

It Started with a Pamphlet

A young postal worker in Korea found the answers he had been seeking, but would his family listen?

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One day in the summer of 1969, a young missionary in Chuncheon, Republic of Korea, handed a pamphlet on the purpose of life to the man at the post office who distributed



the foreign mail. The young elder probably had no idea what a chain of conversions he had begun. Neither did the postal worker who accepted the pamphlet. Cho Joong Hyun did not know why his civil service job had taken him so far from his home in Suncheon, near the southern tip of the Korean peninsula. Only later would he come to understand that he had to be in that place at that time to receive the pamphlet.

This small incident would lead to the conversion of his entire family, as well as many others they would later influence. But those conversions would



Above: Cho Joong Hyun, first of the Cho family to join the Church, and his wife, Lee Hyun Ab. He is currently branch president in his home city, Suncheon. Opposite page: Members of the Cho family, with spouses and children, gather for a family photo in the early 1990s.



not come easily. “It took more than 20 years to get all of my family baptized,” he says. Through his efforts, his parents and his brothers and sisters and their spouses and children have come to enjoy the blessings of the gospel.

Cho Joong Hyun’s own conversion was difficult. The pamphlet given to him by the missionary was “really good,” he says, in that it provided answers about the purpose of life that he had never been able to find in the Christian church he formerly attended. Still, he did not think an unknown American church could be taken seriously, so he tossed the pamphlet into a drawer and forgot it for a time.

He forgot it until early one morning when, awakening after another evening of drinking and billiards with friends, he lay thinking that he ought to change his life. Then he remembered the pamphlet that gave him answers.

The first Sunday he attended a Latter-day Saint meeting, he was not impressed. The rented building was small, and the congregation at Sunday School, he recalls, consisted of the missionaries, their cook, a grandmother and two children, and a couple of college students.

But the answers supplied by that pamphlet, along with the humility and testimony of the young elders, kept him talking to the missionaries, even though he was wary of their Church. He remembers arguing with them about religion. When they quoted scriptures from the Book of Mormon, he thought to himself, “These guys are really good at making this up. It sounds like the Bible.” They gave him a Book of Mormon with Moroni 10:3–5 printed by hand in the front of it, carrying the promise that the reader would learn of the truth of the book

through the Holy Ghost. Remembering the story of Joseph Smith, Cho Joong Hyun went to his favorite spot in the mountains to offer his personal prayer. But he received no immediate answer.



“These Are True”

Then one day as he sat in a library reading the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants, he clearly heard a voice speak to him saying, “These are true, and they are mine.” He looked around to see if anyone else had heard the voice. Tears streamed down his face as he realized the message had been for him alone.

After his baptism and confirmation in 1969, the world changed for Joong Hyun. People and things that had seemed disagreeable before no longer did. He saw beauty around him, even though nothing was different. He spent time going door-to-door with the missionaries sharing his testimony.

He had to put his missionary work aside for a time while he served in the military during the Vietnam War. But he began trying to share the gospel again when he returned home to Suncheon in the mid-1970s.

There were no other Church members in the city. One way he tried to change that was to give copies of the Book of Mormon to people he met. “I thought I needed to share this true and precious book,” he says. Little came of that, however. His greatest impact as a

missionary would be with his own brothers and sisters.

His youngest sister, Cho Sungja (Korean women retain their birth family name after marriage), recalls that at first her brother simply held family home evenings with his brothers and sisters and taught gospel principles. But eventually he introduced them to missionaries.

His youngest sister accepted the gospel readily. She felt the Holy Ghost testify to her of the truth of Joseph Smith's First Vision. Members of another faith had shown her a scripture in the book of Revelation that they said warned against adding to the words of that book (see Revelation 22:18-19). But as she opened the Book of Mormon one day to read in 2 Nephi 29, some of the verses in that chapter told her of the need for additional revelation (see vv. 11-14), and again she felt the Spirit testify that it was true.

Her father was against her joining the Church, but finally,

in answer to her prayers, he gave his consent. She was baptized and confirmed in 1976, at age 16.

Their Trusted Guide

Like her pioneering elder brother, Joong Hyun, Sungja wanted to share the gospel she had found. She shared it freely with friends at school, and eventually five of them were also baptized and confirmed.

