simple village named Jungbyong, in South Korea -- 100 miles south of Seoul. I was born the oldest son into what is referred to as a family of the Yangban class. There is no correct translation in English for this, but it is similar to "noble family" or "elite family of the society." Those families whose ancestors had served in high government position would call themselves Yangban. My grandfather, for example, was born during the Yi dynasty. During that time, a Yangban had to be born in the family tradition of Confucianism, because the Yi dynasty's state religion ("religion" may not be the correct word; it may be more correct to say "way of life" or "tradition") was Confucianism.

My grandfather and also my father were prominent Confucian scholars in the community, while my mother was a good worshipper of anything if she were told that it would help her son's success! In a way, her son (myself) was her religion. She would do or believe anything once she believed that it would be good for the future of her son. I was born from such parental heart.

My family was closely knit and intimate. My father was stern, yet loved me a great deal. My mother, Han Pyung-chun, was absolutely loyal for the sake of her son. I felt tremendous love from my mother, as did my brother and two sisters.

My parents lived in very harsh conditions and as a result, I grew up in near poverty. Traditionally, the Yangban were always landlords. But during the forty-year rule of the Japanese government, the Land Distribution Act was enforced, which deprived us of all the land we owned. The Japanese gave it to the farmers who had tilled, but not owned the land. Since we had not tilled the land ourselves as the landlords, we became virtually penniless overnight. My father and mother had to begin working in the fields in their middle age of over 40. Certainly they could not become farmers overnight, so we barely survived with such a small amount of land to cultivate. Because of these dire circumstances, they could not afford to send me to a good junior high or high school after elementary school for there was no money.

Instead, I entered Cheonan Agricultural School and commuted daily almost 30 miles via train from my home village. This caused extreme suffering to my mother and to myself. After three years of study, I decided that I could not continue my higher education. I told my father that I would become a good farmer in order to take care of my parents, so they needn't work so hard anymore. I then settled at home as a farmer.

Shortly after this, Japan was defeated in World War II by the Allies, liberating the Korean peninsula. Now a farmer, I was asked to become a local country school teacher. That is how I began to do both-a farming career to serve my parents and a teaching career at the local elementary school I had attended in my childhood.

Therefore, you can see that I don't have any formal religious education, except Confucian teaching, but somehow I strongly believed in the existence of God, although not a Christian God as yet. I began having strong urgings to be very prayerful. So early in the morning and in the evening I climbed up a mountain, and prayed during the sunrise and sunset. Of course at that time my prayers were not in the name of Christ and I prayed especially for longevity for my parents and good fortune in my farming so that I would be recognized as a man of success.



Dr. Pak as a young boy (far left) poses for a photo with several of his schoolmates.

The Korean War

That peaceful life which I thought would be my lifetime career was abruptly ended when North Korean forces crossed the 38th parallel. I was 20 years old when I was drafted into the army. Since I had to go to the army anyway, I decided to become a military officer and applied to the Korean Military Academy, equivalent to the West Point of the United States, for advanced study. Luckily, I was accepted. On June 1, 1950 I entered the Korean Military Academy to begin four years of the best training available for the future military leaders of the Korean Army. I was burning with zeal and hope as a young cadet that one day I would become a general. This dream, however, only lasted 25 days.

On June 25, as a young cadet, I found myself in the middle of the Korean War without even knowing how to handle an M-1 rifle.

Communist North Korea attacked that day and

the Military Academy cadets were the first troops committed to stopping this overwhelming invasion, which was an impossible task. Within three days of battle our 330 classmates were reduced by two-thirds. Of my classmates, 220 died without ever receiving even a rank or serial number.

Soon afterward we were sent to Busan for more training. My religious search began during my military service, especially during the war. After only eight weeks of training, I was commissioned as a second lieutenant and immediately became a front-line platoon leader. War is always horrible. People were dying every day: My superior died, my men died. The shadow of death was always around me. Under those circumstances a young officer had to think, "What is death? If I die tomorrow what happens to me after my death?" Certainly, there were no easy answers.

In 1951 the Red Chinese Army launched what has come to be known as the "Spring Offensive of 1951." One day during this time, my company was moving across the Changchon River. All of a sudden, when two hundred men were in the water with all their gear, including rifles, on their heads, enemy fire came from the other side of the river crossing. Bullets showered virtually everyone in the water. I was still on the other side of the river, commanding. When the bombardment of bullets came I immediately downed myself on the sand, although there was absolutely no cover. In this dire emergency I shouted out, "God save me. You are the only one. If you do my life is yours."

Suddenly U.S. fighter planes appeared and began firing rockets at the enemy position, stopping them from shooting at us. I stood up, and called my men in a desperate voice, "Follow me. This is the chance to escape." Only two men followed. Even those two men were terribly wounded. I was the only one without a scratch. At that point I felt my life was no longer mine. I must give my life to the purpose of God.

Most of our Division Combat Team had no time to escape and were left behind enemy lines. I and the two other wounded soldiers were hiding in enemy territory and knew that the end had come. It was just a matter of time before we were found and killed. I saw no hope. As I struggled to pull my two comrades behind a rock for temporary shelter, I prayed. The prayer was a promise. If I lived, I would dedicate my life to God.

We were hiding in the mountains without food or a means of communication for many days. Then one day we saw a long line of enemy soldiers retreating back to the North; many of them were wounded and limping. Gradually, we learned the U.S. Third Division had been pursuing the enemy to the North with tanks. God had saved our lives!

When the U.S. soldiers greeted us, I literally kissed their tanks. I thanked God and thanked our U.S. comrades-in-arms. This was my first personal encounter with the United States of America. America had saved my life.

After that experience, my religious search began. I first picked up the Bible. I also went to the temple to hear Buddha's teaching. I was chosen by my superiors for further training in America and assigned to Fort Benning, Georgia. In those months in America, I became attached to this new country. I really felt the Christian faith was the reason for America's prosperity. Knowing I would be going back into battle again, I wanted to be a Christian because I had seen God in action in America. I wanted to believe in the Christian God and deliver my promise made at the river crossing in that desperate moment.

Trained and prepared for the first time, we returned to the war. With the help of the United States and the other United Nations' forces, the new South Korean army beat back the Northern invaders and their Chinese ally. I fought with Americans in subsequent battles until the war ended in 1953. I prayed to God asking that someday He would give me the chance to repay America for saving my life.



Dr. and Mrs. Pak hold their two children, Jonathan and Grace. Behind them are Dr. Pak's father and grandmother and Captain Kim, his relative.