

**THESE ARE THE
GENERATIONS**

THESE ARE THE GENERATIONS

The Story of How One North Korean Family Lived Out the
Great Commission for More Than Fifty Years in the Most
Christian-Hostile Nation in Human History

Mr. and Mrs. Bae, as told to the Rev. Eric Foley



DOERS OF THE WORD

Colorado Springs, CO

These are the Generations
Copyright © 2012 .W Publishing
Published by .W Publishing, Colorado Springs, CO

Contact us at www.dotheword.org

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

If you are interested in learning more about Christian discipleship, persecution or wish to use the material of this book for your own church or ministry, please contact .W Publishing at +1(719) 481-4408 or info@dotheword.org.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from The HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 Biblica. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved. The “NIV” and “New International Version” trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica. Use of either trademark requires the permission of Biblica.

Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®). Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from The NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Photo cover: © ERIC LAFFORGUE / Alamy

Library of Congress
LCCN: 2012947352

ISBN 978-0-615-67835-1

CONTENTS

Foreword.....	7
Chapter	
One Grandfather: The Original North Korean Jesus Freak	15
Two Son: The Potato-Stealing Christian Ghost Walking Resolutely Out of Town	31
Three Mother: Vending the Bread of Life.....	59
Four Wife: An Altogether Different Kind of Paratrooper	69
Five Family: Emmanuel	91
Afterword	113
About Seoul USA.....	117
Endnotes	119

1. GRANDFATHER:

The Original North Korean Jesus Freak

From Mr. Bae

Some stories of faith are so surprising that you can hardly wait to hear how they end. That's the way I have always felt about my grandfather's stories. As a eleven-year-old boy in North Korea grieving his death, I would beg my grandmother to whisper his stories to me again and again in the dark winter nights, even though we both knew that to retell or even listen to such stories was an act of treason that endangered our whole family. Years later, when I sat on the cold floor of a North Korean prison in one position each day from morning until 10:00 p.m. for more than a year, I'd turn over the smallest detail of one of those stories in my mind for literally days on end. And these days, as I work at the car wash in South Korea in obedience to God's call that I am to raise my daughter as a healer for our broken, divided nation, it is his stories that come to me as my mind drifts heavenward.

I wish you could have known my grandfather. In fact, when I start telling you the story of my grandfather's life—how God would speak to him in a voice so loud that he would nearly go deaf... how, by God's grace, he saved his village time and time again by obeying God's puzzling commands (each more puzzling than the last)... and how he evangelized robbers and

invading armies as he sacrificed his body to prevent a church building from being burnt down (while the pastor hid safely out of sight)—I think you will feel tempted to skip to the end of the chapter so you can read how it all turns out.

So I will save you from that temptation by beginning with the end of my grandfather's story:

And so my grandfather burned all the Bibles just as God had commanded him, and thus the North Korean authorities were outsmarted.

And the Gospel continued to spread.

This may sound like a very unusual ending to a story about Christian faithfulness across generations, but North Korea is a very unusual place to be faithful. In North Korea, faithfulness is not something Christians are while they are busy doing other Christian things. It's what they do with their minds and souls and bodies and strength, and it almost always comes at the cost of their lives. So it is a very precious thing, and it means that our stories often have unusual beginnings and unusual endings. Like this one.

My grandfather's story does not begin in North Korea. Of course, in those days there was no North Korea or South Korea—just one Korea, under the brutal domination of a Japanese empire that, in those days, was sweeping across China like a typhoon. But you may be surprised to learn how God commanded my grandfather to stand in the full force of that typhoon and still it in Jesus' name.

But I am getting ahead of myself. Let me start at the beginning.

He will sound like a figure of legend to you. But he was just Grandfather to me—my mother's father and a church elder, though first and foremost God's servant in an evil place and time.

He was equal parts loving and sincere, clever and kind. He was always surrounded by people at all hours of the day, though many just floated near him on the perimeter of a large

invisible circle that moved wherever he went. The looks on people's faces as they greeted him—I remember those almost more than I remember his own face. When, as a young man in North Korea, I saw the way those in power treated him, I surged with adolescent pride. He himself was never prideful, though, always stopping to help those in need, always sharing a word of encouragement and his constant admonition to have faith.

My family would look back on those days as a fleeting dream—was there really a time when our family name was revered? To our flesh, they were years of pure gold. But Grandfather would tell us then and much later that God always took care of us, no matter how bleak things seemed.

It was around the time of the Second World War that Grandfather heard God's voice for the first time. He would have had to listen for it above the din of the tanks and mortar fire, as the Japanese advanced steadily through the part of northeast China where my family lived. When my grandmother told me the story of Grandfather and the Japanese, I always wondered where Grandfather learned to speak Japanese so well, in addition to Korean and Chinese. The Japanese army contingent that came to tear down the church that day must have wondered the same thing.