Sungja's next oldest brother, Cho Yong Hyun, had listened to the missionaries with his siblings. Their parents were busy running the family restaurant, and Joong Hyun, the second son, was frequently charged with caring for his younger brothers and sisters. His siblings all learned to love him and trust his judgment. "I really respected my older brother, so when he first introduced the gospel to me, I could accept it," Yong Hyun says.





Above: Cho Sungja, second in the Cho family to join the Church, after her elder brother.

Opposite page: Cho Yong Hyun, third in the family to join the Church, with his wife, Lee Eun Sook, and their oldest daughter, Hye In (seated on floor), and Cho Gil Ja with her husband, Sin Ho Pil.

But Yong Hyun's conversion was not based on his brother's testimony alone; he received his own strong witness of the truth, and once a member, he dedicated himself to serving faithfully.

That dedication led him, while he was a college student, to want to serve a mission—a choice his father opposed. But Yong Hyun won his father's consent by promising to be a better student when he returned, and he kept that promise.

Father and son would clash over the Church again some years later when Yong Hyun was offered a position with the Church Educational System. He was doing well in his job with an oil refining firm at the time, but he accepted the Church position and has served as CES coordinator in the Gwangju area of southern Korea since 1986. His father opposed the change, considering it unwise for his son to leave a good position with a prestigious firm to work for a relatively unknown church that had started in America. His father said later that he had cried bitterly over Yong Hyun's decision and had come close to disowning him. Fortunately, the rift was healed.

All of the Cho brothers and sisters will say that their father was the hardest opponent to their studying and living the gospel. He could be demanding and, in his traditional role as head of the family, expected obedience.

Service Was the Answer

But some of the siblings also had their own reservations about the Church. The second daughter, Cho Gil Ja, had doubts centered in part on why her older brother was asked to give so much service to his church without being paid, as ministers were in other churches. She dated, married, and

was raising her own young children before she finally heeded her brother's request to listen to the missionaries.

When they asked her to read the Book of Mormon, she became absorbed in the reading and finished the book in three days. She heeded Moroni's admonition to pray about its teachings and received a strong confirmation that they are true. At that point, she says, "I felt there must be something I could do for God." The impression she received in answer to this desire was that she too should attend church and serve.

Gil Ja had learned service by example. Her mother always lived by that principle, serving Church members even before she became one herself.

Her mother had come to love the members of the Church and the sister missionaries who wanted to teach her. But it was difficult to give up her traditional religion. In her closet she had a small statue of Buddha to which she prayed each day. The turning point in her conversion came after she dreamed that she was praying to her Buddha when it began to cry tears from its painted eyes and slowly turned its back on her. She understood that the dream meant it was time for her to follow a new religious path.

Three years after her baptism and confirmation, her husband—by then the lone member of the family who was still outside the Church—finally consented to listen to the gospel and was converted. After he joined the Church, he became a changed man, his children say—sweeter, kinder, more tolerant.

A Family United

Some 26 years after Cho Joong Hyun's baptism, all of his family were at last members

of the Church. It was a high point for the family when their mother and father were sealed in the Seoul Korea Temple. A touching moment for the entire family came at a later gathering when the Cho children sang to their father the lullaby he had sung to them when they were small.

Their mother served faithfully in the Church until the end of her life. Even in the hospital, suffering from stomach cancer, she was a missionary to the young woman in the next bed, introducing her to the gospel.

Her sons and daughters carry on the tradition of service. There are two President Chos in the family. Yong Hyun, the CES coordinator, has served in a variety of priesthood leadership callings through the years and is currently president of the stake in Gwangju. Cho Joong Hyun, who led the way into the Church for his family, has also served in a variety of leadership roles in Suncheon, including district president.

He is currently president of the Suncheon Branch. Cho Gil Ja has served for more than 16 years as president of the Relief Society in the ward and stake. Other brothers and sisters in the family are active in their own areas as well, and all are married to active members.

Seven of the Cho children and grandchildren have served as missionaries so far, and still others are preparing to serve. Several of the children and grandchildren have married returned missionaries. Now the fourth generation of Chos is beginning to be reared in the Church. Their days have not been free of life's difficulties, but blessings have come through their obedience.

The missionary who handed that pamphlet to a young postal worker nearly four decades ago could not have known what would grow from the small seed he planted. But the harvest has been plentiful—and it may be only beginning. ■