The Japanese oppressed Chinese people in China more than the Korean settlers there. In their minds, the Chinese were uncivilized and dirty, the Koreans slightly less so. But nothing prepared them for the encounter with my grandfather.

He had been fasting for a few days when, according to my grandmother, he heard God summon him—by name—in a voice so loud, so deafeningly loud, that all other sound, even silence, was instantly incinerated.

“Sung do! Sung do! *Sung do!*” the voice thundered. “The Japanese will not harm you. Get close to them.”

Get close to the brutalizers who were hunting Christians down and killing them, plowing down their church buildings?

When it happened the first time, my grandmother told us, he was sure he had heard wrong. So he just remained there, still, in prayer. The voice repeated the message identically three or four more times.

He concluded his prayers and his fast; concluded that he had indeed heard God's voice; concluded that he had to obey it; concluded that he would stay and develop relationships with the Japanese instead of trying to escape.

Madness. That is what the Japanese battalion must have thought when they came to tear down the church that day. I suspect the church pastor thought that too—from his hiding place. My grandfather, however, calmly blocked the doorway with his own body as he called out to them in Japanese, addressing them as his friends as he asked them please not to tear down the building.

They were stunned to see a human shield, let alone a Japanese-speaking one. "There is a guy who speaks Japanese well among the dirty!" they marveled. And they stopped and stood there, immobilized, axes and sledgehammers in hand, as my grandfather explained pleasantly and in perfect Japanese why the church people gathered, who God was, and why they should repent and receive God's invitation in Christ to be reconciled with him eternally. My grandmother reported that many Japanese soldiers became Christians that day. And the church continued to stand.

Some of the Christians had already run away from the village, but others stayed because of my grandfather. He wasn't the pastor, but they followed him. They called him "Jesus Freak" (yes, this was literally his nickname) even into his old age.

I don't know that my grandfather ever really wanted to hear God's voice, since usually when he did, it was a sign that something very bad was about to happen, and my grandfather would need to comport himself in a way exactly the opposite of what common sense and the actions of sensible men would

dictate. Like the time shortly after God used him to save the church. He was humble, but I imagine he must have been at least inwardly gratified that the run-in with the Japanese had turned out so well. So when that ear-splitting voice boomed out his name once again, I wonder if he winced just a little bit.

And when the voice said, “If you don’t want the people in your town to die, leave the village and go to work,” it certainly left him in an awkward spot. Go to work? He asked God for more details because he wasn’t sure what to do. But the more details he received, the less comforted he became. Go and ask every villager, Christian and non, to give him everything they owned, the voice instructed him. Mention nothing about God in the process. Take whatever is given to a faraway place. Invest it. Then return to the village in forty days.

It must have been humbling for him to go door-to-door to make this request. Of course, some villagers scoffed at him and ridiculed him, but you might be surprised how few. After all, even though everyone—Christian and non—called him “Jesus Freak,” they could not doubt his courage and skill and favor with God in the face of the Japanese invaders. And I am sure God softened the hearts of many to send my grandfather off with a modest supply of money. There were even some whose crops had failed who entrusted him with everything they had left.

Nearly forty days after my grandfather left town, the Mafia came. They swooped down into the village from the surrounding mountains. They came like locusts and robbed everything and everyone. As my grandmother said (she and the rest of our family were still there, after all), they didn’t even leave so much as a baby chick behind.

The villagers couldn’t help but notice that the day after the Mafia left town was the day my grandfather was due to return. But he didn’t show up.

So the next day, a villager came to my grandmother’s house and began haranguing her angrily about the whole situation.

He actually grabbed her and beat her head against the wall repeatedly.

The other villagers weren't much better. They were in the poorest of conditions. Many were starving due to the crop failures that had occurred even before the bandits arrived. So to my grandmother's credit, she went door-to-door and shared her remaining food with each family, encouraging them to be patient for my grandfather's return. Some were touched and said they would wait, even if it meant they would die before he returned. But others still complained.

Finally, after giving away all her food and not eating at all for days, she became weak and lost hope. Forty-three days after Grandfather had left, my grandmother decided she would kill herself if he did not return that day. With this resolution firmly in mind, she led her children down to the dock.

My grandfather always wore a white scarf around his neck. At dawn, while my grandmother and her children were waiting, the sun was rising. A boat was approaching, but she could not make out who was aboard because of the glare. But then she could make out a figure on deck who was wearing something white, and she remembered his scarf. Then she saw the figure waving a white scarf at her. She took off a piece of her clothing and waved back. It was him!

As the ship approached, she and her children started dancing and crying. She wanted to go summon her neighbors, but she couldn't. She was starving and not able to walk more.

He had been gone for forty-three days. Some old and young had also gathered there at the dock that day; my grandfather was their only hope. My grandmother says that they had come to see if there was anything to eat and, if not, they planned to die there too. She said that by the time Grandfather's ship tied up at the dock, the port looked like a white sand beach because of how many people had assembled there.

With such a crowd present and pressing in on them, there was no time for personal greetings or any exchange

of information between them. Someone had to address this eager, hungry crowd, and my grandmother, empowered by this blessed and very fortunate turn of events, appointed herself for the task.

She stood on the top of the ship and faced the villagers who had recently been so hostile to her. The first thing she said was that she wouldn't give out any of the food from the ship because they had been so cruel and violent. She chided them for not trusting her and her husband or considering that he might have encountered some unavoidable and entirely understandable delay. She pointed out that the ship was overflowing with food but that the food would not be distributed due to the hard-heartedness of those who had, for example, put her head through a wall. Everyone sobbed quietly and asked for forgiveness. She went on to remind them that she had never deceived the villagers but only sacrificed herself and her own food for them.

Then, my grandfather tapped her gently on the shoulder and said, "Wait. Let me talk to them." He turned to the crowd and began to address them, saying that his was the work of ministry—leading people to God. Not to make money, he assured them, but to promote obedience to God because, after all, God was the One who had asked him to save the village in the first place. He explained to everyone that he was a Christian and he knew that what he was sharing would be hard for non-Christians to understand. So he pointed out to them that if he had not left for business, the money the villagers had given him would have been taken by the robbers. This gave him confidence that it was God who had sent him away to save the villagers, and so the obvious thing for everyone to do would be to believe in God. He told them that God had enabled him to make so much money that the villagers would have enough to eat for the next several years. All the believers and even the nonbelievers nodded approvingly as they listened to him.

Then he asked for those who had trusted him and given money to him to stand on one side. He announced that each of these investors would receive one hundred times more than what they had given him. *One hundred times!*

The others were ashamed of themselves and began to beg my grandparents to save them too. They chanted together, “Save us! Save us! Save us!” My grandfather said he would only trust those who had helped him, but he emphasized that God had surely asked him to leave in order to save the whole village. So he asked the remaining villagers, “Will you now believe in God?” They answered, “Yes! Yes! We believe in God!” They didn’t sound like starving people as they waved their hands and cheered at the top of their lungs.

What happened next surprised everyone. Grandfather provided everyone with exactly the same amount of food, whether they had supported him or not. And that is how everyone in the village started going to church.

After all of this, you can imagine that Grandfather was riding an almost unprecedented wave of popularity. So, when once again, very shortly after his return, that deafening voice punctured the silence of his prayer and fasting and called him by name, he must have wanted to hide. And when that voice ordered him to leave the village *immediately* and take his family with him, I can understand why he initially resisted. After all, he had built an impeccable reputation among the villagers. Church protector! Businessman par excellence! Evangelist without peer!

But the voice insisted, saying it was time to save the village one more time—this time by leaving it. My grandfather and family trudged slowly out of town, while puzzled villagers observed in wonderment. *What a strange man*, they thought. *Right after he achieves everything, he leaves it all behind for nothing.*

They probably thought a lot about that strange man and his strange God’s pledge to save the village when, shortly after

my grandfather's departure, an outbreak of typhoid decimated the village. Many died or were disabled. But our family had been protected, by the grace of God.

But what about the promise that my grandfather would save the village? That may be the strangest story of all. When Grandfather left, he and the family moved to their cousins' village. But that village was in terrible shape—rich neighbors, robbers, thieves, and so many wicked people living there. It was a virtual Sodom and Gomorrah.

They unpacked their bags and started living there. After spending the next year helping the poor, as was their custom, Grandfather and the family found themselves in difficult conditions. Their house was broken into and robbed. My grandmother lamented, but my grandfather kept praying. My grandfather believed they were being tested by God so he could see if they had faith in him or not.

After another year, my grandfather heard from God again. It was the same message: "You will save the villagers." He heard it three times, as loudly as ever.

So he discussed it with his wife. She was worried because they didn't even have food to eat. How could they save themselves, let alone their old village? She figured he must be thinking to leave on business again, and I imagine she probably didn't want her head put through another wall. But he pledged to stay, saying that God didn't tell him to go anywhere or do anything. He said they just needed to believe that God must have a purpose and a plan. So they waited.

In these mountain villages, bands of robbers were pretty common. Some seemed to have a conscience of sorts, stealing only from the wealthy, while others were just angry and took everything from everyone. So into the village descended a band of good robbers, ready to rob the rich in the town. Imagine their surprise when a poor man—my grandfather—interrupted their looting in order to educate them, telling them it was a sin to rob any human being. It wasn't a sermon. He